Utopia: Intentional Communities in America, 1630-1997

This first-year seminar examines the evolution of utopian visions and utopian experiments in American history. It begins with John Winthrop’s 1630 vision of a “City upon a Hill,” explores the proliferation of both religious and secular communal ventures between 1780 and 1920, and concludes with an examination of 20th-century counter-culture communes, intentional communities, and dystopian separatists. Primary source readings include official statements of vision and purpose by a variety of charismatic leaders; personal accounts by members, both loyal and apostate; descriptions and evaluations by “informed” contemporaries; and utopian fiction. We will read scholarly analyses by historians to help us locate those documentary readings in their historical contexts. In combination, the readings, class discussions, and essay assignments introduce students to the sources and methods of historical inquiry and critical analysis, and provide opportunities for students to strengthen their writing skills.

Course Requirements. The seminar consists of two class meetings each week. The reading assignments for each class should be completed by that class meeting. The History 1014 (12) Reading Guide on Blackboard provides questions to help focus your reading for the class discussions. The further readings (listed in the reading guide) are not required. Most of the reading assignments come from the essay collection and monographs assigned for the course. The rest of the assignments (journal articles and primary documents) are available either through e-reserve (use the Library Reserves link on Blackboard or the e-reserves link on the Reading Guide) or by link to an online source or Library database through the Reading Guide. Students are strongly encouraged to print the e-reserve and online articles and to purchase the assigned books from the bookstore; a copy of each of the assigned books is on reserve in the library.

Class participation: You are expected to attend class and to come to all class meetings ready to participate in a discussion and analysis of the readings [35% of final grade].

Essays: Students will write three essays during the first half of the course (the first assignment is required; students will choose two out of three additional assignments). These assignments give students experience in drafting, revising, and editing a short (2-3 pages) focused essay and teach students how to subject primary source materials to critical analysis [together, 35% of final grade]. During the second half of the course, students will design a research project, submit a research paper prospectus, present a five minute work-in-progress report to the class [prospectus and presentation, 5% of final grade], and draft, revise and edit a 5-7 page research paper [25% of final grade]. The Extension, Deadline, and Grading Policy for the course can be found on the course home page.

All students are expected to read, understand, and abide by the Bowdoin College Academic Honor Code and by the rules of citation (When to Cite and How to Cite) described on the Bowdoin College Academic Honesty and Plagiarism website at http://www.bowdoin.edu/studentaffairs/academic-honesty/index.shtml.

Texts: Donald E. Pitzer, ed., America’s Communal Utopias (1997)
Charles Nordhoff, American Utopias, Foreword and Afterword by Robert Fogarty (1993) [originally published as The Communitistic Societies of the United States (1875)]
Edward Bellamy, Looking Backward: 2000-1887 (1888)
The History 1014 Reading Guide and other online resources can be found on Blackboard or at http://www.bowdoin.edu/faculty/s/smcmahon/courses/hist012/index.shtml
WEEK 1
8/30 INTRODUCTION

WEEK 2
9/4 UTOPIAN COMMUNITIES—INTENTIONAL COMMUNITIES

9/6 UTOPIAN VISIONS: REVISIONING COMMUNITY, FAMILY, GENDER ROLES

Instructions for writing the short essays (LINK)

WEEK 3
Early Ventures
9/11 EARLY UTOPIAN VISIONS AND EXPERIMENTS
document: John Winthrop, “A Modell of Christian Charity” (1630) in *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society*. (LINK)

Utopian Ventures in the Early Republic
9/13 MILLENNIALISTS AND RADICAL GERMAN PIETISTS: The Rappites Of Harmony and the Separatists of Zoar

First 2-3 page essay due

WEEK 4
9/18 THE COMMUNITY OF TRUE INSPIRATION AT AMANA

9/20 MOTHER ANN LEE AND THE EVOLUTION OF SHAKER BELIEFS AND THEOLOGY

WEEK 5
9/21 INDIVIDUAL CONFERENCES

WEEK 4
9/25 SHAKERS: REVISIONING COMMUNITY, FAMILY AND GENDER ROLES

Bring draft of second essay to class
Seeking a Perfect Society: Nineteenth Century America

9/27 SECULAR COMMUNITIES: ROBERT OWEN AND NEW HARMONY

Second 2-3 page essay due

WEEK 6
10/2 SECULAR COMMUNITIES: FOURIERISM AND “COMMUNITARIAN SOCIALISM”

