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Together Through the End: Theorizing Community in Apocalypse Literature

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in

Literature

by

Meaghan Mary Baril

Committee in charge:

Professor Page duBois, Co-Chair
Professor Shelley Streeby, Co-Chair
Professor Nancy Caciola
Professor Lisa Lampert-Weissig
Professor Babak Rahimi

2023

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University of California San Diego

2023

DEDICATION

To George and Walter for being right beside me.

EPIGRAPH

“and you already know how this will end”
DeVotchKa

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Dissertation Approval Page.....	iii
Dedication.....	iv
Epigraph.....	v
Table of Contents.....	vi
Acknowledgements.....	vii
Vita.....	xi
Abstract of the Dissertation.....	xii
Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1: Expressions of Apocalyptic Agency and Responsibility.....	41
Chapter 2: Apocalypse Communities: Feminisms, Culture Wars, and Social Justice	80
Chapter 3: “I warn everyone who hears the words of prophecy of this book”: Communicating Warning and Hope.....	122
Conclusion.....	156
References.....	162
Bibliography.....	167

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apocalypse as a category of analysis to think through political rhetoric. Any flaws in my argumentation and writing are all my own, and any bright spots in this dissertation are because of my dedicated, brilliant, and thoughtful committee members.

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Chapter 2, in full, will be a reprint of the material as it will appear in the *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*. The material is currently under review. The dissertation author was the sole author of this paper.

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Together Through the End:
Theorizing Community in Apocalypse Literature

by

Meaghan Mary Baril

Doctor of Philosophy in Literature

University of California San Diego, 2023

Professor Page duBois, Co-Chair
Professor Shelley Streeby, Co-Chair

This dissertation examines how different perspectives on apocalypse and catastrophe allow for alternative understandings of the formation and importance of community through an examination of intersections among race, religion, culture, and politics in apocalyptic texts and rhetoric in late 20th- and early 21st-century United States literature. Using Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower*, Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkin's *Left Behind: A Novel of the Earth's Last Days*, Louise Erdrich's *Future Home of the Living God*, and Matthew Mather's *Cyberstorm*, I analyze how apocalypse narratives serve a myriad of functions that center around contradictory understandings of the

function of community. An understanding of apocalypse as a deserved and inevitable consequence of bad, individual human behavior is one persistent definition, from U.S. Puritan days to the present. Although it is important to see how this definition continues to have power in contemporary culture, I also analyze apocalypse as an ongoing process shaped by racism, genocide, and violence firmly rooted in a settler colonialist and imperialist system that depends on structures of inequality. This is ultimately important because ideas about apocalypse impact the way U.S. empire is understood: either as a naturalized structure that rewards those who recognize and change their behavior, or alternatively, as a structure that people have created, and that people can change, which stigmatizes and punishes those on the outside of U.S. empire. By reframing apocalypse in this manner, I transform it into a generative category of analysis for understanding the U.S. empire as well as anti-imperialist writers and movements. A deeper re-consideration of the apocalypse genre, with special attention to intersections among race, religion, and gender, can help us understand how theorizing and practicing community is key to survival and a hopeful, more equitable future.

Together Through the End: Theorizing Community in Apocalypse Literature

“‘I am the chosen one’: Trump again plays on messianic claims as he embraces ‘King of Israel’ title” -Washington Post headline, Aug 21, 2019

“Apocalypse Becomes the New Normal: We’re already in the early stages of climate crisis”- Paul Krugman, Opinion Columnist for The New York Times, Jan 2, 2020

“The Apocalypse in U.S. Political Thought: Trump Isn’t the First—And He Won’t be the Last”- Alison McQueen, July 18, 2016

“U.S. Braces for Major North Korean Weapons Test as Trump’s Diplomacy Fizzles”- David E, Sanger, Edward Wong, and Michael Crowley, The New York Times, Dec. 21, 2019

“The Doomsday Clock is closer than ever to midnight. Here’s why that matters”- CNN, Jan. 23, 2020

Introduction

When I began this project in the fall of 2019, claims of apocalypse were front and center: the presidency of Trump and the rising tide of Christo-fascism his election represented, yet more rumors of nuclear destruction at the hands of U.S. enemies, and increased intensity and frequency of climate events that portended an alarming future dominated news headlines. And then came the COVID-19 pandemic. At first, whispers of potential alarm made their way out of Wuhan, China in the last days of 2019. By January, it was clear the world was in the midst of catastrophe, and by March 2020, the U.S. officially declared emergency. The pandemic was the first in a series of catastrophic events in the United States that seemed unrelenting—fires and storms, deadly and rampant anti-Black racism, increasingly violent anti-Asian racism, even an attempted coup. Of course, claims of apocalypse and use of apocalyptic rhetoric continued. These claims came from all kinds of people with all kinds of perspectives; from those who

believed selfish U.S. COVID policies would lead us to a place of no return to those who believed that the fires and plagues and unrest portended the events of the Book of Revelation. However, despite the increased intensity of events of the last few years, the apocalyptic rhetoric and claims of doom were consistent with those made in previous decades.

The word apocalypse has come to have a diverse set of associations, and scholars such as Stephen O’Leary discuss the rhetorical impact of the term. He argues that this highly adaptable term is used to discuss and solve problems of time, evil, and authority in many different fields. He points out that although many scholars have studied apocalypse (James West Davidson’s *The Logic of Millennial Thought*, Ruth Doan’s *The Miller Heresy, Millennialism, and American Culture*, and H. H. Rowley’s *The Relevance of Apocalyptic* to name a mere fraction), many have failed to examine the overarching rhetorical impact of the term. Instead of dismissing those who invoke apocalypticism in their work, be it a speech, play, novel, or news article, this popular form of rhetoric found in literature from virtually every time period is a way of communicating that has to be taken seriously, rather than being pushed aside as illogical, trivial, or an uneducated way of describing or understanding an event.

Despite its contemporary importance in the United States, invoking apocalypse is not a new rhetorical tool for many U.S. American authors, who have written apocalypse into their writings with a wide range of intentions, just as is the case today. Examples of the use of apocalypse in U.S. history include Increase Mather’s 1676 text “A Brief History of the Warr with the Indians in New-England,”¹ the Millerite publication of the 1840’s called *Signs of the Times*², and Walter M. Miller Jr.’s brilliant 1959 science fiction novel *A Canticle for Leibowitz*.³ These texts, although very different in form, message, and time frame, all engage apocalyptic rhetoric in order to influence their readers to think about sociopolitical relations in the United

States, ultimately participating in the very U.S. American tradition of using apocalypse to think about politics.

Although apocalyptic thought is woven into numerous aspects of U.S., and particularly U.S. politics, general knowledge of the meaning of the term is imprecise. In popular terms, people understand the word apocalypse to mean the end of the world while in fact, the word comes from the Greek, ἀποκάλυψις, which means “to reveal,” “uncover,” or “unhide;” quite literally, a revelation. Biblical scholars as well as scholars who study apocalypse literature use the term eschatology to refer to the study of the end of the world since the Greek word ἔσχατος means the last of time, or the end of earth. The relationship between the words revelation and apocalypse is due to their connection to “The Revelation of John,” the final book of the *New Testament*, where the “Ἀποκάλυψις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ” or, the revelation of Jesus Christ (which is of course given to John via messenger angel) is precisely that the world, or at least the world as is known, will come to an end.⁴ However, despite the connections to revelation and western culture, apocalypse means so much more and is tied to many overlapping definitions, worldviews, and historical events. It is a central goal in this dissertation to approach apocalypse with this multiplicity in mind.

In this dissertation, I attempt to take seriously the claims, discussions, and fears of apocalypse. Instead of asking “how do people believe in this?” I accept that people do believe in apocalypse. I ask, “what kind of apocalypse do people believe in and how does that influence their behavior?” to come to a closer understanding of the state of contemporary politics and human relationships and the development of community. Understanding that people’s beliefs drive their behavior is central to my dissertation. By refusing to dismiss apocalypse beliefs by saying they are dramatic, uninformed, or exaggerated, I examine a diverse set of beliefs that

directly inform people's relationship to the United States and the world. In doing so, I argue that while there are many ways of conceptualizing apocalypse, there are two distinct modes of apocalyptic thinking: one that furthers the goals of U.S. empire and the self, and another that centers decolonial, intersectional feminist ideologies that work towards equitable community. While asserting that there are two distinct methods of apocalyptic thinking, I also assert that there is a general apocalypse literature category in the contemporary U.S. through which people think through big questions such as the role of the government, spirituality, and community even if the authors of individual texts come to different conclusions based on their political beliefs and apocalyptic perspectives. I believe that these texts should be read together in order for people to understand the stakes of apocalyptic beliefs.

To support these claims, I examine four key contemporary North American apocalypse novels throughout the chapters—Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkin's *Left Behind: A Novel of the Earth's Last Days* (1995), Octavia E. Butler's *Parable of the Sower* (1993), Matthew Mather's *Cyberstorm* (2013), and Louise Erdrich's *Future Home of the Living God* (2017). By interweaving my analysis of these four novels throughout the dissertation, I take the reader through the different ways these texts engage the apocalypse literary category while theorizing very different ways of community and being. In the first chapter, I think through how apocalypse novels understand the importance of responsibility and the impact that understanding has on a person's behavior. I then move on to discussing how concerns about feminism and what feminism is are discussed in apocalypse novels to make claims about how communities should be structured. Last, in the third chapter, I suggest that there are key apocalypse tropes, such as the figure of the child, prophecy, and the importance of hope, that can be seen in most

apocalypse texts and that understanding these key tropes is helpful in understanding contemporary U.S. political discourse.

In what follows, I give a brief history of what apocalypse has come to mean since the advent of the word in ancient Greek texts. I will then explain my methodology and theoretical influences and how they inform the dissertation chapters. Last, I will explain the stakes of this project.

Prehistory of Apocalypse in Euripides' *Bacchae*

In order to fully understand the long history of apocalypse, and therefore its full function in U.S. political life, it is vital to start at the word's pre-biblical roots. By beginning with Euripides' *Bacchae*, I suggest this apocalyptic text paves the way for the imminent "Revelation of John." Euripides' *Bacchae*, which premiered posthumously in Athens in 405 B.C.E., tells the story of crisis in Thebes, brought on by the arrival of the god Dionysus, whose worship is ultimately not supported by Pentheus, the city's young king. Dionysus, out of anger, influences the women of Thebes to follow him in a mad frenzy in the mountains because he has heard rumors saying he was not a god and a son of Zeus. Dionysus is therefore trying to prove his power throughout the entire play, playing the role of an angry god exacting revenge. Simultaneously, Pentheus is shown trying to quell crisis in his polis. He, after his unknowingly misguided arrest of Dionysus, is convinced by Dionysus to go observe the women in the mountain, one of whom is his mother, Agave. Ultimately, the women tear apart the king in what can only be described as an animal-like frenzy. With the king dead, and the rest of his family in exile, Thebes is left without a ruler and marked by tragic catastrophe.

The Greek version of this play, written by Euripides himself, does not have any stage directions written into the body of the text. Because of that, translators and play directors write their own stage instructions into the play based on their own vision of the production or in the case of translators, based on what will exemplify, amplify, or illustrate the main themes of the text. There are many translations of this text in English, but in the English translation that I will be analyzing, by Ian Johnston, the play closes with the remains of Pentheus, the only items left on stage. This compelling and eerie way of ending the play centers on the destruction of Pentheus and the horror and chaos that Dionysus causes.

Through this play, Euripides explores the impact that Dionysus, “the god of intoxication, madness, ecstasy, and metamorphosis,” has on Thebes.⁵ Scholars have argued over whether Euripides is a tragic or comic writer, citing various parts of his texts to prove their argument. Different elements that have been identified as powerful by other scholars, elements that “offer powerful occasions for audiences to experience a *katharsis* of the tragic emotions, especially pity,” such as “Dionysus’s harsh and unforgiving determination to exact revenge upon the house of Cadmus,” have been chosen to examine the question of whether this play is tragic or comic.⁶ Elements of the play, such as this one, are complex and cannot be strictly categorized in one way or another. Chaos and peace are both represented in *Bacchae*, creating tensions in the plot, and influencing the thoughts of the spectator, making the play still relevant today.⁷ I am not as interested in whether the play is tragic or comic as I am in how the play uses apocalypticism to explain the tensions present in the relationships among religion, political structure, and responsibility.

This play is bloody, scary, overwhelmingly tragic, and very much marked by apocalyptic revelation. Motifs such as the action of covering and uncovering and the relationship between

disaster and revelation are overwhelmingly present in the plot. At the center of the play is the tension between the gods and their influence and humans and their own free will, a tension which is echoed at the end of the play by the chorus who speak the last lines:

The gods appear in many forms,
Carrying with them unwelcome things.
What people thought would happen never did.
What they did not expect, the gods made happen.
That's what this story has *revealed*.⁸

By leaving the audience with the last word “revealed,” along with the sole, dismembered, dead body of the king, the translator of this edition, Ian Johnston, is intentionally emphasizing the motif of covering and uncovering as well as the relationship between disaster and revelation that Euripides carries throughout the play. The intentionality of the translation is clear because the Greek, the original words written by Euripides, do not mention any uncovering or revelation. Instead, the Chorus says

πολλὰ μορφαὶ τῶν δαιμονίων,
πολλὰ δ' ἀέλπτως κραίνουσι θεοί
καὶ τὰ δοκηθέντ' οὐκ ἐτελέσθη,
τῶν δ' ἀδοκῆτων πόρον ἦρε θεός.
τοιόνδ' ἀπέβη τόδε πρᾶγμα.⁹

Instead of choosing to end his play with the decidedly more dramatic declaration that this tale revealed truths about humanity and gods/goddesses, Euripides writes, simply, “Such is the thing that happened.” Although this ending, the original, does not emphasize the relationship between

revelation and disaster that Johnston points to, there are plenty of moments in the original text where Euripides uses ideas of un/covering to impress this relationship upon his audience.

Imagery involving un/covering is important in Ancient Greek drama to me because these Greek words are precursors to the word ἀποκάλυψις (or apocalypse). What I mean by this is that the word ἀποκάλυψις is a synthesis of two separate words that are used frequently in Greek drama: ἀπο and κάλυπτω, the preposition “from” and the verb “cover” respectively. ἀπο, or from, is a very active preposition, as opposed to the more passive prefix “un” that I have used to describe the un/covering present in the text. “Cover,” on the other hand, means very simply that something is hidden. These two words drive the thematic elements of the play—showing that the process of hiding and revealing is a process that must be actively carried out and that the process of hiding and revealing is connected to both the divine and the powerful (mortal or otherwise). The word ἀποκάλυψις is not in Euripides’ play once because it has not yet entered the lexicon; however, there are several times where the words ἀπο and κάλυπτω are used.

The theme of covering (and therefore uncovering) is first introduced in Dionysus’s first monologue, which happens at the very beginning of the play. Dionysus is explaining who he is, the son of Zeus and Semele, and that he has changed into a human form from his god form in order to hide or cover his identity. He says that he has been “making known to men [his] own divinity / τάκεῖ χορεύσας καὶ καταστήσας ἐμὰς τελετάς, ἵν’ / εἶην ἐμφανῆς δαίμων βροτοῖς” all throughout different Asian lands and has only come to Thebes in order to punish his dead mother’s family who fail to acknowledge his divinity (ln 22).¹⁰ In addition, Dionysus also mentions that he has “completely covered” his mother’s destroyed house, which serves as a shrine to her, with “leafy shoots of grape-bearing vines, / ἄβατον ὃς πέδον τόδε τίθησι, θυγατρὸς σηκόν· ἀμπέλου δέ νιν πέριξ ἐγὼ κάλυψα βοτρῶδει χλόη,” an offering that symbolizes

Dionysus himself, because Dionysus is known as the god of wine, among his many other designations.¹¹ This early introduction of two different types of covering effectively establishes a relationship between disaster and the divine in relation to un/covering. The next instance where covering is communicated through the plot is when the Chorus is explaining how Dionysus came to be: “Then Zeus, son of Cronos, at once hid him away in a secret birthing chamber, buried in his thigh, shut in with golden clasps, concealed from Hera / λογίους δ’ αὐτίκα νιν δέξατο θαλάμαις Κρονίδας Ζεύς, κατὰ μηρῶ δὲ καλύψας χρυσέαισιν συνερείδει περόναις κρυπτὸν ἄφ’ Ἡρας.”¹² This further establishes, very early on, the relationship of what is hidden, concealed, and covered with the divine. All that is explained as being concealed, hidden, or made unknown to the citizens of Thebes is caused by gods and goddesses.

Divinity plays an active part in *Bacchae* because the gods are also characters, like Dionysus. Instead of mortal characters trying to create or construct reasons behind the mysterious happenings in the world, Dionysus, a god born of both the mortal Semele and the immortal Zeus, tells us himself that he is the one who has honored his deceased mother’s home by decorating her house, covering it with plants that symbolize what his divinity represents. It is Dionysus’s father Zeus who concealed him in his thigh, hiding him from the goddess Hera, another divine figure in the polytheistic religious structure the spectators would have believed in and known about. Euripides is not just creating a character and hoping that his spectators will know that the character is divine; he is using a figure that is well-known, potentially worshipped by those watching his play, and in whose honor this play, and all the tragedies, were performed at the time, in the festival of the god.

The next two examples of concealment are translated as “covering” by Johnston, even though this is not a direct translation. This translation choice, as I said earlier, does the job of

bringing to the forefront the importance of what happens when a cover is ripped away. A messenger arrives in Thebes to convey what he has seen in the mountains to Pentheus. He describes “bulls, proud beasts till then, with angry horns, collapsed there on the ground, dragged down by the hands of a thousand girls. Hides covering their bodies were stripped off faster than you could wink your royal eye” to the horrified Pentheus.¹³ The messenger’s message reveals several things to the audience; it shows how dangerous and violent the Dionysian worshippers are, emphasizes the femininity of the violence, and directly positions the power of Dionysus as one that destroys. Through the jarring imagery of many women ripping the hides off “proud” bulls, it is made clear that Dionysus’ new and foreign religion has the power to uncover the weaknesses of the proud, civilized, and distinguished city of Thebes and ultimately to destroy it (a prophecy that comes to fruition as seen by the destruction of the royal family by the end of the play). Curiously enough, the next instance of the word “cover” that is seen in Johnston’s translation is in reference to what Pentheus should wear in order to disguise himself appropriately as a Dionysian worshipper.

The focus on clothes in relation to religion and politics becomes less frivolous when considering how clothes are one of the most obvious marks of identity, such as relationship to religion and one’s gender. By asking “how should I cover up my body?” Pentheus is really asking how he can effectively appear as a woman and as an active worshipper of Dionysus.¹⁴ This ultimately highlights two separate things about the importance of transvestite cult practice: the importance of appearance in identifying religious orientation and gender, and the inability to know fully the interior relationship a person has with a religion based on their clothing. Although seemingly obvious, clothing will become an important part to consider in later points of this dissertation.

Besides setting up the important rhetorical framework for the use of the word apocalypse later in history, the *Bacchae* also works to reveal how the worship of Dionysus is a precursor to monotheism. Courtney Friesen introduces her argument about the relationship between different cultural and religious groups in antiquity by stating that “Dionysus was appropriated throughout antiquity as a symbol of political and religious change.”¹⁵ Some scholars, such as H.S. Versnel, point out that “no two scholars agree on the meaning of the [*Bacchae*], let alone on the intention of its author.”¹⁶ However, it is clear that by constructing his entire play around a Greek mythical figure with strong associations between fear and change in the politico-religious sphere, Euripides is doing more than writing a play that explores a relationship between disaster and the divine; he is showing the anxiety behind real change in the ways that people were thinking about spirituality and worship during this time, a time where the very nature of polytheistic worship was shifting. According to Versnel, Dionysus, in this play, is shown as the very figure who prefigures the shift to monotheism, as the shift to henotheism takes another century or so to reveal itself. Versnel also argues that despite the ability to read characters, plot points, and themes in the play through various lenses, depending on one’s intents and purposes, Euripides’ specifically writes *Bacchae* to translate “the eternal Dionysiac ambiguity into a conflict manifest in the actual reality of his own time.”¹⁷ By thinking about the play in this way, one point becomes abundantly clear: the anger Dionysus manifested for not being respected is relevant to Euripides’ view of the social, political, and religious interrelations in Athens at the time this play was written and performed. Versnel uses this point to drive his argument about the impact and importance of the play, stating “Euripides was the first Greek author to recognize and design the image of a revolutionary new type of god.”¹⁸

In order to prove that Euripides is exploring the evolution of how gods/goddesses are perceived and worshipped, Versnel gives a multitude of examples of how Greeks reacted to the appearance of foreign cults and notes that not only are the foreign cults negatively perceived, but that “there is a marked resistance to the *novelty* of non-traditional gods and cults.”¹⁹ This resistance that he describes is clearly seen in the plot of *Bacchae*; indeed, this resistance to new non-traditional gods and cults sets in motion the entire plot of the play. However, what is so odd about the framing of this play is that Dionysus is a Greek god, not a foreign one. Not only was he a Greek god, but one whose

“festivals were ubiquitous and were so deeply rooted in religious tradition that they had given their names to months. Athens honoured the god with several great festivals; the great dramatic genres, tragedy and comedy, had their origins in the ambience of the Dionysiac cult; the god was pictured in numerous vase-paintings...”²⁰

The fear of outside cultures and religions is very real in Greece at the time Euripides is alive, and he had many different real-life examples he could have used to show what happens when a new religious idea is planted in Greece, but instead, he chooses to write about a Greek god. This begs the question: how could, and why would Euripides write Dionysus as a new god?

This ultimately is the question that Versnel seeks to answer in his chapter “Heis Dionysos: The Tragic Paradox of the *Bacchae*.” In order to understand the reasoning behind Euripides’ decision to center his plot around Dionysus, it is important first to discuss how Dionysus was set apart from the rest of the Greek gods and goddesses. Myths about Dionysus elucidate several important characteristics about the figure: he was seen as a foreigner, and therefore not an autochthonous Greek, he displays human and animal traits, and different aspects

of him are worshipped by both men (contribution of inventing wine) or women (challenges to traditional Greek culture).²¹ Dionysus in Greek culture is a contradictory and complicated figure; a figure that Versnel argues was worshipped as “their ‘new’ type of god.”²² This new type of worship leads, in Versnel’s view, to “henotheism,” or the worship of one god out of a group of gods and goddesses, a precursor to monotheism.

What Euripides is doing then, is not just writing a play that is either tragic or comic, one that explores chaos from one perspective; instead, Euripides is exploring the implications of revelation, of what happens when the truth that has been concealed comes from underneath the cover. Throughout this play, it is uncovered that Dionysus influences catastrophe to fall upon Thebes, because the people of Thebes did not worship him. By guiding Pentheus, and then Agave and the other women, to commit atrocities, it is revealed that the tragedy that befell the citizens of Thebes is deserved. He shows his audience that chaos is multifaceted and cannot be conceptualized as solely comic or tragic. This exploration of unveiling provides a forum for Euripides to expose the tensions present in his own day with regard to the transition from polytheism to henotheism. The audience is able to see, through the apocalyptic rhetoric, that the chaos and disaster caused by Dionysus is deserved. Pentheus’ xenophobia and fear of change of worship are what cause the destruction. Euripides uses religious transition and the anger of Dionysus to ultimately illustrate that behavior such as Pentheus’s is worthy of punishment, not unjustly given. Through his ever-present motif of uncovering, Euripides provides us with the means to show how effective apocalyptic rhetoric is when discussing the complexities of a society’s political reality.

Apocalypse in Revelation

Despite the widespread usage of the term apocalypse in different genres and through time, its usage is connected to the highly influential “Revelation of John” from the New Testament, which in turn is connected to the tradition of ancient Greek drama. In discussing the rhetorical import of the word apocalypse, O’Leary examines “Revelation of John” to explain that there are tragic and comedic ways of employing the term—in effect situating its rhetorical importance within the conventions of ancient Greek drama. O’Leary writes:

In proposing a dramatistic reading, I begin by noting that many scholars and commentators on this text have found the terminology of drama useful for describing its bipolar symbolism and plot structure, which features no less than God and the Devil, Christ and Antichrist, as its heroes and villains. Others have gone so far as to claim not only that the book has dramatic structure, but that it borrows its narrative devices from the cultic drama of ancient Greece. Thus, according to Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, it possesses “*dramatic personae*, stage props, chorus, a plot, and a tragic-comic ending.” Critic John Wick Howman argues that Revelation is structured as a drama featuring a prologue, seven acts with seven scenes, and an epilogue, and was deliberately patterned after the Greco-Roman theater of its time.²³

O’Leary’s placement of the book of “Revelation” within the ancient Greek drama genre helps contemporary readers better understand how the text is meant to function. O’Leary goes on to explain that “textual evidence from the book itself points to the conclusion that Revelation was originally intended to be read aloud in a public, liturgical setting... and biblical scholars are agreed that the customs of early Christian worship involved the reading aloud of sacred texts before a collective audience.”²⁴ Greek drama was not just a form of entertainment in the Ancient

Greek polis; the plays were meant to function as what D.M. Carter refers to as “political organ[s].”²⁵ For example, as shown earlier, Euripides’ *Bacchae* explores the very present anxiety about the continuation of polytheistic religious tradition within the polis. At this time, foreign religious influences were being introduced that threatened conceptions of traditional gods and goddesses as well as began to introduce the beginnings of monotheism. The citizens would view plays such as *Bacchae* in order to think through the complexities of the issues at hand. These plays were performed at festivals of which all citizens attended and helped the citizens of a polis work through the political *Zeitgeist* of the time.

Although O’Leary is very clear about the relationship between ancient Greek drama and the form of “Revelation of John,” he spends more time explaining the various tensions in deciding whether “Revelation of John” can be seen as a more tragic or more comedic text. This discussion has involved many different scholars who question the rhetorical work that “Revelation of John” is doing. The question of whether or not the text is a comedy or a tragedy is asked in order to further understand the complex text; O’Leary says:

If the book of Revelation is to be interpreted as drama according to Aristotle’s poetic theory, it is patently evident that its plot structure must be classified as comic. For Aristotle, the mark of true tragedy is an unhappy ending, a downward movement from happiness to misery. The heroes of the Apocalypse, the martyrs and saints who reign with Christ in the millennial kingdom, are distinctly comic in the sense that their plot motion is upward rather than downward; ... However, the happy ending is not the whole story. The narrative of Revelation offers a double plot, with “an opposite issue for the good and the bad personages,” in which the

virtuous are rewarded and the wicked punished. According to Aristotle, this plot is often misunderstood as tragic, but properly belongs to comedy.²⁶

This argument, that the “Revelation of John” has a double plot, becomes rhetorically important in O’Leary’s thinking through apocalypse. His argument is primarily about how apocalyptic thinking helps people understand time, evil and authority; understanding whether a text is comic or tragic allows the reader to understand what the author wants the reader (or viewer) to think about the evil written into the plot: is it bad or is it erroneous? In other words, “tragedy conceives of evil in terms of guilt... comedy conceives of evil not as guilt, but as error; its mechanism of redemption is recognition rather than victimage, and its plot moves not toward sacrifice but to the exposure of fallibility.”²⁷ With this logic, the “Revelation of John” does not look at evil through just one lens; instead, the text approaches the problem of evil by exposing that there are manifold types of evil with no one way to execute justice. Ultimately, “Revelation of John” uses ancient Greek dramatic rhetorical conventions to show that apocalypse is neither tragedy nor comedy, but instead both, because evil cannot be understood as only tragic or comic and that the rhetorical work of apocalypse is precisely that: to expose the complex nature of evil in a world of complex people.

O’Leary is not the only contemporary thinker who relates the apocalypse to Greek drama; Elaine Pagels, in her book *Revelations: Visions, Prophecy, and Politics in the Book of Revelation*, shows how the Book of Revelation is a deeply political text, like the Greek dramas that preceded it. Her argument, unlike O’Leary’s does not center on the rhetorical impact of “Revelation of John;” instead, she focuses on questions such as “Who wrote this book? Why—and how—do so many people read it today? And what *is* revelation? Are any so-called revelations what they claim to be: messages from God? How can we know whether these visions

actually communicate truth about reality or only one person's projection or delusion?"²⁸ Pagel's list of questions adequately captures the confusion scholars, Christian readers, and secular readers have had about this ever since "the second century to the fourth, when it barely squeezed into the canon to become the final book in the New Testament."²⁹

What Pagels does, by answering the aforementioned list of questions, is provide context for this highly contested text. She describes in vivid detail how the author, John, is writing as a Jew in a time of great strife, even identifying the text as "wartime literature."³⁰ Pagels describes how his audience would have seen the metaphorical relationship between the Whore of Babylon and Rome and between Nero and the beast, for example, quite clearly.³¹ In addition, she notes that it is of importance that John was not considered Christian in this time, that his affiliation with the Jewish faith makes him an implicated subject in the persecution occurring against Jewish peoples in Rome at this time. His book, therefore, becomes a very strong political allegory against Rome and the sanctioned violence towards Jewish people.

Despite her specifically historical analysis, Pagels still notes, like O'Leary, that apocalypse and apocalyptic imagery inspired by the Book of Revelation have persisted obstinately throughout time. She asks "how did this book speak to people when it was written two thousand years ago, and how does it continue to do so today," answering her own question by saying that "the Book of Revelation speaks to something deep in human nature."³² While she expands on this big claim throughout the rest of her book, it is this question that I am also attempting to address.

