

INTRODUCTION

*The United States of Apocalypse**John Hay*

In her seminal 1993 essay “Left Alone with America” (the opening chapter to the groundbreaking collection *Cultures of United States Imperialism*), Amy Kaplan examines the origins of American Studies as revealed in Perry Miller’s preface to his 1956 *Errand into the Wilderness*, in which Miller claimed that the need to understand “the meaning of America” suddenly became clear to him decades earlier while he was unloading drums of oil on the banks of the Congo River.¹ For Kaplan this autobiographical detail exposes the foundational global imperialism that Miller would otherwise occlude in his subsequent attention to “the New England mind.” We would do just as well to consider Miller’s ending to *Errand into the Wilderness* – a final chapter titled “The End of the World.” Here he examines the seventeenth-century eschatology so prominently displayed in Michael Wigglesworth’s popular 1662 poem *The Day of Doom* (“the first best seller in the annals of the American book trade”) and concludes by reflecting upon “the latest contribution to the literature of the apocalypse”: a report on the destruction of Hiroshima from the United States Bombing Survey.² While similarly gesturing to global imperialism, this moment additionally suggests that American Studies came into being and flourished alongside the threat of nuclear annihilation. For Miller the continuing relevance of American literary and cultural history owed as much to atomic bombs as it did to oil drums.

Such nuclear anxieties – the fear that “the next bomb will obliterate consciousness itself” – informed the very texture of American literature promoted by the Cold War critics who shaped our fields of study.³

¹ Perry Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness* (1956; New York: Harper and Row, 1964), ix; Amy Kaplan, “‘Left Alone with America’: The Absence of Empire in the Study of American Culture,” *Cultures of United States Imperialism*, ed. Amy Kaplan and Donald E. Pease (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), 3–21.

² Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness*, 218, 238. Kaplan recognizes Miller’s conclusion, observing that he “rejects the frightening alternative view of American history culminating in nuclear power” (10).

³ Perry Miller, *The Responsibility of Mind in a Civilization of Machines*, ed. John Crowell and Stanford J. Searl, Jr. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1979), 208. Donald Pease argues that these

Apocalypse constituted the core of the canon. Prominent figures from R. W. B. Lewis and Leo Marx to Richard Slotkin and Sacvan Bercovitch saw their own attitudes toward annihilation mirrored back to them in works of American literature from the colonial period to the contemporary era. These critics promoted antebellum authors who exulted in extermination, such as Poe and Melville, and modernist writers enraptured by ruin, such as Eliot and Faulkner. Lewis, who had turned to Genesis in *The American Adam* (1955), looked instead to Revelation in his 1964 essay “Days of Wrath and Laughter,” in which he explored the “apocalyptic mood” in “an America hovering ever more perilously on the day of doom.”⁴ Marx later reflected that the dropping of the bomb on Hiroshima was the most effective dramatization of what he called “the machine in the garden.” The final sentence of Slotkin’s *Regeneration through Violence* (1973) offers an image of “piles of wrecked and rusted cars, heaped like Tartar pyramids of death-cracked, weather-browned, rain-rotted skulls.” “Is it far-fetched,” wondered Harry Levin in his analysis of Hawthorne’s short fiction, “to see, in Ethan Brand’s lime-kiln, an adumbration of Los Alamos?”⁵

The Cold War critics were most influential in characterizing the apocalyptic worldviews of early Americans, especially the New England Puritans and the “Founding Fathers” of the American Revolution. Bercovitch built upon Miller’s work by claiming that the chief legacy of the Puritans was a “federal eschatology” in the form of a conservative political rhetoric that pointed to both present crisis and impending catastrophe and promoted a return to an older identity – a spiritual rebirth – as the only means of salvation.⁶ The American jeremiad imbues the fearmongering gesture to

critics formed a “cold war consensus” in “New Americanists: Revisionist Interventions into the Canon,” *Revisionary Interventions into the Americanist Canon*, ed. Donald E. Pease (1990; Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994), 1–37; 19.

