

HIS-508  
**SEEKING HARMONY:  
UTOPIANISM IN LATIN AMERICA, 1492-1849**

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Welcome! This course will explore the history of “utopian” thinking in Spanish and Portuguese America: attempts to envision and establish communities organized around ideals of fraternity, virtue, or freedom rather than tradition, domination, or profit. Beginning with Columbus, the American continent inflamed the imaginations of many Europeans, who viewed it as a “New World” where they might escape the corruption and immorality of the Old. Well before the Puritans established their “city on a hill” in Massachusetts, numerous individuals and groups in Mexico, Brazil, Paraguay, and elsewhere were dreaming of the possibility of “starting anew” in America, and were implementing plans for perfect societies free of social, ethnic, religious, and political conflict. Some were more successful than others.

Yet rather than merely assess their successes and failures, in this course we will examine the nature of their idealism as a window into the early modern Latin American world. That is, how can we know colonial peoples through their utopias? How did different thinkers and groups envision the perfect society, and what does this tell us about those thinkers and groups? Going further, what did utopia look like to non-Europeans in the Americas, and in particular native peoples and the descendants of Africans? How might one group’s utopia be another’s dystopia? In short, how does one’s particular vision of a better life reflect his or her social, ethnic, or political condition?



1 Alfonso Villanueva, *Vasco de Quiroga en su proyección social y humana* (1995), Uruapan, Michoacán

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

In History courses, we stress the students' ability to "Think in Time," which includes the following learning objectives:

- Historical Comprehension: Analyze historical duration, succession, and changes in terms of human agency and larger systems or structures.
- Historical Analysis: Use historical thinking to contextualize and analyze primary and secondary sources representing different points of view.
- Historical Research: Conduct original research by investigating and interpreting primary and secondary sources.
- Historical Interpretation: Use evidence-based reasoning to interpret the past coherently while developing and presenting an original argument, orally and in writing.

## REQUIRED READINGS

There is no textbook for this class. Instead, students are required to purchase a sources reader, arranged by the instructor, from the FedEx/Kinko's on Tate Street. The reader includes the majority of the secondary and primary sources of the course; the remaining texts will be posted online to Blackboard or will be otherwise available from the UNCG library. **All readings are mandatory.** Students are responsible for approximately 50-100 pages of reading per week.

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND EVALUATION

Graded work includes short weekly writing assignments, class participation and attendance, one oral presentation introducing and contextualizing a primary source, and longer formal essays addressing the texts and analyzing their historical, intellectual, and social significance. The grading scheme varies slightly between undergraduate and graduate students; whereas the former will write two essays in response to given topics, the latter will choose their own themes (in consultation with the instructor) and produce a longer term paper.

<u>Undergraduates</u>			<u>Graduates</u>	
Attendance	10%		Attendance	10%
Participation	10%		Participation	10%
Short writing assignments	30%		Short writing assignments	30%
Oral presentation	10%		Oral presentation	10%
Two essays (~6-7 pages)	40%		Final paper (~15-16 pages)	40%

All written work is graded according to the following scheme:

**A** = fulfills assignment entirely while amply demonstrating **original insight and reflection**  
**B** = fulfills assignment entirely and thoughtfully  
**C** = mostly fulfills assignment, but without originality (e.g., merely echoes the instructor)  
**D** = partially incomplete, or betrays non-comprehension of theme or issue  
**F** = severely incomplete, irrelevant, plagiarized, or never turned in

## **ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION**

As this is a small seminar meeting only once a week, full attendance and participation is essential to its success. Understanding that illnesses and life events are unavoidable, I allow students one “free” absence, but I will subtract 20 points (from 100 total) for each subsequent absence beyond that. I reserve the right to drop students who miss more than three meetings, as well as any who miss two in a row. Missing any one class does not release students from their written and oral responsibilities. In addition, since it is disrupting, I will subtract 5 points for excessive or habitual lateness.

Class participation includes attentiveness, preparation, and engagement. Students do not have to speak constantly, but they should contribute to each class meeting in some way. I will calculate participation grades thusly: excellent, good, fair, poor, which translate roughly to A, B, C, and D.

