

## Writing Seminar I: Utopic/Dystopic America

Gallatin School, NYU, Fall 2009  
Course No. K10.0365  
MW 4:55-6:10  
715 B'way, Rm. 601

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Office Hours: Th, 3:30-5

“In the beginning, all the world was America,” proclaimed John Locke in 1690. Since its “discovery” by the Europeans, “America” has stereotypically been portrayed as the closest thing to utopia on earth—a land of freedom, democracy, and plenty, so resplendent as to be almost unreal. This utopian vision has made the more sobering struggle for freedom, equality, and wealth in America and in the world shaped by its influence and ideals all the more unsettling. Dystopic visions of life in America and under its influence are as charged and powerful as their utopian counterparts. Through a combination of informal response papers and analytical essays, students will explore the social and political implications of mythical and nightmarish invocations of America in the twentieth century as well as in earlier periods. Texts will include essays and speeches of Locke, Tocqueville, Emerson, Malcolm X, Hurston, Sachs, and Klein.

### Books

The following books can be purchased at NYU bookstore. In addition, there is a course packet, which can be purchased at NYU bookstore.

Jeffrey Sachs, *The End of Poverty*  
Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*  
Alan Weisman, *The World Without Us*  
Hacker, *Pocket Manual of Style*

### Writing

Over the course of the semester, you will complete several informal writing exercises and 3 essays. The informal exercises will not be graded, but I may occasionally collect them. You will submit a rough draft of each of your essays, for which I will give you a preliminary grade. However, only the final grade will be counted. We will frequently workshop rough drafts in class. On the day your essay is being workshopped, you will be responsible for bringing in hard copies for the class or your group.

Final papers must be submitted in hard copy. (i.e. I will not accept email submissions.) Please use 12-pt font, double-space, paginate, and staple your papers. Essays will be graded for the form as well as content of their analysis. I'm often asked, “How do I get an A?” The best way to do well in this class is to write about topics and readings that really interest you and be ready to revise and re-revise your writing in order to explore our theme in as much depth and clarity as possible. Be ready to challenge yourself and to have fun doing it.

### Assignments and Grading

Essay 1: 4-6 pages (25%)  
Essay 2: 4-6 pages (30%)  
Essay 3: 5-7 pages (35%)  
Participation, Informal Writing Exercises, and Attendance: (10%)

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**Late Policy:** Unless you have made other arrangements with me, papers will be penalized by 1/3 letter grade for every day they are late.

**Attendance Policy:** You are allowed 3 unexcused absences, no questions asked. Except for extenuating circumstances, additional absences will be penalized.

**On Plagiarism:** Plagiarism is the representation of someone else's work as your own, in large part or in small part. Someone else means anyone else. Plagiarism is also failure to give credit where credit is due. Do not plagiarize. Consequences for plagiarizing are severe.

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### Introduction:

Sept. 9: Obama, "Yes We Can" (1/27/08)

### Early American Utopias and Dystopias:

Sept. 14: John Locke, "Two Treatises on Government" (excerpts)  
Jan Sadeler, "America" (map)

Sept. 16: Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (author's intro; pgs. 228-259)

Sept. 21: Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (pgs. 259-305)

Sept. 23: Emerson, "American Scholar"  
Pre-draft Writing Assignment Due  
Kinds of Arguments/MLA Citation  
Assign Essay 1

Sept. 28: **No Class**

Sept. 30: **Essay 1 Drafts Due**  
Workshop 2 Drafts

Oct. 5: Workshop 3 Drafts

### Utopia and Dystopia in African-American Politics and Culture:

Oct. 7: **Essay 1 Final Due**  
Martin Luther King, "Nonviolence and Racial Justice"; "Letter from Birmingham Jail"

Oct. 12: Malcolm X, "The Ballot or the Bullet"

Oct. 14: Langston Hughes, "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain,"  
Selected Poetry of James Weldon Johnson, Langston Hughes, and Claude

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McKay

- Oct. 19: Hurston, “How It Feels to Be Colored Me”; “Why The Negro Won’t Buy Communism”
- Oct. 21 Pre-draft Writing Assignment Due  
Assign Essay 2
- Oct. 26: **Essay 2 Drafts Due**  
Workshop 2 Drafts
- Oct. 28: Workshop 3 Drafts

### Utopia and Dystopia: America and the West in the World:

- Nov. 2: Sachs, *The End of Poverty* (intro, chs. 1, 2, 9, 10)
- Nov. 4: **Essay 2 Final Due**  
Sachs, *The End of Poverty* (chs. 12, 18)  
Escobar, *Encountering Development* (ch. 2 and conclusion)
- Nov 9: Weisman, *The World Without Us* (Part 1: pages 1-83)
- Nov. 11: Weisman, *The World Without Us* (pgs. 84-139)
- Nov. 16: Weisman, *The World Without Us* (pgs. 140-231)
- Nov. 18: Weisman, *The World Without Us* (pgs. 232-278)
- Nov. 23: Weisman, *The World Without Us* (pgs. 279-353)  
Assign Essay 3
- Nov. 30: Summary of the National Security Strategy 2002;  
State Department, *The Future of Iraq Project*, Economy and Infrastructure Working Group, Summary (National Security Archive)
- Dec. 2: **Essay 3 Draft Due**  
Workshop 2 Drafts
- Dec. 7: Workshop 3 Drafts
- Dec. 9: **Essay 3 Final Due**  
Naomi Klein, “Baghdad Year Zero: Pillaging Iraq in Search of a Neocon Utopia”
- Dec. 14: Reflections