

Interim Draft September 4, 2013
 Oberlin College Fall 2013
FYSP 132: Searching for Utopia: Episodes in American History
 Mondays and Wednesdays 2:30-4pm in King 335
 Professor Carol Lasser
 carol.lasser@oberlin.edu
 Office Hours in Rice 315:
 Wednesdays 4-5:20, Thursday 12-1:30 and by appointment



from Thomas More, *Utopia* (1518 edition)

A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth even glancing at, for it leaves out the one country at which Humanity is always landing. And when Humanity lands there, it looks out, and, seeing a better country, sets sail. Progress is the realization of Utopias.

--Oscar Wilde, *The Soul of Man Under Socialism* (1891)

How have Americans envisioned more perfect worlds, and what have they done to bring their ideas to life? This course examines the broad sweep of such thoughts and experiments, with special attention to the optimistic heyday of the early nineteenth century. Reading utopian literature and studying the history of intentional communities, we explore how intellectuals and reformers thought about work and leisure, individualism and community, gender and sex, charisma and faith, technology and nature, in the construction of environments that they believed would allow human beings to best flourish. We will consider how utopian thinkers and communal experiments were shaped by the broader society. We will ponder together how to evaluate success and failure. And we will think about prospects for utopian thinking and intentional communities in our future.

This course includes reading assignments from a wide array of genres, class discussions, postings on the class website, different types of writing assignments, and a research paper and presentation to the class. The course aims to enhance students' abilities to undertake critical reading and analysis, hone their writing skills, and deepen their knowledge of research. To this end, each class meeting will involve completion of some combination of reading, writing and thinking assignments in preparation for the class. Please be sure to complete the assignments before coming to class.

Three books have been ordered from the Oberlin College Bookstore for purchase:
 Lyman Tower Sargent, *Utopianism: A Very Short History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010)

Edward Bellamy, *Looking Backward* (1888. Reprint: Dover Thrift Edition)

Charlotte Perkins Gilman. *Herland* (1915. Reprint: Dover Thrift Edition)

Other reading assignments are available at the BlackBoard site for the class, unless otherwise noted.

Schedule of Classes

Wednesday, September 4: Introductions. Utopias and Intentional Communities.

Monday, September 9: Defining Our Term(s)

Reading Assignment:

- Lyman Tower Sargent, *Utopianism*, pp. 1-66, 102-117, 129-142.

Posting #1: Locate two or three specific and different definitions of utopia presented by Lyman Tower Sargent in his "very short introduction." Take care to include specific page numbers. Then write 1 to 2 paragraphs explaining which definition you find most useful.

Please bring your copy of the book to class.

Wednesday, September 11: Refining our Terms: What is a successful utopian community?

Reading Assignment:

- Donald Pitzer, "Developmental Communalism: An Alternative Approach to Communal Studies," in *Utopian Thought and Communal Experience*, ed, Dennis Hardy and Lorna Davidson (BlackBoard)
- Hakim Bey, excerpts from "T.A.Z. The Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchy Poetic Terrorism" (BlackBoard)

Posting #2: In light of your reading of these two articles, how might you revise concerns of time and place in defining utopia?

Monday, September 16: The Original Utopia

Reading Assignment:

- Selections from Thomas More, *Utopia* (selections on Blackboard)

Posting #3: What do you make of More's vision of "the good life"? (Note: this is really a multi-part question asking (1) what is More's vision of "the good life," and (2) your thoughtful evaluation of More's vision.

Wednesday, September 18: City on a Hill: the Religious Origins of the American Utopian Vision

Reading Assignment:

- John Winthrop, *A Model of Christian Charity* (selections on Blackboard)

Posting #4: How does Winthrop understand the role of hierarchy in creating cohesive community?

Assignment:

Write a very short paper (no longer than 3-pages =750 words) defining utopia. Tell me what questions will guide you during the coming semester and why.

Due Friday, September 20

Send your paper as a Word Document or PDF via email to coco.lester@oberlin.edu
BE SURE TO SAVE YOUR FILE!

