American Studies 430.02
Visions of Utopia
T - Fri 02:00PM - 03:20PM
GHH 206
Roger Williams University
Fall Semester, 2013

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Week of September 3, 2013

For Tuesday, September 3

I want to spend a little time with you, getting your reflections on the direction(s) you want this course to take. I also want us to get started on A Traveler from Altruria. As you'll soon find out, if you haven't done so already. This novel first appeared as a chapter by chapter serial in Cosmopolitan Magazine. Each chapter takes the form of a letter. The letters record incidents and reactions to them, and as you might imagine the Altrurian had many misconceptions about how America "worked". He was "shocked" and had lots of questions, while his hosts were shocked that he was shocked, and had some significant reactions to his observations and criticisms.

Starting at the beginning, I'd like to have you read chapters I and II, (in my edition, p. 3 through p. 31, and construct a little chart like this one:

Things that Amaze, Surprise, Confound, and Puzzle (etc.)	
The Altrurian Traveler	His Hosts

As you do this be aware that the chances for misunderstandings are endless. Sometimes a person thinks another person is joking when he's utterly serious. Other times, the opposite is true. Sometimes you'll be seeing reactions to actions–in both directions.

When you are finished, think a bit about this: Suppose the Altrurian's great-grandson or great-granddaughter visited Rhode Island. What would the reactions be? Would they have changed much. Would our generations understand the Altrurian? Would the Altrurian understand us? Write your thoughts about this in the Clog on Bridges.

For Friday, September 6

Repeat this exercise on chapters III and IV, pp. 32 - 62.