

RS 153: The End of the World

Instructor: Micki Lennon

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Meeting times: MWF 10-10:50, Glenn 327

Office hours: MW 2:30-3:30, T 9:30-11:30 and by appointment

Course Description and Objectives:

This course will introduce students to the ways in which religious traditions have helped cultures cope with catastrophes and make meaning out of suffering and death. We will focus on religious and secular visions of the end of the world, examining apocalyptic and millennial themes in Judaism, Christianity, Native American religions, and new religious movements. We will explore the ways religious visions of the end of the world have helped human beings adapt to an often unstable and unpredictable world and cope with the possibility of global annihilation (such as the prospects of nuclear war and ecological catastrophe). We will also look at the ways in which secular discussions of these issues in the 20th and 21st centuries have been shaped by broader religious narratives.

This course meets the general education requirements of Theme U, Catastrophe and humanity. It addresses the human search for meaning in an unpredictable world and explores the relationship between society and nature and the role religion plays in helping different societies manage crises, deal with change, and recover from disasters and catastrophic events.

Required Texts:

Paul Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More*

Walter Miller, *A Canticle for Leibowitz*

Course Reader, available at Mr. Kopy (119 Main, next to 7-11)

Course Requirements and Grading

Participation	300 points	daily
Midterm Essay	200 points	March 7
Research Project	250 points	determined by sign-up
Final Paper	250 points	May 18

Grading

Grading will be on a 1000 point scale. 935 or more points, A; 895-934 points, A-; 875-894 points, B+; 835-874 points, B; 795-834 points, B-; 775-794 points, C+; 735-774 points, C; 695-734 points, C-; 675-694 points, D+; 595-674 points, D; below 595, F.

Participation (25%)

This will be a discussion-oriented course, so your attendance and participation is vital to its success. Your participation grade will be based on attendance, level of preparation for class, contributions to class discussion, and your listening skills.

There are two components to this grade:

● **Preparation (200 points)** It is essential that you complete the assigned readings and reflect on them to allow class discussion to take place. Throughout the calendar of required readings you will find HOMEWORK QUESTIONS (an average of one a week). You should hand in a 2-3 paragraph response to these questions at the beginning of the class period on the day they are listed.

- Homework may be handwritten as long as your handwriting is legible
- Use blue or black ink—no pencil, red or purple ink, etc.
- Use standard size (8.5 by 11) paper
- You don't need to turn in a bibliography with these assignments, but you **should** cite any direct quotations with in-text citations, e.g. (Reader, 46).
- Late homework will receive half credit and should be turned in with the next assignment

You will get an additional 20 points towards your homework grade if you bring in a passport-size photograph of yourself during the first week of the semester. (Hint: if you don't have a recent picture, make a color copy of your ID at the copy center in the library—ask them to enlarge the ID to 150%).

● Attendance and participation (100 points)

I will occasionally take attendance, and I will monitor student participation. There will also be several in-class exercises which will count towards this portion of the grade. If you have an illness or another problem which will affect your ability to attend class regularly, you must let me know as soon as possible.

Midterm Exam (25%)

The midterm will be a combination of multiple choice and essay. If the class wishes, I will make the essay component of the exam a take-home. I will hand out a study guide a week before the exam. Exams cannot be turned in late except in cases of severe illness or other significant emergencies (e.g. death in the family), and you must notify me in

advance if you have such an emergency. If we decide to make the essay question a take-home, please consult carefully the general guidelines for writing assignments below. Plagiarism and other academic dishonesty will result in an “F” for the course and sanctions from Student Judicial Affairs.

Research Project (25%)

Every member of the class is required to conduct a research project for the course. The preferred method for this project is a group presentation. I will also allow students to write a research paper instead of doing a presentation; if the majority of the class chooses this option, individuals will have to present a short (5 minute) summary of their research on the days allotted for group presentations. This research project is designed to give you an opportunity to explore a particular religious group’s understanding of the end of the world in more depth.

