

English 1C  
Fall 2009  
Smallenburg  
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## **Visions of the End Times Biblical Prophecy and its Aftermath**

“Is there any thing which can either be thoroughly understood, or soundly judged of, til the very first cause and principles from which originally it springeth be made manifest?”  
(Richard Hooker, *Of the Lawes of Ecclesiastical Politie*, 1593)

Thematic focus of the course: the traditional theme of the end times, its social and historical origins, its recurrences over the last two thousand years.

Ideas we sometimes take for granted as true started at some point in history related to specific historic circumstances. They catch on, and two thousand years later, people still believe them, whether or not there is any reason to.

The larger issue is prophecy generally: i.e., the books of Nostradamus, or, now, the end-of-times according to the Mayan calendar, or a book like *The Bible Code*, which purported to find in a “code” embedded in the original Hebrew text of the Old Testament predictions of such events as the Holocaust.

During this semester we will

- a. follow an idea that has had a major impact on western culture—that the end of the world will come in a great conflagration, willed by God, as a judgment against sinful people: the righteous would be eternally saved, the wicked will be condemned to eternal punishment. This idea, which shows up in many modern contexts, dates back to canonical and non-canonical books of the Bible, but before that to the ancient (1500 BCE) Zoroastrian religion.
- b. read and discuss texts, including films, related to the origins and recurrent appearances of this idea
- c. survey ways in which this vision has influenced our history over the last two millennia, still influences our politics and our thinking in terms of environment, sense of literary drama—villains who aim to take over the world being defeated in a rousing climax by the forces of good. This plays out in modern times the

pattern of the ancient “combat myth,” seen in Babylonian and other cultures, as well as in sections of the Bible, where Yahweh is depicted as a storm god.

- d. look at various other visions of the apocalypse, including literary and scientific
- e. understand both the socio/cultural and psychological reasons why this vision arose and has continued to compel believers

Required books (available online [Amazon.com] or at the campus bookstore):

*Oxford Study Bible*

*The Living End*, Stanley Elkin

*Rapture, Revelation, and the End Times*, ed. Forbes and Kilde

*Cows, Pigs, Wars, and Witches*, Marvin Harris

Also relevant (not assigned, but useful):

*How We Believe*, Michael Shermer

*The Pursuit of the Millennium*, Norman Cohn

*Cosmos, Chaos, and the World to Come*, Norman Cohn

*A History of the End of the World*, Jonathan Kirsch

*The End of History*, Francis Fukuyama

*Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, Vol. 1, ed. James H. Charlesworth

*Gravity's Rainbow*, Thomas Pynchon

*100 Years of Solitude*, Gabriel Garcia Marquez

*Collapse*, Jared Diamond

the “Left Behind” series (junk reading, but the most popular current depiction of end-time beliefs)

Downloads ([www.harrysmallenburg.com/student](http://www.harrysmallenburg.com/student)):

Bible Time Line

Bible Bibliography

## **Purpose of the course and Student Learning Outcomes:**

English 1C is an advanced critical thinking, writing, and research course.

All writing courses further your basic writing skills, but you should have, when you enter 1C, a firm grasp of basics, including idiomatic expression, grammar and mechanics, principles of focus, organization, development, coherence, point of view, and effective proofreading. Grammar and mechanics refer especially to punctuation, subject-verb agreement, pronoun agreement and reference, sentence fragments, comma splices, fused sentences. You should also understand the basics of MLA citation/documentation from

**English 1A. Lack of competence in any of these areas will prevent you from passing the class.**

By the end of the semester, you will have:

1. an introductory understanding of basic issues and problems related to one of the driving concepts in western religion and politics
2. an understanding of at least some of the history behind current issues and conflicts in American and Middle East politics
3. demonstrated the ability to carry out a 10-12 page research project consisting of the following:
  - a. integration of information and ideas from varied acceptable sources (i.e., scholarly books and articles, not just online encyclopedias and web sites)
  - b. appropriate documentation and evaluation of sources in your use and selection of research materials
4. successfully completed the assigned readings for the course, as well as shorter papers and quizzes during the semester

**Official SLOs (Student Learning Objectives) for the course, as established by the English Division:**

**Upon successful completion of this course, the student will be able to**

- 1. Write research-based essays employing a variety of rhetorical modes and utilizing critical thinking strategies, which include constructing claims, examining alternative points of view, analyzing evidence, explaining assumptions, and drawing judicious conclusions.**
- 2. Write research-based essays that have a clear thesis, coherent paragraphs, and demonstrate a strong command of vocabulary, grammar, spelling, and punctuation.**
- 3. Research and evaluate primary and secondary sources, both paper and electronic, and correctly integrate those sources into written work, utilizing proper MLA citation and documentation.**
- 4. Apply conceptual and theoretical frameworks in research-based essays and an extended research paper.**
- 5. Read critically by recognizing claims, questioning the reliability of evidence, and evaluating alternative points of view and underlying assumptions.**
- 6. Interpret and appraise the cultural, social, and historical context of texts from a variety of disciplines.**
- 7. Recognize and identify conceptual and theoretical frameworks.**

