

HOW TO SURVIVE AN APOCALYPSE

FYSU 134 | First Year Seminar (REI)

TR 1:40-2:55PM | ECTR 103

(+ FYSS 101 | R 3:05-3:55)

YOUR PROFESSOR

Who am I? **Dr. Matthew J. Cressler**, associate professor of religious studies (affiliate faculty, African American studies). You can call me Prof. Cressler, Dr. Cressler, you can even call me Matthew. Just not Mr. Cressler. Please and thank you.

How can you reach me? cresslermj@cofc.edu. Email is my preferred and most frequent form of communication. If you email me on a weekday, I tend to respond within 24 hours. If you email me on a weekend, you may have to wait till Monday. You can also call my office (843-953-1026) and leave a voicemail, but my response will be slower.

Where will we be meeting for class? In **Education Center, room 103**, on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 1:40-2:55PM. Sunday nights are movie nights, but more on that later.

When else can you meet with me? I will hold open office hours on **Wednesdays 1-3PM** in my office in the back annex of 4 Glebe St. This means, unless I tell you otherwise, I'll be in my office at those times and you can meet with me without an appointment. If you would like to schedule a meeting ahead of time, simply email me to arrange a time.

YOUR PEER FACILITATOR

Who am I? **Erin Thomason**, a peer facilitator and team leader. I'm a senior here at CofC and am here to work with you and help guide you through freshman year.

How can you reach me? thomasonem@g.cofc.edu. Email is my favorite and most frequent form of communication. If you email me on a weekday, I will likely get back to you within 24 hours. If you email me on a weekend, you likely won't get a response until Monday. You can also text me (864-344-2675) but please let me know who you are and try email first with more important matters. Don't hesitate to text me if you need me.

Where will we be meeting for class? In **Bellsouth Room 312**, on Thursdays from 3:05 - 3:55.

When else can you meet with me? I have my office hours on **Mondays and Wednesdays from 11 - 11:55 am** in my office in the Center for Excellence in Peer Education (basement of Lightsey Center B66). This means, unless I let you know something different, I'll be in my office at those times and you can meet with me

without an appointment but I would prefer an email or text to let me know before you come in. If you would like to schedule a meeting ahead of time, please email me to arrange a time.

OUR COURSE

What is it about? Americans are obsessed with imagining the end of the world. Post-apocalyptic fiction tops the pop culture charts today. Why? Where do our doomsday stories come from? What do they teach us about ourselves? And can they teach us how to live better lives? This course will ask big questions as we dive deep into movies, shows, comics, and novels, including *The Walking Dead* and Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower*. Students will unpack the religious roots of "apocalypse" as an idea. They will study the history of real-life apocalypses, such as the genocides ushered in by European colonialism around the world. Ultimately, this course asks what the end of the world might look like and invites us to consider the religious, cultural, and political resources necessary for survival.

How will it run? This is an in-person course. This means that, so long as campus is open, we will meet in-person. Repeat: *this is neither an online nor a hybrid course*. Your attendance and participation is essential for your success in this class. You should decide whether this works for you before the drop/add deadline (Monday, August 29).

We don't have excess space in our classroom and cannot fully socially distance. Thus, you are *strongly encouraged* to get vaccinated to protect yourself and classmates and *not allowed* to come to class during your isolation period if you contract COVID, per [college guidelines](#). Vaccinations are available for free on campus: [learn more here](#).

Due to the reality of COVID (not to mention hurricanes and other plagues), we may be required to shift gears and move the course online. This could involve changing due dates and course requirements, but we will do everything necessary to ensure our collective safety. Let's all strive to be patient and flexible!

What will you learn? So many things! By the end of the semester you should be able to:

- Identify "apocalypse" as a religious category with a particular history
- Situate (post)apocalyptic fiction in its social, political, cultural context
- Recognize "religion" and "race" as inseparable categories that emerged in the context of colonialism and identify their role in the making of the modern world
- Understand "visionary fiction" as a subgenre that seeks to combine fantastical writing with aspirations for transforming the real world, both as an idea and in practice through your own creative writing

Does it fulfill your general education requirement in race, equity, and inclusion? Yes!

