

POLITICAL SCIENCE 22205 (LAW LETTERS AND SOCIETY 22205)

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

University of Chicago, Winter 2021

Tuesdays, 2:40-5:40pm

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Office Hours: Thursdays, by appointment

Group Office Hours: Fridays, 1:00-3:00pm

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 contemporary 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

If possible, please arrive to class 5 minutes before the designated start time. Your video will be turned off by default, so you should turn on your camera when you arrive (unless you have explained to me why you cannot do so). Your microphone will be on by default, and you should feel free—in fact, encouraged—to chat to one another while you are waiting for class to start.

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.

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.

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 2) 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 9am on the day of 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.

Group Office Hours

Every student is required to attend weekly group office hours for one 30-minute session per week. Group office hours are an opportunity for up to six students to discuss a text, assignment, or some implication of the reading with me—and with one another. These meetings offer students an opportunity to extend our conversations beyond the classroom, but also to get to know one another a little better and in a less crowded digital space than Zoom sessions sometimes allow.

Final Project

For continuing students, the final project is due (by email) on **Tuesday, March 16** at 6pm. For students intending to graduate this quarter, the final project is due (by email) on **Thursday, March 11** at 6pm. The final project should be 9-12 pages long, double-spaced, 12-font, with 1-inch margins.

This project can take one of two forms.

- The first option, is for you to submit a paper that develops a line of argument that answers a question related to the broad themes of the course. This can be a critical engagement with one or more of the texts that we read for the class, or an essay based on preliminary primary research that aims to explore the themes of the class as they appear in some collection of primary source materials (based on empirical research conducted by you).
- The second option is for you to develop a research prospectus for a proposed thesis research project. This is an opportunity for you to develop a proposal that might form the basis for your future thesis research. This prospectus would need to include a focused discussion of the question you plan to investigate and the intellectual importance of doing so, a detailed literature review that situates this project in the wider academic field into which it hopes to intervene, an account of the primary source materials on which this research would be based, and a careful discussion of the methodological approach that you plan to take, as well as of the possible challenges posed by your chosen method.

Irrespective of which choice of project you hope to undertake, you must receive my approval for your chosen topic. In identifying and crafting an appropriate final project topic, you will be required to fulfill two additional writing assignments.

- First, before **noon on Sunday, February 7**, you will submit a 1-2 page memo identifying a focused topic for your final project. Within this focused topic, you will be required to identify three potential questions that might form the basis of your project, and the significance of each of these questions. You will meet with me in office hours this week to discuss your topic in light of this memo.
- Second, before **noon on Thursday, February 18**, you will submit a second 1-2 page memo that presents a single refined research question. The memo must connect this question to a conceptual puzzle or problem and must make clear the stakes of resolving this puzzle or problem. If the project is based on primary research, the memo must also address the feasibility of conducting primary research on this question in the remainder of the quarter.

When developing your final paper topics, you are welcome to suggest topics that were not directly covered by the readings but that are otherwise related to the themes of the class.

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.

Accessibility

The University of Chicago is committed to ensuring equitable access to our academic programs and services. Students with disabilities who have been approved for the use of academic accommodations by [Student Disability Services \(SDS\)](#) and need a reasonable accommodation(s) to participate fully in this course should follow the procedures established by SDS for using accommodations. Timely notifications are required in order to ensure that your accommodations

can be implemented. Please meet with me to discuss your access needs in this class after you have completed the SDS procedures for requesting accommodations.

Phone: (773) 702-6000

Email: disabilities@uchicago.edu

Zoom Access

The access information contained here is confidential, and should not be shared with anybody who is not registered to participate in this class.

By attending course sessions, students acknowledge that:

1. They will not: (i) record, share, or disseminate University of Chicago course sessions, videos, transcripts, audio, or chats; (ii) retain such materials after the end of the course; or (iii) use such materials for any purpose other than in connection with participation in the course.
2. They will not share links to University of Chicago course sessions with any persons not authorized to be in the course session. Sharing course materials with persons authorized to be in the relevant course is permitted. Syllabi, handouts, slides, and other documents may be shared at the discretion of the instructor.
3. Course recordings, content, and materials may be covered by copyrights held by the University, the instructor, or third parties. Any unauthorized use of such recordings or course materials may violate such copyrights.
4. Any violation of this policy will be referred to the Area Dean of Students.

You should be able to link to these meetings from Canvas. Failing that, you should be able to access them by logging into the Zoom website and searching the section meetings using the below identifying information. All of the class meetings have the same identifying information. I am also providing a US telephone number for anyone who has difficulty accessing an audio feed, or difficulty logging in. This number will allow you to access and participate in the meeting using a telephone. If you are dialing in from an international location, you can find the relevant telephone number here:

Some additional notes:

1. Please go to <https://uchicago.zoom.us/> to set up your Zoom account and download the Zoom app before our first scheduled class meeting.
2. The University of Chicago has requested that instructors record all class sessions conducted via Zoom. It is my intention to abide by this request, but I do not intend to share these recordings with you unless under exceptional circumstances (i.e., where synchronous meetings become impossible for some or all students), and I will erase all of these recordings at the end of the quarter. In the event that a student is compelled to miss a class, I would rather make up that time in office hours than make the recording

available. I am willing to be flexible on this policy, however, if I am given a compelling reason as to why these videos should be shared. I am happy to discuss this policy with you in our opening class, but it might be worth noting that my aim here is to balance considerations of student privacy with those of student access. All recordings in which students are personally identifiable will be managed in accordance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). All recordings will be automatically deleted 90 days after the date of the recording.