⁴ R. W. B. Lewis, *Trials of the Word: Essays in American Literature and the Humanistic Tradition* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1965), 184, 212. Lewis here observes this mood pervading not only American literature but also American literary criticism, and he suggests that an apocalyptic critical vocabulary “may be as serviceable, say, as the Freudian or the existentialist or the sociological” (206). For the idea that Eden and eschatology went hand in hand for the Puritans, see Zachary McLeod Hutchins, *Inventing Eden: Primitivism, Millennialism, and the Making of New England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

⁵ Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (1964; Oxford University Press, 2000), 369; Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600–1860* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1973), 565; Harry Levin, *The Power of Blackness: Hawthorne, Poe, Melville* (1958; New York: Vintage, 1960), 65. For more examples of such an attitude in writings by other Cold War critics, including Lewis Mumford and Newton Arvin, see Christopher Castiglia, *The Practices of Hope: Literary Criticism in Disenchanted Times* (New York: New York University Press, 2017), 19.

⁶ Sacvan Bercovitch, *The Puritan Origins of the American Self* (1975; New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011), 98.

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apocalyptic doom and destruction with the millennial hope of a return to a golden age of peace and prosperity; it unites “secular and redemptive history” in its promise to make America great again.⁷ While Bercovitch was extending this Puritanical culture of apocalypse through American history, Nathan Hatch was characterizing the shift from Calvinist to Enlightenment values in the eighteenth century as the result of a “civil millennialism” that substituted individual political liberty for mass conversion to Christianity as the chief desideratum for America’s civic leaders at the time of the Revolutionary War.⁸ And James Moorhead carried this notion forward in his focus on the intense millennial rhetoric of the Civil War era.⁹ By the 1980s, it had become unremarkable for scholars to characterize key turning points in American literary history as essentially apocalyptic. After all, how far is the distance between Abraham Lincoln’s wartime assertion that America is “the last best hope of earth” and Robert Oppenheimer’s claim (quoting the *Bhagavad Gita*) that he had become “the destroyer of worlds”?

America and Apocalypse had become two sides of the same coin. Pointing to Julia Ward Howe’s enormously popular 1862 “Battle Hymn of the Republic” (which begins, “Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord”), Richard Brodhead identified what he called “the American routinization of apocalypse” – “the preservation of the idea of sacred historical crisis in the mode of empty civic formulaics.”¹⁰ On the one hand, this suggests that the signs of the end times now inspire no greater response than the casual observation and recitation of the items on a grocery list; they are quotidian and mundane even if occasionally amusing.¹¹ On the other hand, it names a pervasive anxiety characteristic

⁷ Sacvan Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad* (1978; Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2012), 176.

⁸ Nathan O. Hatch, “The Origin of Civil Millennialism in America,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 31.3 (July 1974): 407–430. See also Hatch’s *The Sacred Cause of Liberty: Republican Thought and the Millennium in Revolutionary New England* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977). A decade earlier, in *Religion and the American Mind: From the Great Awakening to the Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966), Alan Heimert had argued that the 1740s marked a “watershed in American history” best understood “in terms of the degree to which, after the Great Awakening, the American populace was filled with the notion of an impending millennium” (59).

⁹ James H. Moorhead, *American Apocalypse: Yankee Protestants and the Civil War, 1860–1869* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1978).

¹⁰ Richard H. Brodhead, “Millennium, Prophecy and the Energies of Social Transformation: The Case of Nat Turner,” *Imagining the End: Visions of Apocalypse from the Ancient Middle East to Modern America*, ed. Abbas Amanat and Magnus Bernhardsson (London: I. B. Tauris, 2002), 212–233; 213.

¹¹ For example, *Sports Illustrated* featured a weekly “Sign of the Apocalypse” section in its magazine for over twenty years (beginning in 1993). Jack McCallum, *Sports Illustrated Book of the Apocalypse: Two Decades of Sports Absurdity* (New York: Diversion Books, 2012).

of a nuclear age: teetering on the brink of destruction as the new normal.¹² Because of the mad policy of mutually assured destruction, the Cold War critics could reasonably believe that the fate of America and the fate of the world were one and the same. (A future in which the United States loses a nuclear war is presumably a future in which the earth has been destroyed.) Earlier apocalyptic prophecies and millennial expectations seemed less ridiculous when considered alongside the construction of transoceanic hotlines designed to enhance doomsday politics. With greater conviction that America stood at a point of historical termination came a reasonable desire to trace and to understand the cultural features and ideological expressions that led to this global crisis point. The “meaning of America,” so often the object of inquiry, was inevitably an apocalyptic subject. Just before the US entry into World War II, F. O. Matthiessen had famously characterized the maturation of American literature as due to a “devotion to the possibilities of democracy”; a long train of critics in his wake (while generally paying lip service to the centrality of democratic principles) tended to characterize American literature and culture in terms of the possibilities of apocalypse.¹³

