

SHATTERED STATES  
CATASTROPHE, COLLAPSE, AND DECLINE IN AMERICAN SCIENCE FICTION

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## ABSTRACT

### SHATTERED STATES CATASTROPHE, COLLAPSE, AND DECLINE IN AMERICAN SCIENCE FICTION

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This dissertation investigates how science fiction portrays the collapse of American society and its failure to recover in the wake of large-scale cataclysmic events in relation to the discourse of post-Cold War American hegemony. Although apocalyptic themes are as old as the genre itself, the analysis of post-apocalyptic SF has largely been tied to the Cold War and nuclear fears, or more recently to a shaken post-9/11 American psyche. However, this subgenre has a greater continuity that links those produced during the Cold War to recent stories; this analysis is critical of the cultural assumptions of a post-national future predicated on American-style democracy and liberal humanist values—both typical of mainstream SF. In the aftermath of cataclysm, the United States does not always recover and core values of American civic culture are among the casualties, something that counters the myth of American exceptionalism and “New World Order” representations of global hegemony.

The argument for SF as a reflection of political and social discourse is not new. In the context of postcataclysm, SF is a minority discourse that remains subversive in its ability to talk about the unthinkable, whether that means the end of the world or just the post-American world. A number of political scientists and cultural critics draw from SF when they talk about a coming American “dark age,” or “clash of civilizations,” and even the “end of history.” Others use it to illustrate the consequences of the peak oil crisis and resource scarcity; post-cataclysmic SF is the nexus in which these views meet in representations of a post-modern and post-industrial America. As dystopias these novels, television episodes, and films offer a view of the replacement of the American Dream with a new calculus of survival that includes slavery, colonization, disenfranchisement, and gender and racial inequities that are more than analogies for individual freedoms and rights, but that draw on the discourse of globalization to consider America’s loss of power and prestige on the global stage.

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## **The Gathering Storm [Prologue]**

“It is not enough to survive; one has to be worthy of surviving.”

Commander William Adama, *Battlestar Galactica*

A prisoner struggles as a lieutenant repeatedly plunges his head into a bucket; she asks a single question each time his head is pulled from the water: “Where is the bomb?” A woman lies battered and bruised, dressed only in a filthy, tattered medical smock and chained to the floor of a large cage-like cell. Some of her bruises are fresh, others old and fading; her wounds and scars the result of repeated rapes and beatings—her interrogations as an enemy combatant. A young police cadet arrives at his induction ceremony; the suicide bomb hidden beneath his dress uniform kills members of the occupying force, fellow officers labeled as collaborators, and attending civilians. Against her deepest principles and knowing that it will cost her the upcoming election, a president signs an executive order outlawing abortion and her voice trembles with emotion as she explains that as a race, they no longer have the freedom to choose.

These scenes along with others were displayed before the chambers of the United Nations on March 17<sup>th</sup>, 2009, as the beginning of a two-hour panel that discussed issues including torture, suicide bombers, terrorism, human rights, children and armed conflict, and reconciliation between nations and faiths.<sup>1</sup> While such discussions at the United Nations are not unusual, the source of these vignettes was: the cable television SyFy Channel’s science fiction series *Battlestar Galactica*. The panel was composed of UN delegates and officers, and award-winning actors and the executive producers of the series, who all participated in a retrospective discussion of the four-year run of this post-



apocalyptic dystopian series and how its themes directly correlated with the work of the United Nations. The UN hosts and SyFy Channel sponsors hoped the session would enable a discussion of how critical humanitarian issues can be portrayed via entertainment media in a way that enhances public awareness of the harsh and disturbing realities that persist globally. The panel discussed human rights in both *BSG* and our contemporary world through the use of a series of video clips that highlighted several examples of extreme human rights abuses within the series. The panel compared the situations depicted in the clips and the series at large to real-world examples, and then the United Nations' continued attempts to mitigate such events around the world.

One of the recurrent themes in *BSG* has been what it means to be human and what it takes to remain so in the face of fear and death. Two members of the panel, the executive producers of *BSG*, Ronald D. Moore and David Eick, consider conflict the ultimate test of a society and its values, because it is when life and liberty are most imperiled that a modern democratic society can least afford to accept the false dichotomy of security or human rights. Moore has repeatedly said that the dystopian world of *BSG* was a post-apocalyptic experiment in determining what kind of society could or would be recreated after human civilization was effectively wiped out; this is an oft-repeated theme in science fiction (SF) and one that particularly resonates today in the aftermath of the attacks of September 11, 2001 (9-11) and the devastation of Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

Still, for many SF is limited to the pulp-inspired images of bubble helmets, aliens, and rayguns, or blockbuster movies and their iconic Jedi Knights, starships, or the spectacle of alien invasions. However, as an intertextual genre that includes literature, television, films, animation, computer and role-playing games, and graphic novels, the SF

megatext has long incorporated social critique and commentary within its narratives. Post-apocalyptic and post-cataclysmic narratives such as those found in *BSG* often tie human rights, the decline of civilization, and the clash of cultures or ethnicities to themes of nuclear war, militarism, environmental collapse, or other events that lead to the collapse of modernity or “the end of history.”

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<sup>1</sup> The panel was moderated by Oscar-winning actress Whoopi Goldberg, and featured Oscar-nominated and Emmy-winning *Battlestar Galactica* cast members Mary McDonnell (President Laura Roslin) and Edward James Olmos (Admiral William Adama), as well as executive producers Ronald D. Moore and David Eick. Representatives from the UN on the panel included: Craig Mokhiber, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights; Radhika Coomaraswamy, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict; Robert Orr, Assistant Secretary-General for Policy Planning; and Famatta Rose Osode, of the Permanent Mission of Liberia to the U.N. This event is available online through the United Nations webcast archive. UN Special Event. UN Public Information Department and Sci Fi Channel. 17 March, 2009. <http://webcast.un.org/ramgen/ondemand/specialevents/2009/se090317pm.rm> (realmedia file).

## **On a Pale Horse... [Introduction]**

“Today’s prophets do not tell us to fear angels, dragons, or the abyss. We have to fear nuclear holocaust, overpopulation, pollution, and ecological disaster.”

Roberto Vacca, *The Coming Dark Age*

“With freedom thus a matter of birthright and not of conquest, the American assumes liberalism as one of the presuppositions of life. With no social revolution in his past, the American has no sense of the role of catastrophe in social change.”

– Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., *Liberalism in America: A Note for Europeans*

Since the advent of the nuclear bomb, the world has lived in fear of a man-made cataclysm. One of the oldest subgenres of speculative fiction (SF)<sup>1</sup> focuses on cataclysmic events and post-apocalyptic attempts first to survive, and later to rebuild community, society, and civilization. This genre is one of the least examined, and is often dismissed by SF scholarship in favor of stories about scientific progressivism, advanced technology, utopian visions, or alien species and cultures. For those who have considered the end-of-the-world, it is typically as an unveiling of alternate worlds and more egalitarian societies, warnings of ecological or industrial disaster, or variations of “nuclear criticism” that began to fade after the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991. But the end of the Cold War did not stop the creation of post-cataclysmic narratives; they merely shifted to reflect millennial angst and challenges like the Y2K Bug or global climate change when these stories moved away from nuclear war scenarios. The attacks of September 11, 2001 gave new life to post-cataclysmic narratives that recycled nuclear war and terrorism, or alien invasions and environmental crises, but the subgenre also expanded into nanotech disasters, zombie plagues, and worlds where modern technology fails after the “fire” provided by oil and electricity dies.

Contemporary post-cataclysms have changed a great deal from their earliest manifestations in Shelley, Poe, and Wells; no longer does the story end with the catastrophic event or its deflection, but instead after the catastrophe, at the cusp of a world forever transformed. Some texts remain set in the distant future, but far more recent examples focus instead on the point of departure, when it all went wrong, and follow the attempts of survivors to recover. Science Fiction criticism of apocalyptic texts began with a particularly American view of the end of the material or commercial world, but quickly moved into anti-war nuclear criticism. Some SF matched the themes of mainstream mimetic fiction in the 1970s and 1980s and fears of modernity's collapse in terms of the failure of technologies and institutions, a message later projected by a number of social critics, foreign affairs journalists, and political pundits beginning in the 1990s and continuing today. The ambivalence in these strands of discourse toward the fate of the United States and the longevity of the American experiment provides a framework for the interpretation of SF texts that extends the post-apocalypse into a more encompassing post-cataclysmic discussion.

These narratives are not about apocalypse in the Biblical sense. Rather than bringing an end *to* the world, most cataclysms end modernity, at least as in the form of advanced democratic industrialized societies with largely rational, secular, and egalitarian cultures.<sup>2</sup> Postmodernist interpretations consider American SF as examples of the instability of cultural and social categories, and operate in opposition to historicist readings of apocalypse exclusively in terms of the Cold War. In these texts when the disaster is not global, the fate of the United States is often considered a synecdoche for the world as a whole, and the end of the "American Exception" is a metaphor for the

failure of the progressive promise of modern science and technology. But this leaves a gap in the discourse, especially when the catastrophe is restricted to one specific hemisphere, region, or ethnicity.<sup>3</sup> This privileged interpretation of “the twilight’s last gleaming” as the end of modernity is backwards. The vision of worldwide disaster in this era of transnational corporations and globalization is actually an elaboration on American vulnerabilities. This study challenges ideas of American exceptionalism embedded in interpretations of American SF and traces American cultural decline across popular genres and media that depict post-cataclysmic societies.

Postmodern critics are inclined to project the death of an individual, a family, or even a single town apocalyptically, in cosmic terms read as a variety of global crises, accidents, or devastation caused by human exploitation. But in ignoring the particular as essentialist, or by employing poststructuralist filters or global perspectives that too-broadly cast the inquiry onto Western culture as a project of modernity, the continuity among these texts as related expressions of American cultural insecurities and anxieties is lost. Even apocalyptic heroes’ journeys and neo-medieval final fantasy stories contribute tropes of disaster to an emergent cataclysmic mosaic of American decline that is more than an accretion of Cold War fears, millennial anxieties, and a post-9/11 clash of cultures and ideologies. Such stories must also be considered in terms of the destruction and collapse of American society and its failure to recover. Rather than the more typical techno-positivist views of a science-based recovery and eventual renaissance of a democratic and liberal-humanist society, these texts depict the regression and end of the rights, privileges, and protections engendered in American civic culture and cast doubts on the ascendancy of the United States as the best political and cultural model for “the

end of history.” This study uses SF as a minority discourse (relegated as it often is to the genre gutter) to not only critique the dominant political and social structures, but to talk about the unthinkable, whether that means the end of the world or just the potential for a post-American world.

SF is the secular mythology of modernity, but far too many critics continue to draw distinctions between a small selection of texts they regard as art and high culture, and the rest of the genre that they dismiss as low culture examples of formulaic mass media. This selection often seems to be driven by the political disposition or agenda of the critic, so works that use the symbols and icons of the genre to engage with overtly feminist, postcolonial or post-capitalist perspectives are typically used to define the new critical standard. But unlike the lauded works of Delany, Le Guin, Russ, Vonnegut, and Atwood, for example, or most mainstream mimetic fiction, the greater body of SF is a megatext that depends on its cycles of formula and innovation to maintain its commercial audience. More importantly, as John G. Cawelti argues in *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance*, “good formulaic writers” create art *within* the constraints of formula by innovating to “give new vitality to stereotypes . . . [and] invent new touches of plot or setting.”<sup>4</sup> While beyond his focus, Cawelti mentions SF as another example of formula that does “not simply explain the meaning of a single symbol or myth,” but accounts for the “relationship between many different myths and symbols.”<sup>5</sup> In post-cataclysmic SF this relationship extends from literature—novels and short stories—to film and television, and also to comic books, graphic novels, video games, role-playing games, animation, and new Internet media.

The recurring formulas of early post-apocalyptic and post-cataclysmic narratives set the initial boundaries for the subgenre, and are continually adapted to extend across new media. Screenwriters rework the plot and theme of serialized novels for film and television; writers and artists adapt short stories and books into graphic novels and serialized comic books, which are then recrafted as animated series or features. The formulaic settings and hazards, and archetypical heroes and villains became the staples of role-playing games beginning in the 1970s and 1980s, which provided some of the templates for first person computer games in the 1990s, and in their turn inspired contemporary Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games (MMORPG). These relationships define post-cataclysmic SF as a highly intertextual subgenre or megatext given this range of interlinked formulas, conventions, and archetypes that continue to evolve as stories cross back and forth over and through these permeable media boundaries. When these stories are recast in new formats, the archetypes, symbols, themes and icons are also updated to reflect changes in contemporary science (such as the effects of nuclear weapons, pandemics, etc.). This evolution of formulaic elements helps in “assimilating changes in values to traditional imaginative constructs.”<sup>6</sup>

Over the past two decades Hollywood has used American ingenuity to save the world from comets, asteroids, and alien invasions, but the more interesting stories are those that begin after the disaster has occurred, when the technology and institutions America relies on for its largely urban existence are destroyed, and the survivors struggle to come to grips with a forever-altered existence. Although political pundits and academics increasingly debate the end of the American Century, in the early twenty-first century the United States is the sole superpower; it is the world’s largest single economy,

with the most powerful and technologically advanced military, and it remains a dominant international political presence. The cultural power of the U.S. has also increased through the processes of globalization, especially in the propagation of the myth of the American Dream projected by popular media. But this dream is largely based on a view of the American promise that implicitly assumes the potential for continued economic growth, derived from access to natural resources and human capital, and supported by the institutions of an egalitarian civil society founded on a liberal democratic government and legal system that guarantees human rights. A holistic approach to the subgenre using a series of heuristics is necessary to evaluate how these themes change over time to express shifting political and social issues and suggest anxieties of American decline.

These heuristics of apocalypse help define the recent progress of this American promise—whether it falters or surges—by examining its foundations in terms of: national resources and economy; the form of government and use of military power; race, ethnicity, culture, and religion; and the equal rights and acceptance of sexes, sexualities, and liberalization of gender roles. Each chapter presents its heuristic within a specifically constructed set of timeframes to trace the trend of American decline portrayed in recent post-apocalyptic narratives and to analyze its historiographic implications. The first heuristic analyzes resources—both natural capital (forests, cropland, minerals, fuel sources, etc.) and human capital (trained and educated workers)—and their role in creating American economic power over the past thirty years. The growth of executive power and the use of military force are the focus of the second heuristic, especially as post-apocalyptic imaginings portray an “imperial” Presidency and a decline in republican forms of government. The third examines whether the American melting pot has cracked



by considering whether different ethnicities, cultures, and religions are assimilating into a national culture, or if American national identity has fragmented or balkanized into adversarial enclaves. The final heuristic interrogates the promise implicit in the Constitution, Bill of Rights, and legacy of the Great Society, and asks if the U.S. is becoming more egalitarian and inclusive, or is the equality of sexes, liberalization of gender roles, and acceptance of non-heterosexual sexualities in jeopardy? Even when the danger of famine and plague has dissipated, very few of these stories show a rapid return to the civil order and democratic values of the past, and these principles tend to become luxuries, then histories, and finally myths. Many of these stories incorporate social divisions that capitalize on current inequities within the United States, and the Americas more broadly; in the competition for resources and recovery the borders between ethnicity, religion, gender, sex, and sexuality become more pronounced, suggesting an end to the forward momentum of social change and inclusion, and a rollback of egalitarian principles as identities conflict with each other.

### **Cataclysmic Context**

Stories of the end-of-the-world with survivors but no societies provide insights into what is not working within a civilization by disrupting practices and institutions. This disruption is created by what Gary K. Wolfe terms the “cosmological displacement” in destroying the old world to make way for an unveiling of an alternate and reformed society; for him, “the ‘end of the world’ means the end of a way of life, a configuration of attitudes, perhaps a system of beliefs—but not the actual destruction of the planet or its population (though this population may be severely reduced).”<sup>7</sup> In numerous works recounting nuclear war or accident, the United States is devastated, but in general this

theme centers on the threat of mutually assured destruction during the Cold War nuclear stalemate, or is an ideological critique of post-modern late-era capitalism and industry in the vein of Fredric Jameson or Slavoj Žižek. The majority of literary critics overlook the continuity between the recurring tropes of American social collapse and solipsism within the subgenre that extends beyond the Cold War metaphor to a repeated expression of anxieties that the United States itself is declining in prestige, power, and economic security. Since the end of the Vietnam era post-cataclysmic narratives have offered a range of images of American decline, especially in respect to the hollowness of the American Dream, the end of American Exceptionalism, and the fragility of Civil Rights as each is transformed, discarded, or forgotten in the communities and societies that develop during and after a post-cataclysm social collapse.

One of the characteristics of SF criticism, especially in its dissections of various science fiction subgenres, is the tendency to exclude texts that are too formulaic, accused of failing to develop complex characters, are not sufficiently “fantastic,” or because they are not sufficiently “literary” in their use of formal poetics. Because of the number of possible texts this study will be similarly exclusive, but my goal is to sidestep these more typical genre distinctions and instead tie a broader range of SF sources to nonfiction works as a context, as well as to acknowledge the importance of intertextuality within the genre and across a range of media as an SF megatext. Given the level of factual detail and research incorporated in post-nuclear scenarios, most military SF, techno-thrillers, and an increasing amount of cataclysmic SF, nonfiction used for verisimilitude plays as critical a function in these texts as scientific theory and technology does in Hard SF.

SF often flies under the critical radar, allowing it to operate subversively as a minority discourse that can talk about the unthinkable. Philip John Davies argues that SF is isolated by its commitment to examine alternatives that allow it to “accommodate radical doubt and questioning, whether this be of literary form, of scientific possibility, or of social convention, and from any one of many political directions.”<sup>8</sup> During the 1950s paranoia of the early Cold War, much SF criticized the hostility and hysteria directed toward Communism (and any divergent social or political view); in the 1960s it targeted the specter of global extinction under Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD); and in the late 1960s and 1970s it went after the ecological damage that would follow unfettered industrialization and development. In the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, the critical focus ranges from the end of capitalism and democratic governments, to race and class war, or to the birth of a post-American world.

In *Science Fiction and the New Dark Age*, Harold Berger notes that after the American moon landing the media once again turned to SF authors as futurists, as they had immediately after the use of atomic bombs at the end of World War II. This renewed public interest in science fiction as futurism was often built on the popular perception of SF as space operas and star empires, but Berger points out that rather than technological positivism (better living through science and technology), “the threat of technology and the peril of this very earth” became the dominant theme.<sup>9</sup> Popular media including the *Star Trek* television series (1966-69), animated series (1973-74) and films (beginning in 1979), and especially the blockbusters hits *Star Wars* (1977), *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977), *The Empire Strikes Back* (1980), *E.T.: the Extraterrestrial* (1982), and *Return of the Jedi* (1983) helped promote the public perception of f/x-heavy SF as

centered on adventures in space or with intelligent alien life. Many of these texts promoted American values in the future and in space, and Paul Kinkaid expands this argument with the critical insight that

Before 1984, the future was American . . . [in] the most distant corners of the galaxy, we encountered Americanized planets or we carried American values victoriously with us. If the novel was restricted to Earth, then even a global government was liable to be aspects of America (social, cultural, racial, sexual, political) writ large.<sup>10</sup>

He attributes this in part to the lasting influence of science fiction editor John W. Campbell's American chauvinism on twentieth-century science fiction authors from the post-war era through the early 1970s.<sup>11</sup> But the year 1984 became a prominent point of departure as significant portions of SF literature turned more dystopian, and returned to post-nuclear wastelands as Détente ended and President Reagan began his own foray into science fictional policy after his 1983 announcement of the Star Wars Initiative (SDI). These themes quickly exhausted many readers with relentless images of the apocalypse, overwhelming the genre to the point that the cyberpunk movement pulled dystopia into a milieu beyond the post-nuclear apocalypse<sup>12</sup> even before the Cold War ended in 1991. Several cyberpunk stories created a post-national and even post-nation state settings of corporate greed and control that forecast the darker aspects of globalization as perhaps worse than the Cold War stalemate.

There are conflicting interpretations in the historiography of the 1980s that view Reagan's terms as both a build-up to Armageddon with an end-times evangelical passion, and others that see his desire to step back from the nuclear brink. In *The Age of Reagan*, Sean Wilentz argues that the president "wanted to transform the basic terms of U.S.-

Soviet affairs by rejecting the balance of nuclear terror in favor of actually eliminating nuclear weapons” and that he considered “the possibility of nuclear warfare, with horror” rather than religious fervor or millennial expectation.<sup>13</sup> Wilentz provides a framework for reconsidering the era that begins with the presidency of Jimmy Carter and extends through the presidential election of 2008 in terms of the rise in influence of the New Right in national politics. He argues that this period also saw the eventual dismantling of many New Deal and Great Society social programs by the beginning of the twenty-first century; a dismantling that is reflected in the metaphors of race, class, and culture conflicts portrayed in these SF texts. This is an era that encompasses the formation of OPEC and both 1970s energy crises; a series of scandals and investigations into the abuse of executive power; the economic growth of the mid-1980s and again for most of the 1990s; the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq after 9/11; and the implosion of the Internet and Housing bubbles and economic collapse of 2008. However, Paul Boyer makes the point that even after the end of the Reagan administrations “the components of a partially restructured end-time scenario were falling into place, ready to take up the slack, as it were, left by the end of the Cold War and the decline of nuclear anxiety.”<sup>14</sup> But it was not only the premillennialists who found ways to repackage the “end of times”; new post-cataclysmic narratives were published during the 1990s as the Cyberpunk movement faded, and they proliferated in the early twenty-first century after the brief Y2K scare, and more importantly, after the attacks of 9/11.

In the entry “Holocaust and After” in *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, Peter Nicholls traces the history of post-apocalyptic narratives in primarily British and American SF and media from its beginnings with Mary Shelley in 1826 through 1992 and

the end of the Cold War. Nicholls concludes that since World War II the majority of this literature and film has had a nuclear component, and in broad terms the plots tend toward an “awful” vision of disaster

followed by savage barbarism and a bitter struggle for survival, with rape and murder commonplace; such an era is often succeeded by a rigidly hierarchical feudalism based very much on medieval models [. . .]. But often the new world is seen as more peaceful and ordered, more in harmony with Nature, than the bustle and strife of civilization.<sup>15</sup>

Nicholls argues that many of the post-apocalyptic formulas debase the subgenre and should invalidate it from serious consideration as cultural criticism. One such formula is the neo-barbarism so prevalent in the 1980s, “in which the post-holocaust venue became primarily used as a convenient barbaric backdrop for feats of romantic adventure and, perhaps more worryingly, for the macho acts of rapine and savagery.”<sup>16</sup> Nicholls and other SF scholars, especially those whose work can be considered nuclear criticism, tend to dismiss these and similar stories as examples of action-oriented “survivalist fiction” (in much the same way that current critics often dismiss military SF). However, there are elements that span the subgenre, including these “pulp” formulas, that contribute to an understanding of anxieties of American decline; they often involve: the acquisition and control of natural resources, technology, pre-collapse knowledge, and some movement toward economic recovery.

SF struggles to maintain its fans’ attention by balancing the desire for older, comfortable formulas with the exploration of new innovations in plot, structure, and icons, all while still considering advancements in technology (and technological threats) and futurist projects set against the backdrop of changing societal norms. According to

Veronica Hollinger this presents a challenge for scholars as science fiction criticism must keep up with a genre in a constant state of flux and which is often far ahead of its critics in its exploration of ethical and sociopolitical issues.<sup>17</sup> In dealing with this challenge, SF criticism rapidly refocuses as new theoretical paradigms evolve, often privileging specific subgenres or critical approaches and disrupting the appreciation of overarching trends within the genre, especially those formed by its transmedia intertextuality. Although apocalyptic themes recur throughout the history of the genre, the analysis of post-apocalyptic American SF has been largely tied to the Cold War and the threat of nuclear conflict or, much more recently, to a shaken post 9-11 communal psyche. There is continuity among post-apocalyptic stories spanning the period that begins roughly with the end of the Vietnam War and continues through the first decade of the twenty-first century. The consideration of this arc offers insights into a subversive view of American cultural hegemony, specifically the frequent assumption in more mainstream SF of a post-national future in a unified Earth that is predicated on American-style democracy, liberal humanist values, and either a continuation of free market capitalism or a variant of democratic socialism. Throughout the sources of this study, in the aftermath of cataclysm, society does not always recover and core values are casualties of a warped recovery process that ends the myths of American Dreams and Exceptionalism. This contrasts sharply with representations of American cultural hegemony and the concept of a U.S.-led “New World Order” formulated during the early 1990s.

SF creates the modern myths of America because science and technology are as intrinsic to the nation’s cultural identity as industrialism and manufacturing; Americans believe in the ability of science and technology to provide solutions for the problems

facing humanity (if one ignores the small setbacks like Three Mile Island, Chernobyl, the space shuttle disasters,<sup>18</sup> or the 2010 oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico). Even nuclear weapons—the modern nightmare—have been rehabilitated as Earth’s savior in recent films like *Independence Day* (1996), *Armageddon* (1998), *Deep Impact* (1998), and *The Core* (2003). Still, in the age of the Internet, when America is living in yet another science fictional moment, the post-nuclear future vacillates between the utopian ideals of *Star Trek* (with its own nuclear World War III) and the resistance of human survivors amid the rubble in the *Terminator* franchise—both examples of humanity in recovery after losing command of its technology and weapons.

Not all post-apocalyptic stories offer an insight into a shattered and balkanized United States; however, since the mid-1970s more of these stories incorporate an awareness of the potential for the erosion of American power and civil rights in the aftermath of cataclysm. The military loss in Vietnam, economic dislocation of the stagflation and energy crisis, and even the accident at Three Mile Island unveiled a sense of vulnerability that synched with the beginning of the Iranian hostage crisis and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in the face of impotent U.S. protests and sanctions. The rise of foreign competition in the sale of electronics and automobiles, and domestic instability cast a pall on the American Dream and widened the cracks in American society between classes, ethnicities, and genders. To a large extent these divisions worsened during “the Age of Reagan” and persist in the first years of the Obama administration, but such representations in SF do not directly map to events and personalities, and are characterized by different causalities in each fictional collapse.



This subgenre has always been intensely international: apocalyptic SF began with French and British writers of the nineteenth century,<sup>19</sup> and later crossed the Atlantic and become global, to now include novels and films from Germany, Italy, Spain, Japan, Korea, Pakistan, and Russia.<sup>20</sup> However, this study focuses on novels, films, and television shows created by American writers, filmmakers, and producers, and concentrates on the particular cultural and social decline of the United States. The repetition and similarity of icons, themes, formula, and character types contribute to the megatext that spans the subgenre, but there are too many to be considered in detail; short stories, comic books, animation, role-playing games, and video games will be excluded in the interests of focus and space. The texts that are at the heart of this study must deal to some degree with the process of survival, but paramount is attention to the recovery of some form of community and society after the cataclysm. Many creators have used nuclear war or planetary plague as the explanation for utopias set in the far future. But this survey specifically restricts its range to those texts that tell a story set within one lifetime of the collapse, privileging the role of survivors because it exposes the process that turns the actual memory of American power and institutions into distorted histories and half-forgotten myths, one that traces the decline of the American colossus and dream.

### **Scavenging Sources**

By considering a selection of American-created post-cataclysmic narratives produced between 1977 and 2009 in terms of the destruction and collapse of American society, and more particularly in its failure to recover, this study concentrates on aspects of social regression and the erosion of the rights, privileges, and protections engendered in American civic culture that are integral to the mythic American Dream. These

narratives are linked by a criticism of the continued failure to build a more inclusive and egalitarian society or to fulfill the promise of the Great Society and Civil Rights Movement; it is also an indictment of the resurgence of class division, economic disparity, ethnic tensions, and religious and cultural intolerance. This study applies an historicist approach by considering the social and political events contemporary to the production of these texts, as well as linkages between them and a variety of works including those categorized as foreign affairs, current affairs, political science, economics, ecological studies, and social criticism. Within each heuristic the core SF texts and other materials are grouped into chronologies anchored by events in a way that breaks from the more artificial use of decades or presidential administrations. The historical timeframes within each chapter are: Precursors: 1945-1974; The New Vulnerability: 1974-1983; Doom Deferred: 1983-1990; The New World Order: 1991-2001; and the Age of Crisis: 2001-2009.

### **Precursors: 1945-1974**

While post-apocalyptic SF extend backwards to the early nineteenth century, the Precursors are works created between the use of the first atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 with its attendant surge of nuclear war stories in SF magazines and paperback books, and the mid-1970s, the period during which the United States pulled its last troops out of Vietnam (March of 1973) and Richard Nixon resigned the presidency of the US (August 9, 1974). Paul Briens notes that “most nuclear war fiction can be fairly clearly divided into one of two groups: those depicting a conflict and its immediate consequences, and those set in the more distant future” with the “postholocaust adventure story” far outnumbering those set in the near term.<sup>21</sup> Precursors that are critical to the

post-cataclysmic megatext include George Stewart's *Earth Abides* (1949) and Pat Frank's *Alas, Babylon* (1959). *Earth Abides* is a novel about a pandemic virus that swiftly spreads across the globe, causing the near-annihilation of the human race. Published in the same year President Truman announced that the Russians had also developed their own atomic bomb, this story links nineteenth century plague-apocalypse tales to fears of germ warfare and the beginning of the Cold War. The story of Randy Bragg's community of post-nuclear war survivors in Fort Repose, Florida, is the basis of *Alas, Babylon*. This text appeared during another spike in nuclear fears after the successful launching of the Russian Sputnik in 1957, but also draws on heightened racial divisions during the early years of the Civil Rights Movement after the Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Topeka Board of Education*.

### **The New Vulnerability: 1974-1983**

Beginning in 1969, President Nixon's international diplomacy helped decrease the fear of Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD) from nuclear missiles and bombs, and brought about an era of Détente, one bolstered by the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty and the Strategic Arms Limitation talks (SALT). Nixon's visit to Communist China would eventually lead to the economic and political opening of China to the world, and President Carter's official recognition of the PRC in 1979, much to Taiwan's continued distress. But the Watergate Scandal and Nixon's resignation in 1974 only underscored disruption caused by the ongoing energy crisis that began with OPEC's 1973 oil embargo and the subsequent recession and stagflation that characterized much of the 1970s. *Lucifer's Hammer* is the only source considered from this period; it is closely related to the 1970s disaster movies of Irwin Allen (*the Poseidon Adventure* (1972),

*Earthquake* (1974), and the *Towering Inferno* (1974)), in that its first act sets up the eventual cataclysm: the calving of a comet and the impacts of several of its pieces across the northern hemisphere, devastating much of the world through tsunamis, earthquakes, and volcanic eruptions and ash. In part a response to cuts in the space program, *Lucifer's Hammer* incorporates ecological disaster, the anti-nuclear and environmental movements taken to extremes, race and class warfare, and it even takes a poke at fundamentalism and the growing power of the Religious Right...all a few years before the Three Mile Island Disaster and Ronald Reagan's election in 1980.

### **Doom Deferred: 1983-1990**

For many, SF of the late 1970s and early 1980s is synonymous with the media, dominated as it is by the first blockbuster science fiction films including Spielberg's *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, Lucas's initial *Star Wars* trilogy, and their network television emulations: *Battlestar Galactica* (ABC, 1978, 1980) and *Buck Rogers in the Twenty-Fifth Century* (NBC, 1979-1981). The influence of SF movies on the popular consciousness was such that Senator Edward Kennedy on the Senate floor pejoratively dubbed President Ronald Reagan's March 23, 1983 announcement of SDI as "Star Wars."<sup>22</sup> After Détente effectively failed in 1979 when the Soviets invaded Afghanistan, Reagan's SDI in 1983 intensified a growing anxiety into a new era of nuclear fear that spawned the short-lived academic response of nuclear criticism, but also inspired the *Terminator* franchise and its examples of a nuclear judgment day feared by so many. The core texts of this period include: Kim Stanley Robinson's *The Wild Shore* (1984), Whitley Strieber and James Kunetka's *Warday* (1984), and David Brin's novelization of *The Postman* (1985). After Soviet Premier Mikhail Gorbachev took office in 1985 his

policies of *perestroika* (restructuring) and *glasnost* (administrative openness) helped reduce these nuclear tensions and ultimately paved the way for the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the eventual end of the Soviet Union in 1991. But Reagan fueled these final years with cuts in social spending while creating a three trillion dollar deficit from military spending, leading to economic fears that contrast with the post-Soviet triumphalism.

### **The New World Order: 1991-2001**

President George H.W. Bush announced the coming of a “New World Order” on September 11, 1990. The swift and decisive victory by the United States-led coalition in the First Gulf War (1990-1991), and the dissolution of the Soviet Union on December 25, 1991 help establish the time frame of the New World Order: 1991-2001. Some scholars consider this an interwar period and Samuel Cohen’s *After the End of History* suggests that its literature reacted against “the triumphalist reception of the end of the Cold War”,<sup>23</sup> and that not all seem assured of American supremacy. Rather than triumphant, this was a fragile phase, beginning with a recession but rebounding with the greatest economic surge in American history provided by the growth of the Internet, more deregulation, and the processes of globalization. These sources include Emma Bull’s cyberpunkish “technofantasy” *Bone Dance* (1991), whose overtones of economic unease and its nuclear war within the Western hemisphere is a nod to the secret wars in Central and South America epitomized by the Iran-Contra Scandal of the late Reagan administration. Octavia Butler’s near-future economic apocalypse in *Parable of the Sower* (1993) and *Parable of the Talents* (1998) also brings issues of economic access and class, race, and failed social equality to the fore. The film version of *The Postman*

(1997) drops much of the novel's science fiction elements, but it does give a more contemporary view of the challenges involved in reforming community and restoring the United States.

### **The Age of Crisis: 2001-2009**

The Age of Crisis: 2001-2009 continues to evolve, given the ongoing War on Terror and occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq, but also because the United States is still experiencing the effects of the Great Recession that began in 2007. Even before the attacks of 9/11, the collapse of the Dot Com Bubble in 2000 and the murmurs of scandal surrounding Enron cast doubts about the economic strength of both the United States and global markets, in some ways reflecting the very tensions and conflict that Butler extrapolated in the 1990s. As China began to gain economic power some once again murmured about the threat of Communism, but more were unnerved by SARS, the West Nile Virus, and even the Avian Flu and their continued link to disease and plague, a theme that manifests in the global "Big Death" of the Showtime series *Jeremiah* (2002-2003) and its near-future post-apocalypse. The CBS series *Jericho* (2006-2008) draws on the old Cold War fears with its response to nuclear terrorism in 23 American cities, and the reimagined *Battlestar Galactica* (2003-2009) begins with the nuclear near-annihilation of humanity on its twelve colonies before the "fugitive fleet" heads off on its quest for Earth. Many of these sources deal not only with renewed ethnic tensions and the clash of civilizations, but also the domestic failures of authorities in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in 2005. One of the accusations leveled at President George H.W. Bush is that the invasion of Iraq was prompted by a desire for oil and fuel rather than phantom weapons of mass destruction. The *Emberverse* or *The Change* series (2004-

ongoing) by author S.M. Stirling deals with a fundamental change in the laws of physics and the resultant inability to use electricity and high energy chemical reactions to power technology: in the immediate aftermath close to 90% of humanity die of starvation, disease, or exposure and the modern world, as we understand it, is rendered extinct.

### **Apocalyptic Heuristics**

The analysis of apocalypse and its metaphors in American fiction is not new; critics since the 1960s have traced the influence of millennial anxieties, the fear of nuclear war, and existential uncertainty in the guise of postmodern alienation. These critics either embrace science fiction as part of a tradition of apocalyptic literature, or turn away from SF as too reductive, formulaic, or hyperbolic; others blend the two but limit their approaches to particular theoretic frameworks like Marxist analysis, or to political criticism—usually operating within a context of nuclear fears and total annihilation. Chapter One presents this earlier scholarship as part of the megatext and defines the gap that a post-cataclysmic consideration of American decline fills. This chapter will also touch on the key texts outside the genre and a range of criticism that contributes to this analysis, including that of political science, current affairs, cultural studies, and economics. These SF narratives were created near the end of the Cold War, through the post-Soviet era, and after the events of 9-11, but they draw from precursor texts to offer insights into a possible national decline that has only been seriously entertained within the American public sphere since 9/11.

While a number of post-cataclysmic narratives have considered commodity scarcity, it is only since the mid-1970s that control of natural resources, the availability of manufactured goods, and the role labor and the economy as a whole have been

considered as facets of post-collapse recovery and decline. Chapter Two extends this theme and considers more than just control of fresh water or arable land; it returns repeatedly to energy sources, especially gas, oil, and electricity, and to the machines dependent on them. This focus on technology ties into manufacturing and production, and the jobs associated with those roles—or their eradication. Post-cataclysmic societies have become more sophisticated since the 1970s as the audience has become more aware of the precariousness of their economic position and the contingent availability of jobs, income, and critical resources like fuel, fresh water, and food. Where salvage and theft were once the expected basis for a post-apocalyptic marketplace, these more recent texts go beyond subsistence economies and scavenging to elaborate barter systems and black markets. As dystopias these texts are very conscious of the necessity, control and acquisition of resources and fuel, and the role of human capital, and many imply that knowledge and education may be the most important resource in enabling a speedy recovery and, more importantly, in avoiding a repetition of another cataclysmic cycle.

Chapter Three explores the transformation of authority into an autocratic entity in recent post-cataclysmic SF—an “imperial president” as defined by Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr.; this is a transformation that often occurs with the support of fragments of the armed forces, or through familiarity with, and control of military technology. This chapter investigates the growing role of warlords and despots under the aegis of emergency powers in more recent texts, whereas many older narratives tend to recycle stereotyped misunderstandings of medieval history and feudal relationships. These depictions of authority and military power include the decline of democratic participation, the erosion of civil rights and legal protections, and the support of power



via control of military technology. In particular this discussion of authority considers how the declaration of emergencies and martial law abrogate the rights and protections of individual citizens, and how civil authorities federalize or militarize private contractors. Several of these texts frame government authority as derived from advanced weapons, and imply that it may not be possible for a civilian executive to reestablish control after a massive collapse of infrastructure and institutions.

Chapter Four discusses how in post-apocalyptic SF there is no homogenous American culture and that the very national identity has a number of cracks and fissures that continue to grow as the culture wars intensify. These divisions are suggested in the balkanization of cities and regions of the former nation-state in some texts, or the growing disparity between laborers and the control of resources; often economics and education amplify the friction between ethnicities and cultures and exaggerate who may be best trained and suited to survive and adapt after a cataclysm. Recent historians tend to mark the riots and domestic unrest of 1968 as the beginning of the end of the New Deal coalition and the mid-1970s as the beginning of the decline of President Lyndon Johnson's Great Society programs. While *de jure* discrimination was ended through a variety of 1960s civil rights legislation, in reality Robert D. Kaplan says that today "American communities are increasingly segregated by race and class."<sup>24</sup> Several critics like Kaplan question whether opportunities for minorities have gotten any better, or if they have declined during the past few decades, even as the political left and progressives have become more factionalized and divisive during the "culture wars" as Todd Gitlin and others have observed. This fragmentation of American society and consensus goes far beyond the political split of red state and blue state, or the divisions of urban,

suburban, and rural cultures, but instead treads close to the “clash of civilizations” coined by Samuel P. Huntington, implying that national identity is under pressure from within and attack from without.

The equality of genders and acceptance of non-heterosexual and non-normative relationships has become more common in SF over the past four decades, and despite the competition over resources and the disruption of the rule of law and civil society, this trend appears to continue in many recent post-cataclysmic narratives. The preconception among many fans is that more liberal writers produce SF, and for many this impression explains continued egalitarian social roles post-collapse. However, many post-apocalyptic works are associated with techno-thrillers and military sf, more typically produced by more socially conservative writers. In simplistic terms the equality of gender roles in many SF stories is predicated on the use of technology to equalize the biological differences between sexes, and when technology fails, the argument that (physical) might establishes right and rule might be expected to prevail, but this is frequently not the case, at least in terms of biological difference. Chapter Five considers issues sex, sexuality, and gender and whether the ideal of an egalitarian and open society collapses in these post-apocalyptic stories. These texts go beyond the egalitarian assumptions, and do not accept the worst dystopian depictions, but question a number of issues including: abortion, choice, marriage, patriarchal social structures, the reinforcement or adaptation of traditional gender roles, and the acceptance or repression of homosexuality and bisexuality in an anti-modern context.

Although these are only a small sample of the available post-cataclysmic narratives produced during this time frame, these heuristics can be employed against

other works with similar results. At their root, each of these heuristics considers an expression of American ideology or potential within these dystopian recovery societies. Familiarity breeds contempt or numbness, and by relating aspects of social collapse to conflicts and challenges within contemporary American society, this study works to expose the fears that an American dream is always just out of reach, or only available for those who conform to perhaps increasingly regressive national norms.

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<sup>1</sup> Many authors and critics use the term speculative fiction to encompass the genres of science fiction and fantasy, with many also incorporating works of horror. Others, as in Margaret Atwood's notable example, use the term speculative fiction to differentiate works specifically *from* science fiction. David Langford tracked Atwood's comments regarding her then recent novel *Oryx and Crake* (2003), but she has dealt with this issue repeatedly since winning awards for her 1985 novel, *The Handmaid's Tale*. "Atwood prefers to say that she writes speculative fiction -- a term coined by SF man Robert A. Heinlein. As she told the *Guardian*, 'Science fiction has monsters and spaceships; speculative fiction could really happen.' She used a subtly different phrasing for *New Scientist*, '*Oryx and Crake* is not science fiction. It is fact within fiction. Science fiction is when you have rockets and chemicals.'" David Langford, "Bits and Pieces," SFX 107 (Aug. 2003). <http://www.ansible.co.uk/sfx/sfx107.html>. Web. 15 January 2010. Given the recent genres of Slipstream fiction and the New Weird, as well as 1960s New Wave SF, "rockets and chemicals" may help define "Hard Science Fiction" but they are too limiting to define the genre as a whole.

<sup>2</sup> There are a small horde of definitions of "modernity," but the one I find the shortest and most concrete is Manfred B. Steger's: "The term 'modernity' has become associated with the eighteenth-century European Enlightenment project of developing objective science, achieving a universal form of morality and law, and liberating rational modes of thought and social organization from the perceived irrationalities of myth, religion, and political tyranny." Manfred B Steger, *Globalization: A Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 28.

<sup>3</sup> Outside the scope of this study examples of selective disaster include movies such as *The Day After Tomorrow* (Emmerich, 2004), where only the Northern hemisphere is covered in a new ice age; or Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), in which Caucasians become sterile and die out. This study will discuss other examples that include limited nuclear war or terrorist events only in the United States include the novel

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*Warday* (Streiber and Kunetka, 1984), *The Wild Shore* (Robinson, 1984), and the television series *Jericho* (CBS, 2006-2008).

<sup>4</sup> John G. Cawelti, *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1975), 11.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 36

<sup>7</sup> Gary K. Wolfe, "The Remaking of Zero: Beginning at the End" in *The End of the World*, edited by Eric S. Rabkin, Martin H. Greenberg and Joseph D. Olander, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1983), 1.

<sup>8</sup> Philip John Davies, "Science Fiction and Conflict," in *Science Fiction, Social Conflict and War*, edited by John Philip Davies, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), 5.

<sup>9</sup> Harold L Berger, *Science Fiction and the New Dark Age*, (Bowling Green: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1976), ix.

<sup>10</sup> Paul Kinkaid, "Blogging the Hugos: Decline, part 1," Bigother.com July 14, 2010. "<http://bigother.com/2010/07/14/blogging-the-hugos-decline-part-1/>" Web. Accessed July 21, 2010.

<sup>11</sup> Paul Kinkaid, "Blogging the Hugos: Decline, part 1."

<sup>12</sup> Bruce Sterling elaborates this exhaustion in his preface to William Gibson's 1986 anthology, *Burning Chrome*, (New York: Ace Books, 1987) paperback edition. It is important to note that the stories in this collection, several of them collaborations with other "founders" of the cyberpunk movement and aesthetic, begin with Gibson's "Fragments of a Hologram Rose" originally published in 1977, which again underscores this period and the different SF explorations of anxieties and dislocation.

<sup>13</sup> Sean Wilentz, *The Age of Reagan: A History 1974-2008*, (New York: Harper Collins, 2008), 246.

<sup>14</sup> Paul Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 336.

<sup>15</sup> Peter Nicholls, "Holocaust and After," in *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, edited by John Clute and Peter Nicholls, (London: Orbit, 1993. 1999 Edition), 581-584.

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 583.

<sup>17</sup> Veronica Hollinger and Joan Gordon, "Introduction: Edging into the Future," in *Edging into the Future: Science Fiction and Contemporary Cultural Transformation*, edited by Veronica Hollinger and Joan Gordon, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 2.

<sup>18</sup> These and related events are considered in detail in Ann Larabee's *Decade of Disaster*. To a great extent her analysis suggest the discomfort with technology even as early as the 1980s that was more than a fear of nuclear weapons and military systems. Ann Larabee, *Decade of Disaster*, (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000).

<sup>19</sup> In prose Jean-Baptiste Cousin de Grainville, *The Last Man, or Omegarus and Syderia* (1806) and Mary Shelley, *The Last Man* (1826). But various poems by George Gordon, Lord Byron ("Darkness," 1816), Thomas Campbell, and Thomas Hood also published similar themes in this era.

<sup>20</sup> Kim Newman notes in *Apocalypse Movies* the interrelation of post-nuclear apocalypse "barbarians of the wastelands" movies in the 1980s, especially those of Spanish and Italian directors. The 1980s blood and gore spattered British, Italian, and Spanish versions of zombie apocalypse movies and extended to France and Germany; these became much darker and often politically critical works after September 11, 2001 in American, British, and more recently, Japanese, German, and French variants, as covered first by Kim Newman in *Nightmare Movies* (1988), and more recently Jamie Russell's *Book of the Dead: The Complete history of Zombie Cinema* (2005) and Glenn Kay's *Zombie Movies: The Ultimate Guide* (2008).

<sup>21</sup> Paul Brians. *Nuclear Holocausts: atomic war in fiction, 1895-1984*, (Kent: The Kent State UP, 1987), 54.

<sup>22</sup> Allan M. Winkler. *Life Under A Cloud: American Anxiety About the Atom*, (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 206.

<sup>23</sup> Samuel Cohen. *After the End of History: American Fiction in the 1990s* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2009), 9.

<sup>24</sup> Robert D. Kaplan. "Was Democracy Just a Moment?" in *The Coming Anarchy: Shattering the Dreams of the Post Cold War* (New York: Vintage Books, 2000), 94.

## Chapter 1: Surveying the Ruins:

### Tracing Decline in and Beyond Science Fiction

“Thus, because we are rapidly advancing along this non-sustainable course, the world’s environmental problems will get resolved, in one way or another, within the lifetimes of the children and young adults alive today. The only question is whether they will become resolved in pleasant ways of our own choice, or in unpleasant ways not of our choice, such as warfare, genocide, starvation, disease epidemics, and collapses of societies.”

Jared Diamond, *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed*

Post-cataclysmic literature and media owes its genesis to the Biblical Apocalypse and related studies, but technically all discussions of the end-of-the-world other than divinely inspired prophecy are speculative fiction. Early studies of scripture and eschatology provide frameworks for understanding the medieval West and millennialism. By the end of the eighteenth century, the apocalypse becomes post-apocalyptic and secularized in Gibbon’s study of the decline and fall of empires, and later in the cyclic rise and fall of civilizations by Oswald Spengler.<sup>1</sup> But using religious apocalyptic language creates a tether to “last judgments” and implies failure and punishment, fulfillment and rewards, or responsibility rather than legacy. The body of SF scholarship has a Cold War hangover and continues to confuse the apocalypse with catastrophe, disaster, doomsday, and “the end,” as Mick Broderick has observed, and Kirsten Moana Thompson associates these most recently with the millennial dread of the end of the twentieth century.<sup>2</sup> Post-Cataclysm is meant to distance this discussion from the overtones and implications of judgment—god(s), Gaea, or the cosmos itself—but in a way that retains and blends existential fears with post-national and cultural anxieties.

This chapter provides an overview of the evolution of similar theories in SF scholarship in order to clarify the gaps used in a study of post-cataclysm within the post-apocalyptic megatext.

## **The Road to Post-Cataclysm**

### **Apocalyptic Scholarship**

In his 1992 monograph, *When Time Shall Be No More*, Paul Boyer traces the progress of apocalyptic belief from antiquity to the end of the Cold War, and its transference from traditionally bound Church scholars to contemporary messages of fire and damnation broadcast by televangelists and popular media. After the end of World War I, some historians viewed the Great War apocalyptically; after World War II even more did so, and in many minds the mushroom cloud of the atomic bomb became linked to the end times. Scholars such as Norman Cohn, Norman Cantor, Bernard McGinn, and others have reworked medieval sources to understand millennialism as a cyclical cultural response to upheavals and change. More recently Malcolm Bull's collection of essays, *Apocalypse Theory* (1995), and *End of Days*, edited by Karolyn Kinane and Michael A. Ryan, tie these earlier cycles to recent millennial and apocalyptic anxieties and link angels to aliens, Hellmouths to hydrogen bombs, and zombies to modern plagues.<sup>3</sup> These more recent anthologies contribute to a growing awareness of how the apocalypse has not only been secularized, but has also been somewhat diminished by being too broadly applied to economic recessions, the decline of rural towns, standardized tests scores, and more immediate and personal disappointments (snowpocalypse, carpocalypse, etc.).

This criticism seems to have come full-circle in Lorenzo DiTommaso's argument that those who study modern apocalypticism and its motifs in popular culture and

elsewhere tend not to consider its formal ideologies as derived from revelatory literature or as eschatology distinct from prophecy.<sup>4</sup> Although he acknowledges that contemporary theory also reflects secularized variations on apocalyptic ideologies, he points out that most scholarship on “post-apocalyptic” literature, including SF, tends to miss the deeper meanings for considerations of the “surface topographies” of “easily recognizable motifs and other secondary phenomena.”<sup>5</sup> Although DiTommaso concedes that neither apocalyptic ideology nor genres are static, he implies that to only use apocalyptic (or post-apocalyptic) analysis on a limited scope, such as one culture or nation-state per se, is a misapplication that fails to engage the ideological basis for the framework. However, I disagree; this study uses cataclysm as greater in scope, effect, and affect than any one disaster or catastrophe, but also in a way that acknowledges the potential to irrevocably change the nation and the world, but not by ending all life or erasing all memory of modernity. In SF, after a global cataclysm the end of the nation-state does not immediately end its identity; as a cultural analysis this study considers that the “end” of the U.S. in its current form similarly does not immediately end the influence of its cultural artifacts and ideology, nor does it bring about the end of the world.

### **Post-Apocalyptic Criticism**

Although secular apocalyptic stories begin in the nineteenth century, apocalyptic or post-apocalyptic criticism has only been applied relatively recently. In his introductory essay to *Apocalypse Theory and the Ends of the World*, Malcolm Bull makes the point that the use of apocalyptic scripture, or texts, as historical criticism begins in the twelfth century and continues through the modern age.<sup>6</sup> Mary Shelley's novel, *The Last Man* (1826), is the first English-language example of secular apocalyptic fiction rather than



religious prophesy, and its use of a worldwide plague renders it SF as much as its author's earlier work, *Frankenstein*. Anne K. Mellor argues that the importance of *The Last Man* lies in it being the first literary example of deconstruction,<sup>7</sup> yet it is equally important as a secular apocalypse. In *New Maps of Hell*, Kingsley Amis quotes SF editor H.L. Gold, who said “few things reveal so sharply as science fiction the wishes, hopes, fears, inner stresses and tensions of an era, or define its limitations with such enactness.”<sup>8</sup> But as Philip John Davies’ somewhat sardonically suggests many mainstream critics and those outside the genre ghettoize SF in viewing it as lightweight fantasy and adventure and thereby also dismiss its critical potential. As Davies argues, this “ghettoisation” may actually enable SF writers to achieve more unconventional social and political speculation—subversion—rarely attempted by more mainstream or conventional writers, contributing to the perceptions of many SF writers as being at odds or in conflict with general society. This outsider status, generally acknowledged by many writers and editors within the SF community, combines in the American context where, as Patricia Melzer says, to “recognize the magnitude of the [SF] genre in the cultural imagination of United States society is to treat it as a space where the exchange between text and the reader/viewer engages with political as well as social concepts.”<sup>9</sup> This study uses the term “post-cataclysmic” to refer to narratives that incorporate worldwide cataclysm, but it also covers texts dealing with more localized events that are part of the exchange Melzer describes, one that has moved from the end of the world to the possibility of the end of the modern American way of life.

## SF Criticism

Academically informed SF criticism, rather than purely fan-derived analysis, technically began in the 1940s but comes into its own in the 1950s. Although some of the early histories and criticism were outstanding—such as those written by Damon Knight, James Blish, P. Schuyler Miller, and Algis Budrys—most did not approach the level of objective scholarship.<sup>10</sup> James Gunn notes that the first academic studies were only published in the 1940s, and fans *in* academic positions taught the first classes beginning in the early 1950s. Reginald Bretnor's 1953 collection *Modern Science Fiction: Its Meaning and Future* offered the first general survey of science fiction, and the first journals began in 1959, with *Extrapolation*. The Science Fiction Research Association (SFRA) began to publish its heavily Marxist-informed *Science Fiction Studies* in 1973, shortly after the appearance of the British journal *Foundation* in 1972.

According to Gunn, the “critical ice” was broken by Amis's *New Maps of Hell* (1960), the published version of his 1958-1959 Christian Gauss Seminars in Criticism at Princeton University.<sup>11</sup> Amis's lectures and their publication tie into a late 1950s atmosphere of anxiety sparked by the Russian Sputnik success of 1957 which ignited immediate fears of ICBMs and the more powerful hydrogen bombs raining down on military targets and civilian populations alike, leading to the extinction of all life on Earth. This image crystallized and the potential of nuclear war was projected into mainstream awareness by particularly dark stories in the late 1950s, including Neville Shute's provocative and disturbing *On the Beach* (1957).<sup>12</sup> While most nuclear-war stories at best made their way into B-movies, *On the Beach* was released as a feature film in 1959 with global distribution, including a number of national capitals, including

Moscow. As David Seed points out, it was so popular “that Eisenhower’s Cabinet discussed ways of countering its message.”<sup>13</sup> More importantly, the attention Shute’s novel received prompted military and government consultant Herman Kahn to soften the message he had sent in *On Thermonuclear War* (1960), regarding the aftermath of nuclear war, in his later *Thinking the Unthinkable* (1962), where he emphasizes that no matter how brutal such a conflict could be, there would be survivors and America would continue.<sup>14</sup>

The critical literature on SF matures in the late 1970s and early 1980s according to Gunn, but since then (thanks to book retailers), SF has also been divided into categories if not always into subgenres. From a critical perspective, to borrow from Gary Wolfe, the umbrella categorization of SF can be refined following these divisions: science fiction as the realm of reason; horror as that of anxiety; and the fantastic as that of desire.<sup>15</sup> Gunn differentiates between SF and mainstream fiction in his *Roads to Science Fiction* series and elsewhere by describing traditional or mainstream (mimetic) fiction as the literature of continuity; its elements and tropes are “contiguous with everyday experience.”<sup>16</sup> The corollary is that the literature of discontinuity—that not contiguous with daily experience—is the literature of the fantastic, a broad range of SF that includes science fiction, fantasy, and horror as literatures of change that include the extreme cases of social rupture, disaster, or cataclysm. As such, post-cataclysmic sources, including dystopias and post-apocalyptic stories, consider the dislocation and disruption of individual lives, typically using a cataclysm to shift the frame of reference from everyday life into the unknown with a focus on the responses to the disruption of community, nation, and the world.

Frank Kermode's *The Sense of an Ending* (1967) was published as post-apocalyptic SF criticism began to coalesce, and has become one of the foundational texts of apocalyptic criticism. Kermode's arguments have been applied to classical and pre-modern literature, and contemporary mimetic literature far more often than to SF. But the link Kermode provides is his view of "the end" and its necessity as a "permanent feature of a permanent literature of crisis. If it becomes myth, if its past is forgotten, we sink quickly into myth, into stereotype."<sup>17</sup> Given the importance of the tension between formula and innovation in John Cawelti's argument regarding genre media, "the end" in literature of crisis effectively sets one of the benchmarks for the necessity of innovation; when variations on "the end" become repetitive and trite, it is necessary to shake things up. To some extent criticism of SF tried to engage the end, or perhaps dark beginnings, in Mark Hillegas's *The Future as Nightmare* (1967) with its concentration on the influence of H.G. Wells and the subsequent "anti-utopias," especially those written in partial response to the rise of fascism in Europe during the early twentieth century. But H. Bruce Franklin's *Future Perfect* (1966) was also part of this initial fight to have SF accepted as "legitimate" literature, as was the more apocalyptically oriented *New Worlds for Old* (1974), by David Ketterer, and Harold L Berger's *Science Fiction and the New Dark Age*.

Ketterer's ambitious examination of science fiction attempted to establish it as a viable area of study comparable to other examples of American literature, rather than something to be immediately dismissed as refuse floating in the genre gutter. Ketterer's perspective is that science fiction of the early twentieth century became a very American form of pulp (genre) fiction, and he acknowledges its European roots while emphasizing that science fiction is a form of apocalyptic literature in its unveiling of new and

especially alternative worlds.<sup>18</sup> This study is significant as one of the first instances to apply the same critical methods to SF and mainstream/mimetic literature, but goes too far in attempting to define science fiction as a subset (if not subgenre) of apocalyptic literature, itself conflated to a large extent with all American literature by Ketterer.

In *Science Fiction and the New Dark Age*, Harold L. Berger adds to the discourse of Amis, Hillegas, and others in his attention to dystopic literature of the 1950s and 1960s. Using a self-conscious rhetorical approach similar to Ketterer's, Berger extends his discussion far beyond SF to generate its critical legitimacy. But his argument focuses on SF as futurist prophesy rather than just "reflect[ing] the events of the last several decades;" in particular he argues "the threat of technology and the peril of this very earth has become the dominant theme of science fiction."<sup>19</sup> Berger concentrates on the threat of science, the new tyrannies (of technology and authoritarianism), and catastrophes, which comes closest to contributing to the dialogue on American decline after cataclysm. Although his discussion of race war is detailed and has the potential to contribute to this study, his approach is more of a polemic than exegetic; he argues that SF should tell "black Horatio Algers" stories, but does not, because "race war in America offers a better or easier story line than racial harmony."<sup>20</sup> Even as he says that racism is an American sickness that may be incurable, his most important observation is that his sources "set the racial catastrophe in the present," but he also completely seems to avoid considering works set between 1964 and 1969 as expressions of urban race conflict in America during the later 1960s.<sup>21</sup> While Berger reads SF as prophetic, his disappointment in the way these works reflect the present moment links them directly to the race and class conflict

at the core of examples such as Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle's 1977 comet catastrophe in *Lucifer's Hammer*.

An early digression into *Lucifer's Hammer* and the authors' selection of epigraphs helps define the intertextuality of SF and non-SF texts in the context of a post-cataclysmic sense of foreboding. Niven and Pournelle employ a range of voices, from Shakespeare, Nietzsche, and General MacArthur, to Arthur C. Clarke and Robert A. Heinlein, to the underground newspaper *The East Village Other*, Emil Brunner's 1948 Gifford Lectures, and even Bertrand de Jouvenal's work, *Sovereignty*, but the more significant ones are those that appear a number of times, including: Oswald Spengler, Daniel Cohen, and Roberto Vaccas. Niven and Pournelle use these epigraphs to focus attention on the discourse of collapse and decline, but they also work within a post-cataclysmic discourse linking Spengler's post-World War I concepts to their essential rearticulation in the 1990s in Samuel Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations* discourse. Daniel Cohen's *How the World Will End* (1973) also ties in neatly to the apocalyptic comet, with its attention to the Icarus scare of 1968—the fear of a possible comet impacting the Earth. The source that remains most significant in the epigraphs is Vaccas' *The Coming Dark Age*, originally published in Italian (1971) but revised and translated into English in 1973.

In *The Coming Dark Age*, Vaccas, a computer scientist and systems engineer, posits the collapse of advanced/industrialized civilization as the result of cascading errors and system failures. Although his work is not SF, his argument employs the techniques of SF futurists, many of whom were also engineers, to portray various threats created by modern society's reliance on ever more complex, automated, and interdependent

technology. In 1971 his examples included systems of communication, railway systems, air traffic, streets and highways, electricity production and distribution, and others.<sup>22</sup>

Vaccas hypothesizes that the failure of systems would begin “an apocalypse that is impersonal, casual, and unpremeditated” because “vast concentrations of human beings are involved in systems that are now so complicated that they are becoming uncontrollable.”<sup>23</sup> Vaccas’ central thesis is that human technology and systems are growing too large to be controlled and are close to critical instability:

As yet, a crisis in a single system would not be enough to bring a great metropolitan concentration to a halt. But a chance concomitance of stoppages in the same area could start a catastrophic process that would paralyze the most developed societies and lead to the deaths of millions of people.<sup>24</sup>

Vaccas contributes to the cataclysmic exchange, not just because he elaborates a different causality of collapse, but also because he then proceeds to explain how (a) the effects would be more severe in relation to the relative level of technology of the society, i.e. the developed world (US, Europe) would suffer the most; and (b) the effects of such a cascading collapse would lead to the reemergence of social disruptions and conflict best described in “medieval” terms such as those suffered after the final collapse of Rome.

Beyond supplying thematic context for Niven and Pournelle, Vaccas posits the effects of cascading failures—what might begin with a computer error or lack of electricity would lead to famine, epidemics, and a large-scale die off in cities and urban environments.<sup>25</sup>

Furthering the intertextual associations, Vaccas explains that part of his hypothesis draws from the 1972 report of the Club of Rome, “The Limits of Growth.”

The Club of Rome—composed of thirty scientists, economists, scholars, and industrialists from ten countries—formed in the late 1960s. A core concept of *The Limits*

*of Growth* is that growth (in the 1960s/1970s) was exponential, not linear (as many assumed), and if the projected rates of industrial output, production of pollution and the consumption of natural resources and agriculture continued, there would be a severe depletion and shortage of resources between 2050-2070. The short argument was that the limits of growth in terms of population and developed living spaces would be reached within 100 years, an argument that many criticized as pessimistically Malthusian,<sup>26</sup> at least in various government and industrial circles. Many of the conclusions in the report were developed thanks to an MIT computer model that projected the results once an economy overshoots the carrying capacity of its industrialized and technologically mediated environment; effectively the costs of resources depletion, pollution and waste rise faster than the rate of economic growth. According to Matt Simmons, in his 2001 inquiry into the original findings of the group, while critics found the computer models too simplistic in the 1970s, when the MIT projections were compared to the reality of the early 2000s they matched the reality and expected trends.<sup>27</sup> *The Limits to Growth* will be discussed more fully in chapter two, but it is worth noting here that Niven and Pournelle pulled the report into their fictional narrative in the guise of one of their NASA scientists, ridiculing its Malthusian predictions by saying they were only correct if technological advances halted while population growth continued;<sup>28</sup> this does foreshadow the coming collapse of civilizations in the novel as a result of earthquakes, tsunamis, and climatic changes after the comet strikes and there is a “momentary” end of advanced civilization.

SF criticism continued to develop and expand as the papers presented at the Eaton Symposiums and SF symposiums at MLA conferences during the 1960s and 1970s<sup>29</sup> found their way into anthologies in the 1980s, such as Rabkin, Greenberg, and Olander’s



*The End of the World* (1983), or Rabkin and Slusser's *Aliens: The Anthropology of Science Fiction* (1987). At the same time, less academic, though no less significant works, such as David Hartwell's *Age of Wonders* (1984), focused on the histories, personalities, and ideas of SF. Brian Aldiss comments on the explosion of science fiction in film and television in the 1970s in his later, updated history of SF, the *Trillion Year Spree* (1986). Aldiss's view is elitist; he associates the *Star Wars* franchise and similar films with the "gutter" of (formulaic) pulp magazine stories, and laments what a Marxist might call the "mystification" of audiences by spectacle (special effects) rather than by appreciating the literature and its message. In a similar fashion, the Doomsday Clock of the *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists* became one of the more iconic images of the atomic age, significant in 1950s and 1960s films, 1980s TV movies (*The Day After*), and the 1980s graphic novel series *The Watchmen* and its recent movie adaptation in 2009. These separate strands of literary criticism, SF analysis, and dystopic analysis combine in a distinctly post-apocalyptic discourse after the end of détente during the early Reagan years, most significantly in Warren W. Wagar's *Terminal Visions: The Literature of Last Things* (1982) and his two chapters in the collection *The End of the World*.

Wagar's study is an intellectual history that defines the eschatology of science fiction narratives over approximately 175 years. Wagar sketches out archetypes, worldviews, concepts of time, and how the myth of doomsday was absorbed from pagan belief and recodified into Christian, Jewish, and Islamic (monotheistic) eschatology. These beliefs were then transported from the sacred to the profane (secular) pulp fiction of the nineteenth and twentieth century scientific romances and early science fiction. It is important to note that Wagar expresses a certain intellectual exhaustion in his

introduction, and creates a sense of fatalism and entropy in his discussion that presages the pessimism of later nuclear criticism. The key themes Wagar offers include the blending of interpretations of time as linear (“precivilized,” Germanic, Iranian, Jewish and Christian (Abrahamic)) and cyclic (the peasantry and ruling caste of settled agrarian civilizations; Greek, Roman, etc.) with the fears of apocalypse. His analysis of fear is informed by Freudian psychoanalysis, and his articulation of its cycles applies apocalyptic fears to other eras, such as the shift from Enlightenment rationalism to romanticism, then positivism, which became irrationalism in the modern era. Wagar suggests that in the early 1980s the majority of “thinking people” were agnostics, atheists, or passive believers, implying that this loss of faith warns of an imminent failure of Western culture, and arguing that SF apocalypse had replaced prophecy for a secular society.

In many ways the watershed in the early stages of cataclysmic exchange is the collection *The End of the World*, which makes an early point that only in a very few cases are stories of the end-of-the-world actually about the end of all life. They are more typically stories of transformation where the world that was has ended, and now new possibilities exist. Rabkin's introduction is laced with a Freudian subtext of the uncanny and anxiety, but he essentially talks about creative destruction that liberates and actualizes potential. In his chapter in this volume, Gary K. Wolfe reinforces this, saying these examples can be read as stories of cosmological displacement, tales of the ending of a way of life rather than the world as a whole. Many of the sources he considers reverse the historical process by rolling back social or technological change and advancement to an often romanticized simpler time and place, a typical response to social unrest and

tensions from an historicist perspective. Wolfe identifies several common states of action, or what Cawelti might consider formulas, in apocalyptic stories. Brian Stableford's article ties man-made catastrophes to Mark Hilleglas's earlier study of the anti-utopian, *The Future as Nightmare* (1967), and one of the keys to Stableford's argument is that the scientific imagination provides a new secular mythology, a new set of explanations for catastrophe, that replace and overturn the older mythic and religious imagination. Stableford reinforced Wagar's earlier monograph by contending that the worldview of the Enlightenment—rationalism—took gods out of the equation for the apocalypse and that the creation of the starship myth in the 1950s was the first counter-myth that established an escape from apocalypse. In effect, atomic weapons helped create a consciousness of “the future as a continuing catastrophe, a mess which we had already made and would have to take special measures to escape.”<sup>30</sup> Stableford makes it clear that perceptions changed after 1945, but he also suggests “that the prospect of atomic war has faded from immediate consciousness into the background of the imagination.”<sup>31</sup> So SF plots shifted to overpopulation, industrial waste, or resource depletion rather than nuclear holocaust, a theme picked up by the cyberpunks and the return to both space opera and high fantasy in the late 1980s. The last chapter, Wagar's again, is about the rebellion of nature—natural disasters and apocalypse. He takes this much further in his book, *Terminal Visions*, but offers one particularly salient comment here: “Part of the crisis of modernity is the erosion of the systems of belief and value that once helped to integrate Western civilization and now lie, for many of us, in ruins.”<sup>32</sup> But it is not Western civilization, but rather the United States where this integration is increasingly and alarmingly failing.

## Nuclear Criticism

The “school” of nuclear criticism typically centers on articles within topical issues of specific journals including the *Northwest Review* (1984), *Diacritics* 14.2 (Summer 1984), and *Science Fiction Studies (SFS)* 13.2 (July 1986), and a number of monographs by David Dowling, H. Bruce Franklin, and Martha A. Bartter, as well as the short-lived journal, *Nuclear Texts and Contexts*. And although these publications are definitively linked to a resurgence in nuclear anxiety after Reagan’s SDI announcement in March, 1983, the stage had already been set for a return to nuclear fear by Jonathan Schell in *The Fate of the Earth* (1982), a highly detailed scenario of the ultimate destruction of the planet and extinction of the human species. This was quickly followed by Carl Sagan’s interview on October 30, 1983 in *Parade Magazine*, and the November 1983 publication of the “nuclear winter” theory which suggests that even a limited nuclear conflict could throw enough debris into the upper atmosphere to cause the planet to suffer widespread ecological damage, contributing to the death of many survivors.<sup>33</sup> Outside the academy, Herman Kahn reprised his earlier reaction to Neville Shute by revising and updating it in *Thinking the Unthinkable in the 1980s* (1984),<sup>34</sup> this time in response to Schell’s *The Fate of the Earth*. Schell continued this exchange after Kahn’s death with *The Abolition* (1984), an argument for new policies to promote the abolition of all nuclear weapons.

Linking this discourse of nuclear strategy and the nuclear peace movement to SF, is Jerry Pournelle and Dean Ing’s *Mutual Assured Survival* (1984), a nonfiction analysis of SDI promoting support for Reagan’s new policies and arguing for more scientific research funding. Both Pournelle and Ing write hard SF and often made forays into military SF dealing with nuclear war and post-nuclear holocaust scenarios. The support

of several SF writers and others for Reagan's new nuclear strategy shows in the selection of articles and stories Pournelle chose to fill the nine anthologies of the military SF series, *There Will Be War* (1983-1991). Some of the non-fiction articles highlight recent historical analysis and concerns about American vulnerability, such as an excerpt from Paul Kennedy's *The Rise and Fall of Great Powers* (1987). The contrasts in the political stance between the conservative camp of Pournelle, his contributors, and many writers of military SF, and the liberals including David Brin, Whitley Strieber, and Kim Stanley Robinson, reveals a growing schism within the SF community.<sup>35</sup> As David Seed explains, both military SF and the greater SF community at large seem to have split after 1983 and they only began to reconcile after the end of the Cold War in the early 1990s.<sup>36</sup> Reagan's initial nuclear strategy and focus on the MX missile program and later SDI helped spark the formation of nuclear criticism in response to heightened atomic anxiety.

Nuclear criticism was particularly successful in engaging the politics and policy of nuclear deterrence and its final moments in the era of Reagan. The overarching project in the summer 1984 issue of *Diacritics* was creating a framework for the largely poststructural discussion of such concepts as the nuclear sublime, or the inherent paradox in the unusable nuclear deterrent. Its centerpiece is Jacques Derrida's proposition privileging literature—non-SF texts—and arguing that there can be no meaningful discussion of nuclear war outside the imaginary or literal because, in the event of such a conflict, there will be nothing left and no one to create or maintain the discourse. In many respects the set of articles in *SFS* #39 (July 1986) follows the earlier *Diacritics* discourse, but with the distinction that the *SFS* authors all use science fiction as their primary sources and a more Marxist-informed analytical perspective. These readings essentially

warn that the US has learned little since its leaders stepped back from the brink after the Cuban Missile Crisis and that “everything that has happened before will happen again.”<sup>37</sup>

Not itself part of nuclear criticism, Paul Boyer’s *By the Bomb’s Early Light* is an intellectual history of the early years of American nuclear culture. His sources range from newspaper editorials, to movies, popular music, radio programs, opinion polls, and personal papers, and he includes a section on science fiction. He traces the reaction of Americans to the use of the atomic bomb, additional bomb tests, and the realization after 1949 that the USSR could retaliate in the same way against the United States, sparking the race between the two to build bombers fleets, interceptor craft, and assemble more and bigger bombs. The reactions he cites help construct an understanding of the mentality of SF writers and their audience in the 1950s, a critical component that became the basis for the 1980s return of the nuclear fear. Paul Brians’s study, *Nuclear Holocausts: Atomic War in Fiction, 1895-1984* (1987), goes far beyond his earlier article on a small selection of similar resources in *SFS* #13. Although he provides a survey of English language novels and stories written between 1895 and 1984, Brians’s focus is on those that specifically and (mostly) unambiguously depict nuclear war or its aftermath. Brian’s analysis is the inspiration for my approach in this study, and his analysis includes a brief history of holocausts, the causes of nuclear war, its short-term and long-term effects, and long-term consequences.

Three works round out the discussion of nuclear weapons and deterrence in the vein of nuclear criticism. *War Stars* (1988), by H. Bruce Franklin, is a cultural history of the America’s then-two hundred year long fear that the country is about to be destroyed by external forces and can only be saved by a “superweapon.” Franklin provides a

cultural context for the earlier works of Wagar and Brians in particular, but also for the strength of SF in American culture and an explanation for the ideology of nuclear deterrence. Franklin also suggests that the consensus shifted from support to criticism of the massive nuclear arsenal and its expense, a change created in part by the more critical depictions of nuclear war in the popular culture (TV and books) of the mid-1980s.

Published in the same year, Bartter's *The Way to Ground Zero: The Atomic Bomb in American Science Fiction* (1988), is also critical of the earlier reverence for the nuclear bomb in American popular culture, but hers is more a deeply detailed study that extends Brians's broad overview of nuclear war fiction into more detailed analysis that relates it to the insanity of nuclear deterrence, although not quite as radical in its political criticism as Franklin. Finally, the collection of nineteen essays edited by Nancy Anisfield, *The Nightmare Considered* (1991), marks the transition from the nuclear anxiety heightened by SDI to the apparent rapprochement between the US and USSR after the fall of the Berlin Wall against the backdrop of the nuclear freeze movement and agreements to reduce the number of missiles in arsenals. These essays expand far beyond SF literature and media into the consideration of live performance, art installations, and other examples of a material culture in opposition to the final countdown.

### **Post-Nuclear Criticism**

In his intellectual history on the belief in Biblical prophecy in American culture, *When Time Shall Be No More* (1992), Paul Boyer provides an end-cap to the era of nuclear criticism. Boyer emphasizes the importance of dispensational millennialism after World War II, and the role of its believers in shaping public attitudes towards nuclear weapons, the USSR, and the possibility of war—nuclear Armageddon. Boyer notes that

“the influence of prophecy belief on nuclear decision making” can be seen in the interests of several members of the Reagan administration including the President himself.<sup>38</sup> And while the influence is important, especially in the context of nuclear policy and the proliferation of nuclear weapons, Boyer makes it clear that the premillennialists were a minority, and even then “few consciously sought to bring on Armageddon . . . [but] tended toward passive acquiescence in the nuclear-arms race and Cold War confrontation.”<sup>39</sup> Boyer makes it clear that President Reagan was not alone in his interpretation of Soviet Russia as the “Gog” of a contemporary version of the *Book of Ezekiel*.<sup>40</sup> While SF may have become exhausted with the apocalypse, “the politics of prophecy elicited intense public discussion”<sup>41</sup> in forums beyond SF writers and fans, and the academics and commentators who contributed to nuclear criticism.

Throughout the 1990s a number of cultural histories and studies of SF film and television reconsidered the atomic age, framing it as the era between the use of the first atomic bomb and the collapse of the Soviet Union. Allan M Winkler’s *Life Under a Cloud* (1993) draws from a broad range of popular culture but does not limit itself to SF texts by also considering music and radio, film and television, and books, magazines, and even comic books. Winkler details the arcs of what he considers the nuclear drama between politicians, scientists, and military leaders, and the waxing and waning of popular reactions in support and in protest of the use of nuclear power and weapons. In his essay in SFS #61 (November 1993), “Surviving Armageddon: Beyond the Imagination of Disaster,” Mick Broderick provides a model for a close reading of SF cinema that specifically engages post-nuclear conflict. Broderick creates a six-category schema that maps movies from the 1940s through the 1980s, and extends Brians’s



analysis of nuclear holocausts. But of particular merit for this study is his articulation of the post-apocalyptic hero as an “exterminating angel” who liberates or protects a community and prepares it for renewal.<sup>42</sup>

During the 1990s, the bomb remained active in the American imagination, but rather than serving as a function of international policy, it became the tool of terrorists or a device to save the planet. In 1999, David Seed published an ambitious summary of the themes of the Cold War including an outline of its historical origins and some of its literary conventions and themes, which highlights some of the scholarship and criticism through the early 1990s. Seed’s *American Science Fiction and the Cold War* (1999) is a detailed analysis that contributes most usefully through its discussion of the Star Wars debate and contemporary SF texts. Kim Newman adds to Broderick’s essay by examining films from the early 1950s through the late 1990s, considering them along an eschatological axis in *Apocalypse Movies: End of the World Cinema* (2000). Newman’s cultural history is written more from the perspective of a film critic and SF writer than as an academic scholar, but its detail of the movies of this era helped support the choices I made in excluding the majority of 1980s movies. Jerome Shapiro’s *Atomic Bomb Cinema* (2002) brings in Broderick and Seed’s critical filters, and his analysis is far richer than Newman’s because of the extensive consideration of Japanese sources and cultural responses to the atomic bomb in conjunction with American texts.

Thompson’s *Apocalyptic Dread: American Film at the Turn of the Millennium* (2007), despite the title, does not engage apocalyptic texts beyond the recent remake of *War of the Worlds* (2006) starring Tom Cruise. Her focus is a tradition of cataclysmic narratives that invoke social anxieties and the fear of global catastrophe rather than its

actualization. As a more recent analysis she ties her argument to conservative religious movements and Republican administrations in the US, as well as more global concerns, such as terrorism and looming environmental crises. But because her analysis is a more philosophical and psychological discussion of these themes, her study helps to define the limits of this study. Patrick Sharp's *Savage Perils: Racial Frontiers and Nuclear Apocalypse in American Culture* (2007) emphasizes the function of the post-nuclear frontier in revitalizing America during the early Cold War. Sharp begins his study by linking social Darwinism to man-the-toolmaker as an example of European superiority, and then to Teddy Roosevelt's "nationalist racist" that predicated the growth of the American nation on genocide and the strengthening of (white) settlers in the contest against "savages" on the frontier. Sharp draws Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis into the discussion, emphasizing the developing myth of a "white" America that reinforces nativist responses to non-northern Europeans and supports the abuses of Jim Crow laws. But in focusing on race, especially the perception of blacks and people of the First Nations, Sharp tends to avoid issues of economic mobility and class, even while recognizing (in some instances) that "poor whites" are part of the victim-set in several tales of nuclear apocalypse. He mentions the death of everyone in some works (Shute, etc.) or even desegregation in others (Frank, *Alas, Babylon*), but his study is dedicated to defining everything as either civilized or savage. More importantly, Sharp ends his study in the early 1960s, limiting his study to earlier texts and adding more to an analysis of Cold War America, rather than contemporary post-cataclysmic narratives.

## Lost in the Panic: Beyond the Scope

Between Mary Shelley, H.G. Wells, John Wyndham, J.G. Ballard, and even more recent authors such as James Herbert (the *Rats* quadrilogy), the British have continued to supply a large number of post-apocalyptic texts to the subgenre that fall outside of this study. In a similar fashion Japanese manga, anime, and film have also been excluded, even though such well-known examples as *Gojira* (1954) and *Akira* (1988) continue to set aesthetic standards and contribute to the interlinked stories and popular culture references.<sup>43</sup> Although these examples are well known to American audiences and form part of the megatext, these texts are excluded because Americans did not create them nor do they focus on American decline. Over the past three decades a number of feature films have concentrated on the imminent disaster and humanity's attempt to avert it; including alien invasions in *Independence Day* (1994), *Signs* (2002), *The War of the Worlds* (2005), and technically the remake of *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (2008); comets and asteroids in *Meteor* (1979), *Armageddon* (1998), and *Deep Impact* (1998); or from the planet itself in *The Core* (2003), *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004), and *The Happening* (2008). In almost every one of these examples the world is "saved" but not before suffering extensive damage, loss of life, and the effective disruption of the infrastructure that supplies food, water, and power to the populations of cities and suburbs, but the films stop short of exploring these repercussions. Some features are set within a generation of the collapse of civilization including the *Terminator* franchise with its post-apocalyptic flash forward scenes, *The Postman* (1997), *Reign of Fire* (2002), *Doomsday* (2008), *The Road* (2009), and the *Book of Eli* (2010); but with the exception of *The Postman* and *Doomsday* (British and beyond scope) none offer insights into the social decline and

struggles immediately post-cataclysm. Far too many other post-cataclysmic features are set in some indeterminate far future like *The Planet of the Apes* series (1968-1973) and its 2001 remake, or *Waterworld* (1995) where the collapse of civilization and even our modern era has faded into myth or beyond memory.

The most prolific form of post-cataclysmic narrative during the Precursor era (1945–1974) is the post-nuclear war short story and B-movie. Paul Brians's analysis of nuclear war fiction in *nuclear holocausts* suggests that relatively few texts other than some short stories deal with the immediate consequences of catastrophe. Of the novels in this era, only *Earth Abides* and *Alas, Babylon*, consider the actual cataclysmic event and the recovery of specific societies in its aftermath. Other critically recognized post-apocalyptic novels, such as Philip Wylie's *Tomorrow!* (1954) and *Triumph!* (1963), only deal with the immediate attacks and hint at the world to come, while Wylie's ecological catastrophe, *The End of the Dream* (1972), is set too far in the future to contribute to this study. Similar issues exclude Walter M. Miller, Jr.'s post-nuclear war(s) *A Canticle for Leibowitz* (1960), Robert A. Heinlein's *Farnham's Freehold* (1964), and Edgar Pangborn's *Davy* (1964) and *The Company of Glory* (1975). Pangborn's *The Judgment of Eve* (1966) is set within one lifespan of a nuclear war, as is Roger Zelazny's *Damnation Alley* (1969), but both concentrate more on the motif of a journey through the wilderness (wasteland) rather than presenting a more comprehensive image of the post-war societies or suggesting what they have lost.

Early post-apocalyptic stories and novels in the period of New Vulnerability (1974–1983) often embody neo-barbarian fantasies, return to a new Dark Ages setting, or use cycles of rediscovery in crafting their far future worlds. *The Horseclans* (1975-1988)

series by Robert Adams makes extensive use of the neo-barbarian formula and, since the 1980s, has provided the basis for source books used in a variety of post-apocalyptic role-playing games. The stories are set centuries after the nuclear war, but their examples of far-future nomadic primitives and neo-feudal kingdoms are considered here only as some of the intertext for the *Emberverse* novels by S.M. Stirling. Also excluded are William F. Nolan's *Logan's Run* (1967), released as a film in 1976, and its sequel *Logan's World* (1977) because the length of time that has passed in these narratives after their own nuclear wars and ecological collapse is unclear. While the *Planet of the Apes* films (1968-1973) and the one-season television series (1974) mix metaphors of race into their post-nuclear war setting, the nuclear war occurs sometime in the late twenty-first century but its recovery is centuries later; both conditions place it outside the scope of this study. None of the early science fiction blockbuster films or television series of this period, including the original *Battlestar Galactica* (ABC, 1978, 1980) and *Buck Rogers in the Twenty-Fifth Century* (NBC, 1979-1981), will be considered in this study. *Buck Rogers* is set too into the far future, and although the original *BSG* does have a post-apocalyptic premise, and at least one episode deals with a near nuclear war, it features very little social recovery.

A number of contemporary post-apocalyptic films appeared in the Doom Deferred period (1983-1990), sparked by the renewed nuclear fears caused by SDI, including *Threads* (1983), *The Day After* (1983), and *Testament* (1983), but for the most part these works do not show a period of recovery post-destruction. Another spike in B-movie nuclear war fictions followed producing a wave of "warriors of the wasteland" movies, many poorly modeled on *Mad Max* (1979) and *The Road Warrior* (1981) (U.S. release

titles). Beginning in the late 1980s, there was a proliferation of right-wing fictions and military SF anthologies such as Jerry Pournelle's *There Will be War*, as an almost-paranoid reaction to and distrust of Gorbachev's reforms. Military SF evolved from the pulpy space adventures of earlier eras, and while its newer narratives became more complex and character-driven in the 1980s and 1990s, they are seen as part the resurgence of New Space Opera, especially the works of C.J. Cherryh, David Feintucks, Elizabeth Moon, and Lois McMaster Bujold. The first, brief generation of cyberpunk largely moves beyond the nuclear holocaust theme, and in many cases beyond the era of the nation-state; similarly gritty contemporary fantasies, like the shared-world anthologies of *Bordertown*, initially limit their themes to the resistance to modernity and homogeneity within cities and urban environments.

Movies and television feature post-apocalyptic society more than books during the New World Order (1991-2001) period, including the TV miniseries version of Stephen King's *The Stand* (1994), Kevin Kostner's costly films *Waterworld* (1995) and *The Postman* (1997), and the alien invasions of *Independence Day* (1996) and *The X-Files* (1993-2002). A number of short stories made their way into the magazines *Asimov's* and *Analog*, but there were fewer novels. Jack McDevitt's *Eternity Road* (1997) is set in the far future after another global plague, aligning it with Stewart, Matheson, and King and nodding to the continuing AIDS crisis, but also setting it outside the scope of this study, much like Elizabeth Hand's *The Glimmering* (1997), a story of ecological collapse without a recovery.

One of the risks in even considering the films, books, and television series created during the Age of Crisis (2001-2009) is that both the media and the challenges of the past

several years are ongoing. The intertextual arc of American decline begins in the 1970s, but has intensified to such an extent since the attacks of 9/11 that many overlook the recent texts as continuing an ongoing discourse. During the administration of George W. Bush (2001-2009), the United States suffered the greatest loss of civilian life on its shores in history, and continues to deal with financial scandals and a near-Depression level economic recession and malaise. Rather than a single crisis or emergency, this era enfolds a series of overlapping events that question American military and economic might, as well as the strength of its liberties and rights.

It is critical to recognize the proliferation of dystopias, post-apocalyptic, and doomsday narratives that have appeared in the past decade alone. One significant theme that appears at the end of this era is the recognition of resource and energy scarcity and the possibility of a post-oil world. Although some of these novels do discuss a near-future post-American world and contribute heavily to the current intertext, all of these sources are set too far in the future to fit within the theme of this study. The scarcity of resources and post-industrial era of energy (or calories) figures heavily in the works of James Howard Kunstler's *World Made By Hand* (2009) and *The Witch of Hebron* (2010), Robert Charles Wilson's *Julian Comstock: A Story of the 22nd Century* (2009), and Paolo Bacigalupi's world of the Windup Girl in his short stories over the past decade and novels *The Windup Girl* (2009) and *Shipbreaker* (2010). While all of the texts (including movies) since 2009 alone are too many to list here, a last significant example is Suzanne Collins's world of *The Hunger Games* (2008). Almost all of these sources incorporate some form of social decline—whether the loss of high-efficiency energy sources and

fuels, or rebellion and revolution—they are all slow decline or late post-decline narratives and too recent to fall within the scope of this study.

### **Horror and the Supernatural**

During the paperback book explosion of the late 1970s and 1980s, science fiction, fantasy, and horror were each developed and marketed as discrete genres, although all of their roots reach back to many of the same early nineteenth-century writers such as Mary Shelley and Edgar Allan Poe. Today the *SyFy Channel* offers films and television shows that cross the border so often that it is difficult to tell if something is a science fiction movie with horror elements, or a horror movie using science fictional elements; examples open to interpretation and debate include *Alien* (1979), *Event Horizon* (1997), and *The Road* (novel 2006, film 2009). Works of horror are expected to use the supernatural to unsettle and frighten their audience, often with graphic violence and gore; most recently, visceral body horror including torture and cannibalism has also been a frequent focus, making it particularly relevant to post-cataclysmic stories that use the same tropes. Supernatural elements (gods, angels, demons, visions, etc.) are beyond the scope of this discussion because they rely on superstition and belief more closely linked to the religious aspects of the apocalyptic tradition rather than manmade folly that leads to an inevitable social decline. They are also inexplicable, and rarely offer any sense of recovery—there is no post-apocalypse in this genre. Novels like Stephen King's *The Stand* (1978, 1990), with its visions and psychic phenomena, fall under this rubric, as does Robert McCammon's post-nuclear war *Swan Song* (1988). Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006) is essentially a horror story that never specifies the basis for the fires and death of its world, and its journey of decline has no post-cataclysmic recovery. The film



versions of these novels are also excluded, as are more Manichean supernatural conflicts *The Seventh Seal* (1988), *End of Days* (1999), and the ongoing CW series *Supernatural*, with its apocalyptic war brewing between heaven and hell in the fourth and fifth seasons. For the same reason, other apparent cataclysms without hope of recovery, including the remakes *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1978), *Body Snatchers* (1993), and *Invasion* (2006), and their direct-to-DVD cohort fall outside the purview of this study.