Guidelines for Group Presentations

Group projects should be 20-25 minutes in length. Groups should be composed of 2-5 members, and members should participate equally in both the research and the presentation itself. Each group member must turn in an **annotated bibliographies** with three unique sources (that is, sources not being used by other group members) **one week before the presentation date**. All groups must **meet with me a week before their presentation** to apprise me of their progress. Projects will be judged on research, creativity, organization, and coherence. Please be sure to select a research topic that can be coherently presented in 25 minutes! Group presentation dates will be determined by signups the second week of class.

●●● DEADLINES FOR RESEARCH PROJECT ●●●

- Tentative topics chosen by **February 23**; you must at least decide on the date of your presentation by then.
- A proposal that gives your specific topic and lists at least three bibliographic sources is due by **April 1**. (The class period before that will give groups time to meet during the class session). Groups should turn in one proposal per group, with the one-paragraph proposal, a breakdown of who is doing what aspect of the topic, and one source per group member.
- Groups should meet with me **a week before** the project date to let me know your basic plan
- Annotated bibliographies are due **a week before** your group presents (on the day you meet with me). One annotated bibliography (of at least three sources) **per person!** An annotated bibliography gives the complete citation for each source and also includes a paragraph’s worth of description of the material in the source

that was relevant for the project. For example, an annotated bibliography entry for *The Lorax* might look like this:

Theodore Seuss Geisel, *The Lorax* (New York: Random House, 1971).

The Lorax is an environmental parable in which the story of the “Onceler” is told. The Onceler is a sort of proto-capitalist who comes to exploit the paradisaical land of the Lorax. Before the coming of the Onceler, Truffula trees bloom, Brown Barbaloos play, and all is happy and joyous. The Onceler sets about making products from Truffula trees, and as a result destroys the animals’ habitats and pollutes the air and water. The Onceler becomes rich, but undercuts his own profit-making abilities by destroying all of the Truffula trees. The film is an indictment of capitalism, industry and unbridled expansion, calling on the viewers to treat nature with care. In this project, I am using the Lorax as an example of secular apocalypticism. The narrative structure of the Lorax closely follows the Christian master narrative (paradise, a fall, a savior figure, collapse, final judgment, hope for the future).

●●●Breakdown of the grade for group projects●●●

Proposal: 25 points

Group research: 50 points

Meeting: 25 points

Organization: 50 points

Annotated bibliography: 50 points

Creativity: 50 points

Possible topics:

Early or medieval Christian or Jewish millennialism (e.g. Qumran, the first millennium, Masada, Sabbatianism, the flagellant movement and other responses to the Black Plague); Reformation millennialism (e.g. Diggers, Ranters, Puritans); millennial movements with origins in the 19th century (e.g. Seventh Day Adventism, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Shakers, Mormons, Dispensationalists, Pentecostals, the Scofield Reference Bible)

Native American millennialism (Ghost Dance Religion; Hopi apocalypticism; Mayan or Aztec apocalypticism)

Protestant or Catholic responses to WWII; Significance of the state of Israel; Jewish responses to the Holocaust and WWII; 20th century Jewish or Christian apocalypticism

New religious movements and apocalypticism (People’s Temple, Branch Davidians, Aum Shinrikyo, Montana Freeman, Christian Identity Movement, Solar Temple, Heaven’s Gate, Chen Tao, etc.)

Comparative apocalypticism (e.g. Buddhist or Hindu); secular apocalyptic (e.g. Y2k; responses to September 11)

Environmental apocalypse, e.g. Earth First!; environmental apocalyptic themes in Japanese anime, children's cartoons, or popular film; nuclear apocalypse in film [Note that you CANNOT present on any film we are already doing in class: Barefoot Gen, Dr. Strangelove, Princess Mononoke]

Guidelines for Research paper option:

If you choose the research paper option, you should select one of the above topics and write a 7-10 page research paper on it. You should have at least 5 sources for this paper. These sources should NOT be internet sources, unless they are scholarly articles accessed through library databases or unless you have special permission from me. Your paper should also have a thesis (that is, make some sort of argument, not merely present information).

