

*Progress?*

First Year Seminar 101

Fall 2021

Instructor: Nishi Shah

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Office Hours: Wednesday 3-5pm

### Course Description

Is the world a better place today than it was fifty years ago? Will it be better yet in another fifty years? We cannot answer such questions without asking what we mean by “better,” that is, what counts as progress. The question of what progress is cannot be answered simply: the term has been used in different ways at different times and has also been the subject of much critical examination. We will explore the meaning of progress by engaging with a variety of thought-provoking and influential works.

### Texts

- Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* - ISBN-13: 9780140447576
- Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* - ISBN-13: 978-0-393-30451-0
- Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* - ISBN-13: 9780140439212
- Strunk and White, *The Elements of Style*

All books are available from Amherst Books. In addition, there will be a photocopied collection of readings that will be distributed in class.

### Written Assignments

- Three 1-page papers:
  - due September 3 (to be rewritten and submitted by September 10 for a grade)
  - due September 17 (to be rewritten and submitted by September 24 for a grade)
  - due October 1 (to be rewritten and submitted by October 8 for a grade)
- Two 2-page papers:
  - due October 29
  - due by December 10

### Grading

- 1-page papers (300 words maximum): 10% each
- 2-page papers (600 words maximum): 20% each
- Class participation and weekly writing assignments: 30%

## Readings

### **I. What is Progress?**

Pinker, *Enlightenment Now*

Hobbes, *Leviathan*

Harari, *Sapiens*

### **II. The Paradox of Progress**

Marx and Engels, *Communist Manifesto*

*The Battle of Algiers*; Yeats, "The Second Coming"

King, "Letter from Birmingham Jail"

Weber, "The Spirit of Capitalism"

Forster, "The Other Side of the Hedge"

### **III. Cultural Pessimism**

Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*

Rubenstein, "Mass Death and Contemporary Civilization"

### **IV. The Costs of Progress**

Le Guin, "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas"

Buck v. Bell

Snyder, "The War on History is a War on Democracy"

Lear, *Radical Hope*

Kolbert, *The Sixth Extinction*

## Events

Thursday, 9/23: Discussion with CHI Fellows: Rose Lenehan and Trent Masiki

Thursday, 10/28: Point/Counterpoint with Professors Appiah and Reed

Friday, 11/12: Point/Counterpoint with Professor Stone

Tuesday, 11/30: Point/Counterpoint with Professor Murray