### **Magic and Urban Fantasy**

In the 1980s a new blend of fantasy and science fiction helped establish the new cross genre of urban fantasy. Steven R. Boyett's *Ariel* (1983) tells the story of a boy and his unicorn and their quest to confront a necromancer in the period "post-Change," when many technologies stopped working and myths and legends reentered the world. Boyett returns to the story of Pete and his son Fred in *Elegy Beach* (2009) where magic is the new technology and controlled by the logical approaches of software programming and computer hacking. *Ariel* is mentioned as one of the many inspirations for S.M. Sterling's *Emberverse* series; and Boyett is one of the contributors, along with Charles de Lint, and Will Shetterly and Emma Bull, to the urban fantasy series *Borderlands* (1986-2011) that began with *Borderland* (1986), edited by Terri Windling and Mark Alan Arnold. While not the science-fantasy post-apocalypse of Boynett or Stirling's *Changed Worlds*, the *Border* is a zone/city in North America where magic and technology both work fitfully and humans and the creatures of faery co-exist. The series tends toward social criticism, including class and ethnic issues, and has the feel of a post-apocalyptic dystopia as well as the grittier and seamier underside of contemporary cyberpunk settings; however, its

reliance on magic creates an additional dimension that removes it from the process of American decline and the failure of American society addressed here.

### **Zombie Apocalypse**

The zombie apocalypse has spun off as its own surging subgenre over the past decade, and while generally categorized as horror, it often crosses into SF because several texts invoke a scientific aura to justify the uncanny in the break with the rational and modern realm. Based on Richard Matheson's highly influential vampire apocalypse, *I Am Legend* (1953), the contemporary flesh-eating zombie of unknown provenance (radiation from a Venus space probe, really?) in George Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) set the template not only for his series of films but for an ever-increasing number of copies, spoofs, and variations including the *Return of the Living Dead* and the *Resident Evil* series.<sup>44</sup> Most of these films pay some quick lip service to the end of the world, but only as setting for a story of survival horror as those trapped in the home/mall/military base/etc. are whittled down by each other and the undead. The best of these engage in social commentary regarding ethnicity and class, and sometimes gender roles and expectations, but few depict a post-cataclysmic world, with the exception of the sealed community of Fiddler's Green in *Land of the Dead* (2005), which ends up overrun by the undead. Many of these films and novels, including Brian Keene's *The Rising* universe and his *Conqueror Worms* books, and Max Brooks' *World War Z* (2006), incorporate fears of immigration and the relative decline or continuing decline of the white, protestant majority in the late-industrial era, but the supernatural context of most of these stories and the prolific creation of texts warrants a separate discussion.

## Graphic Novels and Comic Books

During the 1960s and 1970s, Marvel and DC comics both established alternate worlds and far future timelines involving nuclear war. DC's most prominent title was *Superboy and the Legion of Superheroes* (later just the *Legion of Superheroes*) set in the thirtieth century; it follows the tropes of the 1950s: a centuries-long decline into neo-medievalism and long recovery after its own nuclear World War III. DC followed later with *Kamandi: The Last Boy on Earth* (1972-1978), an emulation of the *Planet of the Apes* with degenerate humans controlled by mutated and evolved animals. Marvel Comics began with a near-term post-apocalypse set in the 1990s with the introduction of the character Deathlok in *Astonishing Tales* #25 (August, 1974); in this world a limited war has been fought and military officers use advanced weapons to control the populace of a shattered United States. Deathlok (1974-1976, 1990, 2006) has been reintroduced and revised at least three times over the past four decades. His most recent incarnations are cybernetic systems designed for military missions and counter-insurgencies, developed by multi-national corporations in a post-Cold War cyberpunk setting.

During the 1980s and 1990s, Marvel, DC, and several independent companies, most notably Dark Horse Comics, explored post-apocalyptic storylines and titles; many of which were in response to the new nuclear fear, but by the late 1980s, some drew from the success of cyberpunk. Marvel Comics' most influential storylines include *The Uncanny X-Men*, "Days of Future Past" (Chris Claremont and John Byrne, #141-142, 1981), set in a post-human/mutant war complete with martial law, concentration camps, and hunter-killer teams pursuing escapees and unregistered mutants. The initial two-issue story arc continues to influence recent significant storylines and crossovers and time

travel and temporal paradoxes remain a frequent theme. DC Comics added several wars to the *Legion* universe, including a successful invasion of the Earth published in the mid-1990s, and but its most significant and apocalyptic stories are the 12-issue *Crisis on Infinite Earths* (1985-1986) that wipes away entire alternate worlds (including old Golden Age heroes and villains) and contemporary characters (Supergirl, the Silver Age Flash). *Crisis* was conceived as an anniversary event (50 years) and a way of reconciling five decades of comic history (as well as the assimilation of companies and characters purchased by DC over that period).

Comic books (though not properties) have slumped in sales since the mid-1990s, and DC again attempted a massive continuity-altering series with *Infinite Crisis* in 2006; though it was not as well received. During the 1990s, Marvel experimented with dystopias more than apocalyptic wars or cataclysms, although the *The Hulk: Future Imperfect* (1993) storyline, with its post nuclear war triggered by the Maestro (a further mutated and insane Hulk with Banner's intellect), continues to exert influence over other time-travel storylines and titles. The independent publisher, Dark Horse Comics, in particular offers some of the better post-apocalyptic worlds in their multiple *Terminator* series, some of which include several glimpses of the future and the struggling resistance, and the *Aliens* and *Predator* franchises. The *Aliens* stories end with an Alien-apocalypse when they break free of corporate control and overrun the Earth; reflections of which can be seen in *Alien Resurrection* (1997), *Alien vs. Predator* (2004) and *Aliens vs. Predator: Requiem* (2007). Dark Horse also published the *Give Me Liberty* (1990) series by Frank Miller and Dave Gibbons featuring the character of Martha Washington in an early twenty-first century dystopia where the United States eventually shatters and balkanizes

after a series of failed foreign wars, domestic unrest, the assassination of the president, and a military coup. The tales of Martha Washington continued through the 1990s, including her role in the war to reunite the United States, and end with her death in a final story published in 1997 but set in 2097.

The past decade began with some reflections of the millennial angst, but after 9/11, both Marvel and DC considered a variety of post-cataclysm stories while also attempting to show respect for the victims and the feelings of fellow New Yorkers (both publishing operations are based in Manhattan). In 1999, Marvel created the dystopian *Earth X* (1999-2000) future storyline, although in the early 2000s its continued evolution in the *Universe X* (2001-2002) and *Paradise X* (2003) storylines resolved this as an alternate-world rather than the main title's (Earth 616) timeline. In this world, set twenty to thirty years in the future, all humans are mutated with superpowers and abilities, all telepaths are dead, and the former heroes have grown old and retired, or continue to fight the powers of this dystopian world. These storylines that do not involve superheroes, such as *Y: The Last Man* (2002-2008), where Yorick and his pet monkey travel through a world of female survivors to find the cause of mortality in all males; and the ongoing *The DMZ* (2005- ), about a second U.S. Civil War loosely patterned on Baghdad and the invasion of Iraq but set in New York City, have been very well received critically. Last, Robert Kirkman's *The Walking Dead* (2003- ), published by Image Comics, tells the story of a band of survivors in the world of Romero-inspired zombie apocalypse; AMC began airing a television series inspired by the comics in October 2010.

While several of these comic series and stand-alone graphic novels are relevant to this discussion, especially the Martha Washington stories and *Y: The Last Man*, to

include them would expand the source materials to an unmanageable degree. Unlike a single movie, or the limited run of a television series, the technique used in comics and graphic novels requires an analysis of the implied events and actions that occur between the panels. To properly consider these sources and do them justice will likely require a separate study, one that might employ the heuristics approach to trace their linkages to the literature and media of post-cataclysm.

### **Role-Playing Games**

In the 1970s, Role Playing Games (RPGs) began incorporating the storylines, settings, and characters from various genres including science fiction, fantasy, horror, and detective fiction. The 1971 release of *Chainmail* was initially a rule system for miniature combat, but one of its writers, G. Gary Gygax, quickly incorporated aspects of its combat system within the world of *Greyhawk* (itself derived from a range of myths, histories, and high fantasy texts), co-creating *Dungeons and Dragons* with David Arneson, released by TSR Games (Tactical Studies Rules, Inc.) in 1974. *D&D*, now published by Wizards of the Coast, remains the standard for RPGs and over the past four decades has influenced the creation of a number of other RPGS, some of which are post-apocalyptic. One of the first is the far-future post-nuclear war *Gamma World*, first released by TSR in 1978 and now in its seventh edition (2010), which cites Brian Aldiss, Andre Norton, and even Ralph Bakshi's animated post-apocalyptic science-fantasy *Wizards* (1977) as inspirations. *Gamma World* covers the range of post-apocalyptic science fiction in its use of amazing and advanced lost technology, radioactive ruins and desolate wastelands, roving gangs of mutants and marauders, and small, hidden enclaves of struggling pure-strain humans; later modules and iterations incorporate elements of artificial intelligence

and cyberpunk-era technology, and the latest edition pulls from more recent biotechnology and green energy advances. The games of the 1980s drew more from near-term nuclear wars, set against an expected confrontation between the US and USSR (and sometimes China) as in *The Morrow Project* (1980) and the editions of *Twilight 2000* (1984, 1990, 1993); in 2006 new rules for *Twilight 2013* were released, removing the Cold War confrontation between NATO, the USSR, and China. The influence of Boynett and the *Borderlands* shared universe is evident in the *Shadowrun* RPG (FASA Games, 1989-1991; Catalyst Games Lab, 2010) which uses the apocalyptic (or cataclysmic) event of magic and legendary creatures reentering the world of the early twenty-first century, altering existing nations and borders and where science, magic, and future technology combine in 2072. For many of the same reasons that fantasy is beyond the scope of this investigation, RPGs involve far more magical intervention and do not consistently reflect American decline. They are also constantly evolving narratives, based partly on the players as well as the narrative structures, and warrant further study in their own right.

### **Computer and Video Games**

There are over 100 video and computer games based upon post-apocalyptic environments. The majority are first-person shooter games, like the well-known *DOOM* and *Quake*, as well as the more recent special operations-inspired *Rainbow 6* and *Black Ops*. Others fall into the intensive role-play MUDS (Multi-User Domains), a text-based computer gaming experience derived from the role-playing games begun in the 1970s. Others are games developed for consoles, computer, or PlayStation, X-Box, or PS3 and include the *Fallout* series (8), as well as the *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.* series, *Metal Max*, and several of the *Final Fantasy* series, and the *Duke Nuke-Em* games. The majority feature the

traditional post-nuclear wastelands established in the early Precursor era and the 1980s resurgence of battles in the nuclear ruins, while the rest establish post-alien invasion scenarios or reiterations of a zombie apocalypse; The *Resident Evil* series spawned four movies and one animated feature, and the *Left for Dead* series also includes a webcomic. The zombie apocalypse has become a massive subgenera of its own since Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), and where the game became the movies with *Resident Evil*, the game and television series for *The Walking Dead* inspired by the comic books series, underscoring the intertextuality of these sources. However, while their narratives are based on original SF novels and short stories, their storylines are constantly in flux and they focus more on the immediate interaction with the player than on the development of a stable commentary of decline. Post-apocalyptic SF has taken numerous forms over the years, but only a fraction of that material is relevant to the current discussion because of its emphasis on the potential decline of American values and the disintegration of American exceptionalism.

### **Sources Under Consideration**

The following synopses are provided in order to reduce duplication of content within the individual heuristics, and to provide context for the situations and characters under discussion. In several cases the intertextual linkages that help form the post-cataclysmic megatext are noted to better clarify similar issues and themes within the heuristic analyses. A specific strand of criticism connects these post-cataclysmic SF narratives; one that questions the continued failure to build a more inclusive and egalitarian society or to fulfill the promise of the Great Society and Civil Rights Movement. These texts are also an indictment of the resurgence of class division,



economic disparity, ethnic tensions, and religious and cultural intolerance. This study applies an historicist approach by considering the social and political events contemporary to the production of these texts, and incorporates a range of nonfiction texts including foreign affairs, current affairs, political science, economics, ecological studies, and social criticism.

### **Precursors: 1945-1974**

#### **Earth Abides**

George Stewart's *Earth Abides* (1949) explains how a virulent plague sweeps the globe in a matter of days, killing almost all of humanity. The few survivors are left to scavenge the cities and adapt to an anti-modern lifestyle as nature slowly reclaims the planet from the works of man. Most of the story is set within sight of the Golden Gate Bridge in the San Francisco Bay area over the course of several decades. The protagonist, Isherwood Williams (Ish), is a graduate student (biology or possibly ecology) who had been working alone in the hills and missed the beginning of the outbreak. The first section of the novel concentrates on his observations about the final collapse of civilization after rapid transmission of the plague around the globe thanks to modern air travel. Ish then takes a cross-country journey by car, coming across survivors in the Deep South and New York City before returning to Oakland and meeting his future wife, Emma (Em). Over the next twenty years Ish gathers a small group of survivors, forming "The Tribe." The core adults include: Ish and Em; Ezra and his two wives, Molly and Jean; George (carpenter and handyman) and his wife, Maurine; and Evie, a mentally disabled teen. The core members have several children who eventually intermarry and produce the next generation to begin the next cycle in twenty more years. These

grandchildren, in turn, intermarry with a similar “tribe” called “The Others” from across the bay. Ish remains the leader for the first two generations, but is then displaced and assumes the role of a shamanic (doddering and senile) elder. Ish, the Last American, dies at the end of the novel as wildfires consume his neighborhood and much of the now-ruined city of San Francisco. The Tribe story ends as the remaining members move out into the wilderness.

As a scientist, Ish proves to be an intellectual but uncharismatic leader, so many of his plans and ideas fall by the wayside over the course of time. When the Tribe encounters an outsider from Las Vegas, Charlie, Ish cannot control him and, ultimately, the core adults consider him a threat and vote to take care of it. Ish is essentially an observer and recorder; he is the memory of the ideals of America, the ways things were and why they worked. He cannot instill an interest in learning in the surviving members or their offspring and fails to transfer literacy to the next generation, ending modern science and technology, which ultimately results in the decay of their homes and scavenger lifestyle. The Tribe encounters challenges with disease from people who visit them, difficulties in growing food and developing an agrarian base, and governing themselves. The Tribe meets few people in the first generations and confronts no actual enemies, leaving only natural hazards after their technology base has stopped functioning. *Earth Abides* creates a context in which humanity will recover, but the modern societies and ideologies that precipitate global crisis do not; by returning to plague it also expands the discussion beyond the tired and worn tropes of nuclear apocalypse.

**Alas, Babylon**

*Alas, Babylon* was published in 1959, during the beginning of the perceived missile gap between the US and USSR, after the successful Soviet Sputnik I satellite launch in October 1957. The protagonist of Pat Frank's novel is Randy Bragg, a Korean War veteran, sometime lawyer, and failed candidate for the Florida state legislature due to his open support for racial desegregation. His brother Mark, an Air Force Intelligence Officer, sends his wife and children to Randy in Fort Repose (a small Central Florida town) after warning him that an open confrontation between the East and West is imminent. Randy tells Elizabeth McGovern (Libby), his girlfriend, to warn her parents, and he also warns his friend, Dr. Daniel Gunn. Randy has a single day to prepare before the war begins and spends it acquiring cash and buying several weeks worth of groceries. When the conflict occurs early the next morning, it lasts for only a single day. Fort Repose, its nearby citrus orchards, freshwater river, and fields are untouched by bombs or fallout, even though it lies between the radioactive craters that used to be Miami and Orlando. Despite being relatively unscathed, the town must still deal with the resulting food and water shortages and conflicts with refugees and, later, bandits. Eventually, under Randy's leadership as an Army reserve officer, the town begins to pull together and deal with bandits, the blackmarket, radioactive loot, food and fresh water shortages, and the lack of medicine and electricity. Fort Repose survives the first year after the war before being contacted by remaining USAF units and offered relocation, which they reject.

Beyond the Braggs, Dr. Gunn, and the McGoverns, a number of other characters are important in charting the reactions to the attack and social collapse, or for offering alternatives that heighten their chances of survival. The neighbors of the Braggs are the

Henrys, an African-American family descended from slaves that belonged to the Braggs, but who have since worked for them and live on former Bragg land. The patriarch is Preacher who knows the seasons, crops, fishing holes, and understands the real value of the local rivers and artisanal wells. His son, Malachi, is a former enlisted Air Force mechanic who comes to work closely with Randy in adapting both families to the loss of electricity, gas, and fuel oil. Missouri is Preacher's daughter and a local maid, and her husband Two-tone is a half-hearted laborer and sometime fisherman. The Bragg children (Peyton and Ben Franklin) spend most of their time with Malachi's son, Caleb, as the adults struggle to deal with the loss of communications, directions from civil defense, and the collapse of the local banks and economy. Other characters that factor into the post-war community are Edgar Quisenberry, the local bank manager; Porky Logan, Randy's former political opponent and head of local civil defense; and the Hernandezes of the local ethnic and working class neighborhood of Pistolville.

*Alas, Babylon* considers the effects of a nuclear war, but from the perspective of a relatively shielded community. Because Fort Repose suffers no direct damage, the forms of social disruption and the breakdown of authority and norms also helps set a context for post-cataclysm that does not depend on complete erasure of the past three thousand years of civilization.

### **The New Vulnerability: 1974-1983**

#### **Lucifer's Hammer**

Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle's *Lucifer's Hammer (LH)* (1977) reads like a novelized disaster movie written by hard science fiction authors who use global destruction as a plea to better fund NASA and the space program. The plot begins with a

comet (The Hammer) that passes in near Earth orbit and calves, sending several fragments that impact across the Northern hemisphere. There are strikes in Russia, Europe, North America, and the northern Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, causing earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, tsunamis, the flooding of almost all coastal cities and flood plains, and creating a dense layer of clouds that blocks most sunlight for several weeks. In this ensuing “comet winter” with its prolonged rains, glaciers creep over parts of Europe and much of the USSR, forcing survivors to flee south. But the Chinese trigger a short nuclear exchange against the invading Russians that poisons Siberia and northern China. Europe, the Mediterranean basin, Russia and the Ukraine, and large areas of the American inner continent are left in ruins and nearly devoid of life, and those who remain fight for food, surviving technology, and to settle racial, ethnic, and nationalist scores.

The ionosphere is disrupted for weeks along with the weather, leaving isolated communities and groups to fend for themselves while under the impression that they may be the only survivors. The comet strikes and large-scale devastation set up the central conflict of *LH* between two groups: “the Stronghold,” a valley of farms and ranches in the foothills of the Sierras; and the invading New Brotherhood Army (NBA)—a mix of Army deserters, refugees from Los Angeles and its suburbs, religious fanatics, and inner-city gang members who are all desperate for food and bound by a cannibalistic ritual. Food is the resource that most scavenge, steal, and fight over, but fuel, fertilizer, medicine, and even finished goods quickly grow scarce. Apparently sewing needles wear out very quickly after a cataclysm. As with many earlier sources, education, scientific knowledge, practical military and survival experience became the basis for leadership and

social power as money and the older social norms are dead, and democratic institutions are more ornamental than functional.

The key characters that drive the story and its conflicts include the leaders and individuals in the Stronghold, those who form the New Brotherhood Army, and a beleaguered few in the barely functional San Joachim valley nuclear power station (below water-level, but protected by pumps and an earthen dike). The Stronghold is led by Senator Arthur Jellison (R-CA), an Air Force Reserve General and owner of a ranch in the valley. Because of his Washington, DC and military experience, he has the most political sway, ably backed by his chief of staff (and enforcer), Al Hardy. The Christopher Clan, under the leadership of George Christopher, is an equally powerful voice in the Valley, who become more isolationist after Hammerfall. Harvey Randall (former television journalist) and Tim Hamner (former millionaire and amateur astronomer) are also important to the lead up and events after the strikes. The insane televangelist, Reverend Henry Armitage (a possible metaphor for Oral Roberts or Jerry Falwell), forms the New Brotherhood Army; composed largely from the middle-class and inner-city (and ghetto) refugees of Los Angeles (whom the Stronghold refer to as “Locusts”). The militant “wing” of the NBA is the Angels of the Lord; a group of well armed but underfed Army deserters under the leadership of “The Hook,” (Sgt. Hooker, formerly of Watts). A number of black former-gang members join the Angels under the leadership of Alim Nassor, a black militant leader. The nuclear power plant is run by Barry Price and defended by former Mayor of LA, Bentley Allen, and his “guard” of LAPD. Lastly, the astronauts of the space mission to study the comet, the “Hammer

Lab,” include US astronauts Col. John Baker and Lt. Col. Rick Delanty, and Soviet cosmonauts (Dr.) Leonilla Malik and Brigadier Pieter Jakov.

Lucifer’s Hammer offers significant insights into response to the social fragmentation of the late-1960s in a post-cataclysm that only incorporates nuclear weapons and war as a peripheral plot device. Niven and Pournelle are more focused on modernity and its technological civilization, and underscore its fragility in a failure caused by a non-nuclear cataclysm. This is a disaster of the Détente era, rather than the looming return of post-nuclear wastelands of the Regan era.

### **Doom Deferred: 1983-1990**

#### **The Wild Shore**

Kim Stanley Robinson’s *The Wild Shore* (1984) is set in the Californian hills of what was once Camp Pendleton, between San Diego and Los Angeles some sixty years after three thousand Russian nuclear weapons detonated and destroyed most of the cities of the United States. Unlike most post-cataclysmic narratives, especially the majority of post-nuclear texts of the Reagan era, this story is set long after the attacks rather than in the immediate aftermath. There are few references to radiation or other lingering effects, and those are only provided when the central character, Hank (Henry Fletcher), and Old Tom (local “memory,” teacher, and survivor of the actual attacks) travel south to the “new” San Diego, a small frontier town in comparison to the city’s former glory. In this story much of the United States is destroyed by Soviet neutron bombs smuggled into the country in Chevy vans and exploded in 2,000 cities across the country. The rest of the world then quarantined the former-US and actively interdicts reunification efforts. Much of the story focuses on the coast-based, fishing, villagers of San Onofre and local groups

of ruins Scavengers. Some of the Villagers join a resistance effort to end Japanese control of the West Coast, but fail. The rest of the world fears a return of the Cold War brinkmanship if the US is allowed to reform and rebuild. In San Onofre, Hank's community largely cooperates and shares tasks following the model of a simple fishing village. *The Wild Shore* recreates the nineteenth century American frontier.

Although *The Wild Shore* is in many ways a post-cataclysmic Tom Sawyer-like tale, its focus on not just nuclear terrorism, but an unsupportive international community opens additional perspectives on American decline and collapse. The massive scale of the apparently state-sponsored terrorist attacks simulates a one-sided nuclear war, but the lack of lingering effects so many years later shifts the narrative focus from nuclear weapons to social disruption and, more importantly, American myth and memory.

### **Warday and the Journey Onward**

*Warday and the Journey Onward* (1984) (*Warday*), by Whitley Streiber and James Kunetka, describes the authors' fictional journey through a shattered and traumatized America five years after a thirty-six minute nuclear conflict between the US and USSR on October 28, 1988. Although nuclear weapons are used to destroy entire fleets and armies, only seven locations within the United States are targeted: New York City (Long Island, a near-miss meant for Manhattan the heart of the US economy); Washington, D.C. (command and control in the White House, Congress, and the Pentagon); San Antonio, TX (military assets); and Great Falls, MT; Grand Forks, ND; Minot, ND; Rapid City, SD; and Cheyenne, WY, all nuclear missile sites. However, five years after the attack there is no single U.S. economy; many natural resources have been lost or irradiated, the agricultural sector is a ghost of its former largesse, and the nation is



broken into third-world countries and damaged zones. This story argues that the response to Reagan's proposed SDI would be a preemptive attack rather than greater security, or that even a few weapons missed by a "missile shield" could have disastrous effects ranging from electromagnetic pulse, radioactive fallout, and secondary effects including plague, famine, and the loss of most electronics. The book simulates interview transcripts, government documents, and public opinion surveys in a documentary format. Although the US and USSR have been heavily damaged, Europe (NATO and the Warsaw Pact) and Japan stay out of the exchange and are integral to the rebuilding and recovery efforts.

In the immediate aftermath of the conflict, radioactive fallout poisons substantial portions of the mountain states and Midwest, and even five years later, moderate and severe radiation remains an issue in what had once been America's breadbasket. In the northwest, Washington, Oregon and California remain untouched by bombs, missiles, or fallout. The authors emphasize the cascading effects of resource depletion and famine. There is no single US economy, and what does exist returns to a new gold standard in order to trade effectively with the rest of the world. The middle class lifestyle of the ascendant America is gone: roads cannot be repaired, gas is exorbitantly expensive and less plentiful, and most cars rot where they stood when the EMP fried their electronics. Chicano/Latino nationalists seize portions of Mexico, Texas, and Arizona to form the "homeland" of Aztlan, and New York City is abandoned to packs of wild dogs. In this scenario of limited war and economic decline, the strongest regional economies look out for themselves, create borders, and move toward secession.

As one of the first texts of post-cataclysm to consider the science of nuclear war, *Warday* remains a benchmark in the fictional representation of not only nuclear war, but the massive disruption of the technological and economic infrastructure of America. Although some critics have complained about the lack of character development and plot, this text creates an awareness of the interdependence of the United States in detailing its diminishment in the journey through the different regions of the former nation. The conjecture and attention to detail that Streiber and Kunetka incorporate helps move post-cataclysm texts toward Hard SF rather than the former science-fantasies of post-nuclear proto-medieval kingdoms and peoples.

### **The Postman**

David Brin's short story "The Postman" was first published in *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine* in 1982, and its sequel, "Cyclops," in 1984, before they were combined and expanded into the novel *The Postman* in 1985. Where *Warday* focuses on the journey through post-war America showcasing the country's decline, *The Postman* is a character-driven tale that focuses on Gordon Krantz's survival and eventual transformation into one of those who take responsibility for rebuilding the post-war United States. Gordon's journey centers on the Pacific Northwest twenty years after the missiles, a three-year winter, and waves of famine and plague destroy the United States. In many ways Brin returns to the stereotypes of the 1950s wasteland adventure and military SF, detailing struggles to escape bandits, survive the elements, and swindle a meal and a bed from the small farming communities that have formed in the aftermath. Brin shows the influence of early environmentalism in his Prelude by recognizing the

massive forest fires and ecological damage of a nuclear conflict, but with an awareness that “[o]nly the Ocean, timeless and obstinate, resistant to change, really mattered.”<sup>45</sup>

Brin describes the lifestyle of farming villages and the shadows of towns and cities the bombs missed, and the struggle to keep some small part of American culture alive in the post-nuclear frontier. Each community is isolated, and it is only when Gordon begins traveling in the guise of a postman (a postal inspector of the reformed United States) that communication between outposts begins to grow again, hinting toward a possible realization of a “restored US.” In *The Postman*, raiders and bandits are hazards in an era where laws stop at the village wall, but they are also a shadow of the survivalists who hoarded goods, especially guns and ammunition.

The novel expands on the earlier short stories, but occurs in three broad acts. The first is Gordon’s escape from bandits, and subsequent journey through the Cascades dressed in a looted postal carrier uniform. The second act is discovery of the remains of the University of Oregon and its struggling former staff and faculty in a much-reduced Corvallis, and their apparent last-functioning artificial intelligence (AI), Cyclops. Gordon formalizes his great impersonation and lie, but also continues to build a network of post offices and reluctantly recruits new carriers. The third act is defined by the war of the Corvallis-led northern alliance against the invading Holnist army, which is patterned on the same 1980s survivalists and their doomsday shelters and nascent white power philosophy. In this world it is not the electronics-destroying EMP, destruction of major cities, or the release of various bio-engineered plagues that destroys society, but rather the hyper-survivalists who maintain stockpiles of weapons and ammunition, preying on humanitarian workers and the weakened military and police. This novel has some of the

most obvious traces of American decline; the paranoia evident throughout the nuclear age that pits citizens against one another as each individual hoards and works only for their own survival is what ultimately destroys any possibility of recovery and insures the disintegration of American values and civil liberties.

## **The New World Order: 1991-2001**

### **Bone Dance**

Memories of the Iran-Contra Scandal were still relatively fresh in the early 1990s, which may explain why Emma Bull chose an intra-American nuclear war for her novel *Bone Dance* in 1991. It is unclear exactly how far into our future the war is set, but the technology that helps set the scene for events in a transformed Minneapolis is beyond that of our 1990s. The protagonist is the androgynous Sparrow, a person of rare talents and a knack for repairing and maintaining electronics, whose gender is ambiguous until late in the story.<sup>46</sup> She is a scrounger and a hustler, for whom “The Deal” means that every act has consequences and nothing is free, or a gift, and every transaction must be balanced and paid for. Unlike the post-nuclear frontiers of *The Wild Shore*, *Warday*, or *The Postman*, in *Bone Dance*, there are electronics to repair and scavenge, although the issue of power—electricity, fuel, and renewable forms—is one of the core conflicts within the city. The scrounging, barter, and transactions in places like the Night Market help set the tone for the interactions between different groups.

The people of the city are divided into their own communities, like the Night Market and the power players within the neo-Voodoo community on the island. China Black and Mr. Lyle control the Island, no one controls the Night market, and AA Albrecht runs the City Power Authority and taxes all forms of power within the City. As

the only apparent authority, Albrecht also controls those who pass for police and law (tax and import) enforcement. The Power Authority also controls electronic communications within the City, and beyond the city limits, none are ever mentioned. Last are the Horsemen, a handful of psychics whom have long since lost their original bodies—they hop in and take control of those who become their “horses.” Of the original nine only three remain when the story begins: Mick Skinner, Frances Redding, and “Mad” Tom Worecki.

Those who live outside the city seem based on a version of 1960s hippy communes, but with a greater awareness of technology, and sometimes overtones of ethnic or cultural allegiances. The dominant belief system and religion is a variant of voodoo, and there is a pervasive awareness of the cost of everything, especially power and resources, and an active reuse and green ethic. The economics of a form of class warfare operate throughout the story and set up not just Sparrow’s function as a scrounger, but the eventual conflicts between factions. The people of the Towers are the elite and upper class, secure from the rest, but their children go slumming in the drag of the street where they are known as Nightbabies. On the street are the various hustles and pimps, but also some with a trace of Horseman blood who tap into other voices and powers, like the neo-primitive Jammers, who are linked by a group or hive-mind. In contrast to Albrecht, or the Towers, are the communes like the Hoodoo Engineers, who live outside the city limits, combining equal parts hippy, environmentalist (greens), and the New Age mentality of the late-1980s and early 1990s. This novel displays society at its most dysfunctional; not only have the original ‘values’ of American society not survived, but they have been replaced but an entirely new system with different

classifications of race, gender and religion, and yet some of the same social divisions of current American society persist, like wealth and elitism.

### **Parable of the Sower**

*Parable of the Sower* (1993) (*Sower*) is Octavia Butler's story of a post-capitalist America after the "Pox," a slow economic collapse between 2015-2030. As Butler herself says, she wanted to consider a possible future without psychic powers, aliens, or magic and construct a United States after a period of slow economic and social decline that "combined [the] effects of lack of foresight and short-term unenlightened self-interest...[to become] a third world country."<sup>47</sup> Although this might be considered a dystopia rather than post-cataclysmic society, Butler contends that she wanted to create an apocalyptic warning as she "looked at the growing rich/poor gap, at throwaway labor, at our willingness to build and fill prisons, our reluctance to build and repair schools and libraries, and at our assault on the environment."<sup>48</sup> The Pox becomes the justification for the loss of social control, the decline of cities, and the fortification and militarization of the suburbs.

The protagonist is Lauren Olamina, the teenage daughter of two professors, although her father is also a reverend who commutes between their walled, suburban enclave in Robledo, CA, and a local university a few days a week. In the suburbs, many neighborhoods have contracted into multi-block or smaller (10-15 houses) enclaves, all of which are walled and gated. Because of the safety risks inherent in leaving their fortified homes, almost all travel is done in groups using bikes for speed, while armed as well as possible. The community must maintain its own security and uses gun-trained teens as part of its meager force. Police and law enforcement have become a service for

corporations and the rich, and the enforcement of social norms, contracts, and trust has shrunk, as the lonely, embattled communities are slowly ground out of existence. In this setting there are no long-term positions outside corporate careers or the few surviving tenured positions in universities; what other jobs remain are manual day labor, often paid in trade. In some communities, manual labor is the “punishment” for trumped up charges. In the most extreme situations Butler compares laborers and citizens to slaves, as commodities defined by function: voter, consumer, service provider, etc.

In *Sower*, the gates are breached and a mob of desperate poor, led by drug-crazed (middle class) arsonists, invade the neighborhood and rape, pillage, and burn. Olamina and two of her neighbors escape, slowly making their way north toward where things are reputed to be better—the Northwestern states and Canada. On the road they meet with others, deal with slavers, raiders, and more fire before settling on a small area of land owned by Franklin Bankole. Much older than the rest, Bankole is a former family doctor; he marries Olamina and they begin creating the community of Earthseed on his land, a community that also begins to craft its own beliefs and religion based on the concept that “God is change.” While not post-apocalyptic in the traditional sense, *Sower* features inevitable economic disaster as the ultimate cataclysm predicated on progressive American decline. America was not attacked by foreign powers; its economic inequality and industrial excesses has destroyed its society and ideals.

### **Parable of the Talents**

*Parable of the Talents* (1998) (*Talents*) is told through the journals of Lauren and her daughter, Larkin, both in the years following the founding of Earthseed, and twenty years later as Larkin grows into adulthood. The socioeconomic collapse has become so

severe that, in their desperation, those citizens who still choose to vote bring a religious extremist, the far-right wing leader of the Church of Christian America, Andrew Jarret, to power as the president. Issues of slavery, forced prostitution, and the subjugation of others by Jarret's Crusaders and Christian America are some of the overarching themes throughout the story. Larkin's reading of Olamina's journals tells the tale of Jarret's election to the presidency, the growing religiosity and conservatism as the US briefly becomes a theocracy, and the outbreak of a war with Canada over Alaskan secession. Class warfare and religious domination are the core elements of this story, and Butler continues to develop issues of ethnicity and race, but also makes it clear that this is not a race war. This is the decline of an American society that, in its arrogance, tried to hold on to outdated ideas of class structure and ideology even in the face of total collapse, and as a result only furthered the end of the world, as they know it.

### **Postman (film, 1997)**

Directed by Kevin Costner, the film drops the entire Cyclops AI plotline and shifts much of the focus to General Bethlehem and his Army. Loosely modeled on Brin's Holnists, this army wears proper uniforms rather than military surplus, but they evoke comparisons with Nazi skinheads, white purity adherents, and the rhetoric of late-1990s nativists and anti-immigrants on American talk radio, and among European rightwing political parties. The film reuses the standard images of post-apocalyptic survival (worn clothes, patched, hand-worked structures, and small fields of crops) to depict small farming communities growing slowly from the ruins. This version of the story draws more upon Cold War elements stereotyped as a military fantasy, up to the final showdown between a diverse citizen militia of all ages and ethnicities arrayed against the



racist and predatory survivalist army with their military-grade weapons. Bethlehem's Army draws even more from the survivalist themes in taking recruits by force and preying upon small villages in a neo-feudal style, both stereotypes outlined in Brians's *Nuclear Holocausts*, but not part of Brin's earlier social commentary.

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s a wide variety of post-apocalyptic short stories include famine and disease, and in the 1960s disease became linked to biological warfare—culminating somewhat in the 1971 film, *The Omega Man*, in which the protagonist is a bioweapon researcher fighting the mutated survivors of a world war fought with nuclear missiles and biological weapons. To some extent the memory of earlier Polio outbreaks might also blend with the late 1950s Asian Flu epidemic (1956-1958) that killed an estimated 69,800 Americans, and 2 million across the globe, although later pandemics did not effect Americans as much, such as the late 1960s Hong Kong Flu, the later 1970s Swine Flu, and the recent Avian Flu and West Nile Virus outbreaks.<sup>49</sup> But the fear of disease was not the only concern of the 1950s and 1960s as Alan Winkler points out in his discussion of the Mothers Strike for Peace group and the movement to ban nuclear testing after Strontium 90 was found in children's tooth enamel and linked through milk to fallout from US nuclear tests.<sup>50</sup> On one level there has been a recurring fear that government regulations and protections are not enough to keep the American public safe, or that government regulations are too invasive and unnecessary as the controversy over fluoride in drinking water suggests. Famine, hygiene, disease, and radiation-mutated viruses return to the genre in the 1980s, especially in *Warday* and *The Postman*. However, the 1997 film version of *The Postman* also links disease, sexuality, and fertility. Although But in the 1990s these depictions draw on representations of the

AIDS anxiety and suggest a sexual vector—so many men have been rendered sterile by the “supermumps” that those who remain fertile are viewed as a resource. Similar stories of declining birth rates, male fertility, and reduced sperm counts<sup>51</sup> also tie into the “dying race” motif that lies outside the scope of this study but is also implied in Suzy McKee Charnas’s *Walk to the End of the World* (1974), and critical to Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaids Tale* (1985), and P.D. James’s *The Children of Men* (1992).

### **The Age of Crisis: 2001-2009**

#### **Jeremiah**

The series *Jeremiah* (Showtime, 2002-2004) takes place in the West and Pacific Northwest of what was the United States in 2021, more than fifteen years after “the Big Death” (a laboratory-born virus) escapes into the world, killing almost every human who has gone through puberty. The series was inspired by a Belgian comic book series that began in 1979 and has been translated into English since 1982. The Showtime series blends aspects of the Belgian creator’s version of Cold War fears with post-millennial angst and post-9/11 dread for American and Canadian audiences. In many respects the world of *Jeremiah* is patterned on the earlier global pandemics of *Earth Abides*, *I Am Legend* (1954), and *The Stand* (1978) that leave only a small portion of the population alive but most of the cities and buildings intact and filled with surplus. The point of departure in this series is age, experience, and knowledge; other than a handful of immunes, the survivors are around thirteen, or younger, when “the Big D” takes their families.

In the pilot episode the two main protagonists, Jeremiah and Kurdy, meet and agree to work together. The series revolves around their adventures and challenges as

they try to help others in this recovering world, especially against the organized forces of Valhalla Sector in the first season and the Army of Daniel in the second. One overarching narrative of the series is about rediscovering the values and cultures that make up America as Jeremiah and Kurdy travel throughout this post-cataclysmic frontier. Technology, electricity (batteries), alternative power, ammunition, and knowledge are recurring desires and plot devices over the course of the series. Jeremiah and Kurdy join the community of Thunder Mountain, a former military installation controlled by the now-grown children of the scientists and staff who died while operating Cheyenne Mountain<sup>52</sup> as a research and survival facility while the plague overwhelmed the world. The leader of Thunder Mountain, Marcus, has managed to maintain the facility's technology and resources, but he and his people are afraid they are too few to expose themselves. The primary conflict that drives the series begins after Jeremiah convinces Marcus to use the resources of Thunder Mountain, especially the skills and knowledge base they have maintained and the tools they possess, to help others rebuild.

But outside Thunder Mountain, even where there are larger collections of survivors, few have tried to recreate communities. Most of those that have are small towns where the children grew and have tried to maintain the lives they knew before the plague. One representative exception is Clarefield, similar to Barter Town (*Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome*), and its leader, Theo, a smart, ruthless woman who believes there is a place called "the end of the world" where the world never stopped working and civilization did not collapse. And while Theo is paranoid, ruthless, and casual in her attitude toward killing, her desire is to protect herself and her people rather than being the biggest market or conquering the other survivors. However, conquest is the goal of both

the remnant of the old US in Valhalla Sector (based within the Red Raven complex near Camp David, MD), and the Army of Daniel, who control most of the American southeast. Valhalla Sector and its group of military and political survivors is defeated at the end of season one, and the alliance led by Marcus and Thunder Mountain faces down Daniel's Army at the end of season two, when its soldiers learn that there is no Daniel and they are being manipulated by a secret cabal of immunes left over from the old world.

### **Jericho**

By the time *Jericho* (2006-2008) premiered on CBS, not only had the American public been reminded of the old Reagan-era nuclear holocaust fears by 9/11, but they'd also been horrified by the coverage of the 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami, and shocked in 2005 by the aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita along the Gulf Coast, especially in New Orleans. Set in a small Kansas farming community cut off, slowly running out of supplies, and under the threat of invasion after a series of twenty-three nuclear devices destroy an equal number of major American cities, *Jericho* tackles the heartland's response to these "terrorist" attacks. The producers of *Jericho* explain in the DVD extra segment "What If?" that the series was conceived to not only reflect the earlier nuclear fears of the Cold War, but to raise awareness of the continuing federal government's failures in planning for emergencies, even after the post-9/11 formation of the Department of Homeland Security. The scope of the series' plotlines contribute to their argument that "we have no city, state, or federal organization with *the resources* to meet another Katrina level event" in even one city, much less across the nation. The story-arcs cover a 6-8 month period, from the moment the explosions rip across the U.S. in mid-September through the events of the series finale the following Spring, exploring

how the town copes as it runs out of fuel, medicine, and food; how it must defend against larger groups of invaders; and how it adapts to a barter and black market economy. In the absence of informed consent the town must accept corporate administration (control) while under the threat of marshal law.

The central characters are Jake Green, former town “bad boy” and recent contractor in Iraq, and Robert Hawkins, an intelligence officer whose cover includes the CIA, FBI, and DOH. Other central characters include the rest of the Green and Hawkins families, Gray Anderson (the incoming mayor), Jake’s former girlfriend and teacher, Emily Sullivan, and the new owner of the market, Dale Turner. The population of the town of Jericho and its surrounding farms number less than seven thousand at the time of the attacks. The town has a small sheriff’s department, town hall, a clinic rather than a hospital, elementary and high schools, and a local general store/market, and the unique resources of a nearby commercial salt mine. The attacks occur during a local election year, and the election, transition of power, and differing styles of leadership between Green and incoming Mayor Anderson are critical to several of the conflicts of the first season. Beyond a lack of external communication and relief, and local starvation and medical emergencies, the first season builds up a conflict with the nearby factory town of New Bern. Other threats include the paramilitary group Ravenwood, who claim a deferral mandate, and a squad of US Marine impersonators.

The first season ends as New Bern and Jericho begin a climactic battle, only to be interrupted by the professional military forces of the new Allied States of America (ASA), based out of Cheyenne, WY, with the former junior senator of Wyoming acting as president. At this point the metaphor shifts from post-Katrina New Orleans to Baghdad

under U.S. occupation with corporate administrators; in this case Jericho is occupied by the ASA, whose president gives Jennings & Rall (a Halliburton clone) an exclusive contract to restore the town. J&R assign their subsidiary Ravenwood (analogue for Xe Services LLC, formerly Blackwater) to manage the day-to-day operations and maintain order. Eventually Jericho rejects Ravenwood, J&R, and even the orders of the new military governor, Major Beck.

### **The Emberverser or The Change**

After a bright, white flash, some think that an EMP may have caused the sudden failure of all machinery and electronics, until they realize there have been no explosions, nuclear or otherwise, at least until jetliners begin falling from the sky. The Emberverser was created at 3:15 PM EST, on March 17, 1998, when “the Change” altered the laws of physics on and near the Earth. Afterwards, electricity, high-pressure gas reactions, and fast combustion (all explosives including gunpowder) no longer function—wiping out firearms and most of the technology created in the industrial revolutions of the past three hundred years. Unlike the near futures of *The Wild Shore*, *Warday*, *Bone Dance*, the *Parable* novels, or *Jeremiah*, S.M. Stirling begins his alternate history series in the recent past, before the attacks of 9/11, the Internet Bubble implosion, and the first economic disruptions of 2001. The Change occurs when computers, the Internet, and globalization under the American unipower seem to be ushering in the promise of earlier SF utopias and even the posthuman potential of biotechnology and artificial intelligence. The Change does more than throw America back into a Middle Ages it never had; it also destabilizes confidence in science itself by altering the laws of nature, making recovery a question of “if” and “how,” rather than “when.”

The series is ongoing, but this study will consider only the first two trilogies. The first trilogy includes *Dies the Fire* (2004), *The Protector's War* (2005), and *A Meeting in Corvallis* (2006). The arc of the Emberverse deals with the descent into anarchy and collapse of civilization, the fight for survival after losing all modern technology, and ends with a major war between the societies that have formed in the first post-Change decade. The second set of books is set a generation later and includes *The Sunrise Lands* (2007), *The Scourge of God* (2008), and *The Sword of the Lady* (2009). The second series reveals the changes to North America and portions of the rest of the world during a quest from Oregon to New England, as the Willamette Alliance prepares to defend against the crusaders of an expanding, evangelical power from the interior.

*Dies the Fire* offers homage to its precursors, *Lucifer's Hammer* and *The Postman*; from the former, the settings of Idaho and Corvallis, Oregon and the threat of survivalists; and from the latter, the flight from city to countryside, starvation, disease, cannibals, and the attacks of (formerly) urban populations on rural homes and communities. Two groups trek through Oregon's Willamette Valley and begin forming the Clan of the Mackenzies and the Bearkillers, while a former history professor starts a feudal empire in a chaotic Portland. In *The Protector's War*, the Portland Protective Association (PPA) moves to bring the valley under its control but is opposed by a coalition led by the Mackenzies and Bearkillers of the rest of the communities in the valley including the city-state of Corvallis, the Mount Angel Abbey and its community, the Dúnedain Rangers, and Central Oregon Ranchers Association (CORA). The war peaks and ends in *A Meeting in Corvallis*.

Professor Norman Arming, a sociologist, historian, former Jesuit, and active hobbyist in the Society for Creative Anachronisms (SCA), leads the PPA. Arming takes Tolkien's symbol of Sauron (the lidless eye) as a joke (for the reader and the genre fans within the novel) and sets himself up as the ruler of Portland by recruiting from among the local gangs, and using his knowledge of history and medieval weapons to establish a large force of fighting men. With these forces, he forces most of the city's population out into the countryside other than the fraction he keeps as the PPA's slave labor.<sup>53</sup> As a professor of medieval history, he bases the social and political structure of the PPA on a twelfth century Norman model (think of the film, *the Lion in Winter*), meaning that he needs to conquer the local farmers and expand his lands in order to set up his inner circle on their own fiefs with their own peasants.

The expansionist policies and Catholic prejudice of the PPA bring them into conflict with the Clan Mackenzie, who have become largely Wiccan under the leadership of their chief, Juniper Mackenzie, a former folk-singer and Wiccan priestess. She and her fellow dedicants help organize resistance to cannibals ("eaters") and gangs of bandits, before creating their dún (fortified settlement) that becomes the template for most of the local communities who join the Clan. Lady Juniper's second in command is a former SAS sergeant, Sam Aylward, a hunter and bowmaker who helps train the clans in the style of the Welsh longbow. One of her closest friends and fellow Wiccans, Chuck Barstowe, was also a member of the SCA and a blacksmith and helps train the Clan in the making and use of medieval weapons. Although Juniper, her inner circle, and many of those who join are or become Wiccan, the Clan practices religious toleration and includes believers of many major faiths and philosophies.



Mike Havel uses his Iraqi war experience and Force Recon background to organize and train the Bearkillers when the band forms on the trail west. But recruiting on the trail also limits the size of the initial group to other isolated survivors and those they rescue. Havel is fortunate to save the life of engineer and former CEO, Ken Larsson, as well as that of Will Hutton, a horse trainer with an interest in the history of cavalry, and his wife and daughter. Pam Arnstein, a veterinarian and Renaissance weapons enthusiast, joins the “Outfit” and trains them to use sword, shield, and buckler, but Larsson’s youngest daughter, Astrid, teaches archery and helps the troop to form along the lines of horse archers. Eric Larsson becomes one of Mike’s best fighters, and his twin sister, Signe, eventually marries Mike and becomes his head of intelligence and dirty tricks. Their doctor and surgeon is Aaron Rothman, rescued from the eaters but shy a foot from the experience. The first trilogy ends with the death of the Lord Protector of the PPA (Armingier) and the Boss of the Bearkillers (Havel) during a duel that decides the War of the Eye.

After more than ten years of relative peace, recovery, and development, the Valley is threatened in the twenty-first Change Year by the Seekers and Prophets of the Church Universal and Triumphant, a threat spawned in what was North Dakota. Rudy Mackenzie, the son of the Juniper Mackenzie and Mike Havel, leads a party of the first Change generation to Nantucket Island in the East. During their travels they witness the invasion and destruction of New Deseret (founded by Mormons) in what was Utah, and the subversion of the United States of Boise by the Church. The groups find both a series of large Republics in the heartland, as well as the large area claimed by the State of Nebraska, all of whom have border wars with the neo-Sioux. Lastly, in the far North East

is the kingdom of Norrheim, formed by medieval hobbyists like the SCA who are adherents of the Asatru religion (“belief in the gods” in Old Norse). In the Willamette Valley, Juniper Mackenzie, Signe Larsson, and the regent of the PPA, Sandra Arminger, form a coalition to defend the valley from the Church’s attempts to conquer, convert, and burn.

### **Battlestar Galactica**

The reimagined *Battlestar Galactica*, developed by Ronald D. Moore and David Eick, was first telecast as a miniseries in 2003, and continued as a four-season series on the SyFy Channel from 2004 to 2009. Two movies round out the recent series, *Razor* (2007) and *The Plan* (2009). The recent narratives draw their “mythology” and inspiration from Glen A. Larson’s original ABC series *Battlestar Galactica* (1978-1979) and its half season spin-off, *Galactica 1980* (1980). Unlike most of the other sources for this study, *BSG* also has a line of book adaptations, original novels, comic books, a board game, video games, and recent MMORPG. However, this study only addresses the narratives included in the four seasons and two one-shot movies of the reimagined *BSG*.

All incarnations of *Battlestar Galactica* share the premise of a human civilization based on the twelve colonies (conveniently named using a Western zodiac), which migrated from a homeworld of Kobol long ago. Over the millennia, humanity has engaged in cyclic, genocidal wars with the Cylons, a cybernetic race who now appear human (and some who think they are). In this most recent cycle, the miniseries begins when the Cylons break a decades-long armistice after compromising the computers and networks of all defense systems (planetary networks, and the computers on starships and fighters). The Cylons exploit their insertion of a computer virus to conduct a well-

coordinated attack using nuclear weapons on the twelve colonies and their military outposts. Of the entire fleet, only the battleship/carrier, *Battlestar Galactica*, survives, along with some 220 civilian starcraft carrying the surviving 50,000 humans. Under the leadership of Commander William Adama, the *Galactica* and its pilots lead this fugitive fleet, under the civil leadership of President Laura Roslin, away from the colonies and Cylons in search of legendary thirteenth colony known as Earth.

The first season begins with the *Galactica* and its fleet forced to jump to new star systems every 33 minutes as the Cylon pursuit continues to find them. Once this immediate danger is past, the season slowly reveals that Cylons now appear human to the rest of the fleet; that there are sleeper agents within the fleet who do not know they are Cylons; and that there is growing unrest among different minorities among the ships, most significantly a civil insurrection aboard a prison ship, led by terrorist/freedom fighter Tom Zarek, the man who will one day become President and Vice President. Aboard the *Galactica* schisms develop that ultimately force Commander Adama's son, Lee Adama (Apollo), to side with President Roslin during a face-off with Adama. The season ends with Adama staging what is effectively a coup, before one of his best pilots attempts to assassinate him, revealing that she is a Cylon sleep agent.

The second season plays out the ramifications of the military coup and martial law over the fleet. Work stoppages, slow downs, and disobedient ship captains plague fleet operations while Adama lingers at death's door and the President and Apollo escape detention. Eventually Roslin regains power and she and Adama reach a power-sharing compromise. Major events include the attack of a Cylon boarding party on the *Galactica*, finding and rescuing survivors on Caprica (the primary planet in the original government

system), and the discovery of the Tomb of Athena on Kobol with clues toward Earth. The *Battlestar Pegasus* arrives midseason, under the command of Adama's superior officer, Admiral Cain. Over the course of several episodes, Cain and her immediate subordinates die, leaving Apollo in command of the Pegasus when the fleet discovers the habitable planet, New Caprica, and vote to settle there under the leadership of new President, Gaius Baltar (the man responsible for collaborating unknowingly with the Cylons to enable the initial genocide).

The Cylons arrive at the end of the second season and occupy New Caprica, forcing the battlestars and remaining fleet to jump away. The third season begins with the growing resistance to the occupation under Baltar as a puppet governor. The battlestars stage a daring rescue, but the Pegasus is lost as only some 39,000 of the remaining humans escape. Once again on the run from the Cylons, the fleet discovers the Temple of Five and directions to Earth. Apollo resigns his commission and helps defend Baltar during his trial for war crimes, and after he is found not guilty, a cadre of his fanatic believers spirit him away to a secluded portion of the *Galactica*. The season ends with four of the final five Cylons discovering their true identities during a face-off with another Cylon fleet in the Ionian nebula, while a presumed-dead Kara Thrace (Starbuck) reappears and tells the fleet she knows how to get to Earth.

In the final season, divisions among the Cylon between their core "ethnicities"—model series one through eight—leads to a civil war. The survivors of one faction on a damaged baseship find the *Galactica* and ally with her and the human fleet. This alliance creates divisions among the human survivors, eventually leading to a coup aboard the *Galactica* led by Lt. Gaeta and Vice President Zarek. As the series nears its end, Hera,

the hybrid child of Sharon Agathon (Athena/Cylon) and Karl Agathon (Helo/human), is stolen by Boomer (another Sharon of the eight series and Adama's near-assassin). The *Galactica* assaults the Cylon base in its orbit near a singularity, brings about the rescue of Hera, and rejoins the fleet at our Earth, some 150 million years in the past.

Despite the shared history of conflict and genocide, the Cylons and humans slowly find common ground and move past their hatreds. The civil war is mainly caused by "Number One," John Cavil, who also engineered the memory and identity loss of the "final five" when he placed them among the humans during the Armistice. Other key conflicts involve the different religions: Colonial pantheism, Cylon monotheism, and the "new god" of Baltar's newfound faith and cult. The original Earth is found mid-season, but is an uninhabitable wasteland after having suffering a nuclear war. In a twist, it is revealed that the thirteenth "tribe" were themselves Cylons. As the series concludes, the surviving humans and humanoid Cylons decide to give up all technology, and disperse and settle the planet. It is suggested that they will interbreed with the extant archaic *Homo sapiens*, bringing about modern humans. The last Cylon Centurions are given the remaining Cylon basestar and jump away from Earth. Samuel Anders then commands the last of the Colonial fleet to destroy itself in the sun.

### **Conclusion: Applying the Heuristics**

This study is limited to writers and creators from the United States, and to sources created between 1977 and 2009, but additional boundaries are necessary to focus on cataclysm, collapse, and attempts to recover. I make a conscious distinction in using the term "post-cataclysm" rather than the more familiar "post-apocalypse," to distance my analysis from both a "Cold War hangover" and more importantly, from prophetic or

allegorical interpretations. Also, in past disaster scenarios, apocalypse is often seen as only a warning, a “revelation,” using images familiar in blockbuster movies that avert the disaster or do not continue beyond the event. In some cases these narratives build toward cataclysm and collapse, and either governments or institutions fail to activate contingency plans, or they fail. These failures provide subjects for consideration on their own, but do not tie into the frailty and weakness of American national identity and culture in the way stories that continue beyond the initial event can.

The form of catastrophe is critical, especially when it has lingering effects, but more important is the speed of the social collapse. Given enough warning by experts, the American myth of progressivism says that a scientific solution is always possible and that disaster can be averted, or at least deferred. But this is not the case in post-cataclysmic texts: some events are immediate (nuclear war, alien invasion); others scientific anomalies (the Earth’s core stops, asteroid strikes); and still others are familiar or so subtle that they bring down a state or civilization before the threat fully registers (economic collapse, some diseases and plagues). In a slow decline authority erodes while social and legal structures fail, and security and military needs are given precedence over civil rights and protections. In recent science fiction, the economic collapses of Nalo Hopkinson’s *Brown Girl in the Ring* (1996), and Octavia Butler’s *Parable of the Talents* and *Parable of the Sower* provide one set of examples, and the post-oil story *World Made by Hand* (2008), by James Howard Kunstler, another: all are subtle, slow and implacable examples of collapse. Immediate collapse focuses on efforts to survive and then the process of social adaptation; including Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle’s *Lucifer’s Hammer*, and the series *Jericho* and *Battlestar Galactica*. S.M. Stirling’s *Emberverse* and

its first novel, *Dies the Fire*, are also examples of immediate collapse, but the rest of the series helps define “the cataclysm generation,” those who are born after the event adapt to its aftermath better than their parents and older siblings who retain memories of the lost world. David Brin’s *The Postman* falls into this category, as do Kim Stanley Robinson’s *The Wild Shore*, Whitley Strieber and James Kunetka’s *Warday*, Emma Bull’s *Bone Dance*, the series *Jeremiah*, James Van Pelt’s *The Summer of the Apocalypse* (2006), and Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road* (2006), among others.

One final set helps clarify what remains outside the scope of this study because it incorporates stories set in an alternate future, far after the end of “modern” civilization. Examples of such texts include the early example of Robert Heinlein’s *Farnham’s Freehold*, Robert Adam’s *Horse Clans* (1975-1988) series, Robie Macauley’s *A Secret History of Time to Come* (1979), Jack McDevitt’s *Eternity Road* (1997), the film *Waterworld* (1994), and the post-oil story, *Julian Comstock: A Story of 22nd Century America* (2009) by Robert Charles Wilson. A great deal of international post-apocalyptic films and literature are examples of Ketterer’s description of apocalyptic, and do not fall within my delineation of post-cataclysmic. The end-of-the-world narrative is alive and well, but without taking these distinctions into account, or limiting the works to specific themes, formats, and creators, the analysis of a particular American anxiety and vision of decline would be lost in the noise.

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<sup>1</sup> Edward Gibbon's history of *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (volumes I-VI; 1776-1789); Oswald Spengler's *The Decline of the West* (1918,1922). Spengler also argues that different types of civilizations succeed, or we as we might think of it, outperform others. One aspect of his argument was that Western civilization, what he called Faustian, began its decline in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Where this becomes important is his delineation of Classical (Greek and Roman) as Apollonian, that eventually became Faustian as it spread about the globe (after the first millennium), and its only competitor and resistor was Magian civilization (Jewish/Middle Eastern/Persian influence, but in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Islamic).

<sup>2</sup> Mick Broderick paraphrased in Kirsten Moana Thompson, *Apocalyptic Dread: American Film at the Turn of the Millennium*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), 3.

<sup>3</sup> Rikk Mulligan, "Zombie Apocalypse: Plague and End of the World in Popular Culture" in *End of Days: Essays on the Apocalypse from Antiquity to Modernity*, edited by Karolyn Kinane and Michael A. Ryan, (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2009), 349-368.

<sup>4</sup> Lorenzo DiTommaso, "At the Edge of Tomorrow: Apocalypticism and Science Fiction," in *End of Days: Essays on the Apocalypse from Antiquity to Modernity*, ed. Karolyn Kinane and Michael A. Ryan, (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2009), 221-241.

<sup>5</sup> Lorenzo DiTommaso, "At the Edge of Tomorrow," 223.

<sup>6</sup> "In historical form, derived from the twelfth-century Calabrian abbot, Joachim of Fiore, the scriptures are interpreted with reference to the sequence of events in religious and political history." Malcolm Bull, "On Making Ends Meet," in *Apocalypse Theory and the Ends of the World*, edited by Malcolm Bull, (Oxford and Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1995), 3.

<sup>7</sup> Mellor notes in her introduction to the 1993 Bison Book edition of *The Last Man* that: "Drawing on Shelley's personal experiences, the novel articulates a profound critique of the dominant gender, cultural and political ideologies of the Romantic era, a critique so total that the novel becomes the first literary example of what we now call deconstruction"(vii).

<sup>8</sup> H.L. Gold, editor of *Galaxy Science Fiction*, quoted in Kingsley Amis, *New Maps of Hell*, 54.



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- <sup>9</sup> Patricia Melzer, *Alien Constructions: Science Fiction and Feminist Thought*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006), 3.
- <sup>10</sup> Gary Westfahl, in “The Popular Tradition of Science Fiction Criticism, 1926-1980,” in *Science Fiction Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (Jul., 1999), 187-212.
- <sup>11</sup> James Gunn, “Foreword” to *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction*, Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn (eds), (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003), xv-xviii.
- <sup>12</sup> Kinsley Amis, *New Maps of Hell*, 132.
- <sup>13</sup> David Seed, *American Science Fiction and the Cold War: Literature and Film*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1999), 169.
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 6-7.
- <sup>15</sup> Gary K Wolfe, “Evaporating Genre: Strategies of Dissolution in the Postmodern Fantastic,” in *Edging into the Future: Science Fiction and Contemporary Cultural Transformation*, edited by Veronica Hollinger and Joan Gordon, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 11-29.
- <sup>16</sup> James Gunn, “Toward a Definition of Science Fiction” in *Speculations on Speculation: Theories of Science Fiction*, edited by James Gunn and Matthew Candelaria, (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2005), 7-8.
- <sup>17</sup> Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000 edition (original 1967)), 123-124.
- <sup>18</sup> “Apocalyptic literature is concerned with the creation of other worlds which exist, on the literal level, in a credible relationship (whether on the basis of a rational extrapolation and analogy or of religious belief) with the ‘real’ world, thereby causing a metaphorical destruction of the ‘real’ world in the reader’s head.” David Ketterer, *New Worlds for Old: The Apocalyptic Imagination, Science Fiction, and American Literature*, (Garden City: Anchor Books/Doubleday, 1974), 13.
- <sup>19</sup> Harold L. Berger, *Science Fiction and the New Dark Age*, (Bowling Green: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1976), ix.
- <sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.
- <sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 176.

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<sup>22</sup> Roberto Vacca, *The Coming Dark Age*, translated by Dr. J.S. Whale, (Garden City: Doubleday & Co.: 1973), 34.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 58-59.

<sup>26</sup> At the beginning of the nineteenth century Reverend Thomas Robert Malthus published a treatise that described his principles on population, “An Essay on the Principle of Population” (1798-1826). The short form of his argument is that populations continue to increase until they overwhelm their own ability to feed themselves, at which point disease and famine decrease the population until an equilibrium is achieved. Malthus suggested that controls would manifest as increase in the death rate or decreases in the birth rate. Jared Diamond applies Malthus’s principles in his analysis of the genocidal level of conflict between Rwanda and Burundi in *Collapse* (312-13). Malthus’s core principle is applied to fuel, fresh water, and other critical natural resources in contemporary discussions of the vulnerability of modern society and its dependency on such resources.

<sup>27</sup> In depth discussion of the Club of Rome, *The Limits to Growth*, and the role of MIT and its systems computer models can be found in John Michael Greer, *The Long Descent*, (Gabriola Island, BC: New Society Publishers, 2008); and James Howard Kunstler, *The Long Emergency*, (New York: Grove Press, 2005); and Matthew R. Simmons whitepaper, “Revisiting *The Limits to Growth*: Could the Club of Rome Have Been Correct, After All?” An Energy White Paper, October 2000, pp 65-68. (PDF version) Accessed online: [http://gretchange.org/ov-simmons,club\\_of\\_rome\\_revisted.html](http://gretchange.org/ov-simmons,club_of_rome_revisted.html), accessed May 30, 2011.

<sup>28</sup> Niven and Pournelle, *Lucifer’s Hammer*, p 77-78.

<sup>29</sup> Although the majority of SF academic criticism shifted away from the MLA to organizations including the Science Fiction Research Association and the International Association for the Fantastic in the Arts, among others, the MLA SF symposiums began in 1959 and extended through the 1970s according to most SF historians including James Gunn, Roger Luckhurst, Adam Roberts, and others.

<sup>30</sup> Brian Stableford, “Man-Made Catastrophes” in *The End of the World*, edited by Eric S. Rabkin, et al, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1983), 126.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

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<sup>32</sup> Warren W Wagar, “The Rebellion of Nature,” in *The End of the World*, edited by Eric S Rabkin, et al., (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1983), 170.

<sup>33</sup> Allan M. Winkler, *Life Under A Cloud: American Anxiety About the Atom*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 190-91, 200.

<sup>34</sup> Fred Kaplan, *The Wizards of Armageddon*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1983).

<sup>35</sup> There was an earlier split over the atomic bomb in the 1940s that featured Robert Heinlein, Isaac Asimov, Arthur C Clarke, and others, but that is outside the scope of this discussion. While those personal rifts did not entirely heal, by the late-1960s Vietnam and social issues became the ruptures within the author and fan communities.

<sup>36</sup> David Seed, *American Science Fiction and the Cold War*, 181-192.

<sup>37</sup> This is a recurring message and theme in not only the reimagined *Battlestar Galactica*, but in the franchise as a whole. The series incorporates this as a metatext that links to the earlier phases of nuclear anxiety but with a post-9/11 sense of vulnerability, AND in a continuing discourse among SF sources of all media as suggested by Jim Casey. Jim Casey, “‘All This Has Happened Before’: Repetition, Reimagination, and Eternal Return” in *Cylons in America: Critical Studies in Battlestar Galactica*, edited by Tiffany Potter and C.W. Marshall, (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2008).

<sup>38</sup> Boyer specifically notes the “eschatological interests” of Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger, Interior Secretary James Watt, and even the Surgeon General, C. Everett Koop. Paul Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture*, (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1992), 141-142.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 146.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 162.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 143.

<sup>42</sup> Mick Broderick, “Surviving Armageddon: Beyond the Imagination of Disaster” in *Science Fiction Studies* #69 (Vol. 20, No. 3, Nov., 1993), 373-374.

<sup>43</sup> Paul Boyer touches on the Japanese response to the use of atomic bombs in his study of the immediate post-war years, *By the Bombs Early Light* (1994), but Jerome Shapiro’s chapter on “Japan’s Atomic Bomb Cinema” is one of the most comprehensive in tracing

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the appearance or reaction to atomic and nuclear weapons in film and animation far beyond the typical references to *Gojira*, *Barefoot Gen*, and *Akira*. It is also fair to refer to these as reflections of a Japanese apocalypse as few sources ever clarify that a global cataclysm or war has taken place. Jerome Shapiro, *Atomic Bomb Cinema*, (New York and London: Routledge; 2002), 251-306.

<sup>44</sup> The Zombie Apocalypse is a much broader topic that continues to be discussed by a range of scholars and critics. Romero's series includes *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), *Dawn of the Dead* (1978), *Day of the Dead* (1985), *Land of the Dead* (2005), *Diary of the Dead* (2007), *Survival of the Dead* (2009), and these continue to influence the genre including the five *Return of the Living Dead* movies, as well as the *Resident Evil* series, and the British films *28 Days Later* (2002) and *28 Weeks Later* (2007), among many others. This influence has extended to comedies and spoofs including *Shaun of the Dead* (2004) and *Zombieland* (2009), but also the comic book and television series, *The Walking Dead* (2010), among others.

<sup>45</sup> David Brin, *The Postman*, (New York: Bantam Books, 1985). These notes refer to the 1997 reissue of the Bantam books paperback edition, originally released in 1986. The pages of the Prelude are not numbered.

<sup>46</sup> Sparrow is a cheval, a "horse" or biological construct designed and artificially grown to be "ridden" (mind control) by the "horsemen" or psychics created by the DOD who started the nuclear war between the United States and Central and South America. Sparrow is technically a neuter, but will be referred to as female in this study; the full discussion of her sexuality and gender will be addressed in chapter five.

<sup>47</sup> Octavia Butler, *Parable of the Sower*, (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2007), 337. (Original publication: New York: Warner Books, 1993.)

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 337.

<sup>49</sup> Flu.gov, "Pandemic Flu History," on Flu.gov, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, <http://www.flu.gov/pandemic/history/> Accessed March 9, 2012.

<sup>50</sup> Allan M. Winkler. *Life Under A Cloud: American Anxiety About the Atom*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993: 106-7.

<sup>51</sup> Michael Castleman links the early 1980s fears of lowered fertility with new scientific research that may establish lower sperm counts in the mid-1990s. The focus shifts from tight underwear to the possible effects of xenoestrogens, and Castleman also mentions this a variant on Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, recycling the discourse that we are effectively silencing ourselves. Michael Castleman's "Down for the Count" in *Mother Jones* January/February 1996 issue. January 1996. "<http://motherjones.com/politics/1996/01/down-count>" Accessed May 15, 2011.

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<sup>52</sup> Cheyenne Mountain has been a frequent locale for military and post-military installations since some of its inhabitants closed their operations over the past twenty years. Cheyenne Mountain Air Force Station, in Colorado Springs, CO. is perhaps best known as the former site of SAC (from 1963-1992) (Strategic Air Command) and NORAD (North American Aerospace Defense Command), and later the Strategic Space Command. The Cheyenne Mountain Command Center is still in active use, but much of the retired portions of the facility are sometimes rented to television and movie producers for military or science fiction productions including the Star Gate franchise and Jeremiah. For many Cheyenne Mountain is considered the most impenetrable, well defended military installation in America, if not the world, making it also one of the most often destroyed, as in Independence Day and other alien invasion movies.

<sup>53</sup> S.M. Stirling, *The Protector's War*, (New York: ROC Books, 2005), 410-11. "I saw that the population had to be reduced, and quickly, or everyone would die. So I and my associates—the Portland Protective Association—seized whatever bulk foodstuffs we could before they were wasted or lost. Forty percent of American wheat exported to Asia went through Portland. . . . And then we, mmm . . . encourage the surplus population to leave and shift for themselves; with that here was enough to keep more than thirty thousand people alive for a year."

## Chapter 2: The Dead Dollar:

### Resources and the Post-Cataclysm Economy

“Civilizations have the morality and ethics they can afford. Right now we don't have much, so we can't afford much. We can't take care of our own wounded, much less theirs, so all we can afford to do for theirs is put them out of their misery.”

Senator Arthur Jellison, *Lucifer's Hammer*

“Thus, because we are rapidly advancing along this non-sustainable course, the world's environmental problems will get resolved, in one way or another, within the lifetimes of the children and young adults alive today. The only question is whether they will become resolved in pleasant ways of our own choice, or in unpleasant ways not of our choice, such as warfare, genocide, starvation, disease epidemics, and collapses of societies.”

Jared Diamond, *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed*

The United States has no official church or pre-Christian pantheon, yet it is a nation replete with myths and legends given its relative youth. The land and its bounty are one of the most fundamental American symbols, as it is tied to Thomas Jefferson's yeoman farmer and other icons. During the nineteenth century the emphasis on land shifted to the transformative influence of the frontier on the fledging American identity.<sup>1</sup> As a further elaboration on the frontier, Henry Nash Smith suggested that each new territory was “virgin land” to be cultivated (into a state); Leo Marx argued that once enclosed, the frontier became the middle landscape or verge between the growing cities and the rural towns and surrounding farm country.<sup>2</sup> By the end of the nineteenth century, well before the last territories became states, the internal frontier was gone, but the image it inspired continues to inform American identity and influence the growth of communities in the twenty-first century. Richard Slotkin argues that this romanticized

mindset is part of the “myth of the frontier,”<sup>3</sup> which distorts or avoids acknowledging the costs and abuses that went into expanding America in not just the nineteenth, but also continuing into the late twentieth century. Those early border towns and farming communities became the small towns of the mid-to-late twentieth century, with their iconic Main Streets figuring so prominently in Ronald Reagan’s “Morning in America” during the 1980s ascendancy of the New Right. Wall Street replaced Main Street during the money-hungry 1980s and booming 1990s, but the small town archetype was recycled as recently as the 2008 presidential campaign by Republican Vice Presidential candidate Sarah Palin. While covering the campaign, journalist Joe Klein commented on the manufactured media representation of Palin’s husband, Todd, as a modern “mountain man” on the Alaskan frontier, noting, “Democrats have no myth to counter this powerful Republican fantasy.”<sup>4</sup>

For many, land-as-property is the foundation of the Constitutional “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” and the justification for the exercise of the franchise—voting rights. The land as a space to raise crops and to build upon was a draw for European colonists and immigrants of all nationalities through the late nineteenth century. Even today, for many, the belief in an American Dream of equal opportunity to compete economically, and to own a home—property—is part of the desire to come to the US. But the citizen farmer and his fields faded in significance as cities grew and the industrial demand for coal and oil took precedence. Today, after multiple energy crises and amidst the latest in a series of recessions, alternative fuels and renewable resources satisfy only a small fraction of the combined demands of industry and consumers; the balance is barely supported by dwindling domestic sources of fossil fuels, even

considering natural gas and tar sands, and the increasingly larger and more expensive oil imports. By the mid-twentieth century family farms had fallen on hard times and the yeoman farmer had faded into American myth, but property in terms of the suburban home and consumer goods became the revised dream. Many SF creators began projecting threats of resource depletion, fuel scarcity, and the collapse of production and labor in both dystopic and post-cataclysmic societies.

In most SF narratives resources and energy are seldom depicted as anything other than momentary concerns or plot devices: matter transmission and replication satisfy material needs; solar, fusion, or “zero-point” energy sources power industry, travel, and weapons and defenses; overpopulation is rare as the diasporas of humanity colonize the solar system, or span star systems and galaxies using spaceships and stargates. In post-cataclysmic SF material resources remain tightly linked to essential human needs and are integral to survival after the immediate danger is past and as societies labor to recover. Many of these resurgent communities echo aspects of the nineteenth-century frontier or early industrial towns, and while there is a certain nostalgia involved, it is also because few are immediately able to rebuild a “post-industrial” society. These anti-modern projections often depict the return of slave labor, decline of education and literacy, and unequal access to even basic necessities, suggesting that the promise of modernity (an egalitarian society with equal economic and social opportunities and democratic institutions) is dependent on automation, high-energy fuels, and other contributions of modern technology.

Whether in the aftermath of a comet strike as in *Lucifer's Hammer*, a limited nuclear conflict like that of *Warday*, nuclear terrorism in *The Wild Shore* and *Jericho*,



global plague in *Jeremiah*, or the near-genocide of all humanity in *Battlestar Galactica*, the immediate challenge for those who remain is survival. Once the initial danger has passed, the survivors of apocalyptic or cataclysmic events must satisfy their immediate physiological needs before doing what they can to assure their safety. As a study of post-cataclysmic societies, this analysis presupposes the survival or recreation of basic agrarian communities as the minimum precondition from which to reforge communities. Work and employment that offers more than subsistence—food and lodging—requires a more advanced social organization with both labor specialization and some form of barter system; often this is the level at which slavery or forced labor is used to allow the specialized production of labor-intensive or leisure goods.<sup>5</sup> Trade and commerce also require a less drastic division and specialization of labor within a community, and some measure of collective participation to share functions and fulfill basic needs. The creation of cultural capital is difficult if not impossible post-cataclysm, as even on a resurgent state level such “luxuries” require a more sophisticated market economy, government-set fiat currency or specie-backed currency, and a banking system that supports the recreation of a managerial class—all to support even the possibility of a leisure class to pursue abstract concepts and the recreation of literature and the arts.

In most literature or media, few post-apocalyptic societies fall below the social and economic developmental of Europe’s Middle Ages. They maintain their economy after a fashion, either through barter systems, black-markets or (at least marginally) functioning employment structures. Some critics, like Clute and Nicholls, suggest this is part of a romantic view of the past that encourages heroic male-oriented adventures in a pastoral (or frontier) setting<sup>6</sup>—at best a modern version of the chivalric quest, and at

worst, examples of survivalist fiction that emphasize violence, rape, and male dominated societies.<sup>7</sup> These are fantasies that tie America more closely to Europe through a nostalgic view of cultural histories by embracing earlier ideals of its English and German cultural roots; but this either ignores the multitude of ethnicities that comprise the contemporary United States, or it results in a clash of cultures, a subject explored in more detail in chapter four.<sup>8</sup> Another view is that these post-collapse civilizations return to a different romanticized perspective emphasizing individual strength and ability—the yeoman farmer and craftsman, the frontiersman and cowboy—in an era when America was still expanding to fulfill its “Manifest Destiny” before machines replaced men, and before factories replaced artisans. The quest for salvage, battle for resources, and the formation of an economy and market in post-apocalyptic narratives reflect recent American concerns regarding natural resources, especially the availability and price of energy and fuel, as well as anxieties over a decline in the relative economic power of the United States manifested in the suggestion that its industrial strength is failing, and that aspects of its soft power, such as education, are also waning.

The twentieth century is often referred to as “the American Century,” a period when the United States established itself as a global power through its growth of industrial, economic, and military might, fueled by rapid advances in science and technology before moving into space. Near the turn of the century, Teddy Roosevelt and other Progressives focused on natural resources by enlarging the national parks system and creating the National Park Service to help conserve the nation’s resources. Later, the Hoover Dam and the Tennessee Valley Authority supplied hydroelectric power to fuel development and satiate the growing demand for electricity before mid-century. After the

end of World War II, when the “Arsenal of Democracy” was converted back to peacetime production, America became a global exporter of consumer goods and appliances, and resources such as oil, lumber, coal, steel and grain. America also became the world’s leading creditor thanks to the combined effects of its wartime loans, the Bretton Woods Agreement and formation of the International Monetary Fund, and the influence of rebuilding efforts under the Marshall Plan. During the 1950s and early 1960s, American manufacturers gained a virtual monopoly on international trade while England, France, Germany, Japan, and the Soviet Union worked to recover and rebuild before they could fully reenter the global market. But by the late 1960s, Germany and Japan were able to compete favorably with American exports, often using patents and designs leased to them by American companies; their electronics and consumer appliances were in high demand and presented one of the first challenges to American economic superiority.

Between the end of World War II and the early 1970s, during the waxing of American economic and military power, post-apocalyptic narratives (especially those involving nuclear war) flourished in magazines, mass-market novels, and B-movies. The proliferation of post-nuclear apocalyptic narratives was tied directly to global fears of atomic annihilation fueled by the arms race between the United States and Russia. In his history of a century of nuclear war fiction, Paul Briens notes spikes in the publication of post-nuclear war texts in the late 1940s, and again from the mid-1950s through the early 1960s. In this same era, as Kim Newman details in *Apocalypse Movies: End of the World in Cinema* (1999), SF depicts the world ending thanks to alien invasion, celestial disaster, giant mutants, or becoming a radioactive wasteland after nuclear war. Most of the films

only threaten collapse, but a handful portray the disaster or hint at the beginning of the recovery phase which involves a return to the post-apocalyptic garden no longer threatened by Communists or internal dissent. However, a handful of these texts portray the loss of consumer goods as part of the cost of their eventual recovery, and present the dependency on convenience and leisure as a form of addiction to technology.

The vast majority of post-apocalyptic stories published during the Cold War pay scant attention to the actual battles or individual missile strikes, instead setting their “adventures” and conflicts among the radioactive ruins after farms and forests are devastated. Brians’ discussion of nuclear war sometimes refers to these wastelands as the post-apocalyptic frontier,<sup>9</sup> and given the prevalence of selfish acts of theft, assault, rape, and murder, these might be seen as twisted visions of the Richard Slotkin’s theme of regeneration through violence, although very little is rebuilt and few live to repopulate these deadly and often-radioactive verges. Events of large-scale devastation and social dislocation span the first half of the twentieth century: from post-Great War recovery efforts in Europe, to the collapse of economies and production during the Great Depression; after World War II they include the efforts to rebuild in England, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Poland, and portions of the USSR. Nonfiction treatments of the horrific effects of the atomic bomb, as in John Hersey’s *Hiroshima* (1947), prompted civil defense to plan for the proliferation of public and private fallout shelters, and to demand they be stocked emergency supplies during the 1950s, but most authors focused on destruction, collapse, and historic cycles rather than the implications for resources and an economy in post-cataclysmic recovery efforts.<sup>10</sup>

## Scavenged Sources

Most early descriptions of post-cataclysm devastation owe their verisimilitude to World War II experiences or *Hiroshima*; however, Japanese examples were limited to single cities, and their reality began to pale in contrast to the anxiety over the development of weapons with yields in the megatons rather than kilotons. In Hiroshima and Nagasaki, government, families, and kinship ties extended beyond the bombs' radii, eventually allowing some to receive aid and relief. After the peace treaty was signed, the US sent in scientists to study the effects of the bombs and medical personnel to help treat survivors and document the fascinating and horrifying progression of radiation poisoning. But the photographs and descriptions of the ruins of Hiroshima and Nagasaki blurred into newsreels of ever-larger bomb tests in the 1950s and the images from the Bikini Atoll and later tests that suggested little would remain but radioactive rubble if one or many of these warheads were launched, and that any improbable survivors could expect no aid from a devastated world.

## Precursors

The majority of post-cataclysmic texts from the end of World War II through the mid-1970s deal with nuclear attacks; the rest assume the form of ecological crisis or industrial accident, and these only rarely until the mid-1960s, after the publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* in 1961. The majority of texts such as *Earth Abides* (1949), *I Am Legend* (1954), and *Level 7* (1959), are about the death of most of humanity and the world as a whole sliding toward extinction, rather than the collapse or decline of the just the US. Early in the Cold War, George Stewart offered an alternative to the nuclear wasteland in *Earth Abides*, in which a global plague kills most of humanity,

leaving buildings and machinery intact for the survivors to use as nature slowly reclaims the planet. Stewart's Tribe of survivors establishes the baseline of a post-collapse community by scavenging cities as they fall into ruin. The leader of The Tribe, Ish, lives in his parents' former home in Oakland, running his lights until the water-powered dynamos stop turning, and his taps until the plumbing system falls into terminal disrepair. It is only years later, when wildfires overtake the crumbling suburb, that he and his descendants move out of the ruins of the city. There is little violence in Stewart's vision of regeneration, and Ish's attempts to maintain modernity by teaching the Tribe's children using the resources of the civic and university libraries fail within a generation. The transition from urbanites to farmers is slow and not very successful, although the introduction of the pre-modern bow and arrow helps the Tribe to move beyond scavenging, signaling that this community must find new ways of thinking about itself, its economy and its environment that become based on an older, pre-technological history and culture, rather than relying on the outmoded technological exceptionalism of the pre-cataclysmic past in order to survive.

### **Earth Abides**

*Earth Abides* demonstrates a particularly American urban and suburban mentality of plenty, an unconscious and consumer-based view that there will always be more in the stores and warehouses, and homes with light, heat, and fresh water; the post-plague survivors initially live well on the "windfall" of overproduction. This is catalogue-culture fed by radio and television advertising designed to make the consumer aware of "the next thing" that redefines material *desires* as *needs*. To some extent this reflects the post-World War II end of rationing and the reconversion from war to consumer production,

but Stewart also suggests the actual surplus Americans experienced in the 1950s in new consumer goods. While they pick the bones of the city, the shelves are never bare, and generations of the Tribe continue to eat canned goods retrieved from San Francisco long after the labels begin to fade. When Ish, the senile Last American, dies approximately sixty years after the plague, his descendants are dressed in an ensemble blending neo-primitive and consumer goods: animal skins, moccasins, and denim jeans.

The typical wasteland survivor scours the ruins for food, tools, ammunition, and weapons, or fights to take or defend possessions from others; there is little or no ability to fabricate tools or weapons, or to produce food. Walter M. Miller, Jr.'s *A Canticle for Leibowitz* still sets some of the critical standards for post-apocalyptic works. In it, a former bomb shelter articulates cycles of renewal and warfare that reflect Oswald Spengler and Arnold Toynbee's interpretations of the rise and fall of cultures and civilizations, but the story also provides a touchpoint for W. Warren Wagar's critical study of apocalyptic cycles in *Terminal Visions* (1982). In terms of resources, unlike Stewart's Tribe and its rejection of modern knowledge, Miller suggests that no matter the desire and effort expended, the rote copy of information does not convey comprehension, leaving the archive and its past-knowledge locked. Stories such as Pat Frank's *Alas, Babylon* (1959) reveal that even the best prepared cannot plan for every contingency in a post-war world, and later stories like Harlan Ellison's *A Boy and His Dog* (1969) or Roger Zelazny's *Damnation Alley* (1969) are tinged with the violence of the era as they show the risks survivors will take while scrounging or stealing the scraps that remain after a cataclysm.

## **Alas, Babylon**

In *Alas, Babylon*, Pat Frank depicts the entire town of Fort Repose as a community bomb shelter that lies between targets and is untouched by the bombs or immediate radiation and fallout, but must deal with the successive crises in the aftermath: food shortages, finding fresh water, preserving food, and fighting off bandits and raiders. Martha Bartter suggests it is but one of several stories from the 1950s that promotes the Eisenhower administration's civil defense plans,<sup>11</sup> but Allan M. Winkler argues that such examples actually critiqued these plans as limited or inadequate. By the late 1950s the development of the hydrogen bomb shifted policy from shelters to a half-hearted evacuation plan, of which the only real benefit was the interstate highway system.<sup>12</sup> Frank questions both the possibility of effective defense across the nation as well as post-war American assumptions of plenty, because while Randy Bragg has foreknowledge of the war and is a veteran of the Korean conflict, his reactions are unfocused, scattered, and largely ineffective. Bragg fails to provision appropriately, stocking up on frozen foods and refrigerated staples that are wasted when the power grid fails, although he is at least aware of the likely scarcity of fuel and potential instability of the banks, and gathers gas and cash before the war begins. Without communications and the security and guarantees of national banks and institutions, trade falters and the market collapses, rendering cashier checks and currency worthless. The initial response is hoarding, but the situation declines quickly into price gouging, looting, theft, and "grave robbing." Franks condemns this devolution as the loot from the ruins of Miami and Tampa is tainted; many of the black marketers are poisoned by radiation and become scarred, sicken, or die.



Despite the fact that Fort Repose has an incompetent civil defense warden, it still has ample resources to support its survivors thanks to its cropland, citrus orchards, abundant fish in a nearby nonradioactive river, and access to artesian wells, and later, salt needed to preserve food. However, civil defense provides no guidance for their use, and it falls on individual families and alliances to realize how to best use these resources. Frank criticizes middle-class consumer culture in that Bragg must rely on his immediate neighbors—former hired hands—to help him survive by connecting him to the artesian waters under his own property. The eldest of his neighbors, Preacher Henry, might be mistaken for an example of the “mystical negro” because he teaches the Braggs to net-fish the river, trap local small animals, and track the migrating fish by season. But this is a reductive view of the relationship of his family to Randy, even if Preacher and his family are the descendants of the slaves owned and freed by the Braggs a century earlier. Frank makes a point of the working-class and utilitarian nature of Preacher’s family,<sup>13</sup> which is why they maintain what others perceive as an obsolete older car, and make due without the many middle-class conveniences that become obsolete relics when the power grid dies. It is their reliance on older forms of technology and methods that make them a model of sustainability, highlighting the failures of American progress in the face of cataclysmic destruction.

As Brians notes in *Nuclear Holocausts*, the second brief spike in nuclear war fiction began to decline in the early 1960s, but post-apocalyptic fiction did not completely disappear; rather it began to diversify into environmental collapse and overpopulated dystopias. After some initial resistance, Rachel Carson published her book *Silent Spring* in 1962, and while it exposed the environmental, ecological, and health

hazards of the pesticide DDT, it also incorporated apocalyptic imagery. Carson's work influenced the development of the environmental movement and borrowed from the style of science fiction in its final chapter, "A Fable for Tomorrow," in which an anonymous American town has all of its life "silenced": fish, insects, birds, and even its children. Braggs' orchards in *Alas, Babylon* are leased to corporate agricultural interests, foreshadowing potentially destructive shifts in American agriculture, but a large share of the workforce remained farmers into the early 1960s, and exports from the "American bread basket" contributed significantly to the burgeoning US economy. Carson's dark vision of the damage wrought by DDT extended far beyond contaminated water; it included DDT accumulating in the body fat of animals and man, and contributing to cancer and potential genetic damage. Clute and Nicholls suggest that Carson and Paul Ehrlich's later *Population Bomb* (1968) helped influence the new wave of ecocatastrophes in literature and media in the 1960s and 1970s, but the genre had already begun to show a wary respect for the role of ecology in stories of colonization as early as the 1950s. That said, Carson may have influenced Thomas Disch's 1965 novel, *The Genocides*, in which aliens "overwrite" Earth's ecology by sowing a world-wide crop of alien plants that overwhelm all Earthly flora and are mostly inedible to its fauna, recreating the silent spring by eradicating most native Earth life.

### **The New Vulnerability**

The Vietnam War effort and the beginning of the US trade deficit in 1970 accelerated the inflationary spiral that began in the late 1960s. By 1971 the US was using the basis of the international exchange rate to print more currency than it could cover in gold reserves. Complaints from abroad, especially from France, led President Nixon to

unilaterally remove the US from the gold standard in order to make the dollar inconvertible to gold directly, which opened the currency to market evaluation and accelerated inflation.<sup>14</sup> Dropping the gold standard also ended the 1944 Bretton Woods Agreement, but inflation only continued to worsen, and the economy fell into stagflation, “which led many expert economists to believe that America’s world economic supremacy was ending.”<sup>15</sup> The first OPEC oil embargo in 1973 was retaliation for US support of Israel in the Yom Kippur War, and the second oil embargo in 1979 followed President Carter’s acceptance of the ousted Shah of Iran into the United States for medical treatment. In between, gas prices rose and stayed high, “but the larger ripple effect on the cost of goods throughout the economy was devastating, pushing the annual inflation rate in 1974 to 12.4 percent, double what it had been five years earlier.”<sup>16</sup> By the end of the 1970s the spiraling effects of the oil crisis, inflation, job losses, and foreign competition severely weakened the economy.

