APOCALYPSE IN AMERICAN LITERATURE
AND CULTURE

The idea of America has always encouraged apocalyptic visions. The "American Dream" has not only imagined the prospect of material prosperity; it has also imagined the end of the world. Final forecasts constitute one of America’s oldest literary genres, extending from the eschatological theology of the New England Puritans to the revolutionary discourse of the early republic, the emancipatory rhetoric of the Civil War, the anxious fantasies of the atomic age, and the doomsday digital media of today. For those studying the history of America, renditions of the apocalypse are simply unavoidable. This book brings together two dozen essays by prominent scholars that explore the meanings of apocalypse across different periods, regions, genres, registers, modes, and traditions of American literature and culture. It locates the logic and rhetoric of apocalypse at the very core of American literary history.

John Hay is Associate Professor of English at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, where he specializes in nineteenth-century American literature. He is the author of Postapocalyptic Fantasies in Antebellum American Literature (Cambridge University Press, 2017) and a recipient of grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the American Council of Learned Societies.
Twenty-first-century America puzzles many citizens and observers. A frequently cited phrase to describe current partisan divisions is Lincoln’s “A house divided against itself cannot stand,” a warning of the perils to the Union from divisions generated by slavery. America seems divided in almost every way, on almost every attitude. Civic dialogue on issues often seems extremely difficult. America is an experiment always in process, a remarkable union of 300 million diverse people covering all races and faiths. As a forum in which ideologies and interpretations abound, Literary Studies has a role to play in explanation and analysis. The series *Cambridge Themes in American Literature and Culture* addresses the key cultural themes that have brought America to its current moment. It offers a summation of critical knowledge on key cultural themes as well as an intervention in the present moment. This series provides a distinctive, authoritative treatment of the key literary and cultural strains in American life while also pointing in new critical directions.

**Titles in the Series**

*War and American Literature*
*Edited by Jennifer Haytock, SUNY–Brockport*

*Gender in American Literature and Culture*
*Edited by Jean Lutes, Villanova University, and Jennifer Travis, St. John’s University*

*Apocalypse in American Literature and Culture*
*Edited by John Hay, University of Nevada, Las Vegas*
APCALYPSE IN AMERICAN LITERATURE AND CULTURE

EDITED BY

JOHN HAY

University of Nevada
## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>List of Figures</th>
<th>page viii</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>List of Contributors</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Introduction: The United States of Apocalypse  
*John Hay*

### Part I America as Apocalypse  

1. The Apocalypse of Settler Colonialism and the Case for the Americocene  
   *Jared Hickman*  
   17

2. Apocalyptic Violence in Visual Media  
   *Mark Noble*  
   30

3. Revelation, Secret Knowledge, and 9/11 Conspiracy Theory  
   *Lindsey Michael Banco*  
   42

4. Decolonial Eschatologies of Native American Literatures  
   *Adam Spry*  
   55

### Part II American Apocalypse in (and out of) History  

5. The Puritans Prepare for the Second Coming  
   *Lindsay DiCuirci*  
   71

6. The American Revolution as Extinction and Rebirth  
   *Christen Mucher*  
   84

7. Race, American Enlightenment, and the End Times  
   *Mark Alan Mattes*  
   97
### Contents

8 Sentimental Premonitions and Antebellum Spectacle  
*Melissa Gniadek*  
110

9 Antebellum Anticipations of Annihilation  
*Gordon Fraser*  
122

10 The Apocalyptic Fury of the Civil War  
*Timothy Donahue*  
134

11 Apocalyptic Form in the American Fin de Siècle  
*Jane Fisher*  
147

12 The Ruins of American Modernism  
*Alastair Morrison*  
161

13 Mutually Assured Destruction in Cold War/Postwar America  
*Jacqueline Foertsch*  
175

14 Postmodern American Literature at the End of History  
*Timothy Parrish*  
187

15 Ecology, Ethics, and the Apocalyptic Lyric in Recent American Poetry  
*Jennifer Ashton*  
199

16 Disaster Response in Post-2000 American Apocalyptic Fiction  
*Heather J. Hicks*  
212

### PART III VARIETIES OF APOCALYPTIC EXPERIENCE  
225

17 New History for a New Earth  
*Kevin M. Modestino*  
227

18 W. E. B. Du Bois’s Apocalyptic Ambivalence  
*Autumn Womack*  
239

19 The Empty Cities of Urban Apocalypse  
*Nick Yablon*  
252

20 The Planetary Futures of Eco-Apocalypse  
*Ursula K. Heise*  
268

21 The Last Laughs of Doomsday Humor  
*Frances McDonald*  
281
## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>The Catastrophic Endgames of Young Adult Literature</td>
<td>Claire P. Curtis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Apocalyptic Trauma and the Politics of Mourning a World</td>
<td>Irene Visser</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Posthuman Postapocalypse</td>
<td>Matthew A. Taylor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Further Reading

