

**UTOPIA'S ECLIPSE? THE HORIZON OF POLITICAL HOPE IN THE WAKE OF EMPIRE AND
REVOLUTION**

PLSC 22205/LLSO 22205/CRES 23205

University of Chicago, Winter 2022

Wednesdays, 9:30am-12:20pm

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Office Hours: Thursdays, 3:00-5:30pm (by appointment)

Course description

The twentieth century was a time of extraordinary political hope associated with socialist and anti-colonial struggles that promised to usher in new forms of human freedom. However, by the 1980s, this hope had given way to catastrophe as the horizons of political possibility and revolutionary aspiration characterizing these struggles collapsed. How do we reckon with this collapse, and what does it mean to make a life for oneself in the wake of these failed emancipatory projects?

This course seeks to explore this question by examining the place of utopian thinking, broadly understood, in the projects of anticolonial and socialist struggle in the twentieth century and by reading this strain of thought in light of the doubts that certain thinkers have raised about the possibility of attaining utopia's promise. Taking as a starting point the idea that utopian thinking—at least in its modern, universalistic form—has always existed in a complex relationship to the figure of the “savage Other” and the project of Western imperialism, the first half of the course will invite students to test this claim against the aspirations advanced by certain anti-colonial and left revolutionaries. In the second half of the course, we will turn to debates about the possibilities of renewed utopian thinking in the present. In particular, we will examine some important recent reflections on the postcolonial predicament to consider what we might learn from the revolutionary failures of the twentieth century and what critical resources this history has yielded to us.

Course Requirements

Participation

This course will be run in seminar format, and students are expected to have completed the readings before class and to be prepared to engage actively in class discussions. The cultivation of an effective classroom discussion depends on each student being willing to play different roles. Rather than thinking about a discussion seminar as an environment for students to pose questions about the texts to the instructor, a more effective classroom discussion will result from students being willing to pose questions of interpretation or clarification not only to the instructor, but also to their peers. Students are encouraged to pose questions about the text, to volunteer to answer those questions, and to ask one another, as well as the instructor, to clarify key concepts or ideas that are being used in the discussion.

Reading Responses

With the exceptions of those completing the presentation for a given week are required to write a brief paragraph once a week (beginning in week 1) that develops a question about the week's reading assignment. This exercise will help you to prepare for class discussions. Your paragraph should be at least 150 words and the question should focus on a specific issue, argument, or concept that you find puzzling or especially thought-provoking, whether in the week's reading or in the pre-circulated presentation for that week. As you develop your questions, please feel free to draw productive connections between the texts that we are reading in this course and those that you have read (or are reading) for other courses. Whatever approach you take, be sure to include page numbers for reference. Questions should be submitted via the Assignments section of Canvas by **8pm on the day before class**.

You will receive credit for your weekly questions if you fulfill the stated requirements and submit your work on time. I will give you credit for one late submission if I receive it within a week of its due date; otherwise, late submissions will not be accepted.

Weekly Presentations

Beginning in week 2, one or more students will be asked to prepare a short presentation (5 double-spaced pages) each week based on the assigned reading. Presentations should identify puzzles that arise out of the reading assignments and, where appropriate, make connections to previous weeks' readings. Most importantly, students should use their presentations to take a position on the author's argument by stating and developing a thesis and defending that thesis with evidence from the text. Students should circulate their presentation to their peers 24 hours ahead of class, and all other members of the class are expected to arrive having read the presentation and prepared to respond to the presenter's remarks.

Final Project

This project will invite students to bring the texts we have read in this course to bear on a critical assessment of Aaron Benanav's provocative recent book, *Automation and the Future of Work* (Verso, 2019). Students can either elect to defend Benanav's utopian thesis or to criticize it, but in doing so they must make reference to some of the texts that we have read in the course. It is up to you to decide how many of these texts you wish to place in conversation with Benanav's book, but you should be mindful that you are unlikely to be able to use all the texts that we have read.

