



AMS 370: American Utopias (31155)
Spring 2019 // Tues/Thurs 11:00-12:30 // BUR 436A

Instructor: Dr. Brendan Gaughen //
Office:

What do utopian socialist communities of 150 years ago have to do with the gated suburbs of today? What salacious things were going on in the Oneida Community in the second half of the nineteenth century? Why is the City on a Hill metaphor so persistent? Part geography and part intellectual and social history, this course explores some of the most lasting cultural forces in American thought and practice from the colonial era through the present – belief that America is an ideal place and the recurring impulse to form separate societies by those who have believed America to be an irreparably flawed place. Paying close attention to historic attempts (and failures) to create “perfect” social, spiritual, and physical communities both real and imagined, this course investigates ideas about society, inclusion and exclusion, and American exceptionalism, finding that these communities tell us as much about the beliefs of their adherents as they do about prevailing attitudes and values at various points in American history.

This course uses a variety of primary and secondary texts spanning the colonial era to the postindustrial era to critically investigate historical ideas about community, landscape, nature, property, family, labor, society, optimism, perfection, and other concepts that have influenced the development of America and facilitated the creation and maintenance of various communities within.

This course carries the Writing Flag. Writing Flag courses are designed to give students experience with writing in an academic discipline. In this class, you can expect to write regularly during the semester, complete substantial writing projects, and receive feedback from your instructor to help you improve your writing. You should therefore expect a substantial portion of your grade to come from your written work. Writing Flag classes meet the Core Communications objectives of Critical Thinking, Communication, Teamwork, and Personal Responsibility, established by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board. This course also carries the Independent Inquiry flag.

COURSE GOALS

This course has three principal content-based objectives:

- 1) Greater understanding of how and why certain people have mapped ideas about optimism and perfection onto the American landscape and society and why others chose to attempt to withdraw and form their own communities.
- 2) Greater understanding of how varying perspectives and ideas shape the remembering and retelling of particular episodes of American history.
- 3) Greater understanding of the plurality of viewpoints and experiences of ordinary people at various points in American history.

In addition to learning about the social conditions that gave rise to certain communities, this course has three skills-based objectives that you will develop over the course of the semester. These skills will not only be useful during your academic career, but are essential in the workplace and to the development of an active, informed, and engaged citizenry. These include:

- 1) Writing skills. You will practice cogently crafting an argument based on specific evidence and how to respond to counter arguments. You will also practice crafting clear thesis statements and organizing an argument effectively.
- 2) Close reading and analysis. You will practice how to interrogate and analyze texts that carry specific and often oblique messages to their audiences.
- 3) Synthesizing the research of other scholars. You will be asked to locate an author's main claims, identify their evidence and perspective, and present your findings to the class in the form of leading discussion.

COURSE POLICIES

Readings. Please purchase the course reader, available at Jenn's Copies at 2518 Guadalupe St. I encourage each of you to be active readers and interact with the texts by underlining, highlighting, and engaging with the texts as you see fit. Please bring the reader to class each day ready to discuss the assigned text, ideally with specific questions or talking points in mind. It should go without saying that in a discussion-based course, showing up to class having done the reading is essential. Always check with the syllabus (and/or announcements on Canvas) before proceeding through the course reader.

Attendance. This class is discussion-oriented so attendance is imperative. Missing an excess of five class days will result in a zero participation grade. Explained absences for religious holidays, sanctioned travel related to sports or military service, or other absences you can plan in advance will not necessarily count against you if at least one week's notice is given. Unforeseen absences, such as illness or family emergency, may be excused once proper documentation is provided, at my discretion.

Office hours. I strongly encourage each of you to come to office hours at least once (preferably more) during the semester so you can get the most out of the course. This is an opportunity for you to discuss assignment expectations, difficult aspects of the readings, and seek feedback on your written work before you turn it in. Or just come by to say hello and talk about music or something.

Devices. I strongly suggest that you take notes by hand rather than with a computer or tablet. Numerous scientific studies have shown that people remember lectures better when they've taken handwritten notes. Laptops and tablets in class must be silent and may not be used for any reason other than course-related material. I trust you will all use technology responsibly, but failure to abide by this policy may result in the revocation of in-class laptop/tablet privileges.

Communication. Course-related announcements, relevant or interesting links, and other important information will be sent to you via email, so please check your email at least once per day. All emails sent to me will be responded to within 24 hours of receipt unless unforeseen circumstances arise.

Course website. A copy of this syllabus, specific instructions for assignments, and announcements will be posted to the course Canvas site.

Late work. Late work will receive a deduction of one letter grade per class day past the due date. Extensions will not be granted unless under extraordinary circumstances.