Proposals for research papers are due by April 1. For papers, this should be a 1 paragraph statement of your topic, including your potential thesis, and a bibliography of at least 3 sources.

Please be extremely scrupulous about citing sources you use in the paper; I will check every paper for potential plagiarism, and the penalty for plagiarism in this class is an "F" for the course--there are no exceptions to this policy.

A Canticle for Leibowitz Paper (250 points)

The final paper for this class will be on the last novel we will be reading, *A Canticle for Leibowitz*. There is a study guide for the novel in the course reader, which I urge you to consult. The final paper needs to be a review of the book that integrates some major theme from the class, to demonstrate the knowledge you have gained from the class. For example, you might discuss the ways the novel illustrates one of the major apocalyptic narrative patterns we have discussed in class; you might compare the novel's depiction of the post-nuclear landscape to one of the other such texts we have examined in class, such as *Barefoot Gen* or *Princess Mononoke*; or you might explore the extent to which the novel conforms to (or fails to conform to) Protestant, Catholic, or secular apocalyptic thinking.

General Guidelines for writing assignments

- Students are required to keep a copy of all written assignments submitted to me, and to resubmit written work if required.
- All written assignments should be typed, double-spaced, on standard 8 1/2 by 11 paper. Margins should be one inch on all sides. Please use a 12 point font; I prefer Times New Roman. All assignments should include your name, class and section number, the day

the assignment is due, and (for exams) the number of the question you are responding to or (for papers) the title of your paper. A title page is not necessary. All assignments must be stapled and paginated! If you turn in an assignment in which the pages are not stapled together, I accept no responsibility for lost pages. Please do NOT turn in assignments in binders or plastic covers.

- All assignments should be accompanied by a bibliography or works cited page, in addition to citations you use in the text. (Exception: homework assignments do not need a works cited page, though you should use in-text citations).

- Any instance of plagiarism or other academic dishonesty (e.g. cheating on exams) **will result in an “F” for the course** and a report of academic misconduct submitted to Student Judicial Affairs. If you borrow the ideas of others in composing your written work, they must be cited; if you borrow the words of others, they must be enclosed in quotation marks and cited. If you have any doubts as to whether or not something needs to be cited, play it safe and cite it—or ask me about it. Any standard citation format (MLA, APA, etc.) is fine.

- If you are having health problems or personal crises which might tempt you to plagiarize, please talk to me. In some cases, I may be able to make accommodations for your situation; in other cases, I may advise you to take the late penalty (see below). Students who plagiarize on more than one occasion will be expelled from the university. In the long run, it is far better to receive a lower grade (or even a failing grade) than to jeopardize your entire academic career.

- Please note that material from the internet is still someone else’s work, and must be cited appropriately! If you are unsure of how to do this properly, consult the following website: http://www.csuchico.edu/engl/Links/style_guide.html

- Written work may be submitted late for a point deduction of 20%. The last day I will accept such late work is the last day of classes before finals.

Students with certified disabilities

Please notify me of any special need relating to your disability within the first two weeks of the semester. I will make every reasonable effort to facilitate your success in this course. Please note that you may be required to show documentation of your disability.

If you have a documented disability that may require reasonable accommodations, please contact Disability Support Services (DSS) for coordination of your academic accommodations. DSS is located in Building E. Building E is adjacent to Meriam Library and Bell Memorial Union (BMU). The DSS phone number is 898-5959 V/TTY or FAX 898-4411. Visit the DSS website at <http://www.csuchico.edu/dss/>.

Course Calendar and Reading Assignments

Readings labeled “Boyer” are from Paul Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More*; those labeled “Canticle” are from *A Canticle for Leibowitz*; those labeled “reader” are from the course reader (course packet from Mr. Kopy). Please note that this schedule is tentative and may change if necessary.

□□□**ALL READINGS ARE DUE BY THE DATE LISTED**□□□

For example, by January 31 you must have read Boyer, pp. 1-18.