### **Lucifer’s Hammer**

Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle’s *Lucifer’s Hammer (LH)* (1977) reads like a novelized disaster movie written by hard science fiction authors who make sure to give the space program a brief, supporting role. The plot begins with a comet (The Hammer) that passes in near-Earth orbit, where it calves, sending several fragments across the Northern hemisphere which strike causing earthquakes, volcanoes, tsunamis and floods that devastate and transform the planet. The comet is a metaphor for the true peril these authors felt faced America in the late 1970s: cuts to its science and technology programs, and a reduction in the budget for NASA and its space programs. In the ensuing “comet winter” with its prolonged rains, glaciers creep over parts of Europe and much of the

USSR, forcing survivors to flee south. But in response the Chinese trigger a short nuclear exchange that poisons Siberia and northern China. The limited nuclear conflict adds to the natural devastation that covers all seacoast cities, Europe, the Mediterranean basin, Russia and the Ukraine, and large areas of the American inner continent. The threats of pollution, industrial waste, and overpopulation are gone, but so is the infrastructure of modern life including electricity, long distance communication, fast transportation, and most importantly, food production and distribution. Given Pournelle's later support for SDI in *Mutual Assured Survival* (1984), there is a temptation to read this as a thinly veiled warning against America faltering in the arms race; but the near-annihilation of humanity by a random celestial event instead draws attention to the possible erosion of America's lead in the space race and space-based science, particularly advanced physics, and warns that the result would be worse than just a loss in national prestige or political influence.

By the late 1970s the discourse of collapse had shifted from arguing the "unthinkable" nuclear war, to the threats of overpopulation, famine, industrial pollution and resource scarcity including future oil shortages. *LH* rejects peak oil arguments even as it explores the implications of the disruption of the systems of modern life (especially advanced technology and automation) elaborated in *The Coming Dark Ages* (1973) by Roberto Vacca. In the aftermath of the comet strikes in *LH* cities and suburbs become memories of modernity, but even those who adhere to the Jeffersonian ideal of the farmer and rural farming community lack resources and suffer from the loss outside support, casting the myth of the self-reliant citizen and the supposed strength and vitality of the post-WW II American economy and manufacturing base into question.

The comet strikes and large-scale devastation set up the central conflict and narrative of *LH* as the scarcity of resources and most especially food pits two societies against each other: “the Stronghold,” a valley of farms and ranches in foothills of the Sierras; and the invading New Brotherhood Army (NBA)—a mix of Army deserters, refugees from Los Angeles and its suburbs, religious fanatics, and inner-city gang members who are all desperate for food and bound by a cannibalistic ritual. There are no markets after the Hammer falls and few intact roads; the lack of resources—especially power, fuel, medicine, weapons, and technology needed for salvage (scuba gear and heavy machinery)—are recurrent challenges for all survivors. Some like Senator Jellison prepare for the “impossible” and hoard supplies, and make plans to escape and seek shelter; others either fail to respond, or like Harvey Randall, have the materiel they prepare stolen by opportunists who made no efforts beyond gathering guns and ammunition.

Both before and after the comet strikes the authors use different characters to counter the contemporary arguments of peak oil and resource scarcity, and to suggest that the goal is to ramp up research and technological development rather than to slip into a conservation mode by cutting spending on NASA and reducing the (then) broad federal support for science. One of the early arguments, before the Hammer strikes, is forwarded by Dr. Charles Sharps,<sup>17</sup> who stridently argues for the importance of spending federal dollars on research, the space program, and technology as a means of guaranteeing humanity’s survival. Sharps also makes a point to refute the contemporary warning and predictions of the actual Club of Rome’s 1972 report *The Limits to Growth*, by criticizing it directly: “They tell us we're finished, . . . And that's stupid. We're only finished because

they won't let us really use technology. They say we're running out of metals. There's more metal in one little asteroid than was mined all over the world in the last five years!"<sup>18</sup> But this mischaracterizes the report and the statements made by the Club in much the same way that energy industry executives continue to reject them and similar critics as merely Malthusian—that beyond a certain point available resources will no longer be able to support our current (and growing) population.<sup>19</sup> The deniers reject the peak oil and resource scarcity arguments because they maintain a near-religious belief in the ability of technology to discover new sources of energy. Even after the strikes, as the farming valley falls into its neo-feudal arrangement, Jellison muses that civilization can be rebuilt because there are untapped and underutilized resources left to be recovered and exploited.<sup>20</sup> Between Jellison's intent to scavenge and rebuild, and Sharp's dismissal of the Club of Rome, these authors choose to argue *against* the need to conserve or recycle; unspoken but inferred is that with the massive population reductions scarcity is now an issue of the past—or perhaps the far future.

One subtheme that Niven and Pournelle explore is the importance of the space program as a resource and the failure we as a species make, to borrow from Robert A. Heinlein, in “keeping all our eggs in one basket.” The 1979 movie *Meteor* deals with this concept (and that of US and Soviet space-based missiles), and *Armageddon* and *Deep Impact* both return to it in 1998, again suggesting that nuclear weapons are the only means of dealing with these “global killers” and are therefore necessary to prevent such natural cataclysms while also suggesting that nuclear disarmament weakens the US as a global power and world leader. But little more than a decade later, in 2011, the US space shuttle program ended after thirty years. For the moment, perhaps a long one, America

has become dependent on foreign (Russian) transport to and from the International Space Station, of which the United States is only one of several owners. Since the Apollo program of the 1960s and historic success of the moon landing, the US has declined in its commitment to science, discovery, and new technology so much that it is in danger of becoming a junior partner, overtaken not only by Russia, but also possibly Japan, China, and even India. This is a loss of capability and prestige if not technological ability, but it is also one that relegates America's role to intellectual capital rather than active assets, and means that we will no longer be the "star" in the next global disaster feature.

But the decline imagined in *LH* is not just of America's position in the space race, or its ability to produce ever more advanced and convenient consumer goods, but one that is aware of the role that technology plays in the quality of life and the ability to feed and support its citizens. In the 1970s, as the US became a net importer of oil, many in the energy industry maintained confidence that American technology would find new fuel sources and the US would once again become a net energy exporter. This hope became more frantic with the first oil crisis in 1973, and then after the second in 1979. In *LH*, fuel is briefly highlighted by those stockpiling and hoarding before the comet strike; but in the aftermath, supplies of oil and gas are critical issues because so much infrastructure has been destroyed and homes lack oil or electricity for heating during the "comet winter." Vehicles and equipment stand in the mud unable to plant or harvest crops, and cannot be used to defend against the NBA invasion. The key issue becomes one of the source of power: oil or nuclear (the "comet winter" blocked the sun and makes solar power impossible). The "wizard" of the Stronghold, Dr. Dan Forester, says, "We have to save the power plant. We can rebuild civilization if we have electricity."<sup>21</sup> This echoes the

1950s frenzy for nuclear power after Eisenhower's Atoms for Peace program and its promise of nuclear energy.<sup>22</sup> The authors were strong supporters of nuclear power<sup>23</sup> and the (then) newly built San Joaquin Valley nuclear power plant is focal point of the story and a target of the NBA—and so render a sharp and cartoonish contrast between the “heroic” plant workers (nuclear power industry) and the “villainous” mutineers and cannibals with their reactionary hyper-environmentalist leadership.

Jellison's ranch, disaster preparations, and experience in Washington, D.C. help him to propose and then control the executive council for the valley community. The other members are the Christopher clan and the increasingly absent mayor. The Senator recognizes that the comet strikes mean that the valley is on its own for what will likely be years, and he is also aware that they depend on outsiders for: “gasoline, cartridges, needles and pins, plastic bags, cooking oil, aspirin, firearms, baby bottles, pots and pans, cement.”<sup>24</sup> Jellison prepared by stockpiling<sup>25</sup> and he offers to share when the community pools its resources, but he uses these assets for “political” leverage. He is the first one to realize the extent of materials a modern farmer depends on that come from somewhere else—gas, oil, fertilizer, machinery—and he also recognizes that the new calculus of survival is the need for manpower—human labor—and it must be calculated against the cost in food and shelter. But even as this Malthusian observation is reinforced it also echoes a loss of self-sufficiency in American culture: the information workers and white-collar middle classes are refugees (and sometimes cannibals), but even the “yeoman farmers” have become dependent on foreign oil and basic consumer goods that by the 1970s came more from Taiwan, Korea, and Mexico than the US. The former arsenal of



democracy no longer makes its own pots and pans nor needles and pins, and after China entered the world market in 1978, the shift of manufacturing and fabrication accelerated.

The attention to food and, to a lesser extent, medicine, runs through all post-cataclysmic media. The practice of establishing victory gardens during World War II transformed into growing hobby gardens in the 1960s and 1970s; these changed again to suburban vegetable gardens in the green-conscious 1990s, and the community cooperatives of the early 2000s. Preparation for the comet strike includes the futile—frozen foods—and the rational—careful purchases of canned goods, freeze-dried rations, camping equipment and supplies, spices, and luxury goods like alcohol for bartering.<sup>26</sup> At the Stronghold, the council fixes diets for everyone, setting calories per hour of heavy labor as part of an exchange for preparing the fields and next crops by hand. At the same time, under the new rules, a second offence for hoarding<sup>27</sup> results in exile, with the offender's property confiscated by the collective. To underscore the neo-feudal context of life in the Stronghold, anything that might be a resource is used, including human waste for fertilizer and rat bones for needles. Everyone other than the council engages in relentless manual labor. Technical education is prioritized and the humanities are defined as luxuries,<sup>28</sup> implying that the culture of the Enlightenment has become eclipsed, including the maturation of its philosophies in the ideal of universal human rights that gained traction after World War II.

Beyond the consumer-as-survivor attention to food, medicine, and necessary goods, *Lucifer's Hammer* does more than underscore the typical economic narrative of the 1970s and its gas shortages, stagflation, and unemployment. It also highlights a crisis in production and labor, echoing the rising international competition in manufacturing

that marks the beginning of the decline in US factory jobs which accelerated after the mid-1980s, although rises in productivity thanks to automation, and later computers, often masked this loss.<sup>29</sup> As the Stronghold forms, it privileges farmers—those who live in the valley and work the land; absentee landowners are allowed in, but everyone new to the valley must have a useful skill or trade (blacksmith or brewer, for example) to justify their survival and inevitable drain on resources. In a further privileging of science, the most valuable refugee is the bruised, battered, and diabetic Dr. Dan Forester who buys his way in with a library of books<sup>30</sup> with which they can begin converting and rebuilding, as well as his ability to craft weapons like mustard gas and napalm. There are more refugees available than the community could ever support, so physical labor is cheap and has no voice in this new society for all its democratic origins, refuting the pre-Reagan power of organized labor and unions. The lot for laborers is harsh, but prisoners have it even worse; after the massive battle between the Stronghold and the NBA the question of what to do with the prisoners remains, since all of them have been forced to partake in the ritual cannibalism and are outcasts from civilized society.

Many post-nuclear war survivalist narratives incorporate sex slaves and slave labor in their deathlands adventures, but *LH* actually provides the brutal logic and context for the institution of forced labor as effectively lifelong indentured servitude to support extended efforts to salvage, rebuild, and redevelop civilization. After the Stronghold defeats the invading “cannibal army,” Jellison contends that the Stronghold cannot treat the NBA wounded or take prisoners because it does not have the means to feed and support them. Jellison argues that “[c]ivilizations have the morality and ethics they can afford. Right now we don't have much, so we can't afford much. We can't take care of our

own wounded, much less theirs, so all we can afford to do for theirs is put them out of their misery.”<sup>31</sup> But Maureen, Jellison’s more liberal daughter, will not accept the summary execution of these prisoners. She concedes that the Stronghold “...can't let them go. And we can't keep them as citizens. If all we can afford is slavery, then keep them as slaves.”<sup>32</sup> She defines the only moral and ethical option available to them as putting the prisoners to work: “...we can afford something more. Only we don't call them slaves, either, because that makes it too easy to think like a slavemaster. We can put them to work, but we call them prisoners of war and we treat them as prisoners of war.”<sup>33</sup> The story of *Lucifer's Hammer* ends only as the first vestiges of recovery begin, leaving the end of this “war” and its prisoners in question. The Stronghold and its colony of forced-labor “POWS” links to the Vietnam War, and tenuously to Ford’s disclosure of the CIA’s extralegal activities in the Middle East and Latin America. But the attack of the NBA on the nuclear power plant, and its vulnerability, offers not just an eerie reflection of the mid-1960s discussion of a “China syndrome”<sup>34</sup> event, but presaged the series of atomic accidents to start with Three Mile Island in 1979.

### **Doom Deferred**

George H.W. Bush used the term “voodoo economics” to characterize Ronald Reagan’s references to supply-side economics during the Republican candidate debates in 1980. The economy slowly began to recover in 1981 by increasing the federal deficit, but actual recovery did not begin until 1983. Even then, the impact of Reagan reforms fell unevenly on those dependent on the social programs—minorities and the poor.<sup>35</sup> The economic recovery of 1983 is remembered by many, especially conservative economists,

as the longest continual economic expansion during peacetime in American history, but it was at the cost of “social programs for the needy and unprivileged—public assistance, food stamps, school lunch and job training programs, Social Security disability payments,” because as Sean Wilentz argues “wealth would be redistributed toward the wealthy, while the government would be starved of funds to meet non-military needs.”<sup>36</sup> Awareness of the social and economic crisis was largely channeled into the new Cyberpunk subgenre and its post-industrial dystopias, and amid the decline of nation-states and superpowers the older nuclear apocalypse fell out of focus.

While several of the short stories of the 1950s and 1960s showcased accidents and catastrophic mistakes, the majority of narratives were set after a world war that used nuclear weapons. But in the 1980s the topic was sometimes approached differently; the end-of-the-world is deferred even if the final conflict of the Cold War is launched. In these scenarios the United States is defeated and shattered, as is the USSR (in some instances), but the rest of the world carries on, rendering aid to the survivors and taking command of their fragmented military assets and natural resources. In *The Wild Shore*, by Kim Stanley Robinson (1984), a Russian sneak attack using neutron bombs hidden in trucks ends the Cold War and shatters the United States. In Whitley Strieber and James Kunetka’s *Warday*, the 36-minute exchange of missiles between the US and USSR devastates both nations while NATO, the Warsaw Pact, and everyone else awaits the outcome and then plunders the pieces. But David Brin’s *The Postman* (1985) returns to the older post-global war stereotype, examining the world altered by years-long winters, famines, plagues, and the vicious fights between scrabbling survivors. The first two works align with the growing unease in the early 1980s with the loss of American

strength in manufacturing, economic power, and the growing US reliance on international fuel and raw resources, but all three underscore the awareness of a new political and possibly military vulnerability after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, the Iran Hostage Crisis of 1979-80, and the end of détente with the announcement of the Strategic Defense Initiative in March of 1983.

### **The Wild Shore**

Kim Stanley Robinson's *The Wild Shore* (1984) is set in the Californian hills of what was once Camp Pendleton, between San Diego and Los Angeles some sixty years after three thousand Russian nuclear weapons detonated and destroyed most of the cities of the United States. Unlike most post-cataclysmic narratives, especially the majority of post-nuclear texts of the Reagan era, this story is set long after the attacks rather than in the immediate aftermath. There are few references to radiation or other lingering effects, and those are only provided when the central character, Hank (Henry Fletcher), and old Tom travel south to the ruins of San Diego. However, beyond the travel and exposure to the slightly more "advanced" community near San Diego, this story brings food production, salvage, and the role of communications into the perspective of mutual support and community cooperation, a refutation of the both the myth of the individual and the largesse of the late-capitalist consumer marketplace.

In San Onofre, Hank's community largely cooperates and shares tasks following the model of a simple fishing village. David Seed points out that there is a desire here to recover the past,<sup>37</sup> whether in unraveling the truths buried in Old Tom's stories, or in the resistance that the San Diegoans futilely mount against the Japanese border patrols. However, the shared effort to live frames most of the activity in the novel. San Onofre is

a small village of a few families whose professions are taught by parent to child, or to other children within the community, marking a return to older traditions and a simpler lifestyle that mirrors the return to the pastoral that Nicholls and Clute note as a feature of earlier post-war stories. Most fish, some farm, and a very few try to repair and use objects from the past, but the village is a close community, sharing one baker, coming together to protect the fields with tarps when it rains, and using a communal bathhouse at the end of the day. This is a subsistence economy where a few found objects are transformed into art, and the monthly swap meet brings together people from several small communities with the Orange County scavengers to trade. Those same scavengers are the “other” of the story. They have the unfortunate reputation of being grave robbers and collaborators with the Japanese who keep the California counties isolated from one another, helping the UN maintain a quarantine of the shattered states of America.

*The Wild Shore* is an image of a post-American world in which the United States no longer exists and the USSR dominates the UN and global politics. The story is a response to the renewed and growing fears of a nuclear conflict because of Reagan’s trenchant and militant anti-Soviet rhetoric even before the SDI announcement. But this story is also a possible response to SDI in that the Soviet attack was prompted by the threat of a US space-based defense system that would render Soviet ICBMs ineffective—a fear that such a defense would invalidate the lingering premise of MAD and force a nuclear confrontation. While resources are limited, the importance of radio and communication between distant communities is part of what is necessary to maintain a greater American society, and to strengthen and protect a national culture. This focus on media extends to books as part of the basis of cultural identity; internal references to Glen

Baum's "An American Around the World" blend fiction with possible future fact in a manner reminiscent of L. Frank Baum's *Oz* stories and Mark Twain's *Huck Finn*, an apparent inspiration for Hank. *The Wild Shore* recreates the nineteenth century American frontier, but it is no longer one of promise that casts the US as a nation on the brink of becoming a great power. Instead this post-US frontier is about squandered potential and promise and the loss of the "American Dream" as part of the nation's exceptional identity, themes that are also present in *Warday* where the hope of regeneration or renewal has been replaced by one of bitter nostalgia, loss, and vulnerability—the fears evoked by the immediate Soviet and international response to SDI.

#### **Warday and the Journey Onward.**

At the same time that Reagan's 1984 "It's morning in America" campaign ads tried to turn back the clock to the 1950s and post-war greatness, Whitley Strieber and James Kunetka detail the massive destruction and extensive and lingering effects of even a limited nuclear war in *Warday* as a correction of the fairly optimistic depiction of postwar civilizations in the texts of the 1950s and 1960s. Critics of Cold War fiction, including Brians and Seed, compliment the extensive research and details that produced this story which describes a journey through a shattered and traumatized America five years after a thirty-six minute nuclear conflict between the US and USSR; the rest of the world held to a secret treaty and stayed out of it. There are no psychics or giant mutants, and while bandits are a danger in some regions, there are no roving barbarian gangs or cannibalistic slavers. This was a limited conflict and nuclear weapons only detonate over seven targets in the US: New York City (Long Island); Washington, D.C.; San Antonio, TX; Great Falls, MT; Grand Forms, ND; Minot, ND; Rapid City, SD; and Cheyenne,

WY. However, five years after the attack there is no single US economy; many natural resources have been lost or irradiated, the agricultural sector is a ghost of its former largesse, and the nation is broken into third-world countries and damaged zones. This story criticizes Reagan's proposed SDI because its limited war effectively simulates the "leakage" or small percent of warheads that were expected to penetrate the layers of missile defense. In this scenario, even a limited war would end America as we know it because of the combined effects of the megaton explosions, radioactive fallout, and secondary effects including plague, famine, and the resultant loss of most electronics and advanced technologies from the electromagnetic burst, including communications, most motor vehicles, heavy agricultural, and substantial amounts of the manufacturing base.

In the immediate aftermath of the 36-minute war, radioactive fallout poisons substantial portions of the mountain states and Midwest, and even five years later, moderate and severe radiation remains an issue in what had once been America's breadbasket. But more important than the radioactive fallout dusting croplands is the immediate disruption of the transportation of foodstuffs and other vital resources as a result of EMPs that destroy all unshielded electronics, including the ignitions of most motor vehicles. One character notes that in this post-Cold War milieu, the rest of the developed world (Europe and Japan) want to limit the US to remaining an agricultural producer and not allowing it to rebuild its industrial base.<sup>38</sup> Five years later, in those portions of the southeast, northeast, and western states that still produce agriculture, many of their foodstuffs are needed to pay for resources from the relief agencies of Britain and Japan. In the northwest, Washington and Oregon remained untouched and they've only just begun exporting to other parts of the country, "particularly California"



(as the strongest economy). The “area has become a thriving agricultural and shepherding community,” and can no longer sustain its former manufacturing industries including aircraft, computers, and other technology.<sup>39</sup> The authors emphasize the cascading effects of depletion and famine. Shortages of grain and cropland lead to local consumption rather than sending crops to market, which results in meat shortages as feed is converted for human use,<sup>40</sup> and the continued loss of crops and cropland as wheat and corn are highly domesticated, a point made much earlier in *Earth Abides*. When the stalks rot and blow away, the “raw dirt” itself is exposed.<sup>41</sup> This was only a limited war, but the US continues to decline because five years after the conflict more than twenty-nine million have died of famine and disease, even with the large-scale relief efforts of the British and other nations.

The US economy no longer exists, broken as it is into an “east” and “west” with several smaller markets in different zones that connect tenuously at best to the others. The EMP destroyed over 70% of military and civilian electronics;<sup>42</sup> this wiped out most communications and modern vehicles and appliances, and the factories and advanced technologies that could reproduce them. Some cities, like Detroit, were not bombed but sit idle because even if their technology still functions or has been repaired, the trade balance is such that the US can no longer purchase the raw materials on the world market and prewar stockpiles are exhausted.<sup>43</sup> When the electronic records and paper copies are destroyed in New York City and Washington, D.C., “six out of ten dollars disappeared”<sup>44</sup> and five years on only 14% of prewar cash holdings have been restored. More critically, the US is effectively a colonial market—its resources (especially uranium) flow out, but it is forced to purchase finished goods on the global market. In the

historical context of the 1980s, this follows the trend of factory and manufacturing jobs moving to Southeast Asia, Taiwan, Korea, and China. Today the issue has been exacerbated by NAFTA (1994) and CAFTA (2001), because everything from cars to computers constructed in the US utilizes components fabricated abroad. This neo-mercantile system is emphasized in the novel by the Japanese cars and trains that run in California and Texas, the cheap plastic Ford made by Detroit (ironically echoing Eastern Bloc cars of the era) and pricing consumer imports like Canadian furs and British clothing in gold in US department stores. The return to a gold economy in the text may be a response to the economic weakness associated with Nixon's removal of the US from the gold standard, noted by many historians as part of the beginning of the US loss of post-war economic dominance.

Worldwide cataclysm, or an attack as devastating as that in *Wild Shore*, is unnecessary for the modern American economy to fail in *Warday*. The loss of trade and breakdown of the international system disrupt the production and manufacturing capability that remain, even as food shipped as payment abroad forces citizens to starve. The American Dream of the middle-class lifestyle in a suburban home has been obliterated because the suburbs are mostly depopulated. Gas is too expensive, many cars rot where they've been towed or dragged because the struggling industry can only replace one million of the fourteen million disabled ignitions a year. The personal automobile has become too expensive and the roads have fallen into disrepair and become unreliable. Post-WWII America, the "golden age" between 1945-1975, has evaporated; the new America is a land of internal borders where guards with machine guns and barbed wire prevent US citizens from entering unless they are state residents, and where California

plans to secede and become its own sovereign nation. Chicano/Latino nationalists seize portions of Mexico, Texas, and Arizona to form the “homeland” of Aztlan, and New York City is abandoned to packs of wild dogs while Japan slowly funnels uranium and the secrets of Los Alamos to its own “Atomic City.” In this scenario of limited war and economic decline, the strongest regional economies like California, Washington, and Oregon look out for themselves, create borders, and move toward secession. The loss of America’s superiority in communications and advanced technology further reinforces this balkanization and continued outflow of assets, resources, and people to Britain and Japan, an ironic reversal of the privileged trade position the US enjoyed after World War II. This vision of decline trades on the vulnerabilities made manifest by the energy crisis and stagflation, and foreshadow greater insecurities to come as Japan’s economy skyrocketed and plans for the European Union hinted toward something similar across the Atlantic.

### **The Postman**

Where *Warday* focuses on the journey through post-war America showcasing the country’s decline, *The Postman* is a character-driven tale that focuses on Gordon Krantz’s survival and eventual transformation into a leader who begins to take responsibility for rebuilding the post-war United States. Gordon’s journey centers on the Pacific Northwest twenty years after the missiles, a three-year winter, and waves of famine and plague. In many ways Brin returns to the stereotypes of the 1950s wasteland adventure and military SF, detailing struggles to escape bandits, survive the elements, and swindle a meal and a bed from the small farming communities that have formed in the aftermath. Brin is also apparently well aware of the growing environmentalist awareness and activism as the Prelude to *The Postman* begins with recognition of the

massive environmental effects of the global war. While the Prelude shares characteristics with Steinbeck's omniscient narrative of the onset of the Depression-era dustbowl in *The Grapes of Wrath*, Brin begins by recognizing the massive forest fires and ecological damage of a nuclear conflict, but with an awareness that "[o]nly the Ocean, timeless and obstinate, resistant to change, really mattered."<sup>45</sup> By the end of the novel the planet is on its way to recovery, though Brin's level of ecological detail does not approach Strieber and Kunetka's brief comment that there are over two thousand newly extinct species since *Warday*.

Beginning a generation after the war, Brin describes farming villages, barter, crafts including brewing and horse training, and the struggle to keep some small part of American culture alive, all reminiscent of the American colonial experience. Some villages like New Oakridge have "slipped further" than others—it has adopted feudal aspects like crop-indebtedness and is ruled by a mayor with a personal guard who coerces goods and favors from the townspeople.<sup>46</sup> Each community is isolated, and it is only when Gordon begins traveling in the guise of a postman (a postal inspector of the reformed United States) that communication between these and other outposts begins to regenerate. Brin emphasizes the hope that actual mail (and proof of other survivors), and the lie of a restored federal government in Minneapolis brings to the scattered communities of Oregon. However, one of the first things he restores on this "first circuit" is commerce and a modern economy using salvaged US currency. In Cottage Grove people scrounge for "old-time two dollar bills and pre-1965 silver coins" to be used as postage, after which they "began using these categories of currency to pay off barter debts."<sup>47</sup> This behavior is repeated as Gordon establishes a network in which others take

on the role of courier. This is the finally the beginning of recovery as the re-establishment of communication also means re-establishing a network of people and communities, the first step in restoring American society and culture.

When Gordon reaches Corvallis and the settlements established around the former Oregon State University, he finds a barter economy that relies on a con game rivaling his own story of a restored federal government. The community centered on the former university in Corvallis publishes a newspaper, maintains a lending library, and apparently has the last surviving artificial intelligence, Cyclops. The AI helps farmers and miners in the region and in return they “collect their old machinery, particularly electronics” and donate it to the AI, who takes “their donations of useless, ruined equipment, plus perhaps a little surplus food to maintain its volunteer servants. In return, Cyclops would give . . . things that worked.”<sup>48</sup> The food maintains the former faculty and staff of the university, and their children, and they give the best advice they can based on their former educations, the surviving resources of the university, and the “advice” of the oracular AI, later revealed to have been destroyed immediately after the war when rioters wreck the local power station. The con keeps the “acolytes” fed, and in return they provide technical support by maintaining a “small assembly line for water and wind turbines . . . [and] help area blacksmiths improve their forges and local farmers plan their crops.”<sup>49</sup> The irony is that some of the very people they help are those who tried to burn the university and its AI in the anti-technology riots after the war; this “blame the scientists” attitude recurs in nuclear-apocalypse stories stretching back to the 1950s. Allan M. Winkler and Stephanie Cooke argue that scientists as a group became the surrogates for “the bomb” and targets for opprobrium as early as the Lucky Dragon affair in 1952, and

this blame escalated after the revelations of strontium poisoning in the late 1950s.<sup>50</sup> Ironically, many scientists, like Linus Pauling, originally fought against the development of the bomb and against above ground testing in the Pacific and in Nevada, efforts which combined with early anti-nuclear peace activism in the 1950s and 1960s, and returned with new vigor after the Three Mile Island disaster in 1979. In a similar vein, James G. Watt's contentious tenure as Secretary of the Interior under Reagan (1981-1983), his alleged hostility to environmentalism and support of the use and development of federal lands by commercial interests, especially foresting, ranching, and mining, ties into the loss of resources that Brin suggests, but that are considered in detail in *Warday*.

In *The Postman*, raiders and bandits are hazards in an era where laws stop at the village wall, but they are also a shadow of the survivalists who hoarded goods, especially guns and ammunition. Niven and Pournelle, in *Lucifer's Hammer*, detail efforts to hoard camping supplies, food and spices, luxury goods such as liquor, and even medicine and books. They also describe an apocalyptic "bunker mentality" which involves buying as much as possible using checks and credit, spiking inflation and credit use because it does not matter if things go bad. They also include examples of survival packages that "winked at the gun ban by mail order."<sup>51</sup> But Brin aggressively criticizes this "bunker mentality" as another path to failure and destruction, and encourages the development and maintenance of a communal society, suggesting that in order for America to survive it cannot fracture. In the novel most of the survivalists turn on each other; only a handful remain to later bolster the ranks of the raiding army. These survivalists are an echo of the initial civil defense policy of the 1950s, but are also an expression of the Kennedy plans of the early 1960s and the ideology of the early Reagan years, all of which were criticized

as promoting the chance of conflict and for being too limited in their scope of survival, saving only a few rather than the many.<sup>52</sup> But some, including Pournelle, disagreed with this new policy and argued that preparation must not be ignored. In his role as editor of TOR Books *There Will Be War* anthology series, Pournelle included a large number of nonfiction essays offering survival, shelter, and emergency response advice, much of it initially printed in the magazine *Survivor*. This nonfiction helps to bridge the gap between character-driven, cautionary SF such as Brin's and the "violent and misogynistic" deathlands fantasies such as Jerry Ahern's *The Survivalist*, or William W. Johnstone's *From the Ashes* series. Paul Brians initially criticized such series for their violence and misogynistic sex fantasies,<sup>53</sup> and this criticism was picked up and elaborated as "combat fantasies" of "survivalist fiction" by Clute and Nicholls, as opposed to the more "legitimate" post-apocalyptic works in their editorial view.<sup>54</sup> Regardless, whether serialized trash to borrow from their view, or thoughtful speculative fiction, both types of works link through the nonfiction that concentrated on preparations and survival, all of it contributing to a anxious and harried megatext of post-cataclysm in the 1980s.

### **The New World Order**

The late 1980s set the stage for the eventual fall of the Berlin Wall (1989) and the collapse of the Soviet Union (1991). While the triumphalist narrative of the late 1980s argues that Reagan's military spending helped bankrupt the Soviets, this was dependent on the massive cuts to social programs as part of his attack on "big government" after 1984 that also set up future disasters. The deregulation of business and finance resulted in "the collapse of a large segment of the nation's savings and loan system . . . [and] [h]uge

federal deficits, a direct result of the administration's fiscal policies, effectively forestalled any new major social programs."<sup>55</sup> The 1980s are often referred to as the "me" decade, an era of yuppies, self-indulgent spending, and large returns on large risks, but Wilentz also points out that Reagan inspired a "buccaneer mentality" among business and finance in part thanks to the "flaccid management and oversight that the free-market enthusiasm of Reagan's boom years encouraged."<sup>56</sup> American military might was reorganized, redeployed, but "contrary to Reagan's original supply-side hopes, and in spite of the tax increases that Reagan supported in 1983, 1984, and 1986, the federal debt tripled between 1980 and 1989, from \$994 billion to \$2.8 trillion."<sup>57</sup> Black Monday—October 19, 1987, when Wall Street panicked after the Dow Jones lost 23.6% of its total value—hinted at future economic problems, but the next recession did not begin until early 1990s, under Reagan's successor, George H.W. Bush. Reagan and his aggressive deregulation had set the stage, although only the first hints of corruption were revealed in scandals like the Keating Five and the Savings & Loan Crisis.<sup>58</sup>

The doomsday anxiety lingered but lost its focus after the evaporation of the Soviet Union, and then diminished after the overwhelming victory in the First Gulf War, and with the United States as the world's sole super power in an era that President George H.W. Bush dubbed the New World Order. In Emma Bull's *Bone Dance* (1991) the full extent of the apocalypse is unclear; only the briefest sketch suggests a conflict limited to the western hemisphere. But this post-war Minneapolis seems infused with the influence of New Orleans and Caribbean Creole, as well as psychic talents and voodoo affectations. In Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower* (1993) and *Parable of the Talents* (1998), the apocalypse is a slow economic decline and collapse after a series of small



foreign wars, amplifying class and ethnic divisions and prompting emigration from the US to Canada and Siberia because global warming has made Mexico and the new tropical zones untenable. These stories were published in the 1990s and reflect not only the earlier cycles of recession and inflation, but also the economic damage of the Reagan military buildup and its record three trillion dollar deficit.

### **Bone Dance**

Memories of the Iran-Contra Scandal were still relatively fresh in the early 1990s, which may explain Bull's all-American nuclear-apocalypse some eighty years before the events of *Bone Dance* in a city with the landmarks of Minneapolis. Control of power—electricity and various fuels—and markets, trade, and taxes tie the disparate groups within the city to nearby communities, like the Hoodoo Engineers and similar groups downriver. The protagonist, Sparrow, has some very rare talents that allow her<sup>59</sup> to repair and maintain electronics. She presents a tangible link to the past, to an electronic if not yet digital archive, by maintaining her equipment and library of CDs, tapes, film, and videotapes. Sparrow is a scrounger and a hustler, for whom “The Deal” means that every act has consequences and nothing is free, or a gift, and every transaction must be balanced. Given the genre intertexts of the 1990s, *The Deal* and its *Rules* echo similar exchange or profit-based themes in the *Star Trek* franchises that incorporate the avaricious race of the Ferengi. Bull sub-titled *Bone Dance* a “fantasy for technophiles,” and it draws from the aesthetics of both the fledgling urban fantasy subgenre and the first generation of cyberpunk.

Sparrow's Night Fair could be the mutant offspring of Gibson's Chiba City if it mated with Rossetti's *Goblin Market*; dormant by day, when the sun sets almost anything

is available for barter and purchase, and it functions as a meeting place for the rich, tower-folk, and a variety of street denizens. These people from two different worlds—the gated and secure condos of the neo-yuppies and the urban poor from packs of street kids to sullen and ruined individuals—resonate with news stories in the *Washington Post* and *New York Times* covering the plight of the homeless, especially those turned out of mental institutions in the mid-1980s.<sup>60</sup> The descriptions of those in the middle, who live in anti-modern or salvaged apartments and candlelit stairwells and lofts, and those who fearfully employ hidden windmill generators, point to fears regarding the Reagan and Bush era cuts to social services and medical support, but also the more laissez faire policies employed in regulating banks, utilities, and the commercial use of natural resources.

In *Bone Dance*, Minneapolis does not appear to have suffered an actual missile strike or lasting combat damage, but all of its public institutions and social hierarchies have been shattered by the long past “Big Bang.” Control of the city revolves around literal power, a dynamic that resembles the core conflict within Barter Town in the film *Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome* (1985). In Minneapolis, the City Power Authority controls not just the electricity (most of it channeled into the high-rise towers of the rich), but also the production of power itself (and vanquishes any threats to their monopoly). The Authority imposes a tax on all fuels (electric batteries and chargers, alcohol, and diesel) and charges steep licensing fees for those who try to run their own water or wind-based generators. Their police primarily hunt down pirate utilities, untaxed ethanol, and unregistered portable generators instead of enforcing social norms or any actual laws *not* related to power or fuel.<sup>61</sup> The Authority also attempts to control communications,

banning books and movies that create a black market for them; it is only mildly ironic that the head of the Authority, A.A. Albrecht, is Sparrow's best customer. Albrecht also dominates communications by controlling the single City Broadcast (radio) and the weak, static-filled "party line" telephone system that has replaced the old landlines and cell towers of the former telephone companies. This control of technology and natural resources criticizes the initial waves of deregulation under the Reagan administration, but also extends into the debate for the additional deregulation of telephone and cable utilities, although these were not realized until 1996 under President Bill Clinton, along with the general relaxation of oversight on the use of airwaves by fledgling cellular networks.

These economics create a form of class warfare throughout the story and set up not just Sparrow's function as a scrounger, but the eventual conflicts between Albrecht and other factions. Perhaps an expression of subcultural identity as much as a class issue, the Nightbabies are the children of the towers who go slumming in the Night Market and the Underbridge nightclub. In the manner of the 1990s urban underground, many of them slum in the Night Fair to acquire their drugs, going to the Underbridge to dance, drink, and get stoned, but when they do they ape the fashions of the street—the "High Savage" look or the group-mind Jammers—in much the way that middle-class suburban kids of the 1990s wore new leather jackets and artfully distressed designer jeans to play in their urban playgrounds while posing as punks. In contrast to Albrecht, or the towers, are communes like the Hoodoo Engineers, who live outside the city limits, combining equal parts hippy, environmentalist (greens), and the New Age mentality of the late-1980s and early 1990s. As a group the Engineers come across as something of a family; they are

people who work together to simply “do good in the world” and “keep the energy circulating, to show other people how it's done.”<sup>62</sup> This active involvement in helping others, consciously breaking the quid pro quo rules of The Deal not only set the Engineers apart, but also sets them up in opposition to Albrecht and the power brokers of the city. The group does their best to rescue and raise the descendents of escaped zoo animals, but it is their crops and livestock that make them valuable to Albrecht. But that value is contingent on not interfering with the politics of the city, which happens when they take in the wounded Sparrow and shield her. It is part of Sparrow’s function in *Bone Dance* to end Albrecht’s monopoly, and to help move the denizens of the Night Fair and the city at large beyond the rules of the Deal and restart a more inclusive and community-oriented society—a post-capitalist world that is also briefly mentioned by the Destructuralists in *Warday* who want to force America (sometimes through terrorist acts) to return being farmers and form a “true Jeffersonian society.”<sup>63</sup>

### **Parable of the Sower and Parable of the Talents**

Octavia Butler flirts with such a post-capitalist America using the “Pox,” a slow economic collapse between 2015-2030, that disrupts the nation so much that in their desperation those citizens who still choose to vote bring a religious extremist, the far-right wing leader of the Church of Christian America, to power as the president. As Butler herself said, she wanted to consider a possible future without psychic powers, aliens, or magic and construct a United States after a period of slow decline that “combined [the] effects of lack of foresight and short-term unenlightened self-interest...[to become] a third world country.”<sup>64</sup> The world of the Pox is one in which global warming drives food-price inflation, taking even more money from the pockets of

the poor and the struggling middle-class, and where hunger is not only endemic but increases vulnerability to disease, sparking a series of epidemics. Some might consider this failing society dystopic rather than post-apocalyptic, but Butler says she wanted to create an apocalyptic warning as she “looked at the growing rich/poor gap, at throwaway labor, at our willingness to build and fill prisons, our reluctance to build and repair schools and libraries, and at our assault on the environment.”<sup>65</sup> The fragile promise of the Great Society shattered during the Reagan administration. Fights for vouchers and more limited funds for public schools removed more and more resources, not just from the inner cities but also from the suburbs of cities that relied on the tax dollars of a blue-collar middle-class of factory labor—cities like Detroit, Pittsburgh, Baltimore, and dozens of others, especially in the industrialized regions of the Mid-Atlantic, Northeast, and Midwest. In the mid-1990s, the effects of NAFTA created similar cycles within the Southeast textile industry and in the agrarian sector—parts of California, Oregon, Washington, Michigan, Indiana, and Wisconsin, among other states. In Butler’s future, the slow collapse begins under Reagan, maybe even under Carter, but it continues through Republican and Democratic presidents because power is tied to money, an ideology of its own.

The Pox becomes the justification for the loss of social control, the decline of cities, and the fortification and militarization of the suburbs. This is another anti-modern future, in contrast to its now-stereotypical contemporary cyberpunk stories; in Butler’s novels there is an urban inversion where the suburbs empty or people return to the walled, patrolled, medieval city, an even darker parody than the burbclaves of Neil Stephenson in *Snowcrash* (1992). In Butler’s newly-walled and isolated suburban

enclaves, the adults all go armed because the police are too expensive and only operate on retainer—law and order driven by money and class, which also reflects issues of race or ethnicity because law enforcement responds to rich (and majority white) communities the fastest.<sup>66</sup> Because of the safety risks inherent in traveling between secure zones (from home/enclave to school or church) travel is done in groups, on bikes for speed, and with as many weapons as possible. At one point, thieves come over the wall and the community doesn't have the money to call in the police so several houses are robbed and an elderly woman is killed in her home by the intruders. The community must now maintain its own neighborhood watch and begin using gun-trained teens as part of its meager force. Police and law enforcement have become a service for the rich and for corporations, and the enforcement of social norms, contracts, and trust has shrunk to lonely, embattled communities that are slowly being ground out of existence.

For all but the children of the rich, or those who are attached to their parents within corporate barracks, education has fallen from a federal and state institution to the best an enclave can manage. Before her walled neighborhood is invaded and destroyed by a mix of homeless poor led by rich kids acting out on mind-altering drugs, the protagonist, Lauren Olamina, helped her mother, a former college professor, run the school for the community children out of their home. Home schooling or small community schools in each enclave are now the norm, and all of the children of the local community are trained in gun handling as a matter of course.<sup>67</sup> Acting as a teacher, Lauren also plans for an eventual emergency, and although her best friend cannot accept it, such flight and survival plans, including travel food, water purification tablets, medical supplies, and weapons prove necessary. She enjoys teaching, but Lauren notes with

bitterness that she “watched education become more a privilege of the rich than the basic necessity that it must be if civilized society is to survive.”<sup>68</sup> During the first discussions of school voucher, Butler offers this stark depiction of the limits to the privatization of education and how it will limit social mobility and harden class boundaries.

During the 1990s, as manufacturing jobs leaked across the border into Mexico or overseas, the industrial cities in the Rustbelt and elsewhere emptied at an alarming rate. Almost as quickly as new Internet industries formed, the older sectors moved their service personnel and call centers into the Southeast, Southwest, and overseas. American manufacturing, especially large-scale equipment and consumer electronics and appliances, had steadily faced competition from Germany and Japan beginning in the 1960s. By the late 1980s and early 1990s, many US production facilities were closed as economic leaders turned to “much more profitable areas like high tech and high finance.”<sup>69</sup> In the 1990s the competition against the dollar was framed by the rise of the European Union, and later the “Asian Tiger,” though that imploded shortly after Butler’s *Parable of the Talents* was published in 1998. Manual labor was still “imported” in the form of much cheaper immigrant or migrant labor, especially in the agricultural and construction sectors, from Mexico and Latin America, but trained workers and specialists lost their jobs as their cities lost factories. Media talking heads, business leaders, and the stray economist talked about retraining and retooling the American labor force, but the trend in underemployment and a shift to the growing service industry became the reality for many, and in the 1990s, incorporated many former white collar workers as well. Butler’s *Parables* warns of economic and social instability; Lauren’s enclave were all middle class, former university professors who now run schools out of their living rooms,

or engineers who raise chicken in their garages. During the Pox jobs are scarce and the majority of those available are corporate, but operate as indenture and pay only in room and board. This system of corporate indenture is a parody of the company towns like Pullman and their company scrip in the late 19th century that restricted employees from not just spending in non-company stores, but from leaving the town itself.

In this setting there are no long-term positions outside corporate careers or the few surviving tenured positions in universities, and most jobs are manual day labor, and even those for private businesses and farms often become a form of indentured servitude. In the most extreme situations Butler compares laborers and citizens to slaves, as commodities defined by function: voter, consumer, service provider, etc. In part, this is a function of the shift from manufacturing to service industry, but it also recognizes the function of mass media in dealing with an electorate defined by polls, or possibly the fracturing of the political left and their self-destructive efforts to define ever more distinct and separate identities in the culture wars Todd Gitlin describes in *The Twilight of Common Dreams* (1995). The lack of a civil society goes far beyond the decline of ethnic neighborhoods and the suburbs; it also extends to this view of an individual as just a resource. Butler emphasizes the ethnic component as her metaphor draws on the urban decline of the 1980s and 1990s, but it is not limited to any single ethnicity and so avoids the divisiveness of identity politics. She harshly criticizes the embedded racism of American society in another of her examples of the rise of the Christian American Church (itself a metaphor for the Christian Coalition or the New Right in American politics in the 1990s). A church declares that it has been robbed and in the absence of any evidence, the authorities arrest all of the Black men—laborers—who shelter there; their



sentence is to become indentured, but once in this position they have no way to get any other job or to advance out of this status.<sup>70</sup> One of the routes open to the young, poor, and healthy is to donate “a kidney or cornea” to those who could pay well, a trope straight out of the urban myth of kidney thefts or the Chinese lottery in the *X-Files*; but in the finest cyberpunk style, this money does not enrich the donor because it will only pay off a portion of the indenture.<sup>71</sup> Butler questions the very basis of humanity in this future US because citizens become defined by function, as a commodity or an easily transferred service, and therefore they are traded and regarded as any other raw resource.

Both country and citizens in this dystopic view are nothing but resources for the power elite of the United States, and increasingly for those of the same class outside national borders. Corporate contracts also function as a form of indenture, and while an analogue for the new H1B Visas (for corporate professionals), they are actually a condemnation of the not the legal, but rather illegal immigrant labor as period media coverage would suggest that nannies without benefits and agricultural laborers constitute the majority of immigrant workers. In fact, media coverage of the 1990s suggests that illegal immigrants—from Latin America and Eastern Europe, or elsewhere—are typically paid “under the table,” with few if any benefits, and are found in the homes of the rich, whether liberal or conservative. These illegal workers who can be threatened with calls to the INS, or revocation of green card (and sometimes refugee) status, have few rights and little recourse in American society; their equivalent in Butler are the servants hired as live-in domestic labor, many of whom contractually surrender their rights, are sometimes forced to wear a behavior modifying “slave collar” that helps them to be more compliant, up to and including forced sexual performance.<sup>72</sup> The poor are a form of slave labor, and

the middle class evaporates, becoming bound corporate workers. Respect for the land as a common heritage and holding slips back to its Industrial Era usage as Japanese, German, even Canadian corporations buy entire towns and overwrite their local laws with corporate regulations, suborning civil rights and civic protections to corporate culture, efficiency, and profits. This corporatization of what is left of America reflects not just the monstrous mega-corporations of early cyberpunk, but also the parceling out of America in *The Wild Shore* and *Warday* a decade earlier.<sup>73</sup> In the era of NAFTA and the Internet Boom, the fear of civil decline continues and identification of “others” ever sharper and closer to home.

### **The Postman (film)**

As the audience for video media almost always numbers in the millions, the film version of *The Postman* (1997) is perhaps more widely known than the novel. Brin’s initial story captured not only the renewed fears of a nuclear war, but it forecast the potential threat of isolationist militants—survivalists—in American culture. Directed by Costner, the film drops the entire Cyclops AI plotline and shifts much of the focus to General Bethlehem and his Army. Loosely modeled on Brin’s Holnists, this army wears uniforms rather than military surplus, but evoke comparisons with Nazi skinheads and white purity adherents and the rhetoric of late-1990s nativists and anti-immigrants on American talk radio, and also among European rightwing political parties. The film reuses the standard images of post-apocalyptic survival (worn clothes, patched, hand-worked structures, and small fields of crops) as small farming communities grow slowly from the ruins. This version of the story draws more upon Cold War elements stereotyped as a military fantasy, up to the final showdown between a diverse citizen militia of all

ages and ethnicities arrayed against the racist and predatory survivalist army with their military-grade weapons. Bethlehem's Army draws even more from survivalist themes in taking recruits by force and preying upon small villages in a neo-feudal style. Disease and contagion return as a trope, drawing on the older examples of the 1950s and 1960s and responses to post-World War II famine and the late 1950s Avian Flu pandemic, but perhaps most resonant with the 1980s and early 1990s AIDS anxiety because of their sexual aspect: many men have been rendered sterile by the "supermumps," so those who remain fertile are a physical resource. Similar stories of declining birth rates, male fertility, and reduced sperm counts<sup>74</sup> also ties into the "dying race" trope that lies outside the scope of this study but is also implied in Suzy McKee Charnas's *Walk to the End of the World* (1974), and critical to Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaids Tale* (1985) and P.D. James's *The Children of Men* (1992).

### **The Age of Crisis**

Coming so close on the heels of millennial fears of the Y2K Bug, confidence in technology (and the cyberpunk future) reeled a bit with events like the Enron scandal. In 2006, the American housing price bubble burst, beginning a cascade of economic failures that contributed to the beginning of the Great Recession, a series of interconnected crises that have yet to resolve.<sup>75</sup> The return of fears of a violent apocalypse after the attacks of 9/11 sparked shifts in spending. Later, bankruptcies and corporate restructuring shed many white-collar jobs; more illegal immigrant workers were used in agriculture and industry even though many publicly pushed for more and stronger restrictions, protections, and regulations against such an influx. The arguments for and against global

warming has become a dialogue on global climate change, and more attention has been directed not just at the threat of melting glaciers and coastal flooding, but also to possible water shortages. Beginning in 2003 and extending through 2004, BBC Online posted a series presenting possible environmental crises, including one discussion regarding global water resources and the importance of the vast freshwater reserves in the American Great Lakes, as well as the effects on California, the American Southwest, and Mexico from declining rivers.<sup>76</sup> Messages of resource scarcity, increasing food prices, declining fresh water resources, and the increase in droughts (especially the American Southeast farming regions) tie in with images of cities and human communities besieged by nature from such highly publicized events as the December 2003 Indonesian tsunami and the flooding of New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

In the aftermath of 9/11 several films projected this siege mentality by showing the Earth once again under attack, but using primarily American locations as foci, including the remake of *War of the Worlds* by Spielberg (2005), extending through *The Core*, *The Day After Tomorrow*, and arguably *The Matrix* trilogy. The city as target is not apocalyptic, but many of those films in the early 2000s carried the vibe of crisis and imminent class warfare, including *Batman Begins* (2005), *X-Men: The Last Stand* (2006), the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy (2001-03), although each attack or invasion fails or is forestalled. Actual post-apocalyptic fictions began with the television series *Jeremiah* (2002-2003), *Battlestar Galactica* (BSG) (2003-2009), and *Jericho* (2006-2008), and an array of novels, notably S.M. Stirling's ongoing Emberverse series that began in 2004 with *Dies the Fire*. The producers of *Jericho* point out that the series responds as much to the failures in post-Katrina New Orleans as it does to the earlier occupations of

Afghanistan and Iraq, both contexts beyond Jeremiah's limited run. The *BSG* miniseries covered four seasons stretched over a much longer period with tropes that tie into the political crisis that mounted during the national elections of 2006 and 2008. The Emverse is not, now, the only post-apocalyptic setting in literature, but until the late 2000s it was one of the very few to deal with the immediate aftermath of one that did not involve zombies.

### **Jeremiah**

The series *Jeremiah* takes place in the West and Pacific Northwest of what was the United States in 2016, more than fifteen years after a laboratory-born virus escapes into the world, killing almost every human who has gone through puberty. The series was inspired by a Belgian comic book series that began in 1979 and has been translated into English since 1982. In 2002 the Showtime cable blended aspects of the initial Belgian Cold War fears with millennial angst and post-9/11 dread, especially for American audiences. In many respects the world of *Jeremiah* is patterned on the earlier global pandemics of *Earth Abides* (1949), *I Am Legend* (1954), and *The Stand* (1978) that leave only a fraction of the population alive but most of the cities and structures intact and filled with surplus. The point of departure in this series is age, experience, and knowledge; the vast majority of survivors are thirteen or younger when "the Big Death" takes their families. There is the reversion to "the garden" (after a fashion) as nature and wildlife rebound without the incessant pressure and dangers of human development, and fish and game are even more plentiful than remaining caches of canned goods (if one knows how to hunt or fish). Movement is free for there are few borders and no one needs papers, but travel is not always safe because hate groups, racial conflict, slavery, and

dangerous cults of personality have grown from the old half-understood prejudices. This is also no new age of innocence because most of the current leaders, now in their late-twenties or early thirties, remember the uses of technology and electricity and want to reacquire them to either protect themselves or to extend their control over others.

One overarching narrative of the series is about rediscovering the values and cultures that make up America as Jeremiah and Kurdy travel throughout this frontier renewed by plague. Buildings and shelter are plentiful, and a wide array of electronics remains available, yet inoperable without power. Small arms are easy to find and military grade weapons wait to be found in hidden caches or deserted installations. Over the course of the series the control of technology, gas/fuel, vehicles, electronics, and weapons are dominant, recurring plot points and devices. Their control and possessions are part of what gives leaders their power and position in the eventual network of regenerated communities. After meeting and joining forces, Jeremiah and Kurdy begin working for one such group, Thunder Mountain, which is controlled by the now-grown children of the scientists and military staff that died while operating Cheyenne Mountain<sup>77</sup> as a research and survival facility when the plague overwhelmed the world. The leader of Thunder Mountain, Marcus, has managed to keep radios, satellite connections, and other technology in service; he also commands a stockpile of well-maintained weapons and vehicles. The complex is self-sufficient; they have their own internal power and grow foods hydroponically, but what they lack is manpower. The primary conflict that drives the series begins after Jeremiah convinces Marcus to use the resources of Thunder Mountain, especially the skills and knowledge base they have maintained and the tools they possess, to try and help others rebuild.

But outside Thunder Mountain, even where there are larger collections of survivors, few have tried to recreate communities. Most attempts are small towns where the children grew up and tried to maintain or recreate the lives they knew before the plague. One important exception is Clarefield, similar to Barter Town (*Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome*), and its leader, Theo, a smart, ruthless woman who believes there is a place called “the end of the world” where the world never stopped working and civilization did not collapse. The town is materialist and trade-driven, as much tied to *The Deal of Bone Dance* as it is to Corvallis’s attempts to restore technology in *The Postman*; it thrives on barter in its market and trades in its “saloon” where anything can be exchanged—cans of food, bathtub gin, or even an hour with the girl serving it. The most precious commodities are power (working batteries or generators), fuel, weapons, then food and alcohol, although information that leads to working technology and power sources always receives a premium. And while Theo is paranoid, ruthless, and casual in her attitude toward killing, her desire is to protect herself and her people rather than being the biggest market or conquering the other survivors; these are the goals of the remaining “elders” who control Valhalla Sector in season one, and Daniel’s Army in season two.

Literacy and scientific or technical knowledge—expertise—are the real currency and treasure in this post-cataclysmic world. The plague kills all adults, which means everyone with more than a middle school education, other than a meager handful of immunes who have decided to either hide in new nonreligious “monasteries” and “nunneries,” or who have become the power behind the political façade of Daniel, the Eastern warlord and slaver. The series pilot, “The Long Road,”<sup>78</sup> establishes that Theo has organized Clarefield along a warped high school model; the former “jocks” are her

guards and strongmen, the drama kids run the saloon and endless dance and drum circle; and her pet “geeks” are rewarded with topless cheerleaders when they successfully redevelop a technology, like the light bulb, barometer, and steam engine. This theme recurs in the episode “The Bag,”<sup>79</sup> where Reece Davenport uses an old medical satchel as a talisman to give him the confidence to treat people as best he can with the half-understood techniques he learned watching his father practice as a GP before the plague. Perhaps as an even more pointed metaphor regarding US education and the importance of its embattled public schools and universities is the episode “Out of the Ashes,”<sup>80</sup> where Jeremiah and Kurdy must travel to Denver and protect one of the last surviving libraries from an extremist group, the Order of Final Grace. During the course of the episode both explain how books are important to them: Jeremiah’s mother was an English teacher and Kurdy immersed himself in genre stories (SF is implied) to escape his difficult home life. While this can be interpreted as a typical privileging of intellect and education by SF media, Kurdy’s comment that “libraries are more sacred than churches to me,”<sup>81</sup> returns to the heated debates around school vouchers, privatized education, and in particular the friction between education and religion in the early 2000s, especially that surrounding the teaching of “intelligent design” in opposition to evolution. In the world of *Jeremiah*, books are a resource, but education and critical thinking are themselves weapons of survival, warning that vouchers will be useless after cataclysm.

Since humanity created the means to extinguish itself, a large number of stories have considered the struggle afterwards not just to survive, but also to hold onto the civilization. For many, the challenge is to remain a technological society and maintain or learn to replace machines that increase productivity; for others, the goal is better defenses



and weapons. Others concentrate on preserving of literacy, knowledge, and the means of scientific discovery as in *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, the Corvallins in *The Postman*, and both Theo and another leader, Michelle, in the episode “Mother of Invention” in *Jeremiah*.<sup>82</sup> Michelle’s people have already developed small-scale hydro-generators, and are beginning to quietly distribute them as well as the practical knowledge and blueprints to make more—very much what Jeremiah asks of Marcus. But Michelle’s plans extend beyond machines to preserving the heritage of culture by acquiring and storing paintings, sculpture, and literature. Michelle trades tech and supplies for art, which she admits “...only has value in a free society that has the wealth and free time to enjoy it,” but she is aware that art “is our history . . . who we are and the faces of who we were.”<sup>83</sup> Before becoming *The Postman*, Gordon kept himself fed by performing plays as he traveled West, but Michelle has a more refined appreciation of art; for her it is a bridge between the old world and the one to come through its ability to educate and inspire. Perhaps more critically, these sources of art and their influence cannot instruct in the ways of war, or the use of weapons, which implies the possibility of pursuing another path than the industrial, a theme at the heart of the Emberverses.

## **Jericho**

By the time *Jericho* premiered in the fall of 2006, not only had the American public been reminded of the old Reagan-era nuclear holocaust fears, but they’d also been horrified by the coverage of the 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami, and shocked by the aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita along the Gulf Coast, especially in New Orleans. The artificially engineered California energy crisis of 2000-01,<sup>84</sup> the first sharp upticks in oil prices after the invasion of Iraq in 2003, and the Sundance premiere of *Al*

Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth* in May 2006 all round out the context for the production of *Jericho*. Set in a small Kansas farming-community cut off and slowly running out of supplies and under the threat of invasion after a series of twenty-three nuclear devices destroy an equal number of major American cities, *Jericho* tackles the American response to a series of localized but devastating attacks predicated by terrorists, tapping into a whole host of post-9/11 fears and anxieties about the "threat within" and its ability to destroy the American way of Life. In the DVD extra segment, "What If?," the producers of *Jericho* point out that the series was conceived to not only reflect the earlier nuclear fears, but to raise awareness of the inadequacy of old bomb shelters and civil defense plans, and to emphasize that this old mode of thinking still tinges federal and state policies, even after the post-9/11 formation of the Department of Homeland Security. The scope of the series' plotlines contribute to their argument that "we have no city, state, or federal organization with *the resources* to meet another Katrina level event" in even one city, much less across the nation. The story-arcs cover a 6-8 month period, from the moment the explosions rip across the US in mid-September through the events of the series finale the following Spring, exploring how the town copes as it runs out of fuel, medicine, and food; how it must defend against larger groups of invaders; and how it adapts to a barter and black market economy. In the absence of informed consent the town must accept corporate administration (control) while under the threat of marshal law.

The population of the town of Jericho and its surrounding farms numbers less than seven thousand at the time of the attacks, and they are supported by one small health clinic. Most of their economy is based through Gracie's Market, a café, and a couple of

hardware stores; the nearest department store, a Walmart, is in the nearby factory town of New Bern. In the first hours of the crisis, after news of a mushroom cloud over Denver has spread, the town descends into a near-riot over gas and the goods in the market once the electricity goes out; this marks the shift toward barter exchange as both credit cards and ATMs remain useless, even when the power is restored briefly later. As with most contemporary post-cataclysm narratives, food becomes an ever-greater problem, because even a farming community is largely dependent on shipments from distribution centers. Modern supply-chains only distribute a two to three day volume at a time. Dale, the stock clerk and eventual owner of the Market, finds an abandoned train<sup>85</sup> outside town and recovers much of its shipment (a large one, likely destined for the Walmart), but even these supplies, the shared crops of local harvests,<sup>86</sup> a Chinese relief airdrop,<sup>87</sup> and the last of the local game are not enough to keep the town from the edge of starvation by the end of winter. Isolation weakens the town. The shortage of medicine and health care underscore this by showing the limitations of the town's facilities when the mayor is disabled by a major infection, forcing a dangerous trip to the county seat in quest of a powerful antibiotic,<sup>88</sup> and later when the lack of power results in the death of the town's GP, April Green, during surgery.<sup>89</sup> Unlike the Stronghold of *Lucifer's Hammer* and the communities of the Cascades in *The Postman*, Jericho is vulnerably situated on a plain and only partially protected by two rivers. It does have particular resources in its nearby commercial salt mine; the creators realized the importance of salt for health and food preservation, and make it the town's only industry outside farming, but it is more a plot device and underutilized as a resource.<sup>90</sup> In contrast, the industrial town of New Bern, Jericho's high school football nemesis, has a larger population but no farms or natural

resources, and decides to produce munitions in its factory in order to invade Jericho and divide their farms and food among the New Bern leadership.

In economic terms, Jericho makes a point to respect capitalism and personal property rights far longer into their emergency than any of the other post-cataclysmic narratives, but this exacerbates the eventual deprivation and suffering as much as it indicts their leadership. The writers repeatedly establish that food, gas, and electricity are critical, but neither mayor ask the townspeople of this prairie town to inventory personal stores or contribute; nor do they assess the abandoned and vacant homes and ranches. Beyond the initial requisitions from Gracie's market, and the worthless vouchers they give her, the mayors do little more than prioritize new sources of fuel to maintain the generators at the bar (it has satellite television and is their communications link before the EMP<sup>91</sup>) and the health center. Beyond fuel, or the theme of depleted food reserves and the lack of game animals, only the town's salt mine figures more prominently in a number of episodes. While Mayor Gray Anderson is a part owner, and this explains his frequent interest, thematically salt is one of the necessities of life, but it also used as a preservative, linking themes of memory and nostalgia to the decline of this American community. When other supplies are threatened, as when the paramilitary group from Ravenwood arrives near town to "requisition" supplies for the state government,<sup>92</sup> Jake Green organizes a force to turn them back, but Anderson says "better someone else," be forced to surrender their supplies than Jericho—that someone becomes the nearby town of New Bern.

As with all large-scale disasters, currency becomes unstable between shortages and price gouging, eventually giving way to a barter economy. Gracie begins the most

severe price gouging,<sup>93</sup> but not before she starts the black market by operating as a front for Jonah Prowse's stolen goods, a practice that ultimately gets her killed.<sup>94</sup> Alcohol seems to be one of the resources shared among the survivors; Mary Bailey, the bar owner, and Gracie, then Dale after Gracie's death, have supplies of "moonshine," although Mary donates some to the health center to be used as antiseptic and anesthetic. While Dale does not price gouge, he does leverage supplies for a portion of expected harvests<sup>95</sup> and later decides to no longer accept currency because few others will accept it for payment in return. At this point, he takes possession of the second largest farm around Jericho, recruiting a group of men from the refugees to protect and work the farm; he also offers each of them a stake in the farm as a cooperative venture<sup>96</sup> so it will also be their farm to work but also to protect.

The Blackjack Trading Post offers not only a darker and harsher contrast in its post-cataclysmic trades and view of resources, but it underscores Jericho's limited access to information and manufacturing. In Blackjack, Jake's party learns that there are five contenders for President, that twenty-three or twenty-four cities were attacked. Rumors abound about who started things, but they learn that the ICBMs launched in "9:02" targeted and devastated Iran and North Korea, the reported authors of the attacks on America. The trading post is an exchange for everything from food, to tools, to clothes and other surplus; however, when the Jericho group discovers evidence that this may include slaves of some variety, they decide not to trade.<sup>97</sup> This analog for the global market and processes of globalization is a marketplace that only trades in goods—energy, food, tools, machined parts, weapons, and people—no currencies, no "futures," and nothing on consignment or credit. The Blackjack Trading Post is a heavy handed

criticism of a marketplace that has no effective oversight and no enforcement of ethics rules or restrictions, but this thread of predatory capitalism returns after the war with New Bern is ended by the intervention of the Allied States of America (ASA) and Jennings & Rall are given management of the reconstruction (occupation).

Under “Reconstruction,” in the second season, Dale continues to operate a black market out of his store and serve as a “backdoor” for medicine for the clinic and other supplies for the town. At this point the metaphor shifts from post-Katrina New Orleans to Baghdad under US occupation with corporate administrators; in this case Jericho has become occupied by the ASA, whose President gives Jennings & Rall (a Halliburton clone) an exclusive contract to restore the town. J&R assign their subsidiary Ravenwood (analogue for Xe Services LLC, formerly Blackwater) to manage the day-to-day operations and maintain order. Unfortunately, everyone is “bent”; the administrator is Goetz, the same Ravenwood thug who tried to kill Jake and his brother in “Rogue River,” and later tried to force the town to give up their supplies under threat of “mandatory requisition.”<sup>98</sup> J&R manage to restore 70% of Jericho’s power network and expect to complete the job within another thirty days (when the series ended), but at the same time they have complete control over the influx of all supplies, products, and technology and have the “right” to inspect and “verify the quality” of any foods and pharmaceuticals sold within the town and its environs. Even as J&R helps the local farmers and businesses begin reconstruction, the former IRS agent, Mimi Clark warns Stanley Richmond that the loan agreement he almost signs is predatory and that J&R can take possession of his farm, and with no “national” currency yet in effect any old currency is exchanged by rates set by J&R to their benefit. Dale’s black market operates in contravention of J&R’s

authority and as a form of resistance to their corrupt management practices, profiteering, and price controls. J&R, who have a habit of freezing accounts at will, conducting extended registration investigations, and confiscate all “unlicensed” goods are the personification of corrupt economic policies, business practices, and weakened regulations;<sup>99</sup> they are the evolution of Bull’s monopoly embodied in A.A. Albrecht and the Power Authority in *Bone Dance*—an example of Reagan-style deregulation run wild.

### **The Embervers and The Change**

There is no comet, alien invasion, and the Earth itself does not spawn volcanoes, tsunamis, or a new ice age, but some think an EMP may have caused the sudden failure of all machinery and electronics after the bright white flash, until they realize there have been no nuclear explosions. The Embervers was created at 3:15 PM EST, on March 17, 1998, when “the Change” altered the laws of physics on and near the Earth. Afterwards, electricity, high-pressure gas reactions, and fast combustion (all explosives including gunpowder) no longer function—wiping out most of the technology created in the industrial revolutions of the past three hundred years, and any forms of firearms. Unlike the near futures of *The Wild Shore*, *Warday*, *Bone Dance*, the *Parable* novels, or *Jeremiah*, S.M. Stirling begins his series in the recent past, during the heyday of globalization and the explosive expansion of the information economy, which makes the failure of complex machines and electronics a much more jarring dislocation than it might have been had the event been set after 9/11, or during the current Great Recession. The Change does more than throw America back into a Middle Ages it never had; it also destabilizes confidence in science itself by altering the laws of nature, making recovery a question of “if” rather than “when.” In most of these post-cataclysmic worlds recovery is

a function of how much knowledge has been lost, but in the Emberverses they must rebuild science now that their tools and knowledge are obsolete.

American entrepreneurs, technologists, and investors were able to take advantage of one of the most important developments of the second industrial revolution: the professionalization and institutionalization of discovery and research in the first industrial research laboratories.<sup>100</sup> The United States was able to grow swiftly by incorporating new discoveries including organic chemistry (fertilizer and new compounds) to feed a burgeoning population; explosives to clear land and bore tunnels; electricity to tie far-flung states and territories together through the telegraph, then telephone, and radio; and the internal combustion engine and networks of roads. The nation then rose to great power status as one of the leaders of the third industrial revolution with innovations in electronics and information systems and technology—each the result of synergistic advances in scientific theory, applied engineering, and more refined and precise instruments with which to build, construct, and measure. In the first decade of the twenty-first century America maintains the most powerful and technologically advanced military force and sets the standards (at the moment) for research and higher education in its research universities, and in a flash, the Change removes even these last vestiges of the American century.

The first book of the Emberverses describes the descent into anarchy after modern technology stops working and carries through much of the year that follows as most of humanity dies of starvation, disease, or exposure. *Dies the Fire* (2004) offers homage to its precursors, *Lucifer's Hammer* and *The Postman*; from the former, the settings of Idaho and Corvallis, Oregon and the threat of survivalists, and from the latter, the flight from



city to countryside, starvation, disease, cannibals, and the attacks of (formerly) urban populations on rural homes and communities. Stirling updates the story and characters to incorporate not only information technology, but also the increased interdependence of everyone to the global economy and just-in-time supply chain of local supermarkets. In this 1998, the failure of high speed transport and electronics leaves resources in queue to be processed, and fewer goods on the shelves, whether fresh or canned.<sup>101</sup> The technology that permitted amazing advances in efficiency and increased production and reduced waste sets the stage for more than 90% of the human population to die of starvation, disease, and exposure. But have been no earthquakes, tsunamis, or nuclear missiles to wipe out most of the people living in the cities and hills. Stirling goes beyond establishing the scarcity of food emphasizing the cultural impact that “If everyone shared fairly, that would simply mean that everyone died of starvation. There wasn't enough to go around, and no authority to enforce rationing if there was.”<sup>102</sup> The primary protagonist, Juniper Mackenzie, realizes this, and later refuses to share her meager stores with the “official” representative from Salem who requisitions supplies to feed those in emergency camps because it will only mean that they all starve.<sup>103</sup> The antagonist, Professor Norman Armingier, takes Tolkien’s symbol of Sauron (the lidless eye) as a joke (for the reader and the genre readers within the novel) and sets himself up as the ruler of Portland by seizing ships and shipping containers of grain and foodstuffs. This food supply allows him to recruit from among the local gangs, and using his knowledge of history and medieval weapons he establishes a large force of fighting men to control his labor force of slaves.<sup>104</sup>

The second two novels, *The Protectors War* (2005) and *A Meeting in Corvallis* (2006) describe the four societies that have grown up from the ashes of the old world and come into conflict in the former Pacific Northwest: The Bearkillers, the clans of the Mackenzie, the city of Corvallis, and the Portland Protective Association (PPA). Even in earlier texts, such as *Lucifer's Hammer*, where it is implied that the Senator dies at the end, there are still indications that parts of the federal government have survived. The early decades of this megatext imply that not just civilization, but the United States will be restored in the near future, and suggest that aberrations like the Stronghold's POWs/slaves will be sorted in due course, just as the alliance in *The Postman* begins to build towards its own larger scale, social recovery after the Holnist army is broken. In the Emberverses, Arminger does mellow over the eight years that pass between the first and second novel, eventually recognizing the slaves as serfs and in rare cases as indentured servants. The critical difference in the Emberverses is the recognition of the contributions made by those with the right formal education (history, engineering, and agriculture), hobbies (brewers, blacksmiths, medieval recreationists, weavers, musicians, wood carvers, bow makers), and military (combat or strategy) training, or survival experience or practice using alternative and holistic medicines.

The majority of those with special skills, training, or experience are middle class hobbyists, or middle class academics, while veterans and survivalists tend to come more from the working class and working poor. Many of those who survived did so because they were able to assess the implications of the Change, and rather than follow old responses like the Cold War bunker mentality, they adapted to the new situation. Arminger based the social and political formation of the PPA on his own research into

the Normans and twelfth-century Europe, not necessarily the best possible option for this changed world. The PPA recruits from gangs and criminals for the core of its soldiers, and skilled workers including: blacksmiths, farriers, plumbers, fitters, machinists, bricklayers, carpenters, doctors, dentists, and gardeners or farmers, but general laborers are forced to become slaves and “accept the collar” for their meager food.<sup>105</sup> Mike Havel uses his Iraqi war experience and Force Recon background to organize and train the Bearkillers when the band formed on the trail west, but this also limits the group to those they rescue or recruit. Havel is fortunate to rescue engineer and former CEO, Ken Larsson; Will Hutton a horse trainer who has an interest in the history of cavalry; Pam Arnstein, a veterinarian and Renaissance weapons enthusiast; and surgeon, Aaron Rothman. The Bearkillers are trained by Havel, Hutton, and Arnstein to be a mobile group of horse-archers, but Larsson is the new “wizard,” taking over Dan Forrester’s role from *Lucifer’s Hammer*. His engineering background eventually enables him to understand what the change has done to the laws of physics, as well as to develop new machines and weapons that will work.<sup>106</sup> The value of education is not lost on the other communities. Both the Bearkillers and Mackenzies maintain a system of public education for their children, although it goes beyond arithmetic and history to physical training for weapons. The Mackenzies also require “herb lore and the use of the spinning wheel—and not differentiated by gender, but so children could contribute with chores and to find those best suited to different tasks.”<sup>107</sup> Even Arminger “resurrects” Pacific University as he recognizes the need for new “professionals, engineers, accountants, [and] priests” because so much pre-change training is obsolete.<sup>108</sup>

The world ten years after the Change sketches not only a post-American world, but also an anti-modern world without oil, petrochemicals, synthetics, and high-energy intensive processes. One of the axioms of the Change is that farmland with no mechanical amplifiers, added fertilizers, or insecticide is much less productive, and that the “lower the productivity, the harder the people on the top have to squeeze to get a surplus.”<sup>109</sup> This alternate future does have the benefit of advances in agriculture beyond the use of machines and industrial fertilizers thanks to the agricultural faculty who survived in Corvallis at Oregon State University, but the difference in production requires more farm labor, more manual labor, and allows fewer to specialize (warriors, intelligentsia, priests, craftspeople), especially with compulsory schooling. Even nine years after the Change, salvage provides the valued luxury items<sup>110</sup> in the Willamette economy, but the need to defend against bandits, raiders, and slavers continues to keep those outside Portland divided and overworked. It takes stable political entities, if not actual states, to mint and exchange currency that will be accepted outside their domains. To some extent each of the new cultures function as a nation and accept each other’s currency in good faith (even when at war); the rate of exchange depends on both military power and reputation in terms of quality. There is an equivalency set by the largest groups that forms the basis for this mixed barter and currency economy derived from the bows, farm equipment, and art created by the Mackenzie crafters; the mercenary services and training of the Bearkillers; the salvage of the PPA from the abandoned cities; and the “advanced” products of the factories of Corvallis. In this Stirling goes farther than most writers of fantasy, when he addresses issues that science fiction can largely ignore by depicting the actual post-collapse economy. Stirling’s representation of an evolving

market that must integrate the fading memories of a late-capitalist society with a pre-industrial production system provides something a model that links to more recent post-Americas like Paolo Bacigalupi's *The Wind-Up Girl* (2009) or Suzanne Collins's *Hunger Games* (2008). All of these worlds detail the more competitive and harsher market economy of a post-oil world, and each includes economic collapse and a backstory of global revolutions and revolts, a trending element in post-cataclysmic narratives.

### **Battlestar Galactica**

As the movies *Broken Arrow* (1996), *The Peacemaker* (1997), *The World is Not Enough* (1999), and other techno-thrillers made clear in the 1990s, the fears of nuclear attacks and terrorism in particular did not abate with the end of the Cold War. And after 9/11, the fears of WMDs—including nuclear threats—proliferated in series such as *24* (2001-10); within SF, *Jericho* followed the techno-thriller formula, but after a successful series of nuclear terrorist attacks. *Battlestar Galactica* (2003-09) took the theme far beyond any of the others by incorporating it into a setting of race war and genocide. Where *Jericho*, *Jeremiah*, or *The Wild Shore* start their recoveries amid the shards and fragments of small towns and secluded, rural enclaves, *BSG* begins in full flight from the near-Genocide of the Colonial civilization with thirty billion dead and twelve planets annihilated from space by nuclear bombardments. The series tracks the efforts of the eponymous battlestar and its fleet of civilian refugee vessels to escape the Cylons and find a refuge. Over the course of the five-year story, the fleet and its nearly 50,000 survivors are whittled away by Cylon attacks, terrorist infiltration and bombs, disease, and finally starvation and hopelessness. The desperate attempts of the *Galactica* to find a new planet on which to settle encapsulates the resources and economics heuristic in three

broad ways: first, the loss and replacement of essential resources: water, food, and fuel; second, maintain and scavenging technological resources (and manufacturing); and third—the human capital—pilots, professionals, labor, and most importantly, children.

Almost every series that relies on a setting in outer space invariably incorporates plots that threatens the loss of air or life support; but the loss of water and food in *BSG* menace the whole fleet, and by extension the entire human race, offering a reflection of human concerns on a planetary scale. As a component of first global warming, and now climate change, the global attention to water as a diminishing resource has grown over the past decade. In 2000, Alex Kirby reported for BBC News that “200 scientists in 50 countries had identified water shortage as one of the two most worrying problems for the new millennium (the other was global warming).”<sup>111</sup> In 2003 Kirby later emphasized that the crisis was growing worse, and that water needed to be better managed, especially where it had already been privatized, and that even plans to build more desalinization plants would not meet immediate, much less future needs.<sup>112</sup> Although the *Galactica*’s water recovery system is 100% efficient, it provides the resource to more than a third of the fleet that does not have such technology. North America has the largest freshwater lakes on Earth, but they are gradually succumbing to industrial pollution and other threats, such as Asian carp<sup>113</sup> and their own depletion (by global warming and as bottled commodity)<sup>114</sup>, raising questions about their long-term survival and underscoring future water scarcity as a global issue.

In the second episode, “Water” a saboteur destroys half of the *Galactica*’s water storage and recovery apparatus, forcing the desperate fleet to search for the resource, which slows it and makes it more vulnerable to its Cylon pursuers. When search teams

find a source, recovering it for the fleet will be dangerous work and the only unused labor are the occupants of a prison ship. The prisoners are offered points toward early release in exchange for their risk, but they organize as a union under terrorist/freedom fighter Tom Zarek, and refuse to participate. Ultimately, Lee Adama is forced to agree to Zarek's demands—that President Roslin will comply with Colonial law and schedule a Presidential election rather than continue as executive for the duration of the emergency.<sup>115</sup> But water is not the only essential resource that becomes a problem on BSG as their food sources also become contaminated.

Several weeks after the escape from the Cylons on New Caprica, the fleet's food supply becomes contaminated and they are left with only a week's worth of reduced rations. Searchers find an algae planet, but the logistics require that the entire fleet jump to this new location, a necessary yet highly risky operation involving jumping through a star cluster that costs them two ships and at least one veteran fighter pilot. The algae will provide basic if bland sustenance, but in some ways this problem operates as an analogy for the growing problems with agriculture caused by climate change. Justin Gillis noted in 2011 that over the past decade farm output "has slowed to the point that it is failing to keep up with the demand for food" and that "once-large stockpiles [are] down to worrisome levels."<sup>116</sup> Gillis describes the effects of more severe storms and their greater frequency, earlier argument that "the bad weather hitting agricultural production . . . is starting to look more fundamental and permanent than El Nino and La Nina."<sup>117</sup> Paul Krugman, writing for *the New York Times*, expands beyond food and water shortages by linking climate change and the demand and competition for resources and commodities in developing markets, such as China and India, leaving currently rich countries to face

more economic pressure from the more desperate poor countries on the edge.<sup>118</sup>

Although our technology and science has allowed us to expand beyond the earlier dire predictions of Malthus, there are limits to the amount of land that can be converted to agricultural use; the damage done by increasingly violent storms and diminishing fresh water reserves are both portents of a more fragile future for an increasing global population.

As a battlestar, the Galactica has ample resources to service its squadrons, and to fabricate small parts and replacements, but it lacks the extensive resources necessary to replace its fighters or conduct large-scale repairs and refits. The fleet, but most especially the Galactica must deal with the continuing flight through space and relentless attacks of the Cylons that grind down the people and wear away at the ships. Although the first stop the fleet makes in the pilot is Ragnar Station,<sup>119</sup> where they stock up on arms and ammunition, and they are partially resupplied by the Pegasus when it joins the fleet, by the time they find the second Earth they are scraping the bottom of their bins. The Cylons can download and replicate, and (initially) appear to have resources to build more ships and Centurions, but the Galactica has only the ingenuity of its people and the limited pool of humanity among the fleet to draw upon. Chief Tyrol, his deck crew, and several pilots build the Stealth Ship out of spare and hand fabricated parts.<sup>120</sup> This effort begins as a morale boost, and later becomes critical as the Blackbird is used to destroy the Resurrection Ship and cripple Cylon pursuit for a time. Unfortunately, the fabrication of the Blackbird required scavenging across the fleet and there are just not enough materials to make more. The Galactica itself takes damage from a nuclear missile in the miniseries, and continues to take damage throughout the series as a very clear metaphor for the



military cost of prolonged crisis and war operations. While the *Galactica* does not “fail” until its superstructure is shattered by the final jump to Earth, the continual loss of its systems, fighters, and personnel serve as reminders of the ongoing efforts of the US military in two wars and other duty stations across the globe.

For the personnel of the *Galactica* and the seldom-seen pilots and crews of the other ships there is little downtime and only limited options for liberty and leave. In the first weeks of flight from the Cylons, an accident in the launch bay kills thirteen pilots and badly injures seven more, forcing four squadrons out of rotation. Adama must recruit from across the fleet, and in some cases this means accepting pilots with shadowing pasts or those who have previously washed out of pilot training. For these replacements, Helo points out when interviewed by D’Anna Biers that training “seeks to make soldiers less human”<sup>121</sup> in order to better perform and handle difficult and dehumanizing tasks, although by becoming so “mechanized” they come to reflect the face of their enemy even more. Lt. “Kat” Katraine also, wearily, tells Biers “There are no replacements . . . there is no rest”<sup>122</sup> for the pilots or crew. After the fleet found New Caprica, most of the military personnel left their ships to settle, but during the Cylon occupation many were forced to either become resistance fighters or to join the ranks of the human police force. The only actual retirement in the series is Lee Adama’s, and even it is because he must resign his commission to accept his appointment to the Quorum of Twelve. All of the crew begin to crack under the strain, although Admiral Adama’s descent into alcoholism as the *Galactica* begins to crack and shatter, literally, with every jump is the most spectacular. Both metaphors underscore the strain on military personnel in the ongoing War on

Terror, with its backdrop of Stop-Loss orders and the multiple redeployments of Army, Marine, and National Guard units.

But military personnel are only some of the examples of the attrition of human capital in *Battlestar Galactica*. In post-cataclysmic texts where food is scarce, anyone (other than leaders and rulers) without essential talents or training (soldiers, pilots, doctors, etc.) must learn to farm. In several instances these societies take on feudal aspects, including class hierarchies based on knowledge and professions, and the reintroduction of those who become tied to the land or labor as neo-serfs. Among the Colonial fleet, the episode “Dirty Hands” (episode 316) establishes that the ongoing emergency and “military needs” have begun to create a caste system not only restricts people to their jobs, but that also favors the citizens of the wealthier colonies—Caprica, Tauron, and Picon—while leaving those of the poorer colonies—Aerilon, Sagittauron, and Gemenon—restricted to labor or service roles. While incarcerated and awaiting his trial for treason, Gaius Baltar manages to smuggle out his book, and amid its pages is his charge that the Capricans (including Roslin and the Adamas) are setting up a new aristocracy of privilege that will oppress the workers and poorest among the fleet. The near depletion of the fleet’s fuel reserves, and the proliferation of Baltar’s manifesto brings this conflict to a head in a general strike after working conditions on the refinery ship are shown to be exceptionally unsafe and the efforts required beyond endurance.<sup>123</sup> Adama threatens to have mutineers (strikers among his crew) shot, but President Roslin ultimately negotiates with Tyrol as the head of the Colonial Workers Alliance—the only union among the fleet—to end the strike in return for more labor sharing across the fleet. This episode manages to point to the unequal opportunity within contemporary American

society, but it also operates as a metaphor for a number of other issues including: peak oil, rising fuel costs, the dependency on illegal labor within the US, and even the transfer of American manufacturing jobs (like the refinery workers) to sweatshop factories along the Mexican border, but more importantly to Southeast Asia and the Pacific as part of globalization.

## **Conclusion**

The United States in the throes of its latest economic crisis—a Great Recession that the Left argues just missed becoming another Great Depression, even as the Right counters with its objection that the economy would have improved more quickly if regulations on business were reduced. In the gear-up toward the 2012 election conservatives continue to stress that businesses need fewer limits on their ability to “create jobs” and that the energy industry especially should be allowed to drill in the Arctic national Wildlife Refuge, although President Obama already opened up greater options for offshore drilling in 2010. In Pennsylvania and New York attempts to frack—hydraulically fracture substrates for oil and natural gas—are being resisted, but where the process has been used, some already question the effects on well water and local reservoirs. The debate surrounding the use of the Great Lakes and freshwater has grown more heated, even as coastal cities worry about rising sea levels and longer hurricane seasons. Fuel, water, and food remain critical issues for more than the United States, but over the past four decades the nation has slowly come to recognize its dependence on foreign oil, and only lately to reconsider its diminishing wealth in other natural resources.

Over the past four decades, SF has considered the not only the growing scarcity of fuel and food, but also the economic crisis associated with the loss of jobs and

industrial capacity in its post-cataclysmic narratives. *Lucifer's Hammer* may focus on the war in the ruins, but in 1977 it also describes the glimmerings of an awareness of our dependence on foreign manufacturing for small essentials and consumer goods. The post-nuclear war and terrorism stories of the 1980s recapitulated the massive scale of national destruction the earlier nuclear war fictions of the 1950s and 1960s, but their awareness of the linkages between industry, economic stability, and access to markets is more nuanced and anxious. By the 1990s, both Bull and Butler present very clear dystopias with an economic crisis, a foundational theme that also links them to the Cyberpunk subgenre of the same period, none of which offer a hopeful future for American hegemony or society. After September 11, 2001, more and more such dystopias have appeared, but this recent wave is dependent on the work that has come before, and the most recent elaborates on not only the economic crisis, but the fears that once industry is gone, the only things left are service industries and natural resources...but we seem to be trying to sell this last form of wealth if only to pay the interest on our national debt.

Post-cataclysmic SF is dystopic and it does go for the darkest possible futures and alternate worlds if only to clarify the dangerous path of national policies and social conventions. The very strengths that created the American Century are those that are being twisted against American businesses and an increasingly polarized government, and these texts use drama, despair, and death to project metaphors that will resonate in the consciousness of their audiences. Beyond the need to rebuild and restore cities and infrastructure, many of these texts use not only feudal and medieval motifs to posit the extensive decline, they also use slaves, serfs, and breeding programs to link the American Colonial and Antebellum South to the histories of English and German founders. The

sense of hope, the Dream of opportunity and unlimited possibilities is dead in most of these texts; perhaps this plays into the fears of globalization by some, or those of a fragile “spaceship Earth,” or simply the instability of the dollar as the new Century goes up for grabs.

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<sup>1</sup> Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History*, (Charleston, SC: BiblioBazaar, 2008), (reprint of 1920 edition).

<sup>2</sup> Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950), (2009 printing of 1978 edition).

<sup>3</sup> The trilogy concludes in Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992).

<sup>4</sup> Joe Klein. “Sarah Palin’s Myth of America,” *Time Magazine*. Wednesday, Sept. 10, 2008. Time.com. Accessed March 17, 2010.  
[<http://www.time.com/time/politics/article/0,8599,1840388,00.html>]

<sup>5</sup> An entire recapitulation of the sharing of resources and labor, and economic evolution from kin-based exchanges among bands and village economies, to stratified redistribution of resources and contemporary capitalist or socialist price-market exchanges are far beyond the scope of this discussion. The basic framework I use is defined in detail in Marvin Harris, *Cultural Anthropology*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1983). In many of these texts once survivors have made it through their first year and planting and harvest cycle, the immediate emergency has passed and leaders have come to power who help manage agriculture and the crafting of materials to meet basic individual and community needs. It is part of my argument that more recent post-apocalyptic narratives do not assume the same availability of resources and pre-collapse consumer goods, and that they also point out specific assumptions of contemporary Americans: that there will always be an abundance of food, clothing, medicines, and others goods available because we have a grocery store around every corner, or a 7-11 down the block. These narratives point to the fragility of a distribution system that relies not only on fossil fuels, but advanced logistics provided by computer programs and professional managers and administrators—an extrapolation from Roberto Vacca’s *The Coming Dark Age* and its discussion of systemic breakdown due to overcomplexity and dependencies in the modern infrastructure.

<sup>6</sup> Peter Nicholls, “Holocaust and After” in *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, edited by John Clute and Peter Nicholls, (London: Orbit, 1993), 581-84.

<sup>7</sup> John Clute, “Survivalist Fiction” in *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, edited by John Clute and Peter Nicholls, (London: Orbit, 1993), 1187-88.

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<sup>8</sup> The “clash of cultures” as a subject and debate begins with Samuel P. Huntington’s article “The Clash of Civilizations?” in *Foreign Affairs* (summer 1993) and later collected, along with rebuttals and supportive articles by *Foreign Affairs* in *Samuel P. Huntington’s The Clash of Civilizations? The Debate*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996). This debate was extended further by Huntington’s book-length treatment of the subject, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996); and with inflections of 9-11 in: Lawrence E Harrison and Samuel P. Huntington, *Culture Matters: How Values Shape Human Progress*, (New York: Basic Books, 2000); and Samuel P. Huntington, *Who Are We? The Challenges to America’s National Identity*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004).