This course fulfills the general education requirement in the humanities. Here are your Learning Outcomes for the Humanities in the General Education curriculum:

- 1) Students will identify and analyze how social hierarchies manifest in relation to legacies of colonialism, white supremacy or structural oppression in historical and/or current US and/or global contexts.
 - 2) Students will identify and evaluate legal, political, economic, institutional, and/or personal solutions or forms of resistance to racial inequities and discrimination.
- These outcomes will be assessed in your Creative Character essay.

What about our FYE Learning Objectiv—Of course! It fulfills FYE learning objectives as well. By the completion of the First Year Experience, you will be able to identify and use appropriate academic resources and student support services at College of Charleston, including [Addlestone library](#), [information technology](#), [the Center for Student Learning](#), [the Career Center](#), and other cultural resources too. You should be able to:

- use appropriate tools and search strategies for identifying particular types of information specific to the discipline
- evaluate the relevance, quality and appropriateness of different sources of information
- recognize and classify the information contained within a bibliographic citation
- access and use information ethically and legally

But wait, there's more! By the completion on the first year, you will also be able to:

- use appropriate critical thinking skills and problem-solving techniques in appropriate disciplinary contexts
- make connections across disciplines and/or relevant experiences

What will you need? Lots a stuff. Here's a list.

- **Required Books (listed in order of when they're assigned)**
 - Baker, *The Zombies Are Coming, Revised and Expanded Edition* (2020)
 - Kirkman and Moore, *The Walking Dead, Vol. 1: Days Gone Bye* (2003)
 - Butler, *Parable of the Sower* (1993)
 - All other assigned readings will be posted on OAKS under Content.
 - **Note to self:** all three books are available for purchase via the CofC bookstore, but can be found easily elsewhere online.
- **Required Films and Podcasts**
 - Almost half of our assigned "texts" are not texts at all—they're movies, documentaries, and podcasts. I've tried hard to select multimedia that are free and easily accessible to you, but this does mean that you will need regular access to a computer with reliable internet (see below).
 - The two podcasts we will engage this semester are adrienne maree brown and Autumn Brown's *How to Survive the End of the World* and adrienne maree brown and Toshi Reagon's *Octavia's Parables*. These are both big influences on this course. Certain episodes will be required listening later in the semester, but feel free to listen at greater length.
 - Sunday Movie Nights: I've made a point to assign movies/documentaries for discussion on Tuesdays. Since these are required "texts," you will

need to watch them by the time you come to class and you can do so on your own schedule. However, Sundays at 8:30PM will be my Movie Night and I invite y'all to watch synchronously and group chat while we watch.

- **Note to self:** If all goes according to plan, this course is gonna be a helluva lot of fun! But it won't work if you don't do the work. That means reading the readings, watching the films, listening to the podcasts, and being prepared to talk about them!

- **Tech**

- Join our ([Campus Connect](#)) [GroupMe account: FYSU 134](#). You'll be able to join it with your cofc.edu email address. We'll use this for group chatting throughout the course, especially for when we watch movies together.
- Regular access to a computer (i.e. NOT your phone) with reliable internet
- A webcam and microphone (these are typically built into your computer, but if they aren't, you can purchase an inexpensive set for \$15)
 - **Note to self:** given the world we live in, we may need to pivot to online instruction at a moment's notice, so a computer and reliable Internet access are essential elements for success.
 - You may have heard that there is now a Laptop Requirement for students at the College. For reduced prices, financial aid, and to find potential loaner laptops, [check out this page our IT website](#).

- **Journal**

- We are going to do a good deal of creative writing in this course, so you will need to have a journal where you can respond to writing prompts in class, gather ideas out of class, and reference with ease for assignments.
- So, whether you're old school and like writing with paper and pen/cil or prefer to take notes digitally, you're going to need a journal!
- Buy a notebook and/or set up an app, but either way, it needs to be something you can pull out and use in class as easily you would at home.
 - **Note to self:** take good notes! Take notes on the readings you read, the videos as you watch, on the podcasts you listen to, the lectures you attend, and the discussions we have. This will be an essential element you'll use to study for exams.

