

## Zoom Chat Week 1

### **Majors (reflecting interdisciplinary range of perspectives)**

Zoe Bruce : music education

Josie Graft : Medical Laboratory Science

Kyle Sykes : Mechanical Engineering

Whitney White : Biology

Taylor Eitel : Pre-Pharmacy

Rhiannon Turner : Nursing

Brooke Jackson : English

Robert Leeper : Biology

Miles Ralph : accounting

Sierra Sprungl : Computer Science

Natalie Allen : English

Alexis Voisard : English

Grant Bergman : Accounting and Finance

Victoria Cockrell : International Business

Samantha Leal : Music and Pre-Med

John Stubblefield : English, Creative Writing

Reed Finrock : Mechanical Engineering

Lina Kaufman : English, Technical Writing

Cody : Elementary Education

Maria Herman : Vocal Music Education. Shoutout to Zoe and Samantha!

Tim Stubblefield : Major: Mathematics. Minor: Computer Science

**Hope Jennings** : WHAT INTERESTED YOU IN THIS CLASS, BASED ON THE TOPIC? WHEN YOU HEAR THE WORD, APOCALYPSE, WHAT DO YOU THINK OF?

**Taylor Eitel** : I was afraid at first that this class would be a COVID-centered class. I'm taking public health classes, and feel like I know everything there is to know about COVID this, COVID that. However, I wanted to take this class because I've never really studied societal collapse; we've only been taught how societies come to be, and never what made them fall. It's exactly what I was hoping it would be!

**Haley** : When I hear the word apocalypse, I think of The Walking Dead, or Supernatural. End of the world TV shows. This class just seemed like it would not be boring!

**Lina Kaufman** : Initially, I think of Good Omens by Neil Gaiman and Terry Pratchett. I was interested to see if the class was because of COVID or something else, so it is fun to learn that this is actually your field of study!

**Josie Graft** : I have never seen a class with such an obscure title. I felt that this class would have really interesting conversations. Especially with COVID, I felt this could be a safe and progressive space to talk about it

**Robert Leeper** : I associate rioting, lawlessness, natural disaster , pandemics and the collapse of society with the term apocalypse. In addition, I took this class because it really does seem that we are living in apocalyptic times according to my definition of the term at least.

**Alexis Voisard** : I've taken 3 classes with Dr. Jennings so I sign up for anything she teaches bc her content is superb! But also, apocalypse is something she incorporates in a lot of the lit courses I've taken with her, so spending an entire semester just on this theme is really exciting! I think apocalypse is a very complicated term because it's such a broad term and affects everyone involved differently, including human and non-human agency. Additionally, I have only had exposure to apocalypse narratives in pop culture and I would like to expand my knowledge of apocalyptic narratives.

**Whitney White** : When I first read the title I automatically assumed we would be doing some discussion of surviving after a major apocalyptic event like in the movie 2020. I think I enjoy the topic of apocalypse's in movies because it makes you really think what would you do if it was your last day/week on earth and what is really important.

**Tim Stubblefield** : 1.) Generally, I think of Apocalypse as destruction, death, famine, war, and disease. Apocalypse seems to feature in a lot of Sci-Fi and Fantasy.

**Zoe Bruce** : I thought it was a really awesome topic. I was. Originally signed up to take a marxism class last fall, it was not good at all on the first day so I decided to try again this semester, and when I saw apocalypse I got SUPER excited. I also want to get another perspective on what's going on in the world right now.

**Miles Ralph** : I was definitely drawn to this class because of the pandemic-- even though things are looking up with the vaccine the idea of society collapsing doesn't seem as hypothetical as it used to and I thought this class could be interesting. When I think of "apocalypse" I usually think of disease or economic collapse, not really fantasy apocalypse.

**Grant Bergman** : What interested me in this class was the chance to discuss different types of apocalypses and I have watched shows such as The Walking Dead and thought this case could very interesting. When I hear the word apocalypse I have always thought about the world ending or a great collapse of the institutions that govern the world.

