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Investigates the idealistic promise of American justice and equality

John Michael explores the contradictions between a mythic national identity promising justice to all and the realities of a divided, hierarchical, and frequently iniquitous history and social order. Through a series of insightful readings, Michael analyzes such cultural moments as the epic dramatization of the tension between individual ambition and communal complicity in Moby-Dick, Ralph Waldo Emerson's antislavery activism, and Frederick Douglass's long fight for racial equity.