A survey of the utopian impulse within American culture.

Long portrayed as a land of both plenty and desolation, America has inspired expressions of undying hope and insurmountable despair. This seminar will explore the wide varieties of utopian and dystopian thought in America in historical context. We will examine utopian and dystopian narratives in relation to intentional communities, social movements, progressive politics, popular subcultures and technological change, in order to determine how the principle of hope and communal identities continue to shape the ideals of nationhood.

Prerequisite: fourth-year standing in Honours English.

**Required Readings:**

Thomas More, *Utopia*
Edward Bellamy, *Looking Backward*
Kurt Vonnegut, *Player Piano*
Vladimir Nabokov, *Pale Fire*
Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Dispossessed*
Jonathan Lethem, *Chronic City*
Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Herland*
Octavia Butler, *Dawn*
Cormac McCarthy, *The Road*

*plus* a film screening (TBA)
*and* various Supplemental Readings, online and on reserve.

All titles are available at *After Stonewall Books*, 370 Bank St. (at Gilmour). Secondary and supplemental readings can be found on reserve at MacOdrum Library, linked from our course website ([http://webct6.carleton.ca](http://webct6.carleton.ca)), or in the 4708 Course Reserve binder.
Assignments:

Seminar 30 minutes 20%
Critical Response 10 minutes 10%
Participation in class and online 20%
Term Paper 2500 words (10 pages) for Honours students
3750 words (15 pages) for Master’s students

DUE November 29 50%

Seminar (30 minutes including discussion, 20%)

For your seminar, you might choose any combination of approaches, but should be sure to include a close, theorized and well-researched analysis of our primary text for the week, with a précis and discussion of one or more key points in utopian theory occasioned by our weekly readings.

In your seminar, be sure to address the week’s Selected reading in detail, and are welcome to consider additional articles from our Supplemental readings (in the 4708 Course Reader), and any other works of literary or cultural theory that inform your topic. In other words, I want you to both explain and demonstrate to the class a given critical approach to utopian studies—its methods, applications, contradictions, limitations, and relevance to your topic.

Of course, feel free to draw upon additional literary or critical texts of your own choosing, providing that you can contextualize them adequately for the class. Remember, you’ll be graded on both the depth and originality of your research, as well as the success with which you present your material. A provocative and engaging seminar, solidly grounded in research, is better than one that is overly recondite and jargon-laden. Your ultimate goal is to raise questions and generate critical discussion.

Since utopias are a communal form of symbolic expression, research into utopian literature could also benefit from a collaborative approach. I encourage you to collaborate on your research and/or presentations to ensure that you complement rather than repeat your classmates' presentations. To help prevent redundancy, be sure to clear your topic and approach with me well beforehand.

N.B. Your in-class presentation should be accompanied by TWO legible transcripts of (or notes for) your seminar presentation, one for me and one for your weekly respondent (see Critical Response, below). You should also provide a handout for the class including the following information:

- an outline of your key points and examples, with any salient quotations and page references;
- a list of any key theoretical terms you use, with definitions;
- a selected Works Cited and Consulted, detailing your primary and secondary sources.

It’s up to you whether to present your material conversationally, reveal it Socratically, or read it in the form of a conference paper. Whatever the mode of presentation, be sure to indicate all sources during your oral presentation. A good approach is to foreground a particular literary issue, critical problem or theoretical argument as the focus of your presentation.

You’re welcome to use audio-visual materials (e.g. music, video clips, or digital presentations), but be sure to consult with me first to ensure a seamless presentation. Above all, please stay within your time limit to allow your classmates enough time for their presentations. Failure to scope your presentation appropriately may result in a penalty.

You should be prepared to lead and guide the class in a discussion following your seminar, so come prepared with plenty of provocative questions. Think of the class as a test group for bouncing around ideas that will help guide your final research paper. Be prepared to take notes, as the class will doubtless have some excellent ideas for you.
Critical Response (10 minutes, 10%)

The Critical Response offers you the opportunity to take ten minutes to respond to one seminar presentation (assigned by lottery) at the next class meeting (usually the week following the original presentation). Your response will address both the strengths and the potential oversights or contradictions of the seminar.

In your response, refrain from making ad hominem remarks; instead, you should marshal further textual, critical and/or theoretical evidence that might expand upon, complicate or problematize your classmate’s position. The goal of your response should be to stimulate dialogue and productive conversation by bringing new material or perspectives to light, and to help your classmates develop their own critical approaches.

