

# Research Proposal Sample 1

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## Background:

Postcolonial theory has made a serious impact on the scholarship of American literature over the past few decades. One word that stands out in postcolonial American studies is hybridity. This research aims to examine how hybridity constitutes American national identity in the process of building the U.S. Empire in several antebellum American novels. This research is particularly inspired by two books: Edward Said's *Culture and Imperialism* and Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's *Empire*. However, this research also revises, expands, and even challenges the arguments of these masterpieces on imperialism in the process of critically applying them to American literature.

Said's observations that imperialism brought "the world closer together" making "all cultures" "hybrid" and "heterogeneous" and "American identity is too varied to be a unitary and homogeneous thing" provide an important background for this research. Said's study, however, is concentrated on European imperialism and European authors. Even if he mentions the Puritan "errand into wilderness," U.S. expansion westward, the imperial motif in the works of Cooper, Melville, and Twain, his interest in U.S. imperialism mostly focuses on the post-World War II period when the United States emerged as the imperial super power of the world.

Hardt and Negri focus on the postmodern Empire, which they clearly distinguish from modern imperialism. While modern imperialism is characterized by its rigorous distinction between the colonizing European self and the colonized Other, between the inside of European civilization and the barbarous outside, the postmodern Empire does not have such a binary division since it has internalized the outside and created a transnational global order in which borders between modern nation states are blurred. Hardt and Negri present hybridization as a phenomenon of postmodern society, but they argue that hybridity can serve as a critical term only in the study of modern imperialism which is predicated on binary division.

The insightful observations of Said, Hardt and Negri strongly suggest that hybridity should be an indispensable conceptual tool when we examine 19<sup>th</sup>-century American literature written in the age of modern imperialism. This research aims to consider hybridity as a concept that defines American identity in the post-revolutionary and antebellum era when it was almost a national mission to establish a pure national identity for white Americans. This research also poses hybridity as a crucial quality of the democratic sovereignty Hardt and Negri find in the founding of the United States. The democratic expansion of the constitutional right of American citizenship is possible only on the basis of inclusive admittance of the Other into its national boundaries and the consequent creation of hybrid identity. Hybridity is not a postmodern phenomenon but refers precisely to that ever-inclusive and creative process which recognizes and even empowers the Other in the expansion of democratic sovereignty.

U.S. history, however, has been dominated by a consistent tendency to exclude the Other from its national identity and purge hybridity from American citizenship. When St. John de Crèvecoeur envisioned America as a melting pot in which "individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men," those individuals were limited to "the western pilgrims." The monumental announcement of inalienable human rights of the Declaration of Independence is tarnished by its denigration of "merciless Indian savages." The U.S. Constitution excluded "Indians not taxed" from the U.S. citizenry and counted African-American slaves as "three fifths" of free persons, thus reducing them to insufficient partial humans. The history of American Supreme Court decisions provides a vivid testimony of this exclusion, from *Johnson v. M'Intosh* which dispossessed Native Americans of their title to the land, and *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia* which denied the sovereignty of the Native American state, through the *Dred Scott* case which deprived African-Americans of their right to U.S. citizenship, and *Plessey v. Ferguson* which endorsed racial segregation, to the case of *Downs vs. Bidwell* which did not allow the extension of the rights of U.S. citizenship to the inhabitants of new territories acquired by imperial wars.

American literature reflects this exclusive tendency of U.S. history and illustrates what Homi

Bhabha called a “colonial fantasy” that “dramatizes the impossible desire for a pure, undifferentiated origin.” American imaginative writings created an “imagined community” from which racial and cultural aliens were virtually excluded. The literary project to found American identity on a pure basis, however, often misfired because the Manifest Destiny of American imperialism has ceaselessly thrown Americans into what Mary Louis Pratt called the “contact zone” in which colonizers and colonized, or travelers and travelees, “are constituted in and by their relations to each other.” This contact zone provided the conditions for hybridity to weave itself into the fabric of the American subject, making American literature a stage for the tension between its aspiration for pure American identity and its opposing tendency toward hybridity. This research will focus on this aspect of American literature in antebellum America.