To be sure, we are no longer beholden to the Cold War critics, and we have made great strides beyond their privileging of white male Protestant perspectives and monolithic exceptionalist national ideologies.¹⁴ Yet we have largely retained their canon, having of course expanded it.¹⁵ And though the threat of global nuclear war has notably diminished since the fall of the Berlin Wall, our apocalyptic anxieties would seem to be as aggressive as ever, multiplying doomsday scenarios to include climate change, pandemic diseases, artificial intelligence, runaway capitalism, solar flares, and a host of other elements. The combined factors of our inherited scholarly traditions and our own fervent apocalypticism make it difficult to conceive of a subject for American literary history that is not

¹² “We’re all gonna die!” shrieks Lenny Bruce (who loves the “postexistential bent” of this line) in Don DeLillo’s *Underworld* (New York: Scribner, 1997), 507.

¹³ F. O. Matthiessen, *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman* (1941; New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), ix. Matthiessen himself reflected in 1949 that the “responsibilities of the critic” had grown “in these few fateful years since the first atom bomb dropped on Hiroshima.” F. O. Matthiessen, *The Responsibilities of the Critic: Essays and Reviews*, ed. John Rackliffe (New York: Oxford University Press, 1952), 9. It is also worth noting that Matthiessen’s first published scholarly article was on the author of *The Day of Doom*: “Michael Wigglesworth, a Puritan Artist,” *New England Quarterly* 1 (1928): 491–504.

¹⁴ The New Puritan Studies, for example, have downplayed the role of millennial politics that earlier generations of scholars saw as central to the New England Way. See Bryce Traister, ed., *American Literature and the New Puritan Studies* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

¹⁵ See Maurice S. Lee, ed., “The End of the End of the Canon?” *J19* 4.1 (Spring 2016): 125–179.

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informed by apocalypse. To the extent that *America* signifies an idea or ideology as well as a geographical space and political state, it has always carried an apocalyptic resonance – a dream alternately revealed, deferred, and anticipated. It is the oneiric foundation upon which American realities have been built.¹⁶ Final forecasts are one of the oldest and sturdiest genres in world literature, and they appear in some of the earliest publications regarding the “New World” and its promise.¹⁷ They have been accompanied by catastrophic policies of eradication and extermination. (Whereas an earlier generation of scholars applied millennial rhetoric to the study of the Puritan Great Migration and the US Civil War, scholars nowadays are more likely to use apocalyptic terminology to describe Native American genocide and US slavery.) Beginning with the eschatological expressions of the age of exploration and the New England Puritans’ preparation for a New Jerusalem, apocalyptic themes recur through the revolutionary democratic discourse of the early republic, the postbellum politics of mourning and memorialization following the Civil War, and the anxious fantasies of the atomic age. As one scholar long ago observed, American apocalypses “are so fundamental to American writing as to be virtually ubiquitous.”¹⁸ For those studying the history of American literature, apocalypse is simply unavoidable.

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The essays collected here explore the meanings of apocalypse across different periods, regions, genres, registers, modes, and traditions of American literature and culture. In its capacious approach, this book establishes apocalypse as a major theme that has resonated through an impressively eclectic and diverse set of works. While certainly not the first volume to consider the apocalypse in America, it employs both a comprehensive scope and a modern-day perspective to address issues of pressing importance to scholars and students in the field.¹⁹

¹⁶ In his afterword to Herman Melville’s *The Confidence-Man* (New York: Signet, 1964), 261–276, R. W. B. Lewis remarked that the apocalyptic vision is “the continuing anti-face of the American dream, the continuing imagination of national and even universal disaster that has accompanied the bright expectancy of the millennium” (263).

¹⁷ “The apocalyptic vision,” observed Perry Miller, “is a literary form more ancient, and more rigid, than the sonnet” (*Errand into the Wilderness*, 238).

¹⁸ Douglas Robinson, *American Apocalypses: The Image of the End of the World in American Literature* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), xi.