[How will your work be evaluated?](#)

- ✓ **What Makes You *You* video essay (5%)** You'll do a little bit of autobiographical reflection and record a short video introducing yourself to your classmates. This very (very!) short video essay is [due by class on Tuesday, August 30](#).
- ✓ **Daily Creative Question (15%)** Each class will begin with a very short writing exercise where you creatively answer a question related to our course.
- ✓ **Reviewing the (Post)Apocalypse (10%)** You'll write a short (2-3 double-spaced pages) review essay of a piece of (post)apocalyptic fiction of your choosing. Your [draft is due in class on September 22 and the final essay is due September 25](#).

- ✓ **Midterm Exam (20%)** You'll take one in-class exam to assess your engagement with and comprehension of course material in the preceding weeks. It will be on [Thursday, October 20 and cover material from weeks 1 through 9.](#)
- ✓ **Peer Review (10%)** You will serve as a peer reviewer for two of your classmates, reading and offering constructive feedback on a draft of their short story. Your [peer review worksheets are due by class-time on Tuesday, November 22.](#)
- ✓ **Visionary Fiction Short Story (30%)** We'll conclude our course by writing our own (post)apocalyptic short stories (approximately 5-10 double-spaced pages) that build on where we've been and what we've learned through the semester. Your first [draft is due to peer reviewers by 11:59PM Friday, November 19.](#) Your [final story is due via OAKS Dropbox by 11:59PM Sunday, December 11.](#)
- ✓ **FYSS Grade (10%)** Ten percent of your final grade in this course will be based on your attendance, participation, and successful completion in the Synthesis Seminar taught by your peer facilitator Erin Thomason.

OUR POLICIES

[What if you're late in turning something in?](#)

- Assignments are due at the time specified on the assignment itself. When an assignment is turned in after the designated deadline, it's considered late. You will be penalized for late material – one letter grade (10 points) per day – but taking the penalty is always better than taking a 0! *[Turn in your materials!](#)*
- No one is more sympathetic to the busyness of our curricular and co-curricular schedules than I am (I have a wife, three daughters, a dog ☺). But, it is crucial that we all learn to plan ahead and balance our respective responsibilities. Please keep an eye on all your commitments and deadlines as you plan your semester.
- We are increasingly dependent on our technologies. Yet, as you know, our tech can fail us. Computers crash, servers are sometimes down, etc. Make sure you work to complete assignments well enough in advance to factor in these variables and always (ALWAYS) back up your documents!!! The easiest way to do this, of course, is to work in a cloud-based app like Google Drive.

[What if you're sick or you've been exposed to someone who is COVID+?](#)

- If you have been exposed to COVID, get tested. Rapid tests are reliable and readily available. If you test positive, **DO NOT COME TO CLASS.** Notify any potential close contacts and begin your quarantine, per [college guidelines.](#)
- Students quarantining due to a positive COVID test should contact me (your professor) for instructions on how/when to join class via Zoom. Only students quarantining due to a COVID positive test will be allowed to join class via Zoom.
- "I might have COVID" is not the same as "I have COVID." Please do not take advantage of the situation to simply not come to class. In-person attendance and participation is essential to your success in the class. This is not a hybrid course.

[What other course and College policies do you need to know about?](#)

Disability Accommodation If you have, or think you may have, a documented disability (physical, learning, psychiatric, visual, hearing, etc.) please visit the [Center for Disability Services website](#) here to arrange accommodations.