### **Objectives:**

This research examines the hybridity of American national identity in four antebellum American novels: *The Pioneers*, the first Leatherstocking novel of James Fenimore Cooper; *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*, the first and only completed novel by Edgar Allan Poe; *Typee*, Herman Melville’s first novel; and *The Life and Adventures of Joaquin Murieta*, the first American novel by an American Indian, John Rollin Ridge. Exploring the different ways in which these novels deal with anxiety and desire concerning American identity, this research shows how they engrave hybridity into American national identity and debunk the myth of pure Americanness.

### **Methodology:**

This research approaches the four novels by contextualizing each in the political, economic, legal, and cultural history of American imperialism and paying close attention to the way each novel comes to terms with the question of racial and cultural hybridity brought about by American imperialism. The novels will be interpreted on their own and in comparison with one another under the common themes of American national identity and hybridity.

*The Pioneers* was published in 1823 when John Marshall, Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court, made a decision on the case of *Johnson and Graham’s Lessee v. William M’Intosh* to the effect that American Indians are “not citizens” and thus have no right to alienate their land titles to private individuals. According to this decision, legitimate ownership of the land is the exclusive right of the European nations which “discovered” the American continent and their successor, the U.S. government. Marshall touches on the issue of hybridity when he says that when one country conquers another country, “the new and old members of the society mingle with each other; the distinction between them is gradually lost, and they make one people.” However, this general process of incorporation does not apply to American Indians since they are “fierce savages.” *Johnson v. M’Intosh* showcases clearly the tendency of the American law to strip hybridity from American identity and replace natural rights with legal rights.

This tendency is replicated in Fenimore Cooper’s *The Pioneers*. The novel creates a conflict between defenders of the natural rights of Indians and advocates of the legal ownership of the white settlers and then resolves this conflict via *deus ex machina*. At the heart of this conflict lies the problem of hybridity of American identity and ownership, and the key to this conflict and its resolution is Oliver Edwards, a man known as a “half-breed” who has “the Delaware blood” and the Indian name “Young Eagle.” The initial conflict between him and Judge Temple over the claim to the deer killed by both shooters leads to the conflict between his natural right to the land as an Indian and Judge Temple’s right as a lawful owner, as well as to a more covert conflict between Edwards and Elizabeth, the heiress to the Templeton estate.

At the end of the story, these conflicts are resolved abruptly by the discovery that Oliver Edwards is indeed Edward Effingham, a pure British man whose father entrusted his land to his friend Judge Temple, and that Oliver’s grandfather, Major Effingham, was adopted as “an honorary member” by the Delaware tribe who granted him their land and also the Indian name “Eagle.” Young

Eagle the half-breed then is reborn as Edward Effingham, a pure British man. His marriage to Elizabeth, the deaths of Chingachgook and Major Effingham, and Natty Bumppo's disappearance into the wilderness complete the process of civilizing Indian land and creating a pure American identity purged of hybridity.

At the same time, this process entails Edward's masquerade as a half-breed and his eloquent advocacy of the Indian title to the land, which undercut the legitimacy of the white ownership. Moreover, Cooper complicates this issue by making Major Effingham's title to the land granted both by "King's letter patent" and by the Delaware tribe, thus casting its legitimacy in ambiguity and contradiction. This contradiction reveals the anxiety over the hybrid origin of American identity and ownership of the land. Despite the symbolic resolution of the dispute over the land ownership through their marriage, Edward and Elizabeth's identity as legitimate inheritors of the American nation is still haunted by cultural hybridity and contradiction. *The Pioneers* is a hybrid text with a double voice that records both the official national narrative of white America and the unacknowledged narrative of its hybrid origin.

Edgar Allan Poe's *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* (1838) narrates a nightmarish adventure of Pym who ventures into the Antarctic, where he encounters black aborigines and, further downward, glimpses a gigantic figure of pure whiteness. Written by a Southerner with a pro-slavery racist ideology, the novel is an imaginative account of the colonial exploration of a barbarous land with the purpose of exploitation and conquest, and a vision of white America untainted by hybridity. This colonial fantasy casts its colonized islanders as "the most barbarous, subtle, and bloodthirsty wretches that ever contaminated the face of the globe." Contamination by racial others certainly threatens the vision of white America. Pym's (and Poe's) anxiety of hybridity renders the island a fantastic site immune to racial and cultural amalgamation. On the island everything white is taboo, and even the distinct veins of different colors of water do not mix with each other. The final apocalyptic scene in which Pym encounters a mysterious figure of pure whiteness appears to confirm this vision of purity.

