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Wesleyan University Spring 1998  
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The End of the World:  
The Millennium and the End Times in American Religious Thought

Eschatology: [Gk *eschatos* last, farthest] 1. a branch of theology concerned with the final events in the history of the world or of mankind.

The approach of each millennium has brought fraught with uncertainty and anxiety for many societies. As we approach the year 2000, some religious groups in the U.S. herald the hastening of the End Times, when a Messiah will appear to cleanse the earth of all unrighteousness.

This course examines various American eschatologies and the religious communities that imagine them. Among the topics we will discuss will be Americanism, or the ways groups imagine the United States to be favored by God, Religious politics (both Christian and Jewish fundamentalists), and the ways that American eschatologies are gendered and racialized. The End Times in Pop culture will be considered through various novels and films.

We will focus on selected societies in U.S. history including Millerites, Jehovah's Witnesses, Afro-Christianities, Rastafari, various Judaisms, Christian Fundamentalists, to end with contemporary millenarian movements including Branch Davidians, the Nation of Islam and Christian Identity.

Requirements: Each Wednesday a one-page response paper will be due. Students will also be responsible for a mid-term, and three 5 page written assignments. Each student will also join a small team of students to research one American group. Note: I will show films on several evenings at 8:00, so please schedule your semester accordingly.

You must find access to a copy of the Bible, the King James Version. If you do not have one, you can find it on the web at <http://ccel.wheaton.edu>

## EXAMINATIONS AND ASSIGNMENTS

Midterm, final, three essays.

Week One

January 21 Introduction

Week Two

January 26 *Apocalypse as genre*

The Book of Daniel

--Memorize at least one line from Daniel to recite in class

"Let the End Begin" and "Shards of Apocalypse" in Mark Kingwell, Dreams of Millennium: Report from a Culture on the Brink. Boston: Faber & Faber, 1996. pp. 1-56.

January 28

"Toward an Understanding of the Messianic Idea in Judaism." in Gershom Scholem, The Messianic Idea in Judaism. New York: Schocken Books, 1971. pp. 1-36.

### Week Three

Feb 2 *Christian Revelation*

The Book of Revelation

"Apocalypse, a History of the End of the World" in Philip Lamy, Millennium Rage: Survivalists, White Supremacists, and the Doomsday Prophecy. New York: Plenum Press, 1996, pp. 31-62.

Feb 4 *America in Prophecy: Israel or Egypt?*

Conrad Cherry, God's New Israel: Religious Interpretations of American Destiny, Englewood Cliffs, NY: Prentice Hall, 1971. pp. 1-30

Jonathan Edwards, "The Latter-Day Glory is Probably to Begin in America."

Albert J. Raboteau, "African Americans, Exodus, and the American Israel." in Hackett, Religion and American Culture.

### Week Four

Feb 9 *The End of the World is a Dud: The Great Disappointment*

Numbers and Butler, eds. The Disappointed: Millerism and Millenarianism in the Nineteenth Century. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987. Ch 1, 10.

Feb 11 *Jehovah's Witnesses*

M. James Penton, Apocalypse Delayed: The Story of Jehovah's Witnesses. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985. pp. 184-208, 253-302

### Week Five

Feb 16 *The Rise of Premillennial Dispensationalism*

Paul Boyer, When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in American Culture. (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard) pp. 80-100

Paul Benware, "The View of Premillennialism" in Understanding the End Times. Chicago: Moody Press, 1995.

Feb 18 *Christian Fundamentalists: An Ethnography*

Nancy Ammerman, Bible Believers: Fundamentalists in the Modern World. New

Brunswick: Rutgers U Press, 1987.

Apocalypse: On the Psychology of Fundamentalism in America. Boston: Beacon Press, 1994. Chs 2 and 3.