1/24: Introduction to the Course

Unit One: Apocalyptic Narratives

1/26: What is apocalypticism? Apocalyptic narratives

Film: *The Lorax*

Please bring in a passport-size photo of yourself. (Hint: make a color copy of you id if you don't have a recent picture. You will NOT get this picture back.) This is worth 20 points if you bring it today, 15 points if you bring it Friday, and 10 points if you bring it Monday).

1/28: Varieties of apocalyptic narrative

Reading: Meredith McGuire, "The Provision of Meaning and Belonging," and Theodore Ludwig, "The Sacred Story and Its Historical Context," both in course reader. [Also on electronic reserve]

1/31: Religious apocalypticism

Film: *The Rapture*

Reading: Boyer, Prologue (pp. 1-18)

2/2: Religious apocalypticism

Film: *The Rapture*

2/4: Apocalypticism in film

Homework question: Write 2-3 paragraphs on ONE of the following questions: (1) Compare the narrative structure of *The Lorax* to the narrative structure of *The Rapture*. The characters and scenarios are obviously very different, but are there similarities in what each warns about the coming end of the world?
(2) Apply one of the concepts discussed in McGuire or Ludwig to *The Rapture*.

UNIT TWO: APOCALYPTICISM IN WESTERN HISTORY

2/7: Origins of apocalyptic thinking
Reading: Boyer, chapter 1 (pp. 21-48)

2/9: Early Jewish apocalypticism
Reading: Daniel (Reader)

Homework question: Pick one of the dreams of Nebuchadnezzar and give Daniel's interpretation. Note: If you find this reading difficult, don't panic--we will be spending the whole class period going over it.

2/11: Early Christian apocalypticism
Reading: Revelations (Reader)

2/14: Revelation and Christian apocalyptic symbolism

Reading: Revelation (reread it, especially if you had problems the first time).

Homework question: Like most apocalyptic books, Revelation is full of symbols. Pick one of the symbols (e.g. number symbolism, the seals, the lamb, the woman, etc.) and discuss what you think it means. Do you think the early Christian church interpreted this book literally? Why or why not?

2/16: Apocalypticism in western history
Reading: Boyer, 46-79

2/18: Jesus' second coming, in female form: The Shakers
Film: Hands to Work, Hearts to God

2/21: Apocalypticism in American history

Reading: John Humphrey Noyes, "Christian Perfectionism" (Reader); Boyer, 80-112.

Homework question: What did Noyes mean by "perfect holiness"? By "Bible communism"? What do you think his ideal society would look like?

2/23: The premillennial impulse

Reading: Edwin Gaustad, "Millerites," "Adventism," "Millennialism," "Holiness and Perfectionism." (Reader)

SIGN-UPS FOR GROUP PROJECTS WILL BE TODAY

2/25: Seventh-Day Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses

Reading: Paul Conkin, "Apocalyptic Christianity." (Reader)

2/28: Pentecostalism

Reading: Roger Olsen, "Pentecostalism." (Reader)

Film: A Thief in the Night

Homework question: Where in the film do you see examples of either (a) prominent apocalyptic symbols from the book of Revelation or (b) examples of specific beliefs about the end times that are characteristic of a particular Christian apocalyptic group?

3/2: Discussion/Wrap-up of unit 2

Unit Three: Comparative Apocalypticism in America

3/4: Apocalypticism in Native American history
Film

3/7: Midterm exam due

3/9: Native American Apocalypticism: Ghost Dance Religion

Readings: Joel Martin, "New Religions in the West (Reader)

3/11: Ghost Dance Religion

Reading: Michelene Pesantubbee, "From Vision to Violence: The Wounded Knee Massacre." (Reader)

Homework question: What did the Ghost Dance movement mean to the Lakota? What did white people of the time think of this movement? How did these conflicting viewpoints contribute to conflicts between the Lakota and the American military?

Have a good spring break!!!!!!!!!!

Unit Four: Comparative Apocalypticism in America: New Religious Movements

3/21: New religious movements: terminology and theory

Reading: Catherine Wessinger, "Introduction" (Reader)

Homework question: Why does Wessinger reject the term "cult"? What does she think of the term "brainwashing"?

