GESM 120G: Seminar in Humanistic Inquiry

Utopias: Imagining Reform

VKC 202 MW 3:30-4:50pm

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# Description

*Throughout the ages the Utopias reflect the anxieties and discontents amidst which they are produced. They are, so to speak, shadows of light thrown by darkness.*

H. G. Wells (1939)

In the wake of the Black Death and on the eve of the Reformation, Europeans began to question some of the fundamental social, political, and economic relationships that had structured their society. The creation of ideal societies in utopian literature became a way to address latent frictions and suggest better ways to address social problems. Early modern encounters with new peoples in Asia, Africa, and the Americas invigorated the genre of utopian literature as Europeans used the existence of these unfamiliar peoples to diagnose the ills of their society and consider alternative civil polities. This interest in utopia was not merely rhetorical; with the discovery of the Americas, utopian thinkers turned to the New World as a blank slate upon which they could establish more perfect civilizations, free from the corruptions of Europe. Beginning with Sir Thomas More’s *Utopia* (1516) to Victorian feminist utopian novels, we will evaluate how different generations of Europeans and Americans defined an ideal society and the underlying beliefs and events that informed their conceptions. We will question the assumed linearity of progress by assessing the degree to which utopian visions reflected reactionary attempts to slow social change amidst debates about absolutism, imperialism, religious toleration, liberty, slavery, capitalism, and women’s rights, and in concert with the emergence of new sciences and enlightenment philosophy. We will consider what the failures of these utopian communities can tell us about the obstacles to reform and progress encountered by different generations.

# HUMANISTIC INQUIRY (GE-B): Description & Learning Objectives

We all are self-reflective. We try to make sense of what it means to be human and how to relate to one another. We seek to understand ourselves and the world around us and always think about how things could be, or should be, or might have been. Humanistic inquiry takes us into realms that lie at the heart of what it means to be a thinking, feeling person, and into realms of interpretation and analysis beyond what facts and figures alone can tell us.

Courses in humanistic inquiry encourage close engagement with works of the imagination—  in words, sights, and sounds—understanding what it means to live another life and to see over the horizon. In this course, we explore language as a medium of artistic expression and communication. We study systems of language and thought. We seek to understand traditions that create different cultures—their concepts, values, and events in history—and see them in relation to one another. Our courses emphasize forms of representation and methods of interpretation, adopting broad perspectives that are chronological, disciplinary, and cross disciplinary.  Students immerse themselves in arts and letters to think about their own place in history and in contemporary society, and inquire into our shared futures.

***Learning Objectives***

USC’s Humanistic Inquiry program will introduce you to a broad range of courses and ways of thinking that will take you beyond the specialization of your major and significantly extend your ability to understand the human world and your place in it. The program will help you achieve six principal learning objectives.

***In Humanistic Inquiry courses you will***:

1. Reflect on what it means to be human through close study of human experience throughout time and across diverse cultures. In this course, you will be reading works of utopian literature as blueprints for reformed societies in Europe, New Spain, Africa, and the United States between 1516 and 1935.
2. Cultivate a critical appreciation for various forms of human expression, including literature, language, philosophy, and the arts, as well as develop an understanding of the contexts from which these forms emerge.
3. Engage with lasting ideas and values that have animated humanity throughout the centuries for a more purposeful, more ethical, and intellectually richer life. This course asks you to think about what constituted “perfect” societies for past actors, why they envisioned these reforms at the time, and how utopian thinking undergirds our modern ideas about progress and social reform.
4. Learn to read and interpret primary and secondary sources actively and analytically, to think critically and creatively, and to write and speak persuasively.
5. Learn to evaluate ideas from multiple perspectives and to formulate informed opinions on complex issues of critical importance in today's global world, such as the organization of labor, gender & racial equality, political & economic relations, and the role of religion in governance.

Having successfully met the learning objectives, you will have acquired both practical skills and more intangible competencies. You will master strategies for finding, reading and understanding relevant information from different genres, for analyzing complex problems, for making and evaluating compelling arguments, and for preparing effective presentations. You will become a clearer thinker and a stronger writer. You will know how to situate current events and ideas in the right historical and cultural context to be able to make better decisions. You will gain new insights and be inspired. You will be ready for a life of learning and creativity.

