

Sociology 115. *Utopia in Theory and Practice*
Spring 2009

Class Meets: M W 10:10 – 11:00 AM
Goldwin Smith 142

Sections: F 10:10 – 11:00 AM
Uris Hall G88

F 12:20 – 1:10 PM
Uris Hall 204

Instructor: David Strang
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TA: Kyle Siler
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Readings

Edward Bellamy, **Looking Backward**

Charlotte Perkins Gilman, **Herland**

Aldous Huxley, **Brave New World**

Rosabeth Kanter, **Commitment and Community**

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, **Manifesto of the Communist Party**

Thomas More, **Utopia**

William Morris, **News from Nowhere**

Max Weber, **The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism**

Eugene Zamiatin, **We**

Course Requirements

Course requirements are a midterm, final and a course paper. The course paper will describe a real-world social experiment or design a utopia. Midterm and final will be in essay form and cover major themes of the course. Each of the three count as 30% of the course grade, with participation in section counting for 10%.

“Utopia” is a Greek pun posed by Sir Thomas More, author of the first and most influential literary utopia. It refers to both “nowhere” (*ou topos*) and “happy place” (*eutopia*). The utopian tradition opposes the ills and injustices of today with a world of the imagination. Utopian novels provide us as readers/sociologists with insight into the social conditions and assumptions of their era, and efforts to turn “nowhere” into “somewhere” serve as natural experiments into the fundamentals of human social behavior.

Sociology 115 provides an overview of utopian theories and practices. Along the way, it introduces some main ideas in sociology. Core questions include: How do men and women imagine the “good society”? What do their imagined remedies tell us about them and the world that they and we live in? What happens when people seek to construct ideal social worlds?

Schedule of meetings

Week of...

Jan 19	Introduction Kateb/Skinner, “Utopianism” (Int’l Ency. of the Social Sciences); Coleman, “Rational Reconstruction of Society” (ASR, 1993)
Jan 26	Classical Utopias More, Utopia
Feb 2	Feminist Utopias Gilman, Herland
Feb 9	Intentional Communities in the 19 th Century Kanter, Commitment , Chs 1-2

- Feb 16 Communal Viability
 Kanter, **Commitment**, Chs 3-6
- Feb 23 Modernity and Weber's theory of capitalism
 Weber, **Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism**
- Mar 2 Communism and Marx's theory of capitalism
 Marx & Engels, **Communist Manifesto**
- Mar 9 Monday: review
 Wednesday: *Midterm*
- <Spring Break>
- Mar 23 Socialism, American style
 Bellamy, **Looking Backward**
- Mar 30 Socialism, English style
 Morris, **News from Nowhere**
- Apr 6 Totalitarian dystopia
 Zamiatin, **We**
- Apr 13 Consumer dystopia
 Huxley, **Brave New World**
- Apr 20 Contemporary visions
 Fukuyama, "The End of History". National Interest, 1989.
 2008 Libertarian Party Platform (<http://www.lp.org/platform>)
- Apr 27 Course review and presentations of paper projects