<sup>9</sup> Paul Briens, *Nuclear Holocausts: Atomic War in Fiction, 1895-1984*, (Kent, OH: Kent State UP, 1987).

<sup>10</sup> Martha A. Bartter. *The Way to Ground Zero: The Atomic Bomb in American Science Fiction*, (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988), 123. Bartter points out that several writers considered civil defense as plot devices or overt messages in works of the 1950s. “Novels by several mainstream authors promoted these [civil defense] measures or warned of the consequences of failing to implement them, notably Philip Wylie’s *Tomorrow!* (1954), Harold Rein’s *Few Were Left* (1955), Martin Caidin’s *The Long Night* (1956), Richard Foster’s *The Rest Must Die* (1959), and Pat Frank’s *Alas, Babylon* (1959).” Philip Wylie’s *Triumph* (1963) can be added to this list although it depicts the survival of any a handful of Americans in a shelter while the rest of the country, no, the continent is devastated and rendered poisoned and lifeless after a full-scale nuclear war, as such it is also outside this scope as there is no recovery—the survivors are transported to Australia, in some ways a send up, perhaps, of Nevil Shute’s *On the Beach* (1957). It is worth noting that similar plots and works were produced again in the early 1980s, during the decline of Détente after Ronald Reagan’s announcement of SDI.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 122-23.

<sup>12</sup> Allan M. Winkler, *Life Under A Cloud: American Anxiety About the Atom*, (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 118-19.

<sup>13</sup> Pat Frank, *Alas, Babylon*, (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2005), 50-52. (Original edition: New York: J. B. Lippincott, 1959.)

<sup>14</sup> Niall Ferguson, *The Ascent of Money: A Financial History of the World*, (New York: Penguin Press, 2008), 306-08.

<sup>15</sup> Sean Wilentz, *The Age of Reagan: A History, 1974-2008*, (New York: HarperCollins, 2009), 35-36.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

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<sup>17</sup> The character Dr. Sharps is the Project Director of the California Institute of Technology's Jet Propulsion Laboratories within the novel *Lucifer's Hammer*.

<sup>18</sup> Niven and Pournelle, *Lucifer's Hammer*, 77.

<sup>19</sup> Kenneth S. Deffeyes, *Hubbert's Peak: The Impending World Oil Shortage* (2001); David Goodstein, *Out of Gas: The End of the Age of Oil* (2004); James Howard Kunstler, *The Long Emergency* (2005); and John Michael Greer, *The Long Descent* (2008), among others.

<sup>20</sup> Niven and Pournelle, *Lucifer's Hammer*, 363. In the aftermath Senator Jellison muses that "...civilization could be built from the wreckage Lucifer's hammer had left. Salvage work. Plenty to salvage in the old seacoast cities. The water hadn't destroyed everything. New oil wells could be drilled. The railroads could be repaired."

<sup>21</sup> Niven and Pournelle, *Lucifer's Hammer*, 528.

<sup>22</sup> Stephanie Cooke. *In Mortal Hands: A Cautionary History of the Nuclear Age*, (New York: Bloomsbury USA, 2009), 109-11; Alan M. Winkler *Life Under A Cloud*, 139-40.

<sup>23</sup> Both Niven and Pournelle have spoken at conventions and online in various forums of their support for nuclear propulsion (The Orion-type ship), nuclear-based defenses, and nuclear power as an option to "free" the US from foreign, especially Middle Eastern oil (in Pournelle's blogs). The novel *Lucifer's Hammer*, in particular is singled out as an example of the pronuclear SF authors, although Gary Westfahl encapsulates the discussion to some extent: "The pronuclear viewpoint, as expressed in novels like Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle's *Lucifer's Hammer* (1977), has been more difficult to maintain since catastrophes like Three Mile Island and Chernobyl. The benefits of nuclear power are mostly quiet and ongoing, its disasters sudden and intense." Gary Westfahl, *The Greenwood Encyclopedia of Science Fiction and Fantasy: Themes, Works, and Wonders*, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2005), 561.

<sup>24</sup> Niven and Pournelle, *Lucifer's Hammer*, 405.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 117. "We'll need equipment. End-of-the-world equipment. Couple of four-wheel-drive vehicles . . . camping gear. Batteries. Razor blades. Pocket computers. Rifles. Sleeping bags. . . .Get it wholesale but be quiet about it."

<sup>26</sup> Niven and Pournelle, *Lucifer's Hammer*, 161-65. Randall's actions are detailed carefully over the course of several pages, with almost as much attention given to the increase in employment, inflation, and use of credit in the months leading up to the comet strike, as to the actual composition of Randall's purchases (vitamins, baking soda, spices, salt. liquor, especially liqueurs, p 165) and preparations (pool full of water, pounds of

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pemmican and jerked beef). In fact, his preparations are so extensive that they draw attention from some neighbors, a local biker gang, who kill his wife when they steal it all.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 68. Peter Bonar is brought before the council for summary judgment, not an actual trial, and then sentenced to “the Road”—ejection and exile from the Stronghold. Bonar had not adjusted to the new ways and protested that Hardy (Jellison’s aide) had no warrant and no right to search his property, as though the old rules applied.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 473. “Someday we’ll be able to afford history. Until then we’ll think of England the way they used to think of Atlantis . . .”

<sup>29</sup> In broad terms this economic shift is repeated in multiple US History survey texts, but Robert B. Reich also details it in *Aftershock* (2010), pp 51-61, and Sean Wilentz refers to the fears of repeating the high inflation and unemployment numbers of 1974 in *The Age of Reagan* (2009).

<sup>30</sup> *Lucifer’s Hammer*, p. 507. “The Way Things Work, Volume II. Volume One is in a safe place. With four thousand other books on how to put a civilization together.” This theme ties in with Butler’s Parable novels, to Stirling’s *Dies the Fire* and the reference to the *Foxfire* series, and to some extent, to the ancient religious *Scrolls of Pithia* and their instructions for finding Earth in *Battlestar Galactica*. Knowledge of physics, chemistry, biology and ecology, and astronomy matters and informs survival, but yet again the humanities, unless religious texts count, remain luxuries.

<sup>31</sup> Niven and Pournelle, *Lucifer’s Hammer*, 607.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 607.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 607.

<sup>34</sup> Allan M. Winkler, *Life Under a Cloud: American Anxiety About the Atom*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 158-59.

<sup>35</sup> Wilentz, p. 141. “On February 18, Reagan announced his budget cuts, amounting to \$47 billion in new reductions from Carter’s final budget, with the heaviest burden falling on programs designed to aid the poor.”

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 144.

<sup>37</sup> David Seed. *American Science Fiction and the Cold War: Literature and Film*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), 173-74.



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<sup>38</sup> Whitley Strieber and James Kunetka, *Warday and the Journey Onward*, (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1984), 159.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 325.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 255.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 267.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 44-50.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 281-283. In a series of “official documents” the effects of the EMP on electrical systems are detailed, as well as the overall damage to industrial and economic sectors. In terms of raw materials, resources: bauxite, chromites, cobalt, columbium, manganese, nickel, the platinum group, tantalum, tin, titanium ores, and tungsten; “The minerals listed above, for all of which the US is highly dependent on *imports...*” (282-283); prewar stockpiles, see p. 281.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 210-11.

<sup>45</sup> Brin, David. *The Postman*, (New York: Bantam Books, 1985). These notes refer to the 1997 reissue of the Bantam books paperback edition, originally released in 1986. The pages of the Prelude are not numbered.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.

<sup>50</sup> Alan M. Winkler, *Living Under a Cloud*, 96-97 and Stephanie Cooke, *In Mortal Hands*, 169.

<sup>51</sup> Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle, *Lucifer's Hammer*, 169.

<sup>52</sup> The essays of *The Counterfeit Ark* are largely negative responses, in 1983, to the crisis relocation planning (CRP) in effect during the first Reagan administration; it was discontinued in 1985. These essays outline many of the inadequacies of the CRP and relate them to the earlier Kennedy and Eisenhower plans and their shortcomings. Jennifer

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Leaning and Langley Keyes, eds., *The Counterfeit Ark: Crisis Relocation for Nuclear War*, (Cambridge: Ballinger Publishing Co., 1984).

<sup>53</sup> Paul Brians. *Nuclear Holocausts*: 89-92.

<sup>54</sup> Add the pages numbers and titles for Clute and Nicholls and survivalist fiction from the Encyclopedia of Science Fiction.

<sup>55</sup> Sean Wilentz, *The Age of Reagan*, 177.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 199-200.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 205-206.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 208-211.

<sup>59</sup> Sparrow is a cheval, a “horse” or biological construct designed and artificially grown to be “ridden” (mind control) by the “horsemen” or psychics created by the DOD who started the nuclear war between the United States and Central and South America. Sparrow is technically a neuter, but will be referred to as female in this study; the full discussion of her sexuality and gender will be addressed in chapter five.

<sup>60</sup> *The New York Times* ran a series of articles in 1987 and 1988, especially after Reagan’s broadcast interview during the Christmas week of 1988, in which he “dismissed the idea that his Administration bears any responsibility for the problem of homelessness...” Steven V. Roberts. “Reagan on Homelessness: Many Choose to Live in the Streets” in *The New York Times*. December 23, 1988. “<http://www.nytimes.com/1988/12/23/us/reagan-on-homelessness-many-choose-to-live-in-the-streets.html>” Accessed: May 10, 2011.

<sup>61</sup> Emma Bull, *Bone Dance: A Fantasy for Technophiles*, (New York: Orb Books, 2009), 145-46. (Original edition New York: Ace Books, 1991.)

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 219.

<sup>63</sup> Whitley Strieber and James Kunetka, *Warday*, 129.

<sup>64</sup> Octavia Butler, *Parable of the Sower*, (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2007), 337. (Original publication: New York: Warner Books, 1993.)

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 337.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>68</sup> Octavia Butler, *Parable of the Talents*, (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2007), 8. (Original publication: New York: Warner Books, 1998.)

<sup>69</sup> Gideon Rachman, *Zero-Sum Future: American Power in An Age of Anxiety*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2011), 111.

<sup>70</sup> Octavia Butler, *Parable of the Talents*, 229-230.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 230.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 130.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 129.

<sup>74</sup> Michael Castleman links the early 1980s fears of lowered fertility with new scientific research that may establish lower sperm counts in the mid-1990s. The focus shifts from tight underwear to the possible effects of xenoestrogens, and Castleman also mentions this a variant on Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, recycling the discourse that we are effectively silencing ourselves. Michael Castleman's "Down for the Count" in *Mother Jones* January/February 1996 issue. January 1996. "<http://motherjones.com/politics/1996/01/down-count>" Accessed May 15, 2011.

<sup>75</sup> The Great Recession is not used universally to designate the current economic situation that begins with the implosion of the US Housing Value Bubble, and carried through the domino-effect of the collapses of over-capitalized loans, monetary instruments, and packages debt that had proliferated through most of the global financial sector. Gideon Rachman's explanation is the one I choose to privilege in this formulation as his *Zero Sum Future* frames the contemporary crisis as the result of under-regulated financial institutions, the pressure for higher returns on investment, and globalization, especially the growing friction between China and the United States in terms of bonds, debt, and trade balances.

<sup>76</sup> Alex Kirby's overview, "Why the Taps are Running Dry" BBC News, Science/Nature. June 20, 2003. "<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/science/nature/2943946.stm>" Accessed May 31 2009. The discussion and additional links stem from: "Planet Under Pressure" (2004). Last updated August 15, 2007. "[http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/in\\_depth/sci\\_tech/2004/planet/default.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/in_depth/sci_tech/2004/planet/default.stm)" Accessed May 22, 2011.

<sup>77</sup> Cheyenne Mountain has been a frequent locale for military and post-military installations since some of its inhabitants closed their operations over the past twenty

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years. Cheyenne Mountain Air Force Station, in Colorado Springs, CO. is perhaps best known as the former site of SAC (from 1963-1992) (Strategic Air Command) and NORAD (North American Aerospace Defense Command), and later the Strategic Space Command. The Cheyenne Mountain Command Center is still in active use, but much of the retired portions of the facility are sometimes rented to television and movie producers for military or science fiction productions including the Star Gate franchise and *Jeremiah*. For many Cheyenne Mountain is considered the most impenetrable, well defended military installation in America, if not the world, making it also one of the most often destroyed, as in *Independence Day* and other alien invasion movies.

<sup>78</sup> “The Long Road.” *Jeremiah*. Showtime. Episodes 101-102. March 2, 2002.

<sup>79</sup> “The Bag.” *Jeremiah*. Showtime. Episode 106. April 2, 2002.

<sup>80</sup> “Out of the Ashes.” *Jeremiah*. Showtime. Episode 117. June 2, 2002.

<sup>81</sup> “Out of the Ashes.”

<sup>82</sup> “Mother of Invention.” *Jeremiah*. Showtime. Episode 114. May 2, 2002.

<sup>83</sup> “Mother of Invention.”

<sup>84</sup> Julian Borger, “Tapes reveal Enron’s secret role in California’s power blackouts” in *The Guardian*. February 5, 2005.

“<http://www.guardian.co.uk/business/2005/feb/05/enron.usnews>” Accessed May 31, 2011.

<sup>85</sup> “The Four Horsemen.” *Jericho*. CBS. Episode 103. October 4, 2006.

<sup>86</sup> “9:02.” *Jericho*. Episode 106. CBS. October 25, 2006.

<sup>87</sup> “Red Flag.” *Jericho*. Episode 110. CBS. November 22, 2006.

<sup>88</sup> “Rogue River.” *Jericho*. Episode 108. CBS. November 8, 2006.

<sup>89</sup> “Winter’s End.” *Jericho*. Episode 116. CBS. March 28, 2007.

<sup>90</sup> The salt mine is used as a plot device several times but never as a means to preserve food or as a dietary supplement in any of the episodes. When the power fails to return after a few days, the wife of the mayor, Gail Green, suggests a massive barbeque to keep the food in the town’s refrigerated and frozen food from going to waste (“Four Horsemen”) but no one thinks to use the massive amounts of nearby salt to preserve any of the food, at least not on camera. The creators seem to pay a certain amount of lip

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service to salt as a necessity but their focus is more on the property rights and inheritance issue involved in Skylar Stevens assuming control of her missing parent's stake and using it to throw in as partner with Dale Turner who comes to own Gracie's Market. The salt mine itself is used to shelter a large number from the town from the feared fallout from Denver ("Fallout." *Jericho*. Episode 102. CBS. September 27, 2006.); a portion of the salt to bargain for the wind turbines from New Bern ("Winter's End."); and the site of a disputed trade with New Bern and gunfight that becomes the catalyst for New Bern's invasion ("One if By Land." *Jericho*. Episode 120. CBS. April 25, 2007.)

<sup>91</sup> "9:02."

<sup>92</sup> "Crossroads." *Jericho*. Episode 109. CBS. November 15, 2006.

<sup>93</sup> "9:02."

<sup>94</sup> It is suggested that Gracie has been using her market to front good from Jonah Prowse for a long time and that the attacks gave her an excuse to try to alter their arrangement more heavily in her favor. Jonah's lieutenant, Mitchell Cafferty kills Gracie because of her greed, but when she was found dead there was no shortage of suspects given her decision to require ever more expensive goods from other townspeople in exchange for her rapidly diminishing stocks. "Red Flag."

<sup>95</sup> In "Winter's End" Dale negotiated with Frederickson, one of the farmers, who refuses to honor the agreement, telling Dale "there are no more laws." Dale returns and confronts him with a gun for his share: 3% of the crop. The writers do not make it clear how important Dale's aid was, but do make it clear that strength is now more of a factor in agreements and negotiations than the social compact or legal system.

<sup>96</sup> "One if By Land."

<sup>97</sup> "Black Jack." *Jericho*. Episode 113. CBS. February 28, 2007.

<sup>98</sup> "Crossroads."

<sup>99</sup> "Oversight." *Jericho*. Episode 204. CBS. March 4, 2008.

<sup>100</sup> Before the late 19<sup>th</sup> century it was typically the engineers who created new technologies and this provoked the interests of scientists who then revised their theories based on new empirical evidence. The merger of science and technology in industry, and in industrial research institutions, comes at the end of the nineteenth century, and even then the merger that creates the massive corporate research entities come about as a result of World War II and the Cold War—the "military-industrial complex" that Eisenhower warned against in his 1961 farewell speech. The actual merger of science and technology

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in industry is sketched out by McClelland and Dorn, and their thesis is that engineering drove innovation before the nineteenth century and required its own organizational shift before the institutionalization of science and research were possible on a large scale. James E. McClellan III and Harold Dorn, *Science and Technology in World History: An Introduction*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP; 1999), 308-12.

<sup>101</sup> S.M. Stirling, *Dies the Fire*, (New York: ROC Books, 2004), 80-81.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 253. Juniper and her clan turn away the foragers, who had told her, “We’re here by order of Acting Governor Johnson to requisition a quota of supplies for emergency redistribution” but this was “the second Acting Governor since the Change, which made it an average of one about every two weeks . . .”

<sup>104</sup> S. M. Stirling, *The Protector’s War*, (New York: ROC Books, 2005), 410-11. “I saw that the population had to be reduced, and quickly, or everyone would die. So I and my associates—the Portland Protective Association—seized whatever bulk foodstuffs we could before they were wasted or lost. Forty percent of American wheat exported to Asia went through Portland. . . . And then we, mmm . . . encourage the surplus population to leave and shift for themselves; with that here was enough to keep more than thirty thousand people alive for a year.”

<sup>105</sup> S.M. Stirling, *Dies the Fire*, 246.

<sup>106</sup> S.M. Stirling, *The Protector’s War*, 69. By Change Year Eight, Larsson has a workshop and foundry that resembles descriptions of Leonardo’s workshop in some respects as “designs were pinned to corkboards along the walls--for reapers and mowers and threshing machines, for pumps and windmills and Pelton wheel water turbines. And for war engines, trebuchets and catapults and a flywheel-powered machine gun he knew he could get working eventually.” He has spent those eight years attempting to understand all of the specific changes through his own series of investigations and experiments while the Bearkillers effectively protect and feed him, and he serves as their chief armorer.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 183-84.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 420.

<sup>109</sup> S.M. Stirling, *Dies the Fire*, 141.

<sup>110</sup> S.M. Stirling, *The Protector’s War*, 273. “I’ve got windup alarm clocks, Swiss army knives, needles and pins, sewing thread, combination padlocks, fishhooks and synthetic

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fishing line, eggbeaters, sausage grinders and such like. And some Fruit of the Loom underwear and good hiking socks, still in the plastic.”

<sup>111</sup> Alex Kirby, “Dawn of a thirsty century,” BBC News Online, Friday, June 2, 2000. BBC News Online. Accessed August 30, 2011. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/science/nature/755497.stm>.

<sup>112</sup> Alex Kirby, “Why world’s taps are running dry,” BBC News Online, Friday, June 20, 2003. BBC News Online. Accessed August 30, 2011. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/science/nature/2943946.stm>.

<sup>113</sup> “The Dangers of Asian Carp in Great Lakes.” National Public Radio. June 27, 2010. Accessed August 28, 2011. <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=128149009>.

<sup>114</sup> Lee Carter. “World: Americas Great Lakes in danger.” BBC News. September 27, 1999. Accessed August 28, 2011. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/458579.stm>

<sup>115</sup> “Bastille Day.” *Battlestar Galactica*. Episode 103. SyFy Channel January 21, 2005.

<sup>116</sup> Justin Gillis. “A Warming Planet Struggles to Feed Itself.” *The New York Times*. June 4, 2011. Accessed August 30, 2011. <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/05/science/earth/05harvest.html>.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> The name of the station is a nod to the Norse belief in Ragnarok or the “twilight of the gods” as the final battle between the Aesir and the giants of Jotunheim led by Ymir.

<sup>120</sup> The Black Bird is completed in “Pegasus,” Episode 210, but the mission and destruction of the Resurrection ship occur in “Resurrection Ship – Part 1” and “Resurrection Ship – Part 2.” “Pegasus.” *Battlestar Galactica*. Episode 210. SyFy Channel. September 23, 2005. “Resurrection Ship – Part 1.” *Battlestar Galactica*. Episode 211. SyFy Channel. January 6, 2006. “Resurrection Ship – Part 2.” *Battlestar Galactica*. Episode 212. SyFy Channel. January 13, 2006.

<sup>121</sup> “Final Cut.” *Battlestar Galactica*. Episode 208. SyFy Channel. September 9, 2005.

<sup>122</sup> “Final Cut.” *Battlestar Galactica*.

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<sup>123</sup> “Dirty Hands.” *Battlestar Galactica*. Episode 316. SyFy Channel. February 25, 2007. The leader of the workers on the Trilium refinery ship, the Hitei Kan, claims they’ve not had a day off since the original attacks. This overlooks the period of the attempted settlement on New Caprica, although it is possible that some of the workers were required to stay and continue operations to support the small percentage of the fleet who remained behind on the Battlestars Galactica and Pegasus, and the rest of the ships not grounded with the settlement.



### **Chapter 3: Separation Anxiety: Post-Cataclysmic Democracy**

“Perhaps it is a universal truth that the loss of liberty at home is to be charged to provisions against danger, real or pretended, from abroad.”

James Madison

“Rights aren’t rights if someone can take them away. They’re privileges. That’s all we’ve had in this country is a bill of temporary privileges . . . and every year the list gets shorter, and shorter, and shorter.”

George Carlin

To some, the twentieth-century was the American Century—a reflection of the might of the United States, especially as a superpower after World War II, and later as the hyperpower after the collapse of the USSR.<sup>1</sup> The development of its economic and military preeminence derives in part from another facet of American exceptionalism—its once-revolutionary (democratic) republican government, codified in a Constitution that defines both a separation and balance of power between three branches of government, rather than its concentration in a single absolute authority. It was the reaction to the perception of the growing Soviet threat that first imperiled this balance by fueling the accumulation of precedents and exceptions by the Presidency; this began in the sphere of foreign affairs, but later extended into domestic policy under the auspices of national emergencies and security. Even at the height of the Cold War the enemy was never limited to foreign armies, so in addition to increasing the size and budget of the US military, the executive branch bureaucracy and intelligence services expanded to better support foreign policy and diplomacy. Part of the enduring strength of this vision of American exceptionalism is that it also embodies the persistent belief that in the face of adversity, tragedy, or catastrophic events the ideals enshrined in the Constitution of an

elected republican government, individual rights, and civil liberties will survive. But since the mid-1970s, post-cataclysmic SF has instead highlighted the weaknesses in the American model of democracy through the portrayal of government collapse in the aftermath of cataclysmic events that emphasizes these ideals as first among the casualties.

One of the most exceptional traits of American democracy is the office of the President, a normal citizen who is elected by the people to assume a role that is neither a figurehead nor a dictator. The President has immense power, but must wield it in concert with Congress and with the approval of the Supreme Court, and yet it is the Presidency that seems most in jeopardy because it relies upon the persona, ego, and judgment of this individual. In *The Imperial Presidency* (1973), Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. traces the ebb and flow of executive control and the separation of powers over the course of American history. Schlesinger wrote this study in response to his perception that the administration of President Richard M. Nixon was out of control; among Nixon's abuses were the use of armed forces in contravention of congressional war authority and intelligence services employed domestically as a covert extra-legal force. Schlesinger suggests that although President Franklin D. Roosevelt was once America's closest approximation to a modern monarch, most of his power came *with* the approval of Congress and only *after* resolving clashes with the Supreme Court. At the end of World War II, FDR had the trust of the American people and became a martyr by dying in office; conversely, Nixon was forced to resign in 1974 under threat of impeachment. After Nixon's fall the aura of the imperial presidency continued to fade until after 9/11, when executive power once again ballooned with congressional approval (and abdication or delegation of its authority), and reinforcement from a conservative Supreme Court.

In extremis, the nation and often the world look to the American President as a beacon of hope, a promise of stability, and a bastion of strength, but in most post-cataclysmic narratives this President has been destroyed—either a casualty of the disaster or forced by the exigencies of crisis to assume near-absolute power as a tyrant. During the early atomic age, post-apocalyptic SF largely focused on radioactive wastelands and battles between pseudo-medieval warlords or communities defending themselves against neo-barbarians and mutants; these settings reflect the fears of communist victory, where the ideas of modern American democracy no longer have a place. However, during its successive peaks in popularity during the early 1960s and mid-1980s, and even during its decline after the end of the Cold War, post-cataclysmic SF has continued to refine its depictions of the end of democratic institutions, abrogation of civil rights, and the frequent concentration of power in absolute rulers, who are often supported by a new praetorian guard culled from formerly professional armies. These narratives focus on the dissolution of democratic rights and the American “exceptional” identity rather than on the optimistic and perhaps unrealistic survival of American ideals often insisted upon by contemporary politicians and pundits.

Although Schlesinger describes earlier executives as having sometimes usurped power, it is only after the era of FDR that presidents acquired and kept powers beyond those defined in the constitution. In 1973 Schlesinger believed the practice to have peaked with Johnson and Nixon, but in 2004 he issued a warning against its return and acceleration in the aftermath of 9/11. Schlesinger contends that the Constitution requires a strong system of accountability to balance a strong presidency, but that the persistent threat to the separation and balance of powers emanates from the influence of John

Locke’s doctrine of emergency prerogative, or the “law of self-preservation.”<sup>2</sup> At its crux, the imperial president *asserts inherent powers* and takes actions beyond congressional authorization and justifies them as validated by this emergency prerogative—essentially the argument that the President cannot wait for congressional approval and must take immediate action in order to defend citizens (or national interests).<sup>3</sup> In addition to this technical evasion of congressional oversight is the marginalization of the legislature that occurs within Schlesinger’s definition of a plebiscitary Presidency, where the President is no longer held accountable by Congress or the media on a daily basis, but is only truly “exposed” to accountability during elections or impeachment proceedings and the attendant focused media scrutiny. The myth of the “liberal media” and its influence on the public perception of the President entered mainstream discourse during the Nixon era, but the current political polarization and loss of journalistic objectivity by many media outlets has further limited this form of accountability by shifting the plebiscite away from public control toward that of special interests though corporate influence and wealthy donors.

Since the end of the 1960s era of activism fewer and fewer citizens vote, and even though the debate over election reform and corporate donors has recently grown more strident and divisive, little seems likely to change. Sean Wilentz points out that actual democracy is the enfranchisement of all adult citizens, and notes that America was hardly democratic on the eve of the Civil War.<sup>4</sup> But even after the end of slavery, it still took a century and the Fifteenth (1870), Nineteenth (1920), and Twenty-fifth Amendments (1964), and the Indian Citizenship Act (1924) and the Voting Rights Act (1965) to extend the franchise to most adult American citizens. And in 1970, Richard Nixon extended this

to all adults by signing into law the Twenty-Sixth Amendment that reduced the voting age to 18 for all federal, state, and local elections. However, since then, and especially over the last twenty years, voter-turnout has continued to decline and many Americans no longer see a point in going to the ballot box. Today, special interests (still) seek to limit the roles various ethnic groups or collectives in order to sway an election, which has bred a certain amount of cynicism and disillusionment with the American voting system. After the presidential election of 2000, when the Supreme Court essentially ruled the outcome of the race by stopping the recount of votes in Florida, more raised their voices against the function of the Electoral College, and many politicians heeded their constituents to (once again) begin working on election reform. But after the initial success with the passage of McCain/Feinberg, reform foundered in the wake of Supreme Court decisions like *Citizens United vs. the Federal Election Commission* (2010). Some, like Andrew Bacevich, argue that “[a] political elite preoccupied with the governance of empire paid little attention to protecting the United States itself,”<sup>5</sup> thus contributing to the disturbing success of the 9/11 attacks. Post-cataclysmic SF reflects these tensions by crippling or eliding the franchise, and narrowing the scope of participatory democracy.

Yet war and human conflict remain the ultimate test of democratic values and institutions. In our world, Congress legislates the War Powers Act, threatens impeachment, or issues reports and recommendations meant to rein in the power of an out-of-control executive.<sup>6</sup> But in the worlds of post-cataclysmic SF, the very framework of civil order is disrupted and the courts and Congress—the checks and balances—typically fall silent during the emergency. However, for power to concentrate in the hands of the executive, it must first be gathered at the national level, a process Bacevich

argues involves “a succession of national security emergencies, real and imagined, [that] have permitted the federal government to assume a vast array of new responsibilities at the expense of state and local authorities.”<sup>7</sup> The Cold War, Vietnam, and especially the ongoing War on Terror are all examples of prolonged crisis and emergency during which citizens become inured to security restrictions and the loss of freedoms that seem less important—when they are aware of them—as principles in the face of mortal threats. In these texts the executive is sometimes a warlord, one whose position is maintained through force of arms and superior military might; in other instances power is derived from the control of food or critical resources.

The medieval and semi-feudal trappings of many of these post-collapse societies mask the more serious issues evident in the decline or lack of civil rights, the loss of the voting franchise, and the resurgence of a class or caste system based on control of the land, energy and fuel, or the effective military force. The exercise of Locke’s prerogative is used to validate the suspension of civil liberties, fear-induced use of extreme interrogations and torture, and the rise of paramilitary forces in the guise of corporate contractors, faith-based vigilantes, or sectarian fanatics. But these texts posit the subversive view that American democracy is untenable in the face of crisis—that the national character and culture are not exceptional because they are intrinsically neither egalitarian nor democratic. In some cases there is an attempt to maintain laws, civil rights, and the election of leaders; while the best example among these narratives is *Battlestar Galactica*, this still occurs within the context of a persistent military emergency, periods of martial law, and attempted coups. The rarity of such instances in the genre and the typical failure of democratic endeavors is part of the criticism in post-

cataclysmic SF not only of political institutions, but also of the naïve belief that the American exception can survive without overwhelming economic, political, or military power.

### ***Post-Posse Comitatus***

During the Great Depression, under FDR the executive began to grow into a much more complex and, some might argue, massive centralized government. After the war ended, before this burgeoning apparatus could be dismantled, nuclear weapons cast the more imminent nature of modern warfare in stark relief, spurring even greater growth of the government through the Cold War and beyond. The original framers of the Constitution sought to keep war powers divided between Congress and the President, but the new technologies and immediacy of war shifted the focus more and more from *fighting* a war, to *planning to fight* because bombers, missiles, and nuclear devices greatly reduced the available reaction time. In the modern age the time lapse between a declaration of war and the commencement of active hostilities shrank from a matter of days or hours to just a matter of minutes. Undeclared aggression by extra-governmental and state powers could now cause devastation beyond that once considered only possible by armies and navies. After the dissolution of the USSR, during the brief interwar period of the 1990s, before the War on Terror, the President no longer seemed quite as formidable. The series of lawsuits and investigations that culminated in the impeachment hearings of President William J. Clinton, and the mixed results of US military actions in Somalia, Haiti, and the Balkans, created the perception of a weakened Presidency and undermined the legitimacy of the American foreign policy of nation-building. Regardless, beginning during the early years of the Cold War, part of the role of the commander-in-

chief meant that only the President could command the use of weapons capable of not only destroying any enemy, but also all life on the planet. Today, the President still retains this power (even with greatly reduced nuclear stockpiles), but the threat has broadened; rather than a nuclear standoff between two superpowers, it is now more pervasive because rogue individuals acting without state sponsorship or responsibility can acquire nuclear, chemical, or biological materials capable of massive destruction.

In this climate of perpetual anxiety, the military has become a dominant and omnipresent feature of daily life in the media, travel hubs and gateways, and in the proliferation of paramilitary units and independent contractors. Police forces and civil authority have become more militarized; since the urban unrest of the late 1960s, Special Weapons and Tactics teams (SWAT) have become standard in almost every city. Their members are typically veterans of the armed forces and trained in the use of military weapons and equipment. In the 1980s, contractors began to operate as paramilitary organizations and special operations units, including contemporary privatized military firms (PMFs) like Blackwater, Lifeguard, or segments of KBR/Halliburton that proliferate in the post-9/11 military and diplomatic arenas. These PMFs are typically seen occupying foreign zones of conflict, and because most of these organizations are privately owned and funded they need not support any one leader or ideology except that which pays best. In post-cataclysmic SF, the military, or former military personal, often play a role in the absence of the President, reflecting unease with both the power and prominence of the military-industrial complex. Conversely these roles also recognize that those with military training may be the best equipped to survive a cataclysmic event and, ironically, offer the best chance of rebuilding some kind of society from the ruins.



In general, after the pressing crisis is past and survival is assured, new social hierarchies coalesce around the control of supplies and resources, and these elites then sponsor armed forces to both protect their assets and acquire new sources. In some instances this mission uses a nostalgic or neo-nationalist justification for aggression, but it can also employ racial, ethnic, and religious differences as excuses for tyranny. Security and conquest are opposite sides of the military coin in these narratives; the success of warlords is tied to the new social hierarchy and any rights and liberties it extends. However, during the state of emergency and prolonged recovery a social inequity persists that favors elites. The belief that security is paramount for the common good is part of what John Gray defines as an “illiberal democracy” where “everyone who is not deluded or corrupt will support the same policies so there will be no need to protect personal freedom or the rights of minorities.”<sup>8</sup> But in this post-cataclysmic analysis conflict arises more often from the scarcity of resources, lack of space to expand and work the land, and the degradation or failure of the industrial base and infrastructure. According to Paul Kennedy, “all of the major shifts in the world's military-power balances have followed alterations in the productive balances” and more significantly as “confirmed by the outcomes of the major Great Power wars, where victory has always gone to the side with the greatest material resources.”<sup>9</sup> In the body of post-cataclysmic narratives discussed here, resources—access to them, the ability to procure them, capacity to retain them—are the basis for political and social power instead of any sense of inalienable rights. It is in this context that American values truly fail, and the internal conflicts within American national identity and experience are unveiled.

## Post-Cataclysmic Frontiers

During the Cold War, “post-apocalyptic” fiction was almost always set in the aftermath of a future nuclear war waged between the East and West. But Paul Brians argues: “A nuclear holocaust is not a rite of passage, nor is it an apocalyptic cleansing of the Earth to prepare the way for a new and better life.”<sup>10</sup> This is in sharp contrast to Gary K. Wolfe’s assertion that in “most post-holocaust fiction” the end is only to a “way of life” rather than all life. For Wolfe, this extends beyond the limits of nuclear war or a mere lifestyle because each way of life is an interdependent matrix of political, economic and social institutions, behavioral norms and standards, and most significantly, the belief in this system.<sup>11</sup> But the addition of new technologies—atomic weapons, nuclear power, nanotechnology, and stem cell therapy—spark apocalyptic fears and spawn cataclysmic fictions; Wolfe offers it as more typical that “available technologies are *removed*” from these worlds after their cataclysm.<sup>12</sup> This loss of technology can itself be the impetus for the re-emergence of the wilderness (and its hazards) as the populations of cities and towns rapidly decline and survivors gather in fortified homes or stabilize in “frontier-type” settlements.<sup>13</sup> This concept suggests a sentimental view of the mythic frontier as it was briefly reinvigorated during the Reagan years with its nostalgia for post-war American economic and military strength.<sup>14</sup> But such views of the frontier have been called into question, if not rendered myopic, by the past few decades of historical and cultural scholarship that links the frontier experience to the near-genocide of Native Americans and the ethically bankrupt practices of past presidential administrations and congressional leaders.

This emphasis on collapse is key to the function and form of the government and military power in a post-cataclysmic milieu, especially when the failure of the economy or exhaustion of resources (rather than a devastating event or attack) drives a culture to implode and fragment into competing, defensive bands. In his discussion of the long-term consequences of nuclear war, Brians states that “in fiction [it] seems to signal the end of democracy, not of humanity as such.”<sup>15</sup> Brians argues that these examples of postholocaust social collapse are more typical in the formulaic narratives of adventure fiction rather than the more sophisticated metaphors of post-civilized barbarism in Harlan Ellison’s *A Boy and His Dog* (1969) or Roger Zelazny’s *Damnation Alley* (1969).<sup>16</sup> In a modern context the role and functions of government (civil authority, laws, courts, police, emergency response, and taxation) and military power (personnel, technology, training, and support) form a gestalt that helps determine the hierarchies of social control and power in a post-cataclysm environment. But a functioning government requires commonly accepted conventions including the social compact in order to set rules and priorities; this then allows a critical mass of functionaries (workers) to collaborate and support each other, which in turn also requires a shared economic and production system to allow and utilize labor specialization. Brute force alone is not enough to take control because it requires some measure of acceptance by the population at large. A despot or autocratic ruler only becomes a government if s/he has the ability to control social interaction and the populace, protects their possessions and assets, and sometimes the ability to extend their sphere of influence.

In some instances control and rule are derived from the failure of institutions to transition power as part of emergency response. The type of cataclysm is important as the

speed and severity of collapse can disrupt the transition of power and frustrate the rules of succession. In the aftermath of a complete rupture of society and its resultant atomization, the public consensus that establishes a social contract has not only been shattered, but is often renegotiated only by those few who control the military, resources, and the necessities of safety and security. The nuclear wars and attacks (David Brin, Whitley Strieber and James Kunetka, Kim Stanley Robinson) and the comet strikes (Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle) devastate social and technological infrastructure; Steve Stirling's transmutation of the laws of physics knocks the world back to a pre-industrial level; and Octavia Butler uses a world-wide economic apocalypse. These predicate the evaporation of specific modes of leadership and community, or their shift to more immediate relationship as predator and prey. In one respect the violent collapse and frequent eradication of social and political conventions suggests that one contemporary anxiety is that the imbalance of power is too severe and meaningful reforms are not possible unless the system itself is erased and reconstructed from scratch. During the Nixon era this political discourse involved the corruption of more than just the administration, and in the twenty-first century it has expanded to challenge the function and interests of both major political parties, as well as the desires of their foremost donors, and it also implicates the media as having been co-opted by those same interests. In several of these post-cataclysmic narratives voting is only a distasteful memory; political parties have disappeared, and now local leaders serve as strongmen and enforcers who reflect the military juntas of the Reagan and Bush years, and contemporary rulers in Africa, parts of Southeast Asia, and the Middle East.

## Sources of the State

### Precursors

Schlesinger describes the evolution of the imperial presidency between the end of World War II and the mid-1970s in terms of the slow accumulation of power by Truman, Eisenhower, Johnson, and Nixon. The arc of triumphalism and confidence that began after World War II ended with the fall of Saigon, but even before the Vietnam War, the US was involved in a number of military actions, often because the President overstepped his constitutional limits. The growing threat of nuclear war often overshadowed these military engagements, and the atmosphere of “quasi-perpetual crisis”<sup>17</sup> helped justify executive orders and policies that skewed the constitutional balance. Schlesinger augments that this “conviction of crisis had generated a foreign policy that placed the separation of powers [...] under unprecedented, and at times unbearable, strain.”<sup>18</sup> While few knew it at the time, US intelligence services also operated as a module of foreign policy and employed questionable tactics including subverting and overthrowing governments supposedly in the effort to combat the spread of communist revolution.<sup>19</sup>

Although both Congress and the Supreme Court were concerned with the power accumulated by FDR during World War II, neither did much to limit or curb the consequent use of national emergencies to validate executive action. Truman justified his order to commit US forces in the Korean War by claiming it as an internationally sanctioned police action, which allowed him to avoid informing Congress for two days.<sup>20</sup> To support the ongoing military effort in Korea in 1952, Truman ordered the Secretary of Commerce to seize and begin government operation of the steel mills in response to the

threat of a nationwide strike—an abuse of domestic authority under the aegis of national emergency.<sup>21</sup> In contrast, Eisenhower focused on expanding US international commitments far beyond historical interests centered in the Western hemisphere in ways that solidified the Cold War diode, making foreign policy and national security subject to the “diplomacy of brinkmanship,”<sup>22</sup> and partially dependent on intelligence operations and agencies.

The dependence on covert intelligence—both for secret information and to advance security interests—became a hallmark of the Eisenhower and early Kennedy administrations, and although the CIA was held in check under Truman, Nixon expanded its purview, even within the United States in contravention of its international mandate. Eisenhower signed the Korean War Armistice in 1953, but turned to the recently formed CIA (1947) as his “primary instrument of American intervention in other countries.”<sup>23</sup> Since 9/11, an increasing number of critics have focused on Eisenhower’s once-secret use of the CIA in Iran (1953), Guatemala (1954), Egypt (1954), Indonesia (1958), Laos (1959), and Cuba (1960-61) in an effort to explain not only the current hatred of the US in much of the Middle East and Near East, but also the suspicion and hostility in most of Latin America.<sup>24</sup> The historian Douglas Little points out that these covert operations were shortsighted. They were sponsored in order to limit revolutions, but all they really accomplished was creating a lingering distrust of American goals in developing regions at best. At worst they became the basis for later conflict, as with the 1979 Iranian Revolution against the Shah.<sup>25</sup> Schlesinger looks beyond the lack of foresight or cultural blindness within the Intelligence Community, pointing out that “Congress has no

effective means of control or oversight”<sup>26</sup> of the CIA, and would not until the late 1970s when President Ford responded negatively to some of these operations.

Kennedy inherited Eisenhower’s plans for Cuba and Castro, which resulted in the Bay of Pigs fiasco, and Johnson chose to take Kennedy’s military assistance to South Vietnam and promote it into an active military conflict. Johnson had Truman’s Korean War in mind, so he made a point of getting Congressional approval, if not an outright declaration of war, by manipulating the Tonkin Gulf incident so Congress would legislate the subsequent war powers resolution in 1964. But in 1965, in addition to “Americanizing” the Vietnam War, Johnson sent 22,000 US troops to the Dominican Republic without congressional authority.<sup>27</sup> Johnson managed to reduce Congress’s role to one of supporting war efforts rather than declaring wars. Far more ominous for the next few decades was the effect of Johnson’s “shrunk-en-world theory of defensive war,” which meant that any conflict, anywhere, could “constitute an attack on the United States and thereby authorize [the President] to wage ‘defensive’ war without congressional consent.”<sup>28</sup> Nixon inherited the Vietnam War and benefited from Johnson’s doctrines, but he went even further in ordering covert action against Congressional authority and by using intelligence assets to monitor and track citizens and journalists as part of his “enemies” list.

### **Earth Abides**

When *Earth Abides* was published in 1949, the aura of the President was briefly eclipsed by rising tensions with the USSR, the Greek Civil War, unrest in Turkey, and the growing importance of the new United Nations. Truman may have won the 1948 election in an unexpected upset over Republican candidate Thomas Dewey and Dixiecrat Strom

Thurmond, but only after first fighting a three-way split within the Democratic Party itself. Although Truman was an advocate for civil rights, and the importance of a strengthened and cohesive military was immediately apparent, he was only able to integrate the armed forces by executive order. That it took until 1950 to complete the desegregation of the military after certain commanders and officers dragged their feet suggests that the influence of the President had declined since the end of the war, even with the looming Communist threat. Ironically, the Soviet development of their own atomic bomb in 1949 should have focused more attention on the role and actions of the intelligence community, but covert operations remained out of the spotlight even as efforts to develop thermonuclear weapons intensified.

In the post-plague Bay area of *Earth Abides*, a council of elders controls the Tribe rather than elected leaders or a titular executive. Ish may be considered the de facto leader, but for more than a generation the other founding adults shrug off his suggestions and demands to try and restore aspects of modern civilization. When their children come of age and begin marrying and producing their own children, Ish's sons in particular not only ignore his arguments, but they also actively deride his weak overtures to rebuild as cyclic nostalgia. The one endeavor that matters most to Ish—the continuance of schoolroom instruction and education—is abandoned within the first decade after the death of his favorite son, Joey, the only child to express any interest in reading and the past. Whatever respect and control Ish has among the elders is derived from his intellect and education, but ultimately those graduate studies only help him understand the way the world changes after the death of men, not to teach or train the future generations. Of



all his experiments and plans, it is only his introduction of bows and arrows that contributes meaningfully to the future of the Tribe.

At the end of the novel when the ruins of San Francisco and the homes of the Tribe are consumed by wildfire, the last of the Americans, Ish, also dies. Although he and the founding elders are called “the Americans,” Ish never institutes elections nor codifies the rules or laws of the Tribe. When Dick and Bob return from their cross-country trek, they bring the stranger, Charlie, with them from Las Vegas who quickly charms them with his charisma and stories. But Charlie develops an interest in Evie, and she apparently returns it, and when Ish attempts to intercede, Charlie not only refuses Ish’s implied order, but also challenges his right to effectively isolate Evie. After this confrontation it becomes clear that Ish’s insecurities and prejudices, rather than an actual worry about mentally disadvantaged children or Charlie’s rumored STDs, drive the quick decision to execute Charlie. The council—prompted by Em and Ish—decide that Charlie is a threat but if they exile him, he might bear a grudge. But the truth of the matter is that Ish fears Charlie’s charisma and immediate influence, and has no means to command either respect or obedience. Although Ish and his inner circle deem this an execution for the good of the community, it is not more than legal murder, used to shore up a threatened executive. It is an abrogation of civil rights and the very spirit of American democracy, revealing that these “last Americans” have already surrendered to fear, a reflection of the beginning of the Cold War anxiety.

### **Alas, Babylon**

Between 1949 and the early 1960s the federal government pursued multiple and often contradictory policies concerning civil defense in the event of nuclear war. One of

these was the 162-page US “Blue Book” prepared by the National Security Resource Board in 1950, followed by policies for evacuation (the most effective were at the state and county level), personal (home) shelters, and the National System of Interstate and Defense Highways, begun in 1956 under Eisenhower. But by 1957 the critics of Eisenhower’s nuclear policy included those like Michael Amrine, the former managing editor of the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, who accused the Eisenhower administration and the Atomic Energy Commission of negligence and the civil defense officials of misleading the public regarding the dangers of fallout and the implications of a large-scale nuclear exchange.<sup>29</sup> The conflicting official documents, chronic congressional underfunding, and media hype regarding fallout and bomb shelters promoted a growing sense of insecurity and uncertainty, especially after the Soviets demonstrated the possibility of intercontinental ballistic missiles in 1957 with the Sputnik launches.

When it was published in 1959, Pat Frank’s *Alas, Babylon* exploited the same anxiety of a “missile gap” between the US and Soviets that later helped propel Kennedy to victory in the 1960 Presidential election. Although critics like Martha Bartter and Patrick Sharp tend to focus on the depictions of race and post-racism in Frank’s novel, others such as David Seed consider it more in terms of its survival themes. Seed explores Randy Bragg’s military associations in relation to the warning his brother (illegally) gives him, and how Bragg is forced to evolve from a bachelor to the head of an extended family that eventually becomes the nucleus of the post-cataclysmic community.<sup>30</sup> In this and other stories of the era, Seed recognizes the recurring importance of the family, itself the core of civil defense post-war planning. And while Frank incorporates a range of

families into his narrative, some of which do not survive, Fort Repose's survival in a devastated Florida after the failure of both civil defense and military strategy criticizes executive policy and planning.

Military personnel—active duty, reserve officers, and veterans—permeate the entire story, but it is errors in strategic planning that lead to the escalation of violence in the Mediterranean Sea, and the nuclear war that sets the stage for the narrative. The conflict is the result of a series of mistakes, a profound criticism of the MAD doctrine and policies of brinkmanship at the executive level, but also of the breakdown in civil defense planning that occurs at the local level. Bubba Offenhaus, the local mortician and funeral director, is tapped as the civil defense officer because he owns the two local ambulances; but he fails fulfill the duties of this post by choosing not to pass out the informative pamphlets on fallout and radiation poisoning because they were “too gruesome.”<sup>31</sup> Moreover, Fort Repose is fortunate because it lies between two targets, Miami and Tampa, and escapes their fallout. Because evacuation plans are not publically announced, survivors do not know where to rally and few arrive in Fort Repose; and although the families of military personnel are informed, no survivors ever appear from Homestead AFB.<sup>32</sup> In one more bit of dark irony, when Fort Repose receives the Presidential order to institute an economic freeze, it is too late—after the run on the bank, all that the stores have left is cash, no goods, and the bank president has already committed suicide when he recognizes the end of a cash and credit economy. Frank recognized that much of America's post-war strength was derived from its economic power, one tightly linked to Europe and Japan through the Marshall Plan that supported their recovery and rebuilding efforts. In post-cataclysm the dollar is only a semi-useless

piece of paper because its symbolic value vanishes with the government that guaranteed its barter value.

The elected President is killed early in the war, to become a heroic martyr, and his replacement mainly narrates stopgap measures and oversees the transition of power from the federal government to local, military authorities under martial law. The very ideal of American democratic society, the presidency, is rendered impotent and willingly hands over governing authority to the military. A member of Randy's intimate circle, Admiral Hazzard, speculates that the actual President died in Washington, D.C. because he chose to stay and conduct the critical opening phase of the war rather than evacuate before the first missiles hit. It is a number of days later, after law, utilities (water and power), and the economy have collapsed in and around Fort Repose, that they receive a transmission over the emergency communications network from the "Acting Chief Executive," Mrs. Josephine Vanbruuker-Brown, the former Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare. The acting President first reassures her audience that the fight continues before issuing a series of executive orders. She declares a "state of unlimited national emergency until such time as new elections are held, and Congress reconvenes," as well as "martial law" to be administered by the Army, or local reserve officers if necessary.<sup>33</sup> Vanbruuker-Brown draws on the myth of FDR, from the name with its Dutch resonance, her order to close the banks as Roosevelt did in his first 100 days, to the reuse of "this day of infamy" in her radio address. Casting her as the member of the cabinet in charge of education sets up the far later transfer of power to the new President of the Colonies in *BSG*—she is also the Secretary of Education, which underscores the interconnection of this theme in the genre megatext.

The executive order puts the responsibility of local command on Randy's shoulders as an officer in the Army reserves and a veteran of the Korean conflict. The sheriff and deputies are killed within the first few days of the war, but Randy initially only worries about protecting and defending his extended family. Even after he is technically in charge it takes an attack by raiders on Randy's friend Dr. Dan Gunn, the only local physician, to propel him into action. In another error in judgment, Randy chooses to use only his own people to set a trap for the raiders, but its success (the deaths of the raiders, not their capture nor trial) it is at the cost of his neighbor and friend, Malachi Henry. Not only is Malachi black, a pronounced minority in this text, but he is also the mechanic and technician who helps the extended Bragg community survive in more comfort than most of Fort Repose. Malachi is an Air Force veteran and reservist, and as an enlisted officer his loss is an indictment of Bragg's leadership and military ability, suggesting that martial law will only offer a limited form of unstable government to a vulnerable community. Unlike the majority of post-nuclear war texts generated during the 1950s, Frank makes a point to suggest through Bragg that military leaders are best suited to deal with combat and limited emergency responses; they are not the best foundation for a democratic society even under a perpetual crisis.

### **The New Vulnerability**

Schlesinger marks Johnson and Nixon as the apex of the accumulation of "imperial" power, and as such, they open the increasing doubt and cynicism felt by a large segment of the American public toward the President and the Washington political establishment after Vietnam and Watergate. Where Johnson manipulated the Gulf of Tonkin crisis to turn a *de facto* war into an actual one, Schlesinger points to the invasion

of Cambodia and bombing of Laos as the greatest of Nixon's international abuses, enabled as they were by the "Nixon-Rehnquist proposition"—the authority to deploy armed forces when the President decides that foreign powers constitute an active threat and have invited retaliation.<sup>34</sup> Johnson was weakened by large-scale activism and protests which prompted him to refuse to run for reelection, but later Nixon responded to his critics by trying to control the media, using the FBI and Justice Department to interfere with political opponents, and attempting to bypass congressional authority. Nixon tried to neutralize the congressional power of the purse through impoundment and the reallocation of funds.<sup>35</sup> Schlesinger recalls Nixon's attempts to pressure the media (wiretaps, subpoenaing reporters' notes, threatening licenses), lie to the press, and undermine the independence of the press in order to subvert its ability to inform the public.<sup>36</sup> Sean Wilentz adds that under Nixon, had the Huston Plan not failed it would have "empower[ed] the White House to spy on and even lock up, without legal authorization, Americans it deemed dangerous or undesirable."<sup>37</sup> For a brief span Nixon threatened the very balance of constitutional power, and by interfering with the press he partially blinded the public, limiting its ability to limit his actions by voting him out of office.

But the creation of the War Powers Act of 1973 curtailed the President's ability to order military actions without formal declaration of war. For Nixon, the Watergate scandal and impeachment resulted in his resignation, but it also created a widespread distrust of not only the White House, but of Washington and the entire "Beltway" culture, including Congress. Part of this distrust was directed toward the unelected President, former House Speaker Gerald R. Ford. Ford was appointed by Nixon to replace Spiro

Agnew as Vice President in 1973, after Agnew was charged with accepting bribes. When Nixon resigned, Ford became President, and whatever trust he might have had was eradicated only a month after his inauguration when he pardoned Nixon. The threat of the imperial presidency ended for a time with Nixon's resignation, but the public had to deal with not just the scandal and exposure of corruption within the Executive, but with the defeat of the American military in Vietnam. The fall of Saigon in 1975 and loss of South Vietnam as an ally against Communism created a crisis of confidence within the military that lasted until the first Gulf War. The last vestiges of the triumphal US armed forces that "won" World War II had disappeared; the returning Vietnam veterans found an economy in crisis that had no jobs for them, and a society that considered them an embarrassment and reminder of the abuses of recent Presidents.

Jimmy Carter's victory in the 1976 Presidential election over Ford is primarily attributed to his outsider status; as the Governor of Georgia, he was not a Beltway insider and did not have the history and relationships in Washington that promoted Johnson, Nixon, or even Ford. Unfortunately, as Wilentz points out, "Carter's steady decline after his propitious start was caused chiefly by the country's renewed economic woes. The rise of inflation, which stood at 6 percent the month he took office, rose on average every year for the rest of his presidency, reaching the low double digits in 1979 and 1980."<sup>38</sup> Inflation, unemployment, the energy crisis and gas rationing—domestic issues—plagued Carter's single term, but international crises more than anything deepened the doubts and dashed the hopes placed in this new President. Russian premier Leonid Brezhnev took advantage of the fallout of Watergate and Vietnam to push proxy wars in Africa and continue the Soviet military buildup, effectively ending Détente and bringing back the

Cold War fears.<sup>39</sup> The end of the 1970s was difficult, and 1979 was a particularly bad year; the Three Mile Island incident “raised grave questions about promoting atomic energy as an alternative to imported oil”<sup>40</sup> and other presidential policies. On November 4<sup>th</sup> the US embassy in Tehran was overrun, and fifty-four hostages taken by Iranian militants and students, and Carter’s responses were initially limited to diplomacy. Even Carter’s relative successes with the SALT II talks and Camp David Accords were overshadowed by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979. Carter’s response was to organize a 50-nation boycott of the Olympic Games in Moscow, and to impose a boycott of American grain sales to Russia, which did more to “harm ordinary Russians and American grain producers and suppliers,”<sup>41</sup> than Soviet leaders. In April 1980, while enmeshed in a bitter reelection campaign, the attempted hostage rescue, Operation Eagle Claw, utterly failed, further weakening both Carter and the image of the President.<sup>42</sup> His efforts were further undermined by secret negotiations between the Iranians and Carter’s political rival for the presidency, Ronald Reagan, who would elevate the imperial presidency to new heights after his election.

Reagan’s winning campaign trumpeted a “new morning in America” and employed western-movie trappings to leverage the candidate’s cinematic background, but also to reenergize the myths of American exception and frontier vitality. This carried with it the overtones of religion and family values through the influence of the conservative right. Bacevich notes that Reagan gained mileage from his criticism of Carter’s suggestion that the real danger to American democracy lay within a “crisis of confidence,”<sup>43</sup> or as he phrased it, “that the United States, like other great civilizations of



the past, has reached the zenith of its power.”<sup>44</sup> But Reagan reasserted America’s power through an emphasis on martial strength. After his victory, Reagan set about resolving the hostage crisis in Tehran (later a source of conspiracy theories and investigations), but also in establishing his Cold Warrior credentials by implementing new doctrines of imperial sovereignty with “the rapid expansion of offensive weaponry, including militarization of space [...] and other measures designed to place the entire world at risk of instant annihilation.”<sup>45</sup> Moreover, borrowing from the Eisenhower playbook, Reagan used the CIA and paramilitary contractors in a “clandestine war” that eventually fueled solidarity movements in Central America, but also refreshed anti-American sentiments and popular resistance that continues today.<sup>46</sup> As H. Bruce Franklin argues in *Warstars*, Reagan explicitly rejected Détente by 1982, and the work of “Science fiction writers, some directly tied to the aerospace industry, were central figures in the [space war] campaign, indefatigably churning out fiction and nonfiction glorifying Star Wars”<sup>47</sup> by 1983, as the new fear crested.

### **Lucifer's Hammer:**

In 1977 when *Lucifer's Hammer* was published, it reflected ambivalence and doubt about not just the President, but also the federal government and the armed forces. There is no direct analogy for executive power, but in its absence the compromises necessary for power-sharing and survival contrast with the expectations of the social contract, as well as the obligations of pseudo-feudal leaders and landholders who accept refugees as neo-serfs. The novel was published during Carter’s first year, and although the story includes indictments against evangelical Christianity, inner-city corruption, and

budgetary myopia, its key thematic plea is for more funding for NASA, and space science and exploration. The story pits a senator from California and local families against an insane preacher, Army mutineers, and social and environmental activists driven mad by the end of the world. Local authorities—mayors and sheriffs—become set dressing, and the federal government and shadows of the President only enter near the end of the story as multiple claimants compete through scattered radio broadcasts to succeed the lost President. This is a conservative tale in that the Stronghold community must fend for itself, ignoring most of the Bill of Rights and conventions of American society to do it.

Comet strikes across most of the Northern hemisphere and their resultant devastation set up the central conflict of *LH*, as the scarcity of resources, especially food, pits these two groups of survivors against each other. The “heroes” are the near-feudal meritocracy centered in “the Stronghold” in the northern Californian hills, largely supported by its local farms and ranches. Those who are allowed to enter as refugees are carefully selected for their skills and professional training, a process that is part of the “lifeboat ethics” of survival that Ann Larabee traces to Michel Foucault’s descriptions of the necessary responses used by medieval towns to survive the Black Plague.<sup>48</sup> The opposing, predatory force is the invading cult-like New Brotherhood Army (NBA)—a neo-Luddite anti-technological cannibal “army” formed from those who escaped the cities, a combination of poor and working class survivors from ethnic neighborhoods and white, middle-class, suburban refugees. A conservative US Senator, Arthur Jellison, leads the Stronghold in a semi-partnership with the largest group in the valley, the Christopher clan. The NBA are controlled by a deranged group that includes an insane evangelical radio-preacher, a radical environmentalist, a black Vietnam veteran, and black gang

leaders. Much of the conflict sets farmers against the urban survivors who are defined as having few if any skills that will help them survive or contribute meaningfully to the recovery of civilization.

The Stronghold is relatively secure once the waves of refugees end, the council finishes its inventories and plans, and begins to build greenhouses and convert existing structures. Jellison owns a working farm, but it is the political support he enjoys from the local conservative farmers that gives him leadership of the Stronghold council after the (elected) local mayor steps down. The local community believes that as a Senator, Jellison has greater authority and political awareness, and this familiarity and his former service as an Air Force general will translate into a way to deal with this crisis. The largest and most financially powerful group in the valley, the Christopher Clan, initially forms his political opposition and balances his power mainly through their “military” strength in terms of an extended family and its armed hired hands. George Christopher, their leader, articulates the antipathy towards the thousands of strangers—refugees—fleeing the city and lowlands that he views as “a locust plague” because they have white-collar jobs that are now useless, dependent as they were on technology or commercialism, or because they are “the forever unemployed” making these locusts “the landless people without jobs or skills or tools or homes” in this post-collapse milieu.<sup>49</sup> As far as the members of the Stronghold are concerned, they have all the labor they require, and have no need for the managers and white-collar workers of the now-dead modern world, although they will revise the list to accept doctors, surgeons, dentists, etc. after a bit of reflection.

The Stronghold council (primarily George Christopher and Senator Jellison) rations supplies, sets exchange rates, and passes judgment on anything deemed criminal after revising the laws to a more effective and limited set after Hammerfall. Jellison uses his insider knowledge and relationships with various scientists to prepare for the possible comet strike by hoarding food, fuel, and other goods; he does offer to share with the community, but only on the condition that everyone contribute and pool resources. In the beginning, one of the Christophers argues that such a plan to inventory resources and coordinate their use from a central authority is Communism, and surprisingly, Jellison's tepid response is only that survival will require cooperation. Given the central role of the council, this plan does seem to resemble soviet-style communism in many respects, especially after the council begins to exile hoarders and appropriate and redistribute their goods when they violate one of the new laws.<sup>50</sup> It is Jellison who first considers all the things that a modern farmer must have to plant and harvest—gas, oil, fertilizer, machinery—and he also recognizes that the new calculus of survival is the need for manpower—human labor—calculated against the cost in food. But even as this Malthusian observation is reinforced, it echoes a loss of self-sufficiency in American culture: even the “yeoman farmers” have become dependent on basic consumer goods that by the 1970s come more from Taiwan, Korea, and Mexico than from the US. The former arsenal of democracy no longer makes its own pots and pans nor needles and pins, and after China entered the world market in 1978 the shift of manufacturing and fabrication accelerated, a central argument of Gideon Rachman's *Zero-Sum Future* (2011).

As both a military officer and a Senator, Jellison took an oath to serve and protect the Constitution, and while his leadership arguably preserves lives it is at the expense of the not only the Bill of Rights, but also personal property. Niven and Pournelle represent the farmers and ranchers as understanding “the need for organization,” as in the collectivization and rationing of resources, “but they weren’t servile about it. But the others—the pathetic refugees [...] the city people [...] even rural people whose lifestyles depended on feed trucks and refrigerated railroad cars and California weather—for them the Jellisons were ‘the government’ which would care for them, as it always had.”<sup>51</sup> But whether “servile” or not, the valley is no longer democratic and the power favors the Christophers and Jellison, whose rules are “laid down without discussion.”<sup>52</sup>

The Senator and George Christopher decide how and when everyone in the valley must share, and they are the judges and jury for violations of “their” law, which after the second offense becomes a death sentence in the form of exile—no one can survive outside the Stronghold. When Peter Bonar is sentenced to “the Road” for hoarding, he is permitted a brief hearing. In his defense, he argues that Jellison’s hatchet man, Hardy, “had no warrant” for the search of Bonar’s home that revealed the unregistered supplies, as though the old rules still applied.<sup>53</sup> There is still an assumption of civil liberties, even though the structures that supposedly guaranteed them no longer exist which highlights the fragility of the system, particularly post-cataclysm. Where theft in desperate circumstances can be understood, the hoarding charge brushes past the implicit criticism—that the “guilty” father does not trust these new authorities to protect him any more than the last, so he is left to be responsible for his family and when he chooses them over the community he is expelled. This same penalty is leveled against Hugo Beck, a

former head (and owner) of a commune within the valley, when he is summarily found guilty of theft.

American democracy includes political parties and the public election of its leaders, and since the ratification of the Twenty-Fifth Amendment, a defined succession of power should the President be incapacitated. However, none of these mechanisms are part of post-comet northern California. Jellison becomes the senior member of the council more or less by popular acclaim in the manner of a New England town meeting, but George Christopher's power is based on his family's status in the valley and the manpower he commands. The Senator also suffers from a health condition, but does not plan for succession, although his chief of staff does: the new leader must wed his daughter, Maureen Jellison—hardly a democratic transfer of power. In fact, none of the local elected leaders hold power by the end of the narrative—the mayor within the valley has effectively resigned in favor of the Senator; the Mayor of Los Angeles, Bentley Allen, is reduced to being a refugee in the besieged nuclear power plant; and the Lieutenant Governor of California is either a member of or held hostage by the NBA—nobody is quite sure. Regardless of whether he joined them willingly, the Lieutenant Governor uses his apparent legal authority to sign a writ instructing anyone to whom it is presented to surrender to the NBA as the “duly authorized” representatives of the legal government of California. At the very least, this gives the NBA the ersatz legal right to requisition food, supplies, and weapons, but it is used as leverage to force other survivors to submit to the NBA, which also implies joining in their cannibalistic communion and religious Luddite cult. Neither the Stronghold nor the NBA respect individual rights and liberties, and both use force to guarantee compliance with their dictates and demands.

*Lucifer's Hammer* signals the ambivalence with which not only the Army, but also the National Guard and police were regarded in the mid-1970s. As Tim and Eileen flee Los Angeles, they drive through Tujunga where men in a mix of uniforms, some old and ill fitting, try in vain to control the rising tide of refugees.<sup>54</sup> The instability of the Army unit is a more pointed in its criticism, as it almost immediately descends into mutiny and preys on the surrounding homeowners and farmers. After Hammerfall, Corporal Gillings assassinates the company commander, Captain Hora (Army Reserves), with no real plan other than the fantasy of becoming a warlord. The company comes under the control of Sergeant Hook, but they grow desperate, losing “men to disease, to desertion, to the guns in the valley [...] farmers.”<sup>55</sup> The remaining sixty or so men maintain some of their discipline, but are no longer an Army, but a well-armed mob forced to become cannibals, feeding on the very people and society they were supposed to protect. It takes the insane Reverend Armitage to tap into their self-hatred and disgust, and forge them into the Angels of the Lord. The combined forces of the Stronghold alliance defeat the Angels and NBA, but this creates a brief crisis. As Maureen Jellison points out: “We can't let them go. And we can't keep them as citizens. If all we can afford is slavery, then keep them as slaves [...]. Only we don't call them slaves, either, because that makes it too easy to think like a slavemaster. We can put them to work, but we call them prisoners of war and we treat them as prisoners of war.”<sup>56</sup>

But *Lucifer's Hammer* goes no further; its prisoners remain veritable slaves, and the majority of the survivors in the valley are subjected to the equivalent of hard labor, even after the valley is wired to the nuclear power station. Shorelines, landmasses, currents, wind and weather patterns—all leave this a colder world, and make the very

first few years after the strikes a time of great hunger and deprivation. Even when a new President is chosen from among the claimants, and communications are restored, it will take years to rebuild the country and decades for the world to recover enough to recreate a global economy. If the NBA and even the more “moderate” Stronghold response are any indication, this is a world where those with the weapons and manpower will take advantage of the situation to make sure they and their followers are not the ones who starve. Any sense of American exceptionalism or democratic ideals vanishes in the interests of survival.

### **Doom Deferred**

Reagan’s cold warrior policies may have helped mitigate feelings of post-Vietnam vulnerability and impotence after the Iran Hostage Crisis, but his Armed Forces budget contributed to the next recession, and his proposed militarization of space brought the US and USSR back to the brink of nuclear war. By 1982, Sean Wilentz suggests that Détente had largely been abandoned, and “the main elements of Reagan’s militant foreign policy were advancing at a rapid clip.”<sup>57</sup> Reagan’s militant bluster may have accelerated the financial crisis for the Soviets, and helped bring about the election of Mikhail Gorbachev as a reformer, but at the cost of Carter’s attempts to promote human rights and “devastating the fiscal, judicial, and ideological foundations of liberal reform have left an enduring mark on American politics and government.”<sup>58</sup> Reagan ran on the platform of shrinking the role of government by dismantling the federal bureaucracy, and reducing taxes and regulations. But by the end of the 1980s, these policies put American troops at risk in the Middle East, exploded the federal deficit, and exposed abuses of power related to both financial oversight and the use of intelligence assets and paramilitary operations.



The myth of American primacy in technology and science promoted what was perhaps the biggest bluff of the twentieth century—Reagan’s announcement on March 23, 1983 of the Strategic Defense Initiative. It mattered little that Senator Edward Kennedy denounced it pejoratively as “Star Wars,” because most of America and many US allies hoped (and some enemies feared) it was possible. As Franklin explains in *Warstars*, the idea of a space shield was only the latest in a series of American attempts to develop the superweapon.”<sup>59</sup> Robinson’s *The Wild Shore* and Strieber and Kunetka’s *Warday* both consider Soviet feelings of vulnerability and the fear of successful Star Wars technologies in their preemptive attacks on the US. As Allan Winkler points out, several scientists and industry insiders contended that the shield would not be effective enough and that the illusion of safety would promote the chance of attack.<sup>60</sup> The pursuit of space-based defenses put considerable diplomatic stress on the Soviets (and NATO allies) until after the Reykjavik Summit in late 1986, and the first moves toward decreasing US and Soviet nuclear arsenals in 1987. The Star Wars proposal, nuclear winter, and post-apocalyptic scenarios may have been prominently featured in SF, but the renewed attention to conventional military forces strengthened the appearance of executive power and prompted the development of the techno-thriller subgenre.

Although Reagan’s military expenditures helped build the force that contributed to the coalition victory over Iraq in the first Gulf War, this came after a series of military embarrassments and missteps. American historian David Hoogland Noon argues that the neoconservative supporters of Reagan’s cold war policies “anchored the identity of the United States in its need for a strong military, its moral commitment to the spread of democracy everywhere, its near-total responsibility for the international order, and its

resulting obligation to challenge those who defy American values.”<sup>61</sup> This belief promoted American operations in Lebanon, Grenada, the Indian Gulf, and under George H.W. Bush, in Panama. However, Wilentz’s criticism is that the political and military objectives for many of these missions were murky and conflicted, leaving Americans exposed and vulnerable; in Beirut, all Americans became targets: On April 18, 1983, suicide terrorists drove a van of explosives into the American embassy, killing sixty-three people, and a few months later, on October 23, a suicide bomber drove a Mercedes-Benz delivery truck also packed with explosives into the US Marines’ main barracks killing 241 servicemen, and injuring sixty others.<sup>62</sup> The Grenada mission was authorized the day before the bombing of the Marine barracks; however, to many, the invasion was perceived as an attempt to repair military prestige. Douglas Little suggests something similar regarding Operation Praying Mantis off the coast of Iran in 1988,<sup>63</sup> and Wilentz offers a similar view of Operation Just Cause in Panama in December 1989.<sup>64</sup> According to Paul Kennedy, by 1988, while the US was not in decline, it came close to “imperial overstretch” as its global interests and obligations were far greater than the ability to meet them, and though it is beyond this study, this explains the need for the international coalition in the first Gulf War.<sup>65</sup>

Where military success was gradual and halting, the Reagan administration suffered from a loss of prestige over its economic stewardship and the exposure of secret, illegal negotiations and intelligence operations. Wilentz details the subversion of the rule of law in the Iran-Contra “Arms for Hostages” deals, as well as the deliberate destruction of evidence by John Poindexter, Oliver North, and Richard Secord as “beyond even

Richard Nixon's obstruction of justice.”<sup>66</sup> The exposure of Iran-Contra had little negative effect on Reagan's reputation, but it did promote greater oversight on the executive as a whole, especially on those highly placed within the administration. Wilentz also laments the reduction of federal oversight because this “success” resulted in “the savings and loan scandal, the politicization and plunder of the Environmental Protection Agency, the junk-bond boom and associated scandals on Wall Street, the outrages involving procurement at the Pentagon.”<sup>67</sup> In many respects, the first President Bush inherited the fallout of Reagan's economic policies and either his inattention to the efforts of his key staff, or the actual commission of illegal activities by the President. The post-cataclysmic SF of this era begins with the heightened nuclear fears (and a wave of academic nuclear criticism) in the wake of the SDI announcement and concentrates on post-war scenarios, some of which through dystopias like *Bone Dance* that also explore corporate control of government, which blurs into the (then) new subgenre of Cyberpunk. Whether post-war or late-capitalist, these dystopias cast the US as no more than a shell of its former power, when it has not yet fragmented and been sold piecemeal to the highest bidders.

### **The Wild Shore**

The world of *The Wild Shore* is post-American; there are no longer any states, much less a national government, and both the US Army and the President are only dim memories for the paltry few lingering survivors among the post-cataclysm communities decades later. The novel is critical of intelligence agencies, such as the CIA and FBI, because the successful coordination necessary to smuggle such a vast number of Russian warhead-laden Chevy vans into so many cities, and to synchronize their detonation implies a massive failure of security. But the power of the President is most notable in its

absence—this is an America kept fragmented and weak by UN-mandated patrols on its former national borders. Canada, Mexico, and Japan police the reformed communities, towns, and proto-cities; they suppress recovery when it reaches enough technological capability—transportation and communication—that the restoration of the greater nation might be possible. The UN orders and border patrols are at the “behest” of the USSR, but the remaining powers fear that if the US reunifies, both the nation and the threat of global nuclear war will return.<sup>68</sup> This novel centers on the deliberate desire to keep American democratic and civil society from resurfacing, recognizes the flawed reality of these systems in the modern world, and rejects the idea that American political ideology can or will save the world.

In some respects, the small fishing village of San Onofre is semi-utopian; it is governed by most of the town’s adults using a town meeting, and the community is nearly self-sufficient in its collective support. In contrast, the resurgent city growing on the edge of the San Diego ruins is less politically stable and incites attack from the UN wardens. The leaders of New San Diego not only scavenge from the ruins, particularly weapons and technology, but they also try to rebuild the railway system and renew links between the disparate settlements on the Californian coast. In this post-apocalyptic southern California, the adults of San Onofre act more in line with the elders of Stewart’s Bay area Tribe rather than the more insular Braggs in Fort Repose, or the neo-feudal Stronghold of *Lucifer’s Hammer*. The fishing village displays an ethos that is more Libertarian and appears to promote choice and individual responsibility, at least until those choices pit some of the young men, members of the “American resistance,” against the Japanese. San Diego is more rebuilt and is just large enough and powerful enough to

be nostalgic about lost American might, and also to be unrealistic about current Japanese abilities. Paul Kennedy explains this perception of Japanese power as a threat tied to the penetration of both European and American domestic markets with Japanese cars and consumer goods in the mid-to-late 1970s and early 1980s. This “rise of the Pacific region,”<sup>69</sup> as Kennedy calls it, is reflected in the metaphor of renewed Japanese military prominence not only in *The Wild Shore*, but also in *Warday*—both stories of American decline, but not of global cataclysm, leaving other nations to rise and fill the power vacuum.

The town meeting of San Onofre votes against an alliance with San Diego, which has plans to not only resist Japanese patrols (and attack tourists who slip past quarantine), but also to join a rumored national resistance movement based on the other side of the Rockies. Though the mayor of San Diego and his inner circle argue that “real Americans”<sup>70</sup> fight back (against “Chinese”), their eventual attempts do little more than kill a Japanese tourist and cost them some of their own people from both San Diego and San Onofre. Once again, missiles launched from sea or orbit destroy the restored railways, and the Mayor of New San Diego is ousted; his people are no longer willing to risk attack and the loss of what has taken decades to restore, including a small broadcast tower, printing press, and small scale publishing house. *The Wild Shore* is a boy’s coming of age tale, with a ridiculous resistance story as an excuse for pursuit in the woods, adventures on (and in) open water, and the distraction of Scavenger families who inform to the Japanese. The American decline provides an excuse for adventure and for leaving behind the responsibility of contributing to the village, or worse, growing up and merely replacing their parents and elders as they grow old and wear out. This is a world in which

the American Dream died when the van-bombs exploded and the remains of the US became scattered, third world fragments of a slowly forgotten promise.

### **Warday**

*Warday* was written in part as a response to the announcement of the Strategic Defense Initiative—the novel attempts to depict realistically the results of even a limited nuclear exchange or the damage from an “acceptable” level of collateral damage. This is definitely an anti-war, and to some degree an anti-deterrence, narrative. It is not the technology that fails necessarily, but the political and diplomatic process. Reagan announced the SDI in 1983, attaching the aura of the President to both the initiative and its perceived success and benefits, or failure and possible nuclear apocalypse. *Warday* is the latter; it is the logical extrapolation of the “leakage” of a fraction of Soviet missiles through an expensive and high technology defense (whose feasibility was already encountering fierce obstacles by 1984). In this story, Russia uses a nuclear weapon against the space shuttle in order to prevent a space-based missile defense system from going active. But this “defensive counter-measure” sparks a nuclear exchange between the US and USSR; however, it is limited because both NATO and the Warsaw Pact activate a secret agreement, and not only abstain from the conflict but place Russian troops and bases under military arrest. Still, the fallout and famine extend beyond regions of the US and USSR, severely damaging parts of Mexico, India, and China, paving the way for Britain and much of Europe to reassert international dominance, in concert with a remilitarized Japan.

The United States remains in name, but is fragmented and balkanized and only those regions left untouched have something approaching their former economies and

standard of living. Strieber and Kunetka offer a riff on Steinbeck's depiction in *Grapes of Wrath* of Depression-era California, where the state militarizes its borders against all other US citizens in order to maintain its economy. More often the examples given in Los Angeles and San Francisco suggest this is also class-based—most those who have property and liquid capital manage to increase their wealth or at least ignore the increasing inequities. However, the growth of ethnic neighborhoods comprised of those who are not accepted back into their grandparents' birth countries (an inversion of the Japanese Nisei experience) turn the regions around San Francisco, San Diego, and especially Los Angeles into *favelas*, depicting Californian success that comes at the price of an income disparity equivalent to that of Brazil and other struggling Latin American nations at the end of the twentieth century. California itself changes and becomes a police state with reminders to report suspicious persons; a place where “outsiders are looked upon as contagious at best, and probably downright lethal,”<sup>71</sup> according to a Catholic priest who operates as part of a new underground railroad. California uses its own National Guard forces and some US Army units to patrol those lines, with lethal force authorized to stop “invaders”—though they come from Nevada or New Mexico rather than Mexico. Oregon and Washington State both follow California's lead and erect their own fences, instituting armed border patrols using former US Army detachments to bolster their own National Guard units to enforce stringent immigration restrictions, although CA, WA, and OR residents come and go at will. “Residents only states” in the South and Southeast including Georgia, the Carolinas, and the rest of Virginia outside the DC metro area, do not accept other American citizens because their own infrastructure

(and food) is overstretched. The Bible Belt cannot extend Christian charity to its poor, much less the starving citizens of the former-Republic at large.

The President and Congress die in the initial attack, and the serving President is effectively sequestered along with the remaining federal government on a few floors of a formerly federal building in Los Angeles. The death of the President and the all-but hostage federal government within an increasingly independent California offer a particularly cynical view of the breakdown of leadership and federal government. The US is Balkanized into regions that are self-sustaining and those that require extensive financial and medical relief; this division makes it easy for other countries to draw resources and assets from the crippled nation: crops and oil for Europe; weapons and nuclear technology for Japan. Strieber and Kunetka also criticize civil defense for being more likely to hide in California, than actually risk going where its help is needed—the effected “war zones” of the Midwest. Its inadequacy and incompetence, or just plain fear, reflect the criticism that James F. Miskel levels at the entire system of disaster relief. As Miskel argues, not only did FEMA inherit civil defense, but it also remains underfunded and poorly directed. The crux of his argument lies in the failures during and after Katrina, of the same system that the nation relies upon today to manage the humanitarian consequences of major terrorist attacks.<sup>72</sup> But beyond the floors of the reconstituted federal government anyone who lacks the proper papers and identification (as a Californian) can be arrested, and given a preemptory trial (with no defense) and sent to prison to perform hard labor. The option of deportation only exists on the borders, and even then it is typically because non-Californians who have become nationalized into the



Californian Army hesitate to shoot their fellow Americans for crossing the border illegally.

Given the brief Reagan recession, some of the consequences of the 36-minute war in this novel emphasize the economic effects of his policies, but at the core is the failure of social programs and the guarantees made by the New Deal and Great Society. The lingering effects of radiation and fallout create birth defects among the sharply declining population of the US, and a new policy of Triage is used to determine whether citizens are given health care beyond immediate and first aid. Triage is used to determine how much of a life-time dose of radiation has been absorbed, and those who have been “triaged” are denied a range of treatments and medicines because the sparse and limited resources of America’s health institutions are not even enough to keep the healthy alive. In fact, the British Emergency Relief Organization supplements and administers most “federal” medical programs. The British also pay the largest government department, the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta—even if it is with the gold they’ve been steadily draining from US federal reserves. Triage and bankrupt hospitals reflect the social cuts under Reagan’s first administration, but the British pursuit and destruction of remaining US and Soviet submarine forces after Warday take on a more ominous and re-colonized aspect, although they state it is only done to prevent “doomsday” orders for late spoiler missile launches.

As part of the fragmentation of the US, California and Texas move to become sovereign states, and the new nation of Aztlan has formed from portions of the US and Mexico. California attempts to have its ambassadors accredited beyond the countries of the Pacific, while Texas is forced to “de-federalize” and nationalize US Army and US Air

Force units in order to prepare for war with Aztlan, which claims a good portion of south and west Texas (as well as Arizona, New Mexico, and portions of California). The Texas Governor maintains a *Book of the Dead* for those lost in the bombing of Austin and San Antonio, and although Texas suffers a direct hit, a number of its citizens are returnees from New York and points east. The secession of Texas has been a popular trope of cataclysmic SF for decades, but in *Warday* it is reluctant, an admission that the nation cannot maintain its own integrity through diplomacy alone, and must rely on military force to meet these objectives, in some ways providing an early example for twenty-first century border wars with narco-powers who possess military assets of their own. Aztlan is a wave toward the Chicano nationalism of the late 1960s and early 1970s; it is called the “Hispanic Free State” and springs up around El Paso.<sup>73</sup> The Secretary of State for Aztlan tells the narrators that everyone is equal and welcome, although some are more welcome than others—in particular Latinos and Chicanos, but anyone who is not Caucasian is granted greater tolerance. Native American tribes are considered sovereign within the Free State, although this works more as a device to allow the struggling Aztlan government from having to respond to waves of anti-Anglo violence around reservations.

The decline of the US military goes far beyond the nationalization of troops and equipment in Texas and California; in several regions British and Japanese forces both occupy and maintain military government. The British, for instance, vie with the Texans over control of portions of south Texas, the very region in dispute with the new nation of Aztlan. While the British threaten to take control, more than a few Japanese troops are on site, supported by Japanese military overflights and armored vehicles.<sup>74</sup> Because of their recognition of the new nation of Aztlan, the Japanese military presence runs through all

of its territories. This includes troops to “protect” Japanese (and Israeli) petrochemical engineers and oil agents in the Mexican Gulf regions, and Japanese “investigators” who “protect” the assets of the former nuclear program in Los Alamos by boxing them up and shipping them to a new nuclear city: “The labs have been moved in their entirety to Japan. And their scientists have gone with them.”<sup>75</sup> National sovereignty is a memory as states squabble for the best spoils, and the remaining US Navy vessels are attached to the Royal Navy and hunt both former Soviet and US nuclear missile submarines. The last of the US Army continues salvage operations in the ruins of New York City in an effort to increase the odds of survival in other portions of the “US.” There is no unified American military power, nor any unified American democratic structures. The once-powerful nation has collapsed, and nothing of its former democratic glory survives.

The main narrative of *Warday* is set a scant four years after the brief nuclear conflict. Much of the story is about the limits of recovery to that point, and it provides reflections on the immediate crisis after the bombs fall in the manner of a documentary. It is a particularly pessimistic view, although Clute, Nicholls, and Brians all applaud its verisimilitude and attention to the very possible damage done by even a limited nuclear exchange. This novel was first published in 1984, an election year (and ironically, the era of George Orwell’s dystopian post-war 1984); this novel is set four years after its war, suggesting the need for awareness, self-education, and political action. Disease, long-term radiation exposure effects, and a shattered economy only underscore the political situation: the fragmentation of the US and a caretaker President with little practical executive power and a dwindling crippled military capability. This is the sunset after Reagan’s new morning in America.

## **The Postman**

Although it is another response to the heightened nuclear tensions of Reagan's first administration, *The Postman* resonates with issues that extend beyond renewed nuclear fears. This text began as a pair of short stories in 1982 and 1984, extended and revised into a novel 1986, well after the announcement of SDI. At its heart it is the story of Gordon Krantz, a man who does not let the memory of America—most especially its dreams, myths, and freedoms—fade into the twilight of a new dark age. In this post-war America sixteen years after the bombs fall, Gordon enters the Pacific Northwest from a long trek in the Midwest. He earns his food on the way by story telling, and reciting memorable speeches and snippets of plays—keeping bits of late twentieth-century culture alive. But later, wearing the salvaged uniform of a mail carrier and spreading the story of a recovering nation, Gordon reawakens the consensual belief in not just the American past, but also in its future. He first poses as a Postal Inspector of the Restored United States of America to survive, but over the course of the novel his lie of a resurgent nation and a phantom President in St. Paul City, Minnesota, become the basis for him to begin the restoration himself—a reaffirmation of the American spirit and American exceptionalism.

Just the belief in a President and the efforts to rebuild the nation is enough to change the behavior and society of many of the post-war Oregon communities that Gordon visits. Where many come to accept the control of warlords, the threat of bandits, and a number of small injustices, Gordon's uniform sparks memories, brings shame, and rekindles the desire for something better. But it is the newly written letters that he carries between surviving communities in Oregon that make at least his portion of the lie a

reality, and by extension his actions lend credibility to the belief that something of the government exists. This tips the balance of doubt and provides just enough support for the stories he spins to desperate audiences. Some communities remain skeptical, but most prefer to share in a common renaissance dream rather than their divided, contentious, and fearful reality. In Pineview, Gordon first performs his new con for the town's doubtful leader, Adele Thompson, but she does not call Gordon's bluff. Thompson sees how his story and the hope it brings reenergize the mountain village and spark renewed interest in books and reading, and in actively salvaging the past from the ruins. When Gordon begins to collect letters in Pineview he is at first cynical about these villagers who "romanticize their memories of men they had once considered lower-class civil servants at best,"<sup>76</sup> but he carries on with his role. In Oakridge the mayor threatens Gordon with summary execution, but he saves himself at the last minute with a letter for Grace Horton, whose brother is alive and well in Pineview. She represents those who want more than to just survive, especially those who discover they are not as alone as they thought; when she receives her letter, "the pain of living seemed a nothing next to a glow of sudden faith."<sup>77</sup> In Oakridge this faith and belief in even the future renewal of government services and law enforcement empower the populace to overthrow their mayor and his cronies, all of whom have lived off their harvests (and daughters) as neo-feudal lords for years. It is an uplifting tale of American renewal that centers on a desire to retain or rebuild facets of democratic society, but which seem untenable post-cataclysm and, in this case, are founded on a lie.

After Pineview, Gordon extends his props beyond his scavenged uniform by using paper and an official seal recovered from the ruins of the Oakridge Post Office to create

the National Recovery Act of 2009.<sup>78</sup> The Act incorporates a number of provisions, but most importantly it allows local communities to set their own laws as need and custom dictate with a few key exceptions; this allows Gordon to influence these communities without immediately destabilizing the local “strong man” ruler. Under the Act, the former Bill of Rights must be guaranteed, as well as trial by jury and due process whenever possible; it also expressly forbids slavery and debt bondage, and requires the elections of all public leaders by secret ballot every two years. Gordon also adds a provision for the salvage and safeguard of the “physical and intellectual resources” of the United States. In many places education exists only as luxury; in others all books are burned and scientists (and doctors) executed as scapegoats. As some measure of self-protection he even tacks on the provision that interfering with “a letter carrier’s function is a capital crime.”<sup>79</sup>

One of the most pressing challenges for reconstruction in Oregon is the Holnist Army and its depredations. After the “doomwar” and during the thirteen-year winter, instead of survivalists riding it out they become the targets of the desperate and starving with nothing to lose. After the last of the big battles and the disintegration of militias and police forces, the survivalists remain ironically joined together into a “bandit army” and eventually come under the command of a small, select group of former Special Forces soldiers. General Maklin and his immediate lieutenants are part of an experimental cybernetic augmentation program before the war whose subjects were tested first used in Kenya, and later in Cuba. But they experienced problems reintegrating with civilian society when they were released from active service, echoing both the post-Vietnam “Rambo” experience, but also the extra-legal use of American troops during the Reagan administration. Years after the war, the surviving augments—Maklin and his men—use

their experience to organize and train the remaining survivalists and bandits they deem worthy. Following the ethos of a fictional Nathan Holn (a twist on the ideology of the racist and anti-US revolution in *The Turner Diaries*), Maklin then uses this “army” to raid communities and move into Northern Oregon in an attempt to create their own feudal holdings under an ethos based on power and fear. Refugees fleeing the fighting spread stories of “bands of the white-camouflaged barbarians roaming the countryside, burning small hamlets and dragging off food, women, slaves.”<sup>80</sup> As a “federal inspector” with the authority of a restored government behind him, Gordon is called upon to help organize the Willamette Valley Defense Council, but they, even with the aid of “Cyclops” also need the help of George Powhatan and his mountain men to eventually defeat the Holnists and their augmented cyborg leaders. Brin argues that once all the corruption of modern American government and the military-industrial complex is abolished, then the core ideals of American democracy can be reborn; that the spark of the American revolutionary identity can survive a cataclysm but will need to be rekindled once the dust has settled.

The reconstitution of the United States depends not only on Gordon’s work rebuilding a network of communications, but also on the appearance of effective leadership, and a hope for the return of modernity in terms of advanced technology. The surviving faculty of Oregon State University uses the apparent survival of the AI Cyclops to see that “all the villages and towns it serves live together peaceably and democratically.”<sup>81</sup> The belief in its superior intellect (and technology) means that people of the lower Willamette accept the rulings of Cyclops as a technological Solomon; they do not question the contributions (food, clothing) they provide to “sustain” the servants of

Cyclops, as long as they help it to dispense its (frequently obscure) “wisdom” that directs their agricultural efforts and provides small examples of restored and new technologies, like the wind-powered generators. However, Cyclops’s survival is but a myth and a little old professor recreates the AI as Oz by hiding behind a “curtain” of dry ice. The AI was killed when rioters destroy the power plant, and now the former OSU faculty uses its myth to trade pseudo-wisdom, almanac information, and advice for food and other resources. But by perpetuating this fiction, the Servants are able to retain their expert roles that help maintain a vestige of specialized labor and the old “modern” division of work while also fueling the belief in ongoing recovery efforts.