# Required Texts

Sir Thomas More, Sir Francis Bacon, and Henry Neville, *Three Early Modern Utopias: Utopia, New Atlantis, and The Isles of Pines*, ed. Susan Bruce (Oxford, 2009)

William Morris, *News from Nowhere* (Dover Publications, 2011)

Handouts will be available on Blackboard (BB)

# Evaluation

15% Class Participation. You are expected to attend all scheduled class meetings and to actively participate in class discussions. Students will maintain a weekly Journal on Blackboard about the readings. Your journal should reflect on each utopia’s positive qualities and negative qualities, do you think it could have worked? Why or why not? Would you have wanted to live there (explain)? How do you think the utopia could have been improved?

5% Discussion Leader. Students will be assigned as discussion leaders for one week during the semester. This will include preparing topics for discussion and making a brief presentation on the background of the author and relevant context for the primary source(s). Within one week of your presentation, you will submit a brief assessment of your discussion: how do you think it went? what worked? what did not work? what would you have done differently? what would you do again?

15% Primary Source Analysis: Written and Material Sources. Write a 3-4 page paper assessing the physical characteristics and contents of two primary sources, one a written source (printed or archival) and one material object. These sources should be thematically related. Students can find these sources through one of USC’s online databases or internet sources provided by the instructor, Special Collections in Doheny Library, and by visiting local museums. A worksheet will be provided for the assignment. This will be uploaded to Turnitin on **January 30 by midnight**.

20% Midterm Essay. A 5-page essay that answers one of two prompts provided by the instructor. This essay will use multiple primary sources from the course to make an historical argument. This will be uploaded to Turnitin by **February 25 at midnight**.

20% Book Review. A 5-7 page analysis of a utopian book. A list of books will be provided for the assignment and students should supplement their reading with scholarly articles. This will be uploaded to Turnitin on **March 20 by midnight**.

20% Final Exam Essay. A 7-10 page paper in which the student will use the course readings to construct their own utopia. Using the utopias we’ve studied as a comparison, explain the ideals of your utopia. What problems does your utopia seek to solve? How? Where is it located and is the location significant? How is your utopia organized (governance, labor, education, security, household, foreign relations, etc.)? What are the possible dystopic elements of your utopia? What underlying cultural values does your utopia reflect? You may include a map of your utopia. This will be uploaded to Turnitin by **Friday, May 3 by 2pm**.

5% Utopia Presentation. Students will give a 5-minute presentation about their utopia to the class during the scheduled final examination. **Friday, May 3, 2-4pm**.

Final grades in the course will be calculated according to the following scale:

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| A 95-100  A- 90-94  B+ 87-89  B 83-86  B- 80-82  C+ 77-79 | C 73-76  C- 70-72  D+ 67-69  D 63-66  D- 60-62  F 59 and below |

Students will receive a progress report at midterm.

# Assignments

Students can expect to read an average of 80-100 pages each week, though the week-to-week amount could be as little as 50 pages to give you adequate time to handle complex primary sources or up to 150 pages for certain books like Sir Thomas More’s *Utopia*.

Late assignments will be penalized. If you have an excused absence, the new due date is the first class when you return. Remember: partial credit is better than no credit!

Whether your paper is submitted on Turnitin or sent via email, you must verify that your file is readable. If you upload an unreadable file, late penalties will apply until a readable version of your paper is submitted.

Extensions are at my discretion and generally require 24 hours’ notice, but students should notify me as soon as possible if they believe they will need it. The new deadline will be determined according to circumstance and failure to meet it will constitute a late assignment.

# Communication

Questions about content you would like more clarification on, your grade, issues you are having in the course, etc. are all better addressed in-person rather than by email, so I encourage you to take advantage of office hours. If you cannot attend scheduled office hours, please make an appointment.

Emails will receive a response within two business days (i.e. between 9am-6pm on weekdays). If you do not receive a response within that time, please re-send your email.

Please identify the course in the subject line with a brief indication of the issue and include your full name in the message.

Please thoroughly consult the syllabus and/or course handouts BEFORE emailing your question.

Do not delay in informing me about illnesses, crises, or other issues that affect your ability to submit assignments on time or attend classes. I cannot work with you if I do not know what is going on. Likewise, you are better off being upfront with me that your assignment will be late rather than receive messages from me inquiring about it.

