

Utopia

INSTRUCTOR: Dr. Matthew Grow

The United States has long been identified in the popular imagination as a land of rugged individualism and free market capitalism. The individualistic tendencies of American society have nevertheless been balanced by contrary impulses towards community which have led to the creation of utopias and communal societies. Communalism has been a consistent theme throughout American history and has manifested itself in a dizzying array of groups--religious and secular, immigrant and home-grown, conservative and radical, authoritarian and anarchist, celibate and free love--from the colonial era to the present. These groups have typically included some form of joint ownership of property and communal work arrangements, though the exact nature of each has varied tremendously. Throughout American history, these groups have captivated, bemused, and infuriated the broader public. Their efforts have provoked deep controversy as they questioned some of the most fundamental ideals of society—private property, capitalism, republican government, traditional gender roles, mainstream clothing and diet mores, and monogamous marriages.

This course will examine the theme of utopia in both literature and in history. We will pay particular attention to attempts to implement utopias and communal societies in the American past and present. We will pay particular attention to nearby New Harmony, the site of two utopian experiments in the early 1800s. As a class, we will undertake a service learning project, "Interpreting Utopia," which will examine (through oral interviews and archival research) how New Harmony has been remembered, interpreted, and preserved in the twentieth century.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:

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