

ENG 882
Nineteenth-Century American Utopian Fiction
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Utopianism appears in political documents, communal living experiments, and literature throughout the nineteenth-century United States. This course primarily examines literary texts, in rough chronological order. We will frame our study with theoretical approaches to utopian studies from Fredric Jameson, Krishan Kumar, Kenneth Roemer, Judith Shklar, Ruth Levitas, and others. Throughout, we will make connections to twentieth-century utopias, dystopias, and heterotopias.

We will briefly address the founding documents of the United States: the Declaration of Independence, the Articles of Confederation, the United States Constitution, and the Bill of Rights. Additionally, we will look at related schemes and texts, such as the work of the American Colonization Society and the Emancipation Proclamation.

Also, we will consider the scores of communal living and utopian experiments of the nineteenth century, such as Brook Farm, Massachusetts; Oneida, New York; Zion, Illinois; Mormonism from Illinois to Utah, as both outliers and deeply situated examples of utopianism in American culture. The relationships between and among national identity formation, community norms, and American experimentalism and exceptionalism will be key areas of inquiry here.

Mostly, though, we will read literary utopias and literary texts that brush up against utopian studies. Some of these texts will be familiar: *Blithedale Romance*, *Looking Backward*, *A Traveler from Altruria*, *Caesar's Column*, *Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*. But we will also read lesser-known texts by women writers, in particular Mary Lane's *Mizora: A Prophecy* (1880-1881), and selections from *Daring to Dream: Utopian Fiction by United States Women before 1950*, to consider gendered approaches to utopia and canonicity in literary studies. Prescriptive, normative alternatives, as well as dystopian consequences, will be key areas of inquiry here.

Students should develop work suitable for presentation at conferences, such as the Society for Utopian Studies, or for submission to appropriate journals, such as *Utopian Studies*. Students interested in further inquiry may have opportunities to assist in preparation of a special issue of *Utopian Studies* on law and utopia, and to participate in the planning and execution of the 2010 Utopian Studies conference in Milwaukee.

Required Texts and Materials:

Course reader, websites, and other materials distributed in class. The reader is available at Clark Graphics on Oakland Ave.

Bellamy, Edward. *Looking Backward*. Any Edition.

Donnelly, Ignatius. *Caesar's Column*. Any Edition.

Griffith, Mary. *Three Hundred Years Hence*. On reserve or via used copies on Amazon.

Kessler, Carol Farley. *Daring to Dream: Utopian Fiction by United States Women before 1950* (2nd ed).

Hawthorne, Nathaniel. *The Blithedale Romance*. Any Edition.

Howells, William Dean. *A Traveler from Altruria*. Any Edition.

Lane, Mary. *Mizora: A Prophecy*. SYRACUSE U. Press edition, 2000

Twain, Mark. *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*. Any Edition.

You should also have access to *The MLA Style Manual*, and I highly recommend use of database or bibliography software for compiling and producing your bibliographies and papers. See handout.

Course Conduct:

I value collaboration, sharing, and creative interplay. Rather than lecturing exclusively, I prefer self-guided reading and writing, followed by discussion and question-and-answer that arises out of student response. This means each of you has to engage the readings critically and make significant contributions to discussions. You are expected to puzzle over, worry at, think upon, write about, and otherwise actively engage the material rather than simply imbibe it. That means you must:

- Complete all reading and writing assignments by their due dates.
- Participate vigorously and with respect for the ideas of others, the newness of the material to *everyone* in the class, and the need for patience, patience, patience.
- Hold yourself and your peers to a high standard—and strive to meet it.

Your course activities are as follows:

1. Seminar participation: each student will take responsibility for leading at least half of the day's discussion, beginning in the third week. There will be two discussion leaders each week. I will make initial assignments, but you are welcome to trade with each other to accommodate your schedules, exams, other papers, etc. Do so ASAP and notify me in writing. Concerns? See me.
 - a. At least one week in advance, provide me with one or two journal articles or book chapters relevant to the novel and discussion you will lead. I will copy and distribute to the group.
 - b. At least two days in advance (by Monday) provide by email a 2-3 page response to the day's reading to form the basis of the discussion. Other participants should read these responses in preparation for discussion.
 - c. Optional-but-encouraged: a short bibliography of additional references be useful in writing seminar papers.
2. Research paper: a paper of 15-30 pages exclusive of references *or* a conference-length paper (8-10 pages) accompanied by an annotated bibliography of at least ten pages. If you are interested in developing and presenting a paper from the course at a conference, please discuss this with me as early as possible so we can talk about appropriate venues. Written proposals, including a preliminary bibliography, are due approximately at the halfway point of the term. Earlier is better.

Please take seminar participation—written and verbal, as leaders and listeners—as a

serious obligation from which you can reap great rewards by thinking your way into and through problems. Try to generate class discussion, testing your ideas before making full arguments in essays. Imagine, think implications through, and throw ideas into the mix.

Course Policies

I require attendance at the seminar. If you cannot be there, please inform me in advance, preferably by email so there is a written record. More than two absences will affect your grade. Campus policies on absences, holidays, and everything else relevant at: www.uwm.edu/Dept/SecU/SyllabusLinks.pdf.

Academic Misconduct:

http://www4.uwm.edu/acad_aff/policy/academicmisconduct.cfm.