3/23: Catastrophic millennialism and the People's Temple

Reading: David Chidester, "Jim Jones, The People's Temple, and Jonestown." (Reader)

3/25: Understanding Jonestown

Reading: Rebecca Moore, "American as Cherry Pie." (Reader)

Homework question: Rebecca Moore had two sisters who died at Jonestown, and she has since become an authority on New Religious Movements. How has her own understanding of Jonestown changed over time? What internal and external factors have shaped her understanding of the violence at Jonestown?

3/28: Catastrophic millennialism and UFO religions

Reading: "1997, 1998--Heaven's Gate" [ELECTRONIC RESERVE]; "How the millennium comes violently" (electronic reserve)

3/30: In-class group project research

Unit Five: Secular Apocalyptic Narratives: nuclear war and environmental catastrophe

4/1: The impact of the Atom Bomb on the Apocalyptic Imagination

Reading: Paul Fussell, "Thank God for the Bomb" (Reader)

Film: Barefoot Gen

Paper/Presentation proposals due today

4/4: Experiencing the atom bomb

Reading: Hideko Tamura Snide, "Hiroshima Memories" (Reader)

Film: Barefoot Gen

4/6: The impact of Hiroshima and Nagasaki

Readings: Murray Sayle, "Did the Bomb end the war?" (Reader)

Homework question: Based on Fusell, Tamura Snide and Sayle's articles as well as Barefoot Gen, do you think the U.S. was justified in bombing Hiroshima? Why or why not?

4/8: The bomb and American cold-war culture

Film: Dr. Strangelove

Reading: Daniel Wojcik, "Secular Apocalyptic Themes in the Nuclear Era," (Reader);
Optional, Boyer 323-339.

4/11: The arms race

Film: Dr. Strangelove

4/13: Group presentations; Papers due for those writing research papers

4/15: Group presentations

4/18: Group presentations

4/20: World War III in the Protestant imagination **Possible group presentation**

Reading: Hal Lindsey, "Israel, O Israel" and "World War III." (Reader); Boyer, 181-224

Homework: Find another recent prophecy prediction (I suggest you look online) and write about how it compares to Hal Lindsey's predictions. (You might try searching recent events, such as "tsunami" or "Iraq war" and "prophecy" in an internet search engine).

4/22: Jewish messianism in the 20th century **Possible group presentation**

Reading: Jerome Mintz, "Introduction" and "The Dynasty of Reb Dov Ber" (reader).

4/25: Cold War Catholicism Possible group project
Reading: Michael Cuneo, "The Vengeful Virgin;" Excerpts from Veronica Leuken's *Virgin Mary's Bayside Prophecies* (Reader)
Optional reading: Boyer, 254-290.
Homework question: What are the distinguishing features of Catholic apocalypticism?

4/27: Environmental catastrophe
Reading: Rachel Carson, "Silent Spring;" Joseph Desjardins, "Is there an environmental crisis?" (Reader)
Homework question: Based on the reading, do you believe an environmental catastrophe is imminent? Why or why not?

4/29: The industrial revolution and environmental catastrophe
Film: Princess Mononoke
Reading: Start reading *A Canticle for Leibowitz*

5/2: Environmental catastrophe in film
Film: Princess Mononoke
Reading: *A Canticle for Leibowitz*

5/4: Environmental catastrophe in film:
Film: Princess Mononoke
Homework question: Princess Mononoke study Guide (Handed out at beginning of the film)

5/6: Averting environmental catastrophe
Homework: Study questions for Book 1, *A Canticle for Leibowitz* due today

5/9: Rebuilding after a catastrophe
Reading: *A Canticle for Leibowitz*
Homework: Study questions for Book 2 of *A Canticle for Leibowitz* due today (worth double points)

5/11: Is humanity doomed to cause our own demise?
Reading: *A Canticle for Leibowitz*
Homework: Study questions for Book 3 of *A Canticle for Leibowitz* due today (worth double points)

5/13: Final reflections on the class

5/18: Final papers are at 10 a.m. in the regular classroom.