I turn now to this last canonized book of the bible, the "Book of Revelation," the last book in the *New Testament*. In it the self-proclaimed prophet, John, is visited by a Christ figure who tells John that it is his job to write to the different churches about what will happen to them

if they do not stop sinning. John is then transported to an otherworldly place where he meets a being that is presumably God or another Christ-like figure sitting on a crystal throne, four animals that are covered in eyes with six wings each, and 24 elders worshipping “him who sits on the throne” among other mystical and extravagant figures.³³ Afterwards, John witnesses seven seals, five trumpets, and seven bowls used to instigate havoc upon the Earth. Much of the wrath is directed at the Whore of Babylon (often interpreted as a symbol for the city of Rome), who is accused as being the “mother of prostitutes and of the abominations of the earth.”³⁴ Eventually, after many people have been punished, tortured, and killed for not worshipping the Christian God, a new Jerusalem is built. This New Jerusalem is a utopic Christian paradise, surrounded by “a wall, great and high.”³⁵ Outside the wall are the undesirables, the “dogs and sorcerers and fornicators and murderers and idolaters and anyone who loves or does falsehood.”³⁶ Although I do not have time to delve into the timely and fascinating symbolism of the wall itself, it is important to recognize that New Jerusalem is a utopia whose success depends on the exclusion of a multitude of different people and creatures.

The two texts, *Bacchae* and “Book of Revelation” are surprisingly similar. At first glance, it might seem unusual to situate a Greek drama about excess violence perpetrated by rabid women in the same literary tradition as a canonized book of the Bible. However, the striking imagery of violence, the wrath of an angry god, and the driving theme of revelation place the two texts in the apocalypse genre, and even form the basis of an apocalyptic genre. Interestingly, many scholars have formed a connection between the striking similarities between the *Bacchae* and another book of the Bible, the Gospel of John, even speculating that John wrote this text with *Bacchae* in mind. This theory, the mimesis theory, is commonly criticized, however, because it is unclear as to whether or not the author of the Gospel of John was indeed

influenced by Euripides.³⁷ While difficult to know whether biblical authors were familiar with Euripides and his work, it is still worth noting that there have been many connections made between the *Bacchae* and the Bible. This can in part be explained by Dionysus' being read as a Jesus-like figure in the play (or, as Jesus being read as a Dionysus-like figure) through his esteemed position as the henotheistic god worshipped by the characters in the play.

I analyze the relationship between the two texts in order to reveal how the same literary principles that drive the *Bacchae* are present, even more fundamentally, in the “Book of Revelation.” Because the “Book of Revelation” became so monumentally important to Christians, it is crucial for me to explain how ancient Greek tragic apocalyptic themes and rhetoric are plainly seen in this text. The first similarity that stands out is the parallel between Dionysus and Jesus. In the “Book of Revelation,” Jesus is described as

“someone like a son of man... except his head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes like flames of fire, and his feet like bronze as if made to glow in a furnace, and his voice like the sound of many waters, and he was holding in his right hand seven stars, and out of his mouth was coming a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the shining in the strength of it” / “ἀνθρώπου, ἐνδεδυμένον ποδήρη καὶ περιεζωσμένον πρὸς τοῖς μαστοῖς ζώνην χρυσᾶν· ἡ δὲ κεφαλὴ αὐτοῦ καὶ αἱ τρίχες λευκαὶ ὡς ἔριον λευκόν, ὡς χιών, καὶ οἱ ὀφθαλμοὶ αὐτοῦ ὡς φλόξ πυρός, καὶ οἱ πόδες αὐτοῦ ὅμοιοι χαλκολιβάνῳ ὡς ἐν καμίνῳ πεπυρωμένης, καὶ ἡ φωνὴ αὐτοῦ ὡς φωνὴ ὑδάτων πολλῶν, καὶ ἔχων ἐν τῇ δεξιᾷ χεὶρὶ αὐτοῦ, ἀστέρας ἑπτὰ, καὶ ἐκ τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ ῥομφαία δίστομος ὄξεια ἐκπορευομένη, καὶ ἡ ὄψις αὐτοῦ ὡς ὁ ἥλιος φαίνει ἐν τῇ δυνάμει αὐτοῦ.”³⁸

The translator of this edition, David Palmer, notes in the footnotes that “it is customary to render this phrase as “like a Son of Man,” so that it reminds the reader of this phrase in the prophets Ezekiel and Daniel, etc. But it would be more accurate to translate it "like a human," because that is what seems to be the emphasis here in contrast to later given non-human traits.”³⁹ The attention paid to which components of Jesus are human and which are not is reminiscent of the dual human/god qualities possessed by Dionysus which Euripides begins his play by delineating. This conversation on the importance of Jesus as human or nonhuman is also a factor in heresy accusations in early Christian polemics. Additionally, in the very first line of the text, it is stated that the revelation in the text, the revelation that provides the text with its name, is the revelation of Jesus Christ.

In order to understand the word revelation in this text one must remember that this text was originally written in Greek and that the Greek word for revelation is *apocalypse*. Therefore, the revelation that is given to John, Jesus Christ’s revelation, is that the truth will be uncovered by God which will result in the events that are described in the rest of the text. This truth, this revelation, is ultimately that the people deserve the horrors that will be inflicted upon them. The catastrophes described in this text are explanations of punishments that are deserved due to the faithlessness and corruption of the people.

Besides both centering around the apocalyptic theme of revelation, the texts also are explicit interventions in the political climate of the time. The *Bacchae*, as I said earlier, explores the transition from polytheism to henotheism as well as the xenophobia and fear of change evident in Athens. The “Book of Revelation,” on the other hand, is “among other things... *anti-Roman propaganda* that drew its imagery from Israel’s prophetic traditions.”⁴⁰ Each text is exposing political realities that the author has identified, and each text relies on the language of

apocalypse to do so. The metaphor—the metaphor being the use of apocalypse and the end of the world/the creation of a new one to refer to the wars and strife that John was experiencing while writing this text—of “Revelation of John” is effective as a means to describe both the severity and the reason of catastrophe to readers because of its ability to connect divinity and disaster, to provide a reason for a catastrophe that has affected the city of Rome, and has allowed so many people, whole populations of people, to be complicit in the death and destruction of others.

Essentially, the work of the word apocalypse is to prove that it is the god who has the control over the destruction and is causing it. This is seen throughout all the ancient examples explored in this dissertation, especially *Bacchae* and “Revelation of John.” Even though religion changes through time, and therefore is different in the texts I discuss, it is divinity that causes the death and destruction for reasons that must be illuminated by the divine figure, namely that the actions of human beings deserve negative consequences. In addition, it also introduces the concept of a greater cosmic morality to the narratives being told in both texts. Not only is the god in each text causing destruction, or prophesying a future god-caused destruction, but this destruction is punishment for actions. In each case, the punishment is caused by humans not adhering to a specific religious system. Dionysus wishes to be worshipped as a god, something that in his ambiguous state some Greeks in the *Bacchae* refused him. Similarly, the god (or simply, God) of the “Book of Revelation” is foretelling punishment for seven different churches in seven different cities along with people of the world more generally (although historically speaking the text is referring specifically to Rome).⁴¹ Jesus points out the good deeds of the different churches; for example, he tells John to write to Ephesus saying “I know your works, and your toil and endurance, and how you are not able to tolerate evil people, and have put to the test those who call themselves apostles and are not and have found them to be liars; and you have

endurance, and have held up for the sake of my name, and not become weary.”⁴² He wants John to write to these places to let them know that there cannot be any secrets kept from omnipresent divinity. His threat is made all the more insidious because he does not leave out all the good that the people have been doing.

This idea, of being unable to hide from divinity while also attributing the unknowable and unimaginable to divinity, is not surprising to modern readers; one may say that it is decidedly not a revelation. That is precisely because the model established in Greek drama—the utilization of apocalyptic rhetoric to explain, justify, and perpetuate the relationship between divinity and disaster—as evidenced by the *Bacchae*, and continued through the “Book of Revelation,” has become a widely popular mode of describing and understanding the world. So popular, that apocalyptic language has actually worked to shape Western societies.

Methodology and Chapters

In what follows, I focus especially on the United States from the late 20th through the 21st century (1980-2020). The chapters will build on Daniel Heath Justice’s observation that “the ‘end of days’ isn’t just the stuff of doomsday religionists or science fiction, but of historical memory and lived experience. It’s the template for our survival today, and that, I think, is key: our peoples survived,” resonating with statements made by other artists and scholars such as John Akomfrah, Derrick Bell, Kyle Whyte, and Alexander Weheliye.⁴³ It is important to note that in Indigenous Studies and Afrofuturist thought, the apocalypse has already happened in the form of the Middle Passage, racial slavery, and the continued project of settler-colonialism. I also want to make it clear that I am not conflating Indigenous and Black epistemologies. What I will show is that despite different histories and lived experiences, Indigenous and Black thought

in U.S. American literature sometimes arrives at some similar conclusions about apocalypse: that nation is not a viable entity to organize around.

In Indigenous epistemologies, apocalypse is inherently related to the genocidal project of settler-colonialism. Settler-colonialism, an on-going violence and erasure, has come to presume “that the colonial project has been realized: land has been dispossessed; its owners have been eliminated or absorbed.”⁴⁴ Despite the inherent connection between settler-colonialism and apocalypse, Indigenous authors argue that the goal of Indigenous apocalypse is to fight against the idea that complete erasure has already happened to Indigenous peoples around the world, in this case more specifically in the United States, despite the genocidal intent of settler colonialism. Grace Dillon, in her anthology, *Walking the Clouds: An Anthology of Indigenous Science Fiction*, argues that “many forms of Indigenous futurisms posit the possibility of an optimistic future by imagining a reversal of circumstances, where Natives win or at least are centered in the narrative.”⁴⁵ Similarly, Justice writes that “when apocalypse appears as an overt theme in Indigenous writing, it’s more than speculation—it’s experiential, even in its most fantastical, because in a very real way it hasn’t ended.”⁴⁶ In my dissertation, I would like to show how hope is conceived of as a force built through coalition. I will show how apocalypse literature written by Indigenous authors utilizes the apocalyptic genre theme of hope to resist the narrative that Indigenous culture is only found in that past and to assert that Indigenous peoples are not peoples of the past but people in the present with a future. Even within the apocalypse currently happening to Indigenous peoples, ways are found to survive and provide hope, especially through Indigenous apocalypse literature.

Similarly, in many versions of Black apocalypse in the United States, apocalypse is inherently connected to the Middle Passage, racial slavery, and the continued impact of racial

slavery (such as the prison-industrial complex). As a multitude of scholars and artists who engage with Black Studies, including Kodwo Eshun, Mark Bould, and Mark Sinker, have suggested, the relationship between African American experience and apocalypse is described by Hip Hop group Public Enemies' phrase "Armageddon been in effect" from the song "Countdown to Armageddon" which shows that "slavery functioned as an apocalypse experienced as equivalent to alien abduction."⁴⁷ However, "the triumph of Black American culture is that, forcibly stripped by the Middle Passage and Slavery Days of any direct connection with African mother culture, it has nonetheless survived."⁴⁸ In my dissertation, I will show that Black cultural producers, writers, and artists use apocalypse to explain the impact of slavery and other anti-Black structures, showing how an imagined future event can be used to explain historical events. Nonetheless, despite the horror, these novels work to understand how there can be an alternative future with freedom despite apocalypse.

It is my goal to take seriously the different understandings of apocalypse that people have in the U.S., instead of writing about apocalypse as a kind of fantasy fiction that only takes place within a white, racist, settler-colonial worldview. Inherently related, historical realities and fictions must be thought of in tandem in order to understand the full impact of apocalypse literature. Cacophony does not allow for rigid dichotomies such as white apocalypse and Indigenous or Black apocalypse; instead, it is important to exam how the varying understandings of apocalypse work to create understandings of people's place with each other. This analysis reveals how racism and patriarchy are imbedded into some conceptualizations of apocalypse while other conceptualizations of apocalypse delineate how deadly and catastrophic these formulations of racism and patriarchy can be in establishing relationships.

My first chapter, titled “Apocalyptic Empire: Literary Expressions of Apocalyptic Agency and Responsibility,” explores how apocalypse literature theorizes the way people should behave during catastrophe. Contemporary U.S. apocalypse literature highlights the chaos inherent in structures of empire to allow readers to see various ways that U.S. empire allows space for people affected by U.S. empire to both participate in and work against U.S. imperial structures. By analyzing apocalypse literature, a category of literature deeply concerned with chaos and empire, readers are able to reflect upon how personal conceptualizations of agency and responsibility, informed by individual relationships to race, gender, and capitalism, work to support and undermine U.S. empire. My close readings of the novels such as *Left Behind: A Novel of the Earth’s Last Days*, *Cyberstorm*, *Parable of the Sower*, and *Future Home of the Living God* as well as my engagement with Black Feminist Studies and Indigenous Studies highlights how there are two modes of apocalypse: one that influences and participates in an imperial status quo and another which advocates for communal responsibility and care that undermines and even works directly against the imperial U.S. state.

My second chapter, titled “Apocalypse Communities: Feminism, Culture Wars, and Social Justice,” explores the connections between different understandings of feminism and community construction within the context of U.S. history and the so-called “culture wars.” Reading contemporary apocalypse novels provides insight on the purpose and structure of communities as they relate to U.S. empire due to their focus on survival during catastrophe. These kinds of novels, despite their similar Christian and apocalyptic themes, convey starkly different visions of community that are particularly clear through an examination of feminism. This chapter explores relationships among feminisms, culture wars, and community through an examination of Christian-themed apocalypse novels. My reading of Tim LaHaye’s *Left Behind*

and Octavia E. Butler's *Parable of the Sower* emphasizes how essentialist understandings of womanhood aid in the construction of patriarchal communities while feminisms that engage with histories of gender and racial oppression build socially just spaces. By reframing apocalypse and considering the different ways catastrophe is described, the term is transformed into a generative category of analysis for understanding U.S. empire, community, and the effects of feminism.

My third chapter, titled ““I warn everyone who hears the words of prophecy of this book”- Communicating Warning and Hope,” explores key plot points, themes, and tropes in apocalypse novels to show how similar different apocalypse novels can be in terms of how they present hope and warning. In this chapter, my main argument is that apocalypse novels should be considered as a category that should not solely be subsumed within the genres of science fiction and religious fiction. I do not say this to convey the idea that Indigenous and Black authored apocalypse novels are doing the same political work as apocalypse novels written by white evangelical men. Instead, I believe reading these books together emphasizes how Indigenous and Black authored apocalypse novels present better ideas about how community should function rather than the white evangelical men-authored apocalypse novels that advocate for community structures that brought about catastrophe in the first place. In this chapter, I primarily focus on how apocalypse novels have similar plot structure in that they communicate a warning and then provide hope for the reader. This is done through the presence of specific tropes including the exploration of prophecy and its connection to insanity, the figure of the child, and the veneration of written works.

Ultimately, this dissertation serves as a reflection upon the many different ways people understand catastrophe and how those ways of thinking influence how they behave in their communities. I hope it illuminates how ways of understanding catastrophe that focus on the root

causes of catastrophe and diverge from Western models which focus on perceived individual moral digressions may help people to enact change that increases the potentials for social justice, love, and hope.

Chapter 1: Expressions of Apocalyptic Agency and Responsibility

“Conduct physical & spiritual warfare: using the power of prayer to strengthen your troops in combat and wield modern military weaponry throughout the game world... Recover ancient scriptures and witness spectacular Angelic and Demonic activity as a direct consequence of your choices.” – *Left Behind: Eternal Forces* PC Game description

“But, although *individual* change is the foundation of all things it is not the end of all things. Perhaps it’s time to begin laying the groundwork for the next transformation.” – Sandy Stone, *The “Empire” Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto*

Introduction

In 2006, Inspired Media Entertainment published *Left Behind: Eternal Forces*, a Christian real-time strategy PC game based on the popular evangelical Christian book series, *Left Behind*. This game is advertised as one of choices; players may choose how they conduct physical and spiritual warfare and therefore it is their choice whether or not they will be able to “witness spectacular Angelic and Demonic” activity. The draw of the game is the ability to participate in modern imperial military warfare and use advanced military weaponry, implying that through using military strategies and choosing the right targets a person is able to be rewarded with Angelic activity—a heavenly reward. This game makes explicit that which is already obvious in other sectors of the *Left Behind* franchise: that in order to fully adopt the U.S. fundamentalist Christian worldview, one must choose to engage appropriately with U.S. empire in order to eventually end up in heaven.

Without any context, the existence of this game seems a horrifying instance of U.S. Christian propaganda. This is true. However, this horrific instance of propaganda fits firmly within popular and commonplace white supremacist, hetero-patriarchal, and imperialist ideologies that can be traced throughout U.S. history. These ideologies converge to influence people to be concerned with their own moral status and take a stance or fight anybody who has a differing moral code, ultimately prioritizing the tenets of U.S. empire over every other

community structure. By conflating the United States with Christianity and propagating the idea that U.S. Christians are in an eternal struggle for morality against all non-believers, the Left Behind franchise becomes another tool in which the U.S. empire gains ardent supporters. In this chapter, I pair LaHaye and Jenkin's *Left Behind: A Novel of the Earth's Last Days* with Matthew Mather's *Cyberstorm* in order to illustrate the way pro-imperial ideologies are communicated through prioritizing the individual, or a singular person who understands themselves as part of a community comprised of other singular persons.

Despite the fact that there is powerful and public support for U.S. empire, there are and have been many counter-hegemonic movements and anti-imperialist activists who have fought, organized, and spoke against ideologies that alienate people from their communities. As Sandy Stone, a seminal trans theorist, author, and artist, explains in her 1987 "The *Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto*," individual change, and by extension choice, does not lead to any lasting positive change. Sandy Stone's argument echoes many, including Octavia Butler and Louise Erdrich whose novels I analyze later in this chapter, who advocate for community organization in tandem with individual action. This argument, while seemingly simple, is seen as strikingly counter-hegemonic when put in conversation with the promotion of individualism that dominant U.S. imperial ideology, and therefore much of U.S. popular culture, espouses. Despite the fact that communal responsibility is not the United States' most popular societal organization, there are still pieces of popular culture that advocate for communal responsibility that works against the violent hegemony of U.S. imperialism and the individualism it requires to maintain power. Apocalypse novels are examples of popular culture that have the potential to emphasize these two distinct ways of being. These novels can show us the frightful domination

that U.S. imperial ideology has over its subjects as well as the ways people can work towards ending the United States reign of violence and apocalyptic fear.

Apocalypse is typically thought of on a macro scale: mass devastation, chaos, and fear upending the lives of everyone. Despite this popular definition, the apocalypse genre reminds readers that there are levels in which apocalypse is experienced. The first level of apocalypse is witnessed at a personal level; each person affected by the apocalypse has their own personal relationship to the apocalypse. Apocalyptic literature is an avenue to explore this concept of apocalypse at a personal level. The protagonist of apocalyptic novels allows for an exploration of both how apocalypse influences a person and how people, in turn, influence the apocalypse. By paying attention to how the protagonists of an apocalypse novel understands themselves and their role within their community, readers are able to understand which kind of apocalypse is being mobilized in a text. In this chapter I explore how protagonist's understandings of agency and responsibility are related to apocalypse. I argue that the identity of the protagonist and the way authors contextualize their protagonists through providing information about their identities and backgrounds, inner-monologues, and reactions to events, influence readers' understandings of how people should understand agency and responsibility. Ultimately, apocalyptic authors make a claim through their protagonists for how people should behave in times of crisis.

Through these claims, authors are also advancing ideas of how individuals engage with empire.

I propose reading apocalypse literature, a genre of literature that has worked to question the validity and morality of empire for centuries, as a useful methodological framework for understanding empire. Apocalypse literature works to understand *how* individual people should behave in times of catastrophe in relation to their political climate. From apocalyptic biblical texts that advocate for moral purity in the face of the immoral Roman empire to contemporary

U.S. apocalyptic texts that examine the horrifying consequence of U.S. wartime technology, apocalypse novels are explicitly making connections between immoral empires and individual behavior. Despite the fact that apocalypse literature explores these ideas, not all apocalypse literature understands morality, empire, and catastrophe in the same way especially in contemporary U.S. apocalypse literature, creating a kind of literature that does not have a cohesive aim or purpose. While chaotic, the wide array of beliefs that apocalypse literature examines reflects a cacophony of the manifold belief systems that all exist in the United States. Contemporary U.S. apocalypse literature contends with the wide array of belief systems in support of different kinds of relationships with U.S. empire. These belief systems, in the novel, are communicated through how characters in the novel understand how they can behave and what they can do (agency) as well as who and what they feel responsible for.

In what follows, I suggest that contemporary U.S. apocalypse literature embraces the chaos inherent in structures of empire to allow readers to see various ways that U.S. empire allows space for people affected by U.S. empire to both participate in and work against U.S. imperial structures. I argue that U.S. apocalypse literature examines how U.S. empire impacts the lives of those living domestically in the United States. In order to do so, I will reflect more specifically on how U.S. apocalyptic literature reflects the chaos found when examining people's relationship to empire through an application of Jodi Byrd's term "cacophony." Afterwards, I will move into discussions of two different ways that apocalypticism influences relationships to U.S. empires through a series of close readings of apocalypse novels. By taking apocalypse as my main category of analysis, I explore how literary expressions of individual agency and responsibility in U.S. apocalyptic texts ultimately make clear the function of U.S. empire: either as a structure that works to protect, both physically and morally, white cis-hetero-patriarchy

under the guise of deserved protection or as a crumbling entity whose destruction is both feared and hoped for.

Chaos in Definition: Cacophony of Apocalypse

The more prominent kind of apocalypse seen in U.S. apocalypse literature promotes the idea of American exceptionalism and argues that the contemporary U.S. empire is a kind of utopia threatened by destruction because of individual immoral behavior. On the other hand, apocalyptic narratives can also connect to theories of empire in Indigenous Studies that explain how empire is a system of erasure that attempts, but fails, to silence those who do not conform to imperial norms.⁴⁹ In this understanding, other ways of relationship are explored through apocalypse that do not rely on imperial exploitation of people through their labor and bodies.⁵⁰ This is ultimately important because one's understanding of apocalypse impacts the way U.S. empire is understood: either as a structure that rewards those who recognize and change their behavior, or alternatively, as a structure that actively participates and encourages destruction and punishment of those who do not believe in racist, sexist, or capitalist ideologies promoted by U.S. empire. By reframing apocalypse in this manner, the term is transformed into a generative category of analysis for understanding U.S. empire.

As I noted in the introduction, apocalypse means radically different things to different people depending on lived experience, media consumed, religious affiliation, and importantly, relationships to historical processes and events. Due to this, I find it particularly useful to understand apocalypse through Jodi Byrd's conception of "cacophony," a term coined as a theory to understand empire. In *The Transit of Empire* (2011), Byrd defines cacophony as

... discordant and competing representations of diasporic arrivals and native lived experiences... that vie for hegemony within the discursive, cultural, and political processes of representation and identity that form the basis for what Wendy Brown has identified as the states of injury and Foucault and others have termed biopolitics.⁵¹

Here, Byrd evokes Brown's and Foucault's theoretical concepts to explain how the many overlapping layers of narrative that represent the lived experiences of people in the United States collectively contribute to an understanding of the United States as a (in)coherent political whole. Byrd reminds us that these large conceptual understanding of our political systems that analyze how regulatory systems of the state categorize humanity, ultimately creating violence and hierarchy, depend on an examination of people's lived experiences. It is the many inharmonious and dissonant stories of people that comprise Byrd's cacophony. By understanding, accepting, and allowing for the endless layers of competing and complementary events, people, and ideas that have worked to form the structures that constitute the reality of everyone in our contemporary moment, Byrd is creating a theory for understanding the world that does not just simplify, but instead uses complexity to productively assess and understand "economies of racism, homophobia, sexism, and classism."⁵² By framing apocalypse through cacophony, I argue that apocalypse, as a category of analysis, aids both in understanding how people process chaos caused by U.S. empire as well as understanding that people relate to and understand empire in different ways, producing a cacophony of apocalyptic narratives that explain how U.S. empire is stabilized and destabilized from within. Thinking of apocalypse as a category of analysis exposes some apocalypse views to be immoral views that perpetuate violence primarily

through advocacy of white supremacy and nationalism as opposed to other apocalypse perspectives that work directly to undermine and abolish those ways of thinking.

It is with this definition in mind that I propose that apocalypse can be productively utilized as a form of analysis that exposes parts of U.S. empire in all its complexity. As Shelley Streeby notes, the question of the existence of a U.S. empire has been a contested category throughout the history of the U.S. as well as more specifically within the field of American Studies.⁵³ Scholars such as Jodi Byrd, Melani McAlister, Caroline Levander, and Robert Levine have written about how empire has to be theorized carefully and particularly so as not to turn into a watered down metaphor that does not account for the complex reality of Indigenous sovereignty, hemispheric American studies, and the “connections made below, above, and beyond the level of the nation, as well as multidirectional exchanges among diverse parts of the world and voices from other places.”⁵⁴ In using the term empire, I am evoking Amy Kaplan’s understanding of U.S. empire as deeply invested with the murky borders that distinguish the foreign from the domestic in the U.S. By analyzing how the phrase “anarchy of empire” can be used to describe both the “violent destruction and havoc wreaked on the peoples and lands subject to colonial conquest and domination” and to describe the fear and negation of the validity of “savage anarchy” as opposed to American exceptionalism, Kaplan is showing that borders themselves can be borderless.⁵⁵ Kaplan likens empire to webs of power relations that change depending on the context and how these power relations are situated in time and space. Kaplan describes how empire works as a destabilizer and a stabilizer, both forming and un-forming a national identity. Kaplan describes the “double vision of U.S. imperialism as both expansive and contracting, on the one hand, constitutionally capable of boundless expansion, and on the other, narrowly protective of its own borders.”⁵⁶ This chapter focuses on the unclear borders of empire

and how an apocalyptic framework illuminates the way U.S. empire affects and influences people within empire, revealing how the “double vision of U.S. imperialism” that Kaplan describes is also present in how those within are implicated in the continuation or termination of U.S. empire.

At its core, apocalypse literature is about the creation and dissolution of empires. As Stephen D. Moore notes, “no other New Testament text thematizes “earthly” empire as single-mindedly as Revelation—and precisely in order to attack it with scathing intensity... Revelation is the New Testament par excellence of anti-imperial resistance literature.”⁵⁷ Matthew Gabriele and James T. Palmer expand on this idea by explaining that “apocalyptic and eschatological thought provided ways of understanding and talking about what *sancta ecclesia* was, what an empire was, who the enemies of both were and why, what the dangers of not addressing the need for change were, and for conceptualising the urgency of action.”⁵⁸ Although these ideas have been most readily applied to analysis of the Roman Empire and other regimes from late antiquity to the middle ages, they can most certainly be applied to the U.S. empire as well.

Because apocalypse literature is invested in theorizing and understanding chaos and catastrophe, apocalyptic texts allow readers to consider the different ways empire is thought about and theorized, often in contradictory ways even within a single text. I argue that looking at radically different apocalyptic texts provides an avenue for readers to study how U.S. empire influences domestic behavior. I specifically focus on how individuals embody responsibility in order to show how different apocalyptic ideologies influence peoples understanding of their roles during catastrophe. In the rest of this chapter, I will examine four different U.S. apocalypse novels that are not commonly read together due to their different subject matters and goals: Octavia E. Butler’s *Parable of the Sower*, Louise Erdrich’s *Future Home of the Living God*, Tim

LaHaye and Jerry Jenkin's *Left Behind: A Novel of the Earth's Last Days*, and Matthew Mather's *Cyberstorm*. I will show how reading these texts alongside one another allows us to understand how people conceptualize the root cause of catastrophe and can help answer questions about the work that empire does in influencing human relationships and reactions to global realities.

Individual Fault, Individual Guilt

Many popular contemporary U.S. apocalypse narratives advance the idea that catastrophe is the result of individual bad behavior. These texts, typically written by white men, are notorious for advancing a plot where a male protagonist must come to terms with and overcome his own moral failings or uncertainties to save those who are dearest to him.⁵⁹ These texts, although often warnings of a looming disaster, tend to focus on the fact that a future disaster *will* happen and, often, the explicit message of these texts is that readers should be aware of the potential catastrophe and prepare themselves accordingly. Interestingly, these texts do not interrogate the reasons for why these catastrophes will happen. Consequently, the implicit message of these texts is that events are either controllable through individual good moral behavior or completely uncontrollable. This implicit message takes the scrutiny off U.S. political and economic organizations and puts it on individuals who do not appreciate the life they have while they have it.

The moral code that these texts advocate fits into the moral schema of the Christian Right. As Mark Lewis Taylor explains, the Christian Right “adheres to and is committed to developing an aggressive U.S. American political romanticism. This tends to weld a Christian view of political history to new nationalist projects.”⁶⁰ These kinds of apocalyptic texts are not always overtly Christian, as will be seen through my study of *Cyberstorm*. The texts, however,

have similar understanding of morality, while honesty, faith, and bravery are touted as the most important virtues, which results in plot points such as patriarchal savior narratives, anti-abortion messages, and pro-military and pro-police meanings. These plot points work to undermine the radical potential apocalypse narratives can have because they work to reinforce current trends in right-wing politics, supporting ideas of American exceptionalism, xenophobic nationalism, and imperialism. Ultimately, what becomes important is an analysis of white supremacy in tandem with ethics. The plot points that I have pointed out above are all connected to the maintenance of white supremacy, a cornerstone characteristic of U.S. imperialism.

