

Dystopian Fiction, Horror, and Politics

Politics 290-02, Spring 2020

Zoom: 10-11:15 am Tuesday & Thursday

Professor Zoila Ponce de Leon

Office Hours by appointment (if you would like to video conference at any point just send me an email and we can find some time to chat either that day or the next)

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Course Description

This course examines the political commentary included in dystopian fiction and horror novels and films. Through the analysis of seminal novels such as *1984* and *Brave New World*, and more recent films such as *Snowpiercer* and *US*, the class will assess different political concepts, including power, government, freedom, and equality. Literature and film can offer the most mesmerizing yet frightening depictions of our present and future world. At the same time, they can provide us with the opportunity to critically compare our contemporary experiences to those portrayed in them. Our main goal will be to critically assess the role of the government and powerful actors in our society. We will complement our analysis with a variety of academic readings and opinion pieces.

Course Requirements

First of all, I know these are hard times and the last thing I would want is for our class to make them even harder.

The course will meet twice a week via Zoom. The requirements for the course are first and foremost regular attendance, reading of the assigned materials, and active participation in class discussions. Students are expected to come to each session **ready for a lively discussion**.

You need to contact me ahead of the session that you need to miss. I expect everyone to **join on time**. I appreciate your cooperation.

The following are some guidelines to help you get started:

- **Speak up!** Ask the second you have a question or a comment. Others may have the same concerns you do.
- **Respect** one another. Differences of opinion are likely and also desirable. **Listen** to other students' questions, express your disagreements with respect and value your colleagues' opinions as if they were your own.
- **No cellphones in class.**

Please contact me if you have questions or concerns. If you have any kind of problem with the course or with life, please **communicate** with me. I am willing to work with you to help you succeed, but I cannot do so retroactively at the end of the term.

Course Evaluation

Participation

Participation is key for this course. Students are expected to read the assigned materials before each session and **participate actively** during class meetings. It is essential that you come to class prepared so that you can engage in discussion and ask questions.

Participation performance is not based on the number of times you speak up during class but on the **quality** of your input. By no means, this should be understood as having to “be right” every time. Any comment or question that contributes to our analysis of course contents and discussion is highly regarded.

Leading Discussion

Each student must select one session to lead the discussion. You will prepare two or three discussion topics or questions. Students will make their choices in the first session. Discussion leaders must be prepared to lead an engaging discussion, introducing and explaining what they take to be the most important topics or themes of the assigned readings.

Short Script & Presentation

Students must work on a short script for an alternative ending to any of the novels or movies assigned for the course. You may work on this project individually, in pairs or groups of three. This should be an original, single act script or screenplay, and be approximately 10 pages and 12-point font. This assignment is due before midnight EST on Thursday, **May 21st**.

By **May 11th**, students will have established their respective groups and met via Zoom to discuss the assignment. During this week, you should take some time to start working on your short script. I will give you time options for us to have individual Zoom conferences so that you can ask me any questions you may have as you work on it.

You will also need to prepare a short video presentation (3-5 minutes) of your script. You should upload it to Canvas before midnight EST on Friday, **May 22nd**. You will be required to comment (on Canvas *Discussions*) on at least two presentations. You should assess each other’s ideas on their clarity, novelty, and ability to convince the audience.

Honor System

Familiarize yourself with the system at www.wlu.edu/executive-committee/the-honor-system/the-white-book#The_Honor_System

You also need to familiarize yourself with the concept and practice of plagiarism to make sure that you avoid it. From the Catalog: *"Plagiarism describes the use of another's words or ideas without proper acknowledgment. The students of Washington and Lee University have considered plagiarism a violation of the Honor System; therefore, all forms of plagiarism including Internet plagiarism are taken very seriously. Plagiarism takes many forms, including the wholesale copying of phrases or texts, or the use of ideas without indicating the source."*

Ask me if you have any questions. Leyburn Library has helpful advice on avoiding plagiarism: <https://libguides.wlu.edu/c.php?g=99506&p=644455>

Grade Assessment

Credit/No Credit is determined as follows:

- Students earn the requisite number of credits for the course.
- The credit counts towards their degree as well as towards a major/minor or an FDR requirement, as applicable.
- To earn a Credit grade, the student must complete all course requirements.

Disability Accommodations

Washington and Lee University makes reasonable academic accommodations for qualified students with disabilities. All accommodations must be approved through the Office of the Dean of the College. Students requesting accommodations for this course should present an official accommodation letter within the first two weeks of the term and schedule a meeting outside of class time to discuss accommodations. It is the student's responsibility to present this paperwork in a timely fashion and to follow up about accommodation arrangements.

Diversity Statement

Washington and Lee affirms that diverse perspectives and backgrounds enhance our community. We are committed to the recruitment, enrichment, and retention of students, faculty, and staff who embody many experiences, cultures, points of view, interests, and identities. As engaged citizens in a global and diverse society, we seek to advance a positive learning and working environment for all through open and substantive dialogue.

Important dates

April 30	First Zoom Meeting
May 11-15	Discussion of Script Ideas
May 21	Last Zoom Meeting & Final Script
May 22	Video Presentation

Course Books & Films

We will read 3 books during the term:

- 1) *Brave New World*, by Aldous Huxley.
- 2) *1984*, by George Orwell.
- 3) *The Power*, by Naomi Alderman.

We will watch 2 films:

- 1) *Snowpiercer*, by Bong Joon Ho and Kelly Masterson.
- 2) *US*, by Jordan Peele.

I have posted the remaining required readings on Canvas, which you should **read after** reading the assigned part of the novel/watching the film.

Course Schedule & Readings

Please note that I reserve the right to make changes to the course schedule, including assignments due dates, when unforeseen circumstances occur.

April 30: Course Overview & Discussion Leader Assignments

May 5: *Brave New World*, Ch. 1-8 (138 pages)

- Margaret Atwood, "Everybody is happy now," *The Guardian*.

May 7: *Brave New World*, Ch. 9-18 (120 pages) & *Snowpiercer*

- Emily VanDerWerff, "Sci-fi movie *Snowpiercer* is one of the most political films of the year," *Vox*.

May 11-15: Zoom Meetings to Discuss Script Ideas

May 12: *1984*, Parts I & II (176 pages)

- "A Letter to George Orwell," by Aldous Huxley (October 21, 1949).

May 14: *1984*, Part III (60 pages) & *US*

- Tasha Robinson, "Jordan Peele's *US* turns a political statement into unnerving horror," *The Verge*.

May 19: *The Power*, pages 1-201

- Sophie Gilbert, "What if women had *The Power*?" *The Atlantic*.

May 21: *The Power*, pages 202-372

Final Script Due (Canvas)

May 22: Video Presentation Due (Canvas)