The final part of Brin’s mythic *trifecta* is the military leader who helps defeat the Holnists. George Powhatan draws on the legends of the Roman Cincinnatus and the early Virginian colonies. Powhatan’s successful leadership of the fighters in southern Oregon against the raiders becomes a legend in the Willamette, but when Gordon asks for his help, he refuses. Powhatan’s reluctance to take responsibility for others and become the leader is Brin’s contrast to the grasping and power-hungry nature of many modern Presidents. Powhatan is a reluctant executive, cast in the vein of George Washington’s acceptance of the presidency; this is because Powhatan has been a warrior who has suffered the pain and loss of leading soldiers; he says that “most of us have served and served until there is simply nothing more for us to give” and that peace, an end to the fighting, becomes “more precious than honor.”<sup>82</sup> Powhatan emulates Cincinnatus’ rejection of the Roman Senate’s offers in his desire to retire to his estates and tend his farms rather than rule the people of the Willamette valley. It is this disinterest that makes him acceptable to the people of Oregon because they “have seen too many power-hungry



monsters over the last twenty years to unite under any man or group of men”<sup>83</sup> who desire the power—politicians like Johnson, Nixon, and Reagan.

Brin ends *The Postman* on a romantic note of optimism as the disparate communities of Oregon rejoin and prepare to hunt down the last of the fleeing Holnists, before beginning reconstruction efforts centralize around Corvallis with “university” direction. Powhatan’s leadership is contingent, and he fully intends to retire to his farms when the last Holnist is hanged. As Oregon recovers, it uses the National Recovery Act of 2009 to direct its policies, discard temporary deviations, and even normalize new traditions that spring up during the brutal winter years. Regardless, it is the joint actions of an active and bloodied military, resurgent academia, and the myth of a President and national tradition over the mountains that keep the rebirth going. Gordon appoints postmasters to manage and extend the routes he has started, and they will “continue lying without knowing it” by using the “tale of a restored nation to bind the land together”<sup>84</sup> until it becomes reality. When he is a prisoner in the Holnist camp, Gordon meets a dying man in another uniform, that of the Republic of California, and he begins his next trek south as the story ends. In this story the President is more powerful in his absence, and the military is cast as a barely-contained and ill-trained beast at the end of a very frayed leash. But the whisper of the survival of American civil society, and its democratic ideals, is the breath of wind that will help the US rise from the ashes.

### **The New World Order**

In *After the End of History*, Samuel Cohen defines an interwar period that begins with the unexpected collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and ends with the post-millennial attacks of September 11, 2001. Although the US became the sole superpower,

and the quick and decisive US-led coalition in the first Gulf War underscored this military power in 1991, domestic issues and a new recession plagued the presidency of George H.W. Bush, the 41<sup>st</sup> President of the US (Bush 41). Bush suffered from the fallout of the Reagan years, during which he was Vice-President, and rising distrust in the federal government after a series of scandals and failures, as well as from his own reputation for being out of touch. Moreover, as Larabee points out in *Decade of Disaster*, “the disasters of the 1980s provoked [additional] critiques of corporate and government apparatuses”<sup>85</sup> throughout the 1990s. Even with the apparent end of the threat of nuclear war, the 1980s helped foster a broader awareness and cultural appraisal of systems (and institutions) that echoed the earlier work of earlier critics such as Roberto Vaccas. SF takes this approach further and questions a variety of entrenched social systems including the foundations of late-era capitalism, postindustrial democracy, and the apparent civil society. The cyberpunk subgenre in particular ran counter to the apocalyptic expectations of the Cold War and was critical of American political hegemony and neo-conservative ideology; it also cynically projected the essence of Larabee’s analysis of Exxon’s response to the *Exxon Valdez* oil spill, that governments and corporations sought to protect their images and public capital more than the victims of industrial accident and mismanagement.<sup>86</sup> But the post-apocalyptic subgenre declined into the survivalist fantasies of *The Deathlands*, *The Survivalist*, and the Ashes series—Johnstone and Ahren and their ilk, but this was the case since the mid-1980s when the spike in nuclear war fiction began to fade after Reagan met with Gorbachev in Reykjavik.

However, as John Gray suggests in *Black Mass*, neoconservatives “claimed the world is converging on a single type of government and economic system – universal

democracy, or a global free market”<sup>87</sup> and this view shaped the policies of not only the US but all Western governments through the 1990s. Gray argues in particular that this belief was part of a movement of conservatives and evangelicals to apply a right-wing utopian project more broadly through global economics and the use of US military strength in the 1990s (and post 9/11). For a time this led to a convergence of US interests and an expanding global economy as part of the discourse of globalization. Noon argues that during the 1990s the “direction of U.S. foreign policy [...] has been [...] devoted to ‘commerce and globalization’.”<sup>88</sup> Noon posits that neoconservatives lamented that this put the US in a subordinate role, at least in relation to the use of American military assets, because they ridiculed Clinton for “looking to international institutions as the only source of legitimacy”<sup>89</sup> in the post-Cold War realm of diplomacy, rather than asserting the new US hyperpower role. Gray’s criticism of Clinton’s interwar diplomacy is even harsher, because while he concedes that “the myth that humanity is moving towards adopting the same values and institutions”<sup>90</sup> became a prevalent Western conceit, it still meant that the US continued to apply the American government as the template for every emerging nation it could influence or coerce. Francis Fukuyama initially promoted this approach in *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992), but he later worried in *After the Necons: America at the Crossroads* (2006) that it was being spread too much by force, rather than as the actual fulfillment of democratic movements. Oddly enough, while cyberpunk lost its revolutionary aura and faded into mainstream SF, and urban fantasy and new space operas surged in the genre, post-cataclysmic SF began to take up this counterintuitive strand of American decline in terms of economic apocalypse and the disruption of government services, a future given particular form in “The Deal” of Emma Bull’s *Bone*

*Dance* (1991) and Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower* (1993) and *Parable of the Talents* (1998).

The brief triumphalism that accompanied the coalition victory over Iraq, or the “cure for Vietnam” as George H.W. Bush considered it, was soon tarnished by American peacekeeping efforts in Africa, the Caribbean, and the Balkans, renewing both criticism of the military and the perception of its actual power. The first Gulf War spotlighted American technological prowess as a cure for the Vietnam Syndrome according to Little, but when Clinton briefly considered military intervention in 1993 to halt the Bosnian ethnic cleansing, he was told by the Pentagon that “we do deserts, we don't do mountains.”<sup>91</sup> Wilentz argues that while the American military carefully sculpted public perception by controlling its embedded reporters (and restricting the essence of the First Amendment), the Pentagon had far less control in Somalia.<sup>92</sup> The short 1993 Battle of Mogadishu lasted only two days, but it influenced public perception of military risk and power enough to shift American foreign policy until after 9/11. The Clinton administration became more reluctant to engage in military intervention in the developing world after Somalia, including the 1994 Rwandan Genocide. Clinton was willing to land 22,000 American troops on the shores of Haiti, only ninety minutes away from Miami by air, in an effort to restore “democracy.” But Haiti did not have the organized resistance mounted by Somalia and was a humanitarian crisis in America's front-yard. Even so, American intervention did not preserve democracy, nor did it resolve the humanitarian crisis even with the more immediate access for CNN and other major media outlets.

In 1994 Robert D. Kaplan considered Sierra Leone a snapshot of what was happening throughout the underdeveloped world in the absence of the political polarity of

the Cold War and under the uneven economic influence of globalization. The essays collected in *The Coming Anarchy* (2000)<sup>93</sup> echo concerns embedded in much American post-cataclysm SF, dealing not only with surviving the disaster but with how reemerging communities redefine themselves, their values, and what they decide is expendable. It is in what they lose or cannot protect that these stories highlight the more fragile elements of contemporary American society. Kaplan argues that West Africa in the mid-1990s foreshadowed “worldwide demographic, environmental, and societal stress, in which criminal anarchy emerges as the real ‘strategic’ danger” and where future concerns for the United States such as “[d]isease, overpopulation, unprovoked crime, scarcity of resources, refugee migrations, the increasing erosion of nation-states and international borders, and the empowerment of private armies, security firms, and international drug cartels are now most tellingly demonstrated.”<sup>94</sup> The example of Africa in the 1990s that Kaplan describes bears a resemblance to the dystopias of this study that focus on the collapse of social order and cohesion after the failures of civic and military authorities to maintain order and protect citizens. The form of disaster and the speed of collapse are intrinsic elements that alter the calculus of survival and recovery as natural resources, sources of energy, technology, markets, economies and production, labor and slavery, political representation, and gender, ethnic, and cultural inequities become part of the equation that produces anti-modern post-event societies.

But beyond Africa, Clinton met additional challenges in the Balkans during his second term in office; he refused to mobilize US ground troops to fight the Bosnian Serb Army in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1995, or the Yugoslav Army in the province of Kosovo in 1999. Instead, Clinton ordered air strikes to fulfill commitments and support

UN mandates and cruise missiles on other targets, all of which were seen as signs of a weakened Presidency—the tail wagging the dog. This idea is parodied in the film, *Wag the Dog* (1997) that actually implies that Clinton made up some of these foreign conflicts as a way of alleviating scrutiny of his sexual misconduct. It is a thinly veiled satire, much like the later *Primary Colors* (1998), that emphasizes the moral weakness of the President and the lengths to which the government establishment will go into order to cover it up. As Noam Chomsky argues, “the Clinton Doctrine advocated ‘unilateral use of military power’ to defend vital interests” almost all of which were economic including “access to key markets, energy supplies and strategic resources,” but perhaps more importantly “the more expansive Clinton doctrine was barely even reported.”<sup>95</sup> Still, the use of American technological might in the air—bombers and cruise missiles—did not dispel the aura of vulnerability created by the July 1996 attack on the Khorbar Towers in Saudi Arabia, or the 1997 Al Qaeda bombings of American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania.<sup>96</sup>

Although the Internet boom and massive economic gains for Wall Street speculators and many in the middle class marked most of the 1990s, persistent cracks in the federal power structure appeared and widened during Clinton’s terms. In 1993 Muslim extremists drove a truck-bomb into the World Trade Center, killing 6 and injuring close to 1,000. But the actions of various federal agencies came under intense scrutiny after the 1992 “siege” at Ruby Ridge, Idaho, and the 1993 federal assault on the Branch Davidian compound in Waco, Texas, each with a number of civilian deaths. These events contributed to a rise in militia movements, especially those with more extreme right-wing affiliations. Wilentz links these to the 1995 bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City by Terry Nichols and Timothy McVeigh,

who tended toward “proclaiming slogans of the extreme right-wing Christian Identity movement” and was a “close reader of the neo-Nazi writer William Pierce, whose book *The Turner Diaries* described the overthrow of a Jewish-controlled U.S. government.”<sup>97</sup> These actions by white, Christian terrorists on American soil ties directly to Brin’s survivalists in *The Postman*, and also to some of the initial antagonists in S.M. Stirling’s Embervers series (again, Idaho survivalists/militia), all of which ape the survivalist heroes of William W. Johnstone’s *Ashes* series. Brin described the survivalist ethic as something doomed from the start, but in the early 1990s those survivalists became more organized and formed a number of militias, especially in Midwestern and Northwestern states; McVeigh and Nichols both spent time training with Michigan militias, as documented by Michael Moore in *Bowling for Columbine* (2002). Millennial fears and the Y2K Bug added to these events and stories of New Years plots in Seattle and elsewhere to create a climate of fear for some, especially in the cities, as the 1990s came to an end.

### **Bone Dance**

Emma Bull’s *Bone Dance* portrays a society built on the remains of a war between the Americas, one that uses nuclear missiles and secret weapons to shatter both the land and nations. The story is set in “the City”—a post-cataclysm Minneapolis or St. Paul—where the only apparent authority is organized around wealth, commerce, and the regulation of power including: generators, electricity, and petroleum or diesel fuel. What aspects of authority appear in the story are threats to be overcome, like mercenaries operating as extralegal enforcers, or obstacles to be avoided, such as security stations that inspect cargo entering or leaving the city. The Power Authority taxes all methanol, and

requires the registration of all portable and alternate-source generators (solar, wind, and hydro); the taxes they collect from their monopoly pay for the mercenaries they use to enforce their inspections and the whims of their executives. The head of the Power Authority, A.A. Albrecht, issues money coined with his likeness and controls what the few radio transmitters broadcast. It suits him and the Authority to leave the telephone system as a patched, shoddy party-line system to further limit communication among the populace and prevent “unpleasantness” like organized civil disobedience.

Because the story is told from the perspective of Sparrow, a scrounger of (unregulated) media and a street-level trader, the only aspects of government that enter the story are those that interfere with her trades and personal safety. For the most part each subculture or collective handles its own internal security and discipline, because any formal police or law enforcement would be supplied, paid, and tied to the Power Authority. Albrecht’s bounty hunters and enforcers only interfere when conflict escalates between different communities, or when it threatens their profits. In most respects the civil society—personal rights, laws, and the courts—are things of the dead twentieth century. The Power Authority, Albrecht, and the system they perpetuate with their armed enforcers and taxes reflect not only the narcissism and self-obsession of the 1980s, but also a cynicism toward the presence and abuse of power by police in ethnic and immigrant neighborhoods.

There is also an implicit criticism of the US military, or more specifically the Special Forces and experimental programs (like SDI) that have the potential to either fail, or turn on their masters. Since the apocalyptic war, recessive psychic traits and powers—limited telepathy, empathy, clairvoyance and such—have begun to appear among the



populace. But rather than mutants along the lines of the X-Men, or other “Children of the Atoms,” these are the children of the Horsemen. The full extent of the program is never described, but the Horsemen are selected, trained, and genetically modified to develop psychic abilities, the strongest of which is form of mental dominance that allows them to project their minds into someone else’s body and take it over. However, there are unexpected consequences; where the “blood of the Horsemen had trickled over the continent [...] where that blood was, where those genes came to rest, a skill might sprout: Sherra’s mind-reading; the placing of a nonexistent cinder in someone’s eye.”<sup>98</sup> These powers are integrated into the barter economy as services, but they later become the weapons used to defeat the surviving Horseman who started the nuclear war and has been “running” Albrecht as a puppet for his own comforts and amusement.

The cyberpunk ethos is strong in *Bone Dance*, as are the early strains of urban fantasy, especially the use of psychic abilities and appearance of entities that may be telepathic, or may be something more. Bull deals more with a distrust and resistance to local authority, especially in the absence of any greater government or legal framework and protections, mirroring the cynicism invoked by a multitude of cyberpunk dystopias. Still, the recovering City has more of the neo-anarchist movements, the Freegans, and other subcultures that appear through the 1990s as the backbeat of the Internet Boom rather than an actual shattered world. In *Bone Dance* the technology is recoverable and a new, more sustainable economy and culture looks possible, unlike the sharp decline and collapse of society and government services that are part of the context of the economic apocalypse in the Earthseed novels.

### **Parable of the Sower *and* Parable of the Talents**

Where most of the texts in this study deal with physical destruction on a national or global scale, the *Parable of the Sower* and its sequel, the *Parable of the Talents*, occur during an economic apocalypse—a global economic meltdown and ongoing crisis that lasts in the US for two decades. Octavia Butler portrays an America that in the not-too-distant future suffers from climate change and “starvation, disease, drug damage, and mob rule” in several states, but where “federal, state, and local governments [continue to] exist—in name at least—and sometimes they manage to do more than collect taxes and send in the military.”<sup>99</sup> However, the economic crisis in these novels that extends from the early 2010s through the early 2030s is not the only problem of this era; small-scale wars, severe natural disasters, and increasing acts of piracy and terrorism also help shatter the United States. During these two decades of fear and chaos, the initial executives remain securely isolated and out of touch, but conditions worsen with the election of right-wing presidents: Donner, the apparent tool of corporate interests in 2024, and Andrew Steele Jarret, the leader of the Christian America Church in 2032.

The *Parable of the Sower* consists of two acts: during the first, Lauren Olamina, lives with her family in the struggling, formerly-middle class, walled neighborhood in the Robledo suburb of Los Angeles, circa 2024-2027. In the second act, after her neighborhood is attacked and burned to the ground, she and other survivors travel north on the California freeways, gathering survivors from other communities and even escaped slaves and then found the Acorn community in northern California a few months later.

Life in the walled neighborhood is an inversion of standard American middle-class twentieth-century suburban expectations: civil services are limited and expensive;

education is no longer a right; and every family seems to have contracted in on itself and reverted to the equivalent of a nineteenth-century extended farm family. Each household now has more than one family, and has replaced its lawns with a new version of the victory gardens of WWII. All homes are heavily secured with bars, gates, security systems, and at least two handguns as well as automatic weapons for those who can afford them on the black market. This is not enough; burglaries, theft, and murder become more frequent in the months leading up to the community's destruction.

Although this Los Angeles suburb is formerly affluent, only a few of its members remain employed as professors, a nurse, a pharmacist, an engineer, and others in small, cash-only jobs among the eleven mixed-race households (Anglo, African American, Hispanic, Asian), which include dozens of children, teens, and unemployed adults. The threat to this neighborhood comes from the growing number of “street poor—squatters, winos, junkies, homeless people in general”<sup>100</sup> and those who abuse a new designer drug that encourages pyromania. Although this can be interpreted as a response to the Reagan-era cuts to social programs and the ejection of so many mentally disabled from hospitals and asylums, it also suggests unease with some of Clinton's social programs that proved too limited or appeared to penalize those on welfare.<sup>101</sup> Although written in 1993 and 1998, the 2020s Butler crafts is also eerily prophetic, considering the current economic crisis and civil unrest.

There is a strong component of racial inequality in both novels, but the Robledo neighborhood is of mixed-ethnicity, so it focuses on the economic decline of the middle class; its decline is the reversal of the core growth of the post-World War II golden age of America. These “middle class” families continue to pay property taxes, but police and

fire services are fee-based, and the reaction for any but the wealthy is delayed at best. When the police do respond, only after their fees have been paid, the community still harbors doubts and fears that they are as likely to fabricate evidence in order to quickly “solve” a crime as they are to perform their duties, as almost happened to the Olaminas when they reported their son Keith’s murder; the police would have liked to arrest the Reverend and his wife to wrap the case quickly. The conventional wisdom is that the police can no longer protect, but only avenge after the fact.<sup>102</sup> Even emergency responders are suspect because thefts during fire emergencies are almost as common as the arson used to collect insurance money. Beyond the suburbs, private guards in both secure communities and stores abuse their power. Power-drunk guards with automatic weapons bully patrons in stores in Salinas, and the police who guard the surviving small towns on the route north prefer to nudge travelers along with curses and threats rather than “serve and protect” them—after all, they are only “road trash” who pay no local taxes. Even in northern California where Lauren’s husband, Bankole, owns land, they receive little protection. When Bankole reports the deaths of his sister and her family and the burning of her house, the deputy sheriffs take all the money he has in hand for “services,” yet they never investigate the deaths or arson.

With the inauguration of President Donner in 2025, the focus of the federal government becomes very pro-business. Lauren’s father intends to vote for Donner, but in the end no one from their community bothers to exercise their franchise; most have given up on politicians and distrust their promises to “return us to glory, wealth, and order.”<sup>103</sup> Donner campaigns on a promise to end the “wasteful” space program, and to that effect he shuts down NASA and sells off control of all space science and technology

to corporate interests, many of which are not US-based. More importantly, he pushes through a number of changes to laws and regulations meant to favor those companies that will help put the unemployed to work. Initially these changes “suspend [the] ‘overly restrictive’ minimum wage, environmental, worker protection laws for those employers willing to take on homeless employees and provide them with training and adequate room and board,”<sup>104</sup> but they slowly create debt slavery by requiring an entire family—spouse and children—to be held accountable for a parent’s debts. Moreover, many of these companies pay only in company script, and charge more for rent, food, and services than they pay in wages, recreating the labor inequities of the company towns of the nineteenth century. By the end of Donner’s term the laws are being abused to not only keep citizens as wage-slaves, but to take their children and send them away to work where they are in more demand, although this most often is as factory slave labor, or child prostitution.<sup>105</sup> At the same time, other aspects of nineteenth-century chattel slavery reappear; those who are paid by room and board become trapped by their employers, and in many instances they and sometimes their children are abused and raped by their employers, but there are no authorities to turn to, and nowhere to go. The American democratic system has let them down and eroded to the point that there seems to be no reason to participate at all. In this narrative, democracy, especially one that is corrupted by special interests and the will of the wealthy few, will not restore society nor reverse the effects of the cataclysm.

### **Parable of the Talents**

*Parable of the Sower* runs from 2024-2027 and *Parable of the Talents* focuses on 2032-2035, but also threads in portions of the 2040s, 2050s, and 2060s. The *Parable of*

*the Talents* begins with an assault on Acorn by religious extremists, the illegal imprisonment of the members as the commune is converted into a “reeducation camp,” and the theft and reassignment of their children to other families. After more than a year the surviving members escape and destroy the camp; several leave to try and find their children while the economic crisis and the Al-Can War (Alaska-Canada) finally ends, and Earthseed begins to grow as a community of belief. In 2033, religious fanatics with military weapons and training attack Acorn shortly after President Jarret, the “former” head of the Church of Christian America, is inaugurated. Even before his election the church is tied to ethnic violence, book burnings, and the execution of “witches,” who tend to be Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, and even Mormons, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and Catholics in some parts of the country.<sup>106</sup>

Between the ongoing economic crisis, the overwhelming unemployment and starvation in some regions, and the secession of Alaska when it declares independence, Jarret uses a fictitious “Christian American” past to rally supporters and stoke his base through fear. The witch burnings are not publically linked to Jarret until his reelection campaign in 2036, but they and Jarret’s Crusaders both practice an extremist, Old Testament-inflected-with-Baptist-beliefs form of Christianity. Jarret begins with Donner’s version of the labor laws and weakens them further, and then promotes new laws that allow the indigent to be forced into indentured servitude, especially for the all-but-established new state church, the Church of Christian America. The Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments are severely weakened and citizenship rights fail for many and slavery returns as an almost formalized practice.<sup>107</sup>

In 2032, men, women, and children in convict chains are a frequent sight as they are led from worksite to worksite; their only crime is being born in poverty or becoming poor. As times become more desperate even the police are known for trading the indigent for food and fuel, and even to brothels. This practice is enhanced by the development of convict control devices: “slave collars, dog collars, and choke chains.” These collars have been adapted to control laborers, workers, prostitutes, and sex slaves by creating pain but no physical damage, and the “latest” models can also be used to induce pleasure.<sup>108</sup> The result is that credit debts or debt to an employer are the legal basis for putting someone in a collar and using them as a debt slave, in whatever manner deemed fitting by the owner of their debt or contract. In many instances this is tied to the mission of the CCA and its efforts to cleanse the US of heathens and pagans, including atheists and other Christian denominations, and thence to the President, ending the formal separation of Church and State. But in this attempt to create an established church, and defend its primacy with violence aimed at all non-believers—including the remaining middle class and wealthy—Jarret miscalculates and his position is further undermined by the unpopular Al-Can War. Jarret does not win reelection and ends his life a broken, bitter man, but this example links to that of the established churches in Stirling’s Embervers, and the evolution of Earthseed as an embattled belief system, is similar to the creation of a new (Jesuit-run) Inquisition by the Portland Protective Association against the “witches” of the Wiccan Clan Mackenzie. In the Embervers, the neopagans are largely liberal, as are the Wicca in *Warday*, both offering defensive counterpoints to the rise of the New Right and “Silent Majority” of the Reagan ascendancy.

## **Age of Crisis**

After September 11, 2001, the office of the President changed dramatically; thanks to a growing sense of crisis and renewed emergency prerogative, the executive began accumulating new powers at an incredible pace with the support of a conservative Supreme Court and the acceptance of a cowed Congress. For one brief moment, much of the world united with America in disbelief and empathy, but President George W. Bush dismissed this by moving swiftly to capitalize on the fear generated by the attacks to stabilize and expand their own power base. An erosion of American civil liberties marked the immediate aftermath of 9/11, as the powers of Congress were undermined by the efforts of the Executive Branch to shore up its interests and endeavors. Congress, almost unquestioningly, passed the Patriot Act, sanctioned military action against Afghanistan and later (and more reluctantly) against Iraq. In this climate, any opposition to the policies of the Bush administration or the President's supporters was branded "unpatriotic" and "un-American." This was a first-term President whose legitimacy was still questioned by a large number of Americans in the wake of the Supreme Court's decision to end the Florida recounts, and who was foundering in the polls because of ineffective policies concerning China, the Middle East and a sense of domestic disregard; but 9/11 catapulted him into the preeminent position of a "war-time" President. Bush wasted no time in situating himself as the ideal warrior, and was prepared to use any means necessary to avenge the assault on American soil and accomplish the mission, including unprecedented executive powers, the institution of torture in interrogations, and the revocation of civil liberties for citizens deemed "enemy combatants,"<sup>109</sup> and the illegal wiretapping of American citizens.



The incidence of post-cataclysmic SF was limited to a relative handful of novels and films during the latter 1990s, although there was a brief surge in 1999 and early 2000 predicated on sensationalized end-of-the-world fears of the millennial cusp. After the Y2K Bug failed to end civilization, the creation of such narratives could have been expected to taper off, but instead anxieties were heightened by the five-week conflict and political drama of the Presidential election increased their production. The apocalyptic tenor continued after the election when the economy began to falter after the implosion of the Internet Bubble in the spring of 2001, and grew more strident when the attacks of 9/11 helped crystallize a brief, yet severe recession. Bush had generated controversy with his policies of “compassionate conservatism,” including the largely unfunded mandate of No Child Left Behind and the first moves toward rolling back restrictions on the exploitation of federal lands and loosening of environmental restrictions. However, 9/11 changed the political landscape and generated broad sympathetic support for the US and even for Bush’s initial responses to global terrorism before his policies became more unilateral. The Bush years were tinged with the echo of the long-past Red Scare rhetoric—only now its targets were immigrants, Moslems, and anyone suspected of shielding Al Qaeda or an increasingly expanded “enemy.” During Bush’s two terms in office, fear and paranoia permeated American culture, and over his tenure the specter of an imperial presidency returned during the War on Terror.

Despite the economic prosperity during the Clinton years, Democratic candidate Albert Gore failed to win the election of 2000 against his opponent, George W. Bush. Florida's twenty-five Electoral College votes became central to the outcome of the election; Bush's margin was so slight that it prompted an automatic recount of votes, but

Democrats cited machine errors and asked for ballots to be counted by hand, and Republicans turned to the courts to stop the hand-counts. Finally, the Supreme Court decided against further counting, and for the first time since 1888, a candidate who *failed to win* the popular vote made his way into the White House.<sup>110</sup> Even before this Supreme Court decision (or interference) in 2000 many of the gains of the Great Society were distant memories. Social welfare, a result of both the New Deal and Great Society reforms, was crippled by the 1996 “welfare reform” forced onto an embattled Clinton by the Republican congressional majority even with its “serious flaws” that he later tried to patch where possible.<sup>111</sup> Affirmative action has been repeatedly challenged since the Carter era *Bakke* decision, the Cavazos resignation in 1989 after the “reverse discrimination” ruling regarding scholarships only awarded to minorities, and its reaffirmation in 1994 in *Adarand Constructors Inc. v Pena*.<sup>112</sup> In 2003 the Supreme Court further defined and limited the use of affirmative action in ruling in *Gratz v. Bollinger* that the point-system evaluation used by the University of Michigan was a violation of the Equal Protection Clause, but in contrast the decision in *Grutter v. Bollinger* allows evaluations on an applicant-by-applicant basis to be permissible; the Court also suggested that such racial preferences would no longer serve an interest in 25 years.<sup>113</sup> Beyond chipping away at the foundations of affirmative action and social welfare, the Supreme Court continued to shift power back to the executive after 9/11, resulting in the depiction of a silent or adversarial court and legal system in the dystopian post-cataclysmic works after 2000.

Although the rulings of a conservative Supreme Court helped renew the imperial presidency, it was both the action and inaction of Congress that solidified it. As Wilentz

argues, “the Bush administration was also clear early on about its intention to concentrate power in the executive and shield the White House’s policy making from public scrutiny and congressional oversight.”<sup>114</sup> Justified in part by failures in communication and coordination between different intelligence organizations and divisions of law enforcement in the days before the actual 9/11 attacks, the Department of Homeland Security became a new cabinet position. DHS was created with a very broad mandate, and was given a large degree of autonomy in constructing itself including the all but immediate hiring of military contractors such as those provided by Blackwater, KBR/Halliburton, ITT Corp.,<sup>115</sup> and DynCorp, among others.<sup>116</sup> In creating this new department and cabinet position, the President was able to reshuffle the executive bureaucratic apparatus, including shifting FEMA and focusing intelligence assets under one easily controlled umbrella who reported to new (and loyal) directors. Congress had increased the role and power of the intelligence agencies through the USA Patriot Act,<sup>117</sup> which gave the government agencies a number of new capabilities including the right to eavesdrop on confidential conversations between prison inmates and their lawyers, try suspected terrorists—foreign and American—to be tried in secret military courts, and an enhanced access to electronic and digital communications without a warrant, or probable cause. José Padilla and John Walker Lind found this out after a federal appeals court upheld the President’s authority to designate US citizens as enemy combatants, and detained them without access to counsel.<sup>118</sup>

Although the Bush administration went the traditional route in forging a broad international coalition in its war against the Taliban in 2001, it otherwise abandoned the multilateralism favored by administrations during the cold war and the 1990s. Under

Bush, America withdrew from the Kyoto Protocol on global warming and pulled out of the UN's International Criminal Court. Bush claimed that in the aftermath of September 11, America would exercise the doctrine of preemption—that is, the United States would strike first to counter potential threats from enemies like those in the “axis of evil.” The doctrine of “preemptive war” is based on the right of “anticipatory self-defense,” an extension of the Emergency Prerogative of national self-defense. The Bush administration’s National Security Strategy of September 2002 declares the President’s right to resort to force to eliminate any potential threat, although this can be recast as any potential challenge to American global dominance. Many nations—including traditional allies such as France and Germany—recoiled at Bush's belligerent tone, but he did successfully bring Britain and thirty other countries into a coalition that invaded Iraq on March 19, 2003. Bush announced major combat operations were at an end on May 1, 2003, but the conflict had only gone underground and turned into a guerilla war; as Francis Fukuyama writes, “the invasion of Iraq had made the overall problem of jihadist terrorism worse than it was before 2003.”<sup>119</sup> While most Iraqis celebrated the end of Hussein's repressive regime, they protested the destruction brought to their country, and they perceived US troops as unwelcome occupiers. A powerful anti-American insurgency spread through Iraq after Hussein's fall and produced more US and Iraqi casualties than in the initial invasion.

Lacking the high levels of allied support that had helped win the Persian Gulf War in 1991, America had to rely mostly on its own resources to rebuild a country devastated in the preceding ten years by two wars, economic sanctions, and the corrupt Hussein regime. The “post-war” occupation of Iraq continued to cost American lives and dollars,

further swelling an already bloated deficit, but more importantly, the international standing of the US suffered, and it became more isolated politically because of its failure to find the weapons of mass destruction or evidence of the connections between Hussein and Osama bin Laden that the administration had trumpeted in its effort to win support for the war. But in the early twenty-first century Bacevish argues that the US possesses neither the money nor the troops to “oblige the world to accommodate itself to our desires.”<sup>120</sup> This fulfills Paul Kennedy’s Reagan-era warning: “If, however, too large a proportion of the state’s resources is diverted from wealth creation and allocated instead to military purposes, then it is likely to lead to a weakening of national power over the longer term.”<sup>121</sup>

Because the facts were inconvenient, the Bush administration effectively turned against its own intelligence assets, including disregarding reports contrary to its goals and outing a CIA officer (Valerie Plame) for political reasons. The “Plame Affair” or “Plamegate” embarrassed the President and cost him some of his political capital during his reelection campaign, while the Iraqi insurgency became more active. The charges that the administration effectively exposed an intelligence officer as a means of discrediting a critic of the President and the decision to invade Iraq presents a Nixon-style abuse of executive power, even if Bush himself remained above the fray. Stories of the abuse of prisoners held at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and the Abu Ghraib scandal highlight the mistreatment of prisoners—whether enemy combatants or prisoners of war—and a complete reversal of American’s stance on the use of torture.<sup>122</sup> Even if the designation of enemy combatant is accepted, and with it the inapplicability of the Geneva Conventions, the use of waterboarding and “enhanced interrogation” techniques, as well

as extraordinary rendition, all reflect failures to maintain the spirit of American democratic values and civil rights, a theme that surfaces clearly in *Jericho* and *BSG*.

In the 1980s and early 1990s, the Reagan-Bush era's social cuts and military focus inspired both post-apocalyptic and dystopian SF; the initial steps of Bush 43's administration were seen to be equally regressive, prompting a return to dystopias even before the attacks of 9/11. Wilentz argues that Bush's economic policies went even farther than Reagan's in applying tax cuts, especially for the wealthiest Americans (and corporations), with only the slightest of "compassionate conservative" fig leaves for social programs, such as the unfunded mandate of the No Child Left Behind Act.<sup>123</sup> And, as a born-again Christian, Bush's opposition to same-sex marriage, gay rights, and multiculturalism were initially criticized, but then went largely unremarked after 9/11 and during the first few years of the War Against Terror. But even later, in 2006, as David M. Mason elaborates in *The End of the American Century*, social programs—welfare, education, and transportation—were all scheduled for savage budget cuts in order to maintain and even increase military spending.<sup>124</sup> During the Bush administration, these increases were always attributed to the ongoing military campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as the ongoing hunt for Al Qaeda as part of an atmosphere of fear.

### **Jeremiah**

J. Michael Stracznski, the writer and creative force behind the post-9/11 post-apocalyptic series, *Jeremiah*, designed it "to be a show about hope, set after what could have been the end, because humans persevere."<sup>125</sup> The man-made plague that kills (almost) everyone over "the age of innocence" creates a narrative that not only criticizes American society at the millennial cusp, but also examines what values remain truly

important in what is saved or rejected by those who build the new world from the ashes as they mature. Over the course of its two seasons the series portrays how multiple communities attempt to go forward using what remains of the past; some are little better than scavenger outposts, others have regressed or embrace religious fundamentalism, and still others are racist, xenophobic, or trapped in a fantasy of the past. Several recurring enclaves offer an implied criticism of contemporary political leadership and authority, especially those tied to the control and use of technology and weapons, or because of the continuing negative influence of old world ideologies and leaders. These societies include: the trading town of Clarefield, the survivors' colony in Thunder Mountain (Colorado), the hidden retreat of Valhalla Sector (Pennsylvania), and the domain of the Army of Daniel in the former southeastern US.

In many respects the town of Clarefield resembles the social organization of a black market or frontier town, and its leadership is reminiscent of organized crime in the style of the Russian mafia after the fall of the USSR. When Theo, the small, African-American female leader of the town, is introduced, she comes across as harsh and ruthless in pursuit of her desires. No one from beyond her town's borders receives any special respect or quarter, and even those who are under her "protection" are secondary to her agenda. In the pilot episode, "the Long Road," she uses torture and murder to try and force her captives, Simon and Matthew, to reveal the location of "the End of the World," a rumored community where civilization never ended and everything works.<sup>126</sup> Theo's rule is based on the men and weapons she controls and the technology she can provide or restore. Part of Theo's power derives from her "scientists" (whiz kids) who labor to redevelop or restore power (a steam engine and recharging batteries) and small bits of

modern technology (restored lights, radios, small consumer goods), and who receive as their reward for each success: sex with a “cheerleader.” But over the course of the series Theo changes drastically; a coup<sup>127</sup> makes her realize the fragility of not only her control, but also power based on fear and weapons alone, and so she begins to appreciate the justice (and laws) of the old world when she later joins the Alliance lead by Markus and Thunder Mountain. But Theo’s past haunts her even after joining the Alliance; it takes her very public support of Markus’s initiative to convene a constitutional convention for the post-plague America to earn her the acceptance and respect she covets. It is Theo who stresses that she (and the alliance) should follow Markus as “the man who has the power and doesn’t use it. The man who cares more about his idea than himself. Not the man who wants all the power for himself.”<sup>128</sup> Unlike Theo, who implies she was raped in the first years after the plague and who now uses every advantage to stay in control, Markus has had the privilege of living by his ideals, remaining sheltered and hidden within the well-fortified base of Thunder Mountain. This story arc condemns imperial rule and the contravention of democratic ideals, but also recognizes that in a world where survival is the first priority, civil liberties are among the first casualties.

Before the virus peaked, the US government converted the Cheyenne Mountain military base into a secure research facility dedicated to seeking a cure for the Big Death. They failed, but their children, including Markus, maintain the complex and many of its technological resources as Thunder Mountain (TM). Markus is an old school idealist; he believes America can be restored but “better than it was, more tolerant, kinder” using the gifts of old America: “liberty, courage, hope.”<sup>129</sup> However, this makes him hesitant to act and reveal the base’s location because he views it as an ark—a repository of the



people and resources needed to rebuild America—and he is reluctant to commit to the risky endeavor of reuniting the nation. And even after Jeremiah and Kurdy convince Markus to reach out and help struggling communities to build and grow, he has to convince the TM council to approve his initiatives to extend his support beyond the base. However, the council's is relatively isolationist and anxious; they remove Markus from power because they believe his plans entail too great a risk.<sup>130</sup> Valhalla Sector uses its Burners to destroy entire towns, and Daniel's Army leaves slave-workers and mass graves in its wake, yet the Council hesitates to respond, which suggests a veiled criticism of democracies that cherish their ideals but are unwilling to take the action necessary to preserve them. The Council is only willing to provide intelligence to others using its links to satellites, communications, and other military technology, reflecting Clinton's response to the atrocities committed by Serbia in the mid-1990s and the US response of air strikes and diplomacy rather than "boots on the ground." But Markus does not remain out of power long because the people are not only loyal to him, but also to the vision of a restored America that he instills in them.

No matter how lofty Markus's ideals and how pure his desire to restore liberty and democracy to the shattered United States, his primary resource is technology and knowledge and he lacks experienced leaders and manpower. Markus has about 2,000 people in TM, but they are sheltered and use their electronics to view the world outside the mountain rather than venturing out. This is what makes Jeremiah and Kurdy so valuable to them, but it is also what limits Markus's ability to project force, and alone it is not enough to combat the threat of Valhalla Sector or the later attacks of Daniel's forces. Markus is committed to restoring the old rights and liberties as part of his

resurrected republic, and he draws as widely as possible from the scattered, isolated, and besieged communities under the threat of Daniel's Armies. This process also gives these leaders the chance to reinvent themselves; Theo becomes a defender, and a patriot by advocating the Alliance. The proposed Alliance draws individual warlords and community leaders to pledge their support, but it remains tenuous until the general of Daniel's forces, Sims, is killed.

Thunder Mountain can be taken as an analogue for Clinton's multilateral coalition building, but Valhalla Sector (VS) represents the unilateralism of the Bush administration. VS shelters a cabal of government and military officials who engineered the worldwide release of the bioweapon responsible for the Big Death. As Colonel Quantrell proclaims after his capture by TM, "we're going to build the world based on power. Because we have the knowledge, the technology, the guns."<sup>131</sup> The survivors in VS are not immune to the virus, so their reemergence has been delayed by the need to craft a vaccine or cure. When the leader of the conspiracy, "President Emerson," meets Jeremiah, he explains that the US was never a democracy, but always a republic where only a minority actually voted—or actually mattered. Emerson suggests that once they have a cure they will control the "new" world because of their firepower and military technology.<sup>132</sup> Emerson is not elected by a popular majority, but by control of the process, a clear allusion to the Supreme Court decision that confirmed Bush as the 43<sup>rd</sup> President in 2000. And while their control of the most advanced weapons and military is not disturbed by Markus's resources in TM, it is their concentration and relatively meager numbers that end their plot and ambitions; Megan, a "Typhoid Mary" who carries the Big Death virus, infects the plotters, personnel, and families of those within VS as they

celebrate their capture of the leaders of the Alliance. Although they call themselves the “remaining American government,” the plot of VS is an imperial mode of globalization: it is an attempt to remake the entire world over in their image of America and to eradicate anyone who will not accept this vision.

There are only seven episodes in the second season so the threat represented by Daniel receives less attention and elaboration than VS, or the post-cataclysmic society itself. All of the stories appear to take place in the Rockies or Pacific Northwest, other than the brief assault on VS (Pennsylvania). There is actually no Daniel; he is used as a virtual leader or a talking head that reflects many of the fascist characteristics of the propaganda and nationalist rhetoric of the National Socialists or Mussolini’s Italy. Daniel’s lieutenants dress in black leather trenchcoats, similar to popular culture depictions of the Gestapo, and talk of “strength” in an awkward emulation of Nietzsche, and Daniel’s rule: “hard work and discipline.”<sup>133</sup> The commander of his armies, Simms, sports mutton chops, wears a gray greatcoat, plays the harmonica, and drawls with a Southern accent for all his experience with “cannibals in New York City.” Simms’ mannerisms and style (including his revolvers) is a riff on popular portrayals of Robert E. Lee and George S. Patton—both famous Southern generals. This link to the South is critical in reinforcing the use of slave labor, and to Hitler’s autocratic control of the Nazi government and use of similar labor and death camps, an analogy suggested by the mass graves within Daniel’s domain. But this is not a recapitulation of either the Confederate States or the Third Reich because the underground fighters (resistance) that Jeremiah and Kurdy meet explain that Daniel’s rule is about jailing those who protest, labeling as enemies those who question, and using the media to stoke fear of anyone who is

different—in this instance other communities like Millhaven, TM, and the Alliance.<sup>134</sup>

But these domains are based on a cult of fictitious personality, and when Simms is killed, and the elders forced to reveal that there is no Daniel, the war abruptly ends, leaving TM and the Alliance to begin repairing and rebuilding this post-plague America.

Historically, the semi-militant survivalist ethos has its origins in the 1950s and 1960s, but it begins to mature after *Lucifer's Hammer* when it is questioned in *The Postman* novel of the early 1980s, and again in the film in the mid-1990s. *Jeremiah* employs the militant-survivalist aesthetic; many of its core characters wear some variant of military dress (or surplus) throughout the series, but they question not only their use of force, but the old world's justification for it. Valhalla Sector predicates its plot on the control of the military-industrial complex and advanced science and technology; Daniel's power is derived from an army built through neo-xenophobic fear and the recovered military weapons of the past. Leadership and political power are tied to control of men with weapons, and military assets for almost every faction in *Jeremiah*, and those that are most successful also control science and technology. A similar access to technology—computer networks and spy satellites—is critical in the series *Jericho* because the small, agrarian town in Kansas is repeatedly outgunned and outmanned—first by paramilitary raiders, later by their neighbors in New Bern, and finally by the forces of the Allied States of America as the very idea of a liberal democracy with unified goals and ideals is torn apart.

### **Jericho**

In March 2003, FEMA joined twenty-two other agencies under the umbrella command of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). In August and September

2005, Hurricanes Katrina and Rita savaged the Gulf Coast of the United States, but most especially New Orleans, a city that continues to struggle to recover today. Christopher Cooper and Robert Block argue that far more could have been done by state authorities to prepare for the disaster, but their sharpest criticism is directed against the DHS whose “obsession with terrorist attacks had undermined the nation’s readiness for natural disasters and ironically had made the country more vulnerable to calamity, not less.”<sup>135</sup> The federal response to Hurricane Katrina was bumbling and incompetent from the incomplete disaster plan, to the confusion over how to repair the US Army Corps of Engineers levees, to the difficulty of housing refugees for months afterward, and the eventual media circus and blame game that (correctly) cost the director of FEMA his job.<sup>136</sup> Since so many of Katrina’s hardest-hit victims were poor and black, the disaster also highlighted the severe injustices and deprivations remaining in American society, while Bush policies favored the rich, who disproportionately were white and college-educated.

The first season of *Jericho* depicts the collapse of local and federal authorities and the fragmentation of the United States. The show's co-creators, Jonathan Steinberg and Josh Schaer, said that they intended to explore issues raised by the war in Iraq and the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina through a post-apocalyptic story.<sup>137</sup> Fears of invasion and depleted food and medical resources are traditional themes of nuclear war fiction, but the *Jericho* story also brings the post-deterrence anxiety of stolen Soviet warheads and the WMD debate before the invasion of Iraq in 2003 into sharp relief. In this series members of the US intelligence community actually *give* warheads to the terrorists, creating one of the conspiracy plotlines. The show incorporates a number of plots but those that play off

authorities and intelligence services involve both mayors of Jericho—Johnston Green and Gray Anderson—as well as Johnston's son, Jake Green, and an undercover CIA operative, Robert Hawkins. With the exception of a few scrambled satellite images and one reverse-911 call, the town is cut off from the rest of America. The reactions of both mayors include errors in leadership and judgment that parallel similar mistakes made along the Gulf Coast prior to and in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.<sup>138</sup>

The twenty-two episodes of *Jericho* include several perspectives on leadership, but repeatedly emphasize the failures of local leaders and absence of state and federal authority. In the middle of the first season<sup>139</sup> Johnston loses the mayoral election to Gray, who is immediately sworn in after having used fear of outsiders to prompt a surge at the polls. Both men remain community leaders, but the difference between their leadership decisions contrasts pre- and post-disaster authority, and offers a critique of the Bush administrations response to 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina. Johnston is a Vietnam-era veteran (Army Rangers) who has held the office for the past twenty-five years, since the beginning of the Reagan administration, suggesting a comparison of different Republican eras. After the bombs, his mistakes are due more to a lack of information and state (gubernatorial) or federal guidance. In the second episode, “Fallout,” the lack of planning and training is evident as the town scrambles to prepare for fallout from Denver—a criticism of the DHS and FEMA in respect to the failed responses to Hurricane Katrina. It takes the outsider, Hawkins, to explain to local authorities the dangers of radiation and the measures required to survive exposure. The town has only one remaining shelter; the second in the town clinic has fallen into disrepair. The sheriff is killed in the opening episode, but Johnston remains caught up in events and fails to appoint someone to the

vacant position, echoing the loss of armed and uniformed authority nationally. This leaves a lingering question regarding the separation and continuity of power after a disaster, again emphasized by the later attack of Constantine (and his “imperial ambitions”), the leader of the nearby city of New Bern. Johnston’s deputies echo the post-Cold War worldview when they tell Hawkins that they have no national emergency training.<sup>140</sup> Johnston becomes more proactive once he is removed as mayor, turning to his military experience to organize and protect the community, suggesting that the bureaucracy is too inflexible or overwhelmed to deal with the catastrophe. In contrast, Gray’s business experience proves insufficient to cope with most post-apocalyptic demands and he panics during New Bern’s mortar attack on Jericho. Gray’s failures draw attention to similar mistakes made in New Orleans after the hurricane, and in Baghdad during the ongoing reconstruction efforts and the persistent Bush administration mantra that businessmen make the best leaders.

Before Gray is elected mayor he is the voice of opposition; as mayor, he struggles to adapt after the bombs cripple modern civilization. As a private citizen and candidate, he encourages expediency and supports the looting of the general store after the mushroom cloud appears—an act he would condemn once he is in power.<sup>141</sup> Gray also represents the isolationists within Jericho who would rather huddle in fear rather than reach out to other communities. His “us or them” perspective is the reactionary fear of the ordinary citizen and the foundation of racial profiling and xenophobia, both of which manifest when Gray pressures Hawkins into allowing his house to be searched. A group of mercenaries later try to commandeer supplies from Jericho. The mercenaries, Ravenwood, an obvious analog for Blackwater, are driven off by a combined effort

spear-headed by Jake and Hawkins. Gray's response after the mercenaries leave is, "better they hit other towns than us."<sup>142</sup> The day before the election, Gray leads vigilante groups in search of a fugitive whose capture proves the "tipping point" for his campaign. His first act as mayor is to form a special tribunal that emulates the military tribunals used to deal with the prisoners at Guantanamo Bay (Camp X-Ray). Gray then orders the summary execution of the prisoner; he is thwarted by the combined efforts of the Greens who remind him that if he is wrong and the prisoner is innocent, then he will have committed murder, and his own death will follow.<sup>143</sup> Gray opts for exile rather than execution, but his rush to judgment and failure to follow due process again shadow critics of the invasion of Iraq.

In the end it is Gray's lack of effective executive leadership, diplomacy, and compassion that forces the conflict between Jericho and New Bern. When food and fuel run short, rather than attempting anything creative or organizing a collective effort from the townspeople, Gray orders that refugees to be driven out of town as "the last to come, the first to go."<sup>144</sup> His personal weakness and fear are emphasized when the Greens must again collectively intervene and lead the resistance against New Bern to keep Gray from surrendering farms and allowing the occupation of Jericho—themes hauntingly similar to some reconstruction strategies for Iraq. New Bern attacks because their leader, Constantine, fears that Gray will renege on his deal to supply New Bern with food for the winter if they construct windmill generators for Jericho. The exchange is not compassionate; Gray needs power for the town but he fails to be candid with Constantine and work out a way of sharing resources; instead he only plans for Jericho and considers leaving a lot of New Bern to potentially starve. His decisions as mayor are reminiscent of



the food for oil program in Iraq, and perhaps even of the abuses and corruption of that program by certain American and European companies.

Hawkins, the undercover agent, is the *deus ex machina* of the series. He alone has contact with the world beyond Jericho; he knows who orchestrated the attacks, and he later provides military-grade weapons and intelligence to Jericho when New Bern attacks. A reflection of current controversies such as “Plamegate” and the tensions with Iran, Hawkins is the human face of an intelligence community that generates more anxiety than security—a negative response more often associated by critics with the Fox series *24* (and the BBC series *MI-5* or *Spooks*). Hawkins eventually tells Jake that the bombs were acquired from former Soviet republics and brought into the US by the American government and then distributed to “militants, anarchists, and religious fanatics.”<sup>145</sup> The current head of the Department of Homeland Security is involved in some way, recycling conspiracy theories. While useful to the town, Hawkins at first feeds both paranoia and isolationist responses because his focus is on protecting his family without consideration for the greater community they have joined. As an agent, his cold calculation matches that of bureaucrats and politicians willing to sacrifice millions of lives for power, money, or oil.

*Jericho* was cancelled after its first season, but a feverish fan campaign convinced CBS to give it another chance. And just like the series *Jeremiah*, it had only a half-season to articulate another threat before its final cancellation. In this brief second season, The Allied States of America (ASA) comes to control everything west of the Mississippi (other than an independent Texas), and to impose a combination of martial law and corporate management over Jericho, New Bern, and Kansas—an analog for the

occupation of Iraq. Where the military commander, Major Beck, is a well-intentioned Iraqi campaign veteran, the ASA itself is an obvious metaphor for the Bush administration. Jennings & Rall is the corporation who, much like Halliburton in Iraq, are given the contract to “administrate” Jericho (and the rest of Kansas). This turns control over to Goetz, the Ravenwood unit leader who attempted to raid the town in the first season.<sup>146</sup> Intimidation, torture, and hostages are part of Goetz’s approach to management and they ensure profits, but he is finally terminated after evidence of his embezzlement from J&R is given to his boss.<sup>147</sup> Goetz is the face of the Cheyenne government who acts too swiftly to try to reform Kansas and the other states under its dominion into compliant supporters of the new nation; the new administration does this by censoring the media, assassinating reporters, and attempting to distribute new history and civics books to schools. The series was cancelled before the storylines could be adequately explored, but the series finale sets up a war between the United States, allied with the Republic of Texas, against the Allied States of America after Jake Green delivers the last nuclear warhead to Texas along with evidence of the Wyoming government/J&R corporate collusion in the apocalyptic plot.

### **The Emberverser and The Change**

The declension of modernity represented by the collapse of liberal democratic societies is similar to what some have defined as a global shift from a state-centric system towards a “New Middle Ages,” although more recently this has begun to be cast as a “New Dark Ages.” Critics, such as English political scientist Hedley Bull, have used new medievalism as a model since the 1970s,<sup>148</sup> but after 9/11 a growing number of critics, including Niall Ferguson, have chosen the more drastic image of the New Dark Ages.

Ferguson, a historian at NYU and senior fellow of the Hoover Institute, uses this concept to elaborate on the inevitable decline of American unipolarity because, as he puts it, “history hates a hyperpower.”<sup>149</sup> Rather than any state, such as India, China, or the EU replacing American hegemony, or the resurgence of Britain, Japan, or Russia as *Warday* and *The Wild Shore* envision, Ferguson suggests an absence of hegemonic power in the near future. He warns: “This could turn out to mean a new Dark Age of waning empires and religious fanaticism; of endemic rapine in the world’s no-go zones; of economic stagnation and a retreat by civilization into a few fortified enclaves.”<sup>150</sup>

Bruce Sterling links these strands of political science to contemporary SF and offers a synopsis of the geopolitical models of decline, drawing from Ferguson and other sources including Phil Williams of the Military Strategic Studies Institute of the US Army War College.<sup>151</sup> Williams argues that “global politics [is] now characterized by fragmented political authority, overlapping jurisdictions, no-go zones, identity politics, and contested property rights” and warns that the “failure to manage the forces of global disorder” could lead to a New Dark Age.<sup>152</sup> Another perception of this decline and contraction from globalization and the US as a unipower began with 9/11; Paul Virilio argues, “since the collapse of the USSR, America’s new world hegemony has mainly made itself felt by an arrogance based on its crushing technological superiority rather than on its elevated morality.”<sup>153</sup> The loss of this technological superiority was part of the Y2K scare, but also became the backbeat of the American inability to hunt down Osama bin Laden throughout the 2000s. Ferguson is strident in his alarmist forecast: “Waning empires. Religious revivals. Incipient anarchy. A coming retreat into fortified

cities.”<sup>154</sup> In 2004, SM Stirling plunged the entire world into an actual rather than geopolitical Dark Age in his novel *Dies the Fire* by effectively negating the majority of technology developed over the past 250 years. In this Emberverse, the new societies that form from the ashes and fading memories of the 20th century articulate many of the possibilities of a geopolitical New Dark Age.

Rather than a critique of the Bush administration, or the post-9/11 culture of fear and security, Stirling develops his alternate universe as one that grapples with the end of a civilization and superpower dependent not only on fossil fuels, but on an infrastructure that runs on gas, diesel, and electricity, a theme that has been appearing with more frequency since the invasion of Iraq. Moreover, this is not George Miller’s world of *Mad Max*, but one in which the global village provided by modern media and communications is fragmented in a second; there is no time for a transition of authority, nor the slow acculturation available as gas prices climb, infrastructure crumbles, and cities contract as in Butler’s *Parables*, or the scavenging phase of *Jeremiah* and *Jericho*. The world as we know it comes to a stop in an instant. The extensive apparatus of bureaucracy and modern government can only exist within an overly specialized and technological society. In one respect this is a cautionary depiction of the erosion of social programs and support in a downward spiraling economy as outlined in Chapter Two, but in this instance it also suggests that many of the services and civil liberties considered “necessary” to a basic quality of life become luxuries when actual survival is at stake—a reflection of not only post-Katrina New Orleans, but also Afghanistan and Iraq after the “major military missions” ended and reconstruction and civilian administrations took over.

The Emberverse is about “powers and principalities” (as Simms defines the war between the TM Alliance and Daniel in *Jeremiah*); it is not a saga that lends itself to republican forms of government. The attempts to deal with the catastrophic Change by civil authorities (mayors and governors) all fail; famine, disease, plague, and ultimately the death of 90% of humanity follow—an apocalyptic inversion of the literal value of decimation. Those who manage to save themselves and others are civilians (hobbyists, performers, and academics), veterans, or active duty military, but none are elected leaders or part of the government bureaucracy. This might be read as a criticism of DHS and its inability to counter unknown threats after 9/11, although Stirling’s series begins before Katrina, leaving FEMA out of the critique. The first trilogy is about power in terms of innovation and adaptation: those with the ability to derive new weapons and defenses, to grow food with old methods and techniques, and to give hope to the survivors are the crystals around which new societies form. Although some of these leaders intend to maintain or restore democratic rule, only a few approach this noble goal, and even in these instances (the Mackenzies and the Bearkillers) the cult of personality that forms around their leaders frustrates such aspirations.

The universe of the Change began as a post-cataclysmic dystopia, and while it continues to focus largely on arms, armor, and combat—military SF—the truly interesting stories are about the formation of these post-industrial cultures. The threat of disease, theft, and cannibalism forces the survivor communities initially to distance themselves from each other, which magnifies the choices made by their leaders, creating the distinctive neo-ethnicities described in more detail in chapter four. As part of his approach to crafting the series as post-apocalyptic contemporary high fantasy, Stirling

crafts each society distinctly by choosing a specific culture as a template for the its new political and military structure. Because everyone has been knocked below the level of steam, many of these differences are superficial: the Anglo-Norman/street gang flavor of the Protectorate under Armingier, Renaissance Faire/Neopagan (Celtic) essence of the Mackenzies, semi-Scandinavian/soldier-of-fortune feel of the Bearkillers, and the university-meets-Greece Neo-Athenian Corvallis. A great deal of effort is invested in detailing the different weapons, armor, and doctrines of each nation's military, a function of the size of the nascent nation and form of government. All of the survivor nations recreate feudal political and economic systems because they are dependent on manual labor and farming which allows a fraction of the society to specialize as fighters; within the first generation, the types of specialists expand to include artisans, crafters, medics and doctors, and teachers. The location of the seed community and its initial specialist determine the culture that develops, but in terms of government and executive power there are only a few choices: forms of dictatorship, oligarchy, monarchy, theocracy, or military rule.

Until the end of the Protector's War in the third novel, *A Meeting in Corvallis*, the social compact is defined by military strength. For most of this ten-year span Armingier sets the terms by setting "an alliance of four major and twelve smaller [. . .] university-run city-states, theocracies, clans, village republics, [. . .] trying to fight [his] single dictatorship."<sup>155</sup> Armingier began with the largest force; while the others fought to make their way across a hostile landscape to a safe haven, he used his knowledge of twelfth-century history to recast Portland in its image, complete with slaves, serfs, men-at-arms, and a factory-system of slaves turning out weapons and armor. Because he

controls the docks and grain on ships that will never leave, he forces obedience with the threat of starvation and worse. Arming is a tyrant, but one intelligent enough to use the best of his gang leaders and crime lords as the first generation of nobles and landholders as he pushes his rule north, east, and south. The Protectorate has about 50,000 people when it begins, and although only a fraction of Portland's population, it dwarfs all of the other Willamette Valley groups. Arming finds slave labor is easier to control and replace in the early months of survival, but he later redefines them as serfs. By codifying labor debt into the Protectorate Charter, he allows the debt (and peonage) to be passed between spouses and to their children, creating near perpetual labor contracts. Fear cements Arming's power because his mad Pope Leo can excommunicate, exorcise, and stage inquisitorial courts including "witch burnings" and "exorcisms"—both useful tools for limiting the activities of underground subversives and underground witches who follow the Mackenzie ways.

Juniper Mackenzie, a folk-singer and Wiccan priestess, gathers the nucleus of her clan after retreating from the city of Corvallis to her cabin in Central Oregon. Her people grow from her surviving Neopagan circle to encompass refugees and nearby farmers, and by the time of the Protector's War they have expanded to a number of fortified settlements in the Willamette Valley. Although Juniper is a romantic and earned her living playing folk music at bars and Renaissance festivals, she only intended to use the clan in terms of its communal support, not to recreate the political structure of the Scottish clan that comes to define the Clan Mackenzie. As a Neopagan, Juniper is a strong supporter of religious toleration and does not require those who join the Clan to become Wiccan; in fact, the Clan comes to include a variety of Christians, atheists, and

other Neopagans as the books continue. However, the leaders of every settlement or *sept* are the pair who also lead religious observances (one male and female, but not necessarily married to each other) and represent the god and goddess. Juniper is the High Chief of the Clan and the High Priestess of the faith, which makes her the political and religious leader of all communities that declare themselves part of the Clan; which to some extent renders the Clan a theocracy. In theory she has the power to deal with any emergency or military threat, but in practice she defers to those on her council who are experts, and outside such issues she must debate, cajole, and convince her council and advisers. In many respects she emulates the emergency prerogative and function of an American President—outside military, natural, or supernatural emergency she must negotiate and achieve some measure of consensus with her “Congress.”

Mike Havel did not intend to become the leader of a people who contract out for mercenary duties, or sell the latest in siege gear and castle fortification technology, but his experience as a Marine is used to cast much of the post-cataclysmic survival and conflict into military perspectives. Havel realizes early on that he needs to keep his best fighters well equipped and in training, and he reinvents (with the amused help of Pamela Arnstein and Ken Larsson) a feudal system of his own. Havel is adamant that there must be laws, so he begins with a system where families of farmers support their knight, who then acts as “the local Justice of the Peace and they’ll train and command the militia, and look after the roads and local school.”<sup>156</sup> But Havel and his advisers are also the most pragmatic (outside Astrid Larsson and her Rangers who are derived from Tolkien’s characters of the same name); for them, the memory of American laws and customs is not dead, but they recognize that “food and clothes, and a house and a big garden”<sup>157</sup> are



more important to people who have almost starved—or been eaten by cannibals—than principles and the memory of the Constitution. The Bearkillers enforce regulations that define honorable behavior and contracts, but unlike the PPA and its social hierarchies of nobles, commoners, and serfs, Havel believes that all of his people are equal even if not equally trained as warriors. By the end of the first generation, a system has been put in place that helps give the children of farmers a chance to train and compete for “A-Lister” status (knight), but after Havel dies at the end of the Protector’s War, the plans for drafting a new constitution for his people dies with him.

The United States (of Boise), introduced in *The Sunrise Lands* (2007), is the opposite side of that romantic coin. It may be a reflection of contemporary discourse regarding American imperialism, or merely a greater contrast as a “dead” empire, but the US of Boise modeled its weapons, armor, and tactics on the Romans. General Thurston, an African American Army general in the mold of Colin Powell, is the “military governor” or President of this nation that controls much of Idaho. As its leader, General Thurston maintains as many American laws, rights, and customs as he can and clings to the past even though he does not relinquish power nor hold a democratic election for twenty-odd years after the Change. It is when Thurston plans to step down and hold elections in order to transition the executive office that his eldest son, Martin, stages a coup. Martin colludes with an enemy and foreign power—the theocratic despotism of the Church Universal and Triumphant—to assassinate the general and assume his mantle, primarily because the general is not going to allow the position to become hereditary. It is important to note that Martin can only plan and succeed in this plot because of his control of the Army, and it is through military dominance that he maintains his power when

rumors that he murdered his father begin to circulate in Boise. General Thurston considers himself a caretaker; he is only in charge until the military emergency passes, when he will begin reuniting the formerly United States,. However, this day never comes, and the nation slips from martial law to neo-monarchy as the emergency continues to be used as a tool by its new ruler. In many respects, this blend of romanticized notions of an American (and imperial) past tie the Emberverses to the alternate universe of post-Colonial collapse in *Battlestar Galactica*, where control is passed between a small group of people in a constantly embattled and diminishing fugitive fleet bound for a mythic homeland.

### **Battlestar Galactica (BSG)**

The *BSG* narrative that spans the five-year interval from the fall of the colonies until the remnants of the fleet settle on the planet they name Earth frequently deals with the tensions in a democratic society between safety and security and the preservation of individual rights and freedoms. Throughout the series, this balance is explored in the discord between military and civilian leaders and among the populace when political, social, or religious values come into conflict. The series begins with a clash between father and son that encapsulates the tension not only between the needs of the military mission, but also civilian desires and the reason a military exists in a democracy: to protect its citizens. Part of the story deals with the theme of recognizing when it is time to move on and let go of the past, and in a strictly military sense this reflects the cycles of US armed forces reorganization under Reagan, Clinton, and again under Bush 43. *BSG* also reflects anxieties that the US may no longer be a unipower because its military might has not been sufficient to eliminate Al Qaeda or to maintain order in Iraq and

Afghanistan, and because its economic might falters as the global recession grinds into the second decade of the twenty first century. The clashes between leaders and institutions in *BSG* surface in military resistance to civilian authority, the weakness of democratic elections, failures to transfer authority, and the loss of civil rights in the face of hidden enemies or for the “good” of the species and/or civilization.

After the Cylon attack, Commander Adama initially plans to rearm and return to Caprica to fight the them, but his son, Lee “Apollo” Adama, persuades him to follow the imperative of the protector and follow the orders of the new President to defend the slowly coalescing fleet of fugitive starships. Although Adama realizes the need for the *Galactica* to shepherd the fleet away from the annihilated colonies, he resists Roslin’s authority at first because he views her as a political leader, not as commander-in-chief, and asserts the need for military leadership in this emergency situation. In fact, he “terminates her presidency” at one point, has her arrested and thrown in the brig, although his near assassination shortly thereafter puts the fleet under the direction of Colonel Tigh, who then orders martial law.<sup>158</sup> The result is an “insurgency” when Roslin and Lee Adama escape and begin sending a recording out amongst the fleet (in the style of Osama bin Laden or the French Resistance of WW II). Roslin finally calls for her followers to go to Kobol with her; almost one third of the fleet makes the jump.<sup>159</sup> It is after his near assassination, and the division of not only his fleet, but also his family that Adama begins to reconcile himself to Roslin’s authority. After the occupation of New Caprica by the Cylons, Adama and Roslin begin a romantic relationship that lasts through the return of her cancer and her death during the settlement of Earth. Adama’s relationship with Roslin is only another example<sup>160</sup> of his failure to maintain distance as

a commander (admiral of the fleet); he allows his people to get too close, to become a family, which clouds his judgment. His emotional needs become “military needs” that then threaten the survival of everyone else.

The series is embedded with the threat of not just only a military coup, but also the possibility that citizens will become accustomed to officers of the armed forces operating in the stead of elected (civilian) leaders. The fleet operates under perpetual threat, so many of its officers act as though they should be setting policy for the fleet (civilization) because they have been trained to operate in crises. This leads Adama to arrest the President and stage a military coup because he disagrees with her executive decisions. For Tigh, his own demons and alcoholism drive him to declare martial law, under which a number of civilians are killed during protests and near-riots on the non-military ships. The exceptions to this trend, Apollo and Karl “Helo” Agathon, argue that how the people of the fleet maintain their values and civility when in crisis, doubt, and fear is as important as their actual survival. Helo resists the decision to use biological warfare and commit genocide against the Cylons by using their download technology against them; he does not convince the Admiral or the President to abandon the plan, but instead disrupts it himself (which is technically an act of treason).<sup>161</sup> After being driven to resign his commission by his father, Lee Adama argues for the values of Colonial civilization and the spirit of its laws against those of vengeance and fear during Baltar’s treason trial; he succeeds in convincing the tribunal to render a not guilty verdict.<sup>162</sup> Helo and Lee represent the human side of the military in their role as protectors; however, Admiral Helena Cain is on the opposite end of the spectrum as a leader for whom civilians are unfortunate collateral damage (and often obstacles) in pursuit of mission

success.<sup>163</sup> She is the most vocal (after Tigh subsides) in questioning not only Roslin's legitimacy, but also the necessity of a civilian leader at all.<sup>164</sup>

In this militarized society, Adama effectively demands the role of commander-in-chief and retains it until he is nearly assassinated, and even then he does not lose it until Admiral Cain arrives and asserts her command authority over the combined fleet. Unlike Adama, Cain focuses on the campaign to strike back against the Cylons above everything else. She not only steals the jump drives and critical supplies from the civilian fleet, but dragoons selected "personnel" at gunpoint, and orders that families be shot as examples when they resist. After she takes what is necessary for her guerrilla campaign against the Cylons, she abandons the stripped civilian fleet in deep space. Cain may be offered as the antipode for Adama and Roslin, but their methods vary more by degrees than substance. Cain has her Cylon prisoner, Gina, tortured, beaten, and repeatedly raped to gain both information and revenge.<sup>165</sup> On the *Galactica*, Starbuck tortures a Model Two, "Leoben," with a form of "waterboarding" to get him to reveal the location of a nuclear bomb within the fleet. Starbuck argues that he should not be treated as a prisoner because he is not human, and therefore not entitled to human rights.<sup>166</sup> But it is Roslin who authorizes his ejection into space out of an airlock, a practice later used on a pair of Number Ones "Brother Cavil."<sup>167</sup> Extreme interrogation that verges on psychological torture is also applied to human suspects, including former President Baltar when he is charged with collaboration and treason in the Cylon occupation of New Caprica. Initially, Roslin threatens to "airlock" Baltar, and later allows Adama to administer a powerful experimental psychoactive drug to question him, but he reveals no incriminating evidence under its influence. This resort to torture and "enhanced interrogation" reflects American

society's unease with the Bush administration's implementation of the measures as a weapon in the "War on Terror"; both Adama and Roslin eventually come to the conclusion that as humans they must *deserve* to survive, which means not abandoning human rights in the process.

Although critics question several of Roslin's executive decisions because of her health and medicinal drug use in the course of her cancer treatment, other presidents, including Baltar and Tom Zarek, also provoke dismay and criticism. During the occupation of New Caprica, Baltar is kept as a figurehead and kept in check with hot and cold running interns, Caprica Six, and a near miraculous stock of alcohol while most of the Colonists have limited food and medicine. He is forced to sign execution orders for hundreds of the Colonists suspected of working with the Resistance, but later claims that he knew Gaeta was funneling these documents to the Resistance, which could save these people. Zarek serves as Baltar's Vice President on New Caprica, and when he refuses to work with the Cylons they have him jailed; after the escape he assumes the presidency for the missing Baltar. As President Zarek, he commissions a shadow tribunal comprised of former Resistance members to find, try, and execute anyone they believe to have been a collaborator; the "trials" end when they almost execute Gaeta who reveals he was the source of most of their critical intelligence ... only moments before he is about to be airlocked.<sup>168</sup> In "Black Market", Commander Fisk is assassinated for attempting to manipulate the head of the criminal enterprise; when Apollo finds it engaging in slavery and child trafficking, he shoots the criminal boss and sets new limits, but accepts that a black market will exist even if he destroys this one.<sup>169</sup> Zarek, then acting as a member of the Quorum, assumes control of the criminal enterprise and uses these connections to his

advantage while President. Given his past as a terrorist or freedom fighter, Zarek is a cynical, liminal figure that straddles the halls of power and those of the criminal community and the black market, and one that also requires post-cataclysmic executives to deal with every surviving segment of their society, often regardless of the intervening laws.

Over the course of the series there are two military coups, one with presidential support, and five Presidents but only one election. Roslin assumes the Presidency as the 43<sup>rd</sup> in line of succession after the attacks on the Colonies. Baltar is later able to use the settlement of New Caprica as a wedge issue to be elected President, but only after near defeat in an election rigged by Roslin supporters, including Col. Tigh, but disrupted by Lt. Gaeta. Before the vote manipulation, Baltar was 5,000 votes ahead, a nod to the tight Presidential election of 2000 and its 553,000 margin in the popular count.<sup>170</sup> Although Adama talks Roslin out of allowing the rigged results to stand, she later uses pressure to contest Zarek's Presidency, and he resigns to become her Vice President. During the fourth season, when Adama and an ailing Roslin agree on an alliance with the Cylon rebels, Zarek takes advantage of a bitter and betrayed Gaeta to stage a mutiny and political coup; Zarek himself assassinates the Quorum of Twelve with the sole exception of Lee Adama, the representative of Caprica.<sup>171</sup> Finally, in the series finale, before the assault on the Cylon Colony, Lee transfers the Presidency to Baltar's former defense attorney, Romo Lamkin.<sup>172</sup> Those who assume executive power include a teacher, terrorist, scientist and traitor, pilot, and lawyer, but none are prepared for the burden of leading a fearful, nearly extinct species out of danger. Laura Roslin is President the longest and under the most duress, and it is she who makes many of the most

questionable decisions including genocide, enabling torture, outlawing abortion,<sup>173</sup> and allowing religion and prophecy to influence her decisions rather than abdicate power. Despite the corruption that seems to proliferate the democratic endeavors in *BSG*, it is one of the few post-cataclysmic societies that manages to retain some semblance of democratic ideals, and at least considers the ramifications for civil liberties and the survival of the human race. The political landscape changes, but remains a very active part of Colonial life, and in many respects it becomes much more essentialist and focuses on identity issues and differences in home planet, culture, religion, and even class and education, rather than bringing the entire fleet together as the last of humanity. Their differences may once have given them strength, especially in contrast to the more monocultural Cylons, but these divisions also threaten them with annihilation.

## **Conclusion**

Frank Kermode argues that apocalyptic literature includes themes of decadence and renovation, progress and catastrophe, and that it has a particularly strong connection to imperialism and the concerns of empire.<sup>174</sup> In particular, Kermode's apocalyptic "doctrines of crisis, decadence and empire"<sup>175</sup> allow societies to read nations, wars, and empires in terms of the end of the world. These narratives reveal how fear can often trump principles and privileges, and allow differences and perceived social inequities to turn a people against it and finish the job started by a severe cataclysm. The point of these narratives is that a complete political structure is untenable, incompetent, or too shattered to exist. Even those societies that attempt to hold onto the vestiges of democracy—elections and rule of law—can be overwhelmed by the stacked effects of attacks, or the ongoing enervation of crisis and decline. Often democracy is replaced by oligarchy, and



many of these narratives elaborate a neo-feudal or semi-communist enclave approach as all assets must be collected and dispersed for the communal good, or are hoarded and sold by black markets and criminal enterprises. The civil rights about which we argue, that form some of the basic contentions between Democrats, Republicans, Libertarians, Socialists, and even Communists in the US are altered. The point: without our modern, industrial society where machine and high-energy output power conversion is a possibility, social equality is not guaranteed, in fact, it is very limited if it exists at all.

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<sup>1</sup> Eliot A. Cohen, "History and the Hyperpower," *Foreign Affairs* July/August 2004, accessed August 15, 2011, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/59919/eliot-a-cohen/history-and-the-hyperpower>.

<sup>2</sup> Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Imperial Presidency*, (New York: Mariner Books, 2004), ix.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, xi-xiii.

<sup>4</sup> Sean Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2005), xviii.

<sup>5</sup> Andrew J. Bacevich, *The Limits of Power: The End of American Exceptionalism*, (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2008), 3.

<sup>6</sup> "Reining in the Imperial Presidency: Lessons and Recommendations Relating to the Presidency of George W. Bush." House Committee on the Judiciary Majority Staff Report to Chairman John Conyers, Jr. January 13, 2009. Accessed July 15, 2011. Full PDF available from: <http://www.cfr.org/united-states/house-representatives-report-reining-imperial-presidency-lessons-recommendations-relating-presidency-george-w-bush/p18227>

<sup>7</sup> Andrew J. Bacevich, *The Limits of Power*, 68.

<sup>8</sup> John Gray. *Black Mass: Apocalyptic Religion and the Death of Utopia*, (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2007), 147.

<sup>9</sup> Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1987), 439.

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- <sup>10</sup> Paul Brians, *Nuclear Holocausts*, 69.
- <sup>11</sup> Gary K. Wolfe, "The Remaking of Zero," 1.
- <sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.
- <sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 13-14.
- <sup>14</sup> Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992), 491.
- <sup>15</sup> Paul Brians, *Nuclear Holocausts*, 69.
- <sup>16</sup> *ibid*, 69.
- <sup>17</sup> Andrew J. Bacevich, *The Limits of Power*, 122.
- <sup>18</sup> Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Imperial Presidency*, 163.
- <sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 167.
- <sup>20</sup> *ibid*, 131-33.
- <sup>21</sup> *ibid*, 141.
- <sup>22</sup> *ibid*, 165.
- <sup>23</sup> *ibid*, 167.
- <sup>24</sup> *ibid*, 450-53.
- <sup>25</sup> Douglas Little, *American Orientalism: The United States and the Middle East Since 1945* (3<sup>rd</sup> edition), (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 221-27.
- <sup>26</sup> Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Imperial Presidency*, 167-68.
- <sup>27</sup> *ibid*, 178.
- <sup>28</sup> *ibid*, 184.

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- <sup>29</sup> Allan M. Winkler, *Life Under A Cloud: American Anxiety About the Atom*, (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 104-05.
- <sup>30</sup> David Seed, *American Science Fiction and the Cold War: Literature and Film*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), 61-62.
- <sup>31</sup> Pat Frank, *Alas, Babylon*, (New York: Harper Perennial, 2005), 76. (first published by J.B. Lippincott, 1959).
- <sup>32</sup> *ibid*, 118.
- <sup>33</sup> *ibid*, 125-27.
- <sup>34</sup> Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Imperial Presidency*, 190-191.
- <sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 239-41.
- <sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 30-31.
- <sup>37</sup> Sean Wilentz. *The Age of Reagan: A History 1974-2008*, (New York: Harper Perennial, 2008), 18.
- <sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.
- <sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 106-07.
- <sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.
- <sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.
- <sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 118-19.
- <sup>43</sup> Andrew J. Bacevich, *The Limits of Power*, 32.
- <sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 36-37.
- <sup>45</sup> Noam Chomsky, "Imperial Presidency" in *Canadian Dimension*, January/February 2005 (Volume 39, Number 1). Online. Accessed July 31, 2011. <http://www.chomsky.info/articles/20041217.htm>
- <sup>46</sup> Chomsky, "Imperial Presidency," Online.

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<sup>47</sup> H. Bruce Franklin, *Warstars: The Superweapons and the American Imagination*, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, revised ed. 2008), 202.

<sup>48</sup> Ann Larabee. *Decade of Disaster*, (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 17.

<sup>49</sup> Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle, *Lucifer's Hammer*, 352.

<sup>50</sup> Niven and Pournelle, both relatively social conservative, make no effort to address this charge of communism. In fact, with the later addition of the two Russian cosmonauts and the establishment of the prisoner colony, run by the Brigadier Pieter Jakov, "the Comrade," they seem explain that the valley will not be "ready" for Communism for some time as it is only just barely above the historical level of slavery. It is interesting that much of the stress is on merit—as a military veteran, scientist, or tradesman—and when those who have experience and knowledge make decisions as an operating center it is apparently not Communism, or so the reader is left to infer.

<sup>51</sup> Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle, *Lucifer's Hammer*, 406.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 416.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 468.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 295-96.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 432.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 607.

<sup>57</sup> Sean Wilentz, *Age of Reagan*, 157.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.

<sup>59</sup> H. Bruce Franklin, *Warstars*, 202.

<sup>60</sup> Allan M. Winkler, *Life Under a Cloud*, 205-06.

<sup>61</sup> David Hoogland Noon, "Cold War Revival: Neoconservatives and historical memory in the War on Terror" in *American Studies*, (fall 2007, vol. 48 #3): 75-100; 81.

<sup>62</sup> Sean Wilentz, *The Age of Reagan*, 160.

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- <sup>63</sup> Douglas Little, *American Orientalism*, 251.
- <sup>64</sup> Sean Wilentz, *The Age of Reagan*, 293.
- <sup>65</sup> Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, 515.
- <sup>66</sup> Sean Wilentz, *The Age of Reagan*, 217-21, 227.
- <sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 275.
- <sup>68</sup> Kim Stanley Robinson, *The Wild Shore*, (New York: Tom Doherty Associates, 1984), 58, 89, 99.
- <sup>69</sup> Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of Great Powers*, 441-42.
- <sup>70</sup> Kim Stanley Robinson, *The Wild Shore*, 43.
- <sup>71</sup> Whitley Strieber and James Kunetka, *Warday and the Journey Onward*, (London: Coronet, 1984), 146-47.
- <sup>72</sup> James F. Miskel, *Disaster Response and Homeland Security: What Works, What Doesn't*, (Westport: Praeger Security International, 2006).
- <sup>73</sup> Whitley Strieber and James Kunetka, *Warday*; 52, 115-18.
- <sup>74</sup> The British threaten to extend British rule where “the population is in a state of confusion or upheaval, and the local authorities are not able to cope.”(61) But the Japanese are present in Aztlan (118) with soldiers, Toyota military vehicles, and new, hypersonic military planes above.  
Whitley Strieber and James Kunetka, *Warday*: 61, 118.
- <sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 132-33.
- <sup>76</sup> David Brin, *The Postman*, 40.
- <sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.
- <sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 87-88.
- <sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.
- <sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 203.

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- <sup>81</sup> Ibid., 132.
- <sup>82</sup> Ibid., 229.
- <sup>83</sup> Ibid., 64.
- <sup>84</sup> Ibid., 20.
- <sup>85</sup> Ann Larabee, *Decade of Disaster*, x.
- <sup>86</sup> Ibid., 111-13.
- <sup>87</sup> John Gray, *Black Mass*, 1, 74-75.
- <sup>88</sup> David Hoogland Noon, "Cold War Revival: Neoconservatives and Historical memory in the War on Terror," 91.
- <sup>89</sup> *ibid.*: 91-92.
- <sup>90</sup> John Gray. *Black Mass*, 74-75.
- <sup>91</sup> Douglas Little, *American Orientalism*, 263.
- <sup>92</sup> Sean Wilentz, *The Age of Reagan*, 301.
- <sup>93</sup> Robert D. Kaplan, *The Coming Anarchy: Shattering the Dreams of the Post Cold War*, (New York: Vintage Books, 2000). These are a collection of Kaplan's essays published between 1994-1997 in *The Atlantic Monthly*, *The National Interest*, and *The Wall Street Journal*.
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- <sup>95</sup> Noam Chomsky, "Imperial Presidency".
- <sup>96</sup> Sean Wilentz, *The Age of Reagan*, 353, 358.
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- <sup>98</sup> Emma Bull, *Bone Dance*, 39.

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- <sup>101</sup> Sean Wilentz, *The Age of Reagan*, 326-333.
- <sup>102</sup> Octavia Butler, *Parable of the Sower*, 39.
- <sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.
- <sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.
- <sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 288-89.
- <sup>106</sup> Octavia Butler, *Parable of the Talents*, 19.
- <sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 40-41.
- <sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.
- <sup>109</sup> John Gray, *Black Mass*, 167.
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- <sup>112</sup> The travails of affirmative action increased after *Bakke*, but are integrated through Wilentz’s narrative as both affirmative action and reverse discrimination. Sean Wilentz, *The Age of Reagan*, 88, 304, 358.
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- <sup>160</sup> In episode 105, "You Can't Go Home Again," the search for Kara squanders fuel reserves; in episode 210, "Pegasus," Cain's order to execute Chief Tyrol and Karl Agathon almost turns into open conflict between the two battlestars and their Viper wings.
- <sup>161</sup> Karl "Helo" Agathon argues against the genocide of the Cylons through biological warfare in Episode 307, "A Measure of Salvation."
- <sup>162</sup> Lee Adama argues for the spirit of the laws and against the spirits of vengeance and fear during the trial of Baltar in Episode 320, "Crossroads" (Part 2).
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## Chapter 4: A Grave Society:

### Post-Cataclysm American Culture, Ethnicity and Race

“The Anglo-Saxon was merely the first immigrant, the first to found a colony. He has never really ceased to be the descendant of immigrants, nor has he ever succeeded in transforming that colony into a real nation, with a tenacious, richly woven fabric of native culture. Colonials from the other nations have come and settled down beside him. They found no definite native culture which should startle them out of their colonialism, and consequently they looked back to their mother-country, as the earlier Anglo- Saxon immigrant was looking back to his.”

Randolph S. Bourne, *Trans-national America*, 1916

“In this new era, the single most immediate and most serious challenge to America's traditional identity comes from the immense and continuing immigration from Latin America, especially from Mexico, and the fertility rates of these immigrants compared to black and white American natives.”

Samuel P. Huntington, *The Hispanic Challenge*, 2004

Recent SF self-consciously considers a facet of the belief in American exceptionalism as an aggregate national identity based on shared visions of the American Dream. Weaknesses in this synthetic construct began to appear long before the end of the Cold War with the origins of identity politics in the mid-1960s. The competition among post-cataclysmic community fragments in contemporary SF can be read as metaphors for these ethnic and cultural tensions within the US over the past four decades. One of the more powerful myths underlying American exceptionalism is the belief in a national identity created by blending cultures and ethnicities in the melting pot. During the twentieth century, American involvement in both World Wars and the Cold War helped create a more inclusive, yet superficial national identity. But this identity is fragile; it grew by promoting a consumer culture that purchased the dream on lay-away, and

ignored barely suppressed racial tensions, especially among urban populations. During the 1960s President Lyndon Johnson's Great Society pursued civil rights and racial equality, but these progressive gains were made against a turbulent cultural backdrop punctuated by protests and later, by urban riots. In the early 1970s the positive effects of the Great Society programs were beginning to be seen in: slowly improving racial justice; providing access to housing, education, and voting rights; health care; and began bringing millions of citizens, including minorities, out of poverty.<sup>1</sup> But by the mid-1970s one of Johnson's goals, to equalize access and opportunity with affirmative action, was recast by conservatives as reverse discrimination, one of the opening volleys in the culture wars that increased friction between an assimilationist national identity and a multicultural mosaic.

For many critics, the golden age of science fiction runs from the mid-1930s until paperback books began replacing the pulps and magazines in the 1960s. The stories of this golden age precede, overlap, and draw from this sense of social unification and its frequent defensive "bunker" response to external threats. Some SF critics point out that white men wrote most of the stories of this era primarily for an audience of mostly white boys and men.<sup>2</sup> Much of this American golden age SF was influenced by John W. Campbell's nationalist chauvinism and racial prejudice,<sup>3</sup> giving the democratic and capitalist futures it projected an apparently homogenous (and white) society in the face of the alien Other. In these texts, the alien is often a metaphor for a variety of colonial Others, ranging from aliens (as Native Americans) fought on the galactic frontiers, to backwater, underdeveloped colonial outposts or trading stations that stand in for Third

World countries and developing nations (especially post-colonial Latin America, Africa, and southeast Asia). By the end of the 1960s and early 1970s, different ethnicities and gender roles were consciously and conspicuously cast in *Star Trek*, but literature did not match media because the small but growing numbers of female SF writers was not matched by an increase in authors of color until well into the 1980s.<sup>4</sup>

SF may have largely ignored race during its golden age, but ethnic (and alien) representations gradually became more complex on television and in new subgenres after the second nuclear fear waned in the late 1980s. On television, the *Star Trek* franchises of *ST: The Next Generation* (1987-1994) and *ST: Deep Space Nine* (1993-1999) both offered a far more diverse range of men and women of color, and more complex performances of alienation and the Other. *Babylon 5* (1993-1998) overlapped both series with its own parables of racial, cultural, and religious toleration against a backstory of galactic war, imperialism, and postcolonial conflict. In literature, the New Space Opera subgenre began following similar formulas and conventions in the late 1980s by introducing characters of various (often mixed) ethnicities and genders, but these still tend to recreate “the world as one global United States,” even if it is now multicultural and more tolerant of different cultures and religions.<sup>5</sup> In contrast to the semi-utopian, multi-racial federations and empires of New Space Operas that gloss over racial tensions and conflict, post-cataclysm SF does not and cannot ignore race, ethnicity, culture, or religion because of the competition for safety, security, and resources.

## National Identity and the Culture Wars

If science fiction is the literature of things that have not yet happened, then the discourse of American nationalism as an imminent shared culture is itself a speculative fiction. Benedict Anderson defines a nation as: “an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.”<sup>6</sup> Key to this formulation is the manner in which this concept of nation is communicated and shared among its members so that they develop a consensual virtual identity that draws on similar values and myths. Anderson argues that the Creole states of the Americas were some of the first to develop these concepts of “nation-ness” because early mass media—newspapers—helped them develop a sense of identity as exploited colonials (us) oppressed by the mercantile metropole (them).<sup>7</sup> Gradually this identity evolved because the American Revolution, the War of 1812, and the Mexican-American War contributed to a shared awareness of sacrifice and growing national strength. But Anderson notes that this was also despite the early social division in which “‘white’ settlers were counterposed to ‘black’ slaves and half-exterminated ‘natives.’”<sup>8</sup> This Creole/American<sup>9</sup> national identity is based on a secular and multiethnic foundation, but it must also define itself in opposition to external threats. In the colonial era these were the demands and expectations of London, but in the modern era they have shifted from actual (Japan, Germany, the USSR) to the more vague, if not imagined, threats of the War on Terror. The apparatus of national identity and its defining threat is dependent on mass media and a shared popular culture, so when this *gestalt* breaks down (during a cataclysm), the competition for resources (jobs, social

welfare, property and civil rights) by local communities (ethnic enclaves and regional identities) overwhelms the now disrupted message of shared sacrifice and traditions.