**Kyle Sykes** : When I hear the word apocalypse I think of a complete lack of resources to the extent that people are unwilling to cooperate in any fashion. Societies falling does not necessarily translate to an apocalyptic event to me as the people simply regroup in new societies eventually.

**John Stubblefield** : I was interested in this course because understand the cause for an apocalypse requires understanding in politics, economics, sociology, and other disciplines that describe society. When I think of the word "Apocalypse" I think of countries such as North Korea, Syria, and even recently Venezuela, all societies which have suffered massive tragedies.

**Sierra Sprungl** : When I hear the word apocalypse, I often think of games, movies, TV shows, or other forms of media that talk about zombies or other supernatural elements. This leads me to think about shows and games like Resident Evil or The Walking Dead

**Natalie Allen** : When I hear the word "apocalypse," I think of zombies, extreme natural disasters, and nuclear fallout. I also think of science fiction and end of the world kind of things.

**Samantha Leal** : I registered because I read novels as a kid about "the apocalypse" and considering recent events, thought it really could help out later. When I hear the word "Apocalypse", the images that come into my mind are those after the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki: complete destruction.

**Brooke Jackson** : When I saw this class, I thought it was interesting to take a class that seems so relevant to what we see happening in the world right now, but looks like it explores much more beyond that. Also, I enjoy a good apocalypse novel.

**Reed Finfrock** : When I think of the apocalypse I assume its definition to mean the ending of all human life. I registered for this class because it seemed interesting to explore thoughts and enjoy a class as opposed to survive it.

**Rhiannon Turner** : I decided to take this class because it was the most flexible honors option and the title sounded interesting. When I hear "apocalypse" I think of the end of the world, more often via supernatural forces than viruses or anything human though to be honest. Probably because I read too many dystopian and apocalyptic novels as a teenager!

**Victoria Cockrell** : I was drawn to this class because of how relevant it felt. The pandemic situation and political situation feel like the dystopian world that we are used to just reading about. My views on apocalypse were more shaped by stories like The Hunger Games, than by zombies.

**Maria Herman** : I wondered if we were going to learn about how people actually prepare to survive a suspected impending apocalypse. But I thought whatever the class actually focuses on, it sounded like the most interesting 3000/4000 level honors class offered this semester.

#### **Discussion: "Why Societies Collapse"**

**John Stubblefield** : Tainter writes that the next societal collapse will be global and there will no longer be individual nation collapse. While the world is definitely interconnected, more so than ever before, I feel his position is a little strong. While the collapse of some countries could lead to global crisis, I believe that individual nations CAN still collapse without collapsing the world. Do you agree with this position or do you hold Tainter's view? Also, which countries, if they collapsed, would have the greatest effect on the collapse of others? I say the United States and China. In contrast, if Sierra Leone collapsed, I find it very unlikely the United States, China, Australia, Latin America, Europe, and other countries would follow suit.

**Lina Kaufman** : McAnany points out that the upper class in the Southern Lowland Maya may have been the only ones to feel like the world was ending, when their society collapsed. Do you think it's possible for the collapse to be for all classes and groups of people? Or will it always be a portion of the population while the rest survive? Would the disintegration of world civilization as a whole be bad for everyone? Who is best poised to survive? Those already living off the land locally?

**Alexis Voisard** : I was curious about what "social unrest" Tainter was referring to when he was comparing our current situation to the Black Death of the 14th century. Is he referring to the persecution of Jews? I want to better understand what he's talking about since history has observed many apocolypse narratives and looks to the past to reveal our predictable behaviors, especially tendencies to depend on systems of privilege, racism, etc.

**Rhiannon Turner** : 1. In this essay, the author discusses various factors that can lead to the collapse of society. In modern day society, the media plays a major role in informing the public and shaping viewpoints. Do you think that the media is a helpful or harmful influence on the factors that can lead to societal collapse (i.e., in reference to reports on COVID-19 or political unrest in the U.S.)? 2. In the first few paragraphs of the essay, one of the topics the author touches on is the lack of research on and general concern for the reason why societies fall apart. Yet, dystopian and apocalyptic/post-apocalyptic novels and film adaptations have consistently shown success and popularity in fiction. Think of The Maze Runner, Bird Box, or The Handmaid's Tale, just to name a few. Why do you think that the collapse of society has been such a popular topic in fiction but until recently has lacked research and concern in the real world?

