

# W O R L D ' S   E N D :

## **Millennialism** *in the Modern Age*

### **RE 305**

Classroom: Ladd 207

Mon & Wed 2:30-4:20 pm

### **Prof. G. Spinner**

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office phone: 580-8406

office hours: Tues 11:00-noon, *or by appt.*

### ***Course Description***

End-time preachers, devotees of the Virgin Mary, cargo cultists, would-be messiahs, wagers of racial holy war, followers of Odin or of Rastafari, people waiting for the saucers to land or for the Temple to be rebuilt: these are the millennialists, people who expect an imminent apocalypse that will usher in a Golden Age of peace, material plenty and spiritual pursuits. While many religious traditions posit that at some point in the future the world as we know it will come to an end, millennialists are those who believe that this End is coming *soon*. Whether or not this End will be attended by natural catastrophe, it is always marked by drastic social reversals.

This course surveys millennial movements from around the world, situating them historically, and subjecting them to critical analysis. Some of this material is disturbing; all of it is fascinating. Our aim is to engage the materials carefully, with both academic rigor and some measure of sympathy. We will examine how such millennial movements emerge, and how they continue on even after the anticipated End fails to unfold as predicted. Additionally, we will attend to the paranoid rhetoric of various millennialist groups, scrutinize the role of charismatic leaders, and consider the complicated connections between millennialism and violence.

### ***Learning Goals***

(i.) You will learn to situate religions historically, within social and political contexts, attending to their diversity and complexity. For many of the groups we study, this entails a much closer look than mass media typically affords, going beyond the hype and stereotyping, and humanizing people with millennial convictions.

(ii.) You will learn to apply critical theories, assessing each theory's utility for making sense of our data. This means you do not just criticize millennialism, but become critical of the theories themselves.

(iii.) You will develop research skills, in which you identify reliable information and organize it into a coherent fashion.

(iv.) As this course is conducted as a seminar, you will further develop your ability to freely exchange ideas, to refine your arguments, and to respectfully disagree.

### *Course Materials*

Gershom Gorenberg, The End of Days: Fundamentalism & The Struggle for the Temple Mount (Oxford, 2000).

All other required readings will be made available as a **Course Reader**.

Additionally, you will be assigned to watch documentaries or video clips; the links will be sent via email. Videos are visual texts, and you will be just as accountable for knowing these sources as for the written ones.

### *Course Requirements*

Your grade consists of the following components:

<b>Participation</b>	<b>10 %</b>
<b>Preparing Questions</b>	<b>6 %</b>
<b>First Exam</b>	<b>22 %</b>
<b>Second Exam</b>	<b>22 %</b>
Research project: <i>subtotal</i>	<i>40%</i>
<b>a.) Proposal</b>	<b>5 %</b>
<b>b.) Annotated Bibliography</b>	<b>10 %</b>
<b>c.) Outline</b>	<b>5 %</b>
<b>d.) Final Paper</b>	<b>20 %</b>
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<b>Total</b>	<b>100 %</b>

A few words are in order, at the outset, about some of these components:

**Attendance is mandatory:** you should make every effort to always attend class (and to be on time, and not leave prematurely). If you are too sick to come, or if an emergency arises, then please contact me as soon as possible.

Of course, **participation** is far more than showing up. It is an active engagement: you must have done the reading and be prepared to discuss it. It is talking with and listening to others: you will be an integral part of that conversation. You should have questions; you should have comments; above all, you should have curiosity. So understand that participation is not a default setting, as it requires a conscientious effort throughout the semester. Our goal is have a sustained and thoughtful conversation about this topic, and this will not be achieved through half-hearted attempts.

**Preparing Questions:** for each class you should prepare a minimum of two questions, *along with your own (tentative) answers*, that you could ask the other students with the express purpose of facilitating classroom discussion. You are not trying to stump your classmates; rather you are trying to direct the conversation to some of the more salient points from the readings. Your questions should therefore be carefully chosen and thoughtfully worded. I will collect your

questions at the end of each class session, and will only accept them in class on the day they were due. While I won't be assigning grades (or returning them), I will be looking over your questions to see what you have been thinking about and to assess your level of engagement.

Both **exams** are take-home essays of moderate length. I will say more about effective essay writing and developing your ideas once the semester is under way.