Religious Accommodation Religious practices differ from tradition to tradition and the demands of religious observance in some traditions may cause conflicts with student schedules. If you require “reasonable accommodation for religious observance” please let me know. [The College’s full policy can be found here.](#)

The Center For Student Learning The CSL, located on the first floor of the library, offers a wide variety of tutoring and other academic resources that support many courses offered at the College. Services include walk-in tutoring, by appointment tutoring, study strategies appointments, Peer Academic Coaching (PAC), and Supplemental Instruction (SI). All services are described and all lab schedules are posted on [the CSL website here.](#)

Writing Lab I encourage you to take advantage of the Writing Lab in the Center for Student Learning (Addlestone Library, first floor). Trained writing consultants can help with writing for all courses; they offer one-to-one consultations that address everything from brainstorming and developing ideas to crafting strong sentences and documenting sources. You can visit [the Writing Lab virtually here.](#)

Honor Code And Academic Integrity Lying, cheating, attempted cheating, and plagiarism are violations of our Honor Code that I will report, if suspected, to the Dean of Students. Students found responsible for academic dishonesty will be disciplined by the Honor Board, accordingly. You should be aware that unauthorized collaboration—i.e. working together without permission—is a form of cheating. Unless I specify that you can work together on a graded assignment, no collaboration during the completion of an assignment is permitted. You can access the complete [Honor Code and related processes online here.](#)

OUR EXPECTATIONS

What expectations do we have for our class community?

- Of ourselves
 -
- Of each other
 -
- Of our professor
 -

USER MANUAL

How will you access materials each week? The course material has been organized into 15 content modules on OAKS (one for each week of the semester). I encourage you to look ahead to set your own weekly schedule to work through the material to avoid procrastination. Submodules will instruct you to do things like:

- 1) **Read** (from a required text, in a book or posted on OAKS)
- 2) **Watch/Listen** (required videos, lectures, podcasts, documentaries, etc.)
- 3) **Answer** (questions to answer in your notebook on what you've read/watched)
- 4) **Complete** (assignments, almost all of which will be submitted via OAKS)

Note: Assigned readings and viewings should be completed ***BEFORE*** you come to class.

No, but, like... how will you do all those things? We'll use a number of tools to facilitate learning and build community this semester beyond meeting in our physical classroom. Here's a quick list of each tool, how we're using it, and a link to help you learn how to use it. All of you have access to all these tools for \$Free.99 as CofC students. First things first, here's a link to Student Instructional Tech Services: <http://blogs.cofc.edu/sits/>.

- 1) **OAKS** will be where most of the fun will happen when we're not in our classroom, so get ready!
 - a) I'll use **OAKS news/announcements** and **email** to update you as we move through the course, so make sure you check both throughout the week.
 - b) I'll be posting readings, assignments, and other course materials under **content on OAKS**. There will be checklists to keep you on your toes.
 - c) We may use the **OAKS discussion board** for community-building and learning activities, from ice-breakers to discussions and even debates!
 - d) You'll submit other graded materials via OAKS **assignments/Dropbox**. This is also where you'll find your grades and receive feedback from me.
 - e) Here's [a link to a whole bunch of OAKS tutorials](#), if you need help.
- 2) **Kaltura** is a video-making (and -watching) tool embedded in OAKS that you'll use to record (and view) your video essays for the semester.
- 3) **Kanopy** is how we'll watch most documentaries and films (when they're not on YouTube). I'll link them directly on OAKS (surprise!), but you can also access the full database on our library's website (click "Databases," then "K," and it's there).

[subject to change with advance notice]

Week 1 (August 23 and 25): Who am I? Who are we?

- Tuesday
- Thursday
 - Reading: excerpt from Cormac McCarthy, *The Road*

"It's the end of the world as we know it..."

Week 2 (August 30 and September 1): What is an "apocalypse"?

- Tuesday

- [Due via Kaltura: What Makes You You video essay](#)
- Reading: Kelly J. Baker, "'Apocalypse Obsession': Apocalypticism's Past and Present," in *The Zombies Are Coming*
- Thursday
 - Video: "The Apocalypse: Crash Course Mythology #23"
 - Reading: Bart Ehrman, "The end of history as we know it," in *Jesus*

Week 3 (September 6 and 8): The end of the world in our imaginations

- Tuesday
 - Film: George A. Romero, *Night of the Living Dead* (1968)
- Wednesday: [Last day to consult with Prof. Cressler on your \(post\)apocalyptic choice.](#)
- Thursday
 - Reading: Baker, "Foreword: 'Extreme Zombie Activity': Zombies, Horror, and Us" and "Introduction: 'Mommy, zombies aren't real.' Zombies and the End of the World," in *The Zombies Are Coming*