Schedule of assignments (always be prepared for quizzes; I may bring one in at any time, without warning, or I may call for a short in-class paper based on assigned reading):

1. 9/1: Introduction: the topic, the nature of critical thinking  
Film: *The Late, Great Planet Earth* (1978)  
9/3: For this class: read in the Bible: The Book of Revelation (New Testament, late first/early second century CE) Discussion.
2. 9/8: For class: read “Anna Nicole on the Brain” (article on reserve in the library) from George Lakoff’s book *The Political Mind*.  
9/10: read Marvin Harris: “Messiahs” and “The Prince of Peace” in *Cows, Pigs, Wars, and Witches*. Quiz; Discussion
3. 9/15: Film: *An Inconvenient Truth*, Al Gore (the environmental apocalypse)  
9/17: Read *How We Believe*, Michael Shermer, chapters 7, 8, and 9.  
Quiz; discussion.

Paper assignment: Shermer and Harris both offer explanations for why religious beliefs arise—specifically, for our purposes, the belief in a messiah who will come to earth and initiate a new, heavenly kingdom; the wicked will be punished by eternity in Hell, and the good will get their ultimate reward: eternal life.

Discuss how the two authors’ approaches to the issue of belief differ in the kinds of questions they investigate and the kinds of arguments they develop.

4 pages, typed, double-spaced. Note: the paper should conform to all protocols for writing a formal essay, as you’ve learned them from English 100, 1A, and 1B. Especially, all references to the text should conform to MLA protocols.

4. 9/22: work on paper: see me for conferences during class time  
9/24: Class does not meet: work on paper
5. 9/29: Paper due. Film: *The Seventh Seal*, Ingmar Bergman  
10/1: For this class: early Biblical prophecy 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E.: read Isaiah (Hebrew Bible [Old Testament]) Discussion, especially of “understanding” and “interpretation”—how do we confront difficult and sometimes obscure texts that have no clear relevance to the current times?
6. 10/6: Late Hebrew Bible prophecy: The Book of Daniel (mid 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE). Discussion  
10/8: In-class paper on Isaiah and Daniel: pre-apocalyptic to apocalyptic prophecy
7. 10/13: Film: Peter Weir, *The Last Wave*  
Online resource assignment to be handed out, discussed.  
10/15: Read “What Does the Bible Say About the End-Times?” (Ch. 3, Forbes and Kilde)
8. 10/20: Read: “How Are Jews and Israel Portrayed in the Left Behind Series?”

(Ch 5, Forbes and Kilde)

Film: *Israel, Islam, and Armageddon*.

10/22: Conferences/work period

9. 10/27: Conferences/work period

10/29: Paper due: online resources for the understanding of Biblical prophecy

10. 11/3: Read: *Howl*, Allen Ginsberg; article from *Scientific American* on the gradual end of the history of the cosmos. Both articles on reserve in the library.

11/5: Discussion: research paper, possible topics

11. 11/10: Read Forbes and Kilde, "How did Left Behind's Particular Version of the End Times Develop?" (Ch. 2) Discussion.

11/12: work period

12. 11/17: Conferences: due: declaration of topic, bibliography, probable thesis

11/19: Film: *Waiting for the Messiah*

13. 11/24: For this class: read Stanley Elkin, *The Living End* (quiz)

11/26: Thanksgiving

14. 12/1: conferences: 1st draft due--should have all citations and works cited page in order; this is not a rough draft; it is a next-to-final draft

12/3: conferences, cont.

15. 12/8: conferences, cont'd.

12/10: Final draft due

16. Finals week

Grades:

Grades are based on papers, quizzes, the final project, attendance, and participation. I don't have specific percentages for each assignment or component of classwork, though clearly the writing projects have greater weight than other criteria.

Roughly speaking, class activities are weighted as follows:

Written assignments: most important (50%)

Quizzes: 25%

Attendance, participation, preparation: 25%

Serious deficiencies in any of the above areas can be cause for failing the course.

Papers, and stages in progress toward the final paper, must be submitted on the date they are due. Grades on late papers are lowered at the professor's discretion (i.e., there is no one-grade-lower rule).

All assignments must be completed in order to pass the class.

Plagiarism: consists of any attempt to represent someone else's ideas as your own, whether in an undocumented quote or the use of someone else's ideas. Plagiarized work receives an immediate F with no rewrites.

Research paper: you must show the required work at each step in the process (bibliography/thesis, preliminary draft, final draft). A paper simply submitted at the end, without preliminary approval, development conferences, etc., will receive no credit.

General issues:

1. no cell phones or other electronic media may be used during class
2. as per PCC policy, an accumulation of two weeks' worth of absences can result in failing the class—this is at the professor's discretion.
3. Drops: if, for any reason, you decide not to continue the course, it is your responsibility to drop officially. If your name appears on the roll at the end of the semester, but you haven't been in class or completed the assignments, you will receive an F, even if you intended me to drop you. **No retroactive drops.**
4. Note: keep all documents (papers, quizzes, exams, etc.) pertaining to the class until the grade is officially posted and it is the grade you expect based on your work. No adjustments to your grade will be considered without these documents.