¹⁹ *The Apocalyptic Vision in America*, edited by Lois P. Zamora (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1982), an important precursor, is a multidisciplinary anthology of scholarly essays on the topic, though it is perhaps of limited use to today’s literary historians and cultural critics. Other significant collections, such as *Postmodern Apocalypse: Theory and Cultural Practice at the End*, ed. Richard Dellamora (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), *Apocalyptic*

The scholarship presented here is presentist in the sense that it remains very conscious of our own apocalyptic attitudes and perspectives in the third decade of the twenty-first century. To what extent does the very concept of American history today suggest a millennial desire for the global adoption of a utopian, (neo)liberal, democratic ideology? Such messianism could easily induce resignation or inaction (a conversation stopper, a throwing up of one's hands), but the threat and/or promise of apocalypse and its resulting jeremiads have led to tremendous innovations. Apocalypse, in other words, can be read as an event that passes human understanding but also as a process that inspires transformation. We need to understand the history of how the apocalypse, in both its religious and secular valences, has shaped American attitudes toward the United States and toward the world.

Apocalypse holds a special relationship to literature because it has historically been textual rather than phenomenal. We might say that apocalypse has two often quite separate aspects: its *content* – violent destruction – and its *form* – revealed truth. Beginning with the biblical prophecies in the Books of Daniel and Revelation, the formal logic of apocalypse in the Judeo-Christian tradition contributed to a dynamic, teleological narrative of history – a cosmic emplotment that gave human history a beginning-middle-end structure rooted in a linear (rather than cyclical or seasonal) chronology. The very term *apocalypse* – from the Greek ἀποκαλύπτειν, meaning *to uncover, unveil, disclose, reveal* – gestures to the promise that, at the end of history, God will make clear His ultimate truth. (As Hawthorne put it, everyone will stand waiting, on the last day, “to see the dark problem of this life made plain.”)²⁰ It thus encourages investigative strategies of symptomatic reading and paranoid forms of conspiracy criticism that explicate signs and excavate symbols in order to reveal hidden meanings and secret messages.

The subject includes other terms with etymological roots in Greek (*eschatology*, the study of the end), Latin (*millennium*, the thousand-year peaceful reign), Old English (*doomsday*, the final judgment), and Hebrew (*Armageddon*, the last battle). The rhetoric of apocalypse has, of course, undergone many evolutions over the centuries. But perhaps the most

Discourse in Contemporary Culture: Post-Millennial Perspectives on the End of the World, ed. Monica Germana and Aris Mousoutzanis (London: Routledge, 2014), and *Apocalyptic Chic: Visions of the Apocalypse and Post-Apocalypse in Literature and Visual Arts*, ed. Barbara Brodman and James E. Doan (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2017), have focused on American and European works of the last few decades.

²⁰ Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter* (1850; New York: Penguin, 2003), 115.

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significant has been the growing distinction between *postmillennial* and *premillennial* strands of belief, a distinction that became especially prominent in the nineteenth century with the rising popularity of both Christian socialism and Christian dispensationalism. The former looks forward to a thousand-year period of peace and prosperity that will terminate with the Second Coming of Christ and the ultimate battle with Satan, destroying evil for all eternity. The latter suggests that a vengeful Christ will return suddenly to a fallen world, punishing the unfaithful and protecting His believers in a thousand-year reign capped by the defeat of the devil. These positions are perhaps better calibrated in Ernest Lee Tuveson's distinction between "millennialist" (for postmillennial) and "millenarian" (for premillennial) beliefs.²¹ The millennialist preaches secular reform, the millenarian divine retribution; the one points to the Rights of Man, the other to the Wrath of God. Whereas the millennialist strain in America has led to progressive politics, characterizing the United States as a model community and a beacon of light establishing the Kingdom of God on earth, the millenarian strain has looked forward to a purifying fire that will transfigure the decaying moral fabric of the nation and obliterate the material manifestations of our wicked desires. These two strains thus account for both progress and decline, reform and revolution, spirit and spectacle. They imagine gradual improvement and immediate explosion – the growth of the modern metropolis and the bomb that destroys it.