# Attendance Policy

Attendance will be taken at each class session. All students are permitted one unexcused absences without penalty to their participation grade. Unexcused absences, however, do not excuse students from submitting their assignments on time.

Excessive tardiness will be treated as an unexcused absence. If you know this will be difficult (ex: your preceding class is across campus), please inform me before it becomes a problem.

Excused absences must be accompanied by the appropriate documentation (**Note:** Engemann Health Center does not provide students with doctor’s notes). If you have an issue that may require a lengthy absence, please inform me as soon as possible.

If you miss class, you are responsible for the material covered. If you need class notes, please ask a fellow student. I am happy to meet with you to discuss any questions you have about the material.

# Class Conduct

All students are expected to arrive on time and to remain for the entire duration. If you come late, please enter quietly and take the nearest seat available to minimize the disruption; if you must leave early, please seat yourself near the door for a quiet exit.

Please mute the sounds on all devices (cell phones, tablets, laptops, etc.) before class begins. Devices should be put away unless needed for note-taking or to access class materials. Please do not surf the web or text in class (I can tell!). If your technology disrupts the class, you will be asked to refrain from using it.

In order to create an environment conducive to active participation by all students, everyone is expected to be respectful and to engage constructively and critically with each other’s ideas.

Students are allowed to record lectures or discussions for their own personal or class group use, but they must notify me beforehand so I can inform the class. Distribution or use of recordings for any other purposes requires my express authorization.

All course materials are available either at the USC Bookstore or on Blackboard. These materials are made available to students under fair use copyright laws; however, students are not permitted to distribute any course materials (including readings, response paper questions, or exam questions) to sites such as CourseHero and StudyBlue or to unenrolled students.

# Academic Integrity & Conduct

In accordance with USC policy, students are expected to submit their own work for evaluation. You may not submit work previously evaluated in another course without my prior approval.

Plagiarism is the act of presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either word-for-word or paraphrased. Instances of plagiarism may merit serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in *SCampus* in Section 11, *Behavior Violating University Standards* [https://scampus.usc.edu/1100-behavior-violating-university-standards-and-appropriate-sanctions](https://scampus.usc.edu/1100-behavior-violating-university-standards-and-appropriate-sanctions/).  Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable.

All assignments must have the appropriate footnote citations acknowledging the intellectual contribution of others to your work, including all primary and secondary sources. Lectures do not need to be cited unless you quote me verbatim. I will not accept any papers that do not have footnotes.

Discrimination, sexual assault, intimate partner violence, stalking, and harassment are prohibited by the university.  You are encouraged to report all incidents to the *Office of Equity and Diversity*/*Title IX Office* <http://equity.usc.edu> and/or to the *Department of Public Safety* [http://dps.usc.edu](http://dps.usc.edu/). This is important for the health and safety of the whole USC community. Faculty and staff must report any information regarding an incident to the Title IX Coordinator who will provide outreach and information to the affected party. The sexual assault resource center webpage <http://sarc.usc.edu> fully describes reporting options. Relationship and Sexual Violence Services <https://engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp> provides 24/7 confidential support.

# Support Services

Students whose primary language is not English should check with the *American Language Institute* [http://ali.usc.edu](http://ali.usc.edu/), which sponsors courses and workshops specifically for international students. *The Office of Disability Services and Programs* [http://dsp.usc.edu](http://dsp.usc.edu/) provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange the relevant accommodations. If an officially  declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, *USC Emergency Information* <http://emergency.usc.edu>will provide safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued by means of Blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technology.

Confidential mental healthcare services are available Monday through Friday, 8:30am -5pm at Student Counseling Services in the USC Engemann Student Health Center. Their phone number is (213) 740-7711 and website is <https://engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling/>. For after-hours counseling, call (213) 740-7711 and dial 0.