*Late work will be marked down.* I will deduct half a letter grade for each day any assignment is late. While due dates are firm, the instructor is not inflexible. It is, however, incumbent on you to explain to me why you deserve an extension. And here is some good advice: *one asks for an extension before a deadline is missed.*

Do note that this is a **4 credit hour** class, and thus my expectations for your time and effort, both inside and outside of the classroom, are set accordingly. This is a *reading intensive* course, on top of which each student will undertake a full-length **research project**, complete with annotated bibliography and academic citation. Below, I will say more about conducting research.

### ***Fair Grading & A Reasonable Workload***

As the above section makes quite clear, I expect you to work. I think the workload is entirely appropriate for this level of course; and I trust that we can have some real fun working through it together. But, in the interest of fairness, allow me to be more explicit about what my expectations are, and the standards to which I will hold you.

For each hour spent in class, I expect you to spend 3 hours outside of class reading and writing. This means that you should commit approximately 12 hours per week in preparing, executing assignments, and conducting research. Be assured that **you need to do all of the assigned readings**. There is no way to understand the subject and to fully participate in class if you skip, or skimp, on this most fundamental of labors.

In an era of grade inflation, let me address my understanding of what letter grades signify. I take "C" to be the baseline grade: it is *acceptable*. Thus doing all the assigned work, and doing it adequately, earns one a solid "C." "B" then stands for doing *better than acceptable*, demonstrating some measurable improvement over "C" quality. And "A" translates to *excellent* - a superlative I do not dispense lightly. I am not interested in employing mathematical models, such as by grading on a curve; I will happily give as many "A"s as I have students earning them. But do understand that such a high grade must be achieved through diligent effort, and can not merely be assumed.

I do not just attach a grade to your written work, but provide you with feedback on your writing. I make this effort in order to help you improve your writing skills, and so it behooves you to attend to that critique, and learn from your mistakes. While not my primary concern, errors in spelling, punctuation, and grammar detract from your writing, and thus impact your grade. The overarching goal, however, is more focused on content, so that you learn to express your ideas clearly and to build convincing arguments through a careful use of evidence. This pedagogical concern is shared across disciplines, and this course contributes to that ongoing effort.

With this goal in mind, you will have the option to rewrite certain papers. If you receive a B- or lower on a major paper, then you may exercise that option. (This option only applies for major

papers, such as midterms; it is not available for shorter, reflection papers, and, due to time constraints, for finals). If I hand you back a paper with a lower grade, then you can choose to meet with me. We will discuss the shortcomings of the paper, and set a new deadline for the rewritten version. You will turn in the older version along with the newer, and receive the average of the two grades.

### ***Conducting Research***

Research is simply searching out information. Now one might suppose, in our electronic age of the Internet, equipped with ubiquitous search engines, that this task has been made so much easier. But as the information one seeks out has to be both *reliable* and *relevant*, it can actually be harder today to conduct sound research. I will be saying more about those dual criteria of reliability and relevance, as well as providing further instructions for undertaking your project.

The result of project will be a **12-15 page paper**, tailored to your own interests. Working on such a project helps you cultivate important research skills, and it allows you to explore some aspect of millennialism that we do not address in class, or that you want to probe further. Soon I will distribute a list of sample topics, and give you other tips for getting started. You should consider possible topics carefully, as you want to find one that can sustain your interest for an entire semester. *Please schedule a time to meet with me individually* to discuss your choice of topics.

Looking at the course requirements, it is obvious that the research project, as an ongoing process worked on throughout the semester, constitutes a major portion of your grade. While this is independent work, I will be monitoring your progress. To this end, I have set a series of deadlines through the course of the semester to ensure that you pace yourself in this effort.

### ***Deadlines***

Topic Proposal	<b>Mar 10</b>
Annotated Bibliography	<b>Apr 7</b>
Outline	<b>Apr 21</b>
Research Paper	<b>May 8</b>

### ***Classroom Civility***

Do not be late to class, do not leave the room during that time, and do not be rude while here. I hope that we will engage each other in open and honest ways, yet both our speech and our demeanor should reflect common courtesy for those around us. Inappropriate or disruptive behavior will result in being asked to leave the class.

Please turn off your devices before you come to class. Take off headphones, remove ear buds, and stow anything unconnected to our class well out of sight. I will start out the semester by allowing the use of laptops, as some students prefer to take their notes this way; but I will promptly rescind this permission if I feel that people are paying more attention to their computer screens than to class. Eye contact is not optional.