Even the most cursory glance into American history allows one to see that doomsday declarations, eschatological expectations, and apocalyptic anticipations have always been common. Over time such expressions have gradually been emptied of some of their theological dimensions. Just as the noun *end* now more often indicates "termination" than "purpose," *apocalypse* now tends to signify the termination of the world rather than the purpose of its existence. This secularization of apocalypse is not necessarily a modern phenomenon; the apocalypse has always occupied a meeting point between the eternal and the secular – between heaven and earth. Rather than trying to separate religious prophecy and scientific prediction, it is more profitable to understand the apocalyptic vision as a genre or mode that troubles such a simplistic division. The gulf is not very wide between the evangelical parishioner urging sinners to convert because of God's warning and the environmental activist urging homeowners to conserve because of global warming. If millennial hopes have gradually

²¹ Ernest Lee Tuveson, *Redeemer Nation: The Idea of America's Millennial Role* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), 34.

given way to apocalyptic fears, it may be because we find the prospect of a thousand years of civic peace less realistic than the swift and violent destruction of the planet.²²

Has America become especially apocalyptic today – more so than in the past? While we understand that doomsday prophecies have always been popular, it is nevertheless difficult to ignore the many credible threats to life as we know it that are part of daily life in the twenty-first century. Many critics have suggested that apocalyptic dread has become far more mainstream in American culture than it used to be.²³ And a remarkable number of Americans have taken seriously the notion of surviving an apocalyptic event, “prepping” for global disaster by stockpiling supplies in order to achieve ideal self-reliance. This community, recognized in four seasons of the television show *Doomsday Preppers* (2012–2014), maintains an impressive diversity of cataclysmic convictions; one reporter’s visit to a prepper convention reveals that the “preparedness market” features a “unique mix of gritty survivalism, back-to-the-land self-sufficiency, and outright hippie dream-science.”²⁴ Furthermore, the United States is the only nation in which prepping “exists as a visibly widespread subculture.”²⁵

As seriously as such preppers tend to take themselves, they are nevertheless packaged – along with their fears and anxieties – as what Gwendolyn Foster calls *apocotainment*: “the apocalypse as entertainment for the masses.”²⁶ Indeed, a student today might be forgiven for exhibiting a casual attitude about the end of the world, having grown up immersed in a media environment glutted with apocalyptic traits and tropes. Pop music, comic books, video games, and blockbuster movies targeted at younger audiences routinely feature blasted landscapes and decimated

²² In “Future City,” *New Left Review* 21 (2003): 65–79, Fredric Jameson famously quipped that “it is easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism” (76). Perhaps that has less to do the difficulty of thinking outside of capitalism and more to do with the ease with which we conjure up the end of the world.

²³ See, for example, John R. Hall, *Apocalypse: From Antiquity to the Empire of Modernity* (Malden, MA: Polity, 2009), who observes that “we no longer just have an apocalyptic counterculture; there is an apocalyptic culture to boot” (2).

²⁴ David Z. Morris, “What I Saw at the Doomsday Prepper Convention,” *Fortune* (November 11, 2013).

²⁵ Michael F. Mills, “Obamageddon: Fear, the Far Right, and the Rise of ‘Doomsday’ Prepping in Obama’s America,” *Journal of American Studies* (forthcoming; published online, June 13, 2019): 3. In *Notes from an Apocalypse: A Personal Journey to the End of the World and Back* (New York: Doubleday, 2020), Mark O’Connell goes so far as to suggest that the prepper movement – with its self-sufficient frontier ideology, fetishizing of consumer goods, and mistrust of outsiders – is “a hysterical symptom of America itself” (21).

²⁶ Gwendoline Audrey Foster, *Hoarders, Doomsday Preppers, and the Culture of the Apocalypse* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 2.

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populations (occasionally played for humor), resulting in a zeitgeist much closer to a *Mad Max* future than to the *Mad Men* past. (At the moment of this writing, the 2019 Marvel Comics movie *Avengers: Endgame*, premised upon the destruction of half of all life in the universe, is the highest grossing film of all time.) “The dystopian futures packaged by the gaming industry,” notes Robert Markley, “have turned the guilty pleasure of postapocalyptic violence into the default escapism” of the twenty-first century.²⁷ The tenor of the times cannot be more obvious. As Dan Reynolds sings in “Radioactive,” the 2012 megahit by the band Imagine Dragons, “This is it, the apocalypse.”