Participation (20%)

Please notify me of any anticipated or unavoidable absences from class due to emergency or illness. Regular attendance at seminars is expected, but that alone won’t win you full marks for participation. For full marks (and your added enjoyment) you’re expected to keep up with our reading schedule, participate actively in our weekly seminars, and contribute to our discussions, both in-class and online through diigo.com.

Please remember that these online spaces are a virtual extension of our classroom, and therefore, subject to the University’s conduct regulations. At all times, you must respect your fellow classmates, and try to keep the discussion relevant to our course goals. When in doubt, follow The Golden Rule of Netiquette: Don't post any comment you wouldn't read aloud in class.

Term Paper (3000 words for undergrads, 4750 words for grads, 50%, DUE November 29)

You can write on pretty much any topic relating to our primary or secondary readings, providing you can justify it to me beforehand. Again, it’s a good idea to run your topic by me before you begin researching in earnest. Your term paper can certainly expand upon your seminar topic, providing it also takes in any early feedback from me, your respondent, and the class.

Your paper should provide an original close reading of your primary text(s), carefully researched, theorized and documented, and contextualized within a broader awareness of the kinds of literary and theoretical issues we discuss in class.

You might have to do some digging to secure primary and secondary research materials, especially those with limited distribution. MacOdrum Library has respectable holdings in utopian studies, as a quick subject search will reveal. Moreover, many of these works in turn contain bibliographies that will point you to further sources. The Ottawa University Library and Ottawa Public Libraries are also at your disposal, along with Interlibrary Loans, J-STOR, LION, and Project Muse. But effective research (not to mention interlibrary loans) takes time, so don’t leave it to the last minute.

If you need help getting started, or are having difficulty locating sources, check with me.

Extensions and Late Assignments

• All assignments are expected to be submitted on time, unless you have: i) a medical note from a doctor explaining that you could not complete the assignment; ii) an explanatory note from the Paul Menton Centre (See Special Accommodations, below); or iii) special permission for an extension from me.

• You may submit essays up to 3 days late without penalty; however, late papers will not receive extensive written feedback.

• Essays submitted more than 3 days late will be docked 5%/day, up to a maximum of 15%. Essays handed in more than 6 days past the due date will not be accepted, and will score 0. In other words, plan ahead, develop a work schedule, and stick to it. Any request for an extension beyond 3 days must be submitted by email to the instructor at least one week before the due date.

Delays do sometimes occur as a result of computer errors. However, responsibility for your work rests ultimately with you. Be sure to back up your work (both locally and to network drives) and print out
hard copies regularly as you write. That way, if your computer fails, you can always locate another computer at the University to finish your work.

Special Accommodations

You may need special arrangements to meet your academic obligations during the term. For an accommodation request the processes are as follows:

Pregnancy obligation: write to me with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details visit the Equity Services website http://www.carleton.ca/equity/accommodation/student_guide.htm

Religious obligation: write to me with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details visit the Equity Services website http://www.carleton.ca/equity/accommodation/student_guide.htm

Students with disabilities requiring academic accommodations in this course must register with the Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities (PMC) for a formal evaluation of disability-related needs. Documented disabilities could include but are not limited to mobility/physical impairments, specific Learning Disabilities (LD), psychiatric/psychological disabilities, sensory disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and chronic medical conditions. Registered PMC students are required to contact the PMC, 613-520-6608, every term to ensure that I receive your Letter of Accommodation, no later than two weeks before the first assignment is due or the first in-class test/midterm requiring accommodations. If you only require accommodations for your formally scheduled exam(s) in this course, please submit your request for accommodations to PMC by the deadlines published on the PMC website: http://www2.carleton.ca/pmc/new-and-current-students/dates-and-deadlines/

Submitting Assignments

Term Papers must be submitted twice, both in hard copy and uploaded through the course WebCT site.

Hard Copy Submission:

Please don’t slip essays under my office door. Instead, either submit your hard copy in class, or write both our names on the front page, and hand them into the English Department essay drop box (Dunton Tower 1812).

To prevent the loss of assignments, it's a good idea to set the preferences of your word processor to save backup copies periodically, and to save to your network drive or email account as well. Responsibility for submitting assignments rests ultimately with you. I am not in the habit of losing student work; however, should your assignment become misplaced, you will be required to resubmit another copy upon request, or you will score 0. Be sure to retain a photocopy or print-out of all your work, including all research notes and rough drafts, until your final grade is registered. The instructor reserves the right to request all rough work, and to withhold the grade for any given assignment pending a supplemental oral examination by an ad hoc committee.