3. As a matter of course, please keep your microphone muted when you are not speaking, to avoid interfering with other's efforts to speak. (the mute button is found on the bottom left of the Zoom window)
4. There is an expectation in this class that students will be actively engaged and will have their camera on at all times during class. If you need an exception to be made to this policy, please don't hesitate to reach out to me to discuss this possibility.
5. If you are having difficulty maintaining a robust internet connection, this may be ameliorated by turning off your camera (the camera on/off button is also found on the bottom left of the Zoom window). If this becomes a persistent issue, please reach out to me so that we can discuss ways that you may stay fully engaged in our class discussions.
6. Bandwidth problems will also be lessened if you keep your Zoom window in "Speaker view." The alternative—"Gallery view"—uses a considerable amount of bandwidth. Using it may impair your ability to maintain a stable connection to Zoom.
7. Lastly, if you wish to speak, please use the "raise hand" function, which can be found at the bottom of the "Participants" panel. You may also raise your own hand on camera, though if I don't seem to be calling on you, please default to the "raise hand" function to get my attention.

Zoom meeting

Link:

Meeting ID:

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.

Students who have been exposed to or who are experiencing symptoms of COVID-19 should contact [UChicago Student Wellness](#) immediately to be tested, and reach out to their area Dean of Students to request accommodations for classes until:

- At least 10 days have passed since symptoms first appeared and;
- At least 3 days (72 hours) have passed since recovery- defined as resolution of fever without the use of fever-reducing medications and improvement in respiratory symptoms (e.g., cough, shortness of breath).

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 encourage everyone to come to my individual office hours at least once during the quarter, in addition to the required meetings in preparation for the final paper, though you are welcome to come to office hours as often as you wish. 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. I set aside Thursdays for my office hours meetings. If you wish to meet with me, please contact me by email to arrange a mutually convenient time. If, for whatever reason, we cannot find a time to meet on a Thursday, I will endeavor to find some other time for us to meet.

Once you have arranged a time to meet for individual office hours, you can attend them by following this link:

Group Office hours

You can sign up for group office hours through Canvas: go to our course's homepage and click on the link for "Utopia Class – Group Office Hours." Each 30-minute slot is limited to 6 students. You must sign up for one, and only one, slot per week, though it need not be the same slot every week. If you cannot meet at any of the available times, please contact me as soon as possible so that I might arrange an extra group office hour slot that you can make.

Once you have signed-up for group office hours, you can attend them by following this link:

Policy on electronic devices

You should not be using any electronic device other than the device that you use to access Zoom during class — and you should refrain from reading or answering email, or from using other texting or chat programs during class.

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	30%
Presentations	15%
Weekly reading response	5%
Group office hours	10%
Memo 1: Topic	5%
Memo 2: Refined question	5%
Final Paper	30%

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. Adom Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self Determination* (Princeton University Press, 2019)
3. Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford University Press, 2002)
4. C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (Vintage, 1989)
5. Thomas More, *Utopia*, 3rd Ed., ed. George M. Logan, trans. Robert M. Adams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016)
6. William Morris, *News from Nowhere*, ed. David Leopold (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009)
7. David Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment* (Duke University Press, 2004)

Reading Schedule

Tuesday,
January 12

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.

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

Tuesday,
January 19

Utopia

Thomas More, *Utopia* (Cambridge, 2016), 1-135.

- Students are welcome to read the editor's introduction, though they should first read the text itself.

Tuesday,
January 26

Another world is possible: The Haitian Revolution I

C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (Vintage, 1989), vii-xi, 3-198.

Tuesday,
February 2

Another world is possible: The Haitian Revolution II

James, *The Black Jacobins*, 199-378, 391-418.

**** Memo 1 due, Sunday, February 7 at 12:00pm**

Tuesday,
February 9

Envisioning the future in the late nineteenth century

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

Tuesday,
February 16

Probing Utopia's Limits in the Wake of Catastrophe

Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford University Press, 2002), xi-xix, 1-62, 94-136.

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

* [Excerpt] from "Marxism and the West" in Enzo Traverso, *Left-Wing Melancholia: Marxism, History, and Memory* (Columbia University Press, 2017), pp.164-77.

[Optional] *Ursula K. Le Guin, "The Ones who Walk Away from Omelas."

**** Memo 2 due, Thursday, February 18 at 12:00pm**

Tuesday,
February 23

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

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

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

Tuesday,
March 2

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.

Tuesday,
March 9

Rereading *The Black Jacobins* in the ruins of our present

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

**** Final Project for students intending to graduate this quarter are due on Thursday, March 11 at 6:00pm. Final projects for all other students are due on Tuesday, March 16 at 6:00pm.**

Optional additional reading at the end of the quarter:

Francisco Fernández Buey, "Utopia and Natural Illusions," in *Political Uses of Utopia: New Marxist, Anarchist, and Radical Democratic Perspectives*, ed. S.D. Chrostowska and James D. Ingram (Columbia University Press, 2016), 80-113.¹

¹ This essay is an editorial amalgamation of excerpts from Francisco Fernández Buey's *Utopías e ilusiones naturales* (2007) that touches on some of the themes from our class.