It has become common, in other words, to suggest that we are no longer expecting but actually inhabiting the apocalypse. This is a shift, as Frank Kermode famously observed, from viewing the end as *imminent* to viewing it as *immanent*.²⁸ Playing on Kermode’s observation, Rosalind Williams characterizes the present as “a rolling apocalypse,” in which “history is already and always ending.”²⁹ Reality outruns apprehension as we experience and endure rather than await and anticipate the end of the world. The prominence of *postapocalyptic* narratives is especially indicative of this mentality, implicitly suggesting that a blighted, barbarian future will naturally follow our apocalyptic present.³⁰ In the past, apocalypse had commonly been invoked in the hopes of averting or forestalling it.³¹ But now it would seem to be too late; the end is already here. As one critic recently remarked, “The apocalypse isn’t an event; it’s an environment.”³²

Nevertheless, such pronouncements must be tempered by the collective weight of thousands of years of false forecasts. It is therefore helpful to keep in mind Jessica Hurley and Dan Sinykin’s proposition that apocalypse “is

²⁷ Robert Markley, “As If: The Alternative Histories of Literature and Science,” *Configurations* 26.3 (Summer 2018): 259–268; 265.

²⁸ Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (1967; New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

²⁹ Rosalind Williams, *The Triumph of the Human Empire: Verne, Morris, and Stevenson at the End of the World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 346.

³⁰ “The typical post-apocalyptic scenario of the late twentieth century is distinctive because by the time it had been represented in fiction, it had already occurred in historical reality: the death camp, the nuclear explosion, the urban wasteland.” James Berger, “Propagation and Procreation: The Zombie and the Child,” *Race, Gender, and Sexuality in Post-Apocalyptic TV and Film*, ed. Barbara Gurr (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015), 149–163; 150–151. For a helpful distinction between “apocalyptic” and “postapocalyptic,” see Connor Pitetti, “Uses of the End of the World: Apocalypse and Postapocalypse as Narrative Modes,” *Science Fiction Studies* 44.3 (November 2017): 437–454.

³¹ Daniel Wojcik, “Avertive Apocalypticism,” *The Oxford Handbook of Millennialism*, ed. Catherine Wessinger (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 66–88.

³² Jamais Cascio, “The Apocalypse: It’s Not the End of the World,” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 75.6 (2019): 269–272; 269.

never a locatable event but rather an imaginative practice that forms and deforms history for specific purposes: an aesthetic that *does* as much as it *represents*.³³ Apocalypse may look forward to a future state, but it works in the here and now. A fundamental question thus animates the scholarship in this collection: What has apocalypse done for American literature?

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The twenty-four essays in this volume are organized into three sections. The first, “America as Apocalypse,” covers core issues that appear consistently in apocalyptic American literature and culture. Jared Hickman observes that the millennial discourse of settler colonialism has entailed an apocalyptic ending for indigenous communities; by gesturing to the Ojibwe term *apakwaan*, he suggests that the social and environmental devastation wrought in the post-1492 era of the “Americocene” is best addressed by appealing to Native ways of being-at-home. Mark Noble explores troubled attempts to wring meaning out of acts of catastrophic violence by looking specifically at Civil War photography and its need for textual mediation. By focusing on 9/11 conspiracy theories, Lindsey Michael Banco connects the apocalyptic desire to reveal hidden truths and secret meanings to anxieties about the role of the United States in global energy networks. And by examining speculative fictions by Native American authors, Adam Spry considers a counterapocalyptic tradition that foresees the end of America as a moment of territorial repossession. In their attention to settler colonialism, representations of violence, conspiracy theories, and indigenous futurity (as well as brutality, paranoia, salvation, and renewal), the chapters in this section suggest that the apocalyptic imagination is integral to the very fabric of American history, not just an occasional theme in literary works.

The next section, “American Apocalypse in (and out of) History,” works both thematically and chronologically. The essays here move through American literary and cultural history, offering period-specific reflections on the durability and evolution of apocalyptic elements. In seventeenth-century New England, colonial Puritans increasingly turned to a millenarian version of history that would culminate in a spectacular purifying fire. (“The World,” insisted Cotton Mather, “shall one Day be

³³ Jessica Hurley and Dan Sinykin, “Apocalypse: Introduction,” *ASAP/Journal* 3.3 (September 2018): 451–466; 451. In *American Literature and the Long Downturn: Neoliberal Apocalypse* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), Sinykin further explains that “apocalypse is a political literary form” (2).