Monday, September 23: Early American Searches for Religious Utopia **Reading Assignment:**

- Donald Durnbaugh, "Communitarian Societies in Early America," in Donald E. Pitzer, *American's Communal Utopias* (on BlackBoard)
 - Karl J. Arndt, "George Rapp's Harmony Society," in Donald E. Pitzer, *American's Communal Utopias* (on BlackBoard)
- **Posting #5:** How do these early religious societies compare to the "City on a Hill"?

Wednesday, September 25: Origins and Evolution of the Shakers



Reading Assignments:

- Priscilla Brewer, "The Shakers of Mother Ann Lee," in Donald E. Pitzer, *American's Communal Utopias* (on BlackBoard)
- William Alfred Hinds, "The Shakers and Their Thirty-Five Community Families" in *American Communities* (1902) (on BlackBoard. Please note that William Hinds was a member of the Oneida Community, and writing as a fellow communitarian.

Optional Additional

- Robert Sutton, Chapter 2: Shaker Communities, in *Communal Utopias and the American Experience: Religious Communities, 1732-2000*
- *The Shakers*, a film by Tom Davenport and Frank DeCola (1974) 30 mins. available streaming only at <http://www.folkstreams.net/film,84>

Posting #6: Is the Shaker founding rooted in a particular historical moment? If so, how do we understand the evolution of Shaker communal life? If not,

consider why only three people remain today in the Sabbathday Lake Shaker community in Maine.

Monday, September 30: Early Nineteenth-Century Secular American Utopias: The Owenite Model and its Variations

Reading Assignments:

- Dolores Hayden, "The Architecture of Passional Attraction," in *Seven American Utopias: The Architecture of Communitarian Socialism* (on BlackBoard)
- Donald Pitzer, "The New Moral World of Robert Owen and New Harmony," in Donald E. Pitzer, *American's Communal Utopias* (on BlackBoard)
- Gail Bederman, "Revisiting Nashoba: Slavery, Utopia and Frances Wright in America 1818-1825," in *American Literary History* 2005: on Blackboard, or <http://alfonsofordjournals.org/content/17/3/438.pdf>

Posting #7: Did Owenite utopias turn their backs on the industrial revolution?

Wednesday, October 2: The Founding of Oberlin: Religious or Secular Utopia?



Reading Assignment:

- **Covenant of the Oberlin Colony (1833)**
http://www.oberlin.edu/external/EOG/Documents/Oberlin_Covenant.html
- **Prospectus for the Oberlin Collegiate Institute (1833)**
<http://www.oberlin.edu/external/EOG/Documents/OberlinProspectus.html>
- **Constitution of the Oberlin Anti-Slavery Society (1835)**
<http://www.oberlin.edu/external/EOG/Documents/OberlinAntiSlaveryCon.htm>

Posting #8: Was Oberlin founded as an intentional community, but was it originally envisioned as *communal* utopia? How important was individualism in early Oberlin? How important was religion?

Monday, October 7 Approaches to the Study of Utopia: Scholarly Variety

Note: This class will help students prepare to write the first paper

Reading Assignments:

- Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, Excerpts from *The Communist Manifesto* (on Blackboard)
- Mark Holloway, Introduction, *Heavens on Earth* (on BlackBoard)
- Donald Pitzer, Introduction, *America's Communal Utopias*
- Gregory Claeys and Lyman Tower Sargent, Introduction, *Utopia Reader* (on Blackboard)

Optional:

- Robert Sutton, Introduction, *Communal Utopias and the American Experience: Religious Communities, 1732-2000* (on Blackboard)

Wednesday, October 9: Writing Workshop in Class.

Writing Assignment: *Bring 3 copies of your paper to class.*

Your second paper, about 5 pages (1250) words, will explore antebellum utopias. Please write about whether any of the intentional communities studied so far were successful.

Why or why not? And in what ways? Be sure to (1) provide a definition for utopia/utopian practice, and (2) cite at least two examples of communities from assigned readings.

Your paper is due Saturday, October 12.