10/4 NEW ENGLAND: TRANSCENDENTALISM AT BROOK FARM
documents: Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Historic Notes of Life and Letters in Massachusetts,” Atlantic Monthly, 52.312 (October 1883), 529-543; originally written in 1867, reprinted as “Historical Notes … New England,” in Emerson, Lectures and Biographical Sketches (1904), 325-370. [Focus on the section titled “Brook Farm” at the end of the lecture (Atlantic Monthly, 529, 540-543).] (LINK)
Nathaniel Hawthorne, Passages from the American Note-books of Nathaniel Hawthorne, [April-October 27, 1841], Vol. II (1868), 1-49; Online Books Page, University of Pennsylvania Library, at Eldritch Press. [Focus on the entries from his first stay at Brook Farm, April 13-September 3, 1841]. (LINKS)

Bring draft of third essay to class

WEEK 7
10/9 FALL BREAK

10/11 TBD

WEEK 8
10/16 JOHN HUMPHREY NOYES AND ONEIDA
readings: Lawrence Foster, “Free Love and Community: John Humphrey Noyes and the Oneida Perfectionists,” in Pitzer, America’s Communal Utopias, 253-278.
Charles Nordhoff, “The Oneida and Wallingford Perfectionists,” American Utopias, 259-301. (readings continued on next page)

Third 2-3 page essay due
10/18  **ONEIDA: PRACTICE AND EXPERIENCE**  
*Instructions for writing a short research paper and research paper prospectus in history*  
(LINK)

**WEEK 9**

10/23  **JOSEPH SMITH AND THE BOOK OF MORMON**  
reading: Brian Berry, “Mormonism,” in Berry, *America’s Utopian Experiments* (1992), Ch. 6, pp.64-82. (e-reserve)  

10/25  **MORMONS: DOCTRINE AND EXPERIENCE**  
Ann Eliza Young, *Wife No. 19, or the Story of a Life in Bondage* (1875), Ch. V, XVII, 98-109, 290-305. (e-reserve); or at www.angelfire.com.  
*Bring draft of fourth essay to class*

**WEEK 10**

10/30  **LIBRARY TOUR:** meet at Bookhenge, first floor of Hawthorne-Longfellow Library  
*Fourth 2-3 page essay due*

11/1  **THE END OF CHARLES NORDHOFF’S 1874 TOUR and his comparative view and review of communistic efforts in the United states**  

**WEEK 11**

11/6  **UTOPIAN VISIONS IN FICTION**  

11/8  **JEWISH AGRICULTURAL COMMUNES AND COOPERATIVE FARMING**  

11/9  **INDIVIDUAL CONFERENCES:** Discuss research paper projects

**WEEK 12**

11/13  **THEOSOPHICAL COMMUNITIES AND SOCIALIST UTOPIAS IN CALIFORNIA**  
Contemporary Utopias

11/15 COUNTERCULTURE (1960S) AND INTENTIONAL COMMUNITIES (1970S)

Guidelines for the work-in-progress presentations (LINK)

11/16 Research paper prospectus due

WEEK 13
11/20 VISIONARY COMMUNITIES: 1980s
(If you have time, skim “Introduction,” 11-24, “Starting Over,” 383-414.)

11/22 THANKSGIVING BREAK

WEEK 14
11/27 WORK-IN-PROGRESS PRESENTATIONS

Five-page research paper: penultimate draft due

11/29 WORK-IN-PROGRESS PRESENTATIONS

11/30 WORK-IN-PROGRESS PRESENTATIONS

WEEK 15
12/4 FROM UTOPIA TO DYSTOPIA: People’s Temple [Jonestown, Guyana, November 1978]; Branch Davidians [Waco, Texas, April 1993]; Heaven’s Gate [San Diego, California, March 1997]

Note: for the Branch Davidians and/or Heaven’s Gate, search online newspaper and magazine databases (use Fitzgerald’s journalistic model of investigative inquiry).

12/6 CONCLUSION, OR HOW TO DESIGN A UTOPIAN COMMUNITY
readings: Graham Meltzer, “Cohousing: Linking Community and Sustainability,” Communal Societies 19 (1999), 85-100. (e-reserve)

Five-page research paper due: Sunday, Dec. 16, noon