This project will be completed in two stages:

- Before **noon on Sunday, February 6**, you will submit a 2-page memo outlining the core arguments of Benanav's book, as you see them. The memo should outline how you plan to approach the paper, whether by way of criticism or defense and offer a tentative outline of the argument you plan to make. You will meet with me in office hours the following week to discuss your paper in light of this memo. When you write your final paper, you are welcome to diverge from the approach you outline in the memo. The goal here is to encourage you to begin work on the final assignment early in the quarter.

- The final project should be 10-12 pages long, double-spaced, 12-font, with 1-inch margins. For students intending to graduate this quarter, the final project is due (by email) on the **Monday, March 7 at 6pm**. For, continuing students the final project is due (by email) on **Wednesday, March 16 at 6pm**.

Note: I will not read drafts of the final papers, but students are welcome to meet with me in office hours to discuss their papers.

Late Essay Policy

Please let me know should you ever find yourself in the position of having to submit your papers late. I do not need to know why your work is late, but it is important to maintain communication when this happens. Late papers will be penalized 1/3 of a letter grade per day (e.g. an A- paper one day late becomes a B+).

Finally, all essays will be submitted by email. If there is a problem with your submission, I will contact you via email and you will be expected to send a new file to me the same day that you receive my message, otherwise the paper will be counted as late. You will not be granted a grace period simply because you didn't check your email account.

Absences

Participation in class discussions is the basis of learning in seminar courses, so absences of any kind are taken seriously and will impact your grade. After you have missed two classes, you will automatically lose a full letter from your participation grade for each subsequent absence. You will be ineligible for a letter grade for the course after your fifth absence and you must instead request a W from your advisor.

Per university policy, you will not be penalized for an absence due to a religious observance if you let me know about it at the beginning of the quarter.

Finally, coming late to class affects your own ability to participate and disrupts the learning of others. Tardiness will therefore negatively impact your participation grade.

Individual Office hours

I require everyone to come to my office hours at least once during the quarter. I am happy to discuss the reading and writing assignments with you, and it is especially important to see me if at any point you are struggling in the course. Please sign up for office hours through Canvas: go to our course's homepage and click on the link for "Daragh Grant Individual Office Hours" at the top of the Course Summary. If no appointments show up, make sure that you have our class selected in the list of calendars on the right side of the page.

If you have a class, job, or extracurricular activity during my regular office hours, or if all of the appointments are already booked, you may set up an appointment at another time via email. Please include the days and times that you are available in your message. If you don't have another

obligation during my office hours, I ask that you sign up for an appointment during that time. Please also cancel your appointment as soon as possible should you no longer be able to make it.

Policy on electronic devices

You should not be using any electronic device during class unless you have received an accommodation to do so.

Plagiarism

Proven plagiarism of any kind may result in automatic failure of the course. At minimum, you will receive an F for the assignment and the case will be referred to the University for further disciplinary action. There will be no exceptions to this rule. You should consult the course's writing guidelines or contact me immediately if you are ever unsure about what constitutes plagiarism. I have also included a statement from the American Historical Association with this syllabus, which offers a detailed description of norms of academic honesty.

Grade Distribution

Participation	35%
Weekly reading response	10%
Presentation	10%
Memo: Paper thesis and plan	10%
Final Paper	35%

Required texts

The following texts are available for purchase at the Seminary Co-Op Bookstore. Readings marked with an asterisk (*) are available on Canvas (either via the Library Reserves or the Files link). Please use these editions of the texts to aid in the in-class discussion of specific passages.

1. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox (Grove Press, 2004)
2. Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, trans. James Strachey (W.W. Norton, 2010)
3. Adom Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self Determination* (Princeton University Press, 2019)
4. Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford University Press, 2002)
5. C. L. R. James, *World Revolution, 1917-1936: The Rise and Fall of the Communist International* (Duke University Press, 2017)
6. William Morris, *News from Nowhere*, ed. David Leopold (Oxford University Press, 2009)
7. David Scott, *Omens of Adversity: Time, Tragedy, Memory, Justice* (Duke University Press, 2014)
8. Aaron Benanav, *Automation and the Future of Work* (Verso, 2019)¹

¹ Aaron Benanav's book will form the basis of the final assignment for the class.