The plots of these two texts are somewhat predictable given the affiliations of Tim LaHaye, Jerry Jenkins, and Matthew Mather, all three of whom are connected to U.S politics, directly or indirectly. LaHaye, the author most egregiously and obviously promoting U.S. imperial systems was a Baptist evangelical Christian minister who was deeply involved with U.S. politics beginning in the 1970s with his involvement with the U.S. conservative political advocacy group, the Christian Voice. After that, LaHaye helped Jerry Falwell found the Moral Majority, a group known for encouraging conservative Christians to become more active in U.S. politics. Later, LaHaye helped found the powerful conservative organization, the Council for National Policy, among several other conservative political coalitions. Importantly, LaHaye also publicly advocated for and endorsed Ronald Reagan's, Jack Kemp's, George W. Bush's, and Mike Huckabee's presidential campaigns. LaHaye's coauthor. Jerry Jenkins, the primary author in the LaHaye/Jenkins duo, was the former owner of the Christian Writers Guild and has been a member of the Moody Bible Institute's Board of Trustees. Additionally, Jenkins has co-authored a collection of books with prominent Christian ministers such as Tim LaHaye and Billy Graham in order to help them share their beliefs with broader audiences. Matthew Mather, on the other

hand, is much less politically recognizable. Despite this, the dedications at the front of *Cyberstorm* boast connections and collaborations with members of the United States Air Force, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, and a liaison to NATO. This information, along with the stories and ideas of the texts, provides a clearer understanding of the purpose of the kinds of apocalypse books they are trying to write: books that scare their readers into believing and acting accordingly to agendas that uplift conservative American ideals and promote the strength and dominance of the U.S. military—two of the cornerstones of U.S. empire.

Those familiar with the Left Behind series know of the unprecedented popularity of the long series of novels espousing dispensationalist ideology. Dispensationalism is a way of interpreting the Bible that became popular in the U.S. due to the Scofield Reference Bible in 1909 as well as the fear of rising religious liberalism. Dispensationalists see history as a series of discrete eras called “dispensations.” Currently, dispensationalists believe we are in the final dispensation, the “Church Age,” which will be brought to its conclusion by the events in the “Book of Revelation.” This ideology is particularly popular amongst American evangelical groups like Baptists and Pentecostals. Tim LaHaye’s and Jerry Jenkin’s series was a multimedia phenomenon that was wildly popular from the late 1990s through the early 2000s and ultimately comprised of 16 novels, 4 films, 40 novellas written for children, a spinoff series, multiple graphic novels, a video game, and a musical collection. This series of novels, along with the other products developed to expand on the Left Behind universe, works to maintain U.S. empire by advocating for a kind of individual morality that is focused on self rather than community care, which in turn allows individuals to turn a blind eye to the horrors of U.S. empire, such as military violence, capitalist exploitation and extractivism, racism, and sexism to name a few. While the idea of an earthly empire is frowned upon in fundamentalist Christian theology, this

insistence on inner moral correction and evangelicalism to convince others to reorient to the same dispensationalist worldview, evident in the *Left Behind* series, pushes people to prioritize a heavenly afterlife rather than to focus on dismantling systems of oppression that harm fellow humans. By focusing on the expressions of agency and therefore, responsibility, made by the characters in the *Left Behind* series, readers see that LaHaye and Jenkins ultimately advocate for a maintenance of the imperial status quo—white supremacist patriarchy.

The *Left Behind* series is fraught with questions of agency. Given that the plot of the novel is predetermined by the text of the Bible, the characters can be understood as not having the opportunity to influence any of the novel's events. This question of agency is taken up by Jennie Chapman in her book, *Plotting Apocalypse: Reading, Agency, and Identity in the Left Behind Series*, in which she claims that “the biggest threat to the characters’ agency in *Left Behind* actually issues from the God to whom they are devoted.”⁶¹ Chapman posits that although the characters cannot alter the course of events, they do have agency in the act of reading and interpreting the Bible. Chapman argues that “it is in and through these hermeneutical activities [of reading and interpreting the Bible] that the evangelical characters in the novels... become empowered agents despite the deterministic and fatalistic milieu that they navigate.”⁶² The act of reading and interpreting become important to characters in the novel because it allows them to feel some semblance of control in that they are capable of preparing for what comes next. However, this is not the limit of their agency. Chapman, in her exploration of agency in the *Left Behind* series argues that money “becomes a medium through which a narrative about individual agency can be delineated,” showing that despite the lack of agency in the world as cosmically conceived, the characters still maintain agency on Earth through the neoliberal capitalist economy that is clearly advocated for in the text.⁶³ Here, Chapman is showing that due to the

theological understanding that events are predetermined by God and the Bible, the characters do not have cosmic agency in that they cannot change any worldly outcomes. What happens in the Left Behind series is already written down in the Book of Revelations and those events are immutable. On the other hand, the characters do affect each other in their day to day lives and can affect change through how they choose to spend their money and how they choose to interpret the Bible.

I agree that there are different levels of agency that are embodied by the Left Behind characters; however, I argue that their ability to exercise agency goes beyond spending money and reading and interpreting the Bible. I believe that the characters of Left Behind have the ability to help their fellow community members but choose not to, leaving this potential type of agency unexercised. It is not that they are denied the ability to use their resources to provide help and relief to their community members; it is instead that they choose to prioritize themselves as individuals. The characters in Left Behind are enmired in their own concerns of their status as successful white men, as leaders in their nuclear families, and with self-deprecating thoughts of how they can morally improve. The protagonists have money, connections, and power to assist in the devastation caused by the disappearance of people that results in automobile and airplane accidents, orphaned teenagers, and deep mental distress, to name a few. But instead, the novel focuses on the moral journey of the protagonists.

Expressions of agency are understood primarily through the main protagonists, Rayford Steele and Cameron “Buck” Williams. The first Left Behind novel, *Left Behind: A Novel of the Earth’s Last Days*, is told from the alternating perspectives of Rayford and Buck. Rayford, the character that the reader is first introduced to, is a successful white, commercial pilot and a less successful father and husband. After the rapture happens, he is left behind along with his oldest

daughter and soon converts to Christianity due to his belief that he has been left behind in the rapture. Buck is a young, talented, white journalist. He, like Rayford, has unsuccessful relationships with his family members and spends most of his time travelling between the sites of the stories he is assigned to. Buck is more hesitant to convert after the rapture, and he does not actually convert until he has to confront the supposed Antichrist, Nicolae Carpathia, face to face.

Initially, readers get a sense that the protagonists are charming and responsible men, successful in their professions. Rayford is described as a charismatic, successful, and confident man. Even though he has moral failings such as his agnosticism, as he readily admits, he still behaves like a chivalrous gentleman. When the rapture happens, and many of his passengers disappear, he safely lands the plane while making sure his passengers and crew are as calm as possible. Here we see Rayford making sure “all able-bodied people got down the chutes and that the elderly and infirm were transported by bus” when the plane lands.⁶⁴ This surface-level chivalry, present at the very beginning of the text, recurs throughout the entire series. In this instance, Rayford’s reasoning for putting his passengers first has to do primarily with appearances. When asked why he will not accept a ride from the airplane to the airport, Rayford says that he “can’t see passing [his] own passengers as they walk to the terminal... How would that look?.”⁶⁵ Rayford’s responsibility to his community members is tied to his understanding of his status at work. A captain makes sacrifices for his passengers whereas civilians do not have the same responsibility to other passengers or the flight crew.

The second protagonist, Buck, similarly understands his purpose as tied to his profession, journalism. Buck is also highly successful in his career and is seen as a confident, charismatic, and talented young man. In fact, Buck is so admired that he is seen as a kind of enigma; his fellow colleagues “called him Buck, because they said he was always bucking tradition and

authority. Buck believed he lived a charmed life, having been eyewitness to some of the most pivotal events in history.”⁶⁶ However, there is one major difference between Rayford and Buck: Buck is not a family man. Instead, he spends most of his time alone. Despite this large difference, Buck maintains a similar understanding of responsibility in that his sense of responsibility for his community has to do with his profession and he understands himself as being at fault in not seeing the truth in Christianity. Because Buck is a journalist, he focuses on reporting what he sees as the truth, and when he is assigned the task of writing an article on the global disappearances, he excitedly noted that it was the “assignment of a lifetime!”⁶⁷ This quote betrays Buck’s exuberance at reporting on a devastating event because it will raise his status as a journalist rather than a commitment to sharing the truth of the disappearances with impacted communities. It is very clear throughout the text that Buck is focused on being rational, at understanding all sides of a story, and reporting what he sees as the truth. His communal responsibility ends there.

Readers quickly realize though that the protagonist’s willingness to assist the people in his life ends when appearances, namely keeping up appearances to maintain his status, are not involved. This point is made very clear when examining the relationship between Rayford Steele and Hattie Durham. Hattie, one of Rayford’s top flight attendants and the subject of his pre-rapture sexual fantasies, considers Rayford an important person in her life and when the rapture happens she looks to him for comfort and assistance. When Rayford and Hattie, who has to sit in Rayford’s lap due to space constraints, manage to snag coveted helicopter seats away from the chaotic airport, Rayford spends the time musing about the potential disappearance of his family:

He hadn’t been living for them anyway, certainly not the last several months. He had been playing around on the edges of his mind with the girl in his lap, though

he had never gone so far as touching her, even when she often touched him.

Would he want to live if Hattie Durham were the only person he cared about?

And why did he care about her? She was beautiful and sexy and smart, but only for her age. They had little in common. Was it only because he was convinced Irene was gone that he now longed to hold his wife?⁶⁸

This startlingly misogynistic inner monologue is contrasted with Hattie's insistent concern for Rayford and his family as she disembarks from the helicopter. Hattie "wrapped her arms around his neck in a fierce embrace, and he felt her quiver in fear. 'I hope everyone's okay at your place!... Call me and let me know, okay?'"⁶⁹

Unsurprisingly, Rayford does not check in with Hattie to make sure she made it home or to see if her family and friends are all right. Despite the fact that Hattie is one of his close coworkers and a friend, he decides to paint her as an unimportant nuisance, noting that "he was sorry about [being rude and dismissive to her], but not sorry that he had gotten rid of her for the time being."⁷⁰ This is a decision that Rayford intentionally makes in the name of honoring his disappeared wife. Rayford, in all of his capacities as an intelligent, resourceful, and successful man, chooses not to help Hattie because his previous behavior around her made him uncomfortable. Rayford's obvious dismissal does not go unnoticed by Hattie, who is deeply hurt by Rayford's unwillingness to provide or accept any support for or from her. Rayford does try to ameliorate the situation, but on his own terms. Once Rayford converts to Christianity and starts attempting to convert the people around him, he finally reaches out to Hattie in an attempt to also convert her. In his mind, they can only have a relationship if she has the same worldview as him. Again, unsurprisingly, Hattie is not open to a conversation with Rayford and refuses to convert. Eventually, Rayford chooses to exclude Hattie from his sphere of concern and responsibility

which directly results in Hattie becoming aligned with evil as the assistant and partner of the Antichrist, Nicolae Carpathia. While Rayford considers Hattie to be aligned with evil, it is actually his own domineering and inflexible attitude towards her that repels Hattie away from Rayford and pushes her towards the Antichrist.

Despite Buck's lofty ambitions to provide a needed service to his readership, Buck does not extend a sense of care or feel a sense of communal responsibility in his day to day interactions. In fact, Buck uses his status to repeatedly obtain resources and services while refusing to extend his resources to those around him in need. This aspect of Buck's personality becomes particularly clear immediately after the rapture while Buck is in the airport. The airport, understandably, is engulfed in chaos as people attempt to figure out where their family members are and how to get home. Buck uses this time to get information from his boss, monopolizing outlets and creating a tripping hazard in the already chaotic airport lounge. Buck shows that he sees himself as above the rules when an airport employee asks him to move to unplug his extension cord; Buck responds: "and if I don't, are you going to have me thrown out? Arrested? Cut me some slack today of all days!"⁷¹ Buck is actively creating a hazardous space and flippantly blowing off the directives of the airport employee, who of course is a woman. Buck exercises agency here by choosing to not feel responsible for the safety and well-being of others.

Even after Buck converts, his impulse is not to attempt to help his friends or family (besides a bizarre attempt to deter Hattie Durham's relationship with Nicolae Carpathia, a woman he barely knows), but is instead to join an elite group, the Tribulation Force, whose goal is to "stand and fight the enemies of God during the seven most chaotic years the planet would ever see."⁷² Buck therefore exercises his agency by choosing to not reach out to his family, his friends, and his colleagues. Once both Rayford and Buck convert, their sense of responsibility

does not drastically change. They do not work to aid their communities—which are definitely suffering from the disappearances, deaths, and accidents in the wake of the rapture. Instead, they go on with their lives with a different sense of purpose, to wholeheartedly believe in God. These new Christian beliefs allow them to adopt a new sense of responsibility that involves a profound sense of dismissal of the suffering of anyone outside their inner circle.

In addition to the responsibility Rayford does (or does not) have for his fellow community members post-Rapture, ideas of guilt inform understandings of responsibility and agency as well. After the rapture happens, Rayford feels immensely guilty about the way he treated his wife, Irene. Not only had he lost interest in her and instead became interested in younger women he met through work, like Hattie, but also, he had scorned and belittled Irene for her devotion to Christianity. Rayford shows his guilt for his mental infidelities by lamenting that he did not deserve Irene: “He did not deserve her. He deserved this, he knew, to be mocked by his own self-centeredness and to be stripped of the most important person in his life.”⁷³ Rayford interprets his situation through ideas of responsibility. He behaved irresponsibly and his consequence for doing so, in his mind, is deserved. These feelings of guilt are what inspire Rayford to convert. After Rayford comes to terms with his own guilt, he immediately decides that “above all, he had to study, to learn, to be prepared for whatever happened next.”⁷⁴ His resolution to be prepared allows him to feel agency over his life. The emotion of guilt he feels influences him to take action (the act of taking responsibility) which ultimately works to assuage Rayford’s guilt. Yes, Rayford was in the wrong, but he has a second chance to ameliorate his wrong doings. Despite the changes that Rayford makes mentally by converting, he makes few other changes in his life. As I stated earlier, Rayford is not interested in broadening his

understanding of responsibility. Rayford only extends his assistance to those who experienced similar feelings of guilt and came to the same conclusion as him.

Buck, unlike Rayford, does not explicitly experience strong feelings of guilt at not having understood Christianity before the rapture. Instead, he berates himself for being blind to the truth and comes to the same self-loathing conclusion that Rayford does:

In the lonely darkness he came to the painful realization that he had long ago compartmentalized this most basic of human needs and had rendered it a nonissue. What did it say about him, what despicable kind of a subhuman creature had he become, that even the stark evidence of the Israel miracle—for it could be called nothing less—had not thawed his spirit's receptiveness to God?⁷⁵

Here, you do not see an obvious admission of guilt; however, Buck blames himself for closing himself off to the truth about God and in the process subtly aligns himself with right-wing Christian fundamentalists who think of Israel as a place that fulfills Christian prophecy. His response then, is to take action. Buck goes to Chicago with the explicit goal of meeting Rayford's pastor, Bruce Barnes, to learn more about Christianity and the process of conversion.

When someone does not express a worldview compatible with the dispensationalist Christian ideology, the Left Behind protagonists choose to cut communication, leaving said person without resources, safety, or community. Agency, then, exists in the form of responsibility in the Left Behind series. By this I mean that characters, through how they decide whether a person has value, are able to decide if they are responsible for a person's physical and spiritual well-being. The Left Behind series makes it clear that it is not immoral to deny help to those who understand the world differently from you; in fact, it is encouraged. These kinds of Christians are not responsible for those who do not believe, so Christians should not intervene

even when safety is in question. Paradoxically, despite the fact that personal responsibility for the broader community is de-emphasized, personal responsibility is emphasized in terms of being a believer. Furthermore, calamity is understood as happening through personal fault. Rayford and Buck are left behind because of their personal failings: infidelity, closed-mindedness, and disbelief. The apocalypse is presented as an event that affects those who are sinners; however, the lesson is not to stop sinning, it is to understand that people should ask forgiveness from Christ for their bad behavior. As Irene says, “saved people aren’t good people, they’re just forgiven.”⁷⁶ This lesson that *Left Behind* teaches is that the utility of Christian agency is not to act like a better person, it is to devote yourself to God, which is seen through the actions of Rayford and Buck. The readers are supposed to believe that they have both changed drastically when, in reality, the only thing that has changed is their faith and not the way they treat other people.

Cyberstorm understands ideas of responsibility and agency differently than *Left Behind* largely because of its more secular plotline. However, despite different motivations mobilizing each text—*Left Behind* functioning as a persuasive series that encourages readers to convert or to stay steadfast in their Christian faith, and *Cyberstorm* providing a warning to readers in understanding the precarity of the large influence the internet has on global and domestic sociopolitical affairs—*Cyberstorm* comes to a similar conclusion about the relationship between social responsibility and apocalypse. Through exploring the collapse of New York City due to a catastrophic blizzard, transmission of a new strain of bird flu, and the shutdown of technology, events known as the cyberstorm, Mathers creates characters that also center their own perspectives and guilt without making any substantive moves towards change—mirroring many other white male characters in apocalypse novels, including those in *Left Behind*.

Cyberstorm's white protagonist, Mike Mitchell, describes himself as a down-to-earth, middle-class father. This humble self-description is betrayed by little details throughout the text showing that Mike is in fact a "junior partner in a venture capital fund specializing in social media" and that he lives in "a million-dollar condo" located in Manhattan.⁷⁷ The main conflict in Mike's life before the cyber storm that wreaks havoc upon Manhattan is that he felt like his pregnant wife, Lauren, did not think he was good enough because of his lack of generational wealth. These feelings of insecurity cause Mike to have a strained relationship with his uppity in-laws as well as influencing him to feel paranoid about a potential affair that Lauren is having with a male neighbor. It is clear from the beginning of the novel that Mike does not see himself as an agent in his own life, but instead as someone who has things happen *to* him that he cannot prevent or change.

As conflict and tensions rise when New York City appears to be under siege via cyber warfare combined with deadly winter storms, Mike's paranoid tendencies express themselves through flippant and casual racism. Throughout the novel, the characters living in Mike's upper-class condominium building are all given names, except for one family—"the Chinese family." Because Mike is convinced that China is behind the horror that has befallen his city and his family, he does not allow himself to extend the privilege of humanization to "the Chinese family." The contrast between how Mike describes the rest of his neighbors and "the Chinese family" is stark. While Mike visits his neighbors and talks through various conspiracy theories with the other men, he notes when "the Chinese family at the end of the hall wisely stayed inside" and refers to the part of the hall that "the Chinese family" occupies as "the Asian corner" that his friends are suspicious of because of their fears of China.⁷⁸

At the end of the novel, when Mike realizes that his paranoia about both his wife and China are completely unfounded, he does not ameliorate his relationship with his neighbors or even understand that how he treated his neighbors was racist and harmful. Instead, Mike reveals the lessons that he learned to be solely about himself:

I couldn't believe I'd been so blind, so short-sighted as to believe she'd been unfaithful when all she'd been trying to do was better her life, and mine. The same delusional, single-track thinking had almost cost us our lives when I'd been unable to understand what I saw in Washington as anything other than a Chinese invasion... Antonia giggled in my arms. Seventy thousand people had died, but at least one life had been saved. If none of this had happened, Lauren might have gotten an abortion, and I would never have known about it. I would never have had Antonia in my life, never known that she had existed, and I would probably have lost Lauren as well. Looking into Antonia's eyes, I realized my life had been saved too.⁷⁹

Mike's paranoia, as seen in the above passage, is understood as his biggest flaw. However, despite all the harm that his paranoia causes his Chinese neighbors, his wife, and ultimately his entire community, Mike's takeaway from the cyber storm is that he needs to be a more secure and trusting man as opposed to an analysis of the violence that is caused when non-white groups are blamed for strife.

Opportunities to advocate for increased social responsibility, feminism, and anti-racism are squandered in the conclusion. Mike's feelings of guilt do not ultimately transform into feelings of responsibility although he is well aware that his paranoia and rash behavior worked to negatively impact his community. Mike's conclusion is an expression of gratitude because he

interprets the whole event as a personal lesson in fidelity and the importance of a heteronormative nuclear family. With this in mind, the utility of agency in *Cyberstorm* is therefore to preserve structures that are in place. The unself-conscious conclusion that centers Mike and only Mike is more broadly advocating for a world where people should be grateful for what they have rather than try and advocate for change that would prevent racist conspiracy theories, violence, and harm. This perspective is emblematic of the white patriarch—a figure that specifically does not want any substantive change because that would unseat white men from their positions of power in their families, communities, and in the U.S. more broadly.

In this way, *Cyberstorm* is similar to the *Left Behind* series because there is a deep focus on personal responsibility and its relationship to morality. The guilt that characters like Rayford Steele, Buck Williams, and Mike Mitchell feel is associated with the way that they thought in the past. In all three instances, the men are guilty because the way they thought in the past made them act immorally. All three men recognize their past actions and take steps to reorient their thoughts—Rayford and Buck through conversion and Mike through his decision to trust his wife. However, these men stop short in understanding how their actions affected their broader community and therefore no impactful change is made. All three men have the opportunity to interrogate how they participate in harm, in both mundane and egregious ways. The apocalyptic events the men encounter instigate chains of self-reflection that have the power to radically alter how they understand their world. However, because of the way responsibility is understood, the apocalyptic event only works to solidify secular Christian values—namely those that place white men in positions of familial and communal power—that characterize dominant United States socio-political culture. This understanding of responsibility ultimately has a staggering

negative influence on employment opportunities, reproductive rights, and policing of women and people of color.

One pronounced way that both novels signify that violence, harm, and catastrophe are the fault of individuals is shown through how the characters of *Left Behind* and *Cyberstorm* discuss outbreaks of crime due to catastrophe. Both texts note that crime increases when either the rapture or the cyberstorm happen, respectively, even going as far as to show how the protagonists are victims of crimes: Rayford Steele's house is broken into and thieving conmen target Mike Mitchell's condominium complex looking for food and generators. In both instances, the perpetrators of the crimes are considered criminals and in both cases the police are brought in to help mete out punishment to the offenders. This treatment of crime reaffirms how responsibility functions in the logic of these texts. The "criminals" in each text are morally corrupt people, reduced to "bad guys" who are taking advantage of chaos because they know that the authorities do not have "the time or manpower to do a blessed thing about it."⁸⁰ Instead of showing how violence is often the result of failed state infrastructure to handle catastrophe, blame is instead placed on individuals regardless of whether the crime was committed in the name of survival.

These observations, while not explicating U.S. empire, do show instead how individual people are complicit in the continuation of empire. These two apocalyptic texts which warn of impending catastrophes do not provide a nuanced analysis that explains the fears of global catastrophe and the material reasons for why these catastrophes could very well happen. Instead, they both conclude by reaffirming a moral schema that persuades people to be complicit. Both Rayford and Mike conclude that they deserved facing the apocalypse because of their previous moral failures, but believe because they admit their guilt, they ultimately deserve protection or a

happy ending. These subtle (or not so subtle) messages directly advance U.S. imperial values and urge readers to morally reorient themselves to avoid the worst horrors apocalypse has to offer whilst reaffirming a key component of U.S. empire—white patriarchy.

The Long Apocalypse

Daniel Heath Justice observes that “the ‘end of days’ isn’t just the stuff of doomsday religionists or science fiction, but of historical memory and lived experience. It’s the template for our survival today, and that, I think, is key: our peoples survived” resonates with statements made by other artists and scholars such as John Akomfrah, Derrick Bell, Kyle Whyte, and Alexander Weheliye.⁸¹ Instead of fearing an imminent rapture or yet-to-happen catastrophe, scholars such as Justice emphasize that the horrors that many white people imagine and fear have already happened to people of color and Indigenous peoples—at the hands of white people. It is important to note that for many scholars who engage with Indigenous Studies and Afrofuturist thought, the apocalypse has already happened in the form of the Middle Passage, racial slavery, and the continued U.S. imperial project of settler-colonialism. I also want to make it clear that I am not conflating Indigenous and Black epistemologies. What I will show is that despite different histories and lived experiences, Indigenous and Black writers (as represented in U.S. American literature) sometimes arrive at similar conclusions about apocalypse: that empire and white patriarchy are not viable entities to organize around.

I have argued that there are two recognizable functions of apocalypse in U.S. culture. The first, which I have illustrated above, focuses on individual guilt, while the second focuses on the violence the state can commit against people in the name of power. This second definition is informed by centuries of Indigenous and Black scholarship and cultural production. In

Indigenous epistemologies, apocalypse is inherently related to the genocidal project of settler-colonialism. Settler-colonialism, an ongoing violence and erasure, assumes “that the colonial project has been realized: land has been dispossessed; its owners have been eliminated or absorbed.”⁸² Despite the inherent connection between settler-colonialism and apocalypse, Indigenous authors argue that the goal of Indigenous apocalypse is to fight against the idea that erasure has already happened to Indigenous peoples around the world, but in this case more specifically, in the United States. Grace Dillon argues that “many forms of Indigenous futurisms posit the possibility of an optimistic future by imagining a reversal of circumstances, where Natives win or at least are centered in the narrative.”⁸³ Similarly, Justice writes that “when apocalypse appears as an overt theme in Indigenous writing, it’s more than speculation—it’s experiential, even in its most fantastical, because in a very real way it hasn’t ended.”⁸⁴ Similarly, in many versions of apocalypse authored by Black cultural producers in the United States, apocalypse is inherently connected to the Middle Passage, racial slavery, and the continued impact of racial slavery (like the prison-industrial complex). As a multitude of scholars and artists who engage with Black Studies, including Kodwo Eshun, Mark Bould, and Mark Sinker, have suggested the relationship between African American experience and apocalypse is best described by Hip Hop group Public Enemy’s phrase “Armageddon been in effect” from the song “Countdown to Armageddon,” which shows that “slavery functioned as an apocalypse experienced as equivalent to alien abduction.”⁸⁵ However, “the triumph of Black American culture is that, forcibly stripped by the Middle Passage and Slavery Days of any direct connection with African mother culture, it has nonetheless survived.”⁸⁶ These observations made by scholars, artists, and culture producers all speak to the second function of apocalypse that I previously identified: apocalypse as an ongoing process producing systemic racism, genocide,

chaos, and destruction firmly rooted in imperial, capitalist, white supremacist, and heteronormative structures. These kinds of narratives work to show the chaos caused by U.S. empire and the many intertwined and entangled structures of oppression that work to maintain empire. Through examining how these kinds of apocalypse texts represent agency and responsibility, readers may understand how empire can be undermined through the act of taking responsibility in one's community and using one's agency to create and influence change.

Octavia E. Butler's *Parable of the Sower* features a young, Black, female protagonist, whose racialized and gendered identity, as I later argue, is key to understanding the relationship the characters have to empire. The novel is about humanity leading the world to its demise in a slow, but steady, decline of Californian, and more broadly U.S., society into madness, while the young, African American protagonist, Lauren Olamina, leads a group of survivors to try and find safety after their community was destroyed by drug-abusing, violent pyromaniacs and impoverished scavengers. These survivors, as Lauren J. Lacey notes, have to "work to create alternative relations based on cooperation rather than subjugation" while they travel North to attempt to find safety.⁸⁷ Before Lauren leaves her Baptist, diverse, declining middle-class community, she is a teenage girl who helps out in her community while trying to cope with a genetic disease she has called hyperempathy, which causes her to feel the pain of other people. Butler writes Lauren's character, highlighting her differences to "contribut[e] to the deconstruction of difference as the "other" to a stable identity. Here difference is not the opposite component of identity, but becomes part of the self."⁸⁸ Importantly, Sami Schalk notes that the many different components of Lauren's character must be contextualized within the setting the novel takes place in, arguing that this kind of "disability studies-grounded approach" allows readers to more critically analyze the "thematic, political, and theoretical connections with issues

of race, gender, and class in regard to technology and the future” that Butler presents in this novel.⁸⁹ Lauren compiles verses that come to her and creates or “discovers” a new religion based on the truths that also come to her. This new religion, Earthseed, is based on the premise that God is change and that the ultimate destination for those who follow Earthseed is to go to the stars. After her community is destroyed, Lauren and two of her former neighbors travel together, collecting other lost people along the way while Lauren starts to slowly explain what Earthseed is to her fellow companions, and they slowly start to believe in what she is saying. By the end of the novel, Lauren and her group find an abandoned farm away from the chaos of the world where they will start their new experimental community—leaving the readers with uncertain hope as the positions of the nascent Earthseed community are still fraught with danger. This novel espouses the idea that apocalypse can lead to radical change if people (in this case Lauren and her friends/followers) break away from the many systems that work towards oppression and cause the apocalypse. Despite her marginalized identity categories, Lauren has immense agency in *Parable of the Sower*, as well as the sequel *Parable of the Talents*. The reasons why Lauren has agency are twofold: first, the structures that uphold white supremacist, ageist, and sexist ideologies are collapsing into chaos and second, Lauren is a militant founder and follower of her religion, Earthseed.

In the year 2024, Butler envisions a world where structural boundaries continue to collapse. Jobs and resources become scarce, travel becomes dangerous, and every member of a community must contribute in order to ensure survival. Lauren is born into a close-knit, diverse community, and it is there that she learns about social responsibility. Despite Lauren’s young age—she is 15 at the onset of the novel—she is responsible for helping to educate the youths in the community, taking care of her younger siblings, and assisting in the day to day life of

Robledo. While many scholars focus on Lauren's journey after she is forced to leave a destroyed Robledo, it is important to remember that nearly half of *Parable of the Sower* details Lauren's life while she lives in Robledo, signifying that this portion of her life is vastly important to the person that Lauren becomes as she grows older.