Send your paper as a Word Document or PDF via email to carol.lawser.robertin@du.edu
BE SURE TO SAVE YOUR FILE!

Monday, October 14: John Humphreys Noyes, Oneida, and the Drive for Perfection



Reading Assignments:

- Lawrence Foster, "Free Love and Community: John Humphrey Noyes and the Oneida Perfectionists," in Donald E. Pitzer,
 - *American's Communal Utopias* (on BlackBoard)
- John Humphrey Noyes, *Bible Communism* (excerpt on BlackBoard)

Optional:

- Robert Sutton, Chapter 4: Oneida Perfectionists, in *Communal Utopias and the America Experience: Religious Communities*

Posting #9: How important was complex marriage to the Oneida community?

Wednesday, October 16: Searching the library for utopia.

Class will meet at Mudd Library.

Reading Assignment:

- Robert Fogarty, Introduction, *All Things New*, pp. 1-23

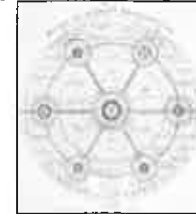
In-class assignment:

You will complete a worksheet distributed during the library session.

Over Fall Break, you will consider communities you might be interested in studying

Fall Break

Monday, October 28: Looking Backward, Looking Forward



IMPORTANT: At this class, you will propose a topic for your research project.

Reading Assignment:

- Edward Bellamy, *Looking Backward*, entire

Posting #10: How does technology shape Bellamy's utopia?

Wednesday, October 30: Visualizing Utopia.

For this class, we meet at the Allen Art Museum. Please be prompt, and be prepared to stay until 4:30

Assignment: Please submit your Visual Analysis Worksheet no later than noon on Friday, November 1.

Monday, November 4 Gendering Utopia

Reading Assignment:

- Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Herland* (entire).

Posting #11: What issues of gender does Gilman insist that utopias must address?

Wednesday, November 6: Planning Presentations and Papers

Assignment: Complete the Paper Planner (to be found on BlackBoard) before coming to class. Bring three hard copies.

This is a working session with peer review.

Monday, November 11: The Persistence of Utopian Visions

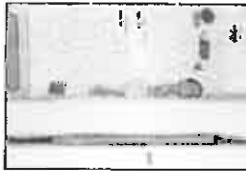
Reading Assignment:

- Timothy Miller, *The Quest For Utopia in Twentieth Century America*, Chapters 1,3 and 4
- Robert Sutton, Chapter 5: Great Depression Secular Communities in *Communal Utopias and the American Experience: Secular Communities*

Posting #12: What was the impact of the Great Depression on American utopian thinking?

Wednesday, November 13: American Utopia: A Film about Llano

Monday, November 18: Utopia in Post WWII America



Baby Lisa in an atr crib at Twin Oaks, before 1970

Reading Assignment:

- Excerpts from B.F. Skinner, *Walden Two* in Gregory Claeys and Lyman Tower Sargent, *Utopia Reader*
- B.F. Skinner, "Walden Two Revisited" in Gregory Claeys and Lyman Tower Sargent, *Utopia Reader*

Posting #13: Was Skinner's thinking about Walden progressive or regressive? Is the Walden he envisioned Utopia or Dystopia?

Wednesday, November 21: Writing Workshop

Please bring to class three copies of your (1) tentative thesis paragraph (2) tentative outline and (3) progress report

Monday, November 25: Back to the Future? The Communes of the 1960s

Reading Assignment:

- Rosabeth Moss Kanter, Chapters 7-8, in *Commitment and Community: Communes and Utopias in Sociological Perspective*
- Robert Sutton, Chapter 6: Modern Communal Utopias in *Communal Utopias and the American Experience: Secular Communities*

Posting #14: Using your historical knowledge, can you identify anything distinctive about the intentional communities of the 1960s?