In *The Twilight of Common Dreams* (1995), Todd Gitlin traces the evolution of the culture wars to some of the same roots Anderson uses to explain the development of American cultural identity. Gitlin argues that the contemporary United States is a composite nationality that owes its population to multiple waves of mass migration. Only a small fraction of the early “native” Americans derived from pre-Colombian tribes or the descendants of Mexican War conquests.<sup>10</sup> The identity of this composite nationality relies on common beliefs of civil liberties and the possibility of everyman economic success embodied in the American Dream. In the nineteenth century, the Dream became a shared mythology through the broadsheets circulated by steamship companies promoting immigration by exaggerating and distorting the potential for wealth. Progressives and socialists criticized this practice at the beginning of the twentieth century, including Upton Sinclair in his novel, *The Jungle* (1904). Throughout the nineteenth century, while the indigenous peoples of the First Nations<sup>11</sup> were forced onto reservations and nearly eradicated by white settlers moving west, some of these new American “natives”<sup>12</sup> formed groups who opposed the assimilation of (conquered) Mexicans, Irish newcomers, and, at the end of the century, immigrants from southern and eastern Europe and Asia. In the mid-to-late nineteenth century, the post-Civil War response to almost all blacks<sup>13</sup> included differing degrees of violence and the beginnings of institutionalized racism, further restricting the pot’s ingredients. These different strands of racial and ethnic defensiveness began to incorporate new elements from the



imported ideas of social Darwinism by the 1890s, which intertwined with class anxieties when the growing middle-class began to move out into the suburbs and to fear the city cores. This anxiety of an “Other” who ate different foods, spoke a different language, and had different religious beliefs overlapped the nationalist response and anti-German sentiment during World War I that prompted Randolph Bourne’s promotion of an inclusive and cosmopolitan American identity in his “Trans-nationalism” essay. But this proto-multicultural cosmopolitan concept was overwhelmed during the Roaring Twenties.

Gitlin’s argument is based on the importance of the shared and common visions of an always-imminent “America” and the individual fruition of the dream, but conflict comes from fears that the chances of such success decrease if (and when) “national integrity [might] be weakened by interlopers.”<sup>14</sup> Anti-immigrant sentiment recurs in almost every generation, accompanying competition for “equal opportunity” on the free market. These older conflicts resurfaced as both class and ethnic strife during the Depression. Much of the anger was directed toward Mexican agricultural workers, who were forcibly deported (including many who were U.S. citizens), but it was then quickly refocused against Asians, Asian Americans, and Pacific Islanders after the attack on Pearl Harbor. In the postwar era there was a brief triumphal moment at the opening of “the world of tomorrow” and its atomic culture, before it turned to fear when the Soviets gained their own atomic weapons in 1949; this fear sparked the second Red Scare as America turned on itself to ferret out those who *must have* helped the Soviets. This revolving and evolving ethnic tension, and its attendant institutionalized racism, is the backdrop to Golden Age SF that largely avoids dealing with race. To some extent this

tension was overshadowed by the Soviet evolution from A-bombs to multi-megaton warheads numbering in the thousands, threatening not just the United States, but also the planet itself, as Jonathan Schell's *The Fate of the Earth* describes in the Reagan era. Gitlin recognizes that the beginnings of the culture wars lay in the late 1960s, but did not achieve critical mass until the demise of the Soviet nuclear boogeyman in 1991. Without a besieged bunker mentality and a bipolar hegemonic geopolitical contest to distract attention, he realized that “[w]ithout the enemy, what united the states?”<sup>15</sup>

But before the disintegration of the USSR, in *The Culture Wars*, James Davison Hunter defined the tensions within American society and civic culture by delineating the polarization of Americans into two hostile groups defined by their ideological worldviews rather than by ethnicity, social class, region, or technically religion. Rather than a shared belief in the American Dream or promise, American society split into two camps—the progressive and the orthodox—whose members share similar but not necessarily identical positions on a set of issues. During the 1990s these core issues slowly hardened into near-religious ideologies and included: abortion (prolife vs. prochoice); the separation of church and state (prayer in schools; creationism vs. evolution); gun laws; homosexuality and marriage equality; censorship; and drug use (legalization vs. the “war on drugs”). Hunter defines this rising “political and social hostility” as ultimately based in different views of “moral authority”<sup>16</sup> that go beyond a specific religious creed. Pat Buchanan entered the culture wars, and as a trenchant conservative validated Hunter’s thesis when he made these issues, as well as women in the military, part of his keynote address at the 1992 Republican National Convention.

Buchanan considered himself a conservative culture warrior, and called the election part of a “religious war . . . for the soul of America” and “a cultural war, as critical to the kind of nation we will one day be as was the Cold War itself.”<sup>17</sup> Buchanan did not promote any one religious sect or creed but implies in his rhetoric that religion and “morality” for (non-Catholic) conservatives is a place-holder for what Samuel P. Huntington defines as the core of American national identity: an Anglo-Protestant culture and values.<sup>18</sup>

Building on Gitlin’s inclusive definition ideology for progressives includes not only most of the world’s religions, but also atheists, new age spiritualists, ethnic nationalists, and neo-pagans. There is strength in this diversity, but unfortunately it can also contribute to a lack of cohesion and internal cultural struggles that have been replicated in contemporary post-cataclysmic SF.

### **American Hegemony and the Clash of Civilizations**

Perhaps it was because of the intensity of the renewed nuclear anxiety after 1983 that when the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, so soon and unexpectedly after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the overwhelming response in much of the West was triumphal.<sup>19</sup>

America’s role as the sole (surviving) superpower after the staggering coalition victory in the first Gulf War validated President George H.W. Bush’s new world order for many, especially for neoconservatives. This mood was so prevalent that many misread Francis Fukuyama’s “end of history” thesis as a further projection of American hegemony.

Fukuyama later attempted to clarify his argument and wrote that the European Union is actually closer to implementing his ideal of a liberal democracy as the “final form of human government.”<sup>20</sup> Fukuyama’s vision of an egalitarian and liberal democracy

parallels much left-leaning utopian SF and a dependence on a post-industrial information economy. Fukuyama uses “logic of modern natural science” to explain:

why we residents of developed democracies are office workers rather than peasants eking out a living on the land, why we are members of labor unions or professional organizations rather than tribes or clans, why we obey the authority of a bureaucratic superior rather than a priest, why we are literate and speak a common national language.<sup>21</sup>

But he also concedes that the “incomplete implementation of the twin principles of liberty and equality,”<sup>22</sup> his ideological basis for a mature liberal democracy, means that injustice and serious social problems continue even *within* stable democracies like the United States.

To reach this end of history requires a belief in scientific progressivism and advanced technology that distributes the benefits of a liberal democracy widely enough to move past the Marxist belief in an evolutionary social path toward Communism.

Fukuyama argues for the surety of a post-capitalist democracy in terms of SF dystopian texts rather than just a Hegelian and Marxian “coherent development”<sup>23</sup> of human society; he references *The Road Warrior* (1981) and related dystopian films as examples of post-cataclysmic collapse that could disrupt such a democracy, but dismisses them by arguing that such a decline would not last. Fukuyama uses the example of post-apocalyptic SF to argue that the progressive urge or momentum can not be stopped, and the blending of social anachronisms like neo-feudalism and slavery “would not be viable for long: for without the destruction or rejection of the scientific method itself, modern natural science would eventually reproduce itself and force the recreation of many aspects of the modern, rational social world as well.”<sup>24</sup> Some recent post-cataclysmic SF

does not accept the optimism and assumptions of this continued scientific progress. The *Emberverse* of SM Stirling provides a counter example to this progressive ontology not by destroying scientific method, but by invalidating current scientific knowledge and forcing humanity to “reset” and forge an alternative to the Enlightenment that does not promote industrialization and the modern age.

While Fukuyama’s thesis requires mature democracies that privilege economic development and global marketplace competition, in *The Clash of Civilizations* (1993) Huntington describes the post-Cold War era as a multipolar ethnic and cultural conflict *irrespective* of economic development. Huntington argues that the differences between civilizations are visible in current and future “fault line wars” rooted in a composite identity drawn from shared membership in “clans, tribes, ethnic groups, religious communities, and nations.”<sup>25</sup> The divisions between these cultures ignore the economic influence of globalization, the effects of modernization, and negate the role of mass media (in creating a shared popular culture) such as that in Anderson’s imagined communities. Huntington’s definition of civilization also opposes Anderson’s more fluid articulation of nationality as a shared identity, although Huntington’s civilizations can potentially encompass a number of nation-states and nationalities. This definition of civilization reflects a similar dynamic in the fragmentation of the USSR under multi-ethnic and cultural pressure, as argued in Rogers Brubaker’s analysis of nationalizing post-Soviet states.<sup>26</sup> However, an important point in Huntington’s formulation is that ethnicity does not define these civilizations, although tribal and ethnic conflict can (and will) occur *within* one. Several of his seven or eight major civilizations are multiethnic

including: the West, Islam, Latin America, and Africa; but most importantly, it is a shared religion rather than ethnicity that defines the core of these civilizations.<sup>27</sup>

Huntington repudiates both Fukuyama's end-point vision of democracy<sup>28</sup> and the "progressive" post-racial and post-national visions of Earth's future in many American SF texts. In opposition to the logic of late-era capitalism and globalization, Huntington defines the new patterns of conflict in the "divisions among humankind" and the coming domination of global politics by the probable violent clash of world civilizations rather than individual nation-states, superpowers, or ethnicities.<sup>29</sup> While his initial argument is meant to promote an alternative view of post-Cold War global politics, within the decade Huntington began to suggest that such a clash would eventually occur *within* the United States, between the Western (and Protestant) "majority" and (Catholic) Latin American immigrants, who will comprise 23% of the population by 2050.<sup>30</sup> Huntington argues that the "demands for special group rights [as affirmative action] and for multiculturalism encourage a clash of civilizations within the United States";<sup>31</sup> in other words, he contends that the future phase of the culture wars must eventually shatter national consensus, identity and community. Huntington links the clash of civilizations to the culture wars through the fear of new non-Western immigrants who are encouraged not to assimilate into the "dominant" "Anglo-Protestant" core of American culture by being granted special allowances for bilingualism or alternative schooling. The essence of Huntington's alarmist thesis is that the United States will not survive as a liberal democracy (with its current dominant culture) if it becomes truly multicultural.<sup>32</sup>

Several critics add to this discourse and refute Fukuyama's earlier optimism by suggesting that more than democracy and economic modernization are necessary for a successful nation, and even that a shared national identity may not be possible in the post-industrial era. In 1987, Gloria Anzaldúa used the actual US/Mexico border to theorize that the borders are not absolute but create borderlands where cultures overlap rather than define each other. Her view is critical of the "Gringo" (Anglo) hegemony as she sees Americans viewing "inhabitants of the borderlands transgressors, aliens—whether they possess documents or not, whether they're Chicanos, Indians or Blacks."<sup>33</sup> Rather than focusing on immigrants, bell hooks questioned the "colonizing gaze" that "reinscribes white supremacy" in the very mass media that Anderson defines as necessary in the creation and maintenance of a shared national identity.<sup>34</sup> José David Saldívar later criticizes the passage of the "hegemonic Proposition 187" by California voters in 1994 as part of "colonialist discourses whereby U.S. Latinos, Chicanos, Mexicanos, Central Americans, and Asian Americans are cast as an illegal outside force, an alien nation 'polluting' U.S. culture."<sup>35</sup> And both Robert D. Kaplan and Vladimir Tismaneanu suggest future divisions in the United States in their analyses of the failure of recent liberal democracies to overcome ethnic divisions, tribal affiliation, and cultures defined by religion in examples drawn from Africa, Central Asia, and the former Soviet Republics.<sup>36</sup> Kaplan highlights the common elements of ethnic and class prejudice within his examples to similar divisions growing within America in the late 1990s. Tismaneanu argues that the revolutions that brought about the struggling liberal democracies among

the former Soviets were actually rejections of modernity and recognitions that creating unified national identities from multiethnic states was a fantasy.<sup>37</sup>

At the beginning of the new millennium the homogenizing and reductive assumptions of Fukuyama and Huntington continued to come under fire. Kaplan again presents Sierra Leone and West Africa as examples of failed democracies in terms of class conflict and the “political and strategic impact of surging populations, spreading disease, deforestation and soil erosion, water depletion, air pollution, and, possibly, rising seas levels.”<sup>38</sup> But these possible catastrophes only set the context for his rejection of Fukuyama’s post-historical realm as class warfare that only admits a slim minority into the “democratic utopia” while the rest remain “stuck in history, living in shantytowns where attempts to rise above poverty, cultural dysfunction, and ethnic strife will be doomed by a lack of water to drink, soil to till, and space to survive in.”<sup>39</sup> Kaplan also rejects Huntington’s hegemonic civilizations, and provides an extensive outline of the divisions within Islamic culture alone. He also points out that a number of Islam’s most violent internal conflicts are not between ethnicities, but rather between different interpretations and traditions of faith.<sup>40</sup>

In the first decade of the twenty-first century the discourse of civilizations, cultures, religion, and race has grown more strident, divisive, and heated. In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, Edward W. Said rejected the clash of civilizations thesis as reductive and simplistic and criticizes Huntington for overlooking the “internal dynamics and plurality” of modern civilizations in rushing to reformulate the Cold War political diode as the “West versus the rest.”<sup>41</sup> Strobe Talbott and Nayan Chanda’s *The Age of Terror*



contributes to both sides of this argument. Niall Ferguson supports Huntington's clash in his analysis of the United States as an informal empire based on political and economic globalization—and also suggests that the US is the only nation with resources to reshoulder the “white man's burden” recast as global economic modernization and the policing of rogue states.<sup>42</sup> Paul Kennedy relates the attacks to his earlier thesis in *The Rise and Fall of Great Powers* (1987), arguing that the military power and strategic controls of a nation (and empire) are based on continuing economic strength and growth. He asserts that the United States still has the material and military resources to defend itself and its policies on the world stage, but that American society has now become aware of its vulnerabilities, just as the British Empire had grown similarly alarmed in the late Victorian era.<sup>43</sup> In a similar collection, *Worlds in Collision* (2002), edited by Ken Booth and Time Dunne, Fukuyama defends his end of history thesis and argues that modernity in the guise of developed (liberal) democracies will continue to spread the “principles of freedom and equality around the world” *despite* militant fundamentalism.<sup>44</sup> Overall, this early discourse is defensive, defiant, and focused externally because a new threat (briefly) united not only America, but also brought others to share in this besieged American identity, especially in the West. From September 11, 2001 until around May 1, 2003, when President George W Bush declared “one victory” in front of a banner that claimed “mission accomplished,”<sup>45</sup> most of the threats to America appeared to be outside its gates and borders.

But as the War on Terror continued, another domestically focused discourse developed, one reminiscent of the anti-German rhetoric of World War I, the Japanese

internments of World War II, and the anti-Communist witch hunts of the Cold War. In 2004, Huntington published *Who We Are?: The Challenges to America's National Identity*, which focuses on the effects of immigration, especially since the 1965 Immigration Act, and warns that if citizens of every ethnicity, race, and religion do not embrace America's core Anglo-Protestant culture then unassimilated enclaves will end any future national identity. Although many of the responses in *Foreign Affairs* and elsewhere overly simplified and reduced Huntington's analysis to a racist polemic, he is consistently careful in making the distinction between ethnicity and culture. Huntington presents an argument that substantiates the earlier criticism of Anzaldúa and Saldívar by taking his definition of civilization and applying it universally to all immigrants from Mexico, Central and South America, and the Spanish-speaking Caribbean in order to talk about America becoming a bicultural, bilingual, and dual religion (Protestant and Catholic) society. While a detailed synopsis of the critics and supporters of this book is beyond the scope of my argument, the main point is that Huntington and others define the growing influence of Hispanic citizens and immigrants as a possible threat to the Anglo-Protestant culture, changing the essence of American national identity, and this anxiety is captured in the fragmented post-cataclysm societies in recent SF texts, including SM Stirling's *Emberverse* and the reimagined *Battlestar Galactica*.

### **Devastation and Diffraction in SF Criticism**

During the Cold War, the fear of a nuclear apocalypse cast a long shadow of inevitability as texts set in the far future often made a point to show their scars, highlighting their utopian aspects. The original *Star Trek* series often mentions its long-

past World War III and in particular offers a post-apocalyptic contrast to the Federation in the genocidal war between the Yang and Comms in the second season episode, “The Omega Glory” (1968). The first run of DC Comics’ *The Legion of Superheroes* (1958-1994) portrays a unified Earth within a thirtieth-century United Planets, and the wastelands outside New Chicago emphasize a similar renaissance for united humanity within the Earth Alliance of *Buck Rogers in the Twenty-Fifth Century* (1979-1981).<sup>46</sup> But texts that focus on the cataclysm itself and its near-term aftermath diverge radically, portraying the collapse of civil order, comity and community, and the difficult struggle toward recovery. Given this dystopian context, racial and sectarian violence, class warfare, and cultural conflict are the least to be expected until society recovers. But since the collapse of the Soviet Union, few if any far future projections include a nuclear war, and rather than the silver lining of the Cold War, any prospective utopias now appear as reactions to late-era capitalism and/or American hegemony. Although these postwar utopias faded as cyberpunk corporations and galaxy-spanning empires replaced nation-states, post-cataclysmic dystopias persisted in depicting deep divisions within America where ethnicity, culture, religion, and class disrupted a cohesive national identity and efforts to rebuild.

During the height of the nuclear stalemate, scenarios of devastated wastelands and poisoned, radioactive landscapes abounded, but beginning in the historical moments of Gorbachev’s *glasnost* reforms these images gradually vanished into the dwindling subgenre of survivalist fiction epitomized by Jerry Ahern, William W Johnstone, and Ryder Stacy.<sup>47</sup> After the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the USSR, the brief

Bush recession of 1991-92 fed cyberpunk's evolution from revolutionary iconoclast to mainstream of SF literature. But the economy reversed course and expanded rapidly after 1992 into the now-largest peacetime boom in American history, itself giving reality to older SF tropes because its success was fueled by the blossoming information economy and technology. This boom coincided with a political fresh start under a Democratic President and (briefly Democratic) congressional majority; SF after 1992 reflects this new optimism in some of the proliferating movements, including new Hard SF, the New Weird, alternate histories, time travel, and most especially New Space Opera and far-flung future space empires.<sup>48</sup> But the older Cold War anxieties were transformed and channeled into anti-corporate cyberpunk or the thinning thread of post-cataclysmic dystopias that continued to call attention to an older minority discourse of cultural and racial tensions.

Criticism of the actual representation of race is dependent on non-white authors, characters in film and television, and the use of ethnicity in the literature that goes beyond being just a dash of color. The actual chronology of known authors of color in SF almost always begins with the work of Samuel R Delany in the late 1960s. Delany describes the racism that existed within the SF community of the late 1960s in his interactions with John W. Campbell and also some of the responses to his reception of two Hugo awards in 1968.<sup>49</sup> The next most-analyzed body of work is that of Octavia Butler, who published from 1971 until her untimely death in 2006. Gender, race, and culture are the overarching themes in most of her fiction, and her answers in interviews to questions regarding race almost always associated with the lack of education and

economic opportunity. In the 1980s more black writers including Charles S. Saunders, Lucius Shepard, and Stephen Barnes added their works to the genre, as well as Native American writer William Sanders (“redbone hillbilly” in his terms). An important distinction regarding much of their work is that it creates alternate histories or fantastic worlds that offer non-Anglo and non-Western civilizations and timelines, including some in which Europe never colonized the western hemisphere—futures in which the concept of an Anglo-Protestant culture is “alien.” By the end of the twentieth century SF collections include works from several non-majority writers including queer (*Bending the Landscape*, 1997 and 1998), African Diaspora (*Dark Matter*, 2000; *So Long Been Dreaming*, 2004), and Latino/Chicana/o (*Cosmos Latinos*, 2003). As the handful of titles and their recent dates of publication may suggest, SF continues to be an overwhelmingly white, male, and straight field of discourse, although the possibilities it explores and its audience both continue to expand.

SF scholarship that focuses on gender appears in the late 1960s, and criticism dealing with race develops even later and more slowly, with isolated articles appearing between the 1970s and the beginning of the new millennium. Overviews of SF criticism, such as *Science Fiction Studies* July 1999 issue on the History of Science Fiction Criticism,<sup>50</sup> and Matthew Candelaria’s article in *Speculations on Speculation*, describe most of the early scholarship as focused on structural analysis or dystopian political and social criticism. Isolated articles that consider race and ethnicity include Charles R Saunders, “Why Blacks Don’t Read Science Fiction,” in *Windhaven* #5 (1977); and Christine Morris’s, “Indians and Other Aliens: A Native American View of Science Fiction,” and Mary S Weinkauf’s “The Indian in Science Fiction,” both in the Winter

1979 issue of the journal *Extrapolation*. But such articles and essays are few and only reached a limited audience. Although cultural studies began to coalesce as an approach to texts in the 1960s, it was not until the late 1980s and early 1990s that its tools and techniques were consistently applied to genre literature, films, and television. The techniques of cultural studies have helped SF scholarship interrogate systems of control and hegemony based on the constructions of race in America much more frequently since the 1990s.

Edward James' 1990 essay, "Yellow, black, metal and tentacled: the race question in American science fiction," traces a rough outline of the attention SF critics have paid to ethnicity in the genre. As part of this historiography, James considers some of the first anthologies of SF criticism published in the 1970s, in particular, *Science Fiction: History-science-vision* edited by Robert Scholes and Eric Rabkin. In his gloss of their introduction, James says they "suggest that there has for some time been a general assumption among SF writers that in the future the question of black/white relations would wither away."<sup>51</sup> Scholes and Rabkin published their anthology in 1977, the same year that *Star Wars: A New Hope* was released, while work continued on the space shuttle program; but this is also the year that *Lucifer's Hammer* was published, a work with very definite racial themes in the struggle between urban and rural populations and an unresolved black/white tension. Scholes and Rabkin align with SF critics who "celebrate the fact that SF has moved the racial boundaries: the human race is seen as one and united, and the problem is what attitude to take to the aliens beyond."<sup>52</sup> James recognizes that post-WWII, the race question in the United States was overall one of the

“place of blacks in American society,” but he was more specific in his discussion of the return of “the Yellow Peril” in 1980s cyberpunk in which the Japanese are often depicted as the “dominant world power.”<sup>53</sup> This image is not limited to cyberpunk (nor to Michael Crichton), and less strident versions of this theme are part of the post-cataclysms *The Wild Shore* and *Warday*. James observes that changing concepts of race in the U.S. make it a methodological challenge “to distinguish those stories which actually *are* about race from those which are not, and, secondarily perhaps, to separate those stories which are *consciously* about race from those which are not.”<sup>54</sup> When James asks if the “latent xenophobia” of some (including SF writers) has been “transferred from human to alien,”<sup>55</sup> it seems almost as an afterthought that avoids the color-blind presentation of a single human race in much SF Golden Age fiction. More recent scholarship has looked back on the depiction of aliens in the 1980s as racism in the guise of human xenophobia at the cusp of the culture wars in America.

Even in the early twenty-first century, to actively incorporate race and ethnicity in SF texts is to walk a tightrope between “readers who feel that the work does not go far enough to address the social ills of the culture they write in and...readers who think it goes too far.”<sup>56</sup> Some of those readers are also critics who are often disappointed by the particular depictions or absence of ethnic minorities, and some who are more sharply critical of the lack of a “positive presence,” to borrow a phrase from Elisabeth Anne Leonard. One of the difficulties with this tightrope is that white writers must be wary of appropriating culture and traditions not their own, but leaving such subjects only for non-white writers stands the risk of creating and reinforcing the monocultural perspectives

Todd Gitlin warns are an overreaction to the culture wars. Even when a thoughtful approach is used, both writers and critics both run the risk of anachronism—applying modern cultural contexts and filters to criticize the shortcomings or “cowardice” of earlier writers for not dealing with race with contemporary sensitivity and awareness.

### **Sources**

The postwar issue of race in the United States is much more than just the black question because the experience of slavery combines with the forced relocation and near-genocide of indigenous peoples, legal and illegal immigration, political asylum, and institutionalized racism. However, most of the limited scholarship dealing with race in SF focuses on the depiction of blackness and black writers, the characters and aliens of the *Star Trek* franchise, or the use of the alien as a metaphor for race in the “final frontier” or for gender within the domestic sphere. In these post-cataclysmic narratives the contrast between social and cultural relations before the event and after either recapitulate the culture wars at their worst, or suggest a potential resiliency in a multicultural America.

### **Precursors**

The attention to race in SF parallels in a small way the progress made in advancing racial and ethnic issues and the civil rights movement in America society. The precursor texts are set against a context that includes Truman’s executive orders to integrate the Army (1949), and Eisenhower’s resistance to implementing school integration (1956), through the clashes of the Kennedy years and the civil rights legislation that culminated in Johnson’s Great Society (1965). Regardless of the oft-repeated criticism that SF before the 1960s was primarily written by white male authors



for a similar audience, some of these early texts considered race, ethnicity, and culture, including Stewart's *Earth Abides* and Frank's *Alas, Babylon*. Race also appears briefly in examples like Philip Wylie's *Tomorrow!*, where the author uses it to contrast the success of civil defense planning in a middle-class (white) suburb against its failure in a poor, largely black, ethnic inner-city neighborhood.<sup>57</sup> Heinlein's *Farnham's Freehold* is very definitely a reaction to the early civil rights movements in its inversion of racial hierarchies; this suggests support for the civil rights movement, although it has been criticized by a number of scholars including James, Sharp and Leonard.<sup>58</sup>

### **Earth Abides**

*Earth Abides* was published in 1949, after President Truman issued Executive Orders guaranteeing fair employment practices in the civil service and banning segregation in the armed forces, but before the armed forces began to implement it in 1950. The novel was published on the cusp of these changes, and this tension informs its overt representations of race and its implied support for integration, but not assimilation. Ish, the protagonist, is white, middle-class, and an intellectual elitist with no apparent race consciousness. In a post-plague cross-country road trip Ish comes across only a few survivors. In Arkansas, he finds three black survivors—a man, a middle-aged (and pregnant) woman, and a young boy—who act as a family and apparently carry on with their lives as sharecroppers near Little Rock, AR. Although he can barely understand their “thick dialect,” he still briefly considers staying with them as “a king, in a little way,” because he assumes they will accept him as the new boss. But Ish is staggered in his realization that these three survivors have come together and are living “creatively”

by adapting to the changed world, whereas he has become nothing more than a ghoul who scavenges the ruins.<sup>59</sup> Belatedly, he realizes that they do not need him and perhaps his assumptions of social superiority would not necessarily have borne out as he expected as the social support for any vestiges of white supremacy are also dead. After he continues on his journey and reaches New York City, Ish spends an evening drinking warm martinis and playing cards with Milt Abrams, a former jeweler, and his new “wife” Ann. Milt and Ann spend their days reading novels, eating what they scavenge from stores, and generally maintaining the semblance of a middle-class (and implied Jewish) existence. But they are unconcerned with both the city around them and the future as a whole. Ish observes that “Fifth Avenue makes a beautiful corpse,” and as he drives away realizes that while Ann will have ice for her martinis, they will not likely survive the winter.<sup>60</sup> Milt and Ann only know the middle-class, urban lifestyle and cannot adapt to the loss of power or modern technology, but the black family in Arkansas has already adapted to the pre-industrial environment and because they no longer works as sharecroppers, have come out ahead. Sharp might consider this a racist assumption of the primitive nature of this black family, but it is instead an affirmation of their knowledge and experience and ability to adapt to change in a way the urban dwellers fail to do throughout the novel.<sup>61</sup>

Twenty-two years later, Ish’s sons, Dick and Bob, make their own transcontinental trek and come across only a few communities like their Tribe in the Bay area. The first community they find is a hyper-religious group in Los Angeles who wear white robes and call themselves “The People of God.” The second group is one outside

Albuquerque that raises Indian corn and beans on a former pueblo, but only a few of the elders speak English. According to the boys, the overall “complexion” of its members “was not very dark,” but Ish takes the description to suggest their “dominant spirit must be Indian.”<sup>62</sup> Both the Arkansas family and Albuquerque pueblo are agrarian, and more successful at it than the Tribe has been under Ish’s leadership, implying a close connection between non-white populations and the land and thus a greater chance of survival in the post-cataclysmic world where the white population, unaccustomed to manual or agrarian labor, struggles to survive. But while farming fails, Ish does teach the children to make their own bows and arrows, and within four generations the Tribe successfully feeds, clothes, and defends itself using these tools. This romanticized view of a more primitive or anti-modern lifestyle is an example of Sharp’s description of the post-nuclear war frontier in *Savage Perils* that returns to the conquest of the “virgin land” and “savage non-white natives” by technologically superior whites. Sharp’s criticism of earlier pulp SF establishes this racist perspective in depictions of First Nations peoples, but Stewart’s story is less an appropriation than an acknowledgment of the utility of pre-industrial lifestyles and tools for the people of the Tribe and the Albuquerque pueblo.

The Tribe of *Earth Abides* is both post-racial and post-American. Because it uses ethnic stereotypes and has few non-white characters, it might be considered as avoiding race, but given the novel’s historic context, the character Emily (Em) suggests more progressive post-cataclysmic possibilities for non-whites. Em is a survivor who Ish meets, weds, and eventually with whom he has several children. Stewart initially describes her as a tall brunette, with “wide-set black eyes in a dark face,”<sup>63</sup> but it is not

until she becomes pregnant that he makes it clear that Emma is of mixed-ethnicity. This is a post-race America; Ish declares that race is a dead issue and the “senators and the judges and the governors are all dead and rotten, and the Jew-baiters and the Negro-baiters along with them.”<sup>64</sup> Ish could not have formed the Tribe or helped it to flourish for more than two generations without Em’s partnership and help, and more to the point, through intermarriage all ethnicities are rapidly syncretizing into a post-cataclysmic Creole. Although Stewart describes the beginning of a post-racial world, it is also post-American because there are no longer “native Americans” and there are no Native Americans to remove, only whites “playing Indian”<sup>65</sup> who replace them.

### **Alas, Babylon**

Pat Frank’s *Alas, Babylon* was published ten years later in 1959, and is more direct in its criticism of racism and segregation, but it is also limited in its depiction of both blacks and Hispanics. As Sharp suggests in *Savage Perils* (2007), the massive destruction of society creates a post-nuclear frontier that reinvigorates and rejuvenates the protagonist, Randy Bragg. Before “the Day,” Randy is directionless; he spends his days drinking, bird watching, and ruminating about his election defeat, which he blames on his support for desegregation. Frank uses Randy Bragg’s Korean War experience to highlight the success of integration in the Army, and to more pointedly criticize states that resisted integration, suggesting that the home schooling of the Bragg and Henry children is superior to those of segregated public systems of states like Virginia, which closed their schools as part of the “Southern Manifesto” opposing integration in the Massive Resistance campaign of 1958.<sup>66</sup> Sharp notes that Frank develops the slowly recovering

Fort Repose as a post-racial community where everyone must cooperate to survive, but he also argues that this attack on segregation is limited by the portrayal of the Henrys.

The Henrys present a complex example of the depiction of race and ethnicity in post-cataclysmic SF. Martha Barrter argues that prejudice is counterproductive as “the most important contributions come from blacks” that the “more urban and civilized whites lack.”<sup>67</sup> Sharp is more critical, arguing that the contributions of knowledge of “farming, fishing, and moonshine” are lessons that the Henrys can only teach as the contributions of “noble savages” once “whites were reduced to a primitive existence.” In viewing the post-nuclear frontier as “frontier Darwinism,” Sharp is limited to this interpretation that “Frank equated whites with advanced tool-making and leadership while he associated blacks with primitive implements and servitude.”<sup>68</sup> However, the contributions of the Henrys are critical not only to the survival of the Braggs (food and salt), but also to the town itself. It is Malachi’s mechanical knowledge that allows the Braggs to tap the artesian wells for house water and to extend their crops; it is also Malachi acting as the driver that allows the trap against the bandits to succeed, although it costs him his life. In each instance these are the actions not of “noble savages” but of equals sharing in the risks and benefits of forming a community. What Sharp sees as a racial divide actually depicts a post-racial society (at least in this instance) where the best-equipped and most useful members may or may not be white, and where the act of survival trumps any sense of racial privilege.

*Alas, Babylon* goes beyond just considering questions of race in the US as white and black by also briefly depicting Hispanics in its post-cataclysmic world. There are

only three described in the text: John Garcia, a fisherman, and the siblings, Pete and Rita Hernandez. Pete works as a cashier at the local grocery store, but in the months after the war begins he exposes himself to an eventually lethal dose of radiation by looting the radioactive ruins of Miami. Although Randy has a young, progressive, upper-middle class and white girlfriend when the bombs fall, he had been involved with Rita Hernandez, a woman who “collected men.” Frank puts Pete and Rita in the “better houses” of the “Pistolville” neighborhood, a combination of ethnic and poor homes. Rita is herself mildly poisoned by some of the scavenged radioactive jewelry she has exchanged for goods after she sets up Fort Repose’s black market. Unlike the contributions of the Henrys, Frank depicts those of mixed “Mediterranean and Caribbean blood” as social predators, ill equipped for survival in a post-urban or anti-modern society.<sup>69</sup> After the war, money and credit are both useless, but somehow the class divisions between the “bad part of town” and everyone else remain, even when the message is that everyone must cooperate to survive. While Frank may be more egalitarian in his portrayal of blacks, his depiction of Hispanics plays into racial fears of immigration and integration that began with the first waves of Cuban refugees into Florida after Castro seized power in 1959.

### **The New Vulnerability**

During the 1960s the success of Johnson’s civil rights and Great Society legislation seemed to usher in a new era of greater common potential, but it very quickly faded as race riots, war protests, and clashes between citizens culminated in young Americans firing on other young Americans on college campuses. Where television had

helped the cause of civil rights by bringing images of the violence perpetrated by white supremacists into the average family living room, only ten years later the coverage of the violence surrounding the 1968 Democratic Convention in Chicago; riots in a number of cities including Detroit, Los Angeles, and Washington, D.C.; and student deaths at the hands of police in Mississippi and National Guard troops in Ohio soured much of the remaining progressive wave. The remaining coalition that had supported civil rights fragmented as each group turned to its own particular agenda and movement, from feminists breaking with the Students for a Democratic Society SDS, to the specific advances of *La Raza* and the Chicano movement, the American Indian Movement (AIM), and after the Stonewall Riot of 1969, the gay rights movement. Gitlin argues that this shift in focus becomes an obsession with group differences by the late 1970s as affirmative action came under attack and each identity-based group fought to advance its own agenda and issues rather than working toward the older powerful and common principle of equality. Although the Right and Republicans suffered from the Watergate scandal, Nixon's resignation, and the economic crisis that continued through Ford's term, the Democrats also diminished by losing their Southern base after 1965, and by moving away from the 1930s cohort of socialist progressives at the same time they disappointed the rest of the 1960s groups.

### **Lucifer's Hammer**

Many SF critics tend to dismiss *Lucifer's Hammer* as a story of global disaster in the vein of survivalist fiction; however, race and religion are both important to the conflict within the novel. Niven and Pournelle set the story in Southern California, and

move the focus from the modern, urban setting of Los Angeles to its climax in an embattled farming valley in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada Mountains.<sup>70</sup> Although *LH* received a nomination for the Hugo Award in 1978, a great deal of fan-based response, especially in recent years, has included accusations of racism. Californian politics contemporary to the novel's release in 1977 involved the recession, welfare, and a growing backlash against affirmative action. Reagan's platform for his 1976 bid for the Republican presidential nomination revolved around an anti-welfare message more aligned with economic insecurity and overtones of class rather than race warfare. Niven and Pournelle were early Reagan supporters because of his Cold Warrior rhetoric, but the racial implications of his anti-welfare policies would not become clear until the early 1980s. Still, the novel was released as the charges of reverse discrimination moved through the courts toward the ultimate Supreme Court *Bakke* decision in 1978.<sup>71</sup> Still, given the focus on college admissions and specifically, medical school, both race and class were both involved in the Court's decision and it goes beyond just being one of the first cases to limit affirmative action. It is also only a little later in 1979 that Niven and Pournelle began their still-ongoing collaboration with Steven Barnes, one of the black authors who began publishing in the 1980s.<sup>72</sup> Adam Roberts, in a gloss of Samuel R. Delany, suggests that "an SF novel needs to aim not at political correctness, or at an unspoken decency regarding race; instead it should make us think about these issues, confront us with them."<sup>73</sup> *LH* forces such a confrontation, but one more of cultural wars, and class conflict than a race war.



The climactic conflict between the New Brotherhood Army (NBA) and the Stronghold has ethnic and racial components, but the potent memories of the Watts Riots (1965) are only part of the novel's social context. Much of the criticism of *LH* concerns the portrayal of the leaders of the NBA, and the perception that it is a black, cannibal horde that most perpetuates old, harmful stereotypes. Between the flooding and unremitting rain, almost everyone who survives the first few weeks post-cataclysm is on the verge of starvation. A mutiny within an Army company in the Sierra Nevada Mountains kills its commander, bringing it under the control of the company non-com, Sergeant Hooker; they have weapons and ammunition, but no food and are forced to turn cannibal. On the day of Hammerfall, Alim Nassor, a former Black Panther and political operator in Watts, was robbing homes with teams of other black men from Los Angeles. Near starvation in the first weeks after the disaster, he and his people chance onto the band of Army deserters and join them after he discovers their leader is "the Hook," whom he had known in high school. This combined group is about eighty people strong, of which only thirty are black. Charges of creating a pack of ravaging black men bent on the destruction of white society are unfounded, since the group is hardly homogenous and the non-black members perpetuate as many atrocities as the blacks. Still later, when they come under the influence of the Reverend Henry Armitage and are dubbed the "Angels of the Lord," blacks become an even smaller minority in the rapidly growing NBA. Cars and motorcycles are necessary to escape the floods; in Los Angeles, the roadblocks of the Comet Wardens trapped many, leaving them to die; moreover, those of the poor communities were restricted to buses that never escaped the valley. Most of those who make it into the hills are desperate, suburban, middle class, and (invisibly) white; they

become the main body of the NBA. The composition of the group emphasizes the desperate refugees and implies an ethnic balance that may privilege whites over any other ethnicity, given the lack of attention to Hispanic or Asian characters and the limited number of blacks drawn from the Army unit and the burglar teams. This also suggests that social decline happens across the board, not just in any single ethnic group.

While the composition of the NBA is more nuanced and their conflict with the Stronghold more one of urban vs. rural entities rather than racially based violence, the overall treatment of race, including blacks, Hispanics, and Native Americans is superficial and stereotypical. Although this is Los Angeles, a city of diverse ethnicities whose suburbs and farming communities hold far more than whites, only two Hispanic names are mentioned: a bartender, Rodriguez, at a swank party, and the company commander, Captain Hora, who at least has a couple of lines before he is shot. Before Hammerfall the only (possibly) Asian character mentioned is John Kim, Mayor Allen's press secretary, but there are no apparent Asians, Asian-Americans, or Pacific Islanders among the survivors. Still, the omniscient narrator describes the tsunamis that overwhelm Japan and Hawaii, and the nuclear launches against China by both the USSR and US, before the ravaged and refugee Soviet Army invades the PRC as a superficial attention to the extended effects of Hammerfall on those outside the United States.

Speaking of noble savages, fifty Tule River Indians help the Stronghold fight off the NBA invasion. Their leader even gets his name, Stephen Tallman, as the leader of those "tough bastards."<sup>74</sup> Admittedly, this plays into Sharp's "nuclear frontier" concept because the actual contemporary Tule River Indian Reservation website notes that the reservation "is accessible only by one winding paved road that follows the meandering

South Fork of the Tule River. It is isolated in a rugged setting that allows for privacy and for development independent from urban or recreational sprawl.”<sup>75</sup> Niven and Pournelle’s limited but positive depiction of the Tule River Indians may be a partial response to the growing sympathy for Native Americans in the wake of the Alcatraz occupation of 1969-71, and the 1973 Siege at Wounded Knee, when Native American issues gained more positive media attention.

Rather than creating a unified, post-racial community in the Stronghold after the defeat of the NBA, the result is the end of any organized ethnic communities (and unions) and their collective power and representation. The authors introduce a number of black characters throughout the story: Mayor Bentley Allen, a mixed-race professor on sabbatical to serve as mayor; Major Rick Delanty, the first black astronaut, part of the Hammerlab; Alim Nassor and his lieutenant, Jackie; and Sgt. Hooker, the military commander of the NBA. Delanty sympathizes with those who were forced to join the NBA as “blacks in this shattered world, [with] no status, no place to go, [and] wanted nowhere. Of course they’d join the cannibals.”<sup>76</sup> But even before Hammerfall there is a sense of decline. Nassor regards Bentley as a “Tom” who sells out and helps end the last vestiges of “black power,” providing his justification for robbing (and murdering) other minorities in Watts. Mayor Allen and a handful of police, including some who are black, eventually find themselves as refugees within the besieged San Joachim Nuclear Project, desperately helping to fight off the NBA. Sgt. Hooker begins the story as a career military man loyal to his captain, but after his soldiers revert to barbarism and cannibalism, he can only avoid guilt and self-hatred by throwing himself into battle and

conquest. There are a handful of others who are named: The Clark family (the only black family) in the Stronghold; Jackie, the fanatic convert to the NBA; and Gina, the valley's sole black postal clerk, whose death—of a broken leg and gangrene—receives a single line in passing. At the end of the novel it is Delanty who decries those in the Stronghold who accept this new Dark Age by reminding them that they once “controlled the lighting.”<sup>77</sup> But this is also the same astronaut who is ill and helpless during much of the space mission, and is distrusted because he is black within the Stronghold. Even after the destruction of the NBA, Delanty worries that he has become nothing more than an exotic trophy for the single (white) women of the Stronghold to fight over—a nod toward the myths of black sexuality, miscegenation, and the “Mandingo” stereotype of 1970s porn and blaxploitation films.

Religion as culture, or at least part of the culture wars, is also part of the *LH* narrative. Where *Earth Abides* and *Alas, Babylon* separate their protagonists from religion or religious communities, *LH* makes a point of presenting religion in several limited and stereotypical guises. As the comets fall across the Earth, the Comet Wardens, clothed in their white robes, are hunted down and lynched by the very people they trapped in Los Angeles. The Wardens wanted media attention to make a statement about the debased, materialistic modern culture but had not *really* expected the comet to hit Earth. Reverend Armitage, the well-financed and experienced televangelist (possibly modeled on Billy Graham), goes mad when he witnesses the beginning of the destruction, and later he tells the cannibals they will be forgiven *if* they become the Angels of the Lord and help smash all surviving technology. In the Stronghold, the town's minister, Varley, preaches charity but is largely ignored because his congregation and the other

survivors in the valley realize they have no choice but to turn the refugees away or to starve themselves. The NBA perverts the ritual of baptism intrinsic to evangelical Christianity and Catholicism in its rite of conversion through communal cannibalism. Jewish religion and ethnicity is absent, beyond a brief narrated introduction for the final battle of Armageddon, fought by knives, in the Middle East. Randall explains the fast growth of the NBA and its conversion success by referring to Islam and Mohammed with his five followers; but Hamner later warns that the cannibals expand as Islam did, only it is “Join or get eaten, they assimilate everybody, one way or the other.”<sup>78</sup> The criticism of Islam is hidden beneath an apparent respect for its history, but this also carries tinges of the anxious response to the Nation of Islam with its militant racial message. Effectively, the authors equate all organized religions with cults to some extent and depict them as inhibiting a rational response to the emergency and social disruption, or as attempts to ignore problems and isolate themselves from society at large.

### **Doom Deferred**

The culture wars gained momentum during the 1980s, and as the Left fragmented and disconnected, the Democratic party lost its rudder by trying to appeal to the competing multicultural groups of hyphenated Americans. In contrast, Reagan was able to revitalize and empower the conservative base, especially for whites (and males) with equal parts “evil empire”<sup>79</sup> rhetoric and feel-good appeals, but also by perpetuating new stereotypes that played on class and race, like the “welfare queen.” Conservatives used such myths to justify slashing social spending, increasing class and ethnic tensions between city and suburb, even as military spending created an enormous federal deficit.

Post-cataclysmic texts of this period focus on the renewed nuclear fear in their depictions of Russian sneak attacks (*The Wild Shore*), limited nuclear exchanges (*Warday*), and the unintended consequences of nuclear winter after a global war (*The Postman*). In many ways the competition between, and suspicion of, other communities in these texts is a reflection of the cultural anxiety of growing class warfare and ethnic division, especially among the poor, working, and lower middle classes, even if the “face” used to stigmatize progressives, liberals, and Democrats was often inner city and black. Although Reagan helped create the myth of the welfare queens in 1976, it gained traction through the 1980s as Republicans increasingly stigmatized the costs of social services. Using race to further divide the fragmented Democratic Party, the Republicans raised the specter of Willie Horton, a black convict released under the Massachusetts Furlough Program, who “walked off” and as a fugitive committed armed robbery and rape. Horton and the Furlough Program were used to inject race into the campaign and to help discredit Michael Dukakis’s presidential campaign by implying a support for “compensation” for past wrongs rather than safety and security.<sup>80</sup>

The ethnic divisions were not limited to domestic minorities because growing foreign competition turned sectors of the American public against their new bosses (Japanese corporations) and against Europeans (Britain and Germany’s green movements) who protested the placement of strategic missiles on their soil. In the 1970s foreign competition in the automobile industry, especially by Japan, whose more “attractive and affordable vehicles that were far more fuel-efficient than their American competitors . . . [helped] economic doomsayers to predict the imminent decline and fall

of the American century and the irresistible future dominance of the Japanese.”<sup>81</sup> The popular reaction to growing Japanese economic power in response to their inroads into American markets, and purchases of controlling stakes in formerly American-owned businesses and real estate, including the much talked about Rockefeller Center deal in New York City, added nationalist and ethnic overtones to existing friction over the trade deficit. Part of this tension became a resurgence of the “yellow peril” motif that appears in both *The Wild Shore* and *Warday*, but which was also a recurring trope within a range of cyberpunk novels and mainstream fiction like Michael Crichton’s *Rising Sun* (1992).

### **The Wild Shore**

There are no more culture wars after the day when 2,000 neutron bombs in 2,000 Chevy vans exploded in 2,000 American cities. Written in 1984, Kim Stanley Robinson’s novel presents a fragmented America reduced to small towns limited to the technology they are able to scavenge from the ruins. The Cold War ended, and Russia “requested” that the reconvened United Nations in Geneva quarantine the United States for the next century to prevent any conflicts over its remains. Those who police the quarantine, at least in the west, include the Canadians, the Japanese, and the Mexicans, but Japanese tourists and thrill-seekers pay well to break quarantine and venture into the ruins of America as post-apocalyptic *voyeurs*. Although it is not part of the official quarantine, a policy exists to prevent the US from rebuilding and reuniting (a possible reflection of the post-WWII attitude toward Germany). Each county is monitored by Japanese satellite surveillance, and if evidence of new roads and railways, rebuilt bridges, or electronic communications is found, then the Japanese use a cruise missile to destroy it. Russia

suggests the quarantine, but other nations have come to fear a return of American power and another nuclear stalemate. Set in 2047, this is one vision of the possible future after a counter-strike strategy wipes out all American cities, like a comprehensive Soviet first strike, one of the actions feared as a potential response to Reagan's SDI proposal; in an attempt to secure the US, SDI would destroy it instead by prompting the war it was "designed" to defend against.

American identity is also wiped out as its very technology and commercial success is turned against it through the Chevy bombs. Technology is a memory, and Old Tom's stories of space flight and walking on the moon are regarded as tall tales. Some elders survive, but they were young when America died and their knowledge base and memories prove suspect; it is only as the San Diegoans begin to print books and distribute them that there is a glimmering of hope that a sense of America's former culture and identity can be recovered. Unfortunately, the small "publishing house" with its mimeograph technology is limited to what books have been salvaged and the fragmented memories of those elders who write them down. Most of the memory of American greatness died with its cities, and this small, independent press might one day help unify the outposts and primitive communities, but it can only present a myth that will read as fantasy rather than a national history. San Onofre offers a view of a post-racial America because names no longer link to a forgotten past, just to those buried in the local graveyard, many of whom died early and young. Names within the fishing village range across a variety of European and Hispanic appellations, but there are no remaining links to this forgotten heritage and history, especially now that those "cousins" imprison America.



When the San Diegoans visit San Onofre, they disrupt the fishing village with ideas of an American resistance (to the Japanese) and offer visions of rebuilding the nation. Beyond the anger and animosity that directed toward the Japanese, the culture of *The Wild Shore* divides itself along class lines rather than ethnicity. The new San Diego, with its greater population and its recovered treasures from the ruins, suggests the upper class with its luxuries of banquets and a printing house. San Onofre implies that the standard community of this post-cataclysmic America is a hard working near-subsistence community in which education and literacy are treasured, but believed to be luxuries by families with too little. Scavengers form the last segment and live by looting the ruins, graves; everyone else looks down upon them because they are believed to steal from anyone who isn't a scavenger. The truth is far worse as scavengers are revealed to act as spies and guides for those who break the quarantine. Their association with the Japanese as guides for gold, and betrayal of the resistance ambush of the Japanese also reinscribes their existence as outsiders, as close to a non-ethnic "Other" as the novel offers. And, although only mentioned once, the Cuyamuca Indians not only survive, but jealously and very effectively maintain their territorial integrity against villagers and scavengers. The Cuyamuca create a border that defines the people of San Onofre, with their various ethnic and national heritages, as a post-American mosaic who are not accepted as "new" Native Americans even though they share a similar near-genocide.

### **Warday**

In *Warday* the authors project themselves into the narrative as journalists who explore and chronicle the post-war United States of 1993, five years after the thirty-six

minute war of 1988. Strieber and Kunetka tap into the spiking nuclear fears of 1984 to craft the worst-case scenario of how much damage a few nuclear weapons can cause—the scenario espoused by critics of SDI. The results of “only” a small number of warheads still poison the heartland, annihilate the economy, and leave the nation to turn on itself; states wall themselves off from their fellow citizens and refugees, even as others rebel and secede or become new republics. The population five years later has shrunk to 75% of what it had been, and stands at 175 million after the famines of 1988-89 and a series of epidemics. The death rate is four times that of live births in Texas and the northeast, with some people only showing evidence of genetic damage years later.

In terms of ethnicity and culture, the American Dream is not so much incinerated, but erased by the EMPs. Any sense of shared national or consensual identity is gone—most struggle to live as a third world country while the “best off” try to leave a sinking ship. Since the war, rebels have broken off as the new Chicano state of Aztlan, and the talk in Dallas is of nationalizing US Army units to take back those pieces of an immanent new Republic of Texas. The US Army patrols the borders of California, Oregon and Washington, and their National Guards and state police check papers and police their fenced and wired borders against other Americans—refugees. Witchcraft—Wicca—has risen as a strong alternative culture throughout the poisoned Midwest and portions of the northeast, and blacks have all but disappeared. Rita Mack, the “rememberer” and performer in Chicago clubs, explains the near-annihilation of blacks in the Midwest (and by implication elsewhere) because they were disproportionately poor, urban dwellers and more vulnerable to the disease, famine, and violence in the first years after the war.

Although one of the authors “remembers” that in 1988 there was a growing racial harmony in parts of the US, the effects of famine, disease, and the loss of federal support have increased divisions and disrupted communities throughout the country. In the past a shared sense of vulnerability helped unify national identity, but a lack of modern media to create a unifying narrative leaves the national culture fragmented, and those least damaged pull away from the desperate and focus on their own recovery. One of the subthemes of the novel is the erasure of knowledge, memory, and history. After the EMP weapons destroy almost all electronics, the ability to communicate long distance remains disrupted even five years later, and the few who travel cross-country do so by old diesel Amtrak trains. Tradition, history, and memory are the cement of Anderson’s imagined community, but as “Strieber” and “Kunetka” travel around the country, they come to believe that history no longer matters,<sup>82</sup> and memories are too painful; bombs have erased the signifiers of the American past, like the city of San Antonio and its iconic Alamo. In some instances, as with the British and Israeli oil import agents, or the neo-colonial exploitation of the Japanese and British who desire America to revert to being solely an agricultural producer, external pressure is used to prevent reunification.<sup>83</sup>

But history and shared myths are critical to subcultures (Wicca) and subnationalities, and Paul Brians links the creation of the Chicano or Hispanic republic of Aztlan in the (formerly) American southwest to memories of the radical 1960s. Aztlan in *Warday* is also an incarnation of Anzaldúa’s “borderlands,” as a homeland for those who are both, yet neither nation. It is also part of the ideology of the Hispanic movement *La Raza* (the race) and because it is local and regional, it can be unified by shared beliefs,

language and culture. This sub-nationalist identity replaces the synthetic national culture after the EMPs end telecommunications and the projection of the “national” (or colonizing) narrative. Espinoza, the foreign minister of Aztlan in the novel, claims the nation is multiethnic, and that the “sovereign nation” of the Mescalero Apaches is merely “within” the republic, as are “Hopi, Apache, Pueblo, and Navajo tribes.”<sup>84</sup> But this is a multiethnic nation that does not forget the past; Anglos were driven from El Paso and Aztlan in large measure, and in Roswell the Mescalero Apaches kill between 500-1000 when they drive the “Americans” out. But Strieber and Kunetka present this as a complex issue and to some extent as the failure of forming a multicultural nation, similar to the future Huntington more fully elaborates on in *Who Are We?*. In fact, Aztlan’s foreign minister, Hector Espinoza, admits that the state is dependent on, and exploited by the Japanese for its (formerly Texan) oil, as is Mexico to a lesser extent. The petroleum-colonization of the Middle East has been reversed, and fragments of both the US and Mexico become “clients” of economic imperialism by Japan and Britain.

Providing context for the novel, since the 1970s, the Californian economy has ranked anywhere from eighth place all the way up to fifth place in terms of economies of the world. In the novel, the plans of California to secede and nationalize by becoming the Republic of California is an issue of class divisions and income disparity, one made concrete in the walls, fences, and standing order to shoot any illegal aliens (which includes non-Californian Americans). Strieber and Kunetka draw on *The Grapes of Wrath* when they describe the “hobo camps” outside the state’s points of entry and argue that “the current California immigration laws are an affront to the very memory of the

Bill of Rights,”<sup>85</sup> an issue that will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Three. Although this taps into an ongoing ethnic anxiety, it is more an expression of (white) suburban fears of the barrio and ethnic communities within Los Angeles, and their “rebellion” against “inflationary redistribution of wealth” that Reagan used against welfare, and social programs for the inner cities throughout the 1980s.<sup>86</sup> As part of the growing social divisions, “militant Asian returnists” are denied reentry to their “homes,” and are trapped in the barrio, fighting for lodgings and jobs with Chicanos and “hundreds of thousands of illegal immigrants from other states,”<sup>87</sup> but blacks are notably absent.

*Warday* does not call blacks “the Other” but instead uses the term “the absent.” There is an impression given that the “black question” ended with the one-day war, but this is only because the authors fail to meet any blacks on the road before they arrive in Chicago. There they meet a black entertainer, Rita Mack, who sings the blues and tells stories of a people for those who are left, “black and white,” as she fights to preserve the memory of black culture.<sup>88</sup> Mack explains that the blacks were poor, so starved first and worse than others, making them more vulnerable to the Cincinnati Flu and other diseases; entire communities were wiped out and blacks became a memory in many parts of the country. The authors push this absence perhaps too much because even when they pass through the American southeast, they fail to mention, or fail to notice, minorities, focusing instead on the more isolationist nature of southern political power and the paramilitary use of police to “bar the gates” and reject refugees who they fear will overtax local resources. Instead, they move uncomfortably quickly from ethnicity and race to ideology and subculture in their consideration of the neo-pagans and Wiccans.

During the 1980s Nixon's "silent majority" became Jerry Falwell's "moral majority," but *Warday* offers a bright spot in that this America is more tolerant of alternative faiths and practices because Wiccans—modern witches—become more widely accepted. This tolerance is centered primarily in the Midwest and northeast because large numbers of people have suffered radiation exposure and will eventually develop cancers, or produce children with birth defects, turn to the Witches who offer alternative healthcare for those denied treatment by the government. In the aftermath of fallout and lifetime radiation exposure, "triage" is used to better allocate limited medical resources; anyone who has been exposed to a "maximum radiation dose" or greater receives no medical care beyond immediate first aid or "repair" measures. Former hippies and New Agers, as well as more academically inclined modern witches, began offering their services as "midwives, herbalists, and healers"<sup>89</sup> to fill this gap. The Catholic and Episcopalian Church reunite and officially condone euthanasia for those suffering from terminal radiation sickness, cancers, and some forms of genetic defects. But it is the witches who handle the massive increase in abortions, give abortion counseling, and who are called in to euthanize newborns crippled and deformed as a result of parental radiation exposure. The witches are not only "angels of death," but also of life working with the local "Diocese of Cleveland and the Council of Churches to foster children orphaned by parents dying of radiation-related issues."<sup>90</sup> Burford, the witch interviewed by the authors, is a Jungian analyst and has an MS in clinical psychology, demonstrating that these Wiccans are not a simple medieval cosmetic evocation, but instead represent a movement beyond the "moral expectations" and limitations of industrialized modern

America by demystifying and moving beyond Huntington's Protestant/Catholic diode of monotheistic and patriarchal faiths.

### **The Postman**

The post-nuclear war world of *The Postman* is similar to *The Wild Shore* in that it offers another primarily post-racial or post-ethnic America. Again, the implication is that the construction of divisive racial identities based on ethnic or cultural differences is only possible with a critical population mass (i.e., a city or urban environment), or if competition develops along ethnic lines as communities fragment. In Brin's story most towns remain small and have a subsistence lifestyle, so much so that for a new man to enter a community many require a duel being fought to the death. The overall impression is that because of the struggle to survive the three-year winter, famines and plagues, concerns beyond a certain personal radius were forgotten. Once in the Cascades, Gordon finds larger and better organized communities, and in the case of Rosemont, or Corvallis, there is more solidarity and cooperation, as well as memory of what America had been.

Although race and mental disability (implied as the result of radiation damage) are one of the elements of the later 1997 film, they are mentioned only briefly in the 1985 novel. The leader of the invading Holnist Army, General Macklin, reprimands one of his men for racist remarks, and then reminds his audience that their creed is about victory through superior strength—a macho meritocracy.<sup>91</sup> David Seed argues that Brin's survivalists link the “paranoid Right to macho militarism”<sup>92</sup> as a criticism of Reagan's hard line anti-Soviet rhetoric and stance on SDI as Paul Boyer also recounts in *By the Bomb's Early Light* (1985). But the description of Corvallis's most capable fighter, Phil

Bokuto, as a black ex-marine, and one of Pine View's elders, Patricia Howlett, as "a small, silver-haired black woman"<sup>93</sup> are part of Brin's attention to race, but in a way that takes into account the local valley communities. The Cascades is a primarily white environment with few minority ethnicities outside its cities, so Brin may be reflecting this fact of American life in the Pacific Northwest, or reinforcing the implications of *The Wild Shore* and *Warday*, that with the death of the cities most minorities have also been eradicated from post-cataclysm America.

### **The New World Order**

The culture wars continued through the 1990s but were primarily fought in the media. Somalia, Haiti, the Rwandan genocides, and Serbian nationalism and atrocities in the Balkans all received so much airtime and commentary on broadcast and cable channels that they effectively tilted US foreign policy toward a more conservative and isolationist stance after the early victories of the first Gulf War. That the ethnic dimensions of US interventions did not favor non-whites became the subject of extended criticism in the media. Gitlin notes that the economic costs of the end of the Cold War made many question the role of the government and expense of federal programs, turning the "rainbow" coalition in on itself even as the Right capitalized on their apparent military credibility thanks to Reagan's earlier Rambo rhetoric and the fast and decisive victories of the Desert Storm campaign. The confirmation of Clarence Thomas to the Supreme Court in 1991 fed into the continuing discourse of ethnic divisions. The allegations of Thomas's sexual harassment of Professor Anita Hill is often cast as a gender issue, especially given the growing conservatism on the Right best epitomized by



the political campaigns of Patrick Buchanan in 1992 and 1996. But Thomas filled the vacancy left by the liberal and activist Thurgood Marshall, altering the balance of the court in regards to affirmative action and women's issues. Although *Time Magazine* declared 1992 the Year of the Woman, race issues often dominated the media. The riots in Los Angeles following the acquittals of four white LAPD officers accused of beating Rodney King were the worst in American history, leaving fifty-two dead and 2,500 injured.<sup>94</sup> The devastation of southern Florida by Hurricane Andrew in 1992 and the failure of insurance companies and federal relief to help minority neighborhoods in south Florida further exacerbated social divisions. These racial tensions contributed to the Million Man March in 1995, and the resulting dispute over actual attendance claims and "official" Park Service estimates of participants. Both sides accused the other of skewing the numbers to serve their own agenda, and either inflating or deflating the power and presence of black men who attended.

In Bill Clinton's first presidential campaign he used the "forgotten middle class" as his cultural touchstone. After his 1992 election victory the Right turned this against progressives by using group identities to counter multiculturalism as part of a strategy that cast it as a series of costly "culturally elite" programs funded by that same beleaguered (and white, Christian) middle-class. Gitlin, in particular, notes the identity politics of the mid-1990s: "a huddling of men who resent (and exaggerate) their relative decline not only in parts of the labor market but at home, in the bedroom and the kitchen, and in culture. Their fear and loathing is, in part, a panic against the relative gains of women and minorities in an economy that people experience as a zero-sum game."<sup>95</sup> The

Moral Majority folded in 1989, but Pat Buchanan's 1992 attack against the "liberal ethos" behind social spending did not help him, or George H.W. Bush win the election because Clinton sidestepped with his mantra "It's the economy, stupid!" However, the differences between Clinton's political ethos and the loose coalition of identity-driven politics among Congressional Democrats helped drive the Republican electoral victories in 1994. The loss of both houses of Congress to the Republicans led to Newt Gingrich's ascension to Speaker of the House of Representatives in 1995 and the initial apparent success of the Contract with America. The resultant division of political power—a Democratic President against a Republican majority in Congress, meant that the issues of women and minorities remained underrepresented and embattled throughout Clinton's second term.

Immigration became a more divisive issue in the 1980s as the first generation to immigrate under the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act began to come of age. In the 1970s Asians formed the largest group; in the 1980s Hispanics overtook them. The 1980 *Marcel* Boatlift from Cuba received media and political attention, but was only part of this demographic shift with its estimated 120,000 refugees. The later influx of refugees from Haiti—around 40,000--after the fall of Baby Doc Duvalier in 1986 and subsequent ousting of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide in 1990 did not mix well with the entrenched Cuban community, and was largely forced to relocate outside Florida, in cities like New York City and Los Angeles. By the 1980s resistance to immigrants began to rise, reaching an acute stage in the mid-1990s in response to corporate relocations and accusations of jobs draining to Mexico after NAFTA, and fears that immigrant workers were lowering wages for all unskilled labor. This backlash against immigrant labor—

legal and illegal—is part of the cultural context for California Proposition 187 in 1994. By the end of the 1990s, even with an economic boom and incredible growth in the technology sector (and an increase in the number of HB visas issued to foreign nationals to come to America and work in the tech fields), suspicions remained. Sharp argues that the persecution of Wen Ho Lee in 1999 was just another in a long cycle of manifestation of the “yellow peril”<sup>96</sup> in American popular thought and culture, although since Japan’s economy had declined in the 1990s, this time it was China and nuclear weapons.

### **Bone Dance**

There is a sense of foreshadowing to Emma Bull’s 1991 *Bone Dance*; racism and ethnicity are only minor details of the nuclear war that provides a backstory, but culture and religion have been extensively altered. There was a nuclear war between North and South America sparked by a monomaniacal, mind-controlling black ops military experiment. But there are no radioactive ruins or neo-barbarians. The main effect of this “nuclear apocalypse” is the disruption and reformation of a different form of class warfare and a completely new paradigm for spiritual life eighty years later. Within the City, there are the wealthy, who live in the Towers; the street hustlers and scroungers of the Night Market; and separatist communities like those on the Island or on the periphery like the Hoodoo Engineers. The head of the Power Authority, A.A. Albrecht, operates as a king, a singular personage in his tower “Ego,” but his “Merlin” is a mad psychic manipulator and the true power behind the throne.

Although class warfare continues even within these post-cataclysmic economies, of barter and newly coined cash, the real clash of cultures is between the children of the

Enlightenment and those of the Loa. The Power Authority and Albrecht are not only the top of the social hierarchy, but they also hold together the ghost of the uptown condos and secure, planned suburban communities as the upper classes of the city. This conflict carries the overtones of the 1990s and its renewed interest in recycling and the first commercial green technologies; shortly thereafter, the rhetoric of global warming collided with the Hummers and SUVs of the quickly affluent Internet and technology bubble. Bull created this story against the backdrop of the short Bush recession, and while the Internet Boom remains linked to cyberpunk, the prosperity of that “era” was limited to those familiar with computers and technology, predominantly college-educated, middle-class, and white. Not everyone else is necessarily “hoodoo” as the protagonist Sparrow terms it, but those who are have more cultural affinities and work together more often than not in opposition of the Authority. In many respects the hoodoo communities operate outside the bounds of established social convention much of the time, and advocate an awareness of the cost of technology on the environment and community.

Racial issues in *Bonedance* are deeply embedded in the construction of religion. Sparrow considers the proliferation of second sight and minor psychic traits as the unintended consequences of the “blood of the Horsemen” making its way across the continent, among the survivors and their children. But Bull also makes it clear that these psychic skills create sensitivity to the psychic manifestation of the hoodoo loa, entities that are presented as “real” in their ability to possess Sparrow. Many pray to them as gods or angels and use the tarot, the bones, and other rituals that borrow from Voodoo, Santeria, and some New Age faiths. If there are any references to any monotheistic faith,

they are well buried because even nonbelievers invoke “Chango” (a reference to the West African Shango, god of Thunder and Lightning), rather than “Christ” as a curse. This is part of the shifting American cultural identity that Huntington only writes about more than a decade after this book was published, but it is important to consider the rising influence Afro-Caribbean immigrants and Hispanics in the United States through the 1980s and 1990s.

Popular imagination pictures Chicanos and Latinos in California, the southwest, Florida, and ethnic neighborhoods in Chicago or New York City, but the in the 1980s, Cuban and Haitian refugees and other Hispanics were settled in a number of Midwestern cities. The writers of *The American Midwest: an interpretive encyclopedia*, make a point of describing the rising popularity among immigrant communities of the rites of Santeria in Minneapolis and other cities in the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>97</sup> Haitian immigrants also flooded into America during the 1970s, 80s and 90s, during the unrest of the two Duvalier regimes. They brought with them variants of Voodoo, similar to the Voodoo practiced among ethnic communities in Louisiana since the nineteenth century, which also has its roots in Haitian culture. The tarot deck Sher uses as a focus for her psi-talent and to foretell Sparrow’s future comes from a “*botánica* in Alphabetland” and their “iconography is a schizoid blend of Christian saints, African deities, and pre-Bang SouthAm pop stars,”<sup>98</sup> completing the image of an evolving syncretic blend of *Santeria* and Voodoo faiths, both of which are clearly tied to ethnic minorities. Bull taps into this influence of Afro-Cuban and Haitian refugees, and the effects of a rising Catholic population within what had been a typically Lutheran culture since its settlement in the

nineteenth century. Huntington formulated his “clash of civilizations” thesis in 1993, and further articulated it in 1996: “The issue is not whether Europe will be Islamicized or the United States Hispanicized. It is whether Europe and America will become cleft societies encompassing two distinct and largely separate communities from two different civilizations.”<sup>99</sup> But Bull had already painted his apparent future fear as early as 1991 by depicting a culture of many ethnicities, a syncretic faith, and a Creole language infused with particularly southern immigrant flavors. This city offers a vision of the Creolization of America in a specific post-cataclysmic community, a vision where ethnicities and religions have syncretized and blended creating a new, racially and ethnically diverse culture reflective of modern America (or where America might be in twenty or thirty years) rather than of an unobtainable or unrealistic alternate universe. In this syncretic society, those who come together and blend their traditions are far more likely to survive and survive well than those who hold on to the racial, religious and cultural divisions of the past.

### ***Earthseed: Parable of the Sower and Parable of the Talents***

Nalo Hopkinson wrote: “to be a person of color writing science fiction is to be under suspicion of having internalized one’s colonization.”<sup>100</sup> Octavia Butler creates this tension between intent and identity in the story of Earthseed in *Parable of the Sower* (1993) and *Parable of the Talents* (1998). Rather than envisioning a cataclysm brought on by aliens, nuclear war, or psychic power, Butler projects a possible future based on her perception of “the growing rich/poor gap, at throwaway labor, at our willingness to build and fill prisons, our reluctance to build and repair schools and libraries, and at our assault

on the environment.”<sup>101</sup> These issues are not limited to the inner city and poorer ethnic neighborhoods, but are also problems that plague poor rural counties, and increasingly in the 2000s, challenge formerly middle-class suburbs and communities. Several of Butler’s other novels also have a strong, black female protagonist, but in the Earthseed novels she presents embattled groups who are multicultural from diverse economic and social backgrounds. Rather than ethnicity, or an ethnic-based culture, the Other she presents in these novels is based on economic status, belief and faith, and genetics—whether or not a character is a “sharer.”<sup>102</sup> The core theme of these novels is the importance of community and the need to not just maintain them, but to adapt them as circumstances and society changes. Both Lauren Olamina’s walled Robledo enclave and the later Acorn compound are diverse in their multiethnic members of varied economic classes and religious orientations. Both are victims of the culture wars: Robledo to the urban and suburban poor who attack those they believe to be wealthy, and Acorn to the militant Christian conservatives.

The eleven homes of Robledo shelter individuals who are black, Hispanic, Chinese, and white, and many of the families are of mixed ethnicities. But in 2024, the “Pox” was officially nine years old, although some argued it began closer to the millennium. Once, many of these families would have been considered middle class or better; among their number are a hydroengineer, a pharmacist, a nurse, and an astronomer, and at least two academics. The leader of their community, Lauren’s father, is a professor, dean, and the Baptist minister of the group. Clean water is scarcer and more expensive than the gas no one can afford, for cars that are seldom used; the poor

and desperate ambush lone travelers, making travel an event handled by bike-packs with an armed escort. Within their small walled space, the Baptist preacher and his congregation, and the Buddhist Hsu family tolerate the richer engineer, Richard Moss, and his polygamy. He uses his wealth to buy desperate women who become his wives, and whom he indoctrinates with his mix of Christian fundamentalism and West African traditions, making them subservient to him as their patriarch. But Moss, while troublesome, is a member of their community, and (sometimes) reluctantly shares in some of their duties, such as the neighborhood watch. Lauren worries about threats to the community even before her father disappears; she felt that an attack was always imminent because of the hatred and jealousy she perceived when she ventured outside: “I didn’t believe we would be allowed to sit behind our walls, looking clean and fat and rich to the hungry, thirsty, homeless, jobless, filthy people outside.”<sup>103</sup> Color and religion do not matter when the raiders ram a truck through their gates, set fire the homes, and murder almost everyone in the night. The attacks are led by rich, drug-addled poseurs who claim the goal is social justice for the poor, but the attacks are directed at small, marginal neighborhoods, themselves barely clinging to the remnants of middle-class privilege.

After the enclave is destroyed, Lauren and two other Robledo survivors (Harry Balter and Zahra Moss) begin their trek from the Los Angeles suburbs to northern California. Using the freeway as their footpath by day, they add nine more people to their core group as they travel: a former doctor and a thief; escaped slaves and indentured workers; abused women and men; adults and children. They are black, white, Japanese, Mexican, Latino, and others who only have a name but no sense of heritage or history.



When they get to their destination in Humboldt County, they bury Bankole's family (Lauren's husband), clear away the ashes of their house and begin building. The community grows to sixty-four, and is branded a "cult" by local politicians who portray them as devil-worshippers to voters who crave an enemy—any enemy—as the focus for their frustration, anger, and rage. The followers of Earthseed believe that "God is Change" and they are committed to self-sufficiency, to questioning, to learning, and to teaching, and they do not restrict it to their beliefs. As the economic apocalypse grinds on, like many other communities Acorn's adults teach their children because the schools for the poor and middle class have closed or burned, and the streets are too dangerous for travel. In fact, Acorn and Earthseed represent the worst fears of Huntington and his cohort because these are examples of multicultural rather than Anglo-Protestant norm. The people of these communities go beyond the narrow American stereotype in that (a) all members learn to speak at least two languages, typically English and Spanish, and (b) the essential tenets of their faith are to question and seek answers, and not to accept either the status quo, established order, or the dominant cultural paradigm as it stands. Lauren considers Earthseed the first step toward a worldwide effort to move beyond Earth, to limit humanity's vulnerability, creating a post-American culture that will go to the stars; the "final frontier" will not be a new white man's burden or an echo of the 1950s US.

*Parable of the Sower* begins in Robledo and describes the anxious, dangerous trek on foot over hundreds of miles to Arcata; *Parable of the Talents* starts with the brief hope of Acorn before it is perverted into Camp Christian, after the rise of President Jarret and near-establishment of Christian America as a state religion. From the perspective of Lauren and her thirteen Earthseed "apostles," Acorn represents the reward for having

survived the gangs, drugs, slavery, diseases, fires, and starvation on the road north. They build their own cabins, plant and tend their own crops, and salvage what they can from the abandoned homes and farms in the nearby hills. More importantly, they teach each other to read, write, and think. But within only a few short years they gain the reputation as a cult, one that attracts the attention of a militant splinter group within Christian America, the Jarret Crusaders. The Crusaders invade using armored vehicles and paralytic gas to incapacitate, and pain-inducing slave collars to control the people of Acorn. Over the next seventeen months they “reeducate” not only the followers of Earthseed, but vagabonds, itinerant travelers, and the mobile poor who are not their type of Christian, or perhaps too dark of skin. Before the election, Jarret’s supporters burn books, houses, and the occasional witch. After his election they are emboldened, and “a witch, in their view, tends to be a Moslem, a Jew, a Hindu, [...] a Buddhist, a Mormon, a Jehovah’s Witness, [...] or a Catholic,” and atheists, eccentrics, and those they define as cultists fall within the same designation.<sup>104</sup> The poor, initially fed and housed by Christian America, are often force into indentured labor (and sometimes reeducation), possibly reflecting the late-1990s attention to the Taliban, and extending an extreme version of the growing religious conservatism in the United States. In many respects, Christian America and President Jarret follow policies that blame the poor for their lot revolving around their laziness, or dullness, and lack of faith or direction.

Jarret’s presidential policies are dehumanizing and allow both indentured servitude and ignore the renewal of chattel slavery; both are a refutation of the earlier spirit of affirmative action and equality of opportunity. In many instances, while Jarret is President and the country reels from its war with Canada and Alaska (that secedes), the

Church abuses its “relationship” with the Oval Office (and by implication, Congress). In one particular instance, when a Church near Acorn is robbed, all of the homeless who were given shelter are arrested. Those who are not locals (and not white) find themselves sentenced to indentured labor, but even when their sentence is fulfilled, they are not freed because they have no job waiting or anyone to stand for them if they are travelers. Once indentured, they have no means to look for other work, or to make a contract. Unable to prove they won’t become vagrant again, the police decline to release them and leave them in Church custody.<sup>105</sup> Although an urban myth in the 1990s, in *Parable of the Sower*, these perpetually indentured are “encouraged” to donate a kidney or a cornea to gain their release—their value is no longer as people, but “souls” who will be saved if pay with a spare corporeal part.<sup>106</sup> In many respects the Christian America Church and its believers will accept any price and sacrifice for social order, stability, and the return of American greatness; their attitude and behavior is no different from that of the fanatics behind the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, but it also resonates with the growing clashes between authorities and white supremacists with their private arms caches and compounds. In Jarret and his church, Butler paints the New Right and religious conservatism of the 1990s as an ultimately futile resistance to the cultural and ethnic hybridization of the US in the very near future.

### **Age of Crisis**

When George W Bush was elected in 2000, it was with a very slim electoral margin; the popular vote went to Al Gore, but the election effectively had to be decided by the Supreme Court, which did not answer charges of voter intimidation, especially in

minority and poor communities.<sup>107</sup> Bush's economic policies went even farther than Reagan's in the application of tax cuts, especially for the wealthiest Americans (and corporations) with the superficial and unfunded mandate of the No Child Left Behind Act<sup>108</sup> to support his ostensible compassionate conservatism. As a born-again Christian, Bush's opposition to same-sex marriage, gay rights, and multiculturalism in general went largely unremarked *after* the attacks of 9/11 and for the first few years of the War Against Terror.

Berman regards contemporary America as having fallen into a Dark Age, regressing from the ideals of the Enlightenment, especially after the reelection of George W. Bush in 2004. Berman argues that the United States has become Rome after the fall and his evidence, "the triumph of religion over reason; the atrophy of education and critical thinking; the integration of religion, the state, and the apparatus of torture"<sup>109</sup> seem particularly compelling as they are drawn from contemporary political discourse and frequently appear in popular culture, especially in post-cataclysm SF since 2001. But more than the decline as empire, Berman argues that America is atomized; that communities are more fiction than reality as a result of the privileging of individuals rather than families or communities. The European city has a tradition of walls and external threats, but this creates boundaries that encourage community and "street life," while American cities are tied to the industrial era, and are patterned on economic interests or scientifically informed optimized functions.<sup>110</sup> This difference between American and European cities and their urban cultures is part of why the American city must change to promote the assimilation that Huntington, Krugman, and even West

believe is at the heart of America remaining a vibrant and active democracy. Berman's *Dark Ages America* (2007) and Jane Jacobs's *Dark Age Ahead* (2004) both point to the ultimate outcome of the culture wars: isolated individuals who are theoretically free to live and compete how they wish, but without a sense of community and no commonplace ideology after education and the press have failed to educate or inculcate even a basic cultural literacy, leaving media to generate divisive identity-specific channels rather than a shared cultural identity.

Since the 1970s, American television has been much more race conscious in its casting if not its depictions of subcultures and ethnicities. Apocalyptic media like *Threads* (1983) or *The Day After* (1983) have their token black character, and in the 1990s similar features made for cable sometimes include other minorities, as in HBO's *By the Dawn's Early Light* (1990). Something that has also changed the face of television science fiction since the early 1990s is the (initially) lower cost of basing production in Canada. *The X-Files* used Canada beginning in the early 1990s, and by the time *Jeremiah* and *Battlestar Galactica* went into production, Vancouver had become the center for SF television production in North America. In 2011, the *SyFy Channel* films and produces most of its series and several features in Canada. The advantage of Vancouver-based production is a wide diversity of ethnicities and international backgrounds among the actors, which provides scriptwriters a broader range of story options. This production trend also means that post-cataclysmic television series are often more ethnically diverse than their print exempla. At times, these advantages require audiences to suspend disbelief regarding the ethnic diversity on screen in contrast to the reality of a fictional

Oregon, Colorado, or New England, and to ignore the “about” of a Toronto accent coming from a character supposedly a Texas native.

## **Jeremiah**

Although the voiceover for the opening credits describes the virus as killing anyone over “the age of innocence,” the ethos that evolves among the “Big Death” generation has as much to do with *The Lord of the Flies* as it does with post-racial harmony. The cast is as diverse as only a Vancouver production can be, and every ethnicity and several cultures are represented, including some that make little logical sense in a future without mass media influence and reinforcement. Most of the organized groups of people and towns sixteen years after the massive die-off are multi-ethnic and post-racial; those that are not are notable in their ideologies, isolationism, or desire to return to “the old ways,” often a less than subtle code for white supremacist ideology. Racism as institutionalized prejudice ended with the governments and corporations, and the Constitutional Convention in the second season draws from every group within the Western Alliance, a collection that incorporates people of black, white, Native American, Hispanic/Latino, and Asian ethnicities in new national identity that draws on a romanticized US. The implication is that in this post-cataclysmic society the racial hatreds deeply embedded in the psyche of the older generation died with them. Racial hatred is taught, and with no one left to teach it, it disappears or at least dissipates.

The essential arc that ties the series together is the recovery of American values (civil rights and freedoms), education, and building a new United States from the remains of the old world. This is the story of the Western Alliance, led by Thunder Mountain, and

opposed at times various specters of the old world: organized skinheads, the leaders of Valhalla Sector, and the Army of Daniel. The protagonists of the series include the eponymous white, male Jeremiah, the son of middle-class parents, and his black, male partner, Kurdy, whose memories suggest crises and abuse before the Big Death.<sup>111</sup> It is Jeremiah's obsession to find his father that drives the arc of the first season. He only reluctantly takes a leadership role in the town of Milhaven after it joins the alliance, recapitulating the problems of individualism argued by Berman in *Dark Ages America*. In contrast, Kurdy begins as an ultra-cautious loner, but becomes the military leader of Thunder Mountain, and later the commander of the combined forces of the Western Alliance during the war with the Army of Daniel. Where Jeremiah is obsessive, driven, and uncomfortable when in authority—the epitome of Berman's American “individual”—it is Kurdy who wishes to stay with Thunder Mountain in the beginning, and who initially contributes to the community. Kurdy is also the adaptive realist who wants literacy and the knowledge and dreams of the past, but who also recognizes that Jeremiah's idealism does not take into account the fear and distrust of others who have long fought just to survive. In many ways their partnership reflects the alliance of academic intellectuals and “street-smart” political activists who work toward a common goal of a multiethnic and cultural social mosaic.

The Western Alliance is about forging a new democracy and nation, but Cornell West<sup>112</sup> notes that every such project “has been undermined by two fundamental realities: poverty and paranoia.”<sup>113</sup> Theo, the young, black, female leader of Clarefield, is the manifestation of these realities more than any other in the series. Theo's introduction is as a strong and hard leader; harsh and ruthless as her Byzantine namesake, she is willing to

torture and kill if she must in pursuit of “the end of the world” with its mythic treasures of working electronics and abundant food. Theo’s desires are initially selfish, another validation of Berman’s failure of individualism. Within the narrative her deep-seated desire for security and safety are a reaction to the time of chaos and victimization and rape of girls and young women. But when she later becomes pregnant, these desires are transferred to her child and are the basis for her decision to support Markus as the leader of Thunder Mountain and the Western Alliance. Once an enemy, Theo becomes one of the strongest supporters of the alliance and its proposed restoration of the United States. But not everyone joins the alliance; in “The Moon in Gemini,” Kurdy and his companion Elizabeth (a young, black woman) fail to convince a group of black separatists who repeat the rhetoric of black nationalism to join the alliance or even meet with Markus. Their leader, Kwame, believes that their conflict has nothing to do with his people—a recapitulation of some of the separate nation (with overtones of black supremacy) seen in the statements of Louis Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam in the 1980s. This isolationist ethos, in a post-cataclysmic milieu, is one that promotes vulnerability and assimilation rather than a living, vibrant identity or culture that may change but continues to project its own influence beyond its members.

Nazi Skinheads and their racist ideology provide some of the early challenges for Jeremiah and Kurdy, but Valhalla Sector (VS) replaces them in the first season, and the invading Army of Daniel is the overwhelming threat of the second. Both Valhalla Sector and the Army of Daniel appear predominantly white, and cabals of elders who survived the Big Death control both groups. The hierarchy of VS includes those who plotted the release of the virus in order to take control of not only the US, but also the world. They



are white political and military leaders, although not all are male. Some black soldiers (extras) appear in the background of the Raven Rock refuge, but other than the double agent Lee Chen, the head of Thunder Mountain security, no one with authority is of color. The explanation “President” Emerson gives Jeremiah is that the virus was released (from an Indian lab) as a means of restoring American power and control, which they imply was under threat from India and China (echoes of global economic competition). Again, by acting conservatively to perpetuate older social norms and the effective division between classes, cultures, and ethnicities, VS becomes vulnerable and is itself annihilated. The VS elites are the surviving elites of the old world, and are shown at a formal ball, dressed in tuxedos, gowns, and military dress uniforms. The plan to use the virus to maintain US hegemony failed, as does any attempt to maintain any form of ethnic or cultural “purity.” If the link between the leaders of VS and millennial elites is unclear, the resonance with the gentility of the American South and the Confederate slave-holding society becomes much more direct in the second season and the Army of Daniel.

Also in the former American southeast, the cities controlled by the Army of Daniel are multiethnic but their leaders are white men dressed in black trenchcoats. The leader of the army is a man named Sims, who affects the mannerisms of Generals George S. Patton and Robert E. Lee (both famous southerners). He speaks with a Georgian accent, sports long whiskers, and wears a gray coat and boots reminiscent of a Confederate uniform. The portrayal of Sims is also a nod to General Bethlehem of the racist Holnist Army in the film version of *The Postman*. Sims commands his men to terrorize and burn, a repetition of the terror tactics of the KKK. As part of his terror

campaign to break the Western Alliance before it gets he eradicates the entire population of one of the communities—that led by Sandor, who is black, and which has a largely multiethnic population. Besides Theo, Sandor is one of the stronger and more capable leaders, but his murder backfires as it prompts several neutral groups to join the alliance. The society that evolves in *Jeremiah* is one that strives against the racial hatred and bigotry of the past, and against the institutions and economic interests that benefit from promoting not only the division of peoples, but also their continued fear and distrust of one another. While the series projects a post-racial attitude, the persistence of racial hatred among certain group reflects certain entrenched beliefs that refuse to die even in the face of modern progressive evolution, or in this case, overwhelming cataclysm.

### **Jericho**

The destruction of twenty-three US cities in *Jericho* causes fear, confusion, and disrupts communications (and apparently travel) throughout the country even more effectively than the limited nuclear war in *Warday*. Because of its national and international audience, and the stated goal of the producers to reflect contemporary social issues in Iraq and post-Katrina New Orleans, race and ethnicity are very much intertwined within the themes of the series. However, while produced in northern California, *Jericho* is set in a small, Kansas town. Diversity would not necessarily be expected in this environment,<sup>114</sup> but many of the episodes include people of color as extras in almost every crowd or group scene in numbers greater than those represented in rural census records. In its attempts to represent ethnic minorities on screen, *Jericho* over-reaches the boundaries of reality and makes the suspension of disbelief a little more

difficult. This is part of the reality of American broadcast television, and it is especially significant in contrast to the whiteness of early science fiction television in the 1960s and the tokens of color in the 1970s and early 1980s. Religion is largely absent (surprising for Kansas), but race is directly and indirectly tied to several of the storylines of those who come from outside Jericho.

However, despite the producers' attempt at diversity, the core community of Jericho is white. The protagonist, Jake Green, and his entire family, including a past and future mayor, are white. The Sheriff and all his deputies are all white; the owner of the local market and tavern are both white (women); and the survivalist/thieves compound outside town is also...white. However, the Hawkins family who arrive with their St. Louis cover on the day the bombs burst, are black. Robert Hawkins is the head of the family. He is an intelligence agent who uses revolving covers, first as a St. Louis police officer, and later as an FBI agent, to hide his "real" identity as CIA or DHS. He knows of the plot, is working to stop it, and manages to steal the bomb destined for Columbus, Ohio, and hide it in Jericho. He brings his wife Darcy (although they had separated), and his daughter, Allison, and son, Sam, with him. Sarah Mason, his former partner (and lover), who is also black, later finds Hawkins and joins him in Jericho. Beyond the Hawkins family, a handful of significant characters add Indian (Hindi) and Latino identities to the mix. So while there is a visual diversity encoded in the series, the main plot features still revolve around a predominately white cast heavily supported by one core black group. While this may be slightly more realistic for the Kansas setting, the effect is a superficial attempt to address disparities of racial representation in modern SF series and somewhat reinforces media stereotypes. However, the series does attempt to

involve other ethnic minorities in the plotlines, and implies that survival and regeneration depends on all the people, regardless of race.

Robert Hawkins, the undercover agent, is the *deus ex machina* of the series. He alone maintains communications with the outside world, knows who orchestrated the attacks, and later provides Jericho with military-grade weapons and intelligence to help defend against the New Bern invasion. Hawkins carries some of the aura of the “shaman” or “wise mentor” in his awareness of the plot and access to surveillance satellites and computer networks while the rest of the town has been reduced to a nineteenth-century technology base. Hawkins reveals the truth behind the bombings to Jake in the eighteenth episode. The bombs were acquired from former Soviet republics, brought in to the US *by* the US government and distributed to “militants, anarchists, and religious fanatics” who want to destroy the government and nation,<sup>115</sup> This suggests the “Rule or Ruin” mentality currently pervasive in American politics; certain groups, interested more in attaining or maintaining power than in protecting the American people and their civil liberties are willing to destroy portions of it and kill millions to achieve their aim—blaming the destruction on outside attacks perpetuated by non-white enemies. The series is critical of that abuse of power, making the Heart Land (so often touted by right-wing conservatives as the “real America,” i.e. white America) the center of resistance to such unrestrained tyranny and inherent racism.

While useful to the town, Hawkins at first feeds both paranoia and isolationist responses, although his goal is to protect his family. Hawkins plays on racial tensions and assumptions when his family is suspected and interviewed by Gray Anderson and his deputy Jimmy in episode 108, “Rogue River.”

Allison: “Are you harassing everyone in town, or just the Black people?”

Darcy: “I thought this was Kansas, not Soviet Russia?”

Robert: “If you can overlook the mess, we can overlook the violation of our civil rights.”

Darcy: “You people drafted my husband into your police force.”

