Description
The word “Utopia,” coined by Sir Thomas More 500 years ago this year, has two meanings: “good place” and “no-place.” In this class, we’ll explore the significance of both of these definitions for American culture, society, and literature. Over the course of its history, America has been seen as a “no-place,” a blank territory onto which individual dreams and shared aspirations can be projected. It’s also been regarded as fertile ground for the plantation of a variety of actual “good places”—communities designed to redress the injustices of mainstream society.

Our journey will take us to diverse places, both real and imagined: a peaceful, yet elitist, society of women in which reproduction no longer requires men; a religious group in New York state who believe that sharing possessions and sexual partners can make human beings perfect; a future California where green activists fight to preserve the wilderness.

Required Texts
Thomas More, *Utopia* (Dover - 0486295834)
Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Herland* (Dover - 0486404293)
Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (Penguin - 0140436677)
Kim Stanley Robinson, *Pacific Edge* (Orb - 0312890389)
Ben Marcus, *The Age of Wire and String* (Dalkey Archive - 1564781968)

All other texts (those marked with a *) to be posted online.

Assessment
Preparation, Participation 10%
Group Presentation 10%
Term Paper 30%
Final Exam (online) 50%

Participation and Preparation
Each Monday, two discussion questions will be posted via LAMS. Students must write brief answers to both of these questions and post their answers on the thread. Answers must be posted online by 12 noon on Tuesdays, the day before class. Answering these questions is compulsory and your answers will determine a large portion of your participation grade.

Late Penalties
Late work submitted without an approved extension will be penalized one half-mark per day late – an A paper submitted one day late would drop to an A-, etc.

Plagiarism
Please see the School of Humanities’ statement on plagiarism [here](#).
Schedule

1. 12th August
   America and Utopia: New Worlds
   Thomas More, Utopia, part one

2. 19th August
   The Meaning of Utopia
   Thomas More, Utopia, part two
   Richard Rorty, “Private Irony and Liberal Hope”*

Unit A: Social Utopias

3. 26th August
   “The Race Problem”
   Sutton E. Griggs, Imperium in Imperio

4. 2nd September
   A Feminist Utopia
   Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Herland

5. 9th September
   “A Social System that Really Works”
   B.F. Skinner, Walden Two

6. 16th September
   The American Revolution
   Thomas Jefferson, “Declaration of Independence.”*
   ---, Notes on the State of Virginia

Unit B: Religious Utopias

7. 23rd September
   The Oneida Perfectionists
   Spencer Klaw, Without Sin*

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8. 7th October
   In-Class Workshop: Utopian Oregon
   Selected newspaper articles*

9. 14th October
   Scientology
   Lawrence Wright, “The Apostate”*
   Paul Thomas Anderson, The Master (film screened in class)
Unit C: Science Fiction Utopias

10. 21st October
Beyond Gender
Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Left Hand of Darkness*

11. 28th October
An Ecotopia
Kim Stanley Robinson, *Pacific Edge*

12. 4th November
A Utopia of Things
Ben Marcus, from *The Age of Wire and String*—term paper due.

13. 11th November
Revision and Exam Preparation