Digital Submission:

In addition to a hard copy, a digital copy of your Term Paper must be submitted through WebCT on or before the essay deadline. Please don’t e-mail assignments. It is important that you submit each assignment through WebCT, as doing so provides proof that you have submitted it on time.
N.B. Only essays submitted through WebCT will be considered for grading.

Documentation

You are expected to document any and all primary and secondary sources referred to (directly or indirectly) in your assignments, including sources for websites, musical, visual and electronic information. The MLA style of parenthetical references with a Works Cited page, as detailed in the MLA Handbook (7th ed. preferred), is the only acceptable method of documentation (see http://www.mla.org/style).

It's your responsibility to educate yourself on how to avoid plagiarism through careful research habits and the proper documentation of sources. Any failure to document sources, whether deliberate or inadvertent, will carry heavy sanctions, and may result in a failing grade or expulsion (see Academic Integrity, below), so please double-check your Works Cited before submitting assignments. Make sure you know both the University’s policies on plagiarism, and the MLA Handbook guidelines for referencing sources. If you’re still in doubt about what constitutes plagiarism or about the legitimacy of a citation or reference, please ask me, or check with the Academic Writing Centre and Writing Tutorial Service (See Helpful Student Services, below).

N.B. To avoid potential sanction, please retain all rough work. The instructor reserves the right to request all rough work, and to withhold the grade for any given assignment pending a supplemental oral examination by an ad hoc committee.

Academic Integrity

Carleton University has a clear policy on academic integrity, including procedures to address academic misconduct (cheating, plagiarism, and other activities that violate academic integrity standards). Full information is in the Undergraduate Calendar under “Academic Regulations of the University” Section E14: http://www.carleton.ca/cu0809uc/regulations/acadregsuniv14.html.

It is particularly important in this class that students understand and meet academic integrity standards, and are sure they do not violate these standards through plagiarism. The following definition of plagiarism is taken from Carleton’s Academic Integrity Policy, Part VI (this definition also appears in the Undergraduate Calendar):

Plagiarism is presenting, whether intentional or not, the ideas, expression of ideas or work of others as one's own. Plagiarism includes reproducing or paraphrasing portions of someone else's published or unpublished material, regardless of the source, and presenting these as one's own without proper citation or reference to the original source. Examples of sources from which the ideas, expressions of ideas or works of others may be drawn from include but are not limited to: books, articles, papers, literary compositions and phrases, performance compositions, chemical compounds, art works, laboratory reports, research results, calculations and the results of calculations, diagrams, constructions, computer reports, computer code/software, and material on the Internet.

Examples of plagiarism include, but are not limited to:

• submitting a takehome examination, essay, laboratory report or other assignment written, in whole or in part, by someone else;
• using ideas or direct, verbatim quotations, paraphrased material, algorithms, formulae, scientific or mathematical concepts, or ideas without appropriate acknowledgment in any academic assignment;
• using another's data or research findings;
• submitting a computer program developed in whole or in part by someone else, with or without modifications, as one's own;
• failing to acknowledge sources through the use of proper citations when using another's works and/or failing to use quotation marks.

For more helpful information visit the Student Academic Success Centre page on academic integrity and citation: http://www2.carleton.ca/sasc/advising-centre/academic-integrity
Whether you borrow their words or ideas, you must acknowledge all secondary sources fully, including those that I put on Reserve. If you have any questions about when and how to cite sources, do not hesitate to ask either me or your T.A. If we suspect that an essay has been plagiarized either deliberately or inadvertently, we are required to submit the essay to the Dean, who will conduct a thorough investigation into the case and administer penalties, if called for. The penalties for plagiarism are very severe, ranging from failure in the course to expulsion from the university. It's not worth the risk!

Carleton has other important policies regarding tests, examinations, and unauthorized resubmission of your work (that is, handing in the same paper in more than one class). Be sure you understand the standards so as to avoid any academic misconduct.

**Community**

If utopias teach us one lesson, it’s that respect for individual rights can exist only within the context of community rights. Please help to ensure the rights and comfort of all members of the class by respecting these guidelines:

- **Don’t come to school or office hours if you’re ill:** you won’t learn effectively, and you will make others sick. Presenteeism is a growing workplace issue, as it impairs overall productivity. It’s a myth that once you are presenting symptoms, you are no longer contagious. Stay home and take care of yourself; then, once you’re completely cured, ask me, your T.A. or a classmate about what you missed.