Wednesday, November 27: Optional Class

Please note: even if you do not come to class, the assignment below is due

Assignment: Complete the Paper Planner (to be found on Blackboard)

Monday, December 2: Looking Behind, Looking Ahead

Film Showing: *Spark: A Burning Man Story*



The Burning Man

Wednesday, December 4: Presentations

Please react to the presentations you heard today. Postings due by 5 pm on Thursday, December 5.

Monday, December 9: Presentations

Please react to the presentations you heard today. Postings due by 5pm on Tuesday, December 10

Wednesday December 11: Last Class and celebration: Still searching for Utopia?

By College Regulation, your final paper is due by 4pm on Friday, December 20. Without an incomplete issued by the Dean of Studies Office, this deadline cannot be extended or changed.

Class Requirements

Writing Assignments: Postings

One regular form of writing required for the class will be **Postings** to the class BlackBoard discussion board. Students will be divided into two groups: Group One will complete odd number postings, and Group Two will complete even numbered postings. A "Posting" should be at least one full paragraph in length (150 -200 words), and should be well written (using appropriate grammar and spelling). It will usually respond directly to the prompt supplied on the syllabus, although it can also seriously engage another idea or issue central to the week's reading. All postings should pose a question, or suggest an interpretation, or present an historically grounded argument or link the particular readings to other key texts read for the class. You may wish to read student postings before crafting your own posting, or because you are interested in how others are reacting to the readings. You may respond to postings even if you are not a member of the Group posting for the particular assignment. I use these postings to help structure the class discussion. Because posts are critical to my class planning, the postings are due no later than 10 am on the day for which they are assigned. Postings are graded on a 4-point scale: Excellent, Good, Present but Indifferent, and Absent (no credit).

Writing Assignments: Papers

The class assignments also include three papers.

- The first short paper, only 3-4 pages in length, is ungraded. It is due Friday, September 20.
- The second paper is due October 9 for discussion in class.
- A revised version of the paper is due Saturday, October 12.

Your final paper, a research paper of about 10 pages in length, will involve several steps on the following time line:

- October 28: Submit a paragraph describing your choice of topic and explaining your choice
- November 6: Complete the "Paper Planner" for discussion in class
- November 21: Draft thesis paragraph, draft outline and progress report due in class
- December 4 or 9: You will present on your paper to the class
- December 20 at 4pm: Your final paper is due

Class Attendance

You are expected to attend all classes, and to be prepared for all classes.

- If you are unable to attend the class because of ill health, or another equally serious reason, *you are expected to notify me in advance.*
- You are expected to participate in this class,
 - you cannot participate if you are not present.
 - You cannot participate effectively if you have not done the reading or are otherwise unprepared.

Unexplained absences will be treated as unexcused absences.

You are required to write and sign the honor pledge on all written work:

"I have adhered to the honor code on this assignment."

For more information on the Oberlin College Honor Code, see

<http://www.oberlin.edu/conservatory/academic-resources-and-support/honor-code.doc>

And

<http://www.oberlin.edu/students/policies/2011-2012/11-Policies-Honor.pdf>

Please let me know by September 16 if you have a diagnosed disability that will require special accommodations so that we can make sure to have them in place!

A Note on Grading

Grading is an art, not a science. I strive to grade responsibly and fairly. Your grade will be based on all aspects of the class, including your class participation, your postings, your four papers (the first paper, both versions of the second paper and all steps third papers), your worksheets, and on your class presentations. Late work will be penalized and usually will not receive comments.

Below is the basic formula I will use—but please know that improvement over the course of the semester or spectacular work will receive notice. Also note that you cannot pass the class unless you complete all written work, required postings, and presentations.

Papers:	
First Paper	7 points
Second Paper, First Version	7 points
Second Paper, Revised Version	7 points
Visual Analysis Worksheet	3 points
Library Worksheet	3 points
Third Paper (choice paragraph=5 points; early worksheet=7 points; tentative thesis and draft outline=9 points; final draft =16 points)	37 points
Class Presentations	7 points
Postings	
7 required, with extra credit possible	14 points
Class Participation (remember, you cannot participate if you are not present, so please be sure to provide information on any unavoidable absences)	15 points
TOTAL	100 points