At no point does anyone in the town mention the Hawkins’ skin color, and their use of race is a conscious attempt to deflect the (ironically legitimate) questions about Robert’s background and their appearance in Jericho on the day of the attacks. But this exchange also has the aura of racial profiling, especially in Allison’s question. This subtext never entirely goes away. Jimmy’s interprets some of Sam’s comments as oblique references to domestic abuse that expose some of Hawkins’ secrets and his status as an intelligence agent to Jimmy and Jake. Because the writers enjoy irony, it is also worth noting that what Jimmy misunderstood was not a reference to Robert abusing Darcy, but rather the shooting death of Sarah Mason, a different manifestation of black-on-black or outsider violence.<sup>116</sup> The introduction of the Chicago refugee and medical intern, Jessica Williams, in “Winter’s End”<sup>117</sup> might be intended to remediate these ethnic overtones because she is young, intelligent, black, and becomes the new town doctor after the death of Dr. April Green and descent of Dr. Kenchy Dhuwalia into alcoholism. But Jessica also reinscribes the city and urban populations as a cultural Other in the milieu of Jericho.

Beyond the black characters (the Hawkins family, Williams, and Sarah Mason) the appearances of other non-white characters are limited but integral to the counterplots against the conspiracies of Ravenwood and Jennings & Rall. Dr. Dhuwalia, an Indian plastic surgeon, is rescued from Rogue River but becomes an alcoholic as his way of

coping with the massacre at the Rogue River county hospital. He is the one able to tell the Green sons about the massacre of civilians by Ravenwood (an allusion to the Blackwater shootings in Baghdad in September 2007).<sup>118</sup> He eventually steps in as the town's doctor after April Green's death—on his operating table—but he remains off-screen beyond these two episodes.<sup>119</sup> Jake's friend who worked with him in Iraq, Freddie Ruiz, is killed in "The Day Before" because he knows Ravenwood is selling weapons to the Taliban. Cheung and Chavez, other agents in Hawkins's counter-espionage group, are instrumental in breaking open the real story of who is responsible for the bombings. The Hispanic military commander of the Allied States of America forces in Jericho, Major Beck, another veteran of Iraq, is sympathetic for several episodes until he finds he has been manipulated and deceived, after which he authorizes extreme interrogation measures to be used on Jake in an attempt to find Hawkins and the nuclear device.<sup>120</sup> But in the final episode, after learning the truth of the corporate plot behind the bombs and the guilt of the new President, he and his men mutiny against the ASA; they will either defend Jericho, or possibly move to bring the corrupt government down.

Although the crowd scenes in Jericho have more than just white faces, it is interesting that most of the outsiders who aid the town and its people are visible minorities. That Sarah Mason is black disturbs a simple reading of the Cheyenne conspirators, those behind the bomb plot, as a version of white America, white supremacy, or "white male hegemony," although her allegiances are not always clear. Mason features in an actual incident of black-on-black violence, domestic disturbance, and is a conflict of interest for Robert Hawkins<sup>121</sup> that goes beyond the political

dynamics of the conspiracy. All of the intelligence agents who work to aid Jericho or expose the conspiracy are minorities, as are all the medical personnel after April Green's death. While not a multi-ethnic community, this cooperation does emphasize solidarity as Americans, in opposition to the efforts of the Cheyenne conspiracy to isolate communities and turn Americans against each other with fear and suspicion, a statement against the polarized politics in the wake of 9/11 and throughout the War on Terror.

### **The Emberverses and The Change**

The world of the Change divorces ethnicity from ethnotype and brings about the creation of a range of new nations from the shattered fragments of the United States. Prejudice based on skin color or genetic traits also ends with the death of 90% of humanity during the famines and plagues that follow the abrupt destruction of modern technology and science. Borrowing from Samuel Delany who considers racism as institutionalized prejudice, this is a post-racial world, but it is not post-ethnic as the process of ethnogenesis creates distinct nations from a combination of their founders' ethnicities, cultures, and heritages and in response to the group's particular survival experience. Where Ish's Tribe in *Earth Abides* is an early, fairly generic version of ethnogenesis, the nations of the Changed world become more pronounced in their new national character as a way of separating themselves not only from their opposition, but also from the dead world of the past, and its ghouls—the cannibals many fought or fled in the immediate aftermath. Because of the initial fierce competition for food and security, the groups of survivors are forced to learn how to fight from handful of military veterans or weapons hobbyists; this creates distinct fighting styles and martial technology that

often influences their social organization, government, and even architecture. Perhaps the most critical characteristics that influence interactions between nations are their particular views on religious tolerance and national faith(s). After the death of almost all of humanity, most believe in some greater power, but everyone believes in luck.

On the meta-level, Stirling set out to create an alternate history resembling the epics of high fantasy set against a (mostly) contemporary social and intellectual context. He very consciously uses examples from European history and the SF megatext to not only craft his new ethnicities, but to provide a shorthand for knowledgeable readers who can read into their conflicts and alliances. Because this is a dystopic SF series, and alternate history and military SF both employ details in large measure, most of these societies use an historic culture as a baseline mutated with select anachronisms. Given the conflict integral to the first trilogy, the cultural dynamics of the War of the Eye are meant to be adversarial: the Portland Protective Association (PPA) is based on the Anglo-Norman long twelfth century; the Bearkillers are a neo-Germanic blend of Anglo-Saxon and Swede (with some Mongolian fighting styles); and the Mackenzies are a Celtic blend of Irish, Scots, and Welsh (much of it romanticized Victorian era inventions). Stirling not only borrows Tolkien's epic scope for the series as a whole, but also pulls Tolkien's books into the narrative; *the Silmarillion* (1977) becomes a cultural bible for the Dúnedain Rangers, a group of ethical mercenaries who come from all the communities in the Willamette Valley. Recapitulating every new nation is beyond the scope of this discussion, so the primary focus is those that formed within North America, and more specifically the role of specific ethnicities or cultures in each nation's development.



The first trilogy includes the Change and the eight years running through the War of the Eye; relevant nations include the (PPA), the Bearkillers, the Mackenzie Clan, and the city-state of Corvallis, Mount Angel, the Central Oregon Ranchers Association (CORA), and the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs. The scope of the second trilogy offers a much wider range as the quest group travels throughout the former United States. The groups germane to this discussion include: New Dessert, the Church Universal and Triumphant, the United States (of Boise), the Provisional Republic of Iowa, the Kingdom of Norrheim, and the Haeda and neo-Sioux. The location and region in which a group forms are critical; Portland, as a city, has a range of ethnicities; the Mackenzies draw from local farming communities; and the Bearkillers form on the road as the group travels from Idaho to Oregon. The survival experiences mark each and the ethos they begin to develop. Many of the core members of these different groups find that a “national style” of armor and dress not only helps them to identify each other on the battlefield, but creates a sense of community and belonging—something essential for many abandoned or driven to desperate measures in the first Change year. By the end of the first trilogy everyone younger than a teen, especially those born after the Change, have accepted the new “neo-feudal” hierarchies, “new” traditions, and often a reinvention of medieval, tribal, or “frontier” fashions that help unify each nation.

As a former Jesuit and professor of medieval Anglo-Norman history, Norman Arminger bases the PPA on the society and culture of the long twelfth century (ca. 1066-1215) and what he considers useful anachronisms. Arminger’s followers come from two communities: the Portland-area Society for Creative Anachronisms (SCA) and the region’s gangs and organized crime syndicates. The hobbyists in the SCA are primarily

white, middle-class, and college-educated; many have overly romantic ideas and fail to adapt to the Changed world, most especially to Armingers enjoyment of slavery and conquest. Stirling implies that Armingers kills those who do not actively and enthusiastically support his rule, and his former SCA friends remained “romantically” attached to social norms such as civil rights and protections; they could not stomach slavery but were not strong enough to fight Armingers because of the gangs and criminals who became part of his power base. Many of the gangs have a strong ethnic component (Chicano, black, Russian, Korean, Chinese), but the racial composition of the gangs are also a stereotype the same way the SCA science fiction fan is used as shorthand for an expected education, level of literacy, and moral flexibility or rigidity. By the time of the War of the Eye, the majority of Armingers forces may be white, but he aggressively recruits from the Portland (and Vancouver, WA.) gangs, so he has one of the most diversified populations. Several of his first generation barons are former gang leaders, in particular Eddie Liu (Chinese-American), Jabar Jones (American black), Emiliano Guitterez (son of an illegal Mexican immigrant), and Alexi Stavros (Russian mafia), all men from diverse ethnic backgrounds. Although many of the men of the SCA cannot adapt to Armingers rule, several of the “Ladies” become the wives of these and other barons. Given his conflict with the Mackenzies, who form around a Wiccan coven, his reinvention of the Spanish Inquisition and support for an insane “Pope” to front his Catholic state church bolster Armingers efforts to militarize the PPA civilians and serfs.

Unlike Armingers, Pope Leo, and the PPA barons, the other communities that form in the Valley are largely tolerant of others’ religions and “eccentricities.” Outside of the PPA, most of the other new nations begin with an organic core of their local community

of families and friends, who, in the case of the Mackenzies, are coreligionists in the Singing Moon Coven that follows Georgian Wicca rites using Celtic symbolism. Juniper Mackenzie uses her grandfather's nineteenth century house as the base for the growing community that takes in refugees and survivors. The Mackenzies construct their first dún (fortified or walled hamlet) for defense against raiders and cannibals, which becomes the template for later communities they settle throughout the valley. From the very beginning the Mackenzies are multiethnic; Juniper's best friend, Dennis, helps rescue his future wife, Sally, a newly widowed Vietnamese woman and her mixed-race son Terry. Others rescue a group of children from an abandoned bus, including a mixed-race boy, Sanjay, with Hindi heritage. The Mackenzies and Bearkillers make a habit of accepting escaped slaves (and later serfs) from the PPA; two Hispanic (and very Catholic) families in particular reluctantly join the Mackenzies. Their societies contrast sharply with that of the PPA because while they are all post-racial in terms of skin color or old ethnic cultures, the PPA enforces a post-Change radicalized Catholicism that reinforces the power of the Protector and is justifies literal witch hunts within their domains and conquest of those beyond their borders.

The culture of the Mackenzies is a definite break with current American norms; their community reflects a more tolerant ideology that rejects any racial or religious discrimination. While the Mackenzies use a neopagan calendar to organize their society by planning their planting, harvests and holidays, they do not force everyone who joins the clans to become Wiccan. In fact, the Mackenzies, as well as the Bearkillers and Corvallans, are all religiously tolerant and come to accept the new faiths as much as the old—in the guise of the Abbey of Mount Angel (Catholic), and after the war, the

Catholics of the PPA. Education and literacy are important to the leaders of all of these communities (a typical SF conceit), including reading, writing, arithmetic, history, but also (especially for the Mackenzies) mythology and lore, herbalism, spinning or weaving, planting and harvesting. But everyone also practices weaponry. Education and art are both important to Juniper and become standard practice for all children in the dúnns, along with herblore, mythology, music, and archery. The Mackenzie dúnns are cooperatives; labor is shared and no one is exempt, and jobs are also assigned to everyone regardless of gender. The PPA very distinctly divides its labor according to class status and rank, although those who fight well are always able to move up the ladder; after the war, a small bourgeoisie begins to form, further stratifying their society. The PPA perpetuates gender constructions that existed before the Change and even rolls them back toward historical medieval models, while the dúnns of the Mackenzie clan move beyond old social divisions and promote a more inclusive future.

For her religious traditions and in the formation of the clan as a community, Juniper Mackenzie draws a great deal from her mother's Irish heritage. Beyond the music and legends, she also inspires many to (unfortunately) adapt a (bad) brogue, although many also try to learn the Irish language. In contrast, the Bearkillers create a culture more dedicated to their fighters because of their service as mercenaries, although they do incorporate aspects of Mike Havel's Finnish-Ojibwa background, as well as a dash of the Swedish culture of the Larssons, and some of Will and Angelica Hutton's Texas background (and Spanish loan words). The Larsson children set some of the tone with their use of Norse myths (only later to become religious), but more importantly Astrid Larsson's dedication to "Tolkien lore" and the motifs of high fantasy sets a wider

acceptance for both myth and the fantastic as the norm among the post-Change generation. Rather than emphasizing ethnicities, the Bearkillers develop more of a warrior ethos, and their version of the feudal system is arranged to support the feeding and training of knights, as well as the proper equipping and training of citizen militias. Among all three of these nations, children of mixed-race/ethnicity become far more common and the lack of distinct minorities encourages this blending as the series continues. The traditional racial divisions break down and the remaining societies become far more of a “melting pot” than pre-Change America ever was, implying that in the face of world-changing cataclysm racial distinctions are superficial and unsustainable.

The depiction of other communities emphasizes their organization or political structure in contrast to the others, and in some cases their faith and beliefs. The city-state of Corvallis forms around the core of the Faculty Senate of the University of Corvallis and the local townspeople, as well as a good number of refugees from Salem. The Corvallins develop embassies from the other nations, and also provide a place for both Catholics and Mackenzie coreligionists. The core of their nation is the university—its fight song is the national anthem, and its mascot the nation’s flag. In many respects they follow an almost classical Athenian model in the public debate for political decisions, but they also incorporate large academic committees to high-level deliberations. Ethnicity is not used as a descriptor, but if the contemporary student body and faculty are an indication, Corvallis is the second most integrated nation in the valley. Mount Angel has both men and women—monks and nuns—but again ethnicity is not a factor. The Abbot is a military veteran, and in the face of the challenges he reforms the abbey and monastery along the lines of the medieval Templars for defense, challenging the shock of

the Changed world. The Abbot does not accept the beliefs of the Mackenzies and other neopagans, but neither does he preach against them.

While European historical precedents inspire the PPA, Bearkillers, and Mackenzies, Corvallis uses Athenian democracy and its phalanx, but several other groups form along ethnic divisions and memories of the frontier or pioneer experience of the nineteenth century. Within the Willamette this includes the Central Oregon Ranchers Association (CORA), Pendleton, and the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs. CORA is an independent group of farmers and ranchers in Central Oregon, mostly Christian and white, but they take in refugees for farm labor in the first few years, diversifying their population a little. The warriors of CORA for all intents and purposes are neo-cowboys, who blend both late-nineteenth century cavalry with the javelin and bow of the Native American Plains tribes. Pendleton forms after a long war between farmers and ranchers in and near Pendleton, OR and the members of the local Umatilla Tribe. They spend more time fighting than working to preserve knowledge and culture, and so lose more and spend more time recovering since the War of the Eye. They are one of the few groups with unblended ethnicities and often fight CORA and the Confederated Tribes because of the earlier conflicts. The Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs begins as the Warm Springs Indian Reservation, but accepts refugees into their territory to settle and work the land. Many of these refugees take on traits and aspects of the tribe's culture, some aggressively so, and in many instances base that identity on half-understood Hollywood caricatures of actual Native American culture. Other tribes that return in force after the Change include (but are unlikely limited to) the Haida, the Pawnee, and the Sioux.

In the second trilogy, the neo-Sioux have grown in size and adapted more quickly than many around them. Led by John Red Leaf, a graduate of South Dakota State University, the Sioux move out from the Pine Ridge Reservation (where they froze in their trailers during winter) and use the memories of elders and a number of books to recreate new versions of the old arts. As a land use and resource expert, one of Red Leaf's goals is to not recreate the past, but use the best of Native practices as well as "germ theory and books,"<sup>122</sup> for example, to create an alternative lifestyle sustainable and healthy for his people as a whole. The Sioux do try to take back their original lands, but are pushed back by the Eastern Republics (Fargo, Marshall, Iowa) with their larger numbers. Part of the success of the Sioux is their adaptable, nomadic lifestyle, herding, buffalo hunts (now again in the millions), and use of a modified *yurt* called a *gert*, created by a Mongolian university student and much more durable and mobile than attempts to return to the use of tipis would have been. Red Leaf encourages the use of Native beliefs and social organization, but the Sioux also incorporate a number of mixed-blood children, mixed marriages, and refugees as well as those bound by blood and ritual, which creates their own integrated minority ethnicities.<sup>123</sup>

Where Arminger uses religion and a pet Pope to help control his people, the Church Universal and Triumphant (CUT) in this alternate world becomes an aggressive, militant power bent on conquest and conversion. In the second and third trilogies, the CUT remain the primary opposition for the Quest and the new war in the West. In the pre-Change world, the CUT are a cult who diminished somewhat after the death of one of their elders in 2007, but in the Changed world they have nearly conquer the Mormon

theocracy of New Deseret (northern Utah and southern Idaho), as well as subverting the United States (of Boise). CUT controls an empire that encompasses Montana, Wyoming, and they expand into Minnesota successfully, forcing the Sioux to accept an unequal peace treaty. The “US” is a “provisional” nation under martial law whose President Thurston is a former US Army General who vows to reunite the USA until he is killed. Stirling casts Thurston and his sons as black, some of the only people of color outside the resurgent First Nations to lead post-Change societies. During the “die off” following the Change, with its attendant social collapse, violence, and famine, and disease, those closest to the cities die. Although Stirling later revises just how extensive the “death lands” are, the scarcity of African Americans suggests that death of cities in the Emberverses remove most of the pre-Change ethnic diversity almost as completely as nuclear war in Strieber and Kunetka’s *Warday*, and Brin’s *The Postman*.

As the Quest moves eastward, they encounter the Republics in the interior. Fargo, Marshall, and the largest and most prosperous in North America, Iowa, manage to recover better than most regions. In part this is because of the lack of dense urban populations. In Iowa in particular, the Governor closes the bridges across the Mississippi River to keep the starving refugees out. By the second series, the Provisional Republic of Iowa has a hereditary Governor, Farmers who act as landed gentry (equivalent to the PPA knights and Bearkiller’s A-List), and the former city evacuees and refugees serve as serfs. Unlike in Arminger’s community, there are never slaves in Iowa, but the serfs have no immediate means to earn money and pay off their work-debts either. Iowa begins to expand into Illinois and Nebraska, yet remains a primarily white and Christian populace, and their only wars are with the Sioux, and now the CUT. As with the United States of



Boise, most of the Republics are more like the America of the early twentieth century, although with much smaller cities and a very marginal ethnic minority that emphasizes post-Change culture (and religion) as the core of difference rather than skin color.

The final nation introduced is one dispersed through the former New England and the nearby Canadian provinces of Quebec, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick. The Kingdom of Norrheim is founded in a fashion very similar to the enclave of the Mackenzies. However, an SCA knight from Boston, Erik Waterson, with a preference for Icelandic sagas and culture founds Norrheim with the help of a priestess of the *Asatru* or Norse-inspired neopagan religion. Each of the communities is fortified and organized to support each other, although they have been kept busy coping with the harsher climate, the still surviving cannibal rovers, and what have become neobarbarians in the Quebecois woods. As with the Mackenzies, their coreligionists are also hobbyists and fighters in the SCA in many cases, and so are able to redevelop Norse weapons and teach tactics. They create a post-cataclysm neo-Norse “ethnicity” using Norse runes and carving styles as a cultural center to ground and focus their friends, families, and any refugees they take in. In addition to his SCA training, Waterson also served in the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne, so this influence is similar to Mike Havel’s Marine Corps background on the early Bearkillers culture. Norrheim appears to be united in its Norse-inspired worship, but they make no especial comment when Rudy Mackenzie and the Quest group arrive, and thank their own (Celtic-inspired) gods. They appear to tolerate other beliefs and homage to other gods, although this magnanimity may derive from the apparent absence of former monotheistic believers in Norrheim.

Another First Nation people, the Mic Mac, have survived and are allied with Norrheim against the neosavages and another tribe, the Bekwa, the former province of Quebec. In Oregon, the People of the Meeting must defend against raids by the Haida, and in the Midwest, the neo-Sioux fought the “Heartland” Republics. But in the far Northeast the Mic Mac ally with the Neo-Norse against a mix of post-cannibal, mixed-ethnicity neosavages, and a post-Québécois mix of the descendants of French Canadians and Bekwa, among others. These alliances incorporate both religious and cultural toleration and verge more towards the multicultural mosaic so popular in Canadian federal policy, but also in ways that reflect the strengths of the individual societies. This suggests both a resistance to the assimilationist philosophy and the narrow, homogenizing policies of the US federal government in its interactions with sovereign American Indian peoples.

### **Battlestar Galactica (BSG)**

I still find it incredible that we still use the term race as a cultural determinant. We’ve made the word race a way of expressing culture. There is no such thing as a Latino race, there never has been. There never will be. There is only one race and that is what the show brought out. That is the human race period.

Edward James Olmos

The conflicts driven by identity politics intertwine the issues of race, ethnicity, culture, and religion with class, gender, sex, and sexuality. The tendency for both SF fans and academics is to concentrate on only a single strand at a time, given how complex, conflicted, and chimerical these subjects remain in public discourse and SF narratives. Some, like actor Edward James Olmos, who plays Admiral Bill Adama on *BSG*, argue

that “race” is an illusion, a lie perpetuated through ignorance and misunderstanding; others contend that to ignore the legacy of slavery and racism in America is to perpetuate racism and white privilege. Within the context of this study, *BSG* is a post-cataclysmic narrative that uses questions of difference to reveal the tensions within Colonial society even after its near genocide, but it also tells the story of how humans and Cylons come together in an alliance, and how their cultures transform over the five year-long epic. The series seeks to dispel any sense of racial or even species difference as the human race evolves, and finds that they are more closely allied to their “alien” creations than they thought.

Where the British SF critic Edward James states that many writers create post-racial futures to avoid race, Elisabeth Anne Leonard, Isiah Lavender III, and others continue to argue that the depiction of the “Other” (aliens, cyborgs, robots, etc.) are elaborations of racism and white economic and political supremacy.<sup>124</sup> But rather than attempting to deal with the construction of race and complexity of multiethnic SF narratives, some choose to remain fixated on the “black/white” question, justifying this in part by suggesting that Native Americans and Asians are used in SF because they are exotic (a sense of Said’s Orientalism, here) but the “African” is a depiction of the primitive or slave.<sup>125</sup> The difficulty with this position is that slavery is not just a black/white issue; Native Americans were owned and transported as slaves, while others owned African slaves.<sup>126</sup> In criticizing SF media, Despina Kakoudaki, and Matthew Gumbert and Christopher Deis who deal with *BSG* in particular, also focus on the use of

black actors and the friction within narrative attempts to present a unified human response in the face of disaster and genocide.<sup>127</sup>

An important distinction regarding *BSG* is that it is not a depiction of just an American metaphor, but one that encompasses the West—or possibly all developed nations; but even these allusions do not remain static within the series. Deis argues that part of the work that *BSG* does is to “make more visible the social consequences of racial hierarchies,” but in the world of the Twelve Colonies visible ethnic difference is not the sole basis of these hierarchies, nor is it within the Cylons. In this universe, “race” is not determined by skin color, but by planetary origin which encodes a sense of class structure. Gumbert argues that the audience reads race in the ethnicity of the actors, so even the choice of a multiethnic cast must engage racial hierarchies and histories, and while this is a valid position, it privileges ethnicity and American relations of race and class without taking into account the factors of religion and Colony hierarchies within the twelve colonies. In an attempt to develop a holistic view of the multiple representations within *BSG*, the Cylons and Colonials must both be considered in respect to each other and to their internal divisions. The focus of this discussion is on how the post-cataclysm experience unifies or further divides each species without just accepting the easy example of the child Hera as a hybrid of both Cylons and Humans.

The Cylons are a distinct, cybernetic (created), asexually reproducing species with a finite set of “ethnic” expressions. Cylons tend to be skeptics or monotheists, some of whom are particularly evangelical. Among the Cylons, there are twelve models: the eight “significant” models and the “Final Five.” The Eight significant models or series download and share consciousness and exist as multiple copies of the same form that are

not telepathically linked, but can anticipate what another of their line will do or say. When one downloads into a new body, it updates the memory matrix with its experiences and assimilates any new uploads to the series' archive. In Cylon politics, the models vote as one, until a rupture within the Eights (Sharons) helps spark the Cylon civil war. The first model, One (John/Cavil) is a late-middle aged white male who is both an atheist and is intent on human genocide. The Twos (Leoben Conoy) are white, middle-aged, male, and a blend of messianic and mystical in their pursuit of Kara Thrace (Starbuck) and eventually the human-Cylon alliance. D'Anna Biers is a white, middle-aged female template for the Threes; she also becomes a religious fanatic. The Fours (Simon O'Neill) are rational (often doctors and scientists), black, middle-aged male models. One of the Simons rejects the order to kill his human family (the child was not his) and chooses suicide instead, a rejection of the Cylon "plan" and the orders of the Ones.<sup>128</sup> The Fives (Aaron Doral) are young white males and apparently religious skeptics. The Sixes (Caprica-Six, but also Gina, Natalie, Shelly, etc.), young white females, are the most prevalent series in the storyline. They produce significant leaders, religious proselytizers, the lover of Gaius Baltar, and later Colonel Tigh. Known only as Daniel, the Sevens are destroyed by the Ones before the second war begins. The Eights are the most prevalent models; two are especially significant within the fleet as Colonial soldiers: Sharon Valerii (Boomer) and Sharon Agathon (Athena). The Eights are young, females of Asian ethnotype.

The "Final Five" or "the Five" are individual and unique models and part of the lost thirteenth tribe who left Kobol to settle Earth—an entire Cylon world destroyed in the last war cycle, 2,000 years ago. Four of the Five are among the human fleet: Samuel

Anders, Tory Foster, Saul Tigh, and Galen Tyrol. Ellen Tigh is downloaded after being executed by Saul Tigh on New Caprica, and is held captive by a One (John) until season 4.5. The Ones know who the Five are, but the rest of the Cylons do not, other than the Threes, who have a distorted awareness of them. In terms of human ethnicities, three are white males, one white female, and one Hindi female (Tory). Where the others remain more or less committed to the fleet and humanity, Tory more completely embraces her Cylon identity and acts on her own desires. As the only non-white among the Five, her behavior can be interpreted as a rejection of colonial hegemony, but also as resistance to cooperation, assimilation, and the multicultural nature of the Cylon-Human alliance. While aid to the President, before becoming aware of her Cylon identity, Tory is involved in the unsuccessful attempt to steal the election from Tom Zarek.<sup>129</sup> Once she realizes her Cylon identity, she is responsible for the murder of Cally Tyrol in an attempt to maintain the cover of the Four among the fleet,<sup>130</sup> and later forcefully pushes for the end of the human-Cylon alliance in favor of the Cylons seeking their own fate.<sup>131</sup> Over the course of the series, Tory becomes more individualistic if not selfish, and her death in the series finale at the hands of her once-lover, Galen Tyrol, is an indictment of her lack of commitment to either a Cylon or a Cylon and human future.<sup>132</sup>

The human Colonials appear to match the range of ethnicities available on Earth<sup>133</sup> but internal “racial” hierarchies are defined by home world/colony, not by ethnicity—and these racial tensions continue even after the near-genocide reduces the (known) human population from nearly 50 billion to 50,000. Among the survivors of the fleet, class inequality and cultural intolerance remain, but religion is possibly the most

contentious issue ranging from near-fanatic conservatism to secularism, to mysticism among those who, by the end of the series, declare Baltar a prophet of another monotheistic religion. Ethnic diversity was one of Ronald Moore's stated goals in the creation of the reimagined *BSG*, but fans and academics have both given mixed responses to the recasting of Colonel Tigh and Boomer, black and male in the original series, as a white male and Asian female, respectively. In some instances, these critics ignore the character of Anastasia Dualla, who is a new (black) bridge officer. This same strand of identity politics also tends to ignore the fact that Edward James Olmos and his son Bodie Olmos (Brendan "Hot Dog" Costanza) bring Hispanics/Latinos into space, and confuse that of Felix Gaeta (an Italian name). Perhaps it is because of their apparent betrayals<sup>134</sup> to the Galactica "family" that many have attacked Tory and Felix in some cases using oblique references to their apparent ethnicity on fan forums. Much of the Colonial backstory is offered in pieces throughout the series, in Moore's podcasts, or after the series ended in the short-lived *Caprica* (2010-1011) spin-off on the SyFy Channel, meaning that a complete understanding of the ethnic and racial dimensions of the series requires extending beyond the series canon itself.

The Twelve Colonies of Kobol were settled after the exodus from Kobol at the end of the last cycle of human/Cylon wars. "Colonial Day" explains that these were initially sovereign worlds that came together as the United Colonies of Kobol approximately fifty-two years before the Cylon destruction of the colonies. Deis argues that "questions and equality and opportunity still affect one's ability to escape" the destruction of the colonies. He also contends that these inequalities belie the apparent post-racial, multiethnic appearance of the cast, especially the integrated crew of the

*Galactica* itself.<sup>135</sup> Issues of equality and opportunity persist among the survivors and are integral to the stories of the episodes “Bastille Day” (1.03), “The Woman King” (3.14), and “Dirty Hands” (3.16). Tom Zarek champions the workers of Sagittauron, whom he argues have been treated as slaves by the colony’s caste system, and that as the poorest, have been exploited by the rest.<sup>136</sup> The abuse on Sagittauron is similar to that Baltar describes on Aerilon, though not as severe. Galen Tyrol’s exegesis in “Dirty Hands” regarding the dangerous and difficult working conditions for laborers among the fleet, many of whom come from the poorer colonies (Aerilon, Sagittauron, Tauron), and the relative comfort of those who come from the rich worlds (Caprica and Picon) reveals that a caste system is solidifying within the fleet. Galen leads a brief general strike until Adama threatens to shoot Cally, but after the latest emergency passes he, as leader of the Labor Union, and President Roslin negotiate an improvement in conditions, better safety, and ways to keep professions from becoming hereditary or allowing the old social inequalities to continue among the fleet.

Although the Colonists are polytheists, many become secular and fall away from religion before the destruction of the Colonies. Others, like the Gemenese and Sagittaurons, are religious fundamentalists, although it is surprising how many are among the fleet given how poor their colonies are. The situation of the Colonists of Gemenon continues the social divisions; they tend toward (but are not all) religious fundamentalists who believe in literal interpretations of the Scrolls of Pithia (their foundational religious texts). In “The Woman King,” President Roslin is forced to ban abortion—one of the Gemenese tenets and necessary for their political support, but also because there are so



few humans left that every single birth is necessary to stave off extinction. In keeping with the episode's religious fundamentalism, the Sagittaurons are revealed to reject modern medicine (like Christian Scientists). Against the resistance and disdain of many of the other Colonials, Karl Agathon (Helo) eventually helps prove that one of the *Galactica*'s doctors is "mercy killing" the Sagittaurons (racial selection or genocide) to preserve diminishing medical supplies. The interactions among the crew make it clear that the populace of a specific Colony does not share the same ethnotype, and in many cases neither do they share the dominant religion, making the distinction one of colony or home planet alone. But the divisions in *BSG*, at least after the near-genocide, speak to the jealousy and attacks on the racial Other over scarce and diminished resources—behavior Gitlin mentions among immigrants to America in the nineteenth century, and still a factor in the contemporary culture wars during the Great Recession of the early twenty-first century.

The Cylons appear unified in their ultimate goals at the beginning of the series, but by the end of the fourth season their consensus has shattered. The plan of the Cavil faction (Ones, Fours, and Fives) to lobotomize the Centurions and Raiders is resisted and results in a civil war. The Cavil faction lures the "rebel faction" (Twos, Sixes, Eights) into a trap from which only a single damaged baseship escapes. The rebel faction finds and joins the *Galactica*, using their technology to help sustain the heavily damaged and failing battlestar. The Cylons join the Colonial pilots, and their Centurions become the infantry/ground troops for the final assault on the last Cylon base in the series finale. Gaeta and Zarek stage their coup d'état in an attempt to end the alliance, but are defeated by the combined efforts of Adama, Roslin, their Cylon allies, including most of the Fives.

The failure of the coup, and the destruction of the Cavil faction leave the remaining humans and Cylons to colonize the habitable planet they call “Earth.” This is a multiethnic and technically a multispecies “nation” that settles the planet, but their unification is brief as they disperse across the surface of the planet and make a point not to rebuild a modern industrial society. The loss of close to half of the post-attack human survivors, and the destruction of the Cylon resurrection ship and technology means that these fragments of two species will be subsumed into far more numerous natives of this planet. This can be read as a warning that if the divisions and competition between not just American immigrant and “native” cultures, but also among the peoples of Earth are not addressed in a manner that moves beyond competition and violence that the fate of humanity itself is in question—the final warning of the *BSG* metanarrative.

### **Conclusion**

There is a tendency to look at the early representations of aliens and robots as the racial Other in order to avoid dealing with the discomfort involved in considering race in an American context. But in more recent SF, the robot and cyborg have become reflections of humanity’s potential for “good” and “evil,” suggested by the range of Cylon actions in *BSG*. In reality, advances in biological and space sciences increase the likelihood of journeys into the cosmos and the chances of meeting actual alien species; the alien invasion is the worst-case scenario, and space opera (*Star Trek*, etc.) is often the most idealized. But post-cataclysmic SF turns the gaze of creators and audience inward, to examine the cracks and social distortions that exist in society before the pieces enter the melting pot of disaster. In some cases the crucible purifies and blends a multiethnic

and tolerant nation, such as the final outcome of Butler's *Parables* and in *Jeremiah* and *BSG*. In others, the fragments are not gathered, but learn to coexist, as in the Emberverses, and to some extent in *Bone Dance*. Those that deal with the nuclear fear and anxiety of the 1980s, as with the earlier texts of the 1950s and 1960s, do not posit a reformed United States and the communities they sketch have either forgotten their history, or remember only the faintest of myths of Americans who strode the stars and sailed the oceans. In many of these texts, the attempts to recreate or preserve racial divisions and barriers impedes survival and regeneration, and weakens the isolated communities when it does not lead them to another round of destruction. In some sense these are post-immigrant nations where diversity must not only be accepted but also celebrated, and where religious toleration today may allow the acceptance of faiths and traditions beyond a purely rational and secular basis, providing a more inclusive future.

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph A Califano Jr., "What Was Really Great About The Great Society: The truth behind the conservative myths," *The Washington Monthly Online*, October 1999, "<http://www.washingtonmonthly.com/features/1999/9910.califano.html>," Accessed July 1, 2011.

<sup>2</sup> In *Dark Matter* a number of authors comment on the few options for SF that engages with race in an intelligent and sensitive matter. This group of writers of color, Samuel R Delany, Charles R Saunders, Walter Mosely, Paul D Miller (DJ Spooky), Octavia Butler, and Sheree R Thomas speak from within the field. Much more recent scholarship continues to debate whether the field is largely race-blind, or avoids race by projecting post-racial and post-ethnic futures. Most histories of SF and literary companions present this as a given until the late 1960s. Delany and Harlan Ellison have both commented on the fact that in the early era of SF submissions were literally blind as everything was handled by mail, so it may never be possible to actually determine how many non-white authors contributed to the golden age of science fiction.

<sup>3</sup> Samuel R Delany, "Racism in Science Fiction," in *Dark Matter: A Century of Science Fiction from the African Diaspora*, edited by Sheree R. Thomas, (New York: Warner Books, 2000) 383-397; 387-88.

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<sup>4</sup> Almost every science fiction companion or critical anthology published in the 1990s and later has a section on race and science fiction and talk about the early importance of Samuel R Delany in the 1960s and Octavia Butler in the late 1970s, but as Sandra M. Grayson points out in *Visions of the Third Millennium*, most non-white writers were black and numbered only a handful even beyond the year 2000. Sandra M Grayson, *Visions of the Third Millennium: Black Science Fiction Novelists Write the Future*, (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2003).

<sup>5</sup> Ángel Mateos-Aparicio Martín-Albo, “The Frontier Myth and Racial Politics,” in *The Postnational Fantasy: Essays on Postcolonialism, Cosmopolitics and Science Fiction*, edited by Masood Ashraf Raja, et al., (Jefferson: McFarland and Co., 2011), 218.

<sup>6</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, (New York: Verso Books, 1991), 6.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 61-63.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 202.

<sup>9</sup> Anderson uses the term Creole in the fashion of the Spanish and Portuguese. Creole in these terms means those of European heritage (blood) born in the New World as opposed to the *Peninsulars* who were born in Europe (Iberian peninsula) and emigrated. In the U.S., Creole also refers to those of mixed heritage in Louisiana and Mississippi. At one point it was just those of French heritage, but later it grew to encompass French, Spanish, Caribbean, especially when those it referred to spoke a patois of these languages.

<sup>10</sup> Todd Gitlin, *The Twilight of Common Dreams: Why America is Wracked by Culture Wars*, (New York: Henry Holt and Company, Inc., 1995), 45.

<sup>11</sup> Scholars and activists often use First Nations to refer to the indigenous peoples of North America rather than Indians or Native Americans, both of which are regarded as pejorative by some to whom it is applied, and which increase the marginalization of these peoples as described by Sierra S. Adare, “*Indian*” *Stereotypes in TV Science Fiction: First Nations’ Voices Speak Out*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005), xiii. I acknowledge this, but I will use both First Nations and Native Americans in this study out of stylistic considerations more than anything else.

<sup>12</sup> But the first post-colonial Americans were a fairly pale blend of English, German, Dutch, and Swedes, and remained so even with the later addition of former French and Spanish colonists, and the successive waves of northern European immigrants in the mid-nineteenth century.

The seventeenth century colony of New Sweden included Swedes, Finns, and some

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Germans in Swedish service. The three counties that were allowed to remain a “Swedish nation” were officially assimilated into Pennsylvania in 1681. Significant Swedish immigration would not occur again until the 1880s.

The Swedish Colonial Society, “A Brief History of New Sweden in America,” History, Last Modified June 10, 2010. “<http://www.colonialswedes.org/History/History.html>” Accessed July 1, 2011.

<sup>13</sup> Throughout this study I will use the term “black” in place of African-American, Afro-Americans, and Afro-Caribbeans. I take this usage from Samuel R. Delany who explains in his essay, “Racism in Science Fiction,” that “the small ‘b’ on ‘black’ is a very significant letter, an attempt to ironize and detranscendentalize the whole concept of race, to tender it provisional and contingent.” Black also stands in for the terms “colored” or “brown people,” used by other critics, although these often read as “non-white” with implied notions of hierarchy and hegemony. The use of black in the U.S. incorporates those with more than one ethnicity as “mixed-blood” still contends with the fallout of the “one drop” rule. What is ironic is that today many claim First nations membership through a mythic family “Indian princess” or distant and undocumented relation just as others were forced to “pass” as white and disavow their non-white ancestors in the past. In certain regions of the U.S. a more “refined” sense of ethnic heritage (and stigma) as developed, such as the Cajun use of “redbone” for someone with First nations ancestors, but for the most part academics have taken to using everything from Creole, to Mestizo, Mulatto, Coyote, and Métis. Latino is sometimes used too broadly to include everyone south of the U.S. border by associating based on a colonized identity drawn from the Europe’s Iberian peninsula; it combines all Hispanics, Chicana/o, and those with more complex identities within the borderlands. It contemporary application also incorporates the more complex identities of subnational communities within Brazil and Argentina, and their different immigrant and slave experiences. Samuel R Delany, “Racism in Science Fiction,” in *Dark Matter*, edited by Sheree R Thomas, (New York: Warner Books, 2000).

<sup>14</sup> Todd Gitlin, *The Twilight of Common Dreams*, 45.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>16</sup> James Davison Hunter. *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America*, (New York: Basic Books, 1991), 42.

<sup>17</sup> Patrick J Buchanan, 1992 Republican National Convention Speech, August 17, 1992, in the Archives of the official website of Patrick J Buchanan, “<http://buchanan.org/blog/1992-republican-national-convention-speech-148>,” Accessed July 10, 2011.

<sup>18</sup> Samuel P Huntington, *Who Are We?: The Challenges to America’s National Identity*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004), 59-68.

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<sup>19</sup> It is important to note that shortly after the disintegration of the USSR its former nuclear weapons became a cause for concern, especially as some experts feared that they were sold to rogue non-governmental powers including Al Qaeda, Mexican drug cartels, or even specific governments such as Iran, Libya, and Iraq. Stephen Younger refers to the claims of retired Russian general Alexander Lebed in 1996 and the claim of missing “Suitcase bombs,” as well as the ongoing rumors of missing or stolen warheads; Graham Allison points to the CIA reports of Al Qaeda operatives repeatedly traveling to central Asian states, supposedly to purchase nuclear materials; however, Thomas C. Reed and Danny Stillman emphasize that by 1996 “the formerly nuclear states of the former Soviet Union all turned in their nuclear weapons, as they had agreed to do”—many in accordance with the SALT I Treaty. The rumors of stolen Soviet warheads and “loose” backpack bombs have remained unsubstantiated and elements of various techno-thriller films including *The Peacemaker* (1997) and *The World is Not Enough* (1999). Stephen M. Younger, *The Bomb: A New History*, (New York: Ecco, 2009), 152-53. Graham Allison, *Nuclear Terrorism: The Ultimate Preventable Catastrophe*, (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 2004), 26-27. Thomas C. Reed and Danny B. Stillman, *The Nuclear Express: A Political History of the Bomb and its Proliferation*, (Minneapolis: Zenith Press, 2009), 219.

<sup>20</sup> Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and The Last Man*, (New York: Free Press, 2006), 346-47.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, xv-xvi.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, xi.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, xii.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>25</sup> Samuel P Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 252-54.

<sup>26</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, and Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the national question in the New Europe*, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996).

<sup>27</sup> Samuel P Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, 28-29.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*: 19-21.

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>30</sup> Huntington quotes projections made by the U.S. Census Bureau that estimates that by 2050 the American population will be 23 percent Hispanic, 16 percent black and 10 percent Asian-American.

Samuel P. Huntington, "If not Civilizations, What?: Paradigms of the Post-Cold War World," in *The Clash of Civilizations? The Debate*, Foreign Affairs, (New York: W. W. Norton & Co, 1996), 61.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 61-62.

<sup>33</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands La Frontera: The New Mestiza* 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1999), 25-26.

<sup>34</sup> Bell hooks, *Black Looks: race and representation*, (Boston: South End Press, 1992), 1-2.

<sup>35</sup> José David Saldívar, *Border Matters: Remapping American Cultural Studies*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), ix-x.

<sup>36</sup> Robert D Kaplan, "Was Democracy Just a Moment?" in *The Atlantic*, December 1997. "<http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1997/12/was-democracy-just-a-moment/6022/>" Accessed June 23, 2011. Vladimir Tismaneanu, *Fantasies of Salvation: Democracy, Nationalism, and Myth in Post-Communist Europe*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).

<sup>37</sup> Tismaneanu, *Fantasies of Salvation*, 162.

<sup>38</sup> Robert D Kaplan, *The Coming Anarchy: Shattering the Dreams of the Post Cold War*, (New York: Vintage Books, 2000), 20.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 28-29.

<sup>41</sup> Edward W Said, "The Clash of Ignorance," *The Nation*, October 4, 2001, accessed June 20, 2011, "<http://www.thenation.com/article/clash-ignorance.>"

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<sup>42</sup> Niall Ferguson, “Clashing Civilizations or Mad Mullahs: The United States Between Informal and Formal Empire,” in *The Age of Terror: America and the World After September 11*, edited by Strobe Talbott and Nayan Chanda, (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 113-41.

<sup>43</sup> Paul Kennedy, “Maintaining American Power: From Injury to Recovery,” in *The Age of Terror: America and the World After September 11*, edited by Strobe Talbott and Nayan Chanda, (New York: basic Books, 2001), 53-79.

<sup>44</sup> Francis Fukuyama, “History and September 11,” in *Worlds in Collision: Terror and the Future of Global Order*, edited by Ken Booth and Time Dunne, (Basingstoke & New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 27-36.

<sup>45</sup> “White House pressed on ‘mission accomplished’ sign,” CNN Politics, October 29, 2003, “[http://articles.cnn.com/2003-10-28/politics/mission.accomplished\\_1\\_aircraft-carrier-conrad-chun-banner?\\_s=PM:ALLPOLITICS](http://articles.cnn.com/2003-10-28/politics/mission.accomplished_1_aircraft-carrier-conrad-chun-banner?_s=PM:ALLPOLITICS)” Accessed July 10, 2011.

<sup>46</sup> *Star Trek* is one of the few franchises to have the longevity to slowly evolve from a Cold War stance toward new challenges and enemies. The Organians imposed an armistice between the Federation and the Klingons in the original series before an actual peace treaty was eventually signed in *Star Trek VI: The Undiscovered Country* (1991). DC Comics’ *The Legion* had its War with the Khund Empire, before being overwhelmed from within by the Dominators in the dystopian “Five Years Later” storyline of the early 1990s, itself highly reflective of the “Culture war” metaphors. The threat to Earth in *Buck Rogers* was the Draconian Empire, but only briefly, but the show used the actor Michael Ansara in the role of (Killer) Kane, giving audiences an SF cross-over as Ansara played the roles of the Klingon Commander Kang in several *Star Trek: TOS* episodes and again in *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*.

There are a number of other examples that affirm this inevitable view of nuclear war including *The Planet of the Apes* original franchise, the Ralph Bakshi movie *Wizards* (1977), and even in the obliteration of the planet Aldebarron in the original *Star Wars* (1977), although none of these use the war in quite the same way to clear the way for a future utopia. On a separate tangent are Octavia Butler’s three novels that comprise the Xenogenesis series, itself predicated on a nuclear war that leaves no more than a handful of human survivors for the alien Oankali to rescue and hold in stasis until they have finished repairing the earth...250 years later.

<sup>47</sup> David Seed, *American Science Fiction and the Cold War*, 177-178, 183.

<sup>48</sup> A number of recent critical anthologies have started to sum up the primary movements within SF literature and media during the 1990s. Judith Berman’s article is a brief overview and more directed toward the lack of apparent unity in the genre and among its



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writers from her perspective. Paul Kinkaid suggests that the new Space Opera was the most commercially successful and the British Renaissance was the most critically significant, although the New Weird and Slipstream works overlap but are not limited to British writers.

Judith Berman, "Science Fiction without the Future" in *Speculations on Speculation*, edited by James Gunn and Matthew Candelaria, (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2005), 34-42; and Paul Kincaid, "Fiction Since 1992," in *The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction*, edited by Mark Bould, et al., (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), 174-82.

<sup>49</sup> Samuel R Delany, "Racism in Science Fiction."

<sup>50</sup> In particular Donald M Hassler "The Academic Pioneers of Science Fiction Criticism, 1940-1980" in *Science Fiction Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (July, 1999), 213-31.

<sup>51</sup> Quoted from *History-science-vision* (New York: Oxford UP, 1977), 187-9, in Edward James, "Yellow, black, metal and tentacled: the race question in American science fiction" in *Science fiction, social conflict and war*, edited by Philip John Davies, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), 26-49; 27.

<sup>52</sup> Edward James, "Yellow, black, metal and tentacled," 27.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>56</sup> Elisabeth Anne Leonard, "Race and ethnicity in science fiction," in *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction*, edited by Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 253-63; 255.

<sup>57</sup> Patrick B. Sharp, *Savage Perils: Racial Frontiers and Nuclear Apocalypse in American Culture*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007), 200-02.

<sup>58</sup> In 1990 James offers a more neutral response in saying that Heinlein emphasized that "an evil system is not the result of race, but of circumstance." Leonard's reading is much more critical and for the most part applies an anachronistic (early 21<sup>st</sup> century) perspective on Heinlein. Edward James, "The Race Question in American Science Fiction, 36; and Elisabeth Anne Leonard, "Race and Ethnicity in science fiction," 258.

<sup>59</sup> George Stewart, *Earth Abides*, 57-59.

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 72-75.

<sup>61</sup> Patrick Sharp, *Savage Perils*, 216-17.

<sup>62</sup> George Stewart, *Earth Abides*, 235.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 118.

<sup>65</sup> Philip Deloria's account of how Americans have adopted Indian attire, images, and traditions for both political and personal needs. Part of adopting certain aspects of First Nations is to differentiate themselves from Europeans and reinvigorate themselves (in Teddy Roosevelt's terms) and regenerate themselves in Richard Slotkin's argument. Philip Deloria, *Playing Indian*, (Stamford: Yale University Press, 1999).

<sup>66</sup> Virginia Historical Society, "Massive Resistance," *The Civil Rights Movement in Virginia*. Website component of an exhibition from February 7 - June 19, 2004. "<http://www.vahistorical.org/civilrights/massiveresistance.htm>" Web. Accessed July 1, 2011.

<sup>67</sup> Martha Bartter, *The Way to Ground Zero*, 223.

<sup>68</sup> Patrick Sharp, *Savage Perils*, 216-217.

<sup>69</sup> Pat Frank, *Alas, Babyon*, 200-03.

<sup>70</sup> Niven and Pournelle never explicitly name the city hall that becomes the center of government for the Stronghold, but Maureen Jellison comments on the limited restaurant options in Springfield and Porterville (126), and there is a Springville in a small valley east of Porterville. If this is an analog for the Stronghold's valley, then it is approximately 150 miles north of LAX.

<sup>71</sup> Regents of the University of California v. Bakke, 438 U.S. 265, 1978.

<sup>72</sup> Michael A. Ventralla, "Interview with Hugo Nominated Author Steven Barnes," on Michael A. Ventralla's Blog, March 24, 2010, "<http://michaelaventralla.wordpress.com/2010/03/24/interview-with-hugo-nominated-author-steven-barnes/>," Accessed July 1, 2011.

<sup>73</sup> Adam Roberts, *Science Fiction*, 98.

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- <sup>74</sup> Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle, *Lucifer's Hammer*, 577, 579.
- <sup>75</sup> Tule River Indian Tribe. Home page. "<http://www.tulerivertribe-nsn.gov/>" Web. Accessed July 20, 2011.
- <sup>76</sup> Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle, *Lucifer's Hammer*, 451.
- <sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 624.
- <sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 524-25, 553.
- <sup>79</sup> Todd Gitlin, *The Twilight of Common Dreams*, 78-79.
- <sup>80</sup> Sean Wilentz, *Age of Reagan*, 272-73.
- <sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.
- <sup>82</sup> Whitley Strieber and James Kunetka, *Warday*, 378.
- <sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 118, 159.
- <sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, *Warday*, 111.
- <sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, *Warday*, 234.
- <sup>86</sup> Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future of Los Angeles*, (London and New York: Verso Books, 1990), 180-82.
- <sup>87</sup> Whitley Strieber and James Kunetka, *Warday*, 226, 303.
- <sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 300-03.
- <sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 310.
- <sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 321.
- <sup>91</sup> David Brin, *The Postman*, 286.
- <sup>92</sup> David Seed, *American Science Fiction and the Cold War*, 179.

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<sup>93</sup> David Brin, *The Postman*, 37.

<sup>94</sup> Sean Wilentz, *The Age of Reagan*, 319.

<sup>95</sup> Todd Gitlin, *Twilight of American Dreams*, 233.

<sup>96</sup> Patrick Sharp presents a compelling case that this variant of the “yellow peril” theme in science fiction links directly to questions regarding the technological ability and sophistication of non-Western nations, in particular the persecution of Wen Ho Lee in connection with nuclear weapons technology at the end of the 1990s. Patrick B. Sharp, *Savage Perils*, 221-22.

<sup>97</sup> *The American Midwest: an interpretive encyclopedia*, edited by Richard Sisson, et al., (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 750-51.

<sup>98</sup> Emma Bull, *Bone Dance*, 27.

<sup>99</sup> Samuel P. Huntington. *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 204.

<sup>100</sup> Nalo Hopkinson, “Introduction” in *So Long Been Dreaming: Postcolonial Science Fiction & Fantasy*, edited by Nalo Hopkinson and Uppinder Mehan, (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2004), 7.

<sup>101</sup> Octavia Butler, *Parable of the Sower*, (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 1993), 337.

<sup>102</sup> Sandra M. Grayson, *Visions of the Third Millennium: Black Science Fiction Novelists Write the Future*, (Trenton and Asmara: Africa World Press, 2003), 18-20.

<sup>103</sup> Octavia Butler, *Parable of the Sower*, 187.

<sup>104</sup> Octavia Butler, *Parable of the Talents*, (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 1998), 88.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 229-30.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 229-30.

<sup>107</sup> While a complete history of ethnic and racial intimidation has not yet been written, Project Vote has published a number of reports on the national elections of 2000, 2004,

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and 2008 on their website. "Voter Intimidation," Project Vote, "<http://www.projectvote.org/voter-intimidation.html>," Accessed June 10, 2011.

<sup>108</sup> Sean Wilentz, *The Age of Reagan*, 435-37.

<sup>109</sup> Morris Berman, *Dark Ages America: The Final Phase of Empire*, revised edition, (New York: WW Norton & Co., 2007), 10-11.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 257-59.

<sup>111</sup> In one episode (117, "Out of the Ashes") Kurdy reminisces about how his father used to take him out and teach him about the constellations. Yet in another episode (107, "City of Roses"), he remembers having hidden in his closet as a child, the apparent victim of child abuse. There is no reconciliation of these experiences and other memories, but the suggestion is that his family either experienced an economic crisis, or he lost his father years before the Big Death. Unfortunately, none of this is clearly and explicitly stated, but for Jeremiah the audience is given flashback scenes that clarify his family's relative status and his father's role as a scientist and researcher.

<sup>112</sup> Only while rereading *Race Matters* did I notice the quote of Henry Louis Gates, Jr., who called Cornell West "our Black Jeremiah." My use of West in the section of *Jeremiah* is based on the nature of his comments on the project of democracy, not this line.

<sup>113</sup> Cornell West, *Race Matters*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1994); 155.

<sup>114</sup> According to the US census Bureau, 84% of the population of Kansas reports themselves as white, 6% black, 2% Asian, and 1% Native American; 10% reported Hispanic, overlapping with those who answered the 2000 Census as white. U.S. Census Bureau. Quick State and County Facts: Kansas. Comparative data from the 2000 and 2010 Census. "<http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/20000.html>" Accessed July 20, 2011.

<sup>115</sup> "A.K.A.," *Jericho*, episode 118, CBS. April 11, 2007.

<sup>116</sup> "Semper Fidelis" *Jericho*, episode 115, CBS, March 14, 2007.

<sup>117</sup> "Winter's End," *Jericho*, episode 116, CBS, March 28, 2007.

<sup>118</sup> David Johnston and John M. Broder, "F.B.I. Says Guards Killed 14 Iraqis Without Cause," *The New York Times*, November 14, 2007, accessed July 30, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/14/world/middleeast/14blackwater.html>.

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- 119 “Rogue River” and “Winter’s End.”
- 120 “Sedition,” *Jericho*, episode 206, CBS, March 18, 2008.
- 121 “Semper Fidelis”
- 122 S.M. Stirling, *The Scourge of God*, (New York: ROC Books, 2008), 369.
- 123 *Ibid.*, 369.
- 124 Elisabeth Anne Leonard, “Race and ethnicity in science fiction,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction*, edited by Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 253-62.  
Isiah Lavender III, “Critical race theory” in *The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction*, edited by Mark Bould, et al., (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), 185-92.
- 125 “Whereas Native Americans and Asians provide exotic images, in the sf imagination Africa evokes a sense of primitivism.”  
Isiah Lavender III, “Critical Race Theory,” 188.
- 126 Colin G. Calloway, *First Peoples: A Documentary Survey of American Indian History*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, (Boston and New York: Bedford St. Martins, 2008).
- 127 Despina Kakoudaki, “Spectacles of History: Race Relations, Melodrama, and the Science Fiction/Disaster Film,” in *Camera Obscura* 50, Volume 17, No. 2 (Duke University Press, 2002), 108-53.  
Matthew Gumbert, “Hybridity’s End,” in *Cylons in America: Critical Studies in Battlestar Galactica*, edited by Tiffany Potter and C.W. Marshall, (New York and London: Continuum Books, 2008), 143-155.  
Christopher Deis, “Erasing Difference: The Cylons as Racial Other,” in *Cylons in America: Critical Studies in Battlestar Galactica*, edited by Tiffany Potter and C.W. Marshall, (New York and London: Continuum Books, 2008), 156-68.
- 128 *Battlestar Galactica: The Plan* (Syfy, 2010).
- 129 “Lay Down Your Burdens, Part II,” *Battlestar Galactica*, episode 220, SyFy Channel, September 19, 2006.
- 130 “The Ties that Bind,” *Battlestar Galactica*, episode 403, SyFy Channel, April 18, 2008.

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<sup>131</sup> “No Exit,” *Battlestar Galactica*, episode 417, SyFy Channel, February 13, 2009.

<sup>132</sup> “Daybreak (Part 2)” *Battlestar Galactica*, episode 422, SyFy Channel, March 20, 2009.

<sup>133</sup> Not every ethnotype on Earth is represented in the series, but to pick one particular type, say “pure blood” Mongolian, Sioux, or the Matis of the Amazon, and argue that their lack is significant is to ignore the limitations of SF television. It is also quite possible that these elisions suggest that in the move from Kobol that the smallest minorities were assimilated, in much the same way that “Hispanic” and “Chicana/o” ethnicities incorporate minority expressions from various African and Native American ethnotypes in various degrees.

<sup>134</sup> Tory kills Cally and Felix stages a coup on the *Galactica* that divides the fleet and very nearly succeeds.

<sup>135</sup> Christopher Deis, “Erasing Difference,” 159.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.

## Chapter 5: Disastrous Difference:

### Sex, Sexuality, and Gender in Post-Cataclysm

“Within the context of most human societies to date, women of strength and achievement are exceptions to the rule. This is reflected in novels about the past or present. Science fiction and fantasy, on the other hand, allow one to imagine and write about worlds where strong independent women are the rule, or to construct a society whose features can illuminate the workings of our own.”

Pamela Sargent, *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* (Autumn 1977)

“The only good thing about Hammerfall, women’s lib was dead milliseconds after Hammerstrike . . . .”

Al Hardy, *Lucifer’s Hammer* (1977)<sup>1</sup>

“Bursts of artillery fire, mass strikes, massacred protesters, bomb explosions—these are our images of revolution. But some revolutions are harder to recognize: no cataclysms mark their beginnings or ends, no casualties are left lying in pools of blood. Though people may suffer greatly, their pain is hidden from public view. Such was the case with the American women’s movement.”

Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open*

Over the course of the past forty years post-cataclysmic texts have projected the fragility of the American promise through a range of cautionary tales that incorporate resource depletion, economic collapse, totalitarian or military rule, and the increasing ethnic and cultural divisions within American society. But over this same span the depictions of evolving constructions of gender or biological and sexual difference are not as frequently pessimistic; while some texts regress toward medieval or frontier stereotypes of subordinated and threatened women, others present social and political



parity. This divergence, if not optimism, hinges on the distinction between post-apocalyptic and post-cataclysmic narratives. Several texts set themselves in the far future, when the old culture and its restriction of sexual minorities and gender has been forgotten, but these post-apocalypses do not imagine the point of collapse and the often painful transition from the old world to the new. Post-cataclysmic stories, however, deal with the disaster and its immediate fallout and by doing so create a metaphor that visualizes the social dislocation, anxiety, and fear of many men and social conservatives as the world spins out of (their) control, thus offering insights into contemporary conflicts centered around sexuality, identity, and gender. While there is much to be gained by reading these texts from within feminist and queer theoretical frameworks, this study uses a materialist and humanist reading to explore post-cataclysmic constructions of gender and sexuality after the limits imposed by modernity are erased through disaster. Since the 1970s post-cataclysms have shifted from initially regressive depictions of women and gender roles, to their rarified appearances in the 1980s, but then into more diverse characters in the 1990s, and after 2000, women, men, and increasingly, gay protagonists all holding positions of power and control. Despite the collapse of American social values and civil liberties in post-cataclysmic narratives, gender equality and tolerance for sexual difference survive. In many cases, these are the only forms of social progress to remain within these societies where democratic ideals have failed, and more often than not, these societies are presented as *more* progressive regarding gender and sexuality than our contemporary America.

The difficulty in discussing feminist theory is that there are so many different, fractured interpretations of feminism. The basic tenets of Second Wave feminism in the

1960s and 1970s argued for equal rights in professional and political life, wage parity and fair working hours and conditions, and then shifted to the quest for reproductive rights that (briefly) culminated in the landmark *Roe vs. Wade* decision in 1973. But within the women's movement, the consensus quickly splintered as individual groups of women identified their concerns not only on the basis of gender, but also on the basis of generation, sexuality, ethnicity, and class. Lesbian feminists argued that heterosexual women were "sleeping with the enemy" and diminished the cause, and black women argued that white women could not understand the double oppression of being both a woman and a person of color, while working women contended that suburban housewives were out of touch with their reality. Third wave feminism tried to account for all these disparate voices within the women's movement, and gave rise to number of smaller, more focused (and often narrow) groups. In many ways, the diversity of the women's movement contributed to its instability, and to the backlash of patriarchal society that declared feminism's fractures to be proof of its weakness. In its vision of other worlds, alien encounters, utopias, dystopias and cataclysm, SF reflects the strife and political contention over several social issues, including the quest for sexual equality.

As the golden age of SF came to a close in the early 1960s, much of the genre languished in near-exhausted repetitions of worn formulas and suburban (largely white, middle-class) tropes. When the New Wave's experimentation and break from tradition stretched beyond these dull and comfortable spaces, it attracted new readers, although it also alienated a significant number of fans. This became a critical point for the emergence of new narratives that blended the experiments in literature and film "with the potential to radically reconceptualize power relations."<sup>2</sup> By the early 1970s the New

Wave had crested, but fresh approaches that dealt with more personal and cultural perspectives continued, and this period became a point of emergence for themes dealing with race, ethnicity, and non-Western cultures. Patricia Melzer, in her feminist study of SF, stresses that this era also saw the introduction of “formerly taboo subjects, such as depictions of sexuality, violence, and race relations, accompanied by a growing appreciation of the ‘soft’ sciences.”<sup>3</sup> Perhaps most significantly the presence and influence of female writers also became more immediately apparent with the proliferation of texts that questioned “gender roles, racism, and class exploitation;”<sup>4</sup> these are woven into feminist and separatist-lesbian utopias in the 1970s and 1980s, and helped lay the groundwork for explorations of sexuality and queer themes in the 1990s and beyond.

The end of the 1960s and early 1970s was a critical juncture for SF because of the confluence of the women’s liberation movement, a surge of women into the SF fanbase, the beginning of the gay rights movement, and the creation of powerful post-apocalyptic feminist worlds. This period is now defined by some critics as the “golden age” of feminist SF.<sup>5</sup> Adam Roberts argues that the success of the original *Star Trek* series in representing “the encounter with the alien” and “questions of difference, of alien-ness and otherness, were also powerful and relevant to the female perspective on the old patriarchal world” and highlighting the function of difference, “where ‘alien’ becomes an encoding of ‘woman’.”<sup>6</sup> However, this particular wave of female-centered and often feminist stories abated by the late 1980s in part because they were cast by critics as only relevant to a small, self-involved and exclusive subgenre created for a like-minded audience; this backlash attempted to marginalize these stories and their influence within

mainstream SF. But these more radical separatist views also suffered from the exhaustion of the apocalypse thanks largely to the renewed nuclear fears of Reagan's policies and the fragmentation of the women's rights movement into the often conflicting identitarian goals of third wave feminism. While feminist utopias continued to inspire scholarship, after the fall of the USSR even these stories trickled off while most other post-apocalyptic SF was once again consigned to the genre sewer as out-of-date variants of military SF, where they were forgotten by most critics and editors until the cusp of the millennium.

In many respects mainstream SF roughly lumps disaster narratives, post-apocalyptic tales, and survivalist fiction together as a form of male-oriented adventure tales or military SF, as Clute and Nicholls explain at length in *the Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*.<sup>7</sup> The post-cataclysm became more a staple of comic books than SF literature and media during the 1990s, with notable exceptions that include authors such as the Emma Bull, Octavia Butler, P.D. James, and Margaret Atwood. It is not a coincidence that the proliferating academic articulations of queer theory in the early 1990s resonates with Bull and Butler and their use of non-male protagonists in situations that call both constructions of gender roles and sexual identity into question. In the early 1980s the initial progress made by the women's rights movement suffered from the failure to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment, and the gains made toward gay rights faltered with the emergence of HIV/AIDS and its depiction as the "gay disease" by social conservatives and portions of the Reagan administrations. Susan Faludi defines the resistance to feminist activism in the 1970s and 1980s in *Backlash* (1991), including the distortions of neofeminists and neoconservatives. Faludi's criticism prefigures and

resonates with Jaqueline Foertsch's *Enemies Within* (2001) and her articulation of the hostility, hysteria, and paranoia that conservatives appended to sexual identity as the awareness and fear of HIV grew through the 1980s and into the 1990s. These studies shed light on some of the underlying fear and paranoia that bled into the renewed post-apocalyptic fears of the millennial cusp. After 9/11, as Susan Faludi posits in *The Terror Dream* (2007), much of the media returned to more limited representations of women as victims who would only be "safe" within their homes. In contrast, much of the post-cataclysmic SF destabilizes this cultural narrative through strong female protagonists and the end of circumscribed gender definitions and roles after collapse. These texts reveal a disconnection between perceptions of equality and actual practice; they question whether America continues to become a more egalitarian society or if laws and politics are superficial lip service that masks a perpetuated patriarchy.

Where SF literature has become more critical and subversive in imagining difference and questioning the social constructions of gender and sexuality over the past forty years, SF media has a tendency to reify the difference as divisive and constraining by crafting an objectifying male gaze in terms of female bodies, sexual acts, and the visual spectacle of violence. Science fiction media is immensely popular; its audience exceeds that of SF literature by orders of magnitude. In part this is because of the use of spectacle in terms of F/X and digital effects that not only fulfill (most) fan expectations, but also in a way that also makes the fantastic accessible to a mundane audience. Keith Booker, Christine Cornea, Annette Kuhn, Vivian Sobchak, and J.P. Telotte, among others, have all explored the use of spectacle to amaze, shock, awe, and horrify audiences of the fantastic, but in post-cataclysmic SF this scope narrows to blasted wastelands or

post-collapse urban decay, and frequently employs scenes of gratuitous violence and carnage, where murder and rape are indiscriminate and salacious.<sup>8</sup> Such images are used to titillate (typically young male) audiences with their R-rating or to present heavy-handed distinctions between heroes and villains in a way that unfortunately supports the dismissive analysis of Clute and Nicholls.<sup>9</sup> At least one general perception created by movies like *Mad Max* (1979), *Waterworld* (1994), *The Postman* (1997), *The Road* (2009), and *The Book of Eli* (2010) is that cataclysm ends any equity between biological sexes and the diversification of gender roles by leaving women dependent on men for protection (and training); it is also typical in these texts for non-heterosexuals to be erased by cataclysm. Film (and where possible cable rather than broadcast TV) uses rape as a dramatic visual tool to dramatize the collapse of social norms and laws that is immediately evident in examples of survivalist fiction and apocalyptic horror. There is an entire discourse centered on rape and sexual violence that interrogates biological sex, gender victimization, and rape as acts of domination and control; this typically employs a sex-negative and critical view of pornography as misogynistic, especially in the work of Catherine McKinnon and Andrea Dworkin;<sup>10</sup> however, the more sophisticated post-cataclysmic narratives also depict men as the objects of rape to delineate clearly dystopic hierarchies of power and control. In many films, the attempt to appeal to a greater audience reinscribes more traditional views of gender that places females in an embattled domestic sphere or as potential victims of predators freed from the possibility of legal sanction and penalty.

But many post-cataclysmic texts also focus on the death of technology: the loss of machines that mitigate biological difference in terms of physical labor, and science and medicine that control reproduction or make a greater range of sexual and biological identity possible; the erasure of such technology reifies the heterosexual diode limited to “male” and “female.” Contemporary constructions of gender and the current range of sexual identities are greatly dependent on engineering and medical technology. In more immediate terms this limits the exploration of transgender issues and surgical reassignment or biochemical remediation because these forms of advanced technology are lost or rare after cataclysm, thus creating a counter to the recent themes of the post-human that elaborate Donna Haraway’s theories of post-human cyborg identity.<sup>11</sup>

However, these texts do not always accept the assumption of a physically defined social hierarchy after disaster; several texts make a point of questioning the expectation of male physical preeminence in terms of combat or defense, in particular Stirling’s *Emberverse*, where he emphasizes and contrasts female strengths (agility, hand-eye coordination, speed) with the adaptations possible to fight, contribute physical labor, and protect the community as equals with men. Others, such as *Bone Dance* or *BSG*, destabilize the frequent assumption of biologically determined sexes and gender roles through the need to make extreme changes to social conventions and behavior, even when adaptive technology remains available. All of these texts go beyond egalitarian assumptions, yet they seldom present the worst dystopian predictions of sex slaves, harems, child brides, or neobarbarian patriarchies; what they do is question a number of issues including: abortion, choice, marriage, the reinforcement or adaptation of traditional gender roles,

and the acceptance or repression of homosexuality and bisexuality in an anti-modern context.

### **Apocalyptic Utopias**

The political project of working toward social justice for women is an implicit and often explicit theme in works of feminist (and much queer) SF. Veronica Hollinger argues that this desire to change the world “aims to render obsolete the patriarchal order whose hegemony has meant inequality and oppression for women as the ‘others’ of men.”<sup>12</sup> Feminist writers expanded SF narratives with strong non-male protagonists, and by undermining “the ideological separation of ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ sciences [. . .], which portrayed technology as good and sciences as progressive, rational, and predictable (i.e. masculine), pitched against alien ‘sciences’ such as telepathy and telekinesis that were considered witchcraft, evil, manipulative, obscure, and subjective (i.e. feminine).”<sup>13</sup> Melzer argues that feminist writers used this diversity to reclaim the archetypes of the witch and healer through the use of alternative sciences, which helped fortify the criticism of scientific determinism and futures predicated on always-advancing technology; the result was a number of post-apocalyptic feminist utopias after the failure of modern patriarchal societies.

Radical feminist utopias overlapped the explorations of the New Wave and newer works of SF literature even after the failure of the ERA in the early 1980s. Adams contends that the “thought experiment of a female-only society remains a staple of contemporary SF,”<sup>14</sup> even if such fictional cultures now only appear infrequently. In the post-war period C.L. Moore, Carol Emschwiller, and Leigh Brackett, to name only a few,



dealt with domestic issues in the aftermath of a nuclear war, including mutated children, the post-atomic family, and fears of technology. Writers like Marion Zimmer Bradley, Andre Norton, and Ursula Le Guin helped build the bridge between the pulps and golden age SF and new feminist SF by creating strong Amazonian Others as strong female protagonists or matriarchal hierarchies.<sup>15</sup> Sometimes considered part of this New Wave, writers including Joanna Russ, Alice Sheldon (under her male pseudonym, James Tiptree, Jr.), and Suzy McKee Charnas created more radical and often single-sex societies where men die off, are confined to “reservations,” or have been replaced by new technologies that provide complete control over reproduction.<sup>16</sup> These more radical writers often challenge assumptions of what Adrienne Rich identifies as “compulsive heterosexuality” that lends itself to “an influential body of lesbian and queer-feminist SF and utopian fiction.”<sup>17</sup> But as Jenny Wolmark notes in her study of feminist SF, *Aliens and Others* (1994), after the social and political gains of the 1970s were eroded in the 1980s, these “post-apocalyptic scenarios of feminist science fiction [. . .] contained many ambiguities about gender relations, and this has become increasingly obvious as more recent versions of women-only communities confront the essentialist nature of those utopias.”<sup>18</sup>

The notion of equality between sexes continued to grow through the 1980s and beyond, but at the same time some fans and others critical of these worlds without men or of subordinated (and sometimes enslaved) males created a backlash in fandom, at SF conventions, and even in academic journals. The social instability of the 1970s and exhaustion after the turmoil of the 1960s aggravated resistance to discussing difference, bringing some to sharply contest the women’s rights movement—this cultural resistance

to women's rights and the necessary social change is a key element of both Faludi's *Backlash* and Ruth Rosen's *The World Split Open* (2000), a history of the modern women's movement. Part of this response was the creation of harsher and more misogynist texts, many of which included male fantasies of female submission such as John Norman's *Gor* series and the survivalist fiction of Johnstone (*Ashes*) and Axler (*Deathlands*). The neobarbarian but non-apocalyptic world of *Gor* was introduced in 1966 with *Tarnsman of Gor*, but the series attained a particular popularity in the late 1970s and early 1980s that coincided with the fight for ERA and the strengthening of gay activism in the early years of the HIV/AIDS crisis.

In his entry that surveys post-apocalyptic science fiction, "Holocaust and After," Peter Nicholls argues that during the 1980s post-apocalyptic stories in literature and media primarily used a neobarbarian setting of technological and social decline and all too often depicted "macho acts of rapine and savagery."<sup>19</sup> According to Suzy McKee Charnas, these stories frequently recapitulate the tropes of sword and sorcery that are often loosely inspired by the "tradition of heroic myth/fairy tale that tends to be violently misogynistic" and that "depends on reminding the reader of Arthurian stories . . . or Nordic sagas of men murdering or murdered by their nasty sisters," and with a recurring thread of "woman-hate/woman-fear."<sup>20</sup> In some respects these might be regarded as science fantasies or weak speculative disaster fiction, but they are also a form of resistance to feminist SF as part of the misogynist backlash against the post-apocalyptic feminist utopias of the 1970s and early 1980s, a reaction also evident in Niven and Purnelle's *Lucifer's Hammer* (1977). While not necessarily misogynist, women are

largely absent in Robinson's *The Wild Shore* (1984); they only act in a few limited roles in Strieber and Kunetka's *Warday* (1984).

A great deal of recent feminist SF scholarship and criticism concentrates on the role of science in engineering the technological body of the cyborg "other," such as Donna Haraway's post-humanism or Shulamith Firestone's advocacy for technology to free women from "the tyranny of reproduction."<sup>21</sup> All post-cataclysmic texts that disable or destroy technology disrupt reproductive control for women as well as men. The loss of all compensatory technology and medicine requires a return to less effective forms of contraception and birth control and engages the discourse of sexual freedom and social responsibility for both men and women, but it does not necessarily require the moralistic approach to sexuality employed by earlier authors, or the casual attitudes of the post-Pill sexual revolution. Those who pass through cataclysm remember their former options and have the ability to draw on them to adapt new social practices and alternatives; post-cataclysms do not necessitate a regressive anti-sex response. As Stirling notes in his *Emberverse*, even after the tech-base has been crippled to a pre-industrial level, the memory of modern society and its institutions remains and survivors choose to accept the new technological limits or to seek out older traditions. In some ways this reinforces the growing power of alternative and holistic medicines in the New Age movement since the 1960s and 1970s that call the expertise of (male-dominated) science into question, but it also reinforces the importance of individual choice regarding reproduction and sexual freedom.

## Cataclysmic Chimera

Although the term “cyborg” was only coined in 1960 by Manfred E. Clynes and Nathan S. Kline,<sup>22</sup> fictional (not mythological) representations of humans with extensive prosthetics arguably go back as far as Edgar Allan Poe’s 1843 story, “The Man Who Was All Used Up.” The contemporary cyborg is a hybrid of human and synthetic parts (prosthetic replacements and/or augmentative implants), although Donna Haraway’s oft-cited *Manifesto for Cyborgs* redefines them as “creatures simultaneously animal and machine, who populate worlds ambiguously natural and crafted.”<sup>23</sup> Haraway is credited by most SF critics who engage with feminism and/or queer theory for using the cyborg to advance the post-gender post-human, because, as Veronica Hollinger notes, the cyborgs as manifestations of “science and technology are disrupting and revising many conventional ideas about human subjectivity and human embodiment.”<sup>24</sup> Haraway’s theories of post-modern humanity dissolve the real and imagined barriers of biological normativity created in a conceptual adherence to sexual dimorphism, but she argues that the cyborg is foremost an individual, uncoupled from the ontology of reproduction if not sexuality, and that it is “a creature in a post-gender world; it has no truck with bisexuality, pre-oedipal symbiosis, unalienated labor, or other seductions to organic wholeness through a final appropriation of all the powers of the parts into a higher unity.”<sup>25</sup> According the Haraway’s argument the irony of the cyborg lies in its constructed essentialism so that it has no “origin story;” it is the “apocalyptic telos to the ‘West’s’ escalating dominations of abstract individuation, an ultimate self untied at last from all dependency, a man in space.”<sup>26</sup> But the cyborg remains dependent on an

advanced technological society's science; it requires tools and knowledge to free this "dominated" individuality and enable the chimera or hybrid to expand beyond the biological-determinist definitions of sexuality and identity that rely on sexual dimorphism.

Although cataclysm obviates the post-human cyborg, it does not necessarily reinscribe traditional gender roles and limitations. In almost every cataclysm or near-apocalypse, one of the central issues becomes reproduction—how to repopulate the Earth and avoid human extinction. In the 1950s and 1960s several stories consider anti-nuclear responses by representing children as mutants, in their own way transformed into post-humans; in some instances the descendants are subhuman, providing a justification for the human minorities to wage genocidal wars that often suggest resistance to the civil rights movement more than anything else. Thanks to the women's movement and lesbian activism, early feminist writers questioned the earlier assumptions of the 1950s and 1960s post-nuclear scenarios and asked whether women must reproduce; several went further to erase males from the equation in the lesbian-feminist utopias previously discussed. The resurgence of "warrior of the wasteland" narratives and movies in the 1970s and 1980s were a reaction against these worlds without men, and Clute and Nicholls (among others) disdain them for their misogynist plots that frequently depict macho, virile middle-aged men who have sex with every grateful woman that they rescue, with no concern for disease, birth control, pregnancy, or childbirth without medical support, much less the messy issue of child rearing afterward. However, during the 1980s and 1990s queer theory advanced earlier feminist concepts by breaking apart the invisible "natural" assumptions of heterosexuality (and often reproduction),

challenging the “obvious” alignments of sex, gender, and sexuality. In “Thinking Sex” Gayle Rubin argues that sex and gender are not the same thing and that even lesbian feminists tend to collapse sex and sexuality into gender as part of an essentialist system.<sup>27</sup> Judith Butler adds to the discourse from a psychosexual perspective and argues that the body—biological sex (which is not just male or female) does not determine gender, but that gender is discursive and created by social and political forces that tend to unquestionably naturalize and privilege heterosexuality. Gender identity is a performance that navigates cultural expectations and social norms that continually seek to limit expressions and self-awareness.<sup>28</sup> In addition to these issues of gender roles is the discourse of sexuality which privileges heterosexuality first, but then often seeks to essentialize desire for the same sex as part of a homosexual identity. However, this homo/hetero categorization also creates a diode that elides expressions of sexuality and desire that lie along the sexual spectrum and incorporate bisexuality, asexuality, and forms of gender/queer identity and behavior.

In most respects the precursor texts, *Earth Abides* and *Alas, Babylon*, reinforce traditional gender roles, as does *Lucifer's Hammer* in the tumultuous 1970s. The works of the 1980s do little to extend beyond the traditional and do nothing toward presenting non-heterosexuals, although Brin's *The Postman* does begin to consider women as warriors rather than leaving all conflicts to men. Finally, in the 1990s, *Bone Dance*, the *Parable of the Sower* and the *Parable of the Talents* all consider different aspects of identity that contend with “natural” biology, or destabilize both straight and gay sexual identities. But it is not until the first decade of the new millennium that post-cataclysmic

fiction offers presents gay and lesbian characters whose sexuality is part of who they are, not their determining characteristic. Somewhat unexpectedly for fans of the genre, these characters are part of the ostensibly military SF Emberverses by SM Stirling, who also incorporates bisexuality, at least in terms of teenage romantic explorations by girls into his narrative.

## **Sources of Sexuality**

### **Precursors**

As discussed in chapter four, Golden Age SF extended through the post-war era into the early 1960s and both its writers and audience as a rule were largely male, white, middle class, and straight; by corollary, so are the women who infrequently appear (sometimes only two-dimensionally) within these texts. Even as the number of women in the workforce doubled between 1940 and 1960, these numbers reflect the growing presence of minorities—especially in domestic and service jobs—who are typically elided by the dominant “mainstream” histories.<sup>29</sup> Many of these (white and middle class) wives who entered the labor force to aid the war effort or to support their families found themselves forced back into the home by a renewed conservative ideology that reapplied the old Victorian ideal of the separate domestic and public spheres. The baby boom and the first stirrings of nuclear anxiety dovetailed to reinforce the view that mothers (and newlyweds) should be at home, maintaining the new domestic refuge for their “Cold Warrior” husbands, raising the children so that the new atomic family could become the bulwark against world communism. Even at a time when women continued to enter the workforce in record numbers, the family thus became the ideological centerpiece of the

1950s American society—at least on television and in advertising. Only now this role was simplified if not completely stripped of its progressive features. The threat of nuclear war generated anxiety and uncertainty, and the threat of conflict with the communists and the reversal of a long decline in birth rates were used to try and limit women to a domestic role.

This renewed domestic ideology still failed to address the reality for many women (especially minorities, rural families, and the poor) and the challenges faced by single mothers. But this time the stigma attached to workingwomen was worse because of the way mass media turned the ideal of the stay-at-home wife and mother into the centerpiece of middle-class success and social status. Film and television exploited the myth that women worked only for supplemental income rather than as the primary breadwinners in the family, yet this was only the case for an increasingly narrow section of workingwomen. This prejudice was emphasized during the brief recession and competition for jobs as the nation shifted back to a commercial non-war industrial footing in the immediate post-war years; the social pressure was to push out women in order to give jobs to those men who returned from the war because they were “expected” to support the family. Most of middle class American society—both men and women—appeared to subscribe to the belief that women worked only to supplement income, based on its prevalence in mass media advertising and mainstream television including series like *Ozzie and Harriet*, *Leave it to Beaver*, and even the later SF “American family Robinson” *Lost in Space* (1965-1968). This ideology reinscribed a number of gender norms and limited the career options for women, making it much more difficult for women to move into careers and professions like doctors, lawyers, professors, and



especially scientists. Even though much of the precursor post-cataclysmic SF was critical of the government and military, and questioned the ethnic divisions in post-war America, it still limited the presence and agency of female characters by reify the domestic roles of women or victimizing those who took control of their own lives or their families as single parents.

### **Earth Abides**

George Stewart's *Earth Abides* returns to the narrow conventions of women as wives and mothers as part of its renewal of the American frontier after a plague that nearly annihilates the human race. Stewart concentrates on the end of modernity as an industrial and technological society and the recovery of a more pastoral (if not agrarian) lifestyle. Although released in the same year that the Russians developed their own atomic bomb, this is not a story of apocalyptic dread so much as it is an anthropological exploration of an alternative to the modern city and its alienations. The plague in effect stops the machine, and in doing so, it "frees" the survivors to be renewed by the challenges of the post-cataclysmic frontier. A few months after the plague burns itself out the protagonist, Ish, meets a woman, Emma; they "marry" and eventually become the nucleus of a community, "The Tribe," that deviates from the atomic family model. The formation of the Tribe not only recapitulates the heteronormative frontier family in its depiction of the division of labor and authority, but it also relegates women primarily to roles that either define the male characters or operate as domestic support—a regressive theme that reflects post-war reactions against women in the labor force.

In *Earth Abides* none of the women are fully fleshed out characters, and other than Emma, the rest are limited to their primary function: wife and mother. In the fourth year after the plague the Tribe begins to coalesce around Ish and Emma: Ezra and his two wives (Molly and Jean), the couple George and Maurine, and pre-teen Evie, who is mentally disadvantaged and might also suffer from extreme trauma or post-traumatic stress. Most of the women are given one significant characteristic: Jean is an adamant atheist and helps end the half-hearted religious observances of the group; Maurine is the least intelligent and a source of nostalgia; Molly is quiet, pragmatic and supportive; and finally, the damaged and taboo Evie, who never has a speaking role, repeatedly features in the narrative to define unacceptable sexuality. Because of her mental disability, Evie raises the issues of welfare and community support, and suggests some of the harsher contemporary eugenics discourse and discussion of contraception. Although Evie is young and beautiful, she never mentally matures beyond the age of a child; this causes Ish (and the others) to assume that the cause is biological and fear that she will have children who will drain the resources of the community by also being mentally deficient. As such, she is rendered an “untouchable” to the men and first generation of boys in the community, but Stewart presents this as a nonissue because she initially has no active sexual identity or interests in the story. However, circumstances change when the survivor from Las Vegas, Charlie, joins the Tribe and takes a sexual interest in Evie, to which she responds. The situation becomes a crisis after Charlie confides in Ezra that he has some “Cupid’s diseases,” suggesting that he and Evie will pollute the community with “social diseases” or children with disabilities; this horrifies the elders, who then decide to execute Charlie. This fear of disease and corruption links to the myth of

radiation-induced birth defects and fear of mutants and contagion iconic within the post-nuclear war stories, but it is also a reflection of the eugenics discourse of the early twentieth century in much of the Western world.

Compared to the other women, Emma has a much larger presence in the community, but even she is limited in the roles she takes and functions she performs. Emma is given short shrift; she is self-deprecating about her own intelligence and education, highlighting Ish's intellectual status as a graduate student. She is also initially concerned and insecure because she is of mixed-race, a topic explored in Chapter Four. While Ish refers to her as the "heart" of the community and his source of strength, she primarily serves to support his decisions and reinforce his self-confidence and leadership. But within the sphere of the home and within the context of the Tribe as an extended family, Emma frequently proffers invaluable ideas and suggestions. She provides many of the ideas that keep the community functioning including suggesting that they create a new calendar that begins on the solstice, and it is she who convinces Ish that *she* can accept the risk involved in bringing her first pregnancy to term (noting that women through the ages have done so without hospitals and doctors). It is also Emma who prods the men of the tribe to move beyond the old laws and juries—American concepts of justice—to sentence Charlie to death merely because they feel he represents a *threat* to their children and dependents, including Evie. Emma reinforces both the traditional female gender roles of wife and mother, as well as recreating the domestic sphere as a female space.

Stewart emphasizes Ish's intellect and critical faculties, overcompensating for his deficits in social skills and empathy, but those attributes do not make him a gifted orator

or politician, much less a warrior or dispassionate lawgiver. As a leader he is moody, fitful, and often sullen, and it takes Emma and Ezra to keep him motivated to participate. The council sets the normative behavior, but they take their lead from Ish. Although he is tolerant in matters of religion (semi-atheist benevolent neglect that becomes a neo-paganism) and marriage (Ezra's bigamy/polygamy), he is less accepting of extra-marital sex. On the night Ish first meets Emma, he briefly panics before deciding that they can exchange their own marriage vows (so that they can morally have sex for the first time).<sup>30</sup> Later, while concerned that Evie might produce "damaged" children, Ish reflects on how the elders have made a point to marry the boys as early as possible to limit the "temptation" she represents. By promoting quick and apparently stable monogamy the boys have no chance to "experiment" with Evie or any of the other female children, although this also reinforces the male control and misogyny that permeates their Tribal society.<sup>31</sup> Stewart reinscribes patriarchy by using the post-cataclysmic frontier to humanize Ish and put him in the position of influencing the recovery and development of a small section of post-American society; Ish emphasizes the importance of mothers, but shrugs off Ezra's polygamy, scorns sexual promiscuity at the dawn of the cocktail culture, and offers only the narrowest form of agency for women.

The post-apocalyptic fiction of the 1950s and 1960s continued this trend of two-dimensional females and subordinate gender roles, when they appear at all. Several of the stories of this period, like Philip Wylie's *Tomorrow!* (1954) do not engage with the post-apocalyptic world, although his later novel, *Triumph* (1963), does incorporate some of the typical stereotypes in its circle of seven survivors of the sneak attack on the US.

Walter M. Miller, Jr.'s *A Canticle for Leibowitz* (1959) focuses on post-apocalyptic iterations of the Catholic Church which remains a male-dominated society, and his only female characters are a woman and her child who suffer from radiation poisoning and the two-headed mutant tomato-woman, Mrs. Grales, whose second-head, Rachel, refuses baptism in the minutes before death. Both serve important functions in underscoring controversies within the Catholic Church including euthanasia as a response to terminal radiation poisoning, as well as the incidence of mutation among children, a repeated issue for women in the 1950s sparked by reactions to nuclear tests and the fear of fallout.<sup>32</sup>

### **Alas, Babylon**

A decade after Stewart's post-apocalypse, Pat Frank's *Alas, Babylon* (1959) turns the fictional town of Fort Repose, Florida, into another post-cataclysmic frontier that promotes the redemption and renewal of its male protagonist, Randy Bragg. But Randy's transformation hinges on the support of several people, especially the actions, advice, and knowledge of the women in his extended family-cum-tribe. Frank's attention to women (and girls) is complex given the novel's publication shortly before the advent of second wave of feminist activism. Although most of its women are cast in supportive and subordinate roles, some are more than simple two-dimensional characters and plot devices. Yet few can be read as criticism of (incompetent) male authority within the local community. One of Frank's themes is the lack of effective preparation and understanding of the effects and costs of nuclear war, so his indictment of (typically politically conservative) male local leaders is not necessarily a feminist message. The best-defined female characters include Elizabeth "Lib" McGovern and Helen Bragg; Alice Cookley

and Rita Hernandez have smaller roles, but embody issues of education, class, and female agency; and several other more incidental female characters (Missouri Henry, Lavinia McGovern, and Florence Wechek) round out the narrative while reflecting contemporary stereotypes.