Written assignments. All assignments must be typed with 1-inch margins and 12 point font. Use a standard citation style (e.g. Chicago Style, MLA) to cite your sources when applicable. All papers must be turned in as hard copies at the beginning of class on their respective due dates. Somehow, printers always miraculously malfunction 10 minutes before papers are due. Please plan accordingly. Given this course's writing requirements, I strongly encourage you to take advantage of the resources of the Undergraduate Writing Center (PCL 2.330; <http://uwc.utexas.edu>).

Changes to the syllabus. I may slightly modify the course schedule, assigned readings, and due dates as I see fit. You will be alerted to these changes in class and/or via email.

Students with disabilities. Any student with a documented disability who requires academic accommodations should contact Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) at 512-471-6259 (voice) or 866-329-3986 (video phone). Faculty members are not required to provide accommodations without an official accommodation letter from SSD.

Academic honesty. In an effort to create an atmosphere of mutual respect and integrity in the classroom, cheating and plagiarism of any kind will not be tolerated. Such actions will result in an automatic zero for the assignment and may be reported to the Dean of Students for further disciplinary action. University policies regarding academic honesty are available at http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/acadint_what_is.php.

Grading system. This course follows a plus/minus grading system:

A 93-100 / A- 90-92 / 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 0-59

TL;DR version: show up to class prepared to discuss the readings, be respectful of each other, put phones away, submit assignments on time, show up to class consistently, don't plagiarize.

ASSIGNMENTS (detailed instructions can be found on Canvas)

Two-page reading responses (5)	30%	Due dates variable
Precis/discussion (3-4 pgs)	15%	Due date variable
Final project proposal (1 pg)	5%	Due Mar 12
Annotated bibliography	15%	Due Apr 11
Final project (8-10 pgs)	30%	Due May 9
Attendance/participation	5%	Assessed at the end of the semester

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1 – Laying the Foundation

Tue Jan 22 // Course introduction

Thu Jan 24 // A persistent idea (links to all three readings will be posted to Canvas)

- 1) Allison Meier, "500 Years of Failed Utopias," *Hyperallergic* (12/13/16).
- 2) Terry Eagleton, "Utopias Past and Present: Why Thomas More Remains Astonishingly Radical," *The Guardian* (10/16/15).
- 3) China Mienville, "We Are All Thomas More's Children: 500 Years of Utopia," *The Guardian* (11/4/16).

Reminder – purchase the course reader at Jenn's Copies, 2518 Guadalupe St

Week 2 – Envisioning utopia in the New World

Tue Jan 29 // European visions of the New World

- 1) Christopher Columbus, *The Four Voyages: Being His Own Log-Book, Letters and Dispatches with Connecting Narrative* (New York: Penguin, 1991), 51-76.

Thu Jan 31 // English colonists

- 1) John Smith, portion of "A Description of New England" (1616).
- 2) John Winthrop, portion of "A Model of Christian Charity" (1630).

Week 3 – Ideology and space

Tue Feb 5 // Perfecting the land

- 1) David Nye, *America as Second Creation: Technology and Narratives of New Beginnings* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), chapter 1, "Narrating the Assimilation of Nature" (9-20).

Thu Feb 7 // How political-economic systems shape the land

- 1) Kate Brown, *Dispatches from Dystopia: Histories of Places Not Yet Forgotten* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), chapter 6, "Gridded Lives: Why Kazakhstan and Montana are Nearly the Same Place" (97-133).

Week 4 – Attitudes about landscape

Tue Feb 12 // Picturing the land

- 1) Barbara Novak, *Nature and Culture: American Landscape and Painting 1825-1875* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980, 1995), chapter 7, "The Primal Vision: Expeditions" (137-156).

Thu Feb 14 // Transforming the land

- 1) David Nye, *America as Second Creation* chapter 7, "Let Us Conquer Space" (147-173).

Week 5 – Utopian communities in early America

Tue Feb 19 // The first American utopias

- 1) Yaacov Oved, *Two Hundred Years of American Communes* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1988), chapter 1, "Communes in the History of the United States" (3-15) and chapter 2, "Ephrata and the First Communes in North America" (19-33).

Thu Feb 21 // Communitarian living in the nineteenth century

- 1) Dolores Hayden, *Seven American Utopias: The Architecture of Communitarian Socialism, 1790-1975* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1976), chapter 2, "The Ideal Community: Garden, Machine, or Model Home?" (8-29).

Week 6 – Harmony, Perfectionism, and heaven on earth

Tue Feb 26 // Shakers

- 1) Dolores Hayden, *Seven American Utopias* chapter 4, "Heavenly and Earthly Space" (64-101).

Thu Feb 28 // Oneida

- 1) Dolores Hayden, *Seven American Utopias* chapter 7, "The Architecture of Complex Marriage" (186-220).

Week 7 – Suburban enclaves

Tue Mar 5 // The nineteenth century suburb

- 1) Dolores Hayden, *Building Suburbia: Green Fields and Urban Growth, 1820-2000* (New York: Vintage, 2003), chapter 4, "Picturesque Enclaves" (45-70).