Reading Schedule

Week 1

12 January

Introduction

*Michel-Rolph Trouillot, "Anthropology and the Savage Slot: The Poetics and Politics of Otherness," in *Global Transformations: Anthropology and the Modern World* (Palgrave, 2003), 7-28.

*Michel-Rolph Trouillot, "A Fragmented Globality," in *Global Transformations*, 47-78.

*Sylvia Wynter, "1492: A New World View," in *Race, Discourse, and the Origin of the Americas: A New World View*, ed. Vera Lawrence Hyatt and Rex Nettleford (Washington, 1995), 5-52.

Optional:

*Short extract from Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller*, trans. John and Anne Tedeschi (Baltimore, 1992 [1976]), pp.81-86.

Week 2

19 January

Socialism and Utopia

William Morris, *News from Nowhere*, ed. David Leopold (Oxford University Press, [1891] 2009), entire.

*Karl Marx to Arnold Ruge, September 1843, in Marx, *Early Writings*, trans. Rodney Livingstone and Gregor Benton (Penguin, 1992), 206-09.

*Holly Jean Buck, "On the Possibilities of a Charming Anthropocene," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 105 (2): 369-77.

Week 3

26 January

Revolution!

C. L. R. James, *World Revolution, 1917-1936: The Rise and Fall of the Communist International* (Duke University Press, 2017), 63-191.

Week 4

2 February

Finding hope in the wake of betrayal

James, *World Revolution*, 192-400.

**** Memo due before noon on Sunday, February 6**

Week 5

9 February

Probing Utopia's Limits in the Wake of Catastrophe I

Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, trans. James Strachey (W.W. Norton, 2010), entire.

Week 6
16 February

Probing Utopia's Limits in the Wake of Catastrophe II

Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford University Press, 2002), xi-xix, 1-34, 94-136.

*Theodor W. Adorno, "Resignation" (1969).

Week 7
23 February

Anti-colonial Futures: The Revolutionary Aspirations of the Third World

*Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin/White Masks*, trans. Richard Philcox (Grove Press, 2008), 198-206.

Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox (Grove Press, 2004), 1-62, 97-180, 235-39.

Week 8
2 March

The Promise of the Post-colony: Making the World Anew

Adom Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self Determination* (Princeton University Press, 2019), entire.

Week 9
9 March

Envisaging a future from the ruins of the postcolonial present

*David Scott, *Refashioning Futures: Criticism after Postcoloniality* (Princeton University Press, 1999), 190-224.

*David Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment* (Duke University Press, 2004), 1-9.

David Scott, *Omens of Adversity: Time, Tragedy, Memory, Justice* (Duke University Press, 2014), entire.

historians. Although they recognize the legitimacy of restricting access to some sources for national security, proprietary, and privacy reasons, they have a professional interest in opposing unnecessary restrictions whenever appropriate.

Historians sometimes appropriately agree to restrictive conditions about the use of particular sources. Certain kinds of research, certain forms of employment, and certain techniques (for instance, in conducting oral history interviews) sometimes entail promises about what a historian will and will not do with the resulting knowledge. Historians should honor all such promises. They should respect the confidentiality of clients, students, employers, and others with whom they have a professional relationship. At much as possible, though, they should also strive to serve the historical profession's preference for open access to, and public discussion of, the historical record. They should define any confidentiality requirements before their research begins, and give public notice of any conditions or rules that may affect the content of their work.

4. Plagiarism

The word *plagiarism* derives from Latin roots: *plagiarius*, an abductor, and *plagiare*, to steal. **The expropriation of another author's work, and the presentation of it as one's own, constitutes plagiarism and is a serious violation of the ethics of scholarship.** It seriously undermines the credibility of the plagiarist, and can do irreparable harm to a historian's career.