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Index</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>328</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>333</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figures

2.1 Andrew J. Russell, Stone wall below Marye’s Heights, May 3, 1863. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, LC-DIG-ppmsca-32937

2.2 Attributed to Thomas Roche, Fortifications and bombproofs in front of Petersburg, Virginia, 1865. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, LC-DIG-cwpb-02845, LC-DIG-cwpb-02844

2.3 George N. Barnard, Destruction of Hood’s Ordnance Train. Atlanta, GA. 1864. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, LC-DIG-ppmsca-33492

8.1 F. O. C. Darley, “Mary, Byrnewood, and Lorrimer,” in George Lippard, The Quaker City; or, The Monks of Monk Hall (1845; Philadelphia: Leary, Stuart and Company, 1876), p. 126


19.1 Alvarado M. Fuller, A.D. 2000 (Chicago: Laird and Lee, 1890), opposite p. 166


19.3 “Sightseeing in 1920,” illustration on cover of Life 39 (February 6, 1902)

19.4 Cartoon from Life 67 (May 25, 1916), p. 997
Contributors

Jennifer Ashton teaches at the University of Illinois at Chicago. She is the author of *From Modernism to Postmodernism: American Poetry and Theory in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge University Press, 2005) and the editor of *The Cambridge Companion to American Poetry since 1945* (Cambridge University Press, 2013). Her articles have appeared in numerous edited volumes and in journals such as *ELH*, *ALH*, *Modernism/Modernity*, *Chicago Review*, *Interval(le)s*, and *Nonsite* (of which she is also a founding member of the editorial board).

Lindsey Michael Banco is a professor of American literature and culture at the University of Saskatchewan and has interests in conspiracy theory, nuclear culture, and Gothic literature. He is the author of two books: *Travel and Drugs in Twentieth-Century Literature* (Routledge, 2009) and *The Meanings of J. Robert Oppenheimer* (University of Iowa Press, 2016).


Lindsay Dicuirci is an associate professor of English at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County. She is the author of *Colonial Revivals: The Nineteenth-Century Lives of Early American Books* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019).
List of Contributors

TIMOTHY DONAHUE is an assistant professor of English at Oakland University, where he teaches and researches nineteenth-century literatures of the United States and the Americas. His essays have appeared in *J19: The Journal of Nineteenth-Century Americanists* and *American Literary History*. He is currently writing a book about literary form and political sovereignty in the borderlands of nineteenth-century North America.

JACQUELINE FOERTSCH is a professor of English at the University of North Texas and the chair of its Postwar Faculty Colloquium. She is the author most recently of *American Drama: In Dialogue, 1714–Present* (Palgrave, 2017) and *Reckoning Day: Race, Place, and the Atom Bomb in Postwar America* (Vanderbilt University Press, 2015).

JANE FISHER holds a PhD from Cornell University and is an associate professor of English at Canisius College. Her writing has focused on interdisciplinary approaches to modernist literature, emphasizing gender, race, and medicine, especially in the works of Virginia Woolf. Her recent publications include *Envisioning Disease, Gender, and War: Women’s Narratives of the 1918 Influenza Pandemic* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012) as well as an article on teaching the 1918–1919 influenza pandemic appearing in *Teaching Representations of the First World War* (2017) and a forthcoming article on Claude McKay and African American World War I soldiers in *Afro-Americans in New York Life and History*. Her most recent research centers on Gothic figurations of World War I in twentieth-century literature.

GORDON FRASER is a lecturer and presidential fellow at the University of Manchester. He is the author of *Star Territory: Printing the Universe in Nineteenth-Century America*, forthcoming from the University of Pennsylvania Press.

MELISSA GNIADEK is an assistant professor of English at the University of Toronto, where she teaches early and nineteenth-century American literature and culture. Her work has appeared in journals including *American Literature*, *Early American Literature, J19: The Journal of Nineteenth-Century Americanists*, and *Legacy: A Journal of American Women Writers*.

JOHN HAY is an associate professor of English at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, where he specializes in nineteenth-century American literature. He is the author of *Postapocalyptic Fantasies in Antebellum*...
List of Contributors

American Literature (Cambridge University Press, 2017). His articles have appeared in scholarly journals such as Early American Literature, ESQ, and the New England Quarterly.

Ursula K. Heise is the chair of the English department at UCLA and Marcia H. Howard Chair in Literary Studies. She cofounded the Lab for Environmental Narrative Strategies (LENS) at UCLA’s Institute of the Environment and Sustainability. Her books include Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global (2008) and Imagining Extinction: The Cultural Meanings of Endangered Species (2016), which won the 2017 book prize of the British Society for Literature and Science. She is also producer and writer of Urban Ark Los Angeles, a short documentary on red-crowned parrots and urban biodiversity conservation.