Lauren is taught, by listening to conversations between her father and stepmother in particular about how agency is linked to social responsibility:

“Did you notice,” Dad said, “that every off duty watcher answered the whistles last night? They came out to defend their community... We can't think that way anymore. Cory, there's nobody to help us but God and ourselves. I protect Moss's place in spite of what I think of him, and he protects mine, no matter what he thinks of me. We all look out for one another... I know what it is to be left alone.

This is no world to be alone in.”⁹⁰

Through listening to this conversation, Lauren is able to learn how actions are essential because outside help is not coming. People have to act for their well-being, and that can only be done in tandem with efforts of the community. However, Lauren understands that her father and Cory fall short: their actions do not allow for progress, but stagnation. Lauren realizes that “it isn't enough for us to just survive, limping along, playing business as usual while things get worse and worse. If that's the shape we give to God, then someday we must become too weak—too poor, too hungry, too sick—to defend ourselves. Then we'll be wiped out.”⁹¹

This realization allows for Lauren to adopt and put into action her more militant Earthseed ideas of shaping change:

All that you touch
You Change.

All that you Change
Changes you.
The only lasting truth
Is Change.
God Is Change.⁹²

Lauren begins to assemble resources in an effort to shape change. These resources are from a diverse group of sources, primarily comprised of survival and history books from her grandmother who had a library. This library had texts on many topics, from Indigenous survival practices—such as where to find water in nature and what plants were edible—to books about Frederick Douglass. What we see is that to Lauren, agency must be exercised purposefully in order for social change to happen and that purposeful action can only occur if you are openminded, willing to use all of your available resources, and willing to be patient to allow resources such as seeds time to grow and develop. Once Lauren is forced out of her beloved community due to arson, she has to very purposefully go about creating community. The values that were instilled in her by her father and stepmother, and then altered and strengthened by Earthseed, push her to create a community based primarily on the idea that every member of Earthseed has agency and does enact change, purposefully or not.

Despite Lauren's focus on agency, it is clear that Butler is not advancing an argument in which individuals are responsible for the chaos and strife that create catastrophe throughout the novel. Instead, Butler posits that the structures that dictate United States sociopolitical life are the fundamental cause of violence, harm, and catastrophe that is illustrated throughout Butler's novel. Throughout the text, it is very clear that Butler is mobilizing the second definition of apocalypse that I proposed earlier: that apocalypse is an ongoing process produced by systemic

racism, genocide, chaos, and destruction firmly rooted in capitalist, white supremacist, and heteronormative structures. In many versions of apocalypse written, conceived of, or produced by Black authors and cultural producers in the United States, apocalypse is inherently connected to the Middle Passage, racial slavery, and the continued impact of racial slavery.

One major plotline that Butler introduces in her novel that connects this text to a long tradition of understanding the apocalypse as an ongoing phenomenon is how slavery functions in this fictional society. Due to the lack of jobs, and out of control inflation, many families and individuals must engage in debt slavery, where they are paid less than they need to survive and continuously are in debt to their employer and therefore lose their freedom. Debt slavery, a practice that has historically heavily impacted the Black community in the United States, is represented in the text as preying on vulnerable people of all races, who desperately are looking for some kind of income to support themselves and their families. Butler shows how forms of slavery have continued throughout time and will only be exacerbated by worsening political, environmental, and economic conditions.

In *Parable of the Sower*, the idea of debt slavery is first introduced with a discussion of Olivar—a corporation that is buying small towns and turning the towns citizens into a labor force. Lauren and her father are particularly suspicious of this, saying that it doesn't "matter how great Olivar looks, all [they'll] get from it in the end is debt and loss of freedom."⁹³ While not explicitly stated just yet at this point in the novel, Butler is specifically referencing the horrors of anti-Black racism and the impact white supremacy has on marginalized people through bringing up the idea of debt slavery and lack of freedom. Although Lauren is very clear about her position on companies like Olivar, it isn't until later in the text that the extent of slavery, and its racial implications, in the world of the text is revealed.

Lauren records a conversation about what the nascent Earthseed community will do for money in her diary between two members, an ex-slave named Emery described as having a Japanese father and a Black mother, and Harry, a white man from the same community as Lauren: “You might be able to get a job as a driver,” she said. “They like white men to be drivers. If you can read and write, and if you’d do the work, you might get hired.”⁹⁴ Harry, from his privileged position, mistakenly thinks that Emery is recommending that he could drive trucks for companies who are transporting secured goods. Emery immediately corrects him and says “trucks? No, I mean driving people. Making them work. Pushing them to work faster. Making them do ... whatever the owners says.”⁹⁵ Here there is a misunderstanding where Emery is referring Harry to a career as a slave driver and Harry thinks she means an automobile driver. This conversation reveals the horrific extent to which an apocalyptic scenario only exacerbates racialized power relations, putting people of color in precarious positions. What is even more interesting about this part, is that Harry, in many categories, does not live a privileged life. His entire family was murdered, his entire community was burned down, and he is a refugee looking for some kind of stable life for himself. However, despite that, the fact that he is a white male still allows him opportunities that would not be granted to others, and if he took those opportunities in order to feed and clothe himself, he would be participating in the subjugation of other human beings. Here, Butler is showing the reality of white supremacy as a primary structure in the U.S.: Harry would be complicit in anti-Black racism if he accepts this job. Although it would help him, and his community in the short term by providing needed monetary resources, it still would cause further harm in and outside his community which is why Harry affirms that he cannot accept this job.

It is important to remember that Lauren has recorded this conversation intentionally in her diary. To Lauren, there is utility in remembering this conversation because it speaks to the ideas of agency that she is so concerned about. By calling attention to this specific conversation, Lauren is highlighting how individual people, especially those who aren't in high level positions of power, while sometimes being immoral themselves, are often not the culprits, contrary to the concepts of agency and responsibility that the narratives of *Left Behind* and *Cyberstorm* advance. It is the social conditions created by the imperial state and late stage capitalism that allow corporations to enforce and explicitly endorse white, heteropatriarchal, supremacy.⁹⁶ As Walter Lipsitz argues, "failure to acknowledge our society's possessive investment in whiteness prevents us from facing the present openly and honestly."⁹⁷ The racism enforced by corporations and the privileged classes in the text help the reader to understand the importance of the kind of agency that Lauren espouses as necessary for change to happen. Although individuals are not responsible for suffering that is built into structures that prioritize hierarchy and profit over well-being and sustainability, people working together to purposefully enact change are required for these structures to be brought down.

Louise Erdrich also creates an apocalypse novel that shows how apocalypse is a long process initiated by structures such as racial slavery, settler colonialism, and imperialism in *Future Home of the Living God*. This novel, a beautiful testimony to the endurance of community and a tragic reminder of the violence inflicted by the United States against Indigenous women, tells the story of Cedar Songmaker. described as a young woman whose own concept of her identity is her biggest concern. The book begins with Cedar's first journal entry to her unborn baby, saying:

When I tell you that my white name is Cedar Hawk Songmaker and that I am the adopted child of Minneapolis liberals, and that when I went looking for my Ojibwe parents and found that I was born Mary Potts I hid the knowledge, maybe you'll understand. Or not. I'll write this anyway, because ever since last week things have changed. Apparently—I mean, nobody knows—our world is running backward. Or forward. Or maybe sideways, in a way as yet ungrasped. I am sure somebody will come up with a name for what is happening, but I cannot imagine how everything around us and everything within us can be fixed. What is happening involves the invisible, the quanta of which we are created. Whatever is actually occurring, there is constant breaking news about how it will be handled—speculation, really, concerning what comes next—which is why I am writing an account.⁹⁸

This (long) excerpt from the very beginning of the novel immediately calls to its central concerns: the intersectionality of identity; the chaos and uncertainty of apocalypse; and the desire for a sense of agency, similar to Butler's *Parable of the Sower*.

Cedar primarily understands agency in how she interprets her own identity. Throughout her life, Cedar has conflicting understandings of who she is and makes specific and conscious decisions that allow her to take control of her own identity even as people (like her adopted parents and peers) label her in ways that do not necessarily reflect the reality of her day to day life, especially as Cedar grows up and goes to college, where she discovers the “other indigenes” who showed her that “confusingly, [she] had no struggle.”⁹⁹ Here, Cedar is specifically referring to how her adopted parents romanticized her identity as an Indigenous woman and that her internal battles for understanding herself, while challenging, are very different than the reality

many Indigenous people experience being an Indigenous person in the United States. Once Cedar came to terms with the fact that she felt disconnected with her concept of herself, she “embraced Catholicism,” creating for herself an intellectual life and community that reflected the disparate parts of herself that previously, had not seemed to connect.¹⁰⁰ Once Cedar is pregnant, she takes another step in cultivating her own identity by going to meet her biological family, the Potts, for the first time.

Despite the fact that Cedar’s motivations are primarily self-centered—she is looking to better understand her place in the world as well as the place of her unborn child—the pointed steps Cedar takes in order to understand herself are explicitly explained as ways for her to create “a web of connections” that will allow her to be a part of a community.¹⁰¹ At the beginning of the novel, the utility of Cedar’s vaguely defined concept of her own identity and desire for community is not clear. As the novel progresses, it becomes clear that the way Cedar has exercised her agency in creating her own concept of herself clarifies Cedar’s concept of social responsibility. Once one belongs to a community, in Cedar’s mind, you are both the responsibility of and responsible for the safety of that community. Once Cedar is seen as both an enemy of and the property of the state, due to the fact that she has a viable pregnancy, the importance of Cedar’s understanding of agency and responsibility are made clear. Because Cedar took steps in the beginning of the novel to understand and create her identity, she was provided with a community that tried their best to protect her while she was a fugitive. The consequences of Cedar asserting her agency are tremendous: Cedar has the privilege of an entire group of people working towards ensuring her safety. This communal effort in breaking Cedar out of the hospital even allows Cedar to help save one of her prison hospital roommates, Tia.

Although Cedar's ability to help her community in return is reduced to the single instance of including Tia in her own escape plan due to her incarceration and fugitive status, she still feels the weight of social responsibility. This is made clear by Cedar's final editor's note in her Catholic publication, *Zeal*, in which she writes: "someone has been tortured on my behalf. Someone has been tortured on your behalf. Someone in this world will always be suffering on your behalf. If it comes your time to suffer, just remember. Someone suffered for you. That is what taking on a cloak of human flesh is all about, the willingness to hurt for another human being."¹⁰² This poignant and powerful quote shows that Cedar understands humans to be connected to each other and responsible for each other. Suffering is not a pointless and painful phenomenon, but a powerful tribute to the degree of responsibility that people have for each other. Cedar recognizes that the suffering experienced in her life is due to the love and care people have for others. Cedar is suffering for her unborn child and her family (both biological and adopted) are suffering to protect her. This idea of individual responsibility for one's community does not imply that individuals are therefore responsible for catastrophe. Erdrich's novel instead shows how heteronormative, white-supremacist, and patriarchal structures work to cause and then exacerbate problems. This is seen throughout the novel in the way that Erdrich describes the different steps of Cedar's incarceration as well as through how Cedar's stepfather Eddy is able to gain a greater sense of freedom as he organizes the taking back of land and resources for the Ojibwe.

This understanding of responsibility actually works to influence the agency that the protagonists have. Both Lauren and Cedar, despite the conditions they are facing as young, vulnerable, non-White women, cause positive and material change through their actions. This form of agency, although empowering, does not completely eliminate suffering. Both Cedar and

Lauren face imprisonment and torture, and it is unclear if Cedar actually survives what she is put through at the hands of the state; however, both characters are consistently working towards a world in which they and their loved ones can thrive together. Responsibility in *Parable of the Sower* and *Future Home of the Living God* does not result in feelings of guilt, but instead in feelings of empowerment. Cedar and Lauren are empowered, by their community members, their faith, and even by fear, to actively work towards change. They become agents through their realizations that the state will not help them and that the catastrophes they are living through are the continuation of consequences for racist, heteropatriarchal, and capitalist structures. They must, and do, intentionally incorporate reflections on the relationships among white supremacy, U.S. empire, and action in order to create and participate in communities that work to support its members rather than create hierarchies that marginalize members of the community. Their agency results in efforts to break free from these systems of oppression, showing the power that responsibility can have.

Toward the End of Empire

Both Butler and Erdrich work to showcase how catastrophe can place marginalized peoples in even more precarious positions, but both also show that catastrophe (both caused and perpetuated by capitalism, racism, and patriarchy) can be combatted by a radical commitment to community care. In both novels, the protagonists understanding of responsibility encourages them to each take actions to work towards creating a community outside of the Western world order that has been complicit in causing them, along with the rest of the world, harm. Responsibility then, can be seen in two ways in Butler's and Erdrich's novels: as personal and social responsibility. First, the horrifying conditions that the protagonists live in are the

culmination of centuries of oppression, manipulation, and abuse of minoritized people and natural resources and not the responsibility of individual people. This, however, does not mean that the authors are arguing for a world in which people are complacent and accepting of these evils. Instead, the authors offer an alternative: individual people are responsible for their communities and responsible for creating and fostering communities that will allow all people to thrive.

Despite the fact that apocalypse is understood in vastly different ways, it is still clear that apocalyptic narratives are concerned with the potential for chaos and the role of empire in that chaos. By interrogating the worlds created in U.S.-based apocalyptic narratives, readers can more clearly understand how U.S. empire does not just impact political realities of foreign governments and peoples; it also impacts the very way people understand their roles as individuals in their communities domestically. All the different narratives represented above take place in a U.S. imperial context, and despite their many differences from each other, they are all working to understand what people can do in the face of catastrophe with the ultimate goal of convincing their readership to behave in specific ways.

I began this chapter by suggesting that apocalypse novels examine the relationships among empire, responsibility, and agency. Although many apocalypse novels, such as *Left Behind* and *Cyberstorm*, reinforce the supremacy of the U.S. empire by emphasizing the morality of individual people and incorporating right-wing talking points, there are apocalypse novels, such as *Parable of the Sower* and *Future Home of the Living God*, that reimagine how people can understand their relationship to empire by thinking critically about how U.S. empire creates apocalyptic scenarios, primarily through white supremacist policies. Through reading these apocalypse novels, readers learn that the only viable method of change that takes the United

States off a path hurtling towards catastrophe is the path advocated by authors such as Butler and Erdrich, that of communal responsibility and care that undermines and even works directly against the imperial U.S. states. The radical paths of resistance that Butler and Erdrich's characters take are not guaranteed to end an imperial regime that has developed in the last few centuries, and they are not guaranteed to be easy. These authors imagine, however, an alternative model of apocalypse that provides hope for change when the chaos surrounding U.S. empire can seem permanent and resistance futile.

Chapter 2: Apocalypse Communities: Feminisms, Culture Wars, and Social Justice

“Yet most people still long for community and that yearning is the place of possibility, the place where we might begin as a nation to think and dream anew about the building of beloved community.” – bell hooks, *Belonging: A Culture of Place*

“These drives are the gift of God to produce the motivation for procreation, which is still the primary social purpose of humankind. That gift influences not only a man’s sexual behavior but also his personality, work, motivation, and almost every other characteristic in his life.” – Tim and Beverly LaHaye, *The Act of Marriage: The Beauty of Sexual Love*

Introduction

In the 1960s, Tim and Beverly LaHaye were just beginning their careers as right-wing political activists although most knew them for their involvement in the San Diego fundamentalist Christian community as well as for Tim’s self-help books pertaining to mental-health, marriage, and religion, featuring titles such as *Spirit-Controlled Temperament* (1966) and *How to be Happy Though Married* (1968). Beverly LaHaye, ever the supportive wife through Tim’s various endeavors—he received both a doctorate in ministry and a doctorate in literature, published dozens of books, and founded a Christian college in San Diego as well as the Council for National Policy—was simultaneously hard at work opposing the ERA as a grass roots activist. By the mid 1970s, Beverly LaHaye was incensed at the direction she believed feminism was heading. She feared that feminism, through the ever-increasing influence of secular humanism, was whittling away what she saw as the central U.S. American community structure: the family. Despite her firm insistence that men were the leaders of the family, and by extension, the country, she founded the Concerned Women for America, a political group whose goal was, and still is, to empower women to engage in political campaigning to maintain the laws and uphold the culture that supports traditional conservative Christian families in the United States.

Although the LaHayes are not well known, their decades-long work in religious, literary, and political communities reveals a persistent and important, albeit alarming, perspective on how some conservative U.S. citizens view the organization and purpose of community. This perspective focuses mostly on the centrality of a male-headed nuclear family and how this male-headed nuclear family is ordained by God in order to fulfill the main purpose of humankind, procreation, as the quote above insists. The divide in this perspective from other, more liberal and leftist understandings of community, serves as an example of the culture wars of the late 20th century and their afterlives in the 21st century. The rest of this chapter will explore the relationships among the culture wars, feminism, and apocalypse during this period.

Despite the rigid rules of community that Christian Right activists have espoused, community is a site of possibility. A strong, healthy community has the power to influence and reinforce relationships forged by love, reciprocity, and respect. Communities built on foundations of love, reciprocity, and respect have the potential for healing past traumas caused by systemic violence and catastrophe. As bell hooks poignantly states in the quote above, community is a desired structure, and that desiring of a strong and healthy community is a place of hope. But how does desire of community realize itself? How can hope for a better future be enacted at the communal level in order to develop “beloved community?” There are many ways to approach the question of community and of community building. I argue that apocalypse literature is deeply invested in the question of community creation. Because apocalypse literature is invested in exploring what happens to people as their systems collapse and chaos and catastrophe ensue, most apocalypse narratives show how community creation is a way for people to survive through the sharing of resources and emotional support that human beings give each other when in community with one another. However, despite the fact that most apocalypse

novels imagine community as a way for survival during catastrophe, not all the communities imagined in apocalypse novels are built upon foundations of love, reciprocity, and respect. Instead, some apocalypse novels imagine communities that reinforce unethical structures of violence perpetuated and enforced by U.S. empire. Because community structures are multifaceted, there are many ways to understand whether community is working towards ideals that promote equity and healing. One way of understanding the purpose of a specific community is through analysis of the presence or absence of feminism.

This chapter moves from discussing individual relationships to community to thinking through how the presence or absence of feminism impacts the structure and inspires the purpose of community. I focus on mapping the feminist, patriarchal, and/or anti-feminist ideas that shape apocalyptic texts, particularly in *Left Behind: A Novel of the Earth's Last Days*, *Cyberstorm*, *Parable of the Sower*, and *Future Home of the Living God*, to highlight the relationships communities have to U.S. culture, and the radical turn towards justice and freedom when care and empowered peace is the goal rather than domination. By asking what feminism means in each text, and by taking the lead from women of color feminist thought and applying historical materialist analysis to my texts, I hope to show that apocalypse authors who engage with lived realities rather than fantasies of destruction create blueprints for communities that strive towards sustainability and peace. I argue that analyzing feminist and patriarchal ideologies in apocalypse novels allows readers a chance to understand that the presence of a feminist imaginative impacts the relationship a community has to U.S. empire, and therefore helps to unveil the purpose of the community. Apocalypse texts show how women of color feminist thought works towards imaginative solutions and practices for enduring and surviving catastrophe inspired by historical events and lived experiences. Alternatively, apocalypse texts also show how patriarchal and

essentialist feminist ideologies advocate for a recommitment to sexist and white supremacist ideologies by threatening readers with narratives of destruction. Additionally, this analysis will consider the debates about the U.S. “culture wars,” showing how the concerns vocalized in the 90s have shifted and amplified through the second decade of the 21st century.

In order to advance the idea that imaginative feminist communities work to create healthy and sustainable communities that break unethical relationships to U.S. empire, I first explain how communities in apocalypse texts form around an amorphous antagonist. These ideas of poorly defined and evolving antagonists inspire apocalyptic communities to be formed, albeit different kinds of communities are formed depending on the goals and politics of the author. I will explain what community means and what its function is in order to then move into a discussion of the radical potential community-creating holds. I will particularly focus on ideas of “beloved community” and “communities of care,” two important ways of conceptualizing the radical potential of community theorized by bell hooks after explaining what community is and why it is important to the texts I examine. Next, I will situate the 1990s in terms of the culture wars of this time in order to show how ideological arguments, like those surrounding feminism, were at the forefront of socio-political discussion. For example, I explain how key activist figures worked for or against women’s rights to issues such as bodily autonomy and right to vote. I then explain how gender is a fruitful site for analysis in thinking through community. My discussion will focus on how feminisms can influence the purpose of community in wildly different ways; for example, essentialist feminism is weaponized by evangelical women trying to maintain patriarchy while women of color and intersectional feminist ideologies can be used in thinking through material steps towards decolonization of the U.S. Apocalypse novels, while exploring fictional narratives, reflect culture wars over the definition of “woman” that have deep roots, as I

explain by telling the histories of some feminists who shaped different and sometimes conflicting understandings of womanhood and the roles women are expected to play in community structures.

Next, I show how essentialist feminism, patriarchy, and goals of domination inform both *Left Behind* and *Cyberstorm*. These overt themes use essentialist and evangelical feminist understandings of womanhood that aid patriarchy, ultimately showing formations of patriarchal communities in times of crisis that replicate structures of U.S. empire that helped to contribute to catastrophe in the first place. On the other hand, *Parable of the Sower* and *Future Home of the Living God* show how women of color and intersectional feminist ideologies, combined with the intentions of creating communities of care are able to successfully work towards radical resistance against U.S. empire. These novels, despite showing a radical vision of the power of community, are directly informed by lived experiences of marginalized folks, particularly women of color and Indigenous women, who face the brunt of violence of U.S. empire in the domestic sphere. I further analyze these novels in relation to the changing meaning of the “culture wars,” by reading *Left Behind* alongside *Parable of the Sower* and *Cyberstorm* with *Future Home of the Living God* in order to show how the political climate of the time helped to inform these texts and in turn how these texts respond to the political climate. I conclude by showing how the hope that *Left Behind* and *Cyberstorm* offers their readers is based on continuation of hierarchical structures, particularly white supremacist patriarchy, that cause harm, while *Parable of the Sower* and *Future Home of the Living God* imagine how to move away from unsustainable and violent models of community that provide hope grounded in realistic understandings of the violent power of U.S. imperial retaliation. Ultimately, these examples show that the way apocalypse communities are imagined mirrors tensions in culture

wars about different aspects of community, illustrating clearly how different understandings of womanhood and feminism can ultimately impact who is cared for in and by U.S. empire and who is subjected to apocalyptic violence at the hands of the United States.

Defining Community

Apocalypse novels are interesting in that many times the antagonist of the apocalypse novel is not a single identifiable entity but instead a more elusive existential threat. Because of this, the main characters of apocalypse novels usually form communities (typically around the protagonist) in order to survive the amorphous antagonist. Examples of these formidable antagonists include nuclear war instigated by hostile countries (unsurprisingly, many nuclear apocalypse novels highlight Russia as the nuclear antagonist), monstrous viral threats that infect a majority of the human population, or even a devastatingly catastrophic storm or other horrific climate crisis phenomenon. In nearly all instances, the solution to battling these formidable opponents lies in the strength of the bonds formed between a community of main characters who must overcome their different backgrounds and pre-catastrophe understandings of social order to work together towards survival. The novels that I engage with are no exception to this trend, although all four novels have different existential threats that communities work to fend off, as I will show below. The different ways that the authors portray community does not take away from the fact that each novel has clearly identified communities of people.

This trend in disparate apocalypse novels begs the question: what is community and how is it created? Despite the fact that community is often easily recognizable, it is not easily defined, and in fact, as Miranda Joseph notes, “the term “community” is used so pervasively that it would appear to be nearly meaningless.”¹⁰³ While she makes a salient point about the pervasiveness of

the word community and its various meanings, I do believe that understanding these definitions aids us in understanding communal relationships.

The term “community” is highlighted in *Keywords for American Cultural Studies* because of its pervasive impact on many facets of U.S. American politics and culture. As Joseph notes, not only does the term signify a relationship between a group of affiliated people, but it also signifies the affiliation of the speaker with a political cause.¹⁰⁴ Because the term “community” has strong cultural capital, the term is used for a variety of purposes, often connected to (dis)identification with ‘society,’ the neoliberal ideas of the centrality of capitalism, and capitalism’s relationship to neoliberal identity politics. This clear relationship between the deployment of “community” with specific neoliberal and capitalist agendas has engendered much criticism of the word community and its possibilities; scholars have many times showed how the rhetorical impact of community often results in reinforcement of harmful structures that perpetuate violence and maintain white supremacist patriarchal hierarchies. For example, “feminist activists and scholars [like Martin and Mohanty (1986)] have argued that the desire for communion, unity, and identity among women tended in practice to make the women’s movement white, bourgeois, and U.S.-centric.”¹⁰⁵ Despite the fact that community is rhetorically deployed by U.S. empire to maintain power and influence loyalty, community can conversely work to dismantle these relationships. In its relation to American Cultural Studies, “community thus can be understood as a necessary supplement to the circulation of state power and capital: as such, it not only enables capital and power to flow, but it also has the potential to displace those flows.”¹⁰⁶ This definition, of community both being used as a force for U.S. empire and as a force against it, is seen explicitly in my exploration of contemporary U.S. apocalypse novels, as

they too illustrate the malleability of the function of community depending on who forms the structure and articulates the purpose of community.

Connected to community's relationship to U.S. empire, community is also fundamentally concerned with ideas of boundaries. In *The Symbolic Construction of Community*, anthropologist Anthony P. Cohen notes that "boundary encapsulates the identity of community."¹⁰⁷ Here, Cohen is signifying that in order to understand a community it is vital to understand what a community considers as its boundaries. Due to the often nebulous form community can take, understanding the boundaries of a community can help inform an understanding of the purpose of a specific community, therefore allowing a more specific understanding of a community's relationship to U.S. empire. Some examples of these kinds of boundaries include geography, language, religious and spiritual ideologies, and political affiliation. These boundaries are not uniform across communities and are instead defined based on the context the community is formed in. For example, in *Cyberstorm* the community that develops is largely informed by who is living in the building of the protagonist, Mike. Due to their survival efforts and dwindling supplies, the community of people living in the condominium high-rise have strict rules about who is allowed into their community. These community boundaries are much different than, for example, Octavia Butler's conceptualization of community in *Parable of the Sower*. Instead of being limited by resources, Lauren's boundaries are determined by who is willing to follow the tenets of Earthseed and contribute to the survival of the entire community.

The boundaries that communities define contribute to an understanding of the relationship between U.S. empire and community because communities can and do state their relationships to the United States. For example, in *Left Behind*, the characters explicitly demonize Nicolae Carpathia's plans for universal healthcare, legalized abortion, and a global

currency. While not explicitly saying that their Tribulation Force is supportive of the U.S. empire, readers will recognize that their community is formed in part to advocate for policies that the U.S. either actively enforces or repeatedly attempts to enforce, such as the continuous and successful efforts to overturn *Roe v. Wade* by right-wing politicians. By creating a litany of shared values, the community created in *Left Behind* effectively creates boundaries that are ultimately in support of state policies. Alternatively, the community that Cedar is part of in *Future Home of the Living God* is decolonial and therefore opposed to U.S. empire. This is made clear because the community that is formed aids women who are targeted by U.S. government officials due to their fertility potential. Nobody is allowed to be part of that community if they agree with how the U.S. is handling the steep decline in birth rate. Additionally, those in the community of people working to save the incarcerated must accept the Ojibwe's desire for sovereignty as the rescues are made possible due to the mobilization of resources by the Ojibwe people. Ultimately, by identifying the boundaries that communities establish, it is clear whether community is being used to further national and/or imperial causes or to challenge and thwart these causes.

In addition to boundaries, community is largely defined by imagination. As Benedict Anderson notes in his seminal *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, "all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined. Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined."¹⁰⁸ While Anderson is arguing that nations themselves are imagined communities, his point about the centrality of imagination to community is essential in understanding community. To Anderson, an important defining characteristic of community is a perceived understanding of "a deep, horizontal comradeship."¹⁰⁹

The comradeship Anderson identifies in community can be imagined, especially in the context of thinking of nation as community, where people who do not know each other and have never met imagine themselves a part of a large sprawling national community; however, in smaller communities' comradeship can be genuine and based on repeated contact. In apocalypse novels, comradeship in community is based on the contact people have with each other, and their shared imagined goal: hope of survival. Imagination drives feelings of hope. By imagining a hopeful future where the communities' goals are met, communities are able to have something to work towards, a purpose.

In apocalypse novels, hope is essential to community formation. The people who band together to form a community have to hope that they will survive in order to devise methods that will allow them to outsmart and/or outlive the catastrophe and chaos that threaten their lives. bell hooks writes about beloved community, a form of community that is focused on comradeship, hope, and love. Importantly, bell hooks grounds her idea of beloved community in the present. Community, while informed by the past and hopeful for the future, is ultimately “a foundation for us to [revise] and renew our commitment to the present, to making a world where all people can live fully and well; where everyone can belong.”¹¹⁰ By emphasizing the present, hooks shows the importance of community to the now. In apocalypse novels, this idea of community being important to the present is key because of the uncertainty of the future. The future, while hoped for and imagined, cannot be the goal when the present is the only guarantee. Additionally, the present is the place where people can feel like they belong.