In addition to the harm that plagiarism does to the pursuit of truth, it can also be an offense against the literary rights of the original author and the property rights of the copyright owner. Detection can therefore result not only in sanctions (such as dismissal from a graduate program, denial of promotion, or termination of employment) but in legal action as well. As a practical matter, plagiarism between scholars rarely goes to court, in part because legal concepts, such as infringement of copyright, are narrower than ethical standards that guide professional conduct. **The real penalty for plagiarism is the abhorrence of the community of scholars.**

Plagiarism includes more subtle abuses than simply expropriating the exact wording of another author without attribution. Plagiarism can also include the limited borrowing, without sufficient attribution, of another person's distinctive and significant research findings or interpretations. Of course, historical knowledge is cumulative, and thus in some contexts—such as textbooks, encyclopedia articles, broad syntheses, and certain forms of public presentation—the form of attribution, and the permissible extent of dependence on prior scholarship, citation, and other forms of attribution will differ from what is expected in more limited monographs. As knowledge is disseminated to a wide public, it loses some of its personal reference. What belongs to whom becomes less distinct. But even in textbooks a historian should acknowledge the sources of recent or distinctive findings and interpretations, those not yet a part of the common understanding of the profession. Similarly, while some forms of historical work do not lend themselves to explicit attribution (e.g., films and exhibitions), every effort should be made to give due credit to scholarship informing such work.

Plagiarism, then, takes many forms. The clearest abuse is the use of another's language without quotation marks and citation. More subtle abuses include the appropriation of concepts, data, or notes all disguised in newly crafted sentences, or reference to a borrowed work in an early note and then extensive further use without subsequent attribution. Borrowing unexamined primary source references from a secondary work without citing that work is likewise inappropriate. All such tactics reflect an unworthy disregard for the contributions of others.

No matter what the context, **the best professional practice for avoiding a charge of plagiarism is always to be explicit, thorough, and generous in acknowledging one's intellectual debts.**

All who participate in the community of inquiry, as amateurs or as professionals, as students or as established historians, have an obligation to oppose deception. This obligation bears with special weight on teachers of graduate seminars. They are critical in shaping a young historian's perception of the ethics of scholarship. It is therefore incumbent on graduate teachers to seek opportuni-

ties for making the seminar also a workshop in scholarly integrity. After leaving graduate school, every historian will have to depend primarily on vigilant self-criticism. Throughout our lives none of us can cease to question the claims to originality that our work makes and the sort of credit it grants to others.

The first line of defense against plagiarism is the formation of work habits that protect a scholar from plagiarism. The plagiarist's standard defense—that he or she was misled by hastily taken and imperfect notes—is plausible only in the context of a wider tolerance of shoddy work. A basic rule of good note-taking requires every researcher to distinguish scrupulously between exact quotation and paraphrase.

The second line of defense against plagiarism is organized and punitive. Every institution that includes or represents a body of scholars has an obligation to establish procedures designed to clarify and uphold their ethical standards. Every institution that employs historians bears an especially critical responsibility to maintain the integrity and reputation of its staff. This applies to government agencies, corporations, publishing firms, and public service organizations such as museums and libraries, as surely as it does to educational facilities. Usually, it is the employing institution that is expected to investigate charges of plagiarism promptly and impartially and to invoke appropriate sanctions when the charges are sustained. Penalties for scholarly misconduct should vary according to the seriousness of the offense, and the protections of due process should always apply. A persistent pattern of deception may justify public disclosure or even termination of a career; some scattered misappropriations may warrant a formal reprimand.

All historians share responsibility for defending high standards of intellectual integrity. When appraising manuscripts for publication, reviewing books, or evaluating peers for placement, promotion, and tenure, scholars must evaluate the honesty and reliability with which the historian uses primary and secondary source materials. Scholarship flourishes in an atmosphere of openness and candor, which should include the scrutiny and public discussion of academic deception.