Intentional Communities

This is a course about people who attempt to create a better life together in community. It is a course about alienation, dreams, optimism, human frailty, charisma, tradition, revitalization, industrial capitalism, agrarianism, individualism, the family, faith, and very possibly the future. Taking this course is unlikely to help you get a job after you graduate, but it may affect how you think about society and your place within it.

Texts

Donald E. Pitzer (ed.), *America’s Communal Utopias* (U.-North Carolina Press, 1997)
Alan Weisman, *Gaviotas: A Village to Reinvent the World* (Chelsea Green, 1999)
E. Ben-Rafael, *Crisis and Transformation: Kibbutz at Century’s End* (SUNY 1997)
Anna Peterson, *Seeds of the Kingdom: Utopian Communities in the Americas* (Oxford University Press, 2005)

Course Requirements: 100 pts Total

1. 6-7 pp. paper on a theme in historic U.S. communes (due 2/13)(25 pts)
2. 7-8 pp. paper on theoretical approaches to historic U.S. communes (due 3/30)(30 pts)
3. 5-6 pp. paper on what’s happening in current communities (due 4/27)(20 pts)
4. group presentation/written report on community vision and plan (due 5/14)(20 pts)
5. class attendance and participation throughout semester (5 pts)

Topics and Readings

I. Introduction

1/19 A. Ethos, World View, and Intentional Communities

1/21 B. Overview of the History of Intentional Communities

Bertrand Russell, “Plato’s Utopia,” from *A History of Western Philosophy* (Simon & Schuster, 1945)

Lawrence Schiffman, “The Character of the Community” (Chapters 6), of *Reclaiming the Dead Sea Scrolls* (New York: Doubleday, 1995) [e-reserv]

Video: portion of “Visions of Utopia” (in class)
II. **American Communitarian Ventures, 1620-1940:** In this section of the course we will examine many of the most noteworthy American intentional communities from the colonial period to WWII. The United States, with its guarantees of religious freedom, its cultural emphasis on experimentation and innovation, and its unfettered early development of capitalism, became the first nation in history to harbor -- and to generate -- such a wide array of intentional communities. With the exception of the Israeli kibbutzim (see Section III), these are the best documented and most studied intentional communities on record.

A. **Historical Sketches:** descriptive accounts

1/23 1. Donald Pitzer, Foreword & Introduction, *America’s Communal Utopias*


1/26 2. Durnbaugh (Colonial Communities) and Brewer (The Shakers) in Pitzer

   Video: “The Shakers” (before class)

1/28 3. Arndt (Harmony Society) in Pitzer


1/30 4. Andelson (Amana) in Pitzer

   Video: “Amana: The Community of True Inspiration” (before class)

2/2  5. May (Mormons) and Foster (Oneida) in Pitzer

2/4  6. Guarneri (Fourierists) and Sutton (Icaria) in Pitzer

2/6  7. Huntington (the Hutterites) in Pitzer

   Video: “The Hutterites: To Care/Not To Care” (before class, 12:45)

2/9  8. Bartelt (Jewish colonies) and Hine (socialist colonies) in Pitzer

2/11 9. Melton (Theosophical comm.) and Weisbrot (Peace Mission) in Pitzer

2/13 ***PAPER DUE:** Write a comparative essay on one of the following themes in American utopian history, 1620 to 1940: (1) ideological basis, (2) mission, (3) leadership, (4) gender/marriage, (5) economic organization, (6) immigrant/native communities, (7) success, (8) other (clear with instructor). Identify significant differences and similarities among communities and offer your insights and
conclusions. Provide in-text citations for quoted, paraphrased, or borrowed material. You may base your essay entirely on course material up to this point, but please do NOT look ahead to articles in the next section. 6-7 pages.

B. Analytical and Interpretive Studies: theoretically-based explications

2/16
1. Liminality and Communitas

Kamau, “Liminality, Communitas, etc.” in Brown (ed.)

Foster, “Between Two Worlds,” in Brown (ed.)

2/18
2. Commitment


3. Charismatic Leaders

2/20


2/23


4. Society and Economy

2/25


5. Social Relations and the Social Order

3/2


3/4


III. Kibbutz: an Intentional Community in Israel: in this section we will examine the rise and decline of the largest and one of the most significant utopian experiment in history, whose story fits almost perfectly into the 20th century.

3/6

Ben-Rafael, Preface, Chapters 1 & 2

3/9
B. Ben-Rafael, Chapter 3

3/11
C. Ben-Rafael, Chapters 4 & 5

Video: (before class)

3/13
D. Ben-Rafael, Chapters 6 & 7

3/14-3/29 SPRING RECESS

3/30 ***PAPER DUE: The articles and the book we have read for sections II-B and III all deal, in one way or another, with the questions of why, when, and how intentional communities get formed and why some persist and others fail. In a 7-8 page paper, present your assessment of the origins, persistence, and decline of such communities. Your task is to think critically about the evidence and the
interpretations, and to present your own synthesis, arguing for or against particular interpretations and possibly coming up with your own.

IV. **Intentional Communities of the 1960s:** among the most colorful and interesting of intentional communities were those founded as part of the self-proclaimed “counter-culture” of the 1960s. Hundreds and perhaps thousands of such communities began during this period, attracting tens of thousands of members. Many, probably most, had short careers, but some have persisted, changing and adapting to new circumstances and inspiring others to start new ones. Our brief survey only scratches the surface.

4/1  A. Timothy Miller, “The New Communes Emerge,” Chap 2 of *The 60s Communes* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1999) (e-reserve)

Gretchen Siegler, “In Search of Truth,” in Brown (ed.)


V. **Intentional Communities and a Sustainable Future:** As modern industrial capitalism reached its zenith, the world came to realize its fatal flaw: a lack of sustainability. Intentional communities have long sought to create a more satisfying way of living than the one offered in consumer-driven urban society. Today, more and more communities around the world are taking up the sustainability challenge. We will examine a few of these, and groups of you will plan your own.

A. Gaviotas: Sustainability in the Colombian Llanos

4/6  1. Weisman: Overture, Part I (to p.59)

4/8  2. Weisman, Part I (p.59-90) and Part II (to p.121)

   Video: “Gaviotas”

4/10  3. Weisman, Part II (p. 121-159) and Part III (to p.188)

4/13  4. Weisman, Part III (p. 188-222) and Afterword

B. The Amish and the Salvadoran *re pobladores* communities

4/15  1. Peterson, pp.1-40

   Video: “The Amish: How They Survive” (before class 12:30)

4/17  2. Peterson, pp. 40-75
3. Peterson, pp. 77-123

4. Peterson, pp. 125-145

C. Planning a Sustainable Intentional Community: An Exercise in Applying Knowledge

1. No readings; form community groups

***PAPER DUE: What’s happening in current communities? In this paper you have the opportunity to survey some aspect of the current communities movement, in the U.S. or abroad, through communities’ websites, special topic issues of Communities magazine (e.g. women in community, the arts, green building, community politics), or other materials you can find. In 5-6 pages, offer your reflective and evaluative commentary on the community/communities or topic you have chosen. Be sure to cite your sources.


3. Christian, Chapters 4-8
   Video: “Visions of Utopia”

4. Christian, Chapters 9-12

5. Christian, Chapters 13-15

6. Christian, Chapters 16-18

*** ORAL PRESENTATIONS BY COMMUNITY GROUPS
THURSDAY, 2-5 P.M.  (refreshments will be served)

Each group must also submit at this time a written community prospectus, including a vision statement and plans for establishing and organizing your community.