Part of beloved community, community where people belong, are loved and respected, and can grow, is the creation of a culture of belonging. Carol Lee Flinders, in *Rebalancing the World*, defines a culture of belonging as “intimate connection with the land to which one

belongs, empathetic relationship to animals, self-restraint, custodial conservation, deliberateness, balance, expressiveness, generosity, egalitarianism, mutuality, affinity for alternative modes of knowing, playfulness, inclusiveness, nonviolent conflict resolution, and openness of spirit.”¹¹¹ This definition of a culture of belonging emphasizes belonging with the people who are in the same community with you and valuing different epistemologies informed by different cultural, racial, religious, and gendered backgrounds, among other identity categories. A culture of belonging creates a community where people will not be ostracized for deviating from dominant ways of understanding identity. Non-white, queer, and/or disabled people, for example, would not be “othered” in a culture of belonging. In addition to people belonging to their community of other people, hooks and Flinders note the centrality of land stewardship. A culture of belonging can only be created if sustainable relationships with land are formed. People have to belong with each other as well as to the land. Apocalypse novels reveal how crucial relationship to land is; when current extractive, predatory, and unsustainable capitalist practices fail, it is knowledge of the land that aids in survival.

Ultimately, community is difficult to define because it is a site of possibility. Relationships formed through and by community can be used to aid or destroy U.S. empire, to support or fight against white supremacy, to ignore climate catastrophe or to rethink human-earth relationships. The communal boundaries formed help people understand what a community’s goals are and therefore can aid in understanding the imagined goal of a community. In an ideal world, all communities would strive towards creating beloved community; however, that is not the reality, and in fact, is rare to find. Apocalypse novels, I argue, are deeply invested in understanding the purpose and structure of community. By creating narratives that place people in the most fraught of conditions and by engaging with their current cultural and political

climate, apocalypse authors theorize how community can aid in survival, and in turn, show readers how different political and social goals are directly related to community structure.

The Culture Wars: The 1990s

The cultural context that the authors were writing in is key to understanding fully how apocalypse novels theorize community; in this case, both Octavia Butler and Tim LaHaye were writing their apocalypse novels during the advent of the late-twentieth century “culture wars” in the United States. The so-called “culture wars” is a term that encapsulates the perception that there was increased polarization in social and political ideology in the United States. While the term had been used in the United States in the early- and mid-twentieth century to describe increased tensions between religious groups as well as recently immigrated folks due to different social ideologies, the term was given a new life in 1991 when James Davison Hunter, a U.S. American sociologist, published a book titled: *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America*. In this text, Hunter argues that cultural conflict shifts in the late-twentieth century due to “the impulse toward orthodoxy and the impulse toward progressivism.”¹¹² For Hunter, cultural conflict is defined “very simply as political and social hostility rooted in different systems of moral understanding.”¹¹³ Hunter believed that there was a *perception* of increased polarization based most reductively on left-leaning and right-leaning political views. He argues that although there was less hostility and conflict between religious groups in the U.S., that the rise in secularism began to pave ways for conflict—the fact that there were increasing amounts of people whose moral system was not based on Judeo-Christian religions was troubling to some people in the United States. On the other hand, demands for civil rights and liberties outside of what was granted by the largely Protestant moral system that informed U.S. laws and policies

were being made by groups that were considered “leftist” and “secularist.” Note that Hunter emphasizes that the culture wars were largely contingent on a perceived idea that there were two different “sides” that were directly at odds with each other. He argues that this perception was largely driven by the media as well as more radical individual people who had the resources to share and enforce their agendas.

This argument received pushback from many critics. Some scholars believed that the existence of a “culture war” was too extreme a label for the reality of the U.S. cultural and political landscape. As sociologist Rhys Williams argues “following the everyday use of myth as something that is not literally true, the culture war is a myth. It does not actually exist either in the streets or in the many indicators used [in this book] to assess whether there are cultural cleavages that could be mobilized into warlike conflict.”¹¹⁴ He follows this assertion with many examples of sociological studies that draw distinctions between the polarizing rhetoric of political leaders “who call to arms” and followers who “fail to respond.”¹¹⁵ However, despite scholarly skepticism about the existence of a culture war, it is clear that many scholars did see the utility in examining the culture wars phenomenon. As Williams notes, “while the culture wars may not be literally true the resonance of the idea expresses a truth about American (sic) politics. That truth understands the important role that culture plays in our political history and the ways in which symbols and stories help form who we are and who we are against.”¹¹⁶ In studying the viability of the culture war theory that Hunter proposed, many scholars in the late 1990s come to the same uneasy conclusion as Williams: that there is not a war and therefore the military language is inaccurate, but there is something going on in the culture of the United States that is cause for concern.

Importantly, Hunter's thesis, and therefore many of the scholars responding to him, focuses on morality and therefore his examples are drawn mostly from conflict between different religious groups that have different historical and ethnic, though largely European, backgrounds. This analytic lens, while important, leaves out other important identity categories not necessarily solely informed by religious background such as gender, race, and sexuality. By doing this, the studies largely do not consider people in the 1990s who were targeted or dismissed by the government due to their racial, gender, or sexual identities and the subsequent protests and social movements that were formed in trying to fight back. Some examples include the Black communities in Los Angeles who were targeted by the police, real estate agencies, and the CIA; women, such as Anita Hill, who were fighting for equality and safety in the workplace; and those impacted by the AIDs crisis. Many people, in just the limited examples I provided, were threatened by and even died directly at the hands of the largely white, Protestant, male-led U.S. state. By primarily studying those who identify with specific religious groups, much of the cultural unrest of the 1990s is obscured. I believe that it is more useful to examine the representations of social movements such as feminism to get a fuller picture of how people were responding to new perspectives that challenged the status quo. In what follows, I explain the many different threads of feminism and anti-feminism that help to contribute to the cultural unrest in the 1990s that resulted in the "culture wars."

Feminisms in Community

In the United States, feminism has had a tumultuous history, and had been a key cause of concern in the culture wars. Many different understandings of feminism worked to shape influential communities over the last several centuries. Feminism has become such a ubiquitous

term that it is difficult to separate multiple and heterogeneous strands of feminist ideologies and goals. Kyla Schuller, introducing her book on the counter-history of United States feminism, says “as a movement for social justice, feminism now seems to stand for nothing at all—as likely to be motivated by racist self-interest as by a desire to minimize suffering and fight for equality.”¹¹⁷ One prominent tension between feminist communities, a tension that Schuller thoroughly and artfully tracks, has been the ideological differences between white feminism and intersectional feminism due to white feminism’s focus on upholding white supremacy and capitalism and intersectional feminism’s focus on deconstructing structures of harm that impact more than just women in the United States and then building new structures that work differently. Additionally, there have been very vocal anti-feminist groups that explicitly denounce any kind of feminist ideology. Apocalypse books that take place in the United States similarly reflect the tensions that appear in histories of United States feminism. Before I begin to explicate how apocalypse novels respond to and shape these tensions, I will first explain some key moments and people in the history of feminisms (and antifeminism).

In the mid 20th century, feminism was a highly contested topic. Not only were there heated debates about whether feminism was a valid ideology and social justice pursuit, but feminists had many different ideas of what feminism should look like depending on religion, class, and race. Feminism was (and still is) a highly contested topic because of what is at stake: feminism has the power to completely upend and change United States social order. Some women, like Betty Friedan, focused solely on the plight of middle-class white women and their inability to access capitalist white male spaces due to confinement in traditional Western patriarchal gender roles. Many note that Friedan’s immensely popular book, *The Feminine Mystique*, helped to usher in the second wave of feminism which focused on liberation and

equality yet fell short in that the means to liberation and equality that the book calls for does not center systemic change that would liberate working-class women and women of color.

In fact, many of the suggestions that Friedan has for her audience of white middle class women displace domestic labor onto working-class women and women of color. In 1966, Friedan helped to cofound the National Organization of Women (NOW), an organization that still is active today. Although the movement was founded by a mixture of intersectional and white feminists, the politics of NOW firmly supported white feminist ideology under Friedan, the president of NOW. Importantly, for Friedan “feminism had internal enemies who threatened the success of the movement and must be eliminated, and those enemies were lesbians.”¹¹⁸ As Schuller argues, “under Friedan’s leadership, NOW treated women as a class unto themselves, held back by sex alone.”¹¹⁹ This narrow focus on sex rather than the intersection of different identity categories is instrumental to understanding the politics of feminism in the late 20th century. The danger in this narrow view is that it benefits white middle- and upper-class women in the short term by granting them increased access to white patriarchal capitalist male spaces. However, this version of feminism is dangerous not only in the way that it disregards the needs and calls for justice and equality of working-class women and women of color but also that it reaffirms white supremacy, patriarchy, and capitalism.

Other women took more radical approaches to feminism—thinking through ways that Western society needed to fundamentally change in order for gender equality to exist. Women such as Audre Lorde and Pauli Murray advocated for Black feminist ideologies that recognize the inseparability of race and gender in the struggle for social justice and equality. During the 20th century, anti-Black racism ran rampant throughout the United States. Feminist organizations were not exempt from racism which impacted both the leadership and the goals of the

organizations that were working to promote women's equality. While there are many examples of this happening in organizations in the United States, a particularly glaring example of racism impacting feminist community organization is that of National Organization of Women. NOW, which I previously noted was cofounded by Betty Friedan was also cofounded by Pauli Murray, an accomplished civil rights activist, lawyer, Episcopal priest, and author. She was a long-time advocate and activist who specifically worked to organize spaces where "Black women and white women join[ed] together in coalition to fight the concentration of power in the hands of wealthy men."¹²⁰ Murray was the first Black person to receive a JSD in the United States and additionally was cited as a precedent by Kimberle Crenshaw in developing her seminal theory of intersectionality. Murray's hope for NOW, despite introducing Betty Friedan to the underground network of passionate intersectional feminist activists, was overrun by Friedan's goal of "enabling middle-class women to thrive" and Murray left the organization to pursue biblical studies and teaching.¹²¹

Another prominent radical feminist author was Audre Lorde, a poet, activist, and teacher. Lorde developed intersectional feminist community through her writing and teaching. She importantly founded Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press which published and promoted women of color authored texts. Additionally, Lorde's activism extended beyond feminist and racial politics of the United States as she was a founding member of an organization that worked to support and advocate for women living under apartheid in South Africa called Sisterhood in Support of Sisters in South Africa. What is interesting to note is that many Black feminists developed community through networks of writing and through education. Many women who are key to the development of intersectional and women of color feminism have worked in and around academic spaces to learn and educate others about the importance of adopting an

intersectional framework that takes into consideration not only the overlapping impact that different identity categories have in United States political and social culture but also a framework that advocates listening to minoritized peoples and organizing around causes to support them.

Less well known are radical evangelical feminists such as Nancy Hardesty and Letha Scanzoni who “argued that the modern version of the Bible evangelicals read and preached from was itself an interpretation... critique[ing] not the Bible but the men who translated, interpreted, and applied the Bible to modern life” in order to show how United States evangelical culture was not inherently patriarchal, but instead purposefully so through patriarchal interpretations that favored the subordination of women.¹²² During the ratification period of time for the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA)—1972-1982—evangelical and feminist women like Hardesty and Scanzoni felt like there were no avenues for their evangelical and feminist beliefs to be heard. Consequently, these women worried that more vocal anti-feminist evangelicals would misrepresent the evangelical community in regard to feminist beliefs. In 1974, evangelical feminists founded the Evangelical Women’s Caucus (EWC), an organization that “wrote, spoke, and struggled against what they viewed as the church’s restrictive definition of womanhood.”¹²³ The EWC emerged from evangelical Christian gatherings called “Thanksgiving Workshops,” which began in Chicago in 1973 and were held over Thanksgiving weekend. These gatherings were open to all evangelicals, not just women, and topics of discussion covered a wide range of social justice issues in relation to Biblical scripture:

... these people challenged whether fundamentally conservative evangelical Christianity and conservative politics were inherently tied together. In a historical example of asking “What Would Jesus Do?,” the Thanksgiving Workshop attendants grappled with tough social issues. Did scripture (and therefore God) support the Vietnam War? Did it demand the continued denial of civil rights to black people and other people of color? Did He support unchecked capitalism and

the growing economic division between the rich and the poor? Most important, did God demand the inequality of the sexes?¹²⁴

This list of questions that were being asked during the Thanksgiving Workshops, and eventually by the EWC, approach an intersectional feminist politics in which they not only question conservative U.S. ideologies as related to Christianity, but work to think of how multiple social justice struggles are implicated in conservative evangelical ideology and policies. This list of questions, however, shows that the demographics of the Thanksgiving Workshops were in large part white evangelical people due to the fact that there was even a question of whether or not racial equality was biblically valid.

Although the liberal evangelicals were asking important questions and doing important work in advocating for more just social policies in the United States, there was still ideological division evidenced during the Thanksgiving Workshops. Although the EWC grew from the Thanksgiving Workshops, not all attendees of the workshops were members of the EWC. Members of the EWC learned during the 1974 Thanksgiving Workshop that “their views and opinions brought more controversy than congratulations. Their proposals were radical, especially compared to the definitions of evangelical womanhood propagated by other evangelical women’s groups.”¹²⁵ Ultimately, despite the fact that there were liberal evangelical and radical feminist evangelical groups, the lack of agreement on what a woman was and what woman’s role in society should be held these groups back from being a cohesive community and ultimately, their voices were drowned out by the louder and more well-funded anti-feminist evangelicals.

Despite the fact that there were many different kinds of feminists in the mid and late 20th century, there were also women who were quite vocal about their disdain for feminist movements and ideology. Many of these women were most vocal in their disagreements with

Betty Friedan, one of the most visible but definitely not the most radical feminists of the 20th century. Marabel Morgan, for instance, argued that it was not that women were trapped in patriarchal domestic roles but instead that women were falling away from God and their biblical role as women. Similarly, Beverly LaHaye, wife of Left Behind author and Christian Right supporter Tim LaHaye who was mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, “believed in male headship and a historically fundamentalist interpretation of the Bible” and argued that the real danger underlying “concerning” feminist movements was the threat of secular humanism. LaHaye was vehemently opposed to feminism and “viewed the war against feminism and the ERA, what they believed to be war for God, in inherently black and white terminology.”¹²⁶ Due to these strong beliefs, LaHaye began the Concerned Women for America (CWA), a socially conservative evangelical Christian non-profit women’s legislative committee that still functions today. Women like Marabel Morgan and Beverly LaHaye worked tirelessly publishing texts, making speeches, and organizing around the idea that feminism was a sin, and that support of male headship was the only way to appropriately and correctly be a (Christian) woman.

What becomes clear through even a quick exploration of different feminist and antifeminist movements is that women of color and intersectional feminists work towards equality for all while white and essentialist feminists as well as anti-feminists primarily work towards accumulation of power for those that conform to their understanding of womanhood. These different threads of feminism and anti-feminism, while sometimes difficult to unravel and follow, help us understand how ideas of what feminism is and what women should be directly impact the way communities are formed. Authors of apocalypse novels explicitly advocate and engage with the different kinds of feminisms and anti-feminism that I have outlined above in their exploration of what it takes to survive through catastrophe.

Imagined Apocalypse Communities in the 1990s

Authors of 1990s apocalypse novels directly engage with concerns about a culture war, not by explicitly using the term, but instead by writing narratives that directly engage with different kinds of cultural unrest that led to discussions of a culture war and by imagining how their turbulent cultural environments could possibly lead to an apocalyptic event. Both Octavia Butler and Tim LaHaye do this in their respective novels *Parable of the Sower* and *Left Behind: A Novel of the Earth's Last Days*. Both texts were written in the same cultural context: both authors were aware of the racial tensions, particularly in Los Angeles, that caused anti-Black police violence, segregated neighborhoods, and increased awareness of racial inequalities in a supposedly desegregated country. Both authors were also in tune to the shifting adherence to Christian thought and increasing secularism in the United States. And both authors were alert to the way imagined catastrophe can resonate with audiences. Although the books' messages could not be more different, both novels tackle the question of how religion and feminism relate to cultural unrest, and potential catastrophe, and the structure of community. There are many apocalypse novels written in the United States during the 20th century that portray communities that champion the importance of conservative Christian values, that support the conservative side of the culture wars, through the exploration of patriarchal fantasies of survival and destruction, including *Left Behind*. As I detailed in my first chapter, these kinds of apocalypse novels champion the idea that individual bad and immoral choices cause widespread catastrophe and devastation and that the only way to alter or stop catastrophe is to accept personal responsibility and adopt different moral beliefs, thereby relieving any state institutions of any responsibility for disaster. The relationship between individual actions and conservative values speak to my core

argument that conservative and right-wing ideology are ill-equipped and fundamentally incapable of effectively creating community that helps mitigate or divert catastrophe.

On the other hand, other apocalypse novels from the 20th century focus on the possibility of community to serve as a site of care and resistance. Apocalypse writers such as Octavia Butler imagine women as leaders who work not only towards survival but also towards improving life conditions for those in their community. Novels such as *Parable of the Sower*, engage with the Christian religion without enforcing right-wing values that cause harm to so many. Additionally, instead of championing patriarchal communities that are de facto led by men, these books imagine what a community would look like if women, and even children, had the authority and respect to be leaders. These novels deconstruct popular constructions of community to think critically about how catastrophe is caused. In the case of *Parable of the Sower*, it becomes clear that insufficient state policies that attempt to maintain a white Christian patriarchal government are the root causes of catastrophe, mirroring the anxieties of the more “progressive” side of the culture wars.

I have made it clear that while *Left Behind* and *Parable of the Sower* explore similar topics, they show radically different examples of how feminism can inform community. In particular, *Left Behind* endorses female submission while *Parable* portrays successful female community leadership. While both texts engage with fundamentalist Christian beliefs, *Left Behind* insists that in order to be a follower of fundamentalist Christian doctrine, community must be under male headship. Alternatively, *Parable* shows that Christian doctrine can be beneficial in its emphasis on self-reflection and community engagement, but that there are shortcomings in its ideology that do not work well in a constantly changing environment, especially for young women of color. Lastly, while LaHaye crafts a narrative that centers the

nuclear family at the core of community, Butler shows how the nuclear family is not a sustainable, and sometimes not a possible, entity to organize a community around. Butler shows how communities can be loving, supportive, and potentially successful without privileging the nuclear family above other relationships. By examining these two texts alongside each other, it becomes clear that the kinds of communities that *Left Behind* advocates do not support all members of a community, in particular women. Consequently, it allows us to rethink the relationship that U.S. culture and politics have with feminism and how anti-feminist sentiment supported by white fundamentalist Christian ideology has daily impacts on the different communities we all belong to. *Parable of the Sower*, then, is particularly useful in that it shows how we can work towards more supportive communities especially in times of social upheaval.

Left Behind shows how essentialist feminist and anti-feminist evangelical understandings of womanhood aid patriarchy and furthermore how these sexist ideologies shape communities whose purpose is to maintain U.S. imperial power structures that are rooted in white supremacy, homophobia, and racism and supported by the capitalist economic system. *Left Behind* reflects the tendency in United States apocalypse novels authored by white men to engage with essentialist feminism and/or anti-feminist evangelicalism in imagining community. Key to patriarchy is the importance of submission to fundamentalist Christians. In fundamentalist evangelical ideology, not only do women need to submit to the male heads of the household but also all people, no matter age or gender, need to submit to God. Although to many the idea of submission sounds restricting and akin to imprisonment, some evangelicals argue that submission actually can bring about liberation for women in a patriarchal family structure. This is because when women submit, they do not need to concern themselves with taking final responsibility for domestic decisions.¹²⁷ This lack of responsibility is seen as freeing women

because they do not have to concern themselves with taking responsibility for consequences. The best way to understand how *Left Behind* imagines the role of women in community, despite their lack of responsibility, is through discussion of the women that the protagonists, Rayford and Buck, feel directly responsible for. Again, it is important to remember that Tim LaHaye was married to Beverly LaHaye and fully supported her anti-feminist views and organizations. This knowledge allows readers the privilege of knowing exactly what LaHaye intended in their development of female characters and the relationship male characters have to them.

Rayford's wife is the epitome of womanhood before she is disappeared in the rapture. Irene is described as an honest, dutiful, and godly woman. While Rayford grieves his wife after her disappearance, "he slowly ate his cookies, the smell and taste bringing images to him of Irene in the kitchen," showing the reader that Irene was a proper Christian housewife who attended her domestic duties.¹²⁸ Even in disappearance, Irene stands as Rayford's moral compass:

Irene had always talked of a loving God, but even God's love and mercy had to have limits. Had everyone who denied the truth pushed God to his limit? Was there no more mercy, no second chance? Maybe there wasn't, and if that was so, that was so.

But if there were options, if there was still a way to find the truth and believe or accept or whatever it was Irene said one was supposed to do, Rayford was going to find it. Would it mean admitting that he didn't know everything? That he had relied on himself and that now he felt stupid and weak and worthless? He could admit that. After a lifetime of achieving, of excelling, of being better than most and the best in most circles, he had been as humbled as was possible in one stroke.¹²⁹

Here, we not only see that Rayford is using Irene's past actions as a way for him to ethically move forward but we also see that, to Rayford, a community could not be formed without guidance from his raptured wife. He notes specifically that he had solely relied on himself in the past instead of his community, namely the Christian beliefs that his wife espoused and was rewarded for.

This revelation that his wife was correct in the kind of life he should be living does not mean that he is more receptive to trusting the women in his life or more willing to relinquish power and control to women. In fact, throughout the series, Rayford deliberately and repeatedly attempts to force his religion, relationship, and employment opinions on his former coworker, Hattie. He even goes as far as to continually pressure her to not get an abortion after she becomes pregnant with Nicolae Carpathia (the antichrist). Even Rayford's own daughter, and Buck's future wife, Chloe is not immune from sexist treatment. Throughout the text, and series, Chloe repeatedly attempts to be more directly involved with the action in the text and is only allowed this when it involves staying at home or talking to other women about Christian womanly duties.

Butler's narrative is mobilized by the action of women leaders rather than defined by the submission of women to the male characters. In *Parable of the Sower*, Lauren Olamina's explicit goal is to create a community that follows the tenets of the religion that she discovered, Earthseed. Throughout the text, Lauren welcomes struggling strangers into her nascent Earthseed community. She has two reasons to grow her community: the first is pure compassion. She wants people to survive the chaos that has enveloped the United States, in particular her Southern Californian home. Not only does she want people to survive, but she wants to reestablish ways of life that lead to flourishing and not just brute survival like people are already engaging in. Secondly, Lauren deeply and firmly believes that her belief system will lead to a better world; a better world quite literally as part of Earthseed is to work towards going to the stars and leaving the dying Earth behind. Despite the fact that Lauren is the leader of Earthseed, she still depends on the other people in her group as they depend on her. Lauren is not creating a hierarchical community, but rather one based on mutual contributions to the same communal goals.

Notably, the women that Butler write about do not solely function to show main male characters their worth. The complex, multi-dimensional character Lauren sparks interesting questions in readers about how individuals can and should resist authority, what kinds of relationships women should be in, and how family is constructed. This novel does not exist to show that men should feel lucky to have women in their life to depend on them in the same way that novels such as *Left Behind* show. Lauren routinely defies male authority in order to do what she thinks is best for herself and those she cares about. For instance, Lauren regularly goes toe-to-toe with men in her group that are skeptical of her plans. Lauren's partner Bankole, a much older male Black doctor, is skeptical of the depth and scope of Lauren's vision for Earthseed. He would rather spend his days quietly building a family and staying under the radar. Lauren is vehemently against this, and although sometimes her decisions result in tragedy, she stays firm in her goals, which inevitably materialize as seen in the sequel to *Parable of the Sower*, *Parable of the Talents*. Even Lauren's father is not supportive of the means she is taking to prepare herself for future disaster. When Lauren attempts to teach her best friend some survival basics, she is scolded and punished for alarming her peers.

Lauren doesn't just take initiative in social circles once she leaves home. She importantly begins taking initiative and crafting her leadership skills when she is a teenage girl at home. Although she greatly respects and loves her father, she knows that his life ideology, informed by his Christian faith and life experiences, inspires complacency rather than growth. Lauren fears that her father is ill-equipped to lead her family and community through the turbulent times predicted ahead. In fact, Lauren is correct. Her father disappears one day and is presumed dead. This tragic event reaffirms Lauren's earlier concerns: her father's advice and directives towards her will not help to save anyone. By centering women's voices in these novels about community

creation, Butler emphasizes how women's voices can, do, and should play a role in community. This observation seems painfully simple, but when compared to the viewpoint of other apocalypse novels, it is easy to see that it is necessary to emphasize this distinction.

In addition to the focus on female submission in these apocalyptic communities, apocalypse texts like *Left Behind* also specifically focus on the roles that belief in God and therefore a specific moral code have in community. In these kinds of texts, a relationship to God is individual and often is either directly or indirectly espousing Christian Right beliefs. This individual relationship to God creates an "every man for himself" mentality within community. Rather than developing moral codes within communities, each person in *Left Behind* assumes that they are all morally on the same page. When you believe in God, in the logic of these texts, there is no need to discuss how individuals behave and how those behaviors impact the community at large. The consequence of this is that these communities adopt a white supremacist and patriarchal structure where white men automatically take charge and expect the women and men of color to follow suit. Even more dangerous is the fact that due to the white supremacist and patriarchal nature of group bonds, people in these communities are "othered" with consequences that sometimes result in death. Butler exposes these issues in *Parable of the Sower* by showing how Lauren's father's Baptist background and faith cannot protect the community. She shows how even her father's version of fundamentalist belief, one that considers the contemporary and historical impact of racism, climate change, and an increasingly stratified class system, only leads to stagnation and not change. This leads her to note that she "feel[s] no love for or loyalty to [her] God."¹³⁰ For Lauren, even the most ethical application of Baptist belief will not produce the change needed. Which, for those whose beliefs align with the *Left Behind* franchise, may actually be the point.

Ultimately, the communities imagined by white male apocalypse authors center around nuclear families. Consequently, the concern of individual family units trumps the concern of the collective, which often creates divisiveness and a sense that the community isn't a coherent whole. In *Left Behind*, the nuclear family is clearly privileged. Despite the fact that the core members of the Tribulation Force (Rayford and Buck and their wives) are consistently evangelizing and looking to recruit more people into Christianity, the two main male characters spend their time and energy protecting their family members. Throughout the series, this results in the death of their community members. One stark example of this is the fact that they secretly develop a bunker underneath the church that can house them and only them once the events leading to the Second Coming become more globally violent. Although they do let some other close friends and famous dissidents hide away in the bunker, they do not even tell their community members about the bunker, forcing these unfortunate people to fend for themselves. What you see, then, is that in a community focused on nuclear family units, resources are hoarded within individual family units rather than shared throughout the community. There are no community conversations about whether they can come up with creative solutions to benefit all. Ultimately, the community members who get left behind in these kinds of texts are those who don't have resources. Which, in this kind of community often means those that are racial minorities and those who do not have a nuclear family with male headship.

Authors such as Octavia Butler, however, imagine an apocalypse community that is not centered around the veneration of the nuclear family. Consequently, the scope of care and consideration of Lauren is not limited to her nuclear family. As a girl, Lauren assists her stepmother in educating the local children and she attempts to teach her friends survival skills, and when she is caught, works to convince her father to help her educate the community with

these skills. For example, Lauren is specifically attached to a young girl whose home life is not particularly stable. She feels responsible for her and when accidental tragedy befalls her, Lauren's beliefs that her home community is not a safe or sustainable place begin to crystallize. As she grows older, Lauren is constantly working to find people who she has shared values with and to show people the value in caring for each other. Her prioritization of values over biological relationship is shown clearly through her relationship with her oldest brother, Keith, who is more interested in domination akin to the kinds of characters lauded in novels like *Left Behind*, although there is a significant difference between these types of characters due to Keith being a young Black man in a precarious time and place.

By privileging female submission, morality based on a strict understanding of Christianity, and the nuclear family, communities imagined in white male-authored apocalypse texts therefore privilege the needs of white men. While these structures produce a whole slew of problematic community relations, the specifically sexist structures shape not only the form of the community but the purpose. In these novels, the purpose of community is ultimately not to work towards building a new kind of social relation that prioritizes equality, safety, and love. Instead, these communities are meant to be defensive groups that ward off unknown and unseen threats of catastrophe based on xenophobic and conspiratorial ideas. The idea is protection, not of the community, but of the white supremacist sexist ideals that form the base ideology of the communities. This point is furthered by realizing that the plots of white male-authored apocalypse books often have racialized amorphous antagonists—in the case of *Left Behind* the non-Christians are demonized (which has anti-Jewish and anti-Muslim implications). Therefore, one of the more implicit purposes of community is to maintain white patriarchy in the face of imagined attacks against white patriarchy. Lastly, these communities showcase the importance of

patriarchal leaders in the community rather than the strength of community as a whole. These novels focus almost solely on the thoughts, emotions, and actions of the male protagonists and pay little concern to how these thoughts, emotions, and actions have consequences for the rest of the community.

Overall, *Left Behind* showcases important threads of patriarchal ideology that are present in the United States. *Left Behind*, through the way community is imagined by Tim LaHaye, shows clearly how a fantasy of destruction caused by racialized non-U.S. others is imagined as only survivable by white men. Despite the fact that the novel does engage with essentialist feminist ideas, gender essentialism is weaponized to promote the idea that (white) men are the only kinds of people capable of helping themselves and others through catastrophe. The novels then become important artifacts in understanding a popular white male fantasy of leadership and strength. Community is not a new site of possibility in these texts but instead a reformulation of the same values that U.S. empire is predicated on.