**Taylor Eitel** : I don't understand on page 8-9 how the article talks about collapse being arguably nonexistent, or not "actual." In a slowly collapsing economy, society, how can it be anything else?

**Grant Bergman** : With our currently complex political environment and government in America, do you see a way that we as a country can make changes to stop or postpone the collapse already taking place in our society? What do you think Americans will do and where do you think we may go the day our their is a collapse and failure occurs within our society

**Miles Ralph** : if "complexity is insidious," then is simplicity the answer? Where and how is the safest balance between complexity and simplicity in a society found?

**Haley** : Does a greater population correspond with a greater felt collapse of society, or is it more because of the interconnectedness of the societies?

**Josie Graft** : Is the COVID-19 pandemic or the political upset (the election, the Black Lives Matter movement. etc. ) more detrimental to the United States' stability of society? This question can be seen in many different disciplines as well

**Maria Herman** : Tainter's theory claims that increasing complexity in societies lead to their collapse. This seems to be unavoidable, but do you think there is any way to avoid increasing complexity in society? Is there another way societal collapse can be prevented?

**Kyle Sykes** : The essay talks about the causes of societal collapse and reviews several fallen empires. The causes of the collapse are sometimes external such as forces of nature or disease. But others are caused by internal conflicts such as civil war. Which is more likely to bring about an end to a society? Do external forces merely reveal internal weaknesses within a culture?

**Robert Leeper** : Do you think that the increased complexity of our world as a result of globalization is potentially detrimental in the sense that the collapse of one society could result in the collapse of the world as a whole?

**Zoe Bruce** : The essay at one point discusses how a society often collapses when its borders are expanded so far that they must spend more money on military to protect their land. I am wondering how human greed; land owning, wealth hoarding, power, fame, etc: can cause a societal collapse?

**Reed Finrock** : How many modern age apocalypses have happened and their importance/lessons are regularly overlooked in modern privileged thought.

**Samantha Leal** : Near the end of the essay, Tainter's perspective is generally summarized as 'Our creativity inevitably leads us to our doom'. To what extent do you believe this is true or not?

**Whitney White** : my question was about the main narrative on how they mentioned complexity being a key cause of collapse. I wondered what balance do they recommend between keeping society simple and not letting things dissolve into chaos. How much food is going to be produced and who will produce it? are there going to be doctors? I was curious to see what types of society would be able to thrive for a long period of time without becoming complex in some way.

**Victoria Cockrell** : Why does it all tend to collapse at once? He discusses so many topics because it seems that there are many different areas of struggles. Why do all factors of society tend to have issues at the same time?

**Brooke Jackson** : We've already talked a bit about the question I had but it was: The article talks about how globalized society is today and how the collapse of one society leads to collapse all around the world. The article then brings up the idea of human adaptability, which makes me wonder if there is a way for one society to collapse today and NOT lead to global collapse due to our adaptability, or are our societies still too interwoven to survive apart from one another?

**Alexis Voisard** : More of a comment but I wanted to critique the scope of Ehrenreich's article in that it doesn't consider collapse for non-human agents in our world. He does discuss natural

disasters but most of it is very centered on the human perspective and I think it will be interesting to explore how apocalypse impacts non-human agents in the novels we're reading for this class, or at least I hope we get to explore them!

**Josie Graft** : Does the mindset or cultural norms established in a society factor into the "vulnerability" of a specific community to collapse?

**Natalie Allen** : Which "triggers," internal or external, leave societies more vulnerable for collapse? What role does cultural and even religious identity play into the survivors of those who lived in the midst of an apocalypse? Does shared identity help ease the impact or even prevent a fall within society?