Pym's pursuit of pure white identity, however, is seriously undermined by his conversion into and intermingling with racial others. Pym's cannibalism aboard the *Grampus* makes him a white double mirroring—not contrasting—the dark other he condemned as savage. Pym's hybridity is thrown into bold relief when he physically merges with Dirk Peters, the half-breed son of an Indian woman and a white man. On the island Pym, following Peters, descends a cliff and suffers a spell of dizziness while looking down. What he sees below is the "dusky, fiendish, and filmy figure" of Dirk Peters, and he swoons and falls into Peters' arms, literally merging with Peters' "mongrel body." The story of Pym's journey as a national narrative of white America turns out to be a story of hybrid America that crosses and destroys racial boundaries.

Herman Melville's first novel *Typee* (1846) is the travel narrative of Tom, an American sailor who deserts a whaler and lives with the Typee tribe on a Marquesan island in South Pacific Polynesia for two months before returning to the United States. In stark contrast to Pym, Tom mounts a scathing attack on Euro-American imperialism in the Marquesan islands, and denounces "the white civilized man as the most ferocious animal on the face of the earth," thus overturning the Western dichotomy between civilization and savagery. However, Tom also engages in the colonial discourse of imperial conquest. Subtitled "A Peep at Polynesian Life," the novel suggests that Tom directs the domineering gaze of a colonial traveler at the natives. Even before he lands on the island, Tom is full of the expectations and desires of a colonial traveler, fantasizing about "naked houris," "cannibal banquets," and "heathenish rites and human sacrifices." Once on the island, Tom becomes a "monarch-of-all-I-survey." While on the one hand erasing the boundary between civilization and savagery that Euro-American imperialism has drawn, he on the other hand redraws the boundaries and participates in the imperial discourse of colonization.

Tom among the Typees crosses cultural and racial boundaries, yet takes pains to maintain the boundaries and preserve his pure American identity. Behind his overt adoration of Typee as a paradise before the Fall of civilization lurks his colonial desire to separate himself from savage Typees. His leg, which swells mysteriously when he enters the Typee valley, is the symptom of his anxiety about

American identity and fear of hybridity. He is afraid that the tattoo he might be forced to receive from the Typees would make him “disfigured in such a manner as never more to have the *face* to return to [his] countrymen.” His anxiety and fear arise from the possibility of becoming a hybrid being who will no longer be accepted as a pure American. However, Tom is already a hybrid, being called Tommo, an appellation made in the Typeean manner of repeating syllables.

Tommo seems to become Tom again when he is saved by an English whale-boat. The moment he succeeds in escaping from the pursuing Typees and gets on the boat, however, he “[falls] back fainting into the arms of Karakoee,” another Polynesian, thus, intermingling again with a racial other, just as Pym falls into the arms of Dirk Peters. His story remains that of Tommo—a transnational and hybrid American who crossed cultural and racial boundaries and lived with the Typees—not of Tom, a pure American, and the story appeals to the reader as such since his “strange appearance and remarkable adventure occasioned interest.” He remains a hybrid American just as Melville became known as “the man who lived among cannibals.”

The last novel this research examines is the first Native American novel written in the aftermath of the Mexican War. Unlike the novels discussed previously, *The Life and Adventures of Joaquin Murieta* (1854) was penned by the half-breed son of American and Cherokee parents who is often called by his Indian name, “Yellow Bird.” John Rollin Ridge’s life dramatizes the conflict between Cherokee identity and American identity. His grandfather, Major Ridge, an Americanized Cherokee leader, was branded as an apostate by the Cherokee community because he signed the New Echota Treaty of 1835 which was designed to remove the Cherokee Indians west to Indian Territory. The murder of Major Ridge and his son (Ridge’s father) by the resentful Cherokees made Ridge an exile in his own tribe, and he became a multicultural cosmopolitan with hybrid identity. *Joaquin Murieta*, however, reflects not merely Ridge’s personal hybridity but also America’s national hybridity which was forged by the intermixture of diverse ethnic and cultural groups after California was annexed by the United States.