It is with this in mind that I support my view that Butler's imagined apocalypse community is a far better model for community. Given the importance that community plays in the everyday lives of people, I believe that Butler's vision of a community based on support, love, and adapting to challenges rather than focusing on hierarchies that enable only certain people to have influence (white men) is the kind of community that can help endure tumultuous times. Instead of being concerned entirely with whether or not people believe in the "right" way to live, an opinion that LaHaye fully endorses throughout his *Left Behind* franchise, we should be focusing on creating communities that Butler writes about that prioritize inclusivity, group-sourced problem solving, and love. Where LaHaye focuses his vision of how society should be solely on his belief system, Butler crafts a narrative informed by the lived experiences of people

in the U.S.: people who already had been victims of racism and sexism, people who had experienced violence at the hands of the state. Butler's vision of community, while fictional, is ultimately inspired by prioritizing the needs and voices of those who have been considered unimportant by the state—a state that LaHaye so diligently worked to strengthen. By enforcing a community structure that prioritizes the people within the community, rather than the people in charge of the community, people will be better prepared at facing and preventing catastrophes—especially those catastrophes specifically caused by humans.

Imagined Apocalypse Communities in the 2010s

In the 2010s, many of the problems that people felt were left behind in the 20th century were indeed still present, albeit in different forms. In a post-9/11, increasingly technological world, white feminism was on the rise, and any ideas of progressing towards a more anti-racist world after Barack Obama's presidency were slashed with the inauguration of former President Donald Trump in 2016. The alarming trends of racism, the support of white feminism over intersectional feminism, an incredible ability by many to turn a blind eye to the injustices the United States was causing, and for others to support these injustices, led us into our current decade: a decade thus far marked by pandemic, anti-Black police violence, the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*, a Capitol riot, and the rise of white supremacist fascist groups.

Apocalypse novels of this decade think through some of the issues that caused fear and concern in the 2010s. For example, Mathers writes a novel that centers on the fear of terrorism, cybersecurity and its flaws, and climate change while Erdrich writes about reproductive rights, climate change, and surveillance. Broadly speaking, both novels are engaging with similar questions about the relationships among security, technology, and the environment. While

Cyberstorm focuses primarily on a vision that excuses racism and sexism as a byproduct of natural expressions of masculine fear for a man's family, however, *Future Home of the Living God* shows the potential consequences of the U.S. government trying to mitigate a climate caused crisis that primarily impacts white people. Erdrich is asking her readers to consider how different models of government and different models of community react to crisis. In both texts, by examining how feminism is present, readers can see that *Cyberstorm* is an apocalypse novel that advocates for a continuation of the U.S. as it already is, whereas *Future Home of the Living God* calls for people to use times of crisis to further community and government structures that work to support rather than oppress.

Although *Left Behind* seems to have very different rhetorical goals, womanhood is portrayed very similarly as in *Cyberstorm*. There are many surprising narrative overlaps between the two texts: specific anti-abortion plotlines, fears and concerns surrounding infidelity, and the idea that a good woman is a forgiving moral compass to the household. On the other hand, the men in both *Cyberstorm* and *Left Behind* assume that the women in their life would like to submit to male headship. There are no conversations surrounding whether the women characters would prefer the responsibility of agency and action. Ultimately, the lack of thought in the texts about female submission reflects the ideology of the male authors: these men are purposefully writing endorsements of male headship because they believe that submissive women are a key component of a successful community. This logic, while incredibly flawed, is also completely opposite to the relationship to responsibility that women of color and intersectional feminists espouse. Responsibility, in these ideologies, is empowering rather than restricting. In *Cyberstorm*, like *Left Behind*, male headship is expected. When the women in this text try and defy the male characters, or even simply do something unexpected, the men become angry and

irrational. Additionally, although the book is not explicitly a piece of U.S. nationalist fundamentalist propaganda like *Left Behind*, it still emphasizes and endorses pro-life agendas, female submission, and nationalism through the conclusion of the plot. Additionally, it becomes clear that the prioritization of the nuclear family is key to success and happiness in Mather's text as evidenced by the book's conclusion.

Throughout the text, *Cyberstorm* explores womanhood and the role of women in communities primarily through wives, particularly that of the protagonist. One of the main conflicts in *Cyberstorm* is that the protagonist Mike's wife, Lauren, has the potential to be a highly successful lawyer and aspires to invest in her career, which she had sidelined to raise their child, Luke. Within the first several pages of the novel, Mather makes it clear that his protagonist Mike is a dedicated family man who is looking to have more children who will primarily be raised by his stay-at-home wife. When Lauren makes it clear that she is in fact interested in re-entering a law firm in a new city to begin a career Mike is shocked that Lauren and his ideas about their lives diverge:

“I thought we were trying for a brother or sister for Luke. Isn't that what you wanted?”

“More what you wanted.”

“I stared at her in disbelief, my vision of our future together starting to unravel with just those four words.”¹³¹

Here, the reader sees that Lauren is not only breaking away from an agreed upon future, but that she is also breaking away from what Mike expects as a wife: someone who would stay at home and take care of multiple children. Mike was not simply surprised at his wife's desire to re-enter the work force, but this suggestion completely unravels his future. He even goes as far as to think that Lauren is having an affair with an unsavory neighbor. By assuming this, Mike is again sidelining his wife's desires for a fantasy that her odd and unsavory behavior can be blamed on

another man. Mike learns of this development in Lauren's goals as the world around him similarly starts to unravel as sickness takes hold in New York. Interestingly, Lauren finds out she is pregnant not long after this conversation, furthering complicating an already fraught relationship. She struggles with the idea of whether she wants to carry the pregnancy to term, a conversation that has similar world-shattering effects on Mike.

As the novel progresses, Lauren decides to not have an abortion, a decision partially decided by the fact that there are no ways for her to get an abortion given that she is quarantined for months in her building with her family and neighbors. These specific circumstances influence Mike to become a protective leader of his family and community. His feelings of fatherhood regularly overlap with his feelings for his community, which assert his feelings of patriarchal dominance over those he is protecting. For instance, when he is aiding healthcare workers and police officer efforts to provide care for the sick, he notes: "The only thing I'd been able to think of, staring at that newborn on the way down, was Lauren. It was as if that little baby in the nurse's arms was mine, my unborn child."¹³² In fact, all of Mike's community leadership revolves around protecting his nuclear family at all costs. Due to pregnancy, illness, and generally being less robust in health than Mike, Lauren is someone who needs protection in Mike's eyes, completely contrary to how he portrays her initially: as a career-driven, family-ignoring, cold-hearted woman who he cannot and will not support.

By the end of the text, nearly everyone has come out on the other side of the cyberstorm alive and well. Mike, in his reflections about the previous months, realizes how fortunate he is to have Lauren and how fortunate he is that Lauren decided to listen to him and be supportive of his leadership. He says, "I couldn't believe I'd been so blind, so short-sighted as to believe she'd been unfaithful when all she'd been trying to do was better her life, and mine."¹³³ This admission

is far from the feminist revelation that Mike seems to think it is. Put in context with the concluding circumstances, Mike gets exactly what he wanted from the beginning. Lauren does not move to Boston, she does not get an abortion, and there is no specific closure on whether Lauren pursues her career. Instead, Mike uses Lauren as a reminder of his fortune and labels her as the moral backbone of his family, fitting right in with essentialist feminist and evangelical anti-feminist understandings of womanhood.

In addition to the anti-feminist ideology the author espouses, it is also clear that Mather does not endorse an intersectional feminist worldview, which is seen by how Mike is frankly racist towards those outside of his close circle in *Cyberstorm*. When resources start to become tight, Mike and his favorite community members—namely his family and his best friend’s family—hoard their own resources and do not share with the other struggling community members. This results in horror. The other community members (who had not been designated leaders as they were not the white male family heads that Mike and his best friend were) resort to drinking bags of blood bank blood to get nutrients and other horrific methods in order to survive. Naturally, the members of the community that get shut out include the supposedly suspect “Chinese family,” who Mike has racist ill-will towards because he blames China, and therefore all Chinese people, for their current apocalyptic scenario. Put into context with his pro-life and nationalist views and his evangelical anti-feminist understandings of womanhood, it is clear that Mike, while not overtly advocating it, believes that the best way to live is in line with the same Christian Right values that *Left Behind* is notorious for pushing on its readers—just two decades later.

While some contemporary apocalypse novels, like the one I examined above, formulate an understanding of community through exploring white patriarchal fantasies of destruction and

survival, other apocalypse novels focus on the possibility of community to serve as a site of care and resistance as I outlined with *Parable of the Sower*. Louise Erdrich similarly understands womanhood in her novel *Future Home of the Living God*, even though she is writing from a different historical perspective as well as in a different context. Erdrich also imagines women as leaders who work not only towards survival but also towards improving life conditions for those in their community. Readers see women in her novel as multi-dimensional characters. They are not solely described as moral compasses or support for male leaders, and importantly are not required to be submissive in their community. Erdrich's text is explicitly formed by lived experiences of violence against women; even though the text is informed by Catholicism and other ties to the Christian church, those beliefs work to support an intersectional feminist community that is decolonial, anti-racist, and anti-sexist. These values work to support a community that is not informed by biological ties, but rather of shared values during a time of crisis.

Louise Erdrich's story revolves around the perspective of an independent women who is supported by the leadership, protection, and advocacy of other women. In *Future Home of the Living God*, Cedar Songmaker is at times a refugee hiding from the U.S. government as well as a prisoner of the U.S. government. Cedar depends on a network of men and women who work to free vulnerable fertile women from the clutches of the United States. Here, Erdrich creates a narrative in which Cedar's adoptive mother, Sarah, and her biological mother, Mary Potts, work together to help save and hide Cedar. Despite the fact that Lauren is a priority to her mothers, the readers recognize that both Sarah and Mary are committed to helping many other women and are working to create and participate in a network of people whose goal is to rescue as many imprisoned women as possible. Again, the authority of Sarah and Mary does not mean that they

are part of a hierarchical system. Instead, they become leaders in this organization due to their knowledge. Sarah has experience with midwifery and Mary is Obijwe. Sarah is key in this organization because she can help the rescued women with their health and the health of their newborns. Mary, on the other hand, has anti-imperialist beliefs and is working with her fellow Obijwe people to reclaim land during this tumultuous time and use Obijwe resources to help rescue women who are imprisoned. In both texts, the women characters play vital roles in making decisions, saving lives, and creating community that focuses on the well-being of all who are vulnerable to the violence and chaos caused by the insufficient state. Cedar, on the other hand, is in a position where she is often isolated in imprisonment or hiding. In the diary format of this novel, Cedar reveals that she doesn't particularly trust her partner Phil, or many men for that matter. These musings, while very different from Lauren's assertive leadership in the face of male skepticism, point to the fact that women's feelings about men and relationships to men matter. In fact, Cedar is proved correct in not trusting Phil as he is the one that ultimately betrays her, resulting in her imprisonment at the end of the novel. By centering women's voices in these novels about community creation, Butler and Erdrich are emphasizing how women's voices can, do, and should play a role in community.

While having strong Christian themes, *Future Home of the Living God* draws on Catholicism rather than Protestantism like the other books I have explored earlier in this chapter. Although Catholicism has a different historical relationship to empire, nationhood, and white supremacy in the United States that Protestantism does, Catholicism still is implicated in histories of patriarchal abuse, colonization, and evangelism that illustrate how Catholicism has a history of attempting to maintain communal structures similar to the Protestant communities I have discussed earlier in this chapter. Despite the ways Catholicism has aided, in particular, in

genocide, subjugation, and colonization of Indigenous peoples in the United States, Erdrich shows how communities can adapt belief systems to support their communal goals, especially if they are not centered around patriarchy, white-supremacy, and nationhood.

In particular, Erdrich focuses her characters worship on Mary, the mother of Jesus, and Saint Kateri Tekakwitha, the first canonized Native American saint. Through the figure of Saint Kateri, Erdrich reiterates that the communities allied with Cedar are committed to its people, especially the most vulnerable during these times of forced detention and testing on fertile women. As Cedar's biological mother says: "Saint Kateri is watching over women in a special way."¹³⁴ Although Cedar is not free from danger, as evidenced by the conclusion, Erdrich is showing how a community's commitment to beliefs that value its vulnerable people operate. They cannot stop every tragedy and violence forced upon their people by the U.S., but they can organize around fighting back. Through these figures, Erdrich conveys a faith based in love, sacrifice, and protection of both one's fellow people and the Earth. In this narrative, Erdrich is therefore explicitly showing how you can participate in the Christian faith while cultivating a feminist, decolonial, and anti-racist community.

Throughout the entirety of the novel, it is clear Cedar is being supported by a network of people, primarily women. What she doesn't realize until the very end is how despite her biological mother and adoptive mother's complicated relationship with each other, they have been diligently working together to further their shared goals of a community that saves and relocates the imprisoned women from the reproductive prisons held by the United States and works to take back land from the United States. Louise Erdrich shows intimately how complicated relations between individual people do not have to get in the way of community development. This realization is brought starkly into relief near the end of the novel, when Cedar

must accept her complicated feelings towards her adopted mother: “Her voice starts again and lulls on, tender and gentle, somehow still managing to be condescending...With a sudden rush of gall that almost chokes me, I hate her. Wait. I love her. But I hate her. And I love her.”¹³⁵ In fact, the nuclear family as a source of strength is a myth that becomes entirely debunked when Cedar realizes that her partner is the one who put her fetus (and her) in danger, when she is primarily supported by her stepfather Eddy, and when her adopted mother and biological mother work together more closely than her biological father does with anyone to protect her. Erdrich shows how human relationships can be incredibly complicated, but when there is an urgent shared goal, the people who love you can rise to the occasion no matter the relationship.

Again, these two apocalypse novels approach the issue of community with vast differences: while *Cyberstorm* supports the continuation of the United States without any criticism or concern for how state actions may lead to more and greater catastrophe, Erdrich shows how community can be created with the aim of surviving the violences brought on by the state. Mathers writes a fantasy where concern over the maintenance of white supremacy in order to support a nuclear family trumps any other concern. Erdrich, though, uses her knowledge of U.S. and Indigenous histories to show how creating community networks can change and help those most vulnerable to the violence of the United States.

Conclusion

In these novels, women of color and Indigenous feminist ideas work against both patriarchy and empire. There are two important ways that the authors insist on community structures that reflect the goal of building anti-imperial feminist community. First, as I have touched on before, the communities created are non-hierarchical. That does not mean that

everyone is treated the same in these communities, but instead that everyone has their own vital role to the community based on their strengths, not assumed identities prescribed by the nuclear family. Second, there is an abundance of love that powers these communities that is not centered on the nuclear family. Each member of the community is dear to all and worth protecting. One life is not valued over another, something that is not present in apocalypse books that are typically written by white men. These two important structural components of community work towards a goal of surviving in *Future Home of the Living God*. The ultimate goal is to defeat U.S. imperial power through building enduring and sustainable communities through the power of respect and love.

The feminism present in these texts shapes this goal of anti-imperialism. First, the feminist ideologies in these texts allow for more imagination of what community is. The community structures created by Lauren and Cedar's family members break from the dominant ideas of how community functions and how it is structured. But despite the imaginative aspects of these communities, they are still grounded in realism. The members of these communities know firsthand the consequences of going against U.S. empire as they and other people in their communities have been subject to those consequences for centuries. Therefore, these texts have elements that are quite tragic. In these novels, the tragedy present illustrates the stakes of the anti-imperialist communities. If U.S. empire continues, the people in these communities will continue to be vulnerable targets.

The goals of *Parable of the Sower* and *Future Home of the Living God* are far more expansive than to procreate. Life, safety, love, and growth are priorities in these two novels for everyone. It is clear that *Left Behind* and *Cyberstorm* are solely focused on creating communities where procreation of white people is the most precious protected, even at the expense of lives

of other people. When we focus on the relationships the authors of these two novels have with the state, it becomes clear that protecting the white male-lead nuclear family *is* in fact more important to these authors than the lives of people of color as well as those who do not conform to this rigid structure based on a very specific understanding of Christian doctrine.

Ultimately, the hope that *Cyberstorm* and *Left Behind* offers their readers is based on a continuation of hierarchical structures that cause harm. *Parable of the Sower* and *Future Home of the Living God* show how apocalypse narratives can be used to imagine how to move away from unsustainable and violent models of community. Here, hope is tenuous, but it is a more realistic portrayal of hope in the face of targeted violence. This study of feminism in apocalypse novels is important because of the latter counter narratives that focus on sustenance of patriarchal communities and individual power rather than strength of community overall. The fact that there is such a divide in how apocalypse communities are imagined ultimately mirrors tensions in culture wars about different aspects of community, such as what a woman is and what womanhood should be, which makes apocalypse novels valuable for their insights. In a post *Roe v. Wade* world, I propose that we look to apocalypse authors such as Butler and Erdrich as communities reel from political decisions that reinforce fundamentalist Christian beliefs that strip away the rights, safety, and well-being of people. Authors such as these have shown readers how to use the tools of people who have survived catastrophe before us to create community networks of diverse people and prioritize the safety and love of all in a “beloved community” over the safety and love for community structures that prioritize the few and harm the many.

Chapter 2, in full, will be a reprint of the material as it will appear in the *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*. The material is currently under review. The dissertation author was the sole author of this paper.

“I warn everyone who hears the words of prophecy of this book”: Communicating Warning and Hope

“Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near.” Rev. 1:3

Introduction

When you do a simple google search for apocalypse literature, the first link shown is a Wikipedia article for “apocalyptic literature.”¹³⁶ Here, it defines apocalyptic literature as “a genre of prophetic writing that developed in post-Exilic Jewish culture and was popular among millennialist early Christians... As a genre, apocalyptic literature details the authors' visions of the end times/end of the age as revealed by an angel or other heavenly messenger. The apocalyptic literature of Judaism and Christianity embraces a considerable period, from the centuries following the Babylonian exile down to the close of the Middle Ages.” In this article, apocalyptic literature is tied explicitly to Judaic and Christian understandings of apocalypse and focuses primarily on the apocalyptic literature of the Early Modern period. On the other hand, if you do a simple google search for apocalypse genre, it isn't until the third link that apocalypse literature is specifically connected to Judaism and Christianity. Instead, the first information that you are shown is a blog excerpt from the New York Public Library that states “This refers to stories that deal with the aftermath of a catastrophic event that devastates humanity.¹³⁷ The catastrophe can be manmade, such as a nuclear war, or a natural disaster such as an asteroid hitting the Earth or a new plague.” The second link takes you to a Wikipedia article that explains how apocalyptic fiction is a “subgenre of science fiction, science fantasy, dystopia, or horror.” By changing the search term slightly, apocalypse becomes divorced from its religious connotations and relegated to a subgenre of science fiction that refers to a plot centering around the catastrophe.

As I have explained previously, this disconnect between apocalypse as a religious term and apocalypse as a science fiction trope leads to a disconnection between important discourses that discusses each meaning separately. Scholars have extensively analyzed the “indefiniability” of genres, noting that “a genre *is* any ongoing discussion... and not a body of texts from which one can expect certain plot elements and specific tropes.”¹³⁸ The conversations about science fiction apocalypse leave many more familiar with popular definitions of apocalypse that relate to science fiction without understanding the long history of religious significance. Typically, apocalypse is used as a descriptor in scholarly works about science fiction and also dystopian novels that refers to a catastrophic event but does not critically examine why the text is described as apocalyptic or post-apocalyptic. For example, in a discussion about how dystopian and science fiction texts are categorized despite their hybridity, scholar J. Norledge writes that changing understandings of dystopian fiction “reflect an evolution in the genre, drawing connections with marginal genres such as fantasy and post-apocalyptic fiction, horror and romance, adding hybridity to the strict parameters of the dystopian form.”¹³⁹ Rather than thinking of apocalypse and post-apocalypse (both highly contested terms with many different meanings) literatures as a more minor type of a different genre, I argue that it would benefit literary studies to more specifically focus on the apocalyptic aspects of what some may define as dystopia or science fiction in order to connect the novels to the long literary tradition of relating catastrophe to society’s moral and religious condition. Focusing on the apocalyptic themes of novels, despite differences in how the novels are classified, opens up avenues of discussion among religious studies, science fiction studies, and more exciting possibilities. In the first chapter, although I analyze the different ways responsibility is communicated and conceptualized in apocalypse novels, I still am looking specifically at the main character in each of the novels,

and how their inner-dialogues reflect how apocalyptic thinking influences their behavior. Despite differences, I suggest that apocalypse novels categorically examine the role of the individual in their community.

Likewise, in the second chapter, although I explore how different conceptions of feminism impact the structure and purpose of apocalypse communities, I still point to how apocalypse novels, at their core, theorize community. Recognizing these similar themes allows readers to engage in deeper more nuanced analysis that engages with both science fiction and religious literature. Instead of placing these different kinds of apocalypses into separate categories, I argue they should instead be understood in relation to each other. In this chapter, instead of emphasizing ideological differences, I want to emphasize instead how apocalypse novels emphasize tropes that cohere this group of texts into a legible group.

The most striking formal quality that can be seen across apocalypse literature is that the plot is set up to provide a warning and then to provide hope. In what follows, I will briefly explain how the apocalypse genre has developed over time in the United States and explain some of the key tropes that are found in apocalypse literature. I especially focus on prophecy and how apocalyptic rhetoric has historically been used to encourage violence. Next, I explain how apocalypse novels warn while communicating hope. I first explore how warning is communicated in apocalypse novels. In this section, I particularly focus on how prophecy is incorporated into warnings of catastrophe but is complicated by accusations of madness. Here, I show how despite different political investments, apocalypse novels explore relationships among prophetic warnings, community, and ableist accusations of madness. I then focus on how hope is crafted in these narratives. Hope is communicated through several different figures. Two that I explore in this chapter are the written word and the child. Apocalypse novels, through narrating

modes of hope, focus on community building through the written word as well as through the emphasis on protecting children. Last, I show how the major differences in these novels are due specifically to the author's political intent. In this section, I go into detail about how the authors of *Future Home of the Living God*, *Parable of the Sower*, *Cyberstorm*, and *Left Behind: A Novel of the Earth's Days* discuss their work in interviews and how their writing process and intent speaks to how we should be incorporating apocalypse novel community lessons into our own communities. Here, I explain how the connections that apocalypse authors make with contemporary political issues in interviews further emphasize how apocalypse novel tropes are intended by their author to impact how readers understand their own communities and place.

While I have explained the divide between apocalypse authors who write in order to further support for dominator culture that causes imperial violence and the apocalypse authors who write in order to show readers communities based on social justice principles in previous chapters, I want to illuminate the commonalities that exist within various apocalypse books.¹⁴⁰ The fact of the matter is that we all live on planet Earth together. We are, as the title of this dissertation suggests, "together through the end." Apocalypse novels show us that building community is deeply important. They show us that different sides of our current cultural wars place similar emphasis, for example, on the importance of children. If we are to successfully navigate tumultuous times, we need to do so together. In this chapter, I hope to show what can possibly bring us together.

Developing Apocalypse

If you are looking for warnings of apocalypse, you do not need to look far. Warnings abound in U.S. popular, religious, and media cultures; from environmental scientists warning us

about the irreversible damage climate change causes to far-right hate groups' such as the Proud Boys' warnings about how racial and gender equality will collapse Western society. Despite all of the different kinds of apocalypses, some of which I have discussed in previous chapters, there is a simple yet compelling structure to stories of impending destruction: a warning and a presentation of a hopeful path forward. This combination of warning and hope is one way that apocalypse literature unites itself into a coherent genre literature despite the vast difference in political investment that these novels have. In apocalypse literature, life itself is at stake. This goal, of attempting to prevent humans from going down paths that will lead them astray, has a long and complicated history. In order to understand this history, I want to provide a brief historical explanation of apocalypse.

Distinguishing apocalypse from other genres that include eschatological or prophetic events is very difficult. Apocalypse is a seemingly murky category, one that is used to explain anything from our current pandemic, to world wars, to a personal devastation. However, by surveying a wide array of apocalyptic literature, it becomes clear that the apocalypse genre is unique. Because of the apocalypse genre's association with texts from the Bible, such as "Revelation of John," many people understand apocalypse as synonymous with prophecy. As biblical scholars such as J. Bloch note, prophecy and apocalypse are distinct in that the apocalyptic writer goes back in time to put meaning into events involving retribution. Essentially, prophecy predicts the future, while apocalypse inserts meaning into the past and present. The confusion is evident, because, as Bloch argues "apocalypse is strongly dependent on prophecy, and that the teachings of the prophets, especially those of post-exilic days from Ezekiel on, follow in no small degree in the trend of the apocalyptic writers. In fact, many of late prophetic writings assume the character of the apocalyptic," showing that despite their

distinctiveness, they still are related.¹⁴¹ While apocalypse novels are connected to Jewish and Christian literary traditions due to the very fact that the word apocalypse is connected to these religious and social traditions, apocalypse books are not specifically or always Christian or Jewish. In the United States, as this dissertation demonstrates, there are many apocalypse novels that use definitions of apocalypse that relate to settler colonialism, racial slavery, and genocide. However, many of these kinds of apocalypse books, including both *Parable of the Sower* and *Future Home of the Living God*, engage with, and often critique, evangelical Christian apocalyptic ideologies that contribute directly to catastrophe.

The other genre used to talk about apocalypse, dystopia, also is different because of the perspective of time. In the dystopian genre one sometimes sees that the eschatological event happens before the narrative begins in order to create the dystopian setting. Instead of showing what happened, the dystopian genre makes cultural critiques on what a current political/social/economical etc. situation will lead to. Apocalypse, on the other hand, shows how the situation happens, providing commentary on who and why people are able to survive. This all goes to say that apocalypse novels depend on the manipulation of time to understand the combination of fear and hope that the apocalypse genre is intentionally inspiring.

It is due to the “present-ness” of apocalypse that I argue that apocalypse must be considered its own category, one that includes not only theories of morality, time, and purpose inspired by Jewish and Christian theology, but also a category that helps illuminate Afrofuturist, Indigenous, and ecological theories of time and history that also think through the relationships among catastrophe, morality, and responsibility.

In order to fully account for how apocalyptic rhetoric has been incorporated into U.S. political discourse we must examine political rhetoric from when settlers first colonized what is

now the United States. It is well documented that Puritans engaged in apocalyptic rhetoric. For example, Increase Mather, a New England minister, wrote “A Brief History of the Warr with the Indians in New England” in order to explain, as the longer title states: “A Brief History of the Warr with the Indians in New England: Wherein the Grounds, Beginning, and Progress of the Warr, is summarily expressed, Together with a Serious Exhortation to the Inhabitants of that Land.”

His first intention in writing this narrative was to give a summary of the events that happened in what is known as King Philip’s War; but second, and arguably more important, he uses the space of the narrative to argue that the Puritans living in the New England colonies caused the apocalyptic war by behaving in ways that called for divine retribution. While describing one of the many meetings of the general court in Boston, Mather writes

That some effectual course should be taken for the Suppression of those proud Excesses in Apparel, hair, &c. which many (yea and the poorer sort as well as others) are shamfully guilty of. That a due testimony should be borne against such as are false Worshippers, especially Idolatrous Quakers, who set up Altars against the Lords Altar, yea who set up a Christ whom the Scriptures know not. That whereas excess in drinking is become a common Sin, meanes should be used to prevent an unnecessary multiplication of Ordinaries, and to keep Town-dwellers from frequenting Taverns: and that whereas Swearing hath been frequently heard, they that hear another Swear profanely and do not complain of it to Authority, shall be punished for that concealment.¹⁴²

Here, Mather essentially blames the New Englanders’ dress, language, and alcohol consumption for causing the war. Mather is not the only person who believes this; in fact, he states at the end

of the passage that the whole congregation of people at the general court meeting consented to discipline those who seemed to be behaving in an excessive and therefore ungodly manner.

While Puritan individuals believed this war was God's means of punishment for their daily sins, the war was actually the result of tensions between the settlers and the Indigenous peoples of the area, including the Wampanoag, Wabanaki, and Nipmuc peoples. The war began due to tensions between Wampanoag peoples and the settlers over whether the Wampanoag were allowed to keep their guns after a new peace treaty was signed. Tensions escalated until a full-scale war broke out after the massacre of English colonists in Swansee, Massachusetts. The war ended when Metacom, also known as King Philip, was assassinated by an Indigenous ally of the English colonizers.

Apocalyptic rhetoric and narratives, such as the example above, abound in Puritan texts because it structures the entire mode of Puritan thinking.¹⁴³ This kind of thinking, of encouraging violences by emphasizing breaches of Christian morality, is plentiful in colonial New England and carries on through the advent of the United States until today, as evidenced by some Christian-themed novels I have analyzed in previous chapters. Examples of these kinds of narratives are evident throughout U.S. history, from Jonathan Edwards' "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" (1741), to Jacob Riis's *How the Other Half Lives* (1890), to F. Scott Fitzgerald's "Babylon Revisited" (1931), there are endless examples of the apocalyptic logic found in canonical U.S. literature.