If you need to stand up and stretch, please do so. Feel free to bring a beverage or snack, and, if you are so inclined, enough to share. I just ask that eating and drinking do not interfere with our learning. In short, anything that might provide a distraction to the user, to other students, or to the instructor will not be indulged.

### ***Student Disabilities***

I am happy to make reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. If you believe you will need it, then you must formally request academic accommodation from Meg Hegener, Coordinator for Students with Disabilities, and provide documentation verifying your disability. For further information, please call 580-8150, or stop by the office of Student Academic Services in Starbuck Center.

### ***Honor Code***

I expect you to live up to Skidmore's Honor Code and strictly avoid any forms of academic dishonesty. Copying from others, submitting someone else's work as your own, or submitting your same work for two different courses are all forms of cheating. Any fact, word or thought that originated with somebody else must be promptly and properly cited. Plagiarism, even when inadvertently performed, is a serious violation of academic integrity, and will be treated as such. Suspected infractions of the Honor Code will be duly reported to the Dean of Academic Advising.

### ***Partners in Learning***

To my mind, this syllabus establishes a kind of social contract, in which you and I agree to create a stimulating and supportive learning environment. Therein, we debate positions and challenge each other, and we do so respectfully. Whether engaging the instructor or other students, I simply ask that you be civil, even as I will push you to be honest and open in your thinking.

I trust that with this syllabus I have made clear my expectations; if I have not, please let me know. *You may always ask questions.* I will not mind if you ask me to repeat something or to clarify a point. Feel free to come by my office, or to contact me by e-mail, in order to discuss any matters pertaining to the course.

I look forward to an exciting semester working together.

Dr. Spinner

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## CLASS SCHEDULE / Spring 2017

Please note: *you should have the assigned readings done*  
*before you come to the class for which they have been assigned.*

Jan 25. Introductions. Expectations for the Course.

Jan 30. *Reviewing Scripture*. Prophecy & Apocalypse. Reading 1.

Feb 1. *The Disappointed*. William Miller & Adventism. Reading 2.

Feb 6. *Ranch Apocalypse*. The Branch of David. Reading 3.

Feb 8. *Ranch Apocalypse*. "Bible Babble" & the Siege at Waco. Reading 4.

Feb 13. *Cargo Cults*. Awaiting the Return of the Ancestors. Reading 5.

Feb 15. *Theorizing the Deprived*. Reading 6.

Feb 20. *The Downtrodden*. Ras Tafari, Black Messiah. Reading 7.

Feb 22. *The Dispossessed*. The Ghost Dance. Reading 8.

Feb 27. *UFOs*. When Prophecy Fails: The Case of 'Mrs. Keech.' Reading 9.

Mar 1. *UFOs*. When Prophecy Never Fails: The Case of Unarius. Reading 10.

**First Exam:** due Mar 3.

Mar 6. *Apocalypse Delayed*. The Case of Jehovah's Witnesses. Reading 11.

Mar 8. *Messages from the Heavenly Mother*. The Secrets of Fatima. Reading 12.

**Research Proposal:** due Mar 10.

### *Spring Break*

Mar 20. *Messages from the Heavenly Mother*. The Visions of Bayside. Reading 13.

Mar 22. *Racist Apocalypse*. Christian Identity. Reading 14.

**Second Exam:** due Mar 24.

## **CLASS SCHEDULE**, *continued*

- Mar 27. *Aryan Resistance, Ragnarök & Metal Rage*. Odinism. Reading 15.  
Mar 29. *Conspiracy Theorists*. The Paranoid Style of American Politics. Reading 16.  
  
Apr 3. *Salvation & Suicide*. The People's Temple. Reading 17.  
Apr 5. *The Deprogrammed*. Leaving This Level Behind. Reading 18.

**Annotated Bibliography:** due April 7.

- Apr 10. *The Deprogrammed*. Entering Heaven's Gate. Reading 19.  
Apr 12. *Aum Shinrikyo*. Leaving the World. Reading 20.  
  
Apr 17. *Aum Shinrikyo*. Killing for Salvation. Reading 21.  
Apr 19. *Violence & the Millennium*. Reading 22.

**Outline:** due April 21.

- Apr 24. *In Jerusalem*. Cattlemen of the Apocalypse. Reading 23.  
Apr 26. *In Jerusalem*. Rebuilding the Ruined Temple. Reading 24.  
  
