

HL 4023
Advanced Studies in American Literature
American Utopias
Professor Christopher Trigg

Fridays 2:30-5:30
TR+112

Description

The word “Utopia,” coined by Sir Thomas More in the 16th century, has two meanings: “good place” and “no-place.” In this class, we’ll explore the significance of both of these definitions for American culture, society, and literature. Over the course of its history, America has been seen as a “no-place,” a blank territory onto which individual dreams and shared aspirations can be projected. It’s also been regarded as fertile ground for the plantation of a variety of actual “good places”—communities designed to redress the injustices of mainstream society.

Our journey will take us to diverse places, both real and imagined: a peaceful, yet elitist, society of women in which reproduction no longer requires men; a religious group in New York state who believe that sharing possessions and sexual partners can make human beings perfect; a future California where green activists fight to preserve the wilderness.

Required Texts

Thomas More, *Utopia* (Dover - 0486295834)
Sutton Griggs, *Imperium in Imperio* (Modern Library Classics - 0812971604)
Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Herland* (Dover - 0486404293)
B.F. Skinner, *Walden Two* (Hackett - 978-0-87220-778-3)
Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (Penguin - 0140436677)
Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Left Hand of Darkness* (Ace Charter - 0441478123)
Kim Stanley Robinson, *Pacific Edge* (Orb - 0312890389)
Ben Marcus, *The Age of Wire and String* (Dalkey Archive - 1564781968)

All other texts (those marked with a *) to be posted online.

Assessment

Preparation, Participation 10%
Presentations 15%
Term Paper 25%
Final Exam 50%

Late Penalties

Late work submitted without an approved extension will be penalized one half-mark per day late – an A paper submitted one day late would drop to an A-, etc.

Plagiarism

Please see the Division of English’s statement on plagiarism [here](#).

In-Class Workshop – March 12th

During the workshop the class will be broken into groups. Each group will be given a document packet relating to a Utopian community of the American West in the nineteenth or twentieth century. The group will read and discuss these documents and prepare a short presentation, which will be given to the rest of the class at the end of the seminar.

Schedule

1. 15th January

America and Utopia: New Worlds

Thomas More, *Utopia*, part one

2. 22nd January

The Meaning of Utopia

Thomas More, *Utopia*, part two

Richard Rorty, “Private Irony and Liberal Hope”*

Unit A: Social Utopias

3. 29th January

“The Race Problem”

Sutton E. Griggs, *Imperium in Imperio*

4. 5th February

A Feminist Utopia

Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Herland*

5. 12th February

“A Social System that Really Works”

B.F. Skinner, *Walden Two*

6. 19th February

The American Revolution

Thomas Jefferson, “Declaration of Independence.”*

---, *Notes on the State of Virginia*

Unit B: Religious Utopias

7. 26th February

The Oneida Perfectionists

Spencer Klaw, *Without Sin**

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8. 12th March

In-Class Workshop: Utopian Communities of the American West

9. 19th March

Scientology

Lawrence Wright, “The Apostate”*

Paul Thomas Anderson, *The Master* (film screened in class)

25th March – Good Friday – no class

Unit C: Science Fiction Utopias

10. 1st April

Beyond Gender

Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Left Hand of Darkness*

11. 8th April

An Ecotopia

Kim Stanley Robinson, *Pacific Edge*

12. 15th April

A Utopia of Things

Ben Marcus, from *The Age of Wire and String*

David Rose, from *Enchanted Objects*