On the other hand, scholarship in the U.S. has begun to understand, accept, and interrogate literature outside of this Western, Christian, patriarchal framework in recent decades. For instance, afrofuturism, a term coined by Mark Dery in conversation with Black writers and cultural producers in 1993, has exploded into the academic consciousness and robust scholarship

about afrofuturism has been published especially in the last decade. Afrofuturist literature, which interrogates the relationships between African diaspora culture alongside technology and the history of racism and genocide, asks some of the same questions that U.S. white Protestant literature has similarly been asking for centuries: Why and how do catastrophes happen? What do we do to end the horrors? What is the relationship between spirituality and earthly events? Because Afrofuturism is a newer term, because racial slavery stifled (but never stopped) creative output from Black people, and because of Western academic hierarchies that preserve and prioritize Western knowledge over all else, the relationship between Afrofuturist literature and white Protestant literature has been unsatisfactorily examined.¹⁴⁴

Warning

Warnings abound in apocalypse literature. Often, apocalypse texts speak to what are considered our most existential issues: questions of climate, systemic injustice, and failed morality appear in our zombie apocalypses, big storm apocalypses, nuclear apocalypses, and so on. What ties these together is the fact that the author is writing about a warning that is ultimately legible to their audience. Readers of Max Brooks' *World War Z* are aware of the horrifying impact of disease and are made aware of the inadequacy of current global structures to stem the spread of viruses. Readers of Pat Frank's *Alas, Babylon* know of the horrors that nuclear bombs leave behind once they are dropped. And readers of Leslie Marmon Silko's *Almanac of the Dead* are aware of genocide and violence that settler colonialism and capitalism continue to leave in their wakes. These fictions are about problems that we face and the authors provide a specific lens for us to approach these problems. The ways that apocalypse authors craft these

warnings into stories bears resemblance to an important aspect of Post-Exilic Jewish and early millennial Christian apocalypse literature: prophecy.

Often, in order to call something prophecy, there needs to be a prophet communicating the prophecy. As James Darsey notes in *The Prophetic Tradition and Radical Rhetoric in America*, prophets are people who communicate a message from, typically, God against their will. Prophets are not meant to seek out their title but instead the opportunity to be a prophet is bestowed upon them, whether they like it or not. While some have ascribed the U.S. prophetic tradition to Ancient Greece, scholars such as Darsey argue that the prophetic tradition stems from the Old Testament due to the fiery and strong language that very adamantly describes what should be done versus what should not be done. Because of the strength and specificity of the U.S. prophetic tradition, illustrated most commonly by Protestant pastors such as Jonathan Edwards, the U.S. prophetic tradition is key in understanding radicalism in contemporary U.S. political discourse. He notes, rather aggressively, that “the ‘fire and strength’ of the prophets is as much a part of our cultural inheritance as is the ‘sweetness and light’ of the Greeks, and it is sheer folly to think that we can have an adequate explanation of radicalism in our culture so long as we ignore a discursive tradition marked by obvious similarities to those discourses we today term ‘radical,’ the influence of which is often attested to by the radicals themselves in their allusions and quotations.”¹⁴⁵ Apocalypse novels, in that they warn their readerships of calamities that can occur due to specific kinds of behaviors, participate in both the U.S. prophetic tradition as well as contribute to discourse about the consequences of people’s actions.

By calling attention to the primacy of prophecy in understanding apocalypse literature, I am not suggesting that all apocalypse novels communicate the same intellectual, spiritual, and political agendas and ideologies. Rather, I am suggesting that there is an incredibly long history

of prophecy being used to communicate specific, and potentially radical, political ideas that in turn influence people to act in accordance to the prophecy. Although many apocalypse novels may seem to fit into secular understandings of the universe, most U.S. apocalypse novels, despite different ways of interpreting apocalypse, engage with the U.S. prophetic tradition and Christian beliefs. Since the end of World War II, U.S. literature overwhelmingly attempts to reckon with these traditions.

Religion and literature scholar Christopher Douglas argues for a closer look at the relationships between diverse understandings of how Christianity should be practiced, multiculturalism, and the rise of the Christian right. He argues:

The literary history of the period, in other words, is not just one in which religious experience and contemporary literature share homological qualities of a disinterest in beliefs and doctrines, but one in which that disinterest itself is understood to be a manifestation of religion's quasi-secularized status as a culture granted the same virtues of pluralism and relativism as other cultures. As we shall see, it is the conservative Christian resurgence's continual switching of registers between cultural tradition held by private individuals who have the right to be protected from intrusive, secular modernity on the one hand, and the universal basis for public policy on the other, that begins to sketch the complex ways in which the resurgence at times opposes and at other times dovetails with multiculturalism.¹⁴⁶

While Douglas is making an argument about the relationship between multicultural literature and the rise of the Christian right, his argument applies to understanding apocalypse literature in that apocalypse literature includes some texts that are classically considered multicultural, like

Almanac of the Dead by Leslie Marmon Silko for example, as well as those that explicitly move forward Christian right ideology, such as texts by authors such as Hal Lindsey. While I am not attempting to make a claim about what texts are considered multicultural or not, I maintain, similarly to Douglas, that reading right-wing Christian texts alongside novels with similar tropes, connections, and structures, yet separate political ideas, allows readers to see the relationships among seemingly different perspectives on U.S. American culture. Regarding apocalypse novels as a category expands our understanding of the trajectory of Christianity in the United States.

What contributes to apocalypse literature as both a religious and political genre is that the problems and catastrophes illustrated in these novels are typically problems that are well understood by the audience. The authors write stories that, while not believable to all, ring true for their *intended* audience. For example, although not everyone will read *Left Behind* and believe that the rapture is an event that will come to pass, there are people who do believe that this event will happen and look towards this series to help them better understand the prophesied event. To prove this, consider reviews for apocalypse novels. An example of one such review for *Left Behind* states:

This book is a good read with a great plot. It gets you in really quickly, and shocks you with the reality of its premise. We have all heard about the second coming - what will it really mean? What are the ramifications? This book tells the story so well that I went on to read all the rest of the series as well. For the non-Christian it answers a lot of questions and spells out the reality of their position clearly. For the Christian it challenges you to get real in your faith - time is running out.¹⁴⁷

This review reveals that some audience members are not reading these kinds of books solely for entertainment, but to learn something about what they *should* be doing because they believe the plot of the book relates directly to their realities. Again, I want to emphasize that not all readers, myself included, will have this interpretation. But, as the below interviews with Tim LaHaye show, there are people who understand and identify with the cultural context that the Left Behind franchise engages.

In addition to situating a text in relation to issues that the reader will most likely be aware of while warning the audience, there is another trope that is heavily leaned upon in apocalypse literature warnings: the presence of insanity. In apocalypse literature, unlike many other kinds of genres, it is typically a positive character trait for a character to be labeled as “insane” by others. This is because, usually, the character who is ready for apocalyptic events is communicating their fears to others who do not yet believe that anything bad could happen and therefore will label the character mad. Apocalypse literature, then, is explicitly making a statement on how harmful ableism is, even if the author does not explicitly intend to.¹⁴⁸ Not only for the characters labeled as disabled, or insane, but for the characters who dismiss the knowledge of those labeled as disabled. For many, apocalypse literature, and related dystopian, science fiction, and speculative fiction texts as well, is a robust site for studying how ableism functions in our society as well as case studies for how the label “abled” is created by the environment one is in rather than by any intrinsic characteristic of a person. This is due to the way that, as Sami Schalk explains, literature that incorporates the unreal “can defamiliarize (dis)ability... in ways that are intellectually and politically productive.”¹⁴⁹

In addition to contributing to discourse about ableism, the discussion of insanity, or madness, has long been situated within literary study’s purview due to the many ways

conceptions of madness permeate so many cultures in so many periods of history. Sander L. Gilman notes how conceptions of madness are shaped by an array of social, cultural, and political ideas. He writes “madness has to figure itself not only in relation to ideas about competency, moral ability, curability, and so forth but also in relation to questions of access, stigma, and advocacy.”¹⁵⁰ In ancient times, madness was conceptualized in several different ways:

The Greeks regarded madness as the result of a physical imbalance of the four humors, the bodily fluids that they believed regulated health and temperament. The Chinese at the same time conceived of madness as an imbalance of the primal forces of yin and yang. Jewish beliefs, mirrored in the accounts in the Tanach (Old Testament), stressed moral failing and divine intervention as a primary cause of madness (Daniel 4:31-33). All of these cultures placed the mad in a separate category: for some a higher one of prophecy and illumination, but for most one of marginality and exclusion.¹⁵¹

In apocalypse novels, the tensions between the different ways of understanding madness become very clear. On one hand, the characters accused of madness in these kinds of stories are typically the characters who are right in imagining what will happen. Despite their accuracy, these characters are still widely regarded with caution, as if it is a moral failure to feel the way that the “mad” character feels. The dual representation of being chosen to understand, of being chosen for revelation, while being an outcast connect directly to the warnings being issued. The authors are letting their readers know that the apocalypse will happen, but it will be no easy feat to convince people that it will. In this way, apocalypse novels make a profound observation: knowledge can come from anyone.

White evangelical Christian apocalypse narratives are very straightforward in their warnings. In *Left Behind*, LaHaye uses a popular rhetorical tool amongst evangelical Christians to communicate that the main characters, all believers and converted believers, are the ones who are correct while those who are making fun of them for being too overly zealous or “crazy” are not. LaHaye, in warning his reader, does not mince words. Due to the rapture, several main characters convert to Christianity and in turn try and convert others. Each time, LaHaye uses the word fanatic to describe their incredulity that their worldview has changed due to the chaos and catastrophe around them. For example, when recent convert Raymond first attempts to change his daughter Chloe’s mind about Christianity she recoils and asks if they would “become religious fanatics all of a sudden, start going to church, what?”¹⁵² Similarly, Hattie asks Raymond, as he also attempts to convert her, “you haven’t become some sort of fanatic, have you?”¹⁵³

The choice of the word fanatic is telling. The word fanatic, meaning a person filled with excessive and single-minded zeal, especially for an extreme religious or political cause is derived from Latin (*fanaticus*) and French (*fanatique*) words that describe behavior caused by being possessed by a demon or god. By using the word fanatic, LaHaye implies that expressing and evangelizing Christian ideals leads to people questioning one’s sanity. By being accused of fanaticism, Raymond is being accused of overstepping in his beliefs and placing an inappropriate amount of faith in a specific worldview. What this means is that calling someone a fanatic also implies that the fanatic’s sanity is being called into question. Raymond has to work diligently and persuasively to show his loved ones and community members that the changing chaos of the world can be accurately understood with his worldview, even if it seems extreme.

Surprisingly, the uphill battle that Raymond has in convincing others that his worldview is not only sane but the only way forward is similar to Lauren's struggles. In *Parable of the Sower*, Lauren is constantly being questioned about whether her worldview is appropriate. When Lauren first introduces ideas of survival preparation, she gets in trouble. Her father explains to her that her radical ideas contribute to chaos rather than help to work through it. In addition to being dismissed for her worldview, like Raymond, Lauren has more hurdles to overcome because of her disability, hyperempathy.

As Sami Schalk explains, "hyperempathy is experienced as disabling and understood as a disability by those characters who have it. Hyperempathy is also mostly understood as a disability by medical professionals and most other characters without hyperempathy."¹⁵⁴ In *Parable of the Sower* Lauren's hyperempathy, while still being a characteristic that causes her harm and changes how she walks around in the world, also helps her to reflect on the state of the world. While she can be made fun of or taken advantage of due to her hyperempathy, she is also able to use her hyper-awareness abilities in order to formulate plans that work towards survival despite all the pushback she receives. While I am arguing that Lauren's hyperempathy does influence her understanding of her world, I am not making the argument that hyperempathy is the sole or primary reason for this. Instead, I want to call attention to the fact that Lauren's hyperempathy contributes to how Lauren develops as a leader. For example, Lauren's disability makes her feel pleasure and pain from stimuli that is not directed at her. She says that she is "supposed to feel pleasure *and* pain, but there isn't much pleasure around these days."¹⁵⁵ Lauren's disability gives her the opportunity to think through how her feelings are directly connected to the material reality of her neighborhood. There is not a lot of pleasure for her or her community members, and Lauren's disability, in part, emphasizes this fact and influences her to

seek a different way. For Lauren, her keen observations, resulting in the core Earthseed tenant that god is change allow her to be at least moderately prepared for when catastrophe strikes her neighborhood, Robledo. Lauren has the daunting task of convincing people that her worldview isn't dangerous or "mad."

Both *Cyberstorm* and *Future Home of the Living God* show us a different side of how prophecy and insanity can be portrayed—through depictions of paranoia. Rather than showcasing a prophetic figure, these types of apocalypse novels introduce characters whose paranoia about people is startlingly intuitive. Despite pushback from their communities, these characters are deeply troubled by other members of their communities as well as societal trends. When they attempt to reveal these fears to their family or even think through these fears on their own, their attempts are shrugged off as being overdramatic. These characters, with more subtle leadership qualities, have to work to navigate intricate social situations in the midst of catastrophe. Both Mike and Cedar are portrayed as characters who, while not necessarily leaders like Raymond and Lauren, have strong emotional concerns about the people around them. Mike's paranoia, while completely misdirected, foreshadows the entire plot. In the beginning of the novel, before the titular "cyberstorm" hits New York City, Mike's biggest concern is his status as a husband. He is concerned about his wife wanting a new job in a different city, he is convinced of his neighbor's attraction to his wife, and he feels inadequate in the eyes of his in-laws. His biggest worry is the fear that his wife is already having an affair with his neighbor, a man of seeming prestige and charm.

These feelings of insecurity, anxiety, and fear are already in full force when the storm hits New York. Mike, alongside his best friend and neighbor, starts directing their neighbors into a community where shelter and resources are shared amongst them. Of course, due to the distrust

between Mike and the potential affair partner, the community is organized with his potential breach of trust in mind. Over the course of the novel, this man becomes more insular, and he and his wife are rarely seen. By the end of the novel, it is revealed that this man has been abusing his wife and hoarding supplies and that Mike's wife definitely did not have an affair with him. In this novel, the paranoia that Mike has against his neighbor manifests in how the community is set up, and ultimately results in revelations about this man's character. For Mike, the apocalyptic scenario is not so much that there was a "cyberstorm" as that he deluded himself into believing that he was going to lose his entire family. When Mike realizes that he has in fact deluded himself into believing his relationship with his wife is over, he does not suffer any consequences. Ultimately, although his wife and friends are disappointed in his actions and accusations, they do not have any sympathy or respect for the alleged affair partner. Because of the storm, and because of Mike's influence over his cyberstorm community, the neighbor was exposed to a be a bad man. Without Mike's initial fears, and without the extreme apocalyptic situation, the community would not have realized that they had an abuser in their midst. Ultimately, what are considered irrational fears at the beginning of the novel are chalked up to be understandable and prophetic by his family and friends at the end. In other words, what was seen initially as paranoid behavior by Mike's community is revealed to be appropriate under the circumstances. Despite the initial pushback he receives, his fears come to fruition, and it is his preparedness and warnings that help his community into safety, ultimately validating his dangerous white male paranoia.

For Cedar in *Future Home of the Living God*, her fears come from being cautious about who should be around her while she is pregnant. While pregnant, Cedar hides herself in her home. She does not venture outside, stand in front of windows, or go to get supplies. Because

pregnant women are being detained and experimented on by the government, Cedar can trust very few people. Throughout the beginning of the novel, Cedar goes back and forth about whether she should let her partner and the father of the unborn baby into her life. She is worried about the safety risks. As readers, you root for Cedar and Phil to make it through the plot unscathed and wonder how Cedar could doubt Phil when he is clearly a devoted and loving partner. However, similarly to Mike in *Cyberstorm*, Cedar's fears about Phil come to fruition when Cedar is taken by the government. She finds out towards the end of the novel, to her horror, that Phil is actually the person who gave her location up to authorities. As in, *Cyberstorm*, Cedar's initial seemingly extreme fears are re-painted as prophetic foreshadowing. It is revealed that Phil is not a good partner to Cedar, despite her own attempts to convince herself otherwise. He does not understand the risk she is in as an Indigenous, pregnant woman living under an extremist regime and he discounts her fears (similarly to the male main characters in right wing apocalypse novels) to do what he thinks is best. Ultimately, Cedar is recaptured and spends the rest of her life incarcerated with other pregnant women of color.

The combination of providing readers warning through the tradition of prophecy and prophetic thinking link together apocalypse texts. This structure provides insight on how warnings and prophetic thinking are received in our culture. In all these texts the characters have to fight, either their community members or themselves to be understood as sane. There is doubt placed on their capacity to make sound decisions based on their beliefs about the world, the future, and the people around them. Despite that doubt, and despite the accusations, the characters are still able to form apocalypse communities. However, as I expand on in Chapter 2, the communities created in the right-wing texts validate white male paranoia and the state

violence and othering it causes whereas other texts show how white supremacy and patriarchy discount the fears of women, particularly women of color.

Hope

While warning is essential, an apocalypse text is not one without the requisite emphasis on hope. When I say hope, I do not mean that the authors pave a path for readers to avoid catastrophe altogether; instead, I mean that the authors provide strategies to mitigate the ongoing or looming disasters. One of the more popular ways to communicate hope is through written language.

Written language is key in apocalypse novels. Now, obviously, authors may be biased in terms of their understanding of the purpose and importance of written language given that they are authors. Additionally, I am not arguing that writing is the only important or useful way to communicate important community ideals. However, written language has a long history of being useful in uniting people into a community even if they cannot always be near each other. There are so many examples of how written works have united people and informed people of how a community is doing: written spiritual texts from the Bible to the Qur'an, revolutionary texts from Thomas Paine's "Common Sense" to the Combahee River Collective's 1978 statement, and even more simple community bylaws passed in neighborhoods, workplaces, and educational spaces.¹⁵⁶

As I argued in previous chapters of this dissertation, apocalypse literature is ultimately theorizing community. One of the claims that many apocalypse novels make, either directly or indirectly, is that works of written language are tools to bring communities of people together. They argue that particularly in times of catastrophe and strife, such texts work to both unite

people and give them a purpose, and through this unity and purpose, can find hope. In texts such as Tim LaHaye's *Left Behind*, it is clear what LaHaye thinks of the written word. In this novel, the Bible is the Word of God and needs to be read as such. Although the characters in this text are experiencing times of great tribulation, they are directed again and again back to the Bible. The Bible not only serves as a text that unifies believers during the post-Rapture period in the novel, but it also serves as both a way for the characters to know what will happen and what they should do while it happens. For example, once Rayford converts, he not only spends time every day reading his Bible, but he also actively seeks out others who read the Bible and are following its clues in formulating their own plan for survival or martyrdom.

Matthew Mather's novel is much different in that it is not as easy to see the unifying and hopeful potential of the written word in his text. In this novel, things do not start to turn around for the characters until a young man joins their community. When he does, he writes a code for their phones in order for them to still be connected despite the power and cyber blackouts in New York City. Once people are able to connect, they are able to more easily get medical help, share resources, and contact loved ones who they hadn't been able to find before. This kind of writing, in a language born for technology, provides a different lens in understanding the power of writing. Despite the fact that the code doesn't provide a direct message of hope or a set of actions to carry out in the same way that the Bible does in *Left Behind*, Mather shows us that new ways of understanding language can unify people and provide a specific purpose. Because Mather's text is in part a warning about what can happen if the technology some people are completely reliant on fails, it is interesting that he makes the choice for technology, and the language of technology, to be the saving impetus in a time of dire strife.

Octavia Butler also is more experimental with her use of showing the powers of the written word. *Parable of the Sower* is told through the diary format. The entire story is told through a combination of Lauren's journal entries and through excerpts of her Earthseed writings. Here, Butler is showing how new works can revolutionize the way people understand each other. As is explored in the beginning of the novel, most of Lauren's small community is comprised of Christians. When circumstances quickly and radically change, Lauren is left leading her community members North and trying to convince them to convert to her way of thinking and being—of accepting change as God—even though she spent the early portions of the novel realizing how difficult it would be to break others away from the god that her father believes in.¹⁵⁷ Through the novel, Butler shows how times of connection are formed through readings of Lauren's Earthseed writings. These writings are not just simply accepted to be true, but people use them to think through what they are doing in their apocalyptic world, use them to direct their actions moving forward, and they use them in planning their future permanent home. Lauren's vision becomes so much more because she is able to share it with others, allowing them to read the works when they have time.

Like with *Cyberstorm*, it may not initially be clear how Erdrich's *Future Home of the Living God* reinforces the idea that texts can be used as tools in service of creating hope. However, it could be argued that Erdrich's vision of how to use writing is the most realistic. This text is also told through the lens of a diary, the main character Cedar's diary. Throughout this novel, there are layers at play showing the impact writing can have for individuals and communities. Cedar, despite being in her apocalyptic setting, is also the editor for a small journal about female Catholic figures. The texts that she assembles and distribute provide stories of hope and give meaning to her world. For example, Cedar muses many times on what suffering is and

why it is. Her journal and study of these female Catholic figures leads her to the hopeful place that frames the suffering she experiences as an expression of love and true humanity. In addition to the journal, Cedar's stepfather also writes and often sends excerpts to her. He is writing a book about why he should not kill himself. Every day he writes reasons to live, and those reasons resonate with Cedar and shape how she sees her life having meaning. Through her stepfather's writings, Cedar is able to gain a better understanding of her mother's community and the community that she was never given a chance to become a part of until she was much older. Last, Erdrich leaves us, the readers, with a mixed message of hope. For the reader immersed in the story, Cedar's journal was already written and therefore hope can be gleaned from what otherwise may have been an overwhelmingly hopeless conclusion. You close the book with the question: how did Cedar get the journal out of the prison facility so that I can be reading this text? There is hope that her community was able to save Cedar and create a world where you could read a text about these events.

In both *Parable of the Sower* and *Future Home of the Living God*, written art can "be understood as a form of resistance to the nation-state."¹⁵⁸ Because both texts are overtly challenging the laws and hierarchies of the nation-state, the writings in both texts are explicitly seen as both works of creativity and as important political pieces that help characters align their beliefs with a collective. As Calichman argues through a discussion of Japanese author Abe Kōbō, "no community can exist as simply given. Here the identity required to form community conceals an even deeper level of identification, and this demands that attention now be directed to the question of ideology."¹⁵⁹ In apocalypse books, the writing that the characters read and produce help them to have a shared ideological basis which defines the goals of the community. By ideological goals, I mean the agreed upon intent of the community (such as the Tribulation

Force evangelizing and recruiting believers in *Left Behind*) and the values that support those intentions.

In addition to writing, the child is an important figure that plays an important role in many apocalypse novels. In apocalypse novels, authors are concerned with how an entire community navigates catastrophe and those communities often include children. Apocalypse novelists ask questions such as: How will children be raised during times of disaster? How will pregnant mothers receive healthcare? And how do you protect children from the disasters that come with apocalypse? Much scholarship has been written about how the figure of “the child” factors into regards to futures that will be “good” for children. In fact, more right-wing apocalypse novels, such as *Left Behind* and *Cyberstorm*, directly illustrate the issues that scholars, such as Lee Edelman, have in regard to how the figure of the child is portrayed. As Lee Edelman notes in his seminal *No Future*, “public appeals on behalf of America’s children [are]... hard to refuse.”¹⁶⁰ However, there are significant problems with political messaging and community structuring that focus entirely on what is “good” for the children. Often, as Edelman claims, the political messaging in favor of “The Child” goes to support ideology that uplifts white, heterosexual, patriarchal, and capitalist structures. The appeals for the children are really appeals for a continuation or reaffirmation of U.S. society as it is already structured. Additionally, as Caroline Levander notes, “American literary and political texts do not so much include child subjects as depend on them to represent, naturalize, and, at times, attempt to reconfigure the ground rules of U.S. national belonging.”¹⁶¹ Apocalypse novels specifically think through how the child is seen through times of catastrophe and is often used as a figure that represents hope and futurity in catastrophic times. However, depending on the kind of apocalypse represented, the figure of the child can be used to either reaffirm the popular

narrative like Edelman argues or the child can be used as a symbolic reconfiguration of “the ground rules of U.S. national belonging” like Levander contends.¹⁶²

In the more right-wing apocalypse novels, main characters are mostly concerned with their own children. In evangelical apocalypses that are about biblical apocalypses, many authors, including Tim LaHaye, write about how children are raptured. These texts consider children to be pure and incapable of the evil that can come with growing older and more worldly. In these texts, there is no need to consider children in apocalypse communities because children would not exist on earth anymore. Hope therefore comes from the idea that young children will not experience these earthly horrors and instead will be reunited with believers in heaven. Despite the potential tribulations that adults will face, there is continued hope from God’s promise of heaven.

Additionally, these texts often have a high quantity of anti-abortion themes and content. It is key to conservative apocalypse writers that the relationship between abortion and the devil is communicated. Even in less religiously focused novels such as *Cyberstorm*, the focus is still on anti-abortion and the children of nuclear families. With these kinds of text, hope comes from being able to keep one’s own children alive. At the end of *Cyberstorm*, Mike is happy that he and his family made it through the storm unscathed and looks towards his children as he thinks of his future. Here, the takeaway is supposedly that if we protect our children, the future will be saved because humanity will continue.

In books that focus on inserting love and equity into their communities, such as *Parable of the Sower* and *Future Home of the Living God*, children are seen as vital parts of the community, rather than just innocent beings who will not be involved or are only involved in that they will aid in carrying on a family’s legacy. In *Parable of the Sower*, the ideology that

underpins Earthseed is created by Lauren when she is a young teenager. By having Earthseed be created by a youth, Butler is making the claim that children are a vital part of our communities and not only because of their future potential. Additionally, Lauren's Earthseed community takes in children that are not in anyone's nuclear family. Instead, the entire Earthseed community is responsible for the more vulnerable members of the community, like infants and toddlers. Here the hope comes from the healing work of being in community together and of finding a purpose in creating a home for each person in the community.

In *Future Home of the Living God*, hope similarly comes from the healing work of being in a community with others. In this scenario, unborn children and their mothers are being incarcerated by the government. Given that the U.S. government is so powerful, and that the only women who are capable of having children are women of color, hope is not easy to find. In this text, the U.S. government makes the claim that the incarcerated women and children born into incarceration are making a sacrifice for the future of humanity. Erdrich, in writing this plot, alludes to how Christian and political organizations have in fact taken children away from their family to be put in residential schools in order to "civilize" them so that they can work towards the supremacy of the United States. Underground organizations in this novel, such as the one organized by the Obijwe peoples, work to free the women and their unborn children and bring them across the U.S. border. This dangerous community work is what brings hope. The people involved in the underground network of people bringing women to freedom know that the mere existence of children in the government's hands is not a hopeful future. By emphasizing how people will struggle for and suffer with one's community, Erdrich makes the claim that hope and futurity come from a community that practices fierce, radical, and brave love.

Understanding Authorial Intent

Not all texts are best understood if the authorial intent is known; however, it is key to understand what the author is attempting to do in order to fully understand apocalypse novels. Because apocalypse books are so explicitly political, looking into the authors' backgrounds illuminates understandings of the novels. When analyzing interviews about apocalypse novels, it is clear that some authors use observations about the world to guide their writing process. For example, Octavia Butler and Louise Erdrich point to specific historical events that inspired their novels. In Butler's case, she explains how her research on World War II and Bush's presidency helped her to conceptualize how fascism can take hold in a country. Additionally, Butler also analyzed Reagan, his platform, and its relationships to the rise of the new Christian Right. Erdrich, on the other hand, references how the election of George W. Bush impacted global access to reproductive health care. Tim LaHaye and Matthew Mathers, on the other hand, are trying to create a realistic scenario that depends solely on their worldviews. In these cases, there seems to be a lack of understanding, or a lack of caring to understand, that there are other worldviews that can intersect with their own. These different approaches contribute to the seemingly vast chasm between apocalypse books that focus on themes of power, diversity, and love rather than those that focus on themes of nuclear family and individual integrity.

Some authors like Octavia Butler and Louise Erdrich use their writing prowess as a form of activism in the name of social justice. Their novels examine the relationships among fascism, state power, and catastrophe. In an interview with Joshunda Sanders in 2004, Butler responds to Sanders' observation that *Parable of the Sower* "seem[s] to echo what's happening in the world right now" by explaining that instead of trying to predict the future, she was instead attempting to explore how a nation can descend into fascism.¹⁶³ Butler says

Keep in mind that when I wrote them, Bush wasn't president. Clinton had yet to be reelected. When I wrote them the time was very different. I was trying not to prophesize. Matter of fact, I was trying to give warning. One of the kinds of research I did was to read a lot of stuff about World War II. Not the war itself, but I wanted to know in particular how a country goes fascist. So, I have this country, in *Parable of the Sower*, and especially *Parable of the Talents*, sliding in that direction. And I really was not trying to prophesize that somehow we would do that but... (2004)¹⁶⁴

Here, readers can see that Butler's intent in writing the *Parable* novels was to show people how a country can slip into fascism over time. Her explorations of poverty, racism, and politics were intended to serve as a warning, much in the same way that biblical parables can be understood. Butler herself says here that the startling similarities between the plot of the novel and the U.S. in the last several decades that people notice are not intended, although she has also noted elsewhere that it was indeed intentional. Instead, Butler is implicitly nodding to the fact that by studying and understanding specific historical events, we can better understand our own political climates. By committing to studying how several countries descended into fascism before and during World War II, Butler's narrative is helping us to understand the ways in which the U.S. is currently in a fascist political crisis.

Louise Erdrich also discusses how her novels are explorations of catastrophic historical incidents as well. In a 2017 interview with now TERF Margaret Atwood Erdrich explains how her apocalypse novel was inspired by the election of George W. Bush and expands by explaining how specific legislation passed on existential issues contributed to both her personal outrage and her inspiration for this novel:¹⁶⁵

I started *Future Home of the Living God* sometime after the 2000 U.S. election. I was furious and worried. I saw the results of electing George W. Bush as a disaster for reproductive rights. Sure enough, he began by reinstating the global gag rule, which cuts international funding for contraceptives if abortion is mentioned. This, when we face overpopulation. Also crucial for me was that we lost on climate change; there was a real chance to keep the lid on carbon back then. Oh, and I was pregnant! My youngest daughter was born in 2001, so my identification with Cedar was total. I wrote obsessively in Cedar's voice.