Thu Mar 7 // The twentieth century suburb

- 1) Cynthia Lee Henthorn, *From Submarines to Suburbs: Selling a Better America, 1939-1959* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2006), chapter 6, "Hygienic Solutions for the 'House of Tomorrow'" (142-172).

Week 8 – Survival

Tue Mar 12 // Utopia in the atomic age

- 1) Tom Vanderbilt, *Survival City: Adventures Among the Ruins of Atomic America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), chapter 3, "The Domestication of Doomsday: New Buildings for the Perilous Atomic Age" (96-127).

DUE: final project proposal

Thu Mar 14 // Spaceship Earth

- 1) R. Buckminster Fuller, "Vertical is to Live—Horizontal is to Die," The American Scholar 39: 1 (Winter 1969-70), pp. 27-47.

DUE: first three reading responses

Week 9 – Postwar communes and communities

Tue Mar 26 // Renewed popularity in the 1960s and 70s

- 1) Dolores Hayden, *Seven American Utopias* chapter 11, "Edge City, Heart City, Drop City: Communal Building Today" (320-345).
- 2) Richard Fairfield, ed., *Utopia USA* (San Francisco: Alternatives Foundation, 1972), 9-13.
Herbert Otto, "The Communal Alternative"

Thu Mar 28 // Back to the Land movement

*****Class will meet at the Ransom Center in the Denius Seminar Room*****

- 1) Richard Fairfield, ed., *Utopia USA*, selections.
Mason Dixon, "Country Communes – Escapist?"
Stuart Watson, "Getting in Shape"
Walt Odets, "Drop City Revisited"
Jay Mathews, "Virginia Communes"
Gloria Hutchinson, "The Weavers of Maine"

Week 10 – Sexual utopias

Tue Apr 2 // San Francisco in the seventies

- 1) Frances Fitzgerald, *Cities on a Hill*, portion of chapter 1, "The Castro" (41-69).

Thu Apr 4 // Alternative family systems

- 1) Richard Fairfield, ed., *Utopia USA*, selections.
Anonymous, "Women's Collectives"
Bread & Roses Collective, "Getting Together"
Barbara & Michael McKain, "Building Extended Families"
Vivian Estellanchild, "2 Hip Communes"
Vicki Pollard & Jean Munley, "Five of Us – 2 Views"
Anonymous, "Politics of Housework"
Anonymous, "Politics of Male Liberation"

Week 11 – Twentieth century religious utopias

Tue Apr 9 // Christian fundamentalism

- 1) Dennis Covington, *Salvation on Sand Mountain: Snake Handling and Redemption in Southern Appalachia* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1995), chapter 5, "Jolo" (81-110).

Thu Apr 11 // New Age religious movements

- 1) Frances Fitzgerald, *Cities on a Hill: A Journey through Contemporary American Cultures* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1986), portion of chapter 4, "Rajneeshpuram" (247-281).

DUE: annotated bibliography

Week 12 – The social politics of relocation

Tue Apr 16 // Haight-Ashbury

- 1) Joan Didion, "Slouching Towards Bethlehem," in *Slouching Towards Bethlehem: Essays* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1968), 84-128.

Thu Apr 18 // The Hmong in America

- 1) Chia Youyee Vang, *Hmong America: Reconstructing Community in Diaspora* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010), chapter 2, "A New Home in America" (44-67).

Week 13 – Sonic utopias

Tue Apr 23 // DIY punk in the nation's capital

- 1) Mark Andersen & Mark Jackson, *Dance of Days: Two Decades of Punk in the Nation's Capital* (New York: Soft Skull Press, 2001), chapter 9, "Drink Deep" (179-209).

Thu Apr 25 // Afrofuturism

- 1) Ytasha Womack, *Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci-Fi and Fantasy Culture* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press: 2013), chapter 4, "Mothership in the Key of Mars" (53-76).

Week 14 – Late capitalist utopias/dystopias

Tue Apr 30 // New (sub)urbanism

- 1) Andrew Ross, *The Celebration Chronicles: Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Property Value in Disney's New Town* (New York: Ballantine, 1999), chapter 4, "Main Street is Better Than Alright" (63-93).

Thu May 2 // Urban renewal and displacement

- 1) Sharon Zukin, *Naked City: The Death and Life of Authentic Urban Places* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), chapter 1, "How Brooklyn Became Cool" (35-61).

Week 15 – Where do we go from here?

Tue May 7 // Mars: Earth 2.0?

- 1) Elizabeth Kolbert, "Project Exodus," *New Yorker* (6/1/15).
- 2) Zahaan Bharmal, "The case against Mars colonization," *The Guardian* (8/28/18).

Thu May 9 // Bringing it all together; course evaluations

DUE: Final project, remaining two reading responses

This syllabus is subject to change during the course of the semester, if necessary.