

My American Utopia: Final Project

Length: 2000 word minimum (most students will write more, especially on the creative side, but none should write less)

Format: Any Format You Choose

Due Dates: On calendar

Purpose: To creatively rewrite a mythic American utopia story in a way that expresses your cultural myths, value sets, and ideological views of gender, race, class, sexual identity, law and politics or other cultural issues you consider important (you may explore one or more of these issues). To then complete an analytical analysis of your creative project. This assignment has two parts each of which should have a minimum length of 1000 words.

- Part 1: A creative revision of, transformation of, or extension of an American utopia/dystopia story.
- Part 2: In the first part of this analytical essay, you will explain how and why you changed the previous versions of the American utopia myth you have rewritten. In the second part of the essay, you will examine the relationship between your utopia and the myths and issues we have examined in the course. What myths does your Utopia challenge (and how) and what myths does your utopia advance, perpetuate, or advocate (consciously or unconsciously)? In other words, what is the political and cultural agenda of your utopia and how do you manipulate myth to advance that agenda?

Evaluation Criteria

- **Intertextuality:** Your project should incorporate and play with and upon characters, scenes, incidents, etc. that expand / revise / transform / or extend elements of the original mythic utopia or dystopia. You may add new characters, incidents, scenes, etc. as well if you wish; you may even insert yourself as a character. Through these intertextual explorations, you should develop the cultural issue or issues you wish to explore or comment upon. You may revise an American utopia other than the **Wizard of Oz**, but that Utopia must have at least one written and one visual media version for you to respond to and rewrite. For example, you could use the Superman myth and refer to the comic book and one of the film or TV versions, or you could use *Minority Report* and build on both the film and the story it was based upon, or you could use *Field of Dreams* and the book it was based upon, or any other American utopia myth that you have seen written and media versions of (*Star Trek the Next Generation* or *Star Wars* could work!).
- **Language:** Images, dialogue, metaphors, similes, and symbols that help your text develop your utopia's themes and articulate its cultural myths, values, ideologies, etc. Your analytical essay should demonstrate your awareness of these language tools and an ability to interpret these techniques in rigorous, clear prose.
- **Cultural Engagement:** While your utopia myth should explore character and plot, it must also put these developments in the service of presenting your values, myths, and ideologies about one or more cultural issues and themes. Your analytical essays should explore both the stated and unstated cultural values and ideas explored in your essay (for this aspect of the assignment, you will find the input of your peer critics essential!).
- **Style:** Style counts! I will evaluate your utopia for lively, clear prose that engages the reader and develops themes and cultural ideas without resorting to cliché, summary, or explicit statement. I will evaluate the analytical element of the assignment according to the writing criteria used all quarter in this course.

Some Possible Approaches: You might write a new chapter to the *Wizard of Oz* or *Wicked* or you might rewrite a chapter from one of those books from the perspective of another character (or with the introduction of a new character). You could invent an entirely new event or scene for either of these books and/or add new characters and cultural issues. You could do a screenplay for an additional scene to the *Wizard of Oz* movie or you could rewrite a scene from the movie in any way that you wish (change what happens, modify characters, introduce new characters, etc.).

If you wish to invent your own Utopia from scratch, please run your ideas by me before doing so. While I am open to this approach, I think such a project could prove difficult for its writer. For this reason, no one may design her or his own utopia from scratch without obtaining permission from me first.