(2017)¹⁶⁶

Two things in particular stand out in this excerpt. The first is that, in a similar manner to Butler, Erdrich's work is inspired by political events that result in catastrophe for some people. Secondly, Erdrich is forthcoming in explaining how her life circumstances and identity impact her writing. Erdrich explicitly states that her status as a pregnant woman was a large part of how she identified with her main character.

Octavia Butler also is straightforward in explaining how her identity as a Black woman, in particular how her experiences as a young Black girl interested in science fiction, inspires her work. In an interview with Terry Gross, Butler explains that she "wound up writing science fiction from the point of view of girls and women, just because [she] was a girl and [she is] a woman. [She] wound up writing science fiction from the point of view of Black people because [she is] Black" (1993).¹⁶⁷ In the case of both Erdrich and Butler, both authors explain how catastrophic historical events paired with their experiences as women and also as Indigenous and Black people drive their narratives. In turn, they create stories that explore the complexity of how people are impacted and can navigate apocalypse.

In interviews of Matthew Mather and Tim LaHaye, on the other hand, it is clear that the authors do not consider their positionality as one example out of many examples of positionalities. Instead, they try to universalize their own particular position. By universalizing the human experience, as based on white male Christian identity, these kinds of authors usually default to the experience of a white, heterosexual, man—a phenomenon that *Cyberstorm* and *Left Behind* are not immune to. Now, there is nothing wrong with writing a novel with white, heterosexual men; however, by explaining how their stories are about regular people they are erasing the concept of different kinds of people existing in and understanding the world in different ways. This is clear when, in answering a question about how he creates his characters, Mather explains that “flawed characters interest [him]. [He likes] (to) write characters that do amazing and courageous things, but just as often—perhaps more often—do dumb, random or thoughtless things” (2014).¹⁶⁸ Mather explains that he writes about people who have flaws. He does not explain what he believes the flaws to be, how they are important, or how positionality can impact characters.

To cement this even further, he explains further in a different 2014 interview that *Cyberstorm* “illustrates what a major cyber event could look like from the perspective of an average family trying to escape the disaster.”¹⁶⁹ Here, his term “average family” does an incredible amount of heavy lifting when you consider the fact that *Cyberstorm* is about a young, white, able-bodied, rich family—decidedly not the average in the United States. In a 2016 interview, held right before his death, Tim LaHaye similarly positions his characters and his audience as average people. In a question as to why biblical prophecy is confusing to many people, LaHaye explains how people are confused because “they don’t know anything about Bible prophecy. Their pastor doesn’t teach it or he teaches the wrong view of interpretation of

prophecy” (2016).¹⁷⁰ Now, if this interview was directed towards a specifically Christian audience, this response may make sense. However, this interview was published by the Huffpost, a blog website with over 25 million readers a month. By giving this answer, LaHaye is only speaking to a Christian audience who have an incorrect (male) pastor. While this seems very specific, LaHaye uses universalizing language that shows readers that he believes his experience as a Christian man to be the only one worth thinking about.

Additionally, Mather also explains how he conceptualizes and understands the disasters that influence his writing. He explains, while answering a question about how people react in the face of disaster, that he himself had experienced disasters through living through a train crash and a car crash. When referring to historical events that also inspired his work, Mather explains that his timing in publishing “was just right. Just when [he] put the book out, (there was) a flurry of activity from WikiLeaks and Anonymous, then a few high-profile cyber-attacks that made it into the mainstream media” (2014).¹⁷¹ These answers help us to understand that Mather understands disaster and historical events in terms of how it impacts him as an individual. The cyber-attacks that helped make his books popular weren’t considered by him to be a terrible incident that went to show why his narrative mattered, but instead, a lucky break for him as an author.

Tim LaHaye also has a very narrow view of the disasters and sees them only as either the results of sinful people or as the unstoppable Christian prophecy coming true. He explains to David Reagan when asked about what burdens him in terms of his Bible prophecy viewpoint:

I would say, and let me add a proviso to that I in addition to my love for the Bible and love for Jesus Christ and souls of men I have a passion for America. I’ve always loved- you know I was 17 years old and I volunteered for the Air Force in

World War II because I just loved America. But I look back on it and I see that in the church that has always taught at least in my background that they believed in the fundamentals and they believed in obeying the Scripture and you had to take the Bible literally. And when you apply prophecy to a literal interpretation it makes sense. If you don't use it literally it doesn't make any other sense. And to me the signs of the times are evident that we are in the last days. In fact, I call them the last days of the last days.¹⁷²

Here, LaHaye is explaining how his rigid viewpoint accounts for all of the chaos and catastrophes in the world. He is comfortable with it because he believes that this is biblical prophecy come true, and there is nothing anyone can do to prevent these kinds of chaos.

Another way to understand authorial intent besides interviews and statements is to see who the authors interact with. Both Mather and LaHaye venerate the state, referred to above as "America," and make that clear in several ways. In LaHaye's case, his affiliations are clear and well-known. LaHaye was not only someone who supported conservative political causes throughout his long life but also was a founding member of the Moral Majority and a member of the original board of directors. The Moral Majority helped to solidify the relationship between fundamentalist Christianity and Republican ideology and power in the 1980s. The politics of the Moral Majority very specifically endorse white, Christian, heterosexual, and capitalist views of how individuals, communities, and nations should be structured. When reading *Left Behind*, readers can clearly see how LaHaye's understanding of Christianity endorses a narrow worldview championed by conservative Republicans.

Mather similarly has connections to corporate and state power. In an interview with Jason Gurley in 2014 about *Cyberstorm* Mather explains that his knowledge about technology comes

from his decades of experience in the technology field. He says that “even now, [he] is still on the advisory board of a company and attend[s] conferences on cybersecurity.”¹⁷³ He explains further in a 2014 interview for SFFWorld saying:

I’ve worked for quite a few years in the anti-hacking business, and in writing *Cyberstorm*, I interviewed people like the head of cyber operations for the US Air Force, the DHS and the NATO Cyber Command liaisons (these were all people I had professional contacts with) to come up with (a) plausible scenario that combined Mother Nature and a series of cyber events to create a nightmare scenario in New York City. (2014)¹⁷⁴

Here, Mathers positions himself as someone with connections to the state that help further his livelihood, both as a technology entrepreneur and as an author. Mather’s identification with the state and other affiliated organizations paired with his inability to conceptualize his stories about rich white men to be about one little part of the human experience rather than the “average” speak to his focus on the maintenance of the U.S. status quo that I explored in both chapters 1 and 2 of this dissertation.

Conclusion

Reading apocalypse novels together does more than teach readers about the different ways people imagine catastrophe. By analyzing the convergences and conflicts among these texts, readers can see how pervasive certain communal structures are in the United States. The pervasive impact of Christian prophecy, the idea that our society is on the brink of a disaster we need to be warned about, and the treatment of those considered “mad” for their worldviews allows readers to see a more complete picture of a deeply unsettled society. However, at the

same time, we also see how hope is found through the ways that people share and form identities around ideologies as well as through the protection of young life. Importantly, the hope shown in right-wing texts versus the hope shown in social justice-oriented texts can and does cause harm to those not in positions of power in white, patriarchal communities.

By looking specifically at how the authors understand their work, one can see how some authors, like Butler and Erdrich, analyze their place in the world and historical catastrophes to discuss the complex relationships between community and disaster, while other authors, like Mathers and LaHaye, imagine narratives that foreground and universalize their experiences only. While I recommend that we should all read apocalypse books more broadly, I also believe that we should be advocating for communal structures imagined by authors who do the work of analyzing the complexity of catastrophe and reveal the importance of social justice within community.

Apocalypse books, while not often written about from a broad perspective, offer the opportunity to take the warnings and fears of groups seriously. Despite the fact that apocalypse rhetoric can be seen as dramatic and not relevant to real life concerns, it is clear that authors engage with U.S. culture and reading these kinds of books collectively allows us to understand different political opinions in our culture. Which, given our time of seemingly increased polarization and radicalization of the Right in dangerous ways that work to discredit and texts about justice, is a good idea.

What We Do During the End

“Some things will never wash away”- “Fog,” Radiohead

In many ways, apocalypse thinking has caused irreparable damage. In one sense, the long apocalypses described by Afrofuturists and Indigenous scholars’ detail genocide, erasure of culture, and significant harm to the environment. The impact of racial slavery, Indigenous genocide, and extractive capitalism is unrecoverable. In another sense, the apocalypse feared by many white evangelical Christians is directly caused by ideologies and policies that further disruption, disagreement, and destruction. The focus on white supremacy, patriarchy, and an emphasis on morality that only prioritizes white, patriarchal values is directly linked to ideologies that advocate for and produce violent hierarchal systems. Because apocalypse is such a large category, it is simple to dismiss apocalypse as an unviable way of understanding U.S. political systems and culture.

The Angel of History and the Sankofa Bird

Despite the fact that irreparable damage has been caused by both long apocalypses and the actions of those who fear an imminent Christian apocalypse, there are ways forward. Some of those ways have been described and analyzed in this dissertation: creating communities where a thriving community is the goal rather than individual power and practicing ideologies such as intersectional feminism that work to consider all while undoing structures of harm. Through practicing these actions and moving forward with hope and love, there can be a way forward, away from apocalypse.

In Western literary theory, Walter Benjamin famously explains how:

A Klee painting named 'Angelus Novus' shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned towards the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing in from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such a violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.¹⁷⁵

Here, Benjamin is describing the connection between progress and catastrophe and explains that progress allows us to look back regrettably on what has been caused without being able to fix what has been broken. This analysis, while a hauntingly beautiful interpretation of a mysterious looking painting, paints an abysmal picture of the passage of time and our role in shaping history. I believe that we do not have to understand history this way.

One alternative option to understanding history, time, and our roles in history that we can instead turn to is the Sankofa symbol. The term "Sankofa" comes from the Asante Twi language, spoken by the Akan people of Western Africa. The word, meaning "to return and get it," is most often depicted through the symbol of a bird. This symbol "depicts a mythical bird flying forward with its head turned backward. The egg in its mouth represents the 'gems' or knowledge of the past upon which wisdom is based; it also signifies the generation to come that would benefit from that wisdom."¹⁷⁶ This symbol, rather than emphasizing what cannot be changed, represents what we can bring forward with us. The past, rather than being a horror that we do not have

control over is a source of information, of support, and of wisdom. While it is true that we cannot go back and change what has been done, nothing is set in stone. The Sankofa bird reminds us that we are part of a constantly changing world where we are connected to those that came before us and that we are responsible for bringing wisdom to our present to support future generations of life.

These two symbols, the angel of history and the Sankofa bird, encapsulate a tension that I have been examining through apocalypse novels. Apocalypse novels similarly work to understand this relationship between time, catastrophic events, and social responsibility. When we examine literature as political objects that help us untangle the cacophony of voices, points of view, and cultures that categorize the United States and the world as a whole, the stakes of what apocalypse literature theorizes become clear. Authors who examine the past incorporate the wisdom of ancestors and emphasize the hope of creating communities where the just is brought forward and the unjust is only brought forward as stories of caution and warning, are working towards the spirit of the Sankofa bird. After the last several years of global crisis, we truly need to reconceptualize how we understand our connections to each other, how we approach catastrophe, and how we create communities that center on support for all.

In this dissertation, I argued that apocalypse literature provides a way for people to analyze disparate apocalypse theories and compare them to each other. Comparing Octavia Butler and Tim LaHaye may not be orthodox, but it throws in stark relief the difference in apocalypse ideologies and how those beliefs transfer to everyday actions. In concluding this dissertation, I want to emphasize that it is time we start seriously examining the lessons from those who theorize, think, and write about catastrophe. Ultimately, apocalypse novels make a claim about why society looks as it does, and what it should look like. By reading apocalypse

novels, we get a stronger understanding of why U.S. political discourse is the way it is. These novels do not exist in a vacuum. As this dissertation comes to a close, I want to provide examples for how the lessons learned from apocalypse novels transfer directly into understanding our current political climate. From Never-Trumpers to #NoDAPL, from Christofascists to decolonial anarchists, apocalypse novels help us to make sense of the stakes of these coalitions and movements.

What Do We Look For?

Contemporary U.S. politics is a jumble of pundits, inflammatory politicians, and expressions of mass unrest. In the last several years alone, politicians such as Donald Trump have encouraged a rise in public demonstrations of hate. Proud Boys, Minutemen, and Neo-Nazis protest, hold demonstrations, and recruit young, disillusioned, (primarily) men. On the other hand, movements like Black Lives Matter, labor justice actions resulting in work place strikes, and gun control demonstrations have dominated news media as well. It is hard to imagine a United States that centers its laws and policies on forming and maintaining communities that care for all of its members when we read, watch, or participate in any major political event due to the contentious advocacy for drastically different points of view. That being said, apocalypse novels think through the levels of catastrophe we have been experiencing. This literature thinks through how we move forward after pandemics, after mass violence, and after deadly political violence despite political cacophony.

I have analyzed the importance of social responsibility in this dissertation, especially in Chapter 1. Nothing illustrates the issue of personal political responsibility more than the Never-Trumper movement. This movement, if you can call it that, was a declaration by many prominent

Republicans between the years 2015-2021 that while they were still Republicans, they were vehemently opposed to the ideas, policies, and rhetoric of Donald Trump. Never-Trumper Rick Wilson went as far as to write several books, including *Everything Trump Touches Dies*, about how Donald Trump was bad for politics, the United States, and the Republican party. While I do not believe that he is wrong, his response and demonization of one person did nothing to address the root issues. Now, addressing the root issues would also undermine the state and for some, addressing those issues is a slippery slope of a problem that is too frightening to address. If Donald Trump's dangerous policies, words, and actions have been supported by the U.S. government and a large amount of the public, then what does that mean about the political values of the U.S. government and a portion of the public? By blaming only one person for the state of U.S. politics, Never-Trumpers move blame away from themselves and their values and build support for Republican candidates who have steadily worked to further the agenda of a white, capitalist, patriarchal United States particularly since Ronald Reagan's presidential election in 1980. Similar to the apocalyptic logic in texts such as *Left Behind* and *Cyberstorm*, catastrophe is blamed on individual misbehavior rather than understood as a larger problem rooted in the history of the United States as a settler-colonialist, capitalist, and racist empire.

Using one political figure as a scapegoat to explain away all of the issues of the U.S is dangerous. Currently, the United States is in yet another crisis, one that has been building in velocity over the last couple of decades, defined by violence, individualist understanding of freedom, and a lack of mental health support: gun control. According to the Associated Press Mass Killings Database, there have been "22 mass killings in 2023, defined as four or more people killed, not including the perpetrator."¹⁷⁷ At the Capitol, bitter battles rage between Republicans and Democrats over the issue of gun control. On April 6th, 2023, after yet another

horrifying mass shooting, this time at a Nashville elementary school, two Black “Democratic members of the Tennessee House of Representative were expelled while a third member was spared in an ousting by Republican lawmakers that was decried by the trio as oppressive, vindictive and racially motivated” while the trio of Democrat representatives were attempting to advocate for immediate action on gun control to prevent future tragedies.¹⁷⁸ This disappointing, and yet typical, event illustrates the more nuanced relationship between gun violence and white supremacy while highlighting the attachment that Republican politicians have to the concept of “freedom” at the expense of the safety and freedom of others. These situations will not get better until the public and U.S. politicians reckon with the concept that individual understandings of catastrophe only work against developing caring communities.

With Love,

Luckily, we have a very powerful and infinite resource at our disposal: love. Advocating for an increase in love can sound as empty and promise-less as the thoughts and prayers that Republicans espouse after continuous shootings even while receiving significant donations from the NRA. However, love can be radically transformative when it is applied in the world with intention. Daniel Heath Justice notes how “bodies in love—through love—create constitutive and meaningful relations between peoples that offer new or renewed possibilities for lasting and ongoing kinship.”¹⁷⁹ Love can help create meaning in community. Through love, we can understand how and why we are all responsible for one another. We are all here together and there are ways that we can make our time here together better for everyone. As Justice argues “we need to think of relationships as ongoing commitments, not one-time-only resolutions. If we’re going to figure out how to live together, we need to accept that we’re actually going to be

doing so—and the terms of that relationship can't only be those that benefit settler society.”¹⁸⁰

With this dissertation, I propose that we can use fictional narratives of apocalypse to understand what kinds of theories of community advocate for love, especially in times of ongoing crisis.

Those narratives are not narratives that espouse individual responsibility, or forms of feminism that only apply to one demographic, or force religious ideologies onto diverse populations of people. Paying attention to how people communicate their solutions to apocalypse give us insight on the different ways people believe our world should be structured. To me, the only way forward is with love and a fearless commitment to anti-racism, anti-capitalism, anti-ableism, and anti-sexism.

For now, I leave you with a vision of love, belonging, and justice dreamed by bell hooks:

In my childhood I dreamed about a culture of belonging. I still dream that dream.

I contemplate what our lives would be like if we knew how to cultivate awareness, to live mindfully, peacefully; if we learned habits of being that would bring us closer together, that would help us build beloved community.¹⁸¹

¹ Increase Mather, a New England minister, wrote “A Brief History of the Warr with the Indians in New England” for two purposes; His first intention by writing this narrative was to give a summary of the events that happened in what is known as King Philip’s War; but secondly, he uses the space of the narrative to argue that the Puritans living in the New England colonies caused the war by behaving in ways that called for divine retribution.

² The Millerites were a group of people in the early nineteenth century who “were active in the movements for abolition and temperance before they converted to faith in the imminent Second Coming” (O’Leary 94).

³ *A Canticle for Leibowitz* focuses on monks whose main duty is to preserve knowledge, or the “Memorabilia,” from the previous civilization that was almost completely destroyed in the first nuclear holocaust by both the actual bombs and by the angry surviving citizens who blamed the intelligent people of society—scientists, doctors, government officials, engineers, and businessmen—with the destruction of society.

⁴ “Revelation,” 1:1

⁵ Carlevale, 364

⁶ Shankman, 351, 355

⁷ This play, although apocalyptic as I will show, does not engage the concept of evil as O’Leary argues apocalyptic rhetoric does. Chaos is a more accurate term to describe what apocalyptic rhetoric engages in ancient Greek drama as the concepts of good and evil are Abrahamic concepts.

⁸ Translated by Johnston, ln. 1772-1776

⁹ Euripides, ln 1388-1392

¹⁰ In this example, a synonym for κάλυπτω is used. Euripides, ln 22

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- ¹¹ Euripides, ln 12 and ln 13
- ¹² Euripides, ln. 92-97
- ¹³ Johnston, ln. 742-746
- ¹⁴ Johnston, ln 830
- ¹⁵ Friesen, 2
- ¹⁶ Versnel, 96
- ¹⁷ Versnel, 99
- ¹⁸ Versnel, 100
- ¹⁹ Versnel, 130
- ²⁰ Versnel, 132
- ²¹ Versnel, 132-133
- ²² Versnel, 189
- ²³ O’Leary, 66
- ²⁴ O’Leary, 66
- ²⁵ Carter, 4
- ²⁶ O’Leary 67
- ²⁷ O’Leary, 68
- ²⁸ Pagels, 3
- ²⁹ Pagels, 2
- ³⁰ Pagels, 4 and 7
- ³¹ Pagels, 24 and 32
- ³² Pagels, 2
- ³³ Rev. 4:10
- ³⁴ Rev. 17:5
- ³⁵ Rev. 21:12
- ³⁶ Rev. 22:15
- ³⁷ MacDonald, 123
- ³⁸ Rev. 1:13- 1:16
- ³⁹ Palmer, 8
- ⁴⁰ Pagels, 16
- ⁴¹ If you agree with Elaine Pagels’ argument in *Revelations: Visions, Prophecy, and Politics in the Book of Revelation*, as I do, then this is the god associated with the Jewish faith. If you are reading this text in the context of the Christian Bible, then this character can be read in the context of the Christian faith.
- ⁴² The Jesus of this text is very intimidating and monstrous as seen by his physical appearance, therefore making his threats even more potent. Rev. 2:2-2:3
- ⁴³ Justice, 167-168
- ⁴⁴ Simpson, 11
- ⁴⁵ Dillon, 8-9
- ⁴⁶ Justice, 168
- ⁴⁷ Eshun, 299
- ⁴⁸ Sinker
- ⁴⁹ In particular, I think of Audra Simpson’s *Mohawk Interruptus* where she describes the fraught process Kahnawà:kehró:non are in where they must “ imagine themselves outside of the interstices of Empire while operating within it. They have to, because Empire is both everywhere and nowhere, ahistorical and endlessly performing a fast past; it is a place with a state, with imperatives, and with administrative power on top of Kahnawà:ke land” (26). A process that similarly applies to other Indigenous people and people of color affected by the U.S. imperial regime.
- ⁵⁰ Here, I refer to how U.S. empire has historically used and abused the bodies of Indigenous people and people of color for labor to develop imperial infrastructure domestically and internationally, for imperial conquest in wars, and even in the name of “science” in staggering amounts of experiments.
- ⁵¹ Byrd, xiii
- ⁵² Byrd, xxxix
- ⁵³ Streeby, 95
- ⁵⁴ Streeby, 99
- ⁵⁵ Kaplan, 12 and 13
- ⁵⁶ Kaplan, 12

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- ⁵⁷ Moore, 6
- ⁵⁸ Gabriele and Palmer, 4
- ⁵⁹ Some examples of texts like these include William R. Forstchen's *One Second After*, Gloria Miklowitz's *After the Bomb*, and Pat Frank's *Alas, Babylon*.
- ⁶⁰ Taylor, x
- ⁶¹ Chapman, 30
- ⁶² Chapman, 5
- ⁶³ Chapman, 100
- ⁶⁴ Jenkins and LaHaye, 43
- ⁶⁵ Jenkins and LaHaye, 43
- ⁶⁶ Jenkins and LaHaye, 6
- ⁶⁷ Jenkins and LaHaye, 62
- ⁶⁸ Jenkins and LaHaye, 53
- ⁶⁹ Jenkins and LaHaye, 54
- ⁷⁰ Jenkins and LaHaye, 149
- ⁷¹ Jenkins and LaHaye, 63
- ⁷² Jenkins and LaHaye, 472
- ⁷³ Jenkins and LaHaye, 75
- ⁷⁴ Jenkins and LaHaye, 104
- ⁷⁵ Jenkins and LaHaye, 399
- ⁷⁶ Jenkins and LaHaye, 5
- ⁷⁷ Mather, 13 and 22
- ⁷⁸ Mather, 51 and 97
- ⁷⁹ Mather, 344-346
- ⁸⁰ Jenkins and LaHaye, 265
- ⁸¹ Justice, 167-168
- ⁸² Simpson, 11
- ⁸³ Dillon, 8-9
- ⁸⁴ Justice, 168
- ⁸⁵ Eshun, 299
- ⁸⁶ Sinker
- ⁸⁷ Lacey, 382
- ⁸⁸ Melzer, 31
- ⁸⁹ Schalk, 109
- ⁹⁰ Butler, 70
- ⁹¹ Butler, 71
- ⁹² Butler, 3
- ⁹³ Butler, 120
- ⁹⁴ Butler, 306
- ⁹⁵ Butler, 306
- ⁹⁶ The social conditions I point to are reminiscent of Lipsitz's theory of possessive investment in whiteness (1995). Through analyzing different state policies and laws, such as the Federal Housing Act, he shows how racism is directly built into our laws.
- ⁹⁷ Lipsitz, 384
- ⁹⁸ Erdrich, 3
- ⁹⁹ Erdrich, 5
- ¹⁰⁰ Erdrich, 6
- ¹⁰¹ Erdrich, 6
- ¹⁰² Erdrich, 205
- ¹⁰³ Joseph, 53
- ¹⁰⁴ Joseph, 53
- ¹⁰⁵ Joseph, 54
- ¹⁰⁶ Joseph, 55
- ¹⁰⁷ Cohen, 12
- ¹⁰⁸ Anderson, 6
- ¹⁰⁹ Anderson, 7

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- ¹¹⁰ hooks, 5
- ¹¹¹ qtd. in hooks, 45
- ¹¹² Hunter, 43
- ¹¹³ Hunter, 42
- ¹¹⁴ Williams, 12
- ¹¹⁵ Demerath III and Yang, 36
- ¹¹⁶ Williams, 12
- ¹¹⁷ Schuller, 1
- ¹¹⁸ Schuller, 176
- ¹¹⁹ Schuller, 174
- ¹²⁰ Schuller, 174
- ¹²¹ Schuller, 172 and 174
- ¹²² Griffis, 155
- ¹²³ Griffis, 150
- ¹²⁴ Griffis, 152-153
- ¹²⁵ Griffis 156-157
- ¹²⁶ Griffis, 159
- ¹²⁷ Bartkowski and Read
- ¹²⁸ Jenkins and LaHaye, 103
- ¹²⁹ Jenkins and LaHaye, 104
- ¹³⁰ Butler, 25
- ¹³¹ Mather, 17-18
- ¹³² Mather, 124
- ¹³³ Mather, 134
- ¹³⁴ Erdrich, 230
- ¹³⁵ Erdrich, 225
- ¹³⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apocalyptic_literature
- ¹³⁷ Nyp1.org/blog/2019/12/19/apocalyptic-post-apocalyptic-dystopian-worlds
- ¹³⁸ Evnine, 10 and 6
- ¹³⁹ Norledge, 200
- ¹⁴⁰ bell hooks uses the term “dominator culture” to describe “the system of imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy” that lends power to those who fit within the constraints of who is allowed to hold power in the United States. In using the term, I am referencing hooks’ definition of it as well.
- ¹⁴¹ Bloch, 28
- ¹⁴² Mather, 32
- ¹⁴³ This observation, seemingly an exaggeration to a contemporary audience, is made more clear with an understanding of how the Puritan sect of religion came to be. Puritans are a specific type of Protestant, which is a faction of Christianity that broke apart from Catholicism for a multitude of reasons. One big reason was that the leaders of the Protestant Reformation believed the Pope to be Antichrist. As was explained earlier, the “Revelation of John” was originally written as anti-Roman propaganda; the Protestants who applied the metaphorical language of the “Book of Revelation” were not breaking tradition, or even saying anything radically new by using the text to explain the world around them, in fact, their practice of applying the lessons of the text to the world around them was deeply entrenched in a long tradition of doing exactly so.
- ¹⁴⁴ As Reynaldo Anderson and Charles E. Jones note “Although the practices that form the black artistic matrix and practice what we call Afrofuturism can be traced back over 100 years; its current trajectory can be connected to literary engagement between writers Greg Tate and Mark Sinker in 1992 surrounding the relationship between science fiction and Black music” (viii). Critics such as Martine Syms argue “that Afrofuturism focuses too much on unexamined tropes, references to Egyptology, figures in popular culture, and needs to develop a new focus on black humanity” (ix).
- ¹⁴⁵ Darsey, 7-8
- ¹⁴⁶ Douglas, Loc. 421
- ¹⁴⁷ *Amazon Review*
- ¹⁴⁸ In using the word ableism, I refer to both the definition of ableism as “discrimination towards people with disabilities” as well as the related ability privilege which is “the personal, social, and structural advantages given to the nondisabled in our society” as defined and explained by Sami Schalk in *Bodyminds Reimagined* (4).
- ¹⁴⁹ Schalk, 23

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- ¹⁵⁰ Gilman, 114
- ¹⁵¹ Gilman, 115
- ¹⁵² Jenkins and LaHaye, 171
- ¹⁵³ Jenkins and LaHaye, 285
- ¹⁵⁴ Schalk, 88
- ¹⁵⁵ Butler, 96
- ¹⁵⁶ Although I assert that written language has had a large impact, I do not want to contribute to discourse that privileges and reifies settler-colonial ideals. My analysis of written works within apocalypse novels is meant to show how apocalypse novels understand how communities cohere rather than an endorsement of written language in and of itself.
- ¹⁵⁷ Octavia Butler critiques aspects of Christianity in *Parable of the Sower*. While growing up as a Baptist with Baptist parents, Butler was exposed to and part of evangelical Christian culture. Her critiques of Christianity based on her experiences are reflected in this novel.
- ¹⁵⁸ Calichman, 7
- ¹⁵⁹ Calichman, 9
- ¹⁶⁰ Edelman, 2
- ¹⁶¹ Levander, 4-5
- ¹⁶² Levander, 4-5
- ¹⁶³ Sanders
- ¹⁶⁴ Butlers qtd in Sanders
- ¹⁶⁵ Recently, Margaret Atwood has maintained that her feminism relies on essentialist ideas about how gender is a biological experience. This argument is popular for TERFs (trans exclusionary radical feminists) who argue against the inclusion of trans-women in the category of “female” and do not believe that trans people are deserving of lawful rights and protections.
- ¹⁶⁶ Erdrich
- ¹⁶⁷ Butler qtd. in Gross
- ¹⁶⁸ Mather
- ¹⁶⁹ Mather
- ¹⁷⁰ LaHaye
- ¹⁷¹ Mather
- ¹⁷² LaHaye qtd. in Reagan
- ¹⁷³ Mather qtd. Gurley
- ¹⁷⁴ Mather qtd. in *SFFWorld*
- ¹⁷⁵ Benjamin
- ¹⁷⁶ The Spirituals Project at the University of Denver
- ¹⁷⁷ Hauck
- ¹⁷⁸ Razek and Wolfe
- ¹⁷⁹ Justice, 103-104
- ¹⁸⁰ Justice, 158-159
- ¹⁸¹ hooks, 223

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