- **Avoid wearing strong perfumes or colognes.** Strong scents are outlawed in some Canadian municipalities, as they can cause powerful allergic and asthmatic reactions that interfere with the health and learning of others.
READING SCHEDULE

September

13 Introduction

Supplemental:
Northrop Frye, “Varieties of Literary Utopias”
Krishan Kumar, “Aspects of the Western Utopian Tradition”
Kenneth M. Roemer, “Defining America as Utopia”
Tom Moylan, “The utopian imagination” and “The literary utopia,” from Demand the Impossible

20 More, Utopia

Supplemental:
David Halpin, “Utopianism and Education: The Legacy of Thomas More”
Philip E. Wegner, “Utopia and the Birth of Nations”

27 Bellamy, Looking Backward

Selected: Jean Pfaelzer, “Introduction,” The Utopian Novel in America, 1886-1896

Supplemental:
William Morris, “Bellamy’s Looking Backward”
Kenneth M. Roemer, “Utopia and Victorian Culture: 1888-99”
Sylvia Strauss, “Gender, Class, and Race in Utopia”
Howard P. Segal, “Technological Utopianism in American Culture”

October

4 Vonnegut, Player Piano

Selected: Lyman Tower Sargent, “The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited”

Supplemental:
Marx, “Fragment on Machines”
Raymond Williams, “Utopia and Science Fiction”

11 Thanksgiving
18 Theorizing Utopia

Selected:
- Karl Mannheim, from “The Utopian Mentality,” *Ideology and Utopia*
- Ernst Bloch, from *The Utopian Function of Art and Literature*
- Herbert Marcuse, “Phantasy and Utopia,” from *Eros and Civilization*

25 Nabokov, *Pale Fire*

Selected:
- Isaiah Berlin, “The Pursuit of the Ideal”

Supplemental:
- Richard Rorty, from *Achieving Our Country*
- Slavoj Zizek, “A Plea for Leninist Intolerance”

November

1 Screening: TBA

Selected:
- Darko Suvin, “SF and the Novum”
- Fredric Jameson, “Progress versus Utopia, or; Can We Imagine the Future?”

Supplemental:
- Tom Moylan, “The Locus of Hope: Utopia Versus Ideology”
- Peter Fitting, “Unmasking the Real: Critique and Utopia in Recent SF Films”

8 Le Guin, *The Dispossessed*

Selected:
- Russ, “Recent Feminist Utopias”

Supplemental:
- Samuel R. Delany, “To Read The Dispossessed”
- Naomi Jacobs, “The Frozen Landscape in Women’s Utopian and Science Fiction”
- Peter Seyferth, “Anarchism and Utopia”
- Fredric Jameson, “World Reduction in Le Guin”
15 **Lethem, Chronic City**

*Selected:* Fredric Jameson, “Postmodernism and Consumer Society”

*Supplemental:*
Vincent Geoghegan, “Ernst Bloch and the Ubiquity of Utopia”
Ruth Levitas, “For Utopia: The (limits of the) Utopian function in late capitalist society”
Tom Moylan, “Utopia and Postmodernity: Six Theses”

22 **Gilman, Herland**

*Selected:* Jean Pfaelzer, “A State of Her Own; or, What Did Women Want?”

*Supplemental:*
Fredric Jameson, “The Utopian Enclave,” from *Archaeologies of the Future*
Barbara C. Quissell, “The New World That Eve Made: Feminist Utopias Written by Nineteenth-Century Women”

29 **Octavia Butler, Dawn**

*Selected:* Tom Moylan, “The Critical Dystopia,” from *Scraps of the Untainted Sky*

*Supplemental:*
Michel Foucault, “Of other places”
Madhu Dubey, “Becoming Animal in Black Women’s Science Fiction”
De Witt Douglas Kilgore, “Queering the Coming Race? A Utopian Historical Imperative”

6 **McCarthy, The Road**

*Selected:* Raphael Baccolini, “The Persistence of Hope in Dystopian Science Fiction”

*Supplemental:*
Ruth Levitas and Lucy Sargisson, “Utopia in Dark Times: Optimism/Pessimism and Utopia/Dystopia”
James Berger, “Post-Apocalyptic Rhetorics: How to Speak after the End of Language”
Andrew Ross, “Getting the Future We Deserve”

. . . . and After the End?