Joaquin Murieta is not an American but a Mexican outlaw who rages at the unjust violence of white Americans against the Mexicans. Nonetheless, his “individual history” is a version of American national narrative because his character is “a natural production of the social and moral condition of the country in which he lived.” After the Mexican war made California a U.S. territory, Joaquin crosses the border into California “fired with enthusiastic admiration of the American character.” Ethnically pure Mexican, Murieta is indeed a hybrid subject with complexion “neither very dark nor very light” who condemns “lawless and desperate men, who bore the name of Americans but failed to support the honor and dignity of that title” and aspires to be a true American with Mexican origin.

Joaquin’s aspiration for Americanness, however, is shattered by “the prejudice of color” and “the antipathy of races.” After being violently evicted from his house by white Americans, his subsequent efforts to cultivate a farm are also frustrated by “unprincipled Americans” who evict him as “an infernal Mexican intruder.” The hardship Joaquin endures is based upon real historical violence against foreigners in California in the 1850s, epitomized by the “Foreign Miners’ Tax Law,” which by exacting a heavy tax from foreigners allowed only native citizens of the United States to mine gold. Joaquin’s intention to “to kill the Americans . . . for the wrongs of our poor, bleeding country” seems to make him a Mexican hero who dies fighting against the unjust imperial Americans. However, he remains a hybrid subject, in one episode mistaken for an American because of his “good English,” and in another disguising himself as a white merchant to rescue one of his “dark skinned” gang members. The narrator’s eulogistic description of him after his death as “an extraordinary man” echoes his aspiration for true American character. A story of a man who was born a Mexican and desired American identity but died a Mexican hero and outlaw in the tumultuous age of multicultural confusion and violence, *Joaquin Murieta* is a transnational narrative of hybrid American identity.

This research plans to show that all four novels reveal a subtext that underwrites, doubles, and splits the national narrative of pure American identity and inscribes hybridity into Americanness. Finally, this research plans to assess the significance and limitations of the concept of hybridity in examining the American novels by addressing the question whether hybridity is a conceptual tool that

may be used in economic, political, and ethical as well as cultural and textual realms.

**Significance:**

This research is expected to contribute to post-colonial studies of American literature in Korea. Post-colonial studies have flourished in Korea for the past 20 years, and many scholars have been working on this subject. Most Americanists in Korea, however, tend to focus on twentieth-century American novelists such as Zora Neale Hurston, Alice Walker and Tony Morrison. I hope that my research will draw attention to the significance of American national identity and hybridity in the historical development of the American novel from the inception of the American nation and imperialism, and ultimately enrich the study of American literature in Korea.

**Evaluation and Dissemination:**

This research has grown out of my research on and teaching of American literature in the context of American imperialism over the past 15 years. I have already written essays on the works of Royall Tyler, Lydia Maria Child, Charles Brockden Brown, James Fenimore Cooper, Edgar Allan Poe, and W. E. B. Dubois in this context. I have also taught a graduate course entitled "American Literature/Culture and Imperialism" twice. This research will constitute a substantial portion of my book-length work-in-progress on American literature and imperialism, which will begin with the Pequot War and end with Dubois. Even if this research covers four novels under a single title, it is highly likely that the discussions of each novel will be published as separate journal articles and then developed into separate chapters of the book.

**Justification for Residence in the United States for the Proposed Project:**

After serving as department chair for the past two years, during which I have been frequently distracted from my study, I wish to immerse myself in a new academic environment where I can concentrate on my research on American literature during my sabbatical year. In order to conduct research on American national identity, I need to immerse myself in American culture and interact with American scholars in the States. During my last sabbatical year, I was greatly helped and inspired by the professors of American literature in the States. I expect in conducting my research to be inspired and supported by professors of English at my host institution. Easy access to research sources, some of which are often rare and only available in the States, is also a necessity. I believe that the Library of Congress near the university I wish to visit as an exchange scholar would be the best place to provide research materials for my study on American literature.

**Duration:**

I plan to conduct my research during my sabbatical year from September 2011 to July 2012. As our summer vacation begins from July 2010, I may move to the States in early August and settle down by the end of August. This will allow me to concentrate on my research for almost one full year.

**English Proficiency:**

I was awarded a Ph.D. degree from . . . . . 1995, and have been a professor of English for 15 years. I am proficient enough both in reading and writing in English to conduct extensive research in the United States. I also have a good command of spoken English, and will be able to communicate well with professors of English at my host institution.