Week 4 (September 13 and 15): The end of the world in our imaginations

- Tuesday
 - Reading: Robert Kirkman, *The Walking Dead, Vol. 1: Days Gone Bye* (2003)
- Thursday
 - Reading: Baker, "'Are you able to shoot your kid in the face?' Doomsday Preppers and the Zombie Apocalypse" and "Afterword: 'You've Got Some Red on You': Looking at Zombies, Looking at Ourselves" in *The Zombies Are Coming*

Week 5 (September 20 and 22): The end of the world in our imaginations

- Tuesday
 - Film: Bong Joon Ho, *Snowpiercer* (2013)
- Thursday: [Reviewing the \(Post\)Apocalypse drafts due by the start of class.](#)

Storm Make-up Days: September 24 and 25

The end of worlds...

Week 6 (September 27 and 29): What is colonialism?

- Sunday: [Final \(Post\)Apocalypse review essays due via OAKS Dropbox by 11:59PM.](#)
- Tuesday
 - Documentary: Raoul Peck, *Exterminate All the Brutes*, episode 1
- Thursday
 - Reading: Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, "This Land" in *An Indigenous People's History*

Week 7 (October 4 and 6): What is racism?

- Tuesday
 - Documentary: Raoul Peck, *Exterminate All the Brutes*, episode 2

- Thursday
 - Reading: W.E.B. Du Bois, “The Souls of White Folk”

Week 8 (October 11 and 14): What’s “religion” got do with it?

- Tuesday
 - Documentary: Raoul Peck, *Exterminate All the Brutes*, episode 3
- Thursday
 - Reading: David Chidester, “Expanding Empire” in *Empire of Religion*

Week 9 (October 18 and 20): Genocides and the making of our modern world

- Tuesday
 - Documentary: Raoul Peck, *Exterminate All the Brutes*, episode 4
- Thursday: [Midterm Exam](#)

How to survive an apocalypse...

Week 10 (October 25 and 27): Who was Octavia Butler? What can she teach us?

- Tuesday
 - Podcast: “Let the Ancestors Speak,” *How to Survive the End of the World*
- Thursday
 - Podcast: “Reshaping Apocalypse,” *How to Survive the End of the World*

Week 11 (November 1 and 3): *Parable of the Sower*

- Tuesday
 - Reading: Octavia E. Butler, *Parable of the Sower*, Chapters 1-3 (2024)
 - Podcast: “Parable of the Sower: Chapter 1,” *Octavia’s Parables*
- Thursday
 - Reading: Octavia E. Butler, *Parable of the Sower*, Chapters 4-9 (2025)
 - Podcast: “Parable of the Sower: Chapter 7,” *Octavia’s Parables*

Fall Break: November 7 and 8

Week 12 (November 10): *Parable of the Sower*

- Thursday
 - Reading: Octavia E. Butler, *Parable of the Sower*, Chapters 10-13 (2026)
 - Podcast: “Parable of the Sower: Chapter 12,” *Octavia’s Parables*

Storm Make-up Days: November 12-13

Week 13 (November 15 and 17): *Parable of the Sower*

- Tuesday
 - Reading: Octavia E. Butler, *Parable of the Sower*, Chapters 14-19 (2027)

- Podcast: "Parable of the Sower: Chapter 14," *Octavia's Parables*
- Thursday
 - Reading: Octavia E. Butler, *Parable of the Sower*, Chapters 20-25 (2027)
 - Podcast: "Parable of the Sower: Chapter 25," *Octavia's Parables*

Week 14 (November 22): Writers Workshop

- Tuesday: [Meet with your peer reviewers to discuss your story drafts.](#)

Thanksgiving: November 23-27

Week 15 (November 29 and December 1): Surviving apocalypses

- Tuesday
 - Reading: excerpt from Cormac McCarthy, *The Road*
- Thursday: [Bring your stories in progress to class for our final discussion.](#)

Reading Day: December 6

[Final Short Story is due via OAKS Dropbox by 11:59PM Sunday, December 11](#)