## **SHORT ASSIGNMENTS**

Each week, *before class*, students will submit a brief summary and cursory analysis of the relevant readings in an online journal. The point of these assignments is to encourage students to keep up with the readings as well as prime our in-class discussions.

## **ORAL PRESENTATIONS**

At the beginning of the semester, each student will consult the course schedule and choose one primary source (or group of related primary sources) that he or she will be responsible for introducing to the class. The point of the presentation will be to contextualize the source, outline its essential themes and arguments, and jumpstart the discussions. I do not require an overly formal presentation, but students should be prepared to speak for about ten to fifteen minutes, and address some or all of the following issues:

- *who wrote/produced the text, why, and for whom?*
- *what is the overt argument, and how does the author/thinker arrive at it?*
- *what is the “covert,” or underlying argument, and how can we know?*
- *how was the text received in its own time? how have historians understood it today?*
- Most importantly, *how does this text bear on the history of utopianism in Latin America?*

## **FORMAL WRITING ASSIGNMENTS**

Undergraduates: Twice during the semester I will distribute a paper topic and question. Students will respond by analyzing and interpreting the relevant primary and secondary materials and communicating their findings in a formal academic paper of about six to seven pages.

Graduates: Several weeks into the semester, I will begin meeting with each graduate student to help them devise an individual research topic that relates to both their own academic goals as well as the major themes of this course. At the end of the semester, they will report the results of their research in a formal essay of about 15-20 pages.

## **STANDARDS AND POLICIES FOR WRITTEN WORK**

As historians, your ability to write in clear and articulate prose is very important. I expect the essays to meet basic university writing standards, especially regarding spelling and grammar. Proofread and spell-check everything, as clarity and quality will affect your grade. All work should be typed in 12-pt New Times Roman font, double-spaced, with 1-inch margins all around. **I do not accept electronic submissions or late submissions.** All written work should adhere to Chicago-Style citation and formatting, explained here: [http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools\\_citationguide.html](http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html).

**Take special care not to plagiarize.** Plagiarism – when you quote or paraphrase somebody else’s words or ideas without crediting him or her – is the academic equivalent of lying, cheating, or stealing. **Every word you write in this class must be your own, not copied from any other source, whether in print or online,** unless clearly indicated. If in doubt, ask! The UNCG Academic Integrity Policy is online at <http://academicintegrity.uncg.edu>. I will fail any student who has plagiarized, and report him or her to the dean.

## **CLASS WEBSITE AND EMAIL**

**You must have a working email address, and check it regularly,** as it is the main means of communication out of class. I will send out reminders, assignments, and other announcements regularly.

The website on Blackboard will also play a major role. I will post the mandatory readings, topics for short assignments, study questions, links, and other materials necessary to perform well. The online journals are set up on the Blackboard platform. Occasionally, I will also use the website to follow up on themes covered in lectures and discussions, and respond to student questions. **You should check the website regularly for updates.**

## **CLASSROOM ETIQUETTE**

In this course we will often discuss sensitive and emotionally charged topics, such as race, class, gender, imperialism, exploitation, and immigration. We will also see and read primary materials representing archaic and (frankly) offensive perspectives. As they are part of our history (whether we like it or not), we will not censor or ignore them, and students should be prepared to address them directly and in a mature, academic fashion.

In discussions, we will not always agree with one another, yet we welcome diverse interpretations, as a discussion where everyone agrees is more of a pep rally than a classroom, unlikely to be enlightening. We aim to foster an atmosphere in which all students feel free to express their ideas, and in which we can disagree and challenge one another openly without feeling threatened or disrespected. Thus, **personal attacks and offensive language will not be tolerated,** since they obstruct honest debate. A good rule to keep in mind: **when challenging another’s arguments, try to do so in a way that assumes good faith on his or her part.** Address the strongest aspects of his or her ideas, not a cartoonish, simplistic, and easily dismissed version of them. This rule has the added benefit of requiring each of us to think harder and question our own assumptions.