# Schedule

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| **Week 1** | **Introduction** |  |
| 1/7 | Introduction |  |
| 1/9 | Origins | **Meet at Special Collections** |
| Readings: Plato, *The Republic* (BB); Howard Segal, *Utopias*, ch. 1 (BB) | | |
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| **Week 2** | **Utopia & the New World** |  |
| 1/14 |  |  |
| 1/16 |  |  |
| Readings: Sir Thomas More, *Utopia* | | |
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| **Week 3** | **Utopia in the New World** |  |
| 1/21 | **No Class- MLK Day** |  |
| 1/23 |  |  |
| Readings: Bernardino Verástique, *Michoacán and Eden*, ch. 7-8 (BB); Lyman Sargent, *Colonial and Postcolonial Utopias* (BB) | | |
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| **Week 4** | **Reformation Utopias** |  |
| 1/28 |  |  |
| 1/30 |  | **DUE:** Primary Source Analysis I |
| Readings: Tommaso Campanella, *The City of the Sun* (BB); Johann Valentin Andreae, *Christianopolis* (BB); Chloë Houston, *The Renaissance Utopia*, pp. 61-88 (BB) | | |
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| **Week 5** | **Scientific Utopias** |  |
| 2/4 |  |  |
| 2/6 |  |  |
| Readings: Sir Francis Bacon, “New Atlantis” in *Three Early Modern Utopias*; Margaret Cavendish, *The Blazing World* (BB) | | |
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| **Week 6** | **Millenarian Utopias** |  |
| 2/11 |  |  |
| 2/13 |  |  |
| Readings: Hartlib/Plattes, *A Description of the Famous Kingdom of Macaria* (BB); Samuel Gott, *Nova Solyma* (BB) | | |
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| **Week 7** | **Radical Utopias** |  |
| 2/18 | **No Class- President’s Day** |  |
| 2/20 |  |  |
| Readings: Gerrard Winstanley, *The Law of Freedom in a Platform*; James Harrington, *The Commonwealth of Oceania* | | |
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| **Week 8** | **Midterm** |  |
| 2/25 | **No Class** | **DUE**: Midterm Exam Essay |
| 2/27 |  |  |
| Movie: H. G. Wells’ *Things to Come* (1936) | | |
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| **Week 9** | **Enlightenment Utopias** |  |
| 3/4 |  |  |
| 3/6 |  |  |
| Readings: William Hodgson, *The Commonwealth of Reason* (BB); Anonymous, *The Island of Content* (BB) | | |
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| **Week 10** | **Spring Break** |  |
| 3/11 | No Class |  |
| 3/13 | No Class |  |
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| **Week 11** | **Anti-Absolutist Utopias** |  |
| 3/18 |  |  |
| 3/20 |  | **DUE:** Book Review |
| Readings: Cyrano de Bergerac, *L'Autre Monde* (BB); Louis-Sébastien Mercier, *Le An 2440* (BB) | | |
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| **Week 12** | **Abolitionist Utopias** |  |
| 3/25 | Sierra Leone & Nashoba |  |
| 3/27 |  |  |
| Readings: Charles Bernard Wadstrom, *A Plan for a Free Community at Sierra Leone* (BB); Frances Wright, *A Plan for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery* (BB) | | |
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| **Week 13** | **Socialist Utopias** |  |
| 4/1 | Brook Farm & New Harmony |  |
| 4/3 |  |  |
| Readings: Charles Fourier, *The Theory of the Four Movements* (BB); Firsthand Accounts of Brook Farm; Robert Owen, *A New View of Society* | | |
| \* 4/5 Last Day to Drop | | |
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| **Week 14** | **19th c. Christian Utopias** |  |
| 4/8 | Oneida & Shakers |  |
| 4/10 |  |  |
| Readings: John Humphrey Noyes, *The History of Socialisms*; *Shakers and Shakerism* (BB); Testimonies of Ann Lee and Shaker Women (BB) | | |
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| **Week 15** | **Utopian Literature** |  |
| 4/15 |  |  |
| 4/17 |  |  |
| Readings: Etienne, Cabet, *Travels in Icaria* (BB); William Morris, *News from Nowhere* (BB) | | |
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| **Week 16** | **Feminist Utopias** |  |
| 4/22 |  |  |
| 4/24 |  |  |
| Readings: Mary E. Bradley, *Mizzora*; Elizabeth Burgoyne Corbett, *New Amazonia*; Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Herland*; Alessa Johns, *Feminism and Utopianism* (BB) | | |
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| **Week 17** | **Study Week/finals** |  |
| 4/29 | **No Class** |  |
| 5/3 | **Friday, Final Essay due by 2pm**  **Utopia Presentations** |  |
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