Jared Hickman is an associate professor of English at Johns Hopkins University. He is the author of Black Prometheus: Race and Radicalism in the Age of Atlantic Slavery (Oxford University Press, 2016), a study that charts the modern revival and reinvention of the ancient titan across genres and geographies and in so doing attempts to map the racialized cosmos of global modernity. He is also the coeditor of two essay collections, Abolitionist Places (with Martha Schoolman, Routledge, 2013) and Americanist Approaches to The Book of Mormon (with Elizabeth Fenton, Oxford University Press, 2019).

Heather J. Hicks is a professor of English and the chair of the English department at Villanova University. She is author of The Post-Apocalyptic Novel in the Twenty-First Century: Modernity beyond Salvage (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016) as well as recent articles about apocalyptic literature in ASAP/Journal and the Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Literature.

Mark Alan Mattes is a faculty member in the English department at the University of Louisville. His articles have appeared in the journals Early American Literature and Early American Studies and the collection Handwritten Newspapers: An Alternative Medium during the Early Modern and Modern Periods (Finnish Literature Society, 2019). He is currently editing a collection of essays on the history of handwriting in early America, and he is working on a book manuscript about the archival apocrypha of colonial and Indigenous writing.
List of Contributors

FRANCES MCDONALD is an assistant professor of English at the University of Louisville. Her research and teaching focus on twentieth-century American literature and film, critical theory, and affect studies. Her work has appeared in American Literature, LARB, Post45, and The Atlantic. She is also the coeditor of thresholds, a digital journal for creative/critical scholarship.

KEVIN M. MODESTINO is a master instructor in the English department at Howard University and author of The Aesthetics of History and Imperial Time in Antebellum America (Edinburgh University Press, forthcoming). His research and reviews have been published in ESQ, American Literature, NOVEL, Science Fiction Film and Television, Studies in American Naturalism, and the Journal of Southern History. He received his PhD from Duke University.

ALASTAIR MORRISON is an assistant professor of English at Syddansk Universitet. His research deals with modern and contemporary Anglophone literature, especially poetry, in relation to themes of age, health care, religious difference, and migrancy. His work has appeared in journals including Criticism, Orbis Litterarum, and Paideuma, and he is currently at work on a book about dementia in contemporary literature and the relation between literary problems of bespeaking and decisional risk in dementia care.

CHRISTEN MUCHER is an associate professor of American studies at Smith College and author of Before American History: Antiquities, Archives, and Native Pasts (University of Virginia Press, forthcoming). She is also the coeditor of Decolonizing “Prehistory”: Deep Time and Topological Knowledge in North America (University of Arizona Press, forthcoming).

MARK NOBLE is an associate professor of English at Georgia State University, where he teaches American literature and critical theory. He is the author of American Poetic Materialism from Whitman to Stevens (Cambridge University Press, 2015). His writing has appeared in American Literature, Nineteenth-Century Literature, J19, American Impersonal, and the Los Angeles Review of Books.

TIMOTHY PARRISH is a writer and critic living in Lincoln, where he teaches for the University of Nebraska. His most recent critical book is Ralph Ellison and the Genius of America (University of Massachusetts Press, 2012). His fiction has appeared in Ploughshares (“The Critic,” a novella), Raritan (“Phillip Roth’s Final Hours”), and Equinox (“The

Adam Spry (White Earth Anishinaabe) is an assistant professor of Indigenous literatures at Emerson College. His previous book, Our War Paint Is Writers’ Ink: Anishinaabe Literary Transnationalism (State University of New York Press, 2018), is a history of the Anishinaabeg’s resistance to US Indian policies through writing.

Matthew A. Taylor is an associate professor in the English and comparative literature department at the University of North Carolina–Chapel Hill, where he works on the intersections among nineteenth- and twentieth-century science, literature, and philosophy in a transatlantic context. His articles have appeared or are forthcoming in such journals as PMLA, ALH, J19, Novel, ELH, and Nineteenth-Century Literature. He is the author of Universes without Us: Posthuman Cosmologies in American Literature (University of Minnesota Press, 2013) and is coeditor, with Priscilla Wald, of the journal American Literature.

Irene Visser is a senior lecturer in modern English literature and culture at the University of Groningen in the Netherlands. Her areas of concentration are postcolonial literatures, American literature, and literary trauma theory. A major recent publication is “Trauma in Non-Western Contexts,” in Trauma and Literature, edited by J. Roger Kurtz (Cambridge University Press, 2018).

Autumn Womack is an assistant professor of African American studies and English at Princeton University, where she specializes in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century African American literary culture. Her writing has appeared in American Literary History, Black Camera, J19, Women and Performance, and the Paris Review of Books.