**Paper One Due in my box in the Religion Department Friday Feb 20 by 4:00**

Week Six

Feb 23 *Nuclear Secular Apocalypse*

Daniel Wojcik, "Secular Apocalyptic Themes in the Nuclear Era." in The End of the World As We Know It: Faith, Fatalism and Apocalypse in America. New York: NYU Press, 1997, pp. 97-132.

Philip Lamy, "Babylon the Great is Fallen" on the Unabomber. In in Robbins and Palmer, eds. Millennium, Messiahs and Mayhem. New York: Routledge Press, 1997, 105-108.

Film at 8:00 pm "Dr. Strangelove"

Feb 25 *Apocalyptic fiction*

Ray Bradbury, The Martian Chronicles. New York: Doubleday, 1950

Stephen O'Leary, Arguing the Apocalypse, New York: Oxford U Press, 12994. chapter 8.

Week Seven

March 2

Octavia Butler, The Parable of the Sower (novel)

8:00 Film *On the Beach*

March 4 Midterm

Spring Break

Week Eight

March 23 *Christian Nuclear Visions*

Hofstater, "The paranoid style of mind" in David Brion Davis, ed., The Fear of Conspiracy: Images of Un-American Subversion from the Revolution to the Present. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Hal Lindsey, Late Great Planet Earth (novel)

March 25 Apocalyptic Utopia

David Chidester, Salvation and Suicide, An Interpretation of Jim Jones, the People's Temple, and Jonestown

Week Nine

March 30 African American Apocalypics

Martha F. Lee, The Nation of Islam: An American Millenarian Movement. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1996. pp. 3-35 and 91-105.

Elijah Muhammed, "Message to the Blackman in America" and "An Independent Black Nation and America's Downfall."

April 1 Rastafari Revelations

Leonard Barrett, Sr. The Rastafarians: Sounds of Cultural Dissonance. Beacon press. pp. 103-145.

Joseph Owens, "Dread Judgment" and "Dread Zion" in Dread: The Rastafarians of Jamaica. London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1976 pp. 188-242.

**Paper Two due in my box in Religion by 4:00 on Friday April 3**

Week Ten

April 6 Catholic Apocalypticism

Daniel Wojcik, "Apocalyptic Apparitions of the Virgin Mary in New York City" from Wojcik, The End of the World As We Know It

April 8 Film

Week Eleven

April 13 Contemporary Jewish Messianism

Lis Harris, Holy Days: The World of a Hasidic Family. Ch. 3

William Shaffir, "Lubavitch Millennialism" in The Jewish Journal of Sociology, Vol. 35 No. 2 (June 1993), pp. 1156-128

April 15 Critical Feminists and the End Times

Catherine Keller, "The Breast, the Apocalypse, and the Colonial Journey." in Strozier and Flynn, The Year 2000: Essays on the End. pp. 42-58

Susan J. Palmer, "Woman as World Savior: The Feminization of the Millennium in New Religious Movements." in Robbins and Palmer, eds. Millennium, Messiahs and Mayhem. New York: Routledge Press, 1997. pp. 159-171

Film at 8:00 pm Blade Runner

Week Twelve

April 20 Survivors and Christian Racists

Philip Lamy, Millennium Rage: Survivalists, White Supremacists, and the Doomsday Prophecy. New York: Plenum Press, 1996, pp. 63-134.

April 22 Race War and Apocalypse

Week Thirteen

April 27 Christian Identity Cult Fiction

William Pierce, The Turner Diaries (novel)

April 29

David Koresh, "The Seven Seals of the Book of Revelation" in Tabor and Gallagher, Why Waco? Cults and the Battle for Religious Freedom in America. LA: U of California Press, 1995.

Week Fourteen

May 4 New Agers and Alien Abductees

Charles Strozier, "The Age of Aquarius" in Apocalypse: On the Psychology of Fundamentalism in America. Boston: Beacon Press, 1994. pp. 223-255.

Robert W. Balch, The Gods Have Landed: New Religions from Other Worlds (State U of NY Press, 1995).

**Paper Three due in my box by 4:00 Friday May 8**