**Sierra Sprungl** : What did you think about Turchin's quote "The United States is basically eating itself from the inside out"? Do you think his context about how the U.S. was already falling apart 40 years ago due to a vast separation of the poor and rich? Or do you think it's more of a recent thing like in the past 20 years when we have seen a rise in hating people for their race or region, especially after 9-11?

**Zoe Bruce** : Another question: The title is "How do you know when society is about to fall apart?" When do we know that a society has already fallen apart and it's too late to repair it?

**Tim Stubblefield** : "The Collapse of Complex Societies" mentions that humans are naturally egalitarian. How is this known? I am not sure how the author determined this. That is a topic that is probably up for debate. It would follow the debate on whether altruism or egoism is natural.

**Whitney White** : I just read an article about how COVID affected animals it was very unsettling

**Sierra Sprungl** : I think norms in society make it very vulnerable to collapse, we have people who love conformity and established norms, and we often feel threatened when this conformity and norms are challenged. For example when lockdowns were first put into place for COVID, there were many people who conformed to the new norm and obeyed the lockdown. But there were also people who protested them and refused to break away from their norms. This has caused a lot of violence and unrest between these two groups of people, and think when you have this much violence about norms being interrupted, you risk a society falling apart. This is in response to Josie

**Sierra Sprungl** : I agree with Zoe, I believe people are more to blame for society falling apart, than nature. People I believe are selfish by nature and will in the end only do what is well for them or what will benefit them. This has been seen with the billionaires in our current times, they are making money off what is happening, but not giving anything to people who are struggling with this.

**Samantha Leal** : Society has the ability to make or break norms. I think if a community is unable to let go of cultural norms that are now harmful (but were not in the past), they are more vulnerable to collapse.

**Brooke Jackson** : I definitely agree with you, Sierra

**Zoe Bruce** : Im wondering if we will find themes in these books where there's a conflict between what's more important: working together, or defeating others to survive (supporting the individual or the group)

**Kyle Sykes** : I think the norms and cultural perspective of a society is what defines the conditions for apocalyptic events. So yes, if the culture drastically, the accepted norms make certain communities more likely to fall

**Whitney White** : I think there are a few that if they collapse we all go down but others it wouldn't have such a global impact

**Victoria Cockrell** : I also think that even if we don't quite see the connection between The US/other world powers and the smaller countries, we definitely have our hands in them. The "empires" are deeply involved with every country in some way or another.

**Samantha Leal** : I think it depends on the means of "collapse". Like if we look back at the Cold War, some would say Vietnam and Korea collapsed to Communism. Although these countries weren't major world powers, the collapses of their governments affected the world.

**John Stubblefield** : There is an opportunity for those undeveloped countries to rise in the void of a major power as well.

**Rhiannon Turner** : I think that trade is really a big factor in the globalization question. Countries that produce or consume a large quantity of goods would have bigger impacts on other countries who depend on them if they collapsed

**Zoe Bruce** : I am thinking if a larger country collapsed another would rise to power

**Josie Graft** : I totally agree, Samantha. I think that the word "collapse" may be too of a far-reaching word to describe how every country in the world will be affected.

**Sierra Sprungl** : I think we are all interconnected, if one society collapses, then several others will follow. For example we in the U.S., rely a lot on products from China and other countrys. If one those country's collapsed we whould be a postion where we would have a reduction of reasources, and this reduction to lead to a lot of issues and collapse. In fact this even going on now with COVID, reasources we get from other countrys are being ruduced or hard to get and this has lead to a lot of shortages.

**Alexis Voisard** : I can't really grasp my mind around the concept of a nation collapsing, but what I can understand are invented systems such as capitalism failing, and then those consequences affecting humans across the world. It then asks what is a nation and what does it refer to when we examine these issues. Does it refer to all of its people or only those in power who have the ability to change the direction of these narratives, or moreover those in power who refuse to change these narratives.

**Grant Bergman** : Yeah I agree with you Sierra. If a county like China were to collapse it could cause a domino affect leading to global shortages that could also cause economic hardships and struggles for many people.