May 1. *In Jerusalem*. The Day after the Last. Reading 25.

**Finished Research Project:** due May 8.

*Reading Assignments for*  
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- Reading 1.** *Selections from the Bible:* Amos 8:1-9:15; Isaiah ch.13; Zechariah 1:7-21 and 5:5-11; Daniel ch. 7 and 11:40-12:13; Matthew 24:3-44 and 25:1-13; 1 Thess 4:13-5:11; Revelation chs. 5, 6, 8, 17, and 20-21. Handout: "Beasts & Battles."
- Reading 2.** William Miller, "Evidence from Scripture." Excerpt on Millerism from O'Leary, Arguing the Apocalypse.
- Reading 3.** Bromley & Silver, "The Branch Davidians: A Social Profile And Organizational History." Excerpts from two memoirs: Thibodeau. Doyle. Video: *begin watching*, "Waco: The Rules of Engagement."
- Reading 4.** David Koresh, unfinished ms. on the Seven Seals, from Why Waco? (with commentary by Tabor and Arnold). Tabor, "Religious Discourse & Failed Negotiations." Video: *finish watching* "Waco: The Rules of Engagement."
- Reading 5.** Excerpts from Worsley, The Trumpet Will Sound; *idem*, "Cargo Cults."
- Reading 6.** Excerpt from Talmon, "Pursuit of the Millennium." Cochrane, "Big Men." Excerpt from Aberle, "A Note on Relative Deprivation Theory."
- Reading 7.** Excerpts from Barrett, The Rastafarians. "Creed of a Ras Tafari Man." Video: Newsreel footage of Haile Selassie.
- Reading 8.** Excerpts from Kehoe, The Ghost Dance.
- Reading 9.** Ellwood, "UFO Religious Movements." Excerpt from Festinger, Riecken & Schachter, When Prophecy Fails.
- Reading 10.** Excerpts from Ernest Norman, The Voice of Eros. Tumminia, "How Prophecy Never Fails." Video: "Unarian's Uriel Speaks."
- Reading 11.** Singelenberg, "It Separated the Wheat from the Chaff." Schmalz, "When Festinger Fails." Zygmunt, "When Prophecies Fail."
- Reading 12.** Excerpts from Zimdars-Swartz, Encountering Mary. Press releases about Fatima's Third Secret (Spring 2000).
- Reading 13.** Excerpt from Garvey, Searching for Mary. Veronica Luecken on the "Ball of Redemption," and "New York City Targeted for Destruction." Excerpt on 'miraculous photography' from Wojcik, The End of the World As We Know It.
- Reading 14.** *For background*, read Gardell, "White Racist Religion" (read up to the section on "Wolf Age Pagans"). Barkun, "Racist Apocalypse." Swift, sermons. Video: Blood in the Face.



*Reading Assignments, continued*

**Reading 15.** Excerpts from Gardell, Gods of the Blood.

**Reading 16.** Hofstadter, "Paranoid Style." Post, "Charisma."

**Reading 17.** Smith, "The Devil in Mr. Jones." (This reading includes an appendix transcribing the tape recording of the last minutes of Jonestown; you may listen along to the audio on You Tube). Excerpt from Chidester, Salvation and Suicide. Excerpt from Stories from Jonestown. Video: Life & Death of the People's Temple.

**Reading 18.** Newsweek. Excerpts from How and When "Heaven's Gate" May Be Entered. Zeller, *first part*.

**Reading 19.** Zeller, *second part*. Balch & Taylor. Video: Exit Statements.

**Reading 20.** Excerpt from Reader, Religious Violence in Contemporary Japan, through ch. 3. Video: Aum Shinrikyo anime.

**Reading 21.** More from Reader, Religious Violence in Contemporary Japan, chs. 5 & 6.

**Reading 22.** Excerpt from Wessinger, How The Millennium Comes Violently. Dawson, "Crises of Charismatic Legitimacy and Violent Behavior."

**Reading 23.** Gorenberg, The End of Days, pp. 1-104. Video: "Thief in the Night."

**Reading 24.** Gorenberg, The End of Days, pp. 105-180. Video: "Building the Third Temple in Jerusalem."

**Reading 25.** *Finish* Gorenberg, The End of Days, pp. 181-250.