*Alas, Babylon* is not feminist SF, but women adapt and fail to cope with the same frequency as men, rather than always being represented as weak, vulnerable, and unaware of the needs of the moment. That said, the most significant women are Liz McGovern, Randy Bragg's love interest and eventual wife, and Helen Bragg, his sister-in-law. Liz is college-educated and upper-middle class, and while "more than a friend, although less than lovers,"<sup>33</sup> on the eve of the war she asks Randy to come with her to one of the big cities to achieve his potential rather than vegetating in Fort Repose. After the war begins she adapts to the loss of her urbanite persona and becomes Randy's most active supporter, mitigating communication issues between him and others, including her parents and Helen Bragg. Liz supports Randy's decisions to decoy and ambush the highwaymen, to undertake the risky endeavor to acquire salt, and to organize and lead his militia several months after the war ends, but before international aid appears. Perhaps most critically, Liz understands Helen's delusion that Randy is his brother Mark, and suggests a strategy to defuse it: match-making the widow with Doctor Dan Gunn so that she has a father for her children and a someone to provide her emotional needs. Liz majored in psychology in college, but this is only used in the story to diagnose a fellow woman, and to a lesser extent in reassuring Randy. Frank emphasizes the importance of marriage, but in both instances—Mark and Helen Bragg, and later Randy and Liz—he stresses these more as partnerships rather than making the wife subordinate.

Where Randy often makes mistakes in the domestic sphere, Helen teaches him how to run his house better and how to turn the collection of people he has gathered about him into a post-cataclysmic family that is both more functional and less romanticized than Stewart's Tribe in *Earth Abides*. When Mark warns Randy about the impending war, he tells his brother that it is Helen's strength and ambition that propelled him on the path to his brigadier's star, and that she has been trained to react to emergencies (in contrast with civilians not just civilian wives). Although her awareness of civil defense issues and potential responses to war is due to her being the wife of an Air Force officer, this still gives her an important role in the story as a source of information and assurance for Randy's reactions; his decisions need not be made in a vacuum nor alone. When the power fails, Helen helps preserve the refrigerated foods and creatively fortifies their diets until the eventual harvest. The only time Helen "fails" is when she slips into the delusion that Randy is Mark; in this Frank appears to reinforce stereotypical gender roles and expectations of hysteria, but this is in sharp contrast to Lib's reactions and thus is not a universal depiction of women in the text. Helen is a wife and mother, and in most respects she fulfills not only the expectations of these archetypes, but she, like Liz, also continues to adapt to the ongoing crisis.

Alice Cooksly and Rita Hernandez expand the role of women beyond the family, and to more independent if not completely autonomous positions in the community. Alice is the town librarian, less inclined to gossip, and intensely aware and supportive of education. She does not applaud the war, but is thankful that this means a return to the library for many who had been captivated by their televisions. Where Randy is an advocate for civil rights and greater racial equality, Alice is equally liberal in her hatred

and resistance to censorship and ignorance in the community; she is also more practical. Unlike those who stocked their freezers, she gathered canned goods on the eve of the war. Alice keeps her library open even after the power fails, and does what the civil defense (government) leadership did not: provide the civil defense pamphlets to the public to aid their decisions and recovery. However, Alice is also single, in her forties and friends with the other “old maid,” the gossipy Western Union operator and manager, Florence Wechek. Alice’s competence and intelligence seem to exclude her from a male partner and romance in this small, southern town. In contrast, Rita Hernandez is the epitome of female sexual power and ruthlessness. Frank’s depiction of Rita is troubled; it is implied that she has achieved a measure of agency and autonomy through her sexuality—trading sex for favors and gifts—and Frank is critical of these exchanges by referring to them as “her hobby was men.”<sup>34</sup> Frank uses the 1950s stereotype of the “fast woman” by pointing out Rita’s “annulled high school marriage”<sup>35</sup> and her abortion, illegal in 1959, to not only firmly set her on the wrong side of the tracks in Pistolville, but also to provide a contrast for the virtuous “new woman”—Liz. Randy’s relationship with Rita fits the typical double standard applied to male and female sexuality that unfortunately continues today: Randy’s sexual exploits are part of the life of a young bachelor, but Rita must be held accountable for her open sexuality with annulment and abortion. Frank reinforces both the “bad girl” image and Rita’s amorality by making her the head of the local black market, and by giving her mild radiation poisoning as an atomic stigmata caused by plundered loot. Even here, her strength is undermined; Randy essentially says that she will need a new male protector when her brother dies of his



fallout-induced leukemia. Frank does attempt to bring sexuality into the story, but in 1959 the threat of censorship continued to limit what some publishers were willing to print, and women continue to appear limited by social expectations and relatively narrow standards of moral or acceptable behavior.

When the range of female characters is considered as a whole, Frank's novel is only slightly progressive, although this is itself noteworthy given the core theme—nuclear war and post-apocalypse—and the representation of female characters by his contemporary authors and filmmakers. Several characters reify gender norms and even racial stereotypes: Lavinia McGovern is an urban elitist who dies with the old world (she is diabetic); Missouri Henry is an overweight, slightly-comic domestic worker (to the edge of being a Mammy); Florence is a gossip, racist, semi-hysterical old maid; and Rita Hernandez is not only promiscuous, but also criminal and Caribbean mixed-race. And while both Liz and Helen are strong and intelligent women who perform as supportive wives and partners, neither is from Florida (nor was Frank), but much of Frank's theme can be read as an indictment of the racist and reactionary attitudes in the American South of the 1950s. Other female characters appear throughout the story, and some, like Mrs. Estes in the bank, react more intelligently to the crisis than their male counterparts. However, there are also those like Mrs. Cullen, who respond with greed and little consideration for others—a trait shared with males. *Alas, Babylon* does not represent all women as virtuous victims, nor limit their roles to the home, but neither does it position them as leaders—other than President *pro tem*, the former Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare, Mrs. Vanbruuker-Brown, itself a reification of the limited public

roles available to women in 1959, which placed them as educational leaders, concerned still with the rearing of children.

### **Domestic Disruptions**

As Betty Friedan reveals in *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), many of these urban and suburban housewives and mothers (like Helen Bragg) felt neither fulfilled nor happy. The second wave of feminism threads into the first through the formation of the (conservative and progressive) National Women's Party in 1920 and its introduction of the Equal Rights Amendment in 1923. The NWP was a small group of professional women who were effectively caretakers of the movement through the 1960s, but they remained politically active and sometimes used the importance of motherhood and family as an argument for specific topics and issues, including the "Women Strike for Peace" campaign that tried to promote awareness and end nuclear testing in the early 1960s.<sup>36</sup> During the 1960s women were also part of the civil rights movement, the student movement, and they helped men resist the draft. Beyond political and social activism, workingwomen joined unions in the 1940s, rising through the ranks and becoming officers and leaders through the 1950s and 1960s, although their support from the male-dominated hierarchies declined steadily. Many women entering the work force in the mid-1960s had grown up with mothers who worked or who had worked, so they expected more, and often their mothers encouraged them to demand better.<sup>37</sup> If first-wave feminism focused upon absolute rights such as suffrage, second-wave feminism was largely concerned with other issues of equality, such as the end to discrimination on all fronts, and remained outside most "progressive" SF until the 1960s.

In the 1960s post-cataclysmic film and literature declined after the Cuban Missile Crisis in the face of the very real conflicts and growing social unrest centered on Vietnam and the civil rights movements. The 1960s began with some small progress for women including Kennedy's creation in 1961 of the President's Commission on the Status of Women. Although its report and recommendations proved to be disappointing, according to historian and journalist, Ruth Rosen, the data collected did much to publicly support the complaints and issues of female workers and housewives.<sup>38</sup> Rosen suggests that Kennedy's support of women's issues was reluctantly given, but the Commission's 1963 publication of *The Presidential Report on American Women* opened a number of eyes while also "reflecting the culture's ambivalence about women's proper place in society."<sup>39</sup> In 1962, Kennedy used an executive order to allow women to hold high-level federal positions (although he did not place one in his cabinet); in 1963, the Equal Pay Act was passed; and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (technically) expanded the opportunities and legal protections for women. Progressive attitudes were not always behind this legislation—a southern Congressman added "sex" to Title VII in an attempt to derail the Civil Rights Act; he did not succeed.<sup>40</sup> Unfortunately, as Rosen argues, Title VII had limited effects and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission upheld several long-entrenched forms of sex discrimination.<sup>41</sup>

For many of these women, their participation in the civil rights movement and the students movement offered unique opportunities for leadership roles: in the civil rights movement women of color took such roles when they were available; in the students movements, groups like SNCC (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee) and SDS

(Students for a Democratic Society) also accepted women as leaders, although this was the exception and not the norm. But in each movement women eventually became aware of a division in labor. While men wrote the speeches and led the rallies, women were often delegated to “traditional” roles even in these equal, democratic groups—it was women who were asked to cook and clean for the group houses and safe houses, who were given position papers to copy and speeches to type. Only a scant handful were leaders, and it became apparent that they would need to push harder for change, even within the movement, to be accepted as equals. In 1965, a SNCC position paper circulated regarding the role of women in the movement and made it clear that all participants were not equal. The males in the movement reacted defensively or derisively, citing the oft-quoted caustic retort by Stokely Carmichael, the leader of SNCC: “The best position for women in the SNCC is prone.”<sup>42</sup> This enraged the women in the movement, an anger exacerbated by a later paper that resulted in amusement and ridicule—even these men who were for equality, free love (or was it free sex?) and social justice were not open minded about the acceptance of gender equality, so in 1967 a number of women walked out on the SDS and joined the new women’s movement.

The counter-culture contributed towards an awareness of women’s needs and desires—it built on Betty Friedan’s controversial book, one that spoke directly to young, middle-class housewives, and pushed them to begin living life for themselves. Abortion, birth control, sexual freedom and enjoyment for men and women were all part of the counter-culture. But this freedom was sometimes used in the women’s movement as a litmus test that exploited women: if they wouldn’t have sex with everyone, then they were bourgeois and weren’t truly liberated. Rosen ties such sexual exploitation and abuse

to the limits imposed on women in the organization and the female acknowledgement “that liberal political culture was inadequate to address the reality of women’s lives,” in “declaring their autonomy from a liberal government”<sup>43</sup> they could explore more radical alternatives and solutions. Much of this awareness and attitude permeates the feminist and radical lesbian utopias of the female New Wave writers in the late 1960s and 1970s.

Just before women began to leave the student and civil rights movements, feminists seeking their own rights created an alternative. In 1966, women used the NAACP as the model for the formation of the National Organization for Women (NOW), whose goal was to focus on legal victories specifically in support of women’s rights. Betty Friedan was one of the founders. Among its influences, Rosen cites Alice Rossi’s article, “Equality Between the Sexes: An Immodest Proposal,” in which she argued (as with Simone de Beauvoir) that gender is artificial and a cultural construct.<sup>44</sup> In the 1990s a great deal of queer theory developed from elaborations of this definition of gender and sexual identity as constructions, including the work of Judith Butler, Linda Garber, Monique Wittig, and others.

Unfortunately, because NOW was an overwhelmingly white organization, comprised of members that including everyone from housewives to career professionals, it later suffered schisms over ethnicity, class, and sexual identity. This sapped some of its effectiveness in the mid-1970s as the battle lines of the identity wars including Betty Friedan’s description of lesbians as the Lavender Menace and other elements discussed in Chapter Four began to form.<sup>45</sup> NOW tried to stay true to the ideals of the New Left—participatory democracy—by not establishing a strong hierarchy; instead it was more

organic, composed of smaller groups who focused on other issues, problems common to all (or most) women. The 1966 NOW Statement of Purpose is very simple and direct: “To end discrimination against women where ever it occurred – in government, industry, the professions, education, religion, and political parties – and to eliminate outmoded stereotypes of women.” Beginning in 1972, the battle for the Equal Rights Amendment added to the tensions of the 1970s at a time when many wanted to stop the carousel after the social turmoil of the 1960s, causing many to resist changes that had been building for the past thirty years.

### **The New Vulnerability**

The early 1970s continued some of the progress towards equality women experienced in the 1960s, but reproductive rights and the Equal Rights Amendment drew heavy opposition and helped split the women’s movement. The ERA had been introduced at every Congressional session since 1923, but it gained considerable traction in 1972 when the Democrats added it to their national platform for that year’s elections. In 1972, Title IX of the Higher Education Act declared sexual discrimination to be illegal (and enforced this through the federal funds accepted or used by such institutions), and the ERA passed both Houses of Congress to be signed into law by President Nixon in 1973. Rosen, however, notes the schisms developing between both NOW and radical feminists and the women’s movement as a whole, in many instances over the issue of abortion after the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision. In 1973, the EEOC was overwhelmed by a backlog of uninvestigated complaints, the conservative Heritage Foundation was established by Joseph Coors to contest affirmative action, and Jesse Helms began some of the first

legislative attempts to limit the use of federal funds in any way that could be linked to abortion. In 1972, Phyllis Schlafly formed Stop ERA, and then the conservative and antifeminist Eagle Forum as an alternative to women's lib in 1975. Rosen elaborates a long chain of examples incorporating these events and several others that establish the backlash against feminism and essential elements of female sexual and legal equality during the 1970s, too many to enumerate here. But this chain of events fed into the reactionary depiction of female agency, control, and limited gender roles of conservative SF, including Niven and Pournelle's *Lucifer's Hammer* in 1977.

### **Lucifer's Hammer**

The core of SF as a genre is its diversity of imagined worlds and ideas, but these are not inherently progressive and several works released during the 1970s either failed to keep pace with America's legal and social transformation or were part of an active backlash against civil rights and the women's movement. Post-cataclysmic stories were not the only subgenre in which this occurred, but Niven and Pournelle's disaster tale, *Lucifer's Hammer*, echoes the reactionary undertones of Hollywood blockbusters like *Earthquake* (1974) and *The Towering Inferno* (1974) where women are forced to depend on men for rescue and protection, and to end the crisis. Although one of the authors' messages is the need to finance greater scientific research and education, the misogynistic attitudes of the politicians and scientists in the story convey the belief that men become (or are) better engineers and scientists. Borrowing from Rosen's discussion<sup>46</sup> of the weakness of the EEOC and resistance to Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the implications of this position are two-fold: that the "soft" sciences may help promote

greater understandings of contemporary society, but they cannot avert crisis; and that attempts to enforce equal opportunities—by granting positions or funding for women and minorities—is a drain on finite resources and a policy distraction. Therefore, Niven and Pournelle not only destroy the modern, more egalitarian world in which technology works to level difference, but they also cast their survivors into a beleaguered post-cataclysmic frontier, complete with neo-feudal “lords” and cannibals at the gates of the Stronghold, where women must be sheltered and protected in order to keep the hearth and home, and to raise children.

Following the disaster movie formula, *Lucifer's Hammer* incorporates scenes from a range of cultures and societies throughout California before the cataclysm. These reveal how the male protagonists discover the threat and begin preparation for the disaster, but those focused on women are more immediate and personal and deal with challenges to their careers and relationships, or how they support men. Many of the female characters have only limited roles, but the novel does present three competent and (relatively) independent women whose changing fortunes highlight the misogynist tone of the novel: Eileen Hancock, Marie Vance, and Dr. Leonilla Malik. Although these are intelligent, ambitious, and driven women, each remains limited by social rules and conventions before Hammerfall. However, after the cataclysm each is able to use their training and skills not only to cope, but also to contribute to the Stronghold community, which tempers the reactionary tone of the novel.

Eileen Hancock represents the ambitious and driven members of the women's movement rather than the more radical feminists of the early 1970s. Niven and Pournelle project Eileen as disciplined and ambitious as someone who had “been determined to be



something more than a secretary long before there was anything like a women's rights movement [...] despite the responsibilities of having a younger brother to raise.”<sup>47</sup> Eileen put herself through college while working fulltime as a secretary; she is also an accountant and serves as what is today defined as an office manager—a far greater position than making coffee and handling the typing. The authors make certain to emphasize her limits in the business world by implying that she has sex with a potential client in order to gain new business for the company. Outside the office, Eileen drives aggressively and competitively on the LA freeway, but rather than just acknowledging this as part of her overall competence, the authors leaven these male attributes by showing that she supported her brother, reinforcing the traditional female role within the family. After Hammerfall, it is Eileen's driving that saves her and Tim, even if his money was necessary to purchase the vehicle they use to make their escape from the LA valley. Within the Stronghold Eileen very quickly becomes integral to both the survival and “war” efforts through her accounting and management skills, but these again reinforce the separation of roles between women and men, because her work takes on an essentially domestic supporting role, rather than making her part of the community leadership.

Leonilla Malik, the Russian cosmonaut who finds herself part of the Stronghold community weeks after Hammerfall, is a physician—a medical doctor who represents the growing numbers of professional women in science and medicine during the 1970s. But Leonilla is not cast as a progressive figure despite her critical role as the Stronghold's primary surgeon during the conflict with the NBA. Leonilla argues that she was only sent into space as a form of competitive affirmative action after the Americans announced that

one of their astronauts, Major Rick Delanty, would be the first African-American in space. The authors take jabs at both by giving Rick extreme space sickness that incapacitates him for most of the mission and through the dialogue of the rest of the (male) crew that jokes about the equipment Leonilla requires to support her biological functions (difference) in zero gravity. As with Eileen, Leonilla suffers from the misogyny of her military culture because one of her qualifications for the mission is her piloting experience; she gained these skills only through a romantic (or sexual) liaison with an air force colonel, rather than as standard (or unisex) training. Beyond the mildly masked misogyny aboard the space station, Leonilla is further marginalized by being cast as a “radical”—she frequently questions the orders of the Kremlin—but this is justified by the loss of her father to Stalin’s purges. As such, her character serves to question Communism and the Soviet system and function as an extremely competent surgeon, but she has little voice in the Stronghold community beyond these functions.

After the career woman and the professional, Marie Vance rounds out the roles available to strong women in the 1970s as an upper-class socialite. Marie is the wife of a bank manager, and thus a well placed within LA society. Her position is dependent on her husband’s money and her exceptional social abilities; after Hammerfall, the money is gone and her skills fall outside typical male apprehension, which initially leaves her as superfluous and a beggar in the Stronghold. To establish herself as a member of the community, Marie risks her life as a member of Harvey’s team of guerilla fighters, but the experience changes her as Harvey observes: “Marie Vance: on the board of governors of half a dozen charities; banker’s wife, socialite, country club member; and she was grinning at the thought of a man impaled on a stick smeared with human shit to make the

wounds fester.”<sup>48</sup> Marie remains pragmatic after recognizing that her marriage is over when her husband chooses to become a “mountain man” with a (child) Girl Scout bride, but the authors use this to emphasize that she needs a new male to be her protector and give her a higher status within the Stronghold. As with the other women, the author’s cast sex as one of her weapons, and after she sleeps with Harvey “on campaign” she explains her intention to seduce George Christopher because he is one of the most powerful men in the valley. As the most socially astute characters, Marie sums up the change in fortunes for women after the cataclysm: “It’s a man’s world now. [...] So I guess I’ll just have to marry an important one. I’ve always been a status-conscious bitch, and I don’t see any reason to change now. In fact, there’s more reason than ever. Muscle counts. I’ll find me a leader and marry him.”<sup>49</sup>

Unfortunately, beyond the qualified examples of these three women, the rest of the females cast in *Lucifer’s Hammer* either reinforce negative stereotypes or erode the gains of the women’s movement. One of the major characters, Maureen Jellison, who is intelligent, socially aware, and attractive is defined more by whom she sleeps with and her angst over being a political prize than any action she takes before or after the disaster. Maureen erodes female agency and is used to reinforce the neo-feudal power structure because the man who marries her is assumed to be the heir apparent and expected to take the place of her ailing father as the leader of the valley (with the assent of the Christophers). Moreover, Niven and Pournelle make a swipe at the SF fan community because Maureen, like Harvey, is a fan of science fiction and should be able to envision something better, a more inclusive post-collapse society, but instead she only laments the

return of the “knight” who “would inherit the princess and half the kingdom,”<sup>50</sup> rather than using her immediate influence to maintain her autonomy. The teenage horsewoman, Alice Cox, is the image of frontier competence, but this is balanced by Al Hardy’s observation “it didn't seem right, to send young girls out into the snow and dark. Wasn't that what civilization was all about, to protect Alice Cox.”<sup>51</sup> The other women who appear more than once are killed before they have a chance to adapt (Loretta Randall), discard and forget their formerly radical feminism to work in the (safe) kitchen (Joanna), or other similar regressive images, like 19-year old Donna entering into a polygamous marriage with two older men—Harry the mailman and Jason Gillcuddy, a fiction writer (themselves stand-ins for SF fans, perhaps).

One of the final and most brutal signs of the decline of civilization is the assault and rape of a group of Girl Scouts. Theoretically, scouts receive a variety of training and are somewhat prepared to live off the land, acclimate to the environmental changes, and survive without modern tools and conveniences. However, in the novel such preparation is not a substitute for weapons or (male) strength; the female scout leader is killed trying to defend the girls from their attackers. The girls are taken prisoner, raped over a series of days, and then rescued by the Boy Scouts under Gordon's leadership who trap and murder the rapists/biker gang/ survivalists. But rather than this being a performance of civilized values, Gordon explains it to Harvey as a male act of passage that shifts the ownership of these girls to these newly matured “men.” Gordon argues that the girls—now women—were given a choice, and that they chose to remain with their rescuers, but he is also quite aware of the Senator, as a vestige of old world values and laws, would condemn him as a

statutory rapist and demote the scouts back into “boys” and separate them from their “wives.” This is the final example of the neobarbarism that returns to the frontier and colonial myths of mountain men who tame the harsh and deadly wilderness, part of the romantic American myths threatened in the modern era of feminist activism.

### **Doom Deferred**

Although the backlash against feminism and reproductive rights began as early as 1970 with pro-life Catholic-sponsored activism and Phyllis Schlafly’s pro-family Eagle Forum, it intensified through the 1970s and into the 1980s when the bitter fight to ratify ERA was lost. Reagan won the 1980 election for a number of reasons, including both his optimistic message in contrast to Carter’s pragmatic pessimism, and the support of the growing New Right. The push for romanticized ideals of America was in part a response to the loss in Vietnam, the corruption within the Nixon White House—Watergate—and renewed fears of Soviet military strength between a fictitious “missile gap” and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. Conservatives especially, but others as well, turned toward the mythic 1950s with its televised fictions of the nuclear family and happy housewife to try and create a social foundation against the renewed uncertainties of the 1980s, including the growing awareness of AIDS and fear of nuclear power and rising environmental concerns. For some the resistance to ERA and *Roe v. Wade* was a moral response, but for others it was a reactionary attempt to limit the scope of social change that continued even after most of the activists of the 1960s quit.

As the Left fragmented into identitarian factions as the women’s movement had earlier, the New Right continued to rise and in the late 1970s began adding distinctly

reactionary elements to its former focus on removing government intrusion in business and making the military stronger. These new conservatives incorporated the Religious Right, whose own platform was pro-family, anti-abortion, against women's rights and equality in the form of the ERA, and often opposed career women. The coalition added to these positions by setting itself against "courts" they saw as legislating ("activist" in their view) and by pushing for a "return" to traditional values—their values—that would put prayer in school, end sex education, reassert evolution theology, and somehow return lost US power and prestige on the international stage. The earlier period of economic crisis remained a specter for conservative and heartland Americans and was used as a tool by the New Right to target the working-class and formerly staunchly Democratic unionized workers. In fact the three factors of economic stagnation, inflation, and the energy crisis had as much to do with the early rise of the New Right as the fears of immorality and the collapse of the family fed the disillusionment of former activists on both fronts into the early 1990s.

### **The End of an ERA**

Women within the ranks of the New Right worked stridently (and ironically) to end the achievements of the more progressive women's movement. Schlafly, prominent antifeminist and founder of Stop ERA, was one of the fiercest and most organized opponents of women's rights and abortion. Rosen suggests that it is possible that the majority of those who opposed the ERA were women, and they were partly responsible for preventing its ratification by the June 1982 deadline. The antifeminists tapped into a very broad reactionary sentiment, a fear that in some cases women would be forced to

function as men and serve in the military and other hazardous and traditionally male professions, and also lose their privileged, protected status. This belief is part of the early resistance of organized labor—by women and men—to the women’s movement, and afterward it tied in with internal divisions between housewives and career women over who was most abused and disregarded. Others argued that changes to laws regarding divorce, child custody and support, and retirement and social security benefits would remove many responsibilities from men, creating “deadbeats” and depriving wives and divorcees of their just support. In some instances it was fears of unisex bathrooms and showers, or coed sports teams, and even sex education that fueled resistance to the ERA; for others, it was a fear of lesbians and homosexuals. On the opposite side, the most extreme feminists mirrored the extremist militants of black power, advocating a separate man-free world or society.

In reality, the ERA failed to be ratified by a handful of votes in those states that resisted and ratification required the approval of 75% of the state legislatures. This was almost a generation after the core civil rights movement, and after the failure in Vietnam, change was feared—this was also Ronald Reagan’s first term and a new conservatism with its roots in the movements of the 1950s and 1960s worked against the ERA. In many ways the death of the ERA was a significant defeat for the women’s movement, but by the mid-1980s the movement was splintering along new fault lines: ethnicity, sexuality, even liberal vs. conservative factions. NOW’s early efforts to liberalize state abortion laws helped contribute to the conservative backlash by sparking the reactionary activism of Catholics and fundamentalist Protestants. Many of the progressive gains of the 1970s were mitigated or neutralized by the fragmented feminist movement and the surging unity

of the conservative response. Legislative progress stagnated, and in many ways there has not been significant movement since the 1970s on women's issues. Gender equality is still part of the discourse, but until the new millennium, the emphasis seemed to be on reclaiming a threatened masculinity and reaffirming the primacy of men and patriarchal privilege.

Mainstream media offered conflicting portrayals of women that at once repudiated and reinforced gender stereotypes. The image of the 80's woman was that of a powerful, arrogant "dragon-lady," as a domineering "bitch" who could contend with her masculine contemporaries on equal footing, but secretly yearned for the domestic tranquility offered by marriage and children. At the same time, the 80's man was envisioned as sensitive, yet rugged; sexually aware, yet powerfully dominant. In mainstream films, actresses famed for their strong, progressive performances of the 1970s, like Sally Field (*Norma Rae*, 1979) and Diane Keaton (*Reds*, 1980), reversed those roles to portray women consumed by the corporate world and the drive to succeed but who find ultimate completion and fulfillment in domestic serenity punctuated by some independence, but entirely dependent on marriage and children (Diane Keaton in *Baby Boom*, 1987).<sup>52</sup> Sally Field's is a more complex case given her roles in *Places in the Heart* (1984) and *Steel Magnolias* (1989), where the emphasis shifts to families and motherhood, but her roles are neither weak nor subordinate. In fact, as Susan Faludi argues, many of the progressive images of women in the 1970s later faded into "cheerleaders" for a resurgence of families and the suburban life and those women who remained career-oriented (when the shows weren't cancelled like *Cagney and Lacey*



(CBS)) were cast as worn and tired, and the “stray” feminist became stereotyped as a humorless and dour figure.<sup>53</sup>

But SF media of the 1980s continued to offer a very different kind of heroine, one who remains a protector and sometimes becomes a mother and savior of the human race by accident and sheer determination. Films like the *Alien* series or *Terminator* series place women in untenable and impossible situations that they overcome. Both Linda Hamilton in *Terminator* (1984) and Sigourney Weaver in *Aliens* (1986) capture the essence of the resourceful and independent woman, made stronger by the adversity thrown at her. In many respects, SF media of the 1980s saves women from the mainstream cultural backlash of conservative America. In SF literature the space operas of C.J. Cherryh, Luis McMaster Bujold, among others, cast women as military and political leaders, but in near-future works like post-cataclysmic fiction women are given brief mention in minor, supporting roles, or seem to disappear. They become ghosts of the past who remind the male protagonists of the family life and domestic security that has been lost, while reaffirming the cultural bonding of men. To some extent this may be to protect them, as a response to the renewed nuclear fear of the early 1980s. In these examples of post-nuclear war environments the world has become too harsh and women for the most part remain at home or sequestered in safe jobs in the few remaining civilized spaces; unlike the *Alien* and *Terminator* franchises and other films, they do not change the world themselves. These male authors seem to suggest that men tried to protect their wives, daughters, and families but failed, and worlds without women are bereft of hope, so the foremost function of women becomes reproduction and maintenance of the home as the womb of civilization and recovery of American values.

## The Wild Shore

Henry (Hank) Fletcher is the protagonist of Kim Stanley Robinson's post-cataclysmic SF *bildungsroman*, *The Wild Shore* (1984). As Paul Brians and David Seed point out in their discussion of the novel, this is an adventure story in the tradition of Twain's *Tom Sawyer*; almost the entire cast occupies supporting roles and play minor parts in relation to Fletcher. Although Fletcher's home, the fishing village of San Onofre, includes a number of men and women, they do not share equally important roles in the story. Women and girls appear as mothers, sisters, and girlfriends. Perhaps what is most telling is that many of the wives are only referred to by their married name; while this is a standard mode of address for teens to use with their elders, it limits the use of given names for most of the women and flattens their character in the text. More importantly, Hank is motherless from a young age, and since his father is rendered mentally disabled after a horse kick to the head when Hank was a boy, Hank is forced to reluctantly share domestic duties with him, a circumstance presented as demeaning and emasculating.

As part of the new vulnerability for women in the 1980s, the story not only limits women to the village while Hank has adventures in San Diego, Catalina Island, and on distant beaches, but images of the graveyard underscore the challenges and dangers involved when women attempt to become mothers, often dying in childbirth. At its heart *The Wild Shore* is a boy's adventure tale, along the lines of *Huckleberry Finn*, and so a lack of diverse gender roles is somewhat expected. Robinson's tale is not misogynistic; the village's bathhouse is both communal and unisex, and everyone pitches in to work the fields or fish the coast under Kathryn Mariani and Steve Nicodin's guidance respectively. Perhaps the only negative depiction of females is the obvious attempt of Melissa Shanks

to toy with Hank's teenage affection (and sex drive) and manipulate him into exposing details of the American resistance based in San Diego, but this emphasizes Hank's naïveté more than it denigrates her as a mistress of seduction. The women in the community disagree with joining the resistance and so reinscribe the domestic and communal focus of women in this narrative, presenting a subtle if not regressive reminder of contemporary expectations for females.

### **War Day**

By placing themselves as self-referential characters within *War Day* (1984), Whitley Strieber and James Kunetka make the text as much about their reaction to the loss of family and the life they knew before the brief nuclear exchange as it is about mixed attempts to recover American traditions and institutions. The authors highlight the risks these two men take in making this journey across America, and while the text focuses on the relationship of these two men and their mission, the possible legal and financial consequences for Jim pale in contrast with Whitley's: if things go badly he may never see his wife and son again. This is a quest of discovery, but in detailing how the economy, agriculture, social programs, and US military strength are damaged by the war and have yet to recover, the protagonists tend to overlook the regression of the relatively recent gains made by women. Women appear throughout the novel but only in limited roles: some who form part of the Studs Turkel-style oral history talk about their refugee experience, and the loss of their former careers and universities; some operate on the fringes of the recovering societies as militant social activists, border smugglers, teachers,

and scavengers who salvage from the ruins. *Warday* reinforces these more supportive and traditional roles.

After the pair escape a Californian prison sentence and begin the second leg of their journey, across the poisoned heartland on their way to New York and New England, they encounter more developed female characters. The pair meets Rita Mack, one of the only African-Americans in the story, who works as a “rememberer” for the scant handful of minorities remaining in Chicago. Although Rita’s story is a moving account of how few blacks remain, her story only offers a view of how ethnicity and class made survival nearly impossible because they “were the poorest” and they “starved first and worst,”<sup>54</sup> to die of opportunistic diseases including the mutant Cincinnati Flu. Rita’s introspection is limited—her story does not consider how life has changed for her as a woman, only as a member of a racial minority. This is part of the erasure of professional women in this post-war setting because she creates these social memories by performing for the audiences of bars and small music venues, work that objectifies her as an exotic singer reminiscent of the blues singers of the 1930s and 1940s. Moreover, this “duty” to keep cultural memory alive restricts her agency, similar to the arguments made against black and Chicano women who pushed for their rights rather than supporting “their people” first and foremost.

The Victorian division labor between the sexes required mothers to provide religious and moral instruction within the domestic sphere. Stewart’s characters choose to no longer practice religion; Frank only mentions it in passing; and Robinson ignores it entirely, but Strieber and Kunetka engage it on several levels. *Warday* moves beyond institutionalized monotheistic religion and brings Wicca into the mainstream through its

use of Wiccans as practitioners of alternative medicines and treatments. In this post-cataclysmic society witches provide alternative medicine and act as physical and psychological healers. These Wiccans are not just elaborations of the New Age and SF inspired neopagans of the 1960s; as Terry Burford, a midwife and witch explains, “our concept of witchcraft has, of course, changed radically, as they have begun to make themselves public as midwives, herbalists, and healers.”<sup>55</sup> Burford is not a neohippy, but rather a college-educated clinical psychologist—a “jungian analyst, with a strong Wiccan override.”<sup>56</sup> These modern witches are intimately involved in women’s health, but are not limited to treating women because they are necessary; the society recognizes the limited resources available to practice medicine—the harsh policy of “triage” limits them to anyone who has taken a large enough dose of radiation since Warday. Burford operates as a counselor, midwife, abortion doctor, and euthanist; she handles birth and death for mothers, newborns, cancer, and triage patients. Because of the risks associated with those she treats she performs euthanasia as a free public service for “profoundly crippled or retarded newborns” and as a midwife still loses “about a third of the babies and one mother out of ten [...] due to complications resulting from radiation exposure.”<sup>57</sup> She provides abortion and suicide counseling, and her training in folk and alternative medicines, such as henbane for euthanasia, connect her practice with her faith. In the neopagan Wiccan community not all witches are female, although Strieber and Kunetka imply they are in the majority, making natural remedies, alternative treatments, and community care for pregnant mothers, newborns, and the terminally ill all women’s

issues and reinforcing the idea that even the best educated women contribute most when working to support a community.

Gradually, out of necessity, Wiccan priestesses (and priests) and their intuitive and alternative practices fill the void left after modern medicine and technology has been destroyed or disabled. To some extent this reversal and denial of scientific progressivism is a condemnation of the modern concentration on rationality and technology that not only created nuclear weapons, but also instigated the war with SDI. In a crippled and fragmenting America, older traditions and new practices derived from “soft” sciences are used to alleviate suffering and to deal with the consequences of radioactive fallout and catastrophic cancer rates when there are no funds to support a medical system for anyone other than the most healthy. Regardless, Strieber and Kunetka acknowledge some of the progress made within the SF genre by incorporating not just the soft sciences (psychology) into their narrative, but by also adding alternative non-patriarchal social formations and philosophy in line with Patricia Metzger’s articulation of feminist SF.

### **The Postman**

Although it is another response to the heightened nuclear tensions of Reagan’s first administration, *The Postman* resonates with issues that extend beyond renewed nuclear fears. The story is told from the perspective of a male protagonist, but author David Brin repeatedly contrasts Gordon and the men of the Willamette Valley against the misogyny and will-to-power philosophy of the Holnists; themselves modeled on the survivalists rejected by critics such as Clute and Nicholls. Brin uses the tropes of male-oriented adventure fiction including armed encounters, combat scenes, and attacks on

peaceful settlements, as part of his reclamation of the post-apocalypse for SF rather than leaving it even below the typical “genre gutter.” However, Brin also makes a point to humanize the military because his protagonist is a veteran of the citizen militias that fought to keep portions of America alive during the ten-year winter, and protected settlements against the attacks of survivalist bands and raiders. It is only after the final collapse of local government and community in Minnesota that he sets out on his journey of discovery, but rather than engaging in theft or raids, he earns his meals and shelter by performing bits of plays and historic speeches as he travels from the Upper Midwest into the Pacific Northwest.

Gordon is not cast as the typical macho, male adventure hero who eventually overcomes his enemies and restores American civilization and values. Brin offers his readers contrasting images of the declining survivalists against the struggling yet civilized hamlets and villages of the Willamette Valley that are threatened by the Holnists. The position of women and the roles they have in their communities are a critical part of this difference. In these towns and villages that retain aspects of American civic culture including individual freedoms, property rights, elected officials, and post-nuclear families rather than tribes, women are as likely to be leaders as men (Mrs. Adele Thompson in Pine View), and women hold on to ambitions and dreams of being something more than wives and mothers (Abby hopes to become a teacher, and later asks to attend the university in Corvallis). Even in the more neo-feudal Oak Ridge, fathers lament the deaths of their daughters in childbirth and fear new attacks by raiders who will rape them to death or take them as slaves.<sup>58</sup>

Through this story Brin develops a narrative that counters (most) of the misogyny of neobarbarian adventure and pseudo-military post-apocalyptic SF, suggesting that the survivalists are losing their struggle and democratic values are returning. The fear of post-war disease and epidemics appears in several post-cataclysmic texts: in *Warday* the Cincinnati Flu devastates urban and minority communities; in *The Postman*, the “war mumps” and the “resultant sterility had made for unusual social arrangements everywhere he had traveled.”<sup>59</sup> In response to these medical crises, Brin suggests that procreation is necessary to continue humanity, not simply a fantasy-fulfillment for poorly socialized males as with the polygamy of *Lucifer’s Hammer*. In contrast to the more civilized villages, the survivalists “had taken to raiding for women, as well as food and slaves. After the first few years of slaughter, most Holnist enclaves had found themselves with incredibly high male-female ratios. Now, women were valuable chattel in the loose, macho, hypersurvivalist societies.”<sup>60</sup> However, these slaves do not accept their lot: after Gordon is captured by the Holnists, two of General Maklin’s slaves risk torture and a slow, painful death to free him because they have been inspired by the actions of the all-female scouts of the Willamette Army.<sup>61</sup>

These scouts, and the other women who emulate them, are not “Amazons” to be feared and reviled for their masculine activity. Sarah Lefanu makes a distinction between a male-defined Amazon as a feared and loathed “Other” who is the “castrating mother” and the feminist responses that either reclaim the Amazon as a strong and independent figure, or are “interventions into the sword-and-sorcery genre” where the heroes are merely given breasts.<sup>62</sup> Lefanu questions the latter, arguing that such role-reversal does



not “necessarily challenge the gender types they have reversed.”<sup>63</sup> Brin draws from this contemporary women’s movement and the castrating specter of male fear to construct Dena Spurgeon, a “rip-snorting feminist” and “her girls,”<sup>64</sup> the scouts of the Willamette Army. But the scouts, while far better skilled and trained than most of the men of the valley, are no match for the (Spartan-like) Holnists, refuting any attempts to interpret them as a simple gender reversal. Inspired in part by Aristophanes’ play, *Lysistrata*, Dena and her scouts devise a plan to end the invasion by infiltrating the Holnists. As Dena explains in a letter to Gordon: “we have one last chance to make up for what women have failed to do in the past. We’re going to stop the bastards ourselves, Gordon. We are going to do our job at last . . . to CHOOSE among men, and to cull out the mad dogs.”<sup>65</sup> The immediate plan fails because most of the women are captured and killed before they can dispatch most of their targets; however, their attempt shames and inspires the leader George Powhatan to lead his southern Oregonian forces and ally with the Willamette Army against the Holnists and defeat them.

Although *Lysistrata*’s plan to end the Peloponnesian War in Aristophanes’ play succeeds because the women withhold sexual favors, the attempt to use sex as a prelude to assassination fails for the scouts. Their capture, torture, and deaths might be read as penalties reserved for the feared Amazon, but Lefanu explains that such punishment is only nominally for their “presumption in assuming ‘male’ characteristics, such as strength, agency, and power, but [is] essentially for their declaration of Otherness.”<sup>66</sup> Brin emphasizes that everyone, not just the scouts, suffer: after Dena is caught, Gordon discovers her (with the help of rebellious female slaves) and she explains how the plan

failed before dying in his arms. Interpreting this as a consequence of her having overstepped her limits by forming the scouts, or of having “left” Gordon’s protection would be shortsighted. Instead, the scouts who might be considered throw-backs, or a cult of personality, do not only alter the perception of the female slaves and drudges of the Holnists, but they also inspire a new form of social responsibility that Gordon fears: “In my worst dreams I see women taking up a tradition of drowning their sons, if they show signs of becoming bullies. I envision them doing their duty, by passing on life and death before a male child becomes a threat to all around him.”<sup>67</sup> The war with the Holnists is over and only scattered fugitives remain when Gordon leaves for California, but he departs anxiously, worried that the plan to end war before it can begin again not only ushers in a new culture, but also may lead to a different form of tyranny defined by biology.

### **The New World Order**

The dominant historical narratives of the 1990s tend to focus on America’s military preeminence, the initially weak and then booming economy, the proliferation of personal computers and information technology, and globalization. After the end of the USSR and rapid victory of the American-led coalition in the first Gulf War, the belief in the US as a military and economic hyperpower shifted the cultural focus from the perpetual Cold War toward the new crusade: to export American-style democracy and capitalism as widely as possible. Chapter Three elaborates some of the weaknesses in this impression of military power and Chapter Four addresses contemporary friction created by globalization in the discourse of cultural imperialism. Yet another reaction against this

dominant narrative involves the internal social and political conflicts of the culture wars including the increasing shift to the right in state and federal politics, continuing resistance to third-wave feminism, the persistence of women's activism, and the fight for gay rights.

In many respects the discourse of the New World Order avoids the internal contradictions that confront sex, gender, and sexuality in the 1990s by focusing beyond America's borders. In different ways the apocalypse, alien invasion, and cataclysmic singularity allow a metaphorical circling of the cultural wagons, where individual politics are set aside to fight the emergent menace, or they lose their saliency because humanity has disappeared into the post-human. The continuing crisis of HIV/AIDS and direct action and spectacle of ACT UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power, formed in 1987) ties into the resistance to the appointment of Justice Clarence Thomas to the Supreme Court and Anita Hill's allegations of sexual harassment in 1991. The massive 1992 pro-choice demonstration in Washington, D.C., and the emergence of "dramatically effective feminist PACs like Emily's list"<sup>68</sup> reveal the continued struggle to be heard and counter the dominant discourse of mainstream (male and straight) politics in the early 1990s. In 1992, which *Time Magazine* labeled the "Year of the Woman," several speakers at the Republican National convention, including Pat Buchanan and Vice President Dan Quayle, used their media moments to attack career women, feminism, and homosexuals; it is their America the multicultural UFOs have attacked and irrevocably transformed.

Unfortunately, Bill Clinton's effective shift to the right of the Democratic Party platform and presidential policies continued to limit the gains of women and ignored many of the needs of the gay community. Faludi argues that this shift was supported by

the election of conservative women to the House and Senate in 1994, and the regressive effects of new legislation that “allowed courts to pry into the consensual sexual history of [largely female] defendants in civil cases involving sexual assault.”<sup>69</sup> Later distractions over Clinton’s marital infidelities hijacked the conversation from the real needs of women and the gay community. After the loss of the Democratic (if not always liberal) majority in the elections of 1994, the further pursuit of women’s and gay issues greatly declined even though First Lady Hillary Clinton waged a long battle to develop policy and legislation that would create universal health care, which failed in Congress. Republicans tried to lay its failure at her feet during her 2000 Senate race in New York and painted her as a meddling woman who overstepped the traditional role of the First Lady. President Clinton did succeed in some modest reforms that affected working and poor women, as Sean Wilentz notes, in “[doubling] federal funding for child care and for the Head Start preschool program . . . [and] an increase in the minimum wage as well as tax reduction for the working poor.”<sup>70</sup> While these gains helped mitigate the earlier response of many liberals against the welfare reforms of 1996, they did not counterbalance the betrayal of the 1993 DADT (“Don’t ask, don’t tell”) compromise that became official US policy for homosexuals serving in the military until 2011. The 1990s and early-2000s saw a tug of war in gay and women’s rights, as activists achieved small victories and watched as the New Right dismantled many of those accomplishments, reversing a progressive trend that started in the 1980s.

Critics of science fiction discuss the 1990s in terms of the decline of cyberpunk, the rise of slipstream fiction, the new weird, and alternate histories, and the continued

interest in space operas; for the most part, these subgenres eclipse the apocalypse. Roger Luckhurst argues that in the 1990s apocalyptic SF media was “the mass commercial vehicle for apocalyptic visions,”<sup>71</sup> including SF disaster movies like *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (1991), *12 Monkeys* (1995) and *Independence Day* (1996); however, the first film is part of an always-deferred apocalypse (until *Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines* (2003)), the second offers only glimpses of the post-cataclysmic society, and the last ends at the cataclysmic cusp and refuses to explore a world littered with the fragments of advanced alien technology, but with no cities or urban infrastructure. These films underscore the anxiety surrounding the myth of American hyperpower and draw from the post-war depictions of the US military vs. aliens to recover the aura of (largely masculine) power and control.

But Luckhurst also writes that SF literature produced a new strand within the post-apocalyptic discourse in variations on the technological singularity, coined by Vernor Vinge in 1993, in which “exponential technological development reaches a point where it runs away from human control, becomes autonomous, and rapidly begins to assess the value of retaining humanity at all.”<sup>72</sup> These visions of technological or biological post-human futures do not always incorporate a cataclysm, although notable instances include the self-aware Skynet in the *Terminator* franchise, and the viral nanotechnology “plague” of Greg Bear’s *Blood Music* (1983) which precede Vinge’s articulation, but Bear later explored other “catastrophic evolutionary leaps”<sup>73</sup> in *Darwin’s Radio* (1999) and *Darwin’s Children* (2003). This shift in the apocalypse can also be read as an attempt to avoid the very real and immediate clashes within American

society as third wave feminist theory altered political activism, and as it and queer theory changed the discourse in universities and periodicals throughout the country. The 1990s did produce actual post-apocalyptic stories such as Jack McDevitt's far-future post-global plague, *Eternity Road* (1997), but Emma Bull's *Bone Dance* and most-frequently cited, Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower* and *Parable of the Talents* actually deal with post-cataclysmic change and socio-sexual tensions. One message that permeates these texts is that if society does not acknowledge the problems that immediately exist—sexual difference, gender, ethnicity, culture—then it invites the apocalypse; the fissures within our society will inevitably deepen and widen, bringing about a total collapse.

### **Bone Dance**

Emma Bull's *Bone Dance* flirts with the cyberpunk genre, giving scant attention to technology while capturing a dark and gritty *noir* tone reminiscent of William Gibson and John Shirley and engaging themes of mistaken identity and resistance to corrupt corporate authority. The scientific development of mental abilities and artificial or constructed humans lie at the core of story, but this technology is not explained as much as its social effects are extrapolated in this post-nuclear war dystopia. Veronica Hollinger suggests that *Bone Dance* is “a feminist revision of 1980s cyberpunk,” and Bull's female characters, psychic powers, and attention to spirituality and communal action all fall within the parameters of feminist SF used by Patricia Melzer and Sarah Lefanu. In one of the defining elements of cyberpunk, Gibson invented the consensual hallucination of the matrix as the interactive space in which human and machine intellects mingle with autonomous programs to initiate effects in the real world; in contrast Bull uses voodoo as

a consensual belief system that accounts for both psychic powers and the apparent manifestation of entities who represent themselves as gods and spirits. Beyond this alternative view of alien Others (*loa* as opposed to artificial intelligence), Bull explores gender and sexuality through the psychic horsemen who mentally dominate and take possession of the bodies of others, as well as the “gender indeterminacy,”<sup>74</sup> of her protagonist, Sparrow.

In her capacity as a scrounger and trader of pre-apocalypse technology, Sparrow crosses the borders between every society of Bull’s post-cataclysmic world, revealing that almost every society of this future world incorporates and often balances the contributions of men and women. The vendors of the Night Market, the staff/owners of the Underbridge Club (and by extension active street and night subculture), and the Hoodoo Engineers all share tasks and control between male and female members, and all labor is divided according to ability and knowledge, not biology, erasing many traditional gender expectations. Bull explains the use of Tarot Cards and other objects as triggers that shape the energy of hoodoo, and help voodoo practitioners (all of which are women) interact with the *loa*. On the island of priestess China Black, Mister Lyle uses and repairs the technology and acts as a protector and enforcer, but he leads no rituals. Among the Engineers, Josh Marten is the “head people doctor,”<sup>75</sup> or scientist (most of the commune are trained as farmers and many as veterinarians), but it is Sherrea, the cooperative’s “hoodoo doctor,”<sup>76</sup> who teaches Sparrow to use enough voodoo to serve as a power conduit and *cheval* (“horse,” but think puppet) to combat the scientifically created Horseman, Mad Tom Woreski. Within the city specific men reify traditional male roles

of power or dominance, including Beano, the black marketeer who physically abuses Sparrow, and A.A. Albrecht, who resides within the appropriately named high-rise Ego, and controls or taxes all forms of electricity and by extension, technology, within or coming into the City. Albrecht's displacement and crippling before the final confrontation with Mad Tom ends the male domination of power and technology in the City, but the reins of power do not pass to a woman, they pass to Sparrow whose gender is indeterminate.

One of the recent trends in SF and other genre fiction is to have a key character or (less frequently) protagonist who is gay. However, much like Lefanu's point about Amazons as sword-slingers-with-breasts, this does not necessarily challenge the gender and sexual stereotypes.<sup>77</sup> But Sparrow actually queers the narrative through her biology, social fluidity, and bridging of the worlds of technology and voodoo. The Horseman Frances Redding explains to Sparrow that the *chevaux* were designed and grown (not modified from existing people) to be empty shells for Horsemen—tools of war and bribes to keep the wounded or dying psychic warriors from “eating” their own side. She adds that each had been customized to store useful skills and information, thus Sparrow's innate talent with electronics and technology.<sup>78</sup> Veronica Hollinger emphasizes Sparrow's liminality through her neuter or neutral body and her ability to shift with the expectations of her audience or companions to take on male or female social aspects.<sup>79</sup> However, Hollinger goes further by equating Sparrow's independently developed awareness, consciousness, and personality as something that makes her “one of the many monsters – if not literally female, then certainly metaphorically feminized – imagined in



sf by women.”<sup>80</sup> But Beano’s torture and rape of Sparrow suggest that feminization is not quite right—Bull stresses that this is a sadistic episode of power and control, and while Beano can be read as male sexual violence and aggression, he does not end her ordeal nor particularly care when he eventually discovers that she is neuter. That said, it is primarily because Sparrow is engineered to be an empty vessel and tool, and surrenders control to Beano that Hollinger’s argument must be considered, and for that reason she is referred to as female throughout this study. Through her repeated “possessions” by Mick Skinner and Frances, and her subsequent assault and abuse by Beano, Sparrow is forced out of her insulated, urban mode into a state of complete dependency where she has nothing to trade and is at the complete mercy of strangers; this allows her to reconstitute herself and shed the last vestiges of her fragmented initial government programming. Her time with the Hoodoo Engineer cooperative helps her to become aware of her greater choices and responsibilities, and she returns from this crossroad to confront and destroy Tom—the revenant animus of a dead (male) technological age.

Sparrow does not actually replace Albrecht, but because she is seen as responsible for breaking the power monopoly she comes to occupy a position of techno-wise “woman.” Her talent with technology helps her to begin rebuilding parts of the Cities infrastructure with the help of Theo and others, but people also come to her to be trained to take up the work. Men and women, and those who are both and neither, operate on equal footing in this text. While the assassin, Myra Kinkaid, exchanges her brother’s life for her own and is ostracized, and Frances is incapacitated with a stomach wound, it is the men who suffer in the end, reversing the frequent female sacrifices of many SF hero stories. The human Cassidy and Mick Skinner, the Horseman, are both killed by Tom,

who is himself destroyed; Albrecht is crippled by his involvement with Tom, and even his son, the “heroic” Theo, is sidelined by his own injuries. Mister Lyle (and China Black) remain hidden on the Island rather than playing a role in the final battle, and Dusty Kinkaid is killed by his sister when she decides not to take on the *loa* by confronting Sparrow. After the destruction of the power monopoly, the City begins its transformation into a hybrid post-modern world; it is not the domain of man or woman, but of both.

### **Parable of the Sower and Parable of the Talents**

Octavia Butler’s narrative falls out of a lot of margins (Mainstream, African American, Feminist, SF and F). However, she artfully educated her audience in the motifs she riffs on, using black women heroines to mediate humanity – not as the ultimate universal subjects but as particular agents of change in whose stories we find hope – Butler decenters the presumed white male reader of SF and F, looking for geeky entertainment.<sup>81</sup>

Octavia Butler is a favorite of queer theorists and feminist critics who bring her characters and texts into SF discussions of alienated others, racial and gender boundary transgressions, and non-binary gender and sexualities.<sup>82</sup> In many instances, Butler is the go-to author for female protagonists who not only disturb the assumptions of whiteness in SF, especially in an “American” future or space, but who also subvert “natural” assumptions of male-female gender constructions and extend the discourse of SF sexuality beyond the limited range of the baseline human body. However, most of these critics concentrate on her most radical transformations and transgressions—almost all of

which involve aliens, including the post-apocalyptic Xenogenesis trilogy, which disqualifies them from this study. And while it may be true that the economic apocalypse or ‘Pox of the *Parable of the Sower* (1993) and *Parable of the Talents* (1998) does not create a physical disaster akin to a nuclear war or global pandemic, it is an extended global depression that leads to near-perpetual war and a cyberpunk-style corporate usurpation of political authority. After the erosion of American civic culture, the reintroduction of slavery, and creation of a legal class of neo-serf, a fundamental realignment of political and social institutions is required, ushering in a new age of human development and space exploration—the fulfillment of the American near-renaissance frustrated in the nuclear war of Brin’s *The Postman*.

The *Parable of the Sower* explains the advent of the ‘Pox and portrays the social decline that leads into the wars, the dissolution of American civic culture, and the death of the American Dream for all but the elites. The *Parable of the Talents* begins a few years after *Sower* ends, jumping back and forth between the years of President’s Jarret’s conservative Christian presidency and the “reconstruction” ushered in after the end of the depression a generation later. This world’s dysfunctions reflect the rollback of welfare and social programs during the Reagan-Bush era, the jingoism and propaganda of the first Gulf War, and the dislocation of labor and manufacturing with the advent of NAFTA in the early 1990s, but more importantly it frames many of the challenges faced by its characters in terms of women’s issues, although the outcomes are more due to class, income, and educational disparities than just sex or gender. Women are the main protagonists of both novels, and women’s issues (including marriage, motherhood, fetal drug syndromes, and family cohesion) are among the most important themes, yet the

portrayal of gender roles is not as revolutionary as in many of Butler's other novels. The subversions are strongest for males: boys and men find themselves subordinated as slaves and serfs as much as women, and become the victims of sexual predation and physical abuse—experiences some critics would define as feminizing, although given the overarching economic and class issues, “subordinate” within the discourse of power exchange and inequity seems more appropriate. These novels question sexual norms and heteronormative assumptions to a lesser extent, but only through a meager handful of characters that might be identified as gay or bisexual, and in each case they suffer for their transgressions and divergences.

Within the fortified neighborhood of Robledo there are few deviations from late-twentieth century gender and sexual norms. Outside the neighborhood's walls society continues to crumble; Butler uses poor squatters, arson, murder, and the sexual assault of young women and children to underscore the decline of what had been a reasonably affluent and middle class suburb of Los Angeles. Within the neighborhood, the leaders are male, and it is Lauren's father, Reverend and Professor Olamina, who keeps the community coordinated and united against external predators. However, after he disappears, his wife (Lauren's stepmother) Cory, tries to assume his place, but the best she can do is take over some of his work at the university to keep money coming to the family. Lauren takes over Cory's position as teacher in the “community schooling” programs for the children and young teens of the neighborhood, while also attempting to manage her remaining three younger brothers. Lauren's only escape from this arrangement is the infrequent, furtive sexual liaisons with her boyfriend, Curtis. Almost all of the adults and teens of the community work to plant and harvest their crops and

trees, and later, to maintain an armed neighborhood watch, leaving little time for self-actualization or identity.

Outside this cooperation lies the Moss family. Richard Moss is “rich” and uses his money to buy poor attractive women, whom he then marries according to the precepts of a religion he devises based on a mix of patriarchal Christian and West African beliefs.<sup>83</sup> The neighborhood tolerates his three wives as well as Moss’s demand that they not share in any of the communal work nor learn to handle weapons or maintain the watch. Through Lauren, Butler argues that Richard Moss can do this because he is an engineer, has money, and can ignore the community standards, or rather, abuse them because he knows they have no will or means to enforce them upon him and his family. As such, Moss is a localized reflection of the deviance and elitism of the rich outside the neighborhood who benefit the most from the economic crisis; it is the poor and middle classes who feel the most victimized, but they have been successfully turned against their own class and ethnic interests through the effects of mass media.

After the neighborhood is overrun and most of its inhabitants killed, Lauren leads two other survivors, Zahra Moss and Harry Balter, north and in the process collects the rest of the thirteen future members of the Earthseed community. For almost two years before the attack Lauren worried that it might happen and she has the foresight to prepare a “hurricane bag” of clothes and supplies. Her weapons training allows her to not only survive the attack but to protect herself and the others on their hike north. Part of her success on the road comes from her posing as a young man for the first few weeks, until they have enough numbers that exposing her sex does not increase the group’s vulnerability. However, she is the only one to do “drag” as a defensive measure, and she

is only convincing because of her life-long experience in hiding her responses, thanks to her hyperempathy syndrome, a neurological disorder that causes those who have it to feel or “share” the pain and pleasure of others. The syndrome is a “birth defect” caused by mothers who abused a form of designer “smart drug” during their pregnancies, and Butler adds the ironic twist that this drug disproportionately effects middle class children, as opposed to the incidence of “crack babies” or “AIDS babies” among the American urban poor in the late 1980s and 1990s. The syndrome is not limited to women, and Lauren learns from escaped slaves that it has become a desirable trait for children sold into slavery and the sex trade.

Over the course of both novels, Butler presents Lauren’s greatest achievements as the creation of the Earthseed faith, and by the end of *Parable of the Talents*, the fruition of her dream to send humans—Earthseed—to colonies around other stars. Lauren’s belief begins as a rejection of her father’s faith and a patriarchal god, and because the central tenet of Earthseed is “God is Change,” most of her teachings are a means of dealing with change. Lauren’s “sharing” emphasizes female (if not feminine) characteristics like empathy; Earthseed is about adapting as an individual but also as a community or a family, implying a feminist reading of the religion. Redemption becomes part of adaptation as people become members of the Earthseed community and come to share Lauren’s faith on the road north. Zahra Moss was poor before Richard Moss purchased her from a drug-addicted mother to become his youngest wife; it is she who initially teaches Lauren how to deal with thieves and attacks on the road and she becomes one of Lauren’s first converts. Jill and Allie Gilchrist are beaten, raped, and forced into prostitution by their alcoholic father, but after Jill is killed on the road, Allie not only

becomes a believer but also adopts an orphan the group discovers—redeeming or transforming herself in two ways. Natividad Douglas and Emery Tanaka Solis add to these depictions of threatened and degraded women; Natividad reasserts her agency by leaving a sexually predatory employer and joining Earthseed, and Emery escapes a corporate “wage-slave” program with her daughter after her sons have been “confiscated” and “contracted” against her will and despite her resistance. Each of these women is a mother who looks to the future, and while they learn from Lauren, each of them also teaches her about victimization, slavery, control, and highlight the efforts of the community to combine their experience and efforts as a means of transcending the limits of their society. The transformation of these women after catastrophic events in a world that debases and imperils everyone, but especially women, is part of the strong feminist undercurrent in these novels that reveals the difficulty in reversing the gains made by women over the past forty years.

The depiction of sexuality in *Parable of the Sower* reflects many of its contemporary mainstream attitudes toward sex and sexual identity. The majority of characters do not need to identify as heterosexual because all of the exceptions to this “natural” assumption are called out. Zahra warns Lauren when she decides to cross-dress that the response of others on the road will be a violent rejection of both mixed-race and same sex couples.<sup>84</sup> When Grayson Mora joins the group, he attempts to divide it over Lauren’s usurpation of the “traditional” male role as the group’s leader.<sup>85</sup> But where the first novel presents these attitudes as a fear of the Other and exploitation of difference as justification for theft and preemptive attacks, the *Parable of the Talents* extends and

deepens issues of sexual identity by not only incorporating a gay character, but also some who perform as lesbians, suggesting more fluid variations of bisexuality. After Lauren is reunited with her brother, Marcus, who was sold as a sex slave, he describes how boys, girls, and young women are all subjected to the collar. The first version of this device is designed to induce pain and comply obedience; they are used extensively within the Camp Christian “reeducation” (prison) camp to discipline, punish, and torture inmates. But Marcus explains that newer variants of the device can also trigger pleasure receptors and mediate behavior through addictive rewards of euphoria.

The use of pain and pleasure to enforce sexual compliance reflects contemporary debates on poverty, drug abuse, human trafficking, and prostitution, and Butler places both male and female subjects within the collars. However, the specific links to forced prostitution—Allie and Marcus—are also connected to the performance of homosexual actions and identity. Their father forced Allie and her sister into prostitution with men, but within Camp Christian, Allie becomes involved in a sexual relationship with one of the other women prisoners. When their relationship is revealed, they are tortured through their pain collars; the other woman is killed, and Allie is severely traumatized.<sup>86</sup> The brutal morality of the conservative Christian guards, many of whom are family men, does not extend to their own acts; many of the jailors assert their power over the female prisoners through sexual assault and institutionalized rape.<sup>87</sup>

Butler expands on this Christian double standard through the actions and resistance of Marcus, who has closeted his homosexuality within his Christianity. After Lauren buys her brother and frees him, he briefly joins Earthseed, but he is incapable of



accepting their new faith. Rather than accepting their choices and lifestyle—some members remain Christian and do not follow the faith—he attempts to proselytize and eventually leaves the community. Marcus does not actively attack the community, but when Lauren’s adult daughter finds him years after Jarret’s Crusaders gave her to an Christian American family to raise, he does not help reunite them and he does not even tell Larkin that her mother is still alive or had searched for her. Part of his justification is his loneliness—the Church and his ministry defines him and allows him to ignore his homosexuality, but at the cost of remaining celibate and alone. In *Parable of the Sower*, Marcus appears to be interested in Robin Balter, but they are children and he may not have been aware of his sexuality yet. Where Allie needs emotional and physical solace in the prison after the loss of her adopted son and can only turn to another woman, Marcus is repeatedly raped by men and perhaps women, and forced to turn against his fellow slaves to feed his addiction. Allie’s sexual relationship with another woman becomes associated with a time of rape, the separation from her son, and more than a year of emotional trauma; Marcus associates sex with anyone as forced, or entangled with his betrayal of himself and his Christian beliefs. As such, Butler overlays gay and lesbian desires with shame and victimization. Regardless, Marcus chooses the Church, denying himself not only a partner, but any expression of his sexuality, and it is because of these deprivations that he justifies keeping Lauren and her daughter, Larkin/Asha separated for more than twenty years—an act of control by a desperate male.

## **Age of Crisis**

Although ERA failed to pass, women continued to make gains in almost all sectors of American society. The number of women serving in uniform (active duty and reserves) increased during the first Gulf War even while the Tailhook Scandal of 1991 exposed the ongoing misogyny within the US Navy, and forced the armed forces to accelerate their cultural transformation to better integrate female service personnel. Ruth Bader Ginsburg joined Sandra Day O'Connor on the Supreme Court in 1993. Sonia Sotomayor and Elena Kagan followed in 2009 and 2010—after conservative resistance that focused on their sex and ethnicity as well as their legal records. Even though women have vied for the US presidency since Victoria Woodhull ran in 1872, women were not really seen as viable contenders until Shirley Chisholm competed for the Democratic presidential nomination in 1972. In 1984 Geraldine Ferraro became the Vice Presidential candidate on Walter Mondale's ticket. Sarah Palin became the first female Republican Vice Presidential candidate when John McCain selected her as his running mate for the 2008 election. Carol Moseley Braun ran against an all-male slate for the Democratic Presidential nomination in 2004, and in 2008 Hillary Clinton became the first female contender to win a primary (in New Hampshire), giving the Barack Obama a run for his money in a hotly contested primary race. Although Clinton lost the nomination to Obama, he appointed her to serve as his Secretary of State, the third woman after Madeline Albright and Condoleezza Rice to do so. Nancy Pelosi became the first female Speaker of the House in 2007, and at the beginning of 2011, Barbara Mikulski is the longest serving female Senator. These high-profile political gains seem to validate claims that an ERA is unnecessary and equality of the sexes has been achieved as America

moves beyond the first decade of the twenty-first century, but the depictions of women in leadership roles in *Jeremiah*, the *Emberverse*, and *Battlestar Galactica* challenge this assumption.

The attacks of 9/11 created a brief moment of national unity; political factions swiftly reemerged, women's rights (especially reproductive rights) were shunted to the background, and gay males and lesbians were demonized as symbols of the erosion of morality and Christian values that conservatives claim made the US vulnerable to such attacks. This, at least, was the message of conservative media including Fox News and the *New York Post*, but these attacks on lesbians, gays, and less frequently bisexuals and transgenders, also obliquely assaulted the position of women and sexual minorities in uniform. DADT remained the US military policy, and under its restrictions women especially had to walk a tightrope: "Act 'too masculine' and you're accused of being a dyke; act too 'feminine' and you're either accused of sleeping around, or you're not serious; you're just there to get a man,"<sup>88</sup> writes Mellissa S. Herbert in her study of women in the military. At the end of the 1990s Herbert argues that women who joined the military faced questions regarding their competence, their sexuality, or their suspected gender transgressions; such perceptions persisted during the invasion of Afghanistan and the Iraq War, both conflicts in which women served in record numbers. According to Erin Solaro, the US is has almost ended women's struggles for equal citizenship because the US is now "on the threshold of the only civilization that a free people should cherish: one that men and women create and defend together, as public and private equals."<sup>89</sup> This moment may be imminent, but it has not yet occurred, though

Solaro believes that women can engage in a form of civic feminism that includes military service; moreover, she argues that the stereotype of inherent pacifism in women is part of what disrupted the push for ERA after Vietnam.<sup>90</sup> Sexual harassment, sexual assault, and rape remain problems within the military and are a threat not only to female troops but also to the cohesiveness of the military unit, and are an excuse for those who reject the deployment of women to combat zones. Solaro contends that this situation is improving, but it is a generational change—one that younger service personnel support against the resistance of the old (male) guard,<sup>91</sup> who also continue to resist openly gay personnel.

In the 1990s feature films like *Courage Under Fire* (1996) and *G.I. Jane* (1997) depicted strong, commanding female warriors, but to many Americans, the face they associate with women serving in Iraq or Afghanistan is that of either PFC Jessica Lynch or Private Lynndie England, portrayed as both victims and villains by media across the political spectrum. Jessica Lynch, as Solaro recounts, was first presented as a hero by the Pentagon, but when she honestly admitted that she did not fire her weapon she was castigated by “blogchair” generals and the conservative media, even though her injuries were real and she served honorably; in the end she “retreated” from media attempts to cast her as a “Barbie doll heroine.”<sup>92</sup> Susan Faludi points out that after Lynch’s “heroism” was called into question, the media evolved the story into the happy ending of “a classic American captivity story,”<sup>93</sup> recasting her as the vulnerable victim rather than the heroic warrior. In contrast, Lynndie England was never portrayed as heroic; both Solaro and Seymour M. Hersh in his detailed report of the Abu Ghraib scandal represent her as one of several soldiers who abused, tortured, and were responsible for the murder

of Iraqi military prisoners.<sup>94</sup> She was not the only woman convicted in the Abu Ghraib scandal; Sabrina Harmon was sentenced to six months in prison for her role. But England's involvement was particularly scandalous because she was sexually involved with one of the other servicemen (her fiancé Charles Graner, her immediate superior) whom she claimed ordered her to pose with the naked prisoners, some of whom were forced to masturbate in her presence on film, and because she was pregnant by Graner at the time of her arrest. She was convicted of sexually, psychologically and physically abusing male prisoners of war.<sup>95</sup> Both stories add to the persistent veiled criticism of women in the military.

In many respects women's rights in America were overshadowed by the rhetoric erupting from both the right and left about the status of women in Islamic cultures under Sharia law, in part to fortify the decision to invade Afghanistan and Iraq and to justify their occupation on more "humanist" grounds. American media portrayed women as smart and professional, strong but fickle, sympathetic but always sexy, a little pathetic at times, and occasionally desperate in shows like *Sex in the City* (HBO, 1998–2004), *Desperate Housewives* (ABC, 2004–2012) and *Grey's Anatomy* (ABC, 2005–present). During the first few years of the new millennium American media became more "gay friendly," airing popular premium cable series with their salacious and graphic adult content borrowed from British media like *Queer as Folk* (Showtime, 2000–2005) and *The L Word* (Showtime, 2004–2009). The militant gay male (and lesbian) of organizations like ACT UP were tamed in other nonthreatening portrayals, including *Will and Grace* (NBC, 1998–2006) and *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* (Bravo, 2003–2007). The anger

over the betrayal of DADT continued, but so did the divisions of the identitarian culture wars, where progressive reforms were set against each other by the increasingly powerful religious right in state and federal politics after the legal marriage of the first same sex couple, Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, in San Francisco in 2004. The advances and reversal of state and local legalization of marriage equality—gay marriage—have continued since 2004. It was an important issue in the 2004 Presidential election and is now a defining characteristic of the reactionary positions of almost all Republican contenders for the 2012 presidential nomination.

Within SF, those editors who were “trained” within the misogyny and racism that passed for “natural” American beliefs in the 1950s and 1960s began to retire (or die out) in the late 1990s and early 2000s. The new generation of editors who entered the industry as semi-pros and professionals in the late 1960s, 1970s, or even the 1980s now tend to be more progressive (if not outright liberals), and the effects of blogging and fan forums on the Internet have encouraged a greater acceptance of female writers and characters. But even at the end of the 1990s some of the old guard still resisted characters who were openly gay whose Otherness was not disguised within alien bodies or cultures, even though landmark collections of gay and queer SF had already proven more than a niche interest in the market, including several individual novels and the initial trilogy of *Bending the Landscape* anthologies. Still, at the turn of the millennium, some editors and publishers argued that “the audience” (who they perceived as straight, white, socially maladjusted males) still could not handle protagonists who were “too different” from themselves, although just maybe they could be the new sidekicks.

Because of a sense of inclusiveness in modern media, and a surface awareness of gender disparities in popular television shows that sought to appeal to an increasing female audience, most SF media offered several diverse female characters (if not prominent protagonists), almost too many to enumerate here. *Jeremiah* ran for less than two seasons for a total of twenty-five episodes, and *Jericho* remained on the air for a similar time with a total of twenty-nine episodes. The Emberverser or World of the Change is an ongoing series, with a new book in the series published each fall, adding another 500 pages (approximately) to the diverse, ensemble cast of the series, half of whom are female and germane to this discussion. *Battlestar Galactica* includes a two-episode miniseries, seventy-three television episodes, two TV-movies, and three sets of webisodes. The sheer volume of this information precludes a detailed account of each female representation and renders most attempts to use delicate theoretical tools to read across the grain in an effort to queer the texts beyond conscious representations of non-heterosexual sexual practices, identities, and gender constructions virtually impossible. The depth and breadth of gendered and/or queer material in these narratives warrant a separate and complete analysis of its own that is beyond the scope of this study.

### **Jeremiah**

Speaking of partners, Showtime's *Jeremiah* is, at its core, a dystopian buddy series in which the titular character and his cynical-yet-hopeful African American (male) partner explore the communities that form nearly twenty years after a virus kills everyone who hit puberty. Although educators and social critics lament the death of critical thinking and inability of many pre-adolescents to step away from their TVs or X-Boxes

and read a book, the series exploits the conceit that SF fans read and will therefore accept that the leaders of this world, in their adolescence, did too. This suspension of disbelief allows the articulation of a range of cultures, from *Lord of the Flies*-style hamlets, to black market gangster towns, or isolated communities with a nostalgic idealism for the dead world. However, the show's creators also suggest that racism, sexism, and varieties of religious fanaticism persist through and after the near-apocalypse. Because the primary threads of this story deal with Jeremiah and, even after he dissolves their partnership, Kurdy, the spotlight remains on men; there are few repeating appearances by women, and these are restricted to supporting roles, with the arguable exception of Theo, the leader of Clarefield. This series does not make women subordinate, but the majority of female appearances fall within the standard tropes of a male adventure story: exotic and vulnerable women, many of whom sleep with the heroes or become their love interests, few of whom fight for themselves, and many of whom experience their transformative moments in imminent motherhood. As such, even when the strong female characters like Theo and Erin (and minor characters like Rachel and Michelle) are taken into account, the series limits the narrative for women and sexual minorities.

The series uses the context of a post-cataclysmic frontier to revert fragments of American society into a rough and male dominated "justice" in which strength determines legitimacy. Women are typically weak and vulnerable, and thus forced to use their sexuality to achieve their desires and needs through manipulation. Although sex and female nudity appear in a number of stories, they appear to serve more prurient interests of a (supposedly) young male audience. Subtle and blatant reminders of female objectification and subordinate if not vulnerable status include: the bar staff of Clarefield



who prostitute themselves for food to augment their income; Theo's rewards to her geek squad for technological breakthroughs—sex with a cheerleader;<sup>96</sup> the all-female brothel;<sup>97</sup> and Michelle's deception in using a man's name publicly to disguise her leadership role.<sup>98</sup> In the episode "Ring of Truth," Jeremiah and Kurdy save Theo's life, so she sends them to a local brothel as their reward. However, Kurdy offers to help free his "date" from her contract the next morning in order to reunite her with her daughter by fighting a much larger opponent, the Russian-accented bouncer of the brothel. Beside the issue of restrictive contracts, even if the "madam" takes "good care" of the "girls" and keeps them well fed and compensated, this conflict reinscribes the importance of the role of mother, and undercuts the sex-positivity of sexual choice by implying that prostitution is a selfish act or an act of desperation and exploitation. Moreover, the negative shading of this message is enhanced by the madam who is a male-bodied transvestite with just enough camp in the performance to imply homosexuality without openly demonstrating her sexuality. Kurdy's "chivalry" and the unsympathetic materialism of the transvestite madam both refocus the narrative on a male-oriented heteronormative gaze and reify the importance of children to the future, at the same time reinforcing the idea that women need to be "rescued" from her oppressive circumstances by a "knight in shining armor."

Beyond these negative depictions, several episodes portray women as victims and sacrifices (Elizabeth and Megan), or as spies and deceivers (Rachel and Libby).

Elizabeth, like Marcus's second-in-command, Erin (a woman), and Marcus himself, have all grown up within the secure isolation of Thunder Mountain and their idealism is only matched by their lack of field experience. Because his task requires him to operate in the

field and support Jeremiah, Kurdy cannot join Elizabeth within TM; so she goes into the field with him twice. The first time is to take advantage of their appearance as an African American couple to negotiate with black militant separatists, but the second time ends with her dying in Kurdy's arms. This sacrifice frees Kurdy from his pledge to Jeremiah, enabling him to become the military trainer and leader of the TM forces and the Alliance Army during the conflict with Daniel's forces in Season Two. In a similar fashion Erin only goes into the field once, with Jeremiah, but even then it is to save her twin sister from an abusive boyfriend. As if this rationale weren't enough, the twin also has sex with Jeremiah (although the audience unsure of the identity of the twin in the tent), reusing the theme of sex as payment for rescue.

Although Theo is the most complex character in the series (female or male), her story is one of redemption: joining the alliance (under male leadership) and becoming an expectant mother. As the leader of Clarefield, Theo is driven to find the "End of the World" and its mythic technology and power sources, not to improve life for her followers, but as part of her response to the trauma of implied rapes and sexual assaults she experienced in the aftermath of the Big Death. Unlike the women of Thunder Mountain, Theo is forced to deal with the chaos of collapse, and she starkly elaborates the plight of girls on the edge of womanhood: once they began menstruating they live in terror that they could die at any moment, unlike boys, who discovered an aggressive sexuality without societal constraints.<sup>99</sup> Theo does not explain that she was attacked or raped, but her explanation of the fears and experiences of prepubescent girls after the plague strongly imply that she and many others were assaulted. At the beginning of the series Theo is presented as a harsh, unforgiving, obsessive, and unsympathetic warlord

who is willing to torture and murder to attain her goals. But near the end of the series it is Theo who argues for Marcus and the Alliance because, as she explains to Erin, “a baby has got to have hope.” Theo considers herself a warrior, she has fought for everything, and now she fears failing this unborn child. Erin reassures her by emphasizing the importance of children to the future and motherhood in rebuilding the world: “We’re both warriors, survivors, but what are we surviving for? We’re shaping the world, it isn’t about a gun, or politics.”<sup>100</sup> Once again the series casts women in a traditional and stereotypical role, as the nurturing mother for whom anything can be sacrificed and who must always look to the future for her children.

### **Jericho**

Like *The Wild Shore* and *Bone Dance*, *Jeremiah* occurs years after the cataclysm, in a setting where the transmission of living memory and social norms is disrupted, allowing creators to explore alternative societies, diversified gender roles, and sexualities. Although *Jericho* exploits an incident of nuclear terrorism similar to that of *The Wild Shore* as its divergence event, the actual devastation is geographically distant but chronologically immediate, leaving social and cultural norms untouched but challenged by the slow collapse of the community after power fails, gas runs out, and food supplies dwindle to nothing. Jericho is a small, predominantly-white, farming community in the middle of Kansas, and while issues of race and ethnicity are very much part of its narrative, its “red state” culture allows a specific examination of gender roles and the decline of feminist gains contested by the return of an adversarial prairie-in-winter environment. The series focuses on two men—Jake Green and Robert Hawkins—above

everyone else, and while it only presents a selection of mainstream, Midwest heterosexuality, many of these characters are female, from young teens to elderly mothers and shopkeepers. The executive producers of *Jericho* created the series in part as a reaction against the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, and the failure of federal and state authority to cope with Hurricane Katrina, especially in New Orleans.<sup>101</sup> Therefore, the series' focus on this farming community draws specific attention to the domestic situation of families and children, and the roles of mothers, teachers, and those who interfere with the nuclear family.

In most of these post-cataclysmic texts mothers are absent; the only exceptions appear in *Jericho*, Stirling's *Emberverse*, and *Battlestar Galactica*. Two mothers appear throughout the series: Gail Green, the wife of Mayor Johnston Green and mother of the protagonist, Jake Green and his brother Eric, and Darcy Hawkins, the wife of Robert and mother of Allie and Sam. Gail proves to be the backbone of the Green family and in many respects, the core of the community, even after her husband loses his reelection campaign. It is Gail who not only organizes harvest crews for the Richardson crops when they are threatened, but who also devises farm labor as the penalty for petty and minor crimes rather than jail time.<sup>102</sup> When the town loses electricity after the EMP, Gail puts together the massive barbeque/cookout,<sup>103</sup> and in the depth of winter she arranges for the refugees to move out of the church into the homes abandoned by those who were out of town when the bombs went off.<sup>104</sup> In contrast, Darcy Hawkins begins the series as Robert's estranged wife—she has a boyfriend in D.C. when Robert all but kidnaps her and the children to bring them to Jericho. It is only after several episodes that Robert

finally explains to Darcy exactly how the attack on the US occurred, and how endangered the family remains because of his intelligence activities and the evidence he holds against the conspirators. Darcy remains estranged from Robert for most of the first season, yet she maintains appearances to protect her children, and also backs him when local authorities question him.

To reinforce the moral authority of these mothers, each must contend with the issue of adultery or another woman. Gail, as the Green matriarch, initially rejects Eric's mistress, Mary Bailey, and will not allow her to become part of the family, even after April Green's death in childbirth. But after Eric is taken hostage by New Bern, Gail reconciles with Mary, emphasizing the importance of solidarity and the women of Jericho as a source of strength for the town in a time of crisis. Although Darcy is estranged from her husband and only maintains the illusion of marriage for the town, she is uncomfortable accepting her husband's former lover and fellow intelligence operative, Sarah Mason, into the house as a refugee. Sarah is an expert in hand-to-hand combat, small arms, and is a former member of Hawkins' special operations team—his handler, in fact. But she is also a part of the conspiracy and Allie Hawkins is forced to shoot her in order to protect Darcy and Sam. For Darcy, the children are her foremost concern, and her role illustrates friction between the African American communities and federal government, or the division within American families when parent has been assigned to military or hazardous duty.

But after the mothers, the teachers of the local community emerge as critical components in the town, not because of their role in educating the town's children, but because of other characteristics not typically attributed to women. Emily Sullivan serves

as the love interest for Jake, although she begins the series engaged to another man. Emily may be a second grade teacher, but her past as a former “bad girl” and daughter of the survivalist leader Jonah Prowse give her the experience and knowledge she needs to steal a generator for the town and infrequently aid Jake throughout the series. One of the school’s science teachers, Heather Lipinski, is even more crucial to the survival of the town and specific members of the community. Her scientific education and knowledge of engineering allow her to make ice to help deal with Johnston’s spiking fever while he is still mayor, and she devises a wind turbine to provide power after the EMP.<sup>105</sup> It is Heather who manages to escape New Bern and alert the Army of the Allied States of American to the war between Jericho and New Bern, and after they intercede and end it, she is appointed as the liaison between the two towns and is one of those responsible for maintaining the peace, something greater than the traditional female role of mediator and peacekeeper given the acrimony that remains and the pressure from the occupying Army.

Several other female characters expand beyond traditional limits and not only keeping the town alive, but also defending it against predatory corporate practices and the corrupt ASA government. These characters are only a limited selection in a much larger discussion, and while most remain mothers, wives, lovers, and teachers, they reflect a complex social dynamic that clarifies the inability of a modern American town, even a conservative farming community, to survive without the active and assertive support of both its men and women.

### **Emberverse and the Change**

Since the mid-1960s, when the spiking American interest in the *The Lord of the Rings* sparked a surge of interest in epics of high fantasy just as the publication of post-nuclear war stories ebbed, the fortunes of science fiction and fantasy have complemented each other. In the mid-1980s, after the Reagan-inspired spike in post-apocalypses faded away, fantasy authors like Stephen R Donaldson, Terry Brooks, and Robert Jordan, benefited from a similar shift to fantasy. After 9/11, the coincidental rush of popularity for Peter Jackson's film version of *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy translated into yet another storm of swords and sorcery or mythology-based films, television events, and SF literature—aided by the popularity of J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series and the proliferation of urban fantasy and paranormal romance. However, because so much of this torrent of related fantasy is derived from Tolkien's trilogy, many of these worlds only mimic poorly-understood versions of European history drawn from anywhere between the fall of Rome to the early modern witch craze or Thirty Years War; many overlap anachronisms and capture historical subtleties with as much fidelity as the Medieval Times restaurant chain. As with any other half-understood culture, the impression of the medieval world given by many of these fantasy texts is of misogynistic cultures in which women wield power only through magic and sorcery or by noble birth or marriage, with few acting as warriors in their own right. In one respect this cyclic interest in fantasy is a function of the romanticized ideals of a "simpler time" and nostalgia for a never-was that counters the instability many male fans felt during the rising tide of female writers and feminist SF in the 1960s and 1970s. Other fans turn to fantasy in reaction against homosexual, lesbian, and queer characters they wish to dismiss as artifacts of fictive affirmative action.

S.M. Stirling's novels of the Emberverse or *The Change* were initially inspired by the idea of the Society for Creative Anachronisms (SCA) taking over the world. Those who started the SCA included historians and professional genre writers as well as SF fans, including some who were involved with empowering women in fantasy settings. Stirling, as an amateur historian, meticulously researched not only the military technology, but also the culture that exists today among fans and the neopagan communities, many of which were started by female leaders along matriarchal lines. After technology dies, Stirling's new societies are based on logical extrapolation rather than conservative wish fulfillment; those who experience this cultural dislocation do not forget the world they've known. Through these anti-modern societies Stirling contributes most to the discussion of post-cataclysmic gender roles and sexuality in his depictions of the collapse and social reorganization afterward and what it means for female agency and autonomy; how the status and roles open to women change within the first generation of recovery; and how women become and remain leaders in this new social reality. Stirling persistently describes the physical challenges faced by women who must pick up sword and shield or shoot a longbow in this world, but he repeatedly makes the point that these women can fight and defeat men as long as they take into account the physical differences of size and strength and develop tactics and training to compensate. Within the military forces of the Bearkillers, Clan Mackenzie, the Dúnedain (Rangers) and to a far more limited extent, the knights of the Portland Protective Association and fighters of Norrheim, women are integrated with men and share fighting and camp duties on campaign, reflecting the growing reality and numbers of women in America's armed forces in the twenty-first century.



As with two of the other narratives in this section, *Jericho* and *BSG*, Stirling applies the disaster and decline formula just as *Lucifer's Hammer* did almost thirty years earlier. However, in these post-9/11 sources the cognitive dissonance and trauma of collapse are heightened by portraying only a few hours or minutes of the world the audience knows before the cataclysm occurs. Stirling draws from the same well that produced Niven and Pournelle's cannibal army, Brin's survivalists, and the "paints" that rape and burn men, women, and children in Butler's economic collapse. In the days and weeks after technology dies, social norms collapse where strength is not used to maintain them—such a use of force immediately troubles the narrative by suggesting conservative responses to social change. In Portland, Norman Armingher acts swiftly to seize power and create his fantasy version of twelfth century Norman culture. For much of the first ten years after the Change, within the PPA and its holdings, women are subordinate: they only appear as wives, girlfriends, biker "old ladies," and slaves. Armingher himself develops an appetite and reputation for indulging his repressed adolescent fantasies of rape and torture, and maintains a stable of slaves. His wife, Sandra, is the most powerful woman in the PPA, and she accepts his "foibles" because it keeps him busy and allows her to consolidate her own influence and power. Few women are professionals within the PPA as this regressive social order forms, so to protect themselves from drudge work and slavery, they pair off and marry the new dukes, barons, and lords (many of whom are drawn from street gangs and organized crime) who swear fealty to Norman. Within the PPA women must subordinate themselves to their husbands and to a version of Catholicism that blends the crusades with the Spanish Inquisition, becoming sheltered possessions or risk being forced to wear "bikini briefs [...] and a dog collar."<sup>106</sup> It is only

after much patient urging from the Lady (and later Regent) Sandra that Norman begins to allow women to train and compete as knights, but this is a rare instance in the first twenty years after the Change.

More immediate than the threat of rape and slavery in Portland are the attacks experienced by those who form the nucleus of the Bearkillers and Mackenzies. As a metatextual nod to Brin's *The Postman*, Mike Havel and Eric Larsson encounter survivalists in Idaho who take Will Hutton captive, plan to castrate him and keep him as a slave, and use his wife and their daughter as sex slaves. These same attackers, after escaping Mike and Eric, attempt to rape his sisters Signe and Astrid after torturing and murdering their mother, Mary. Signe and Astrid are assaulted, but their rapes are interrupted by the arrival of Mike and Eric. Stirling describes the resistance of these women to their attackers; Astrid, a vegetarian and pacifist before the Change, calmly uses her bow to shoot one of the fleeing rapists in the spine, paralyzing him and preventing his escape.<sup>107</sup> Signe is less traumatized than Astrid, but she is symbolic of not just women, or rape survivors, but everyone who is dependent on the police and armed forces; in her rage and frustration she demands that Mike teach her how to fight because she refuses to ever again be so helpless.<sup>108</sup> Ken Larsson, the head of the family, is a (modern) strong, intelligent man, and is unable to cope with the death of his wife and near-rape of both his daughters—Stirling uses his reaction and feelings of weakness and helplessness to illustrate that the victims of the Change are not just women or homosexual men.<sup>109</sup> Ken recovers from his mental collapse during the incident with the survivalists, but it takes the understanding and efforts of Pamela Arnstein, who encourages him to forget the “macho

male bullshit,” for him to recover from his trauma by recognizing how the world has changed: “We protect each other. You didn't protect your family before the Change, either: the law did, and the police did, and the military did, and the state of Oregon did, and the U-S of A did. Now the outfit [Bearkillers] does.”<sup>110</sup> Part of Arnstein’s authority is generated by her role as arms trainer for the Bearkillers; even as an Iraq War veteran and former Marine, Mike still needs Pam to teach him how to use a sword and to fight someone with a sword and shield—her experience is necessary to translate book theory into practical skills.

Mike Havel and Norman Arminger become leaders and the formative influence of their societies, which is typical of post-cataclysmic stories going back beyond *Lucifer’s Hammer*, *Alas, Babylon*, and even *Earth Abides*. What Stirling does that supports the gains women have made in American society over the past forty years is to make them the driving force of equivalent societies that are not isolationist feminist utopias or Amazonian fantasies. Although Mike Havel is a veteran and knows how to fight, his primary skills are with modern weapons. It takes Pam’s hobby with Renaissance and medieval weapons, and Astrid’s expertise in archery to train him and the rest of the fighters of the Bearkillers. Pam is also the closest thing to a doctor the group has (she is a veterinarian) until they rescue Aaron Rothman.<sup>111</sup> Among the Mackenzies, Juniper is the crystal for ethnogenesis, but it takes a practical joke to turn them into the caricature of a Scots clan. Regardless, Juniper’s beliefs and faith define the culture her people begin to spread through the southern Willamette, especially after they encounter one of Arminger’s “dukes” and thwart his invasion attempt. The Mackenzie duns are balanced—

following a form of Georgian-rite Wicca, each has a male and female political leader, and a male and female religious leader; most duns have the same couple in both roles. During the crisis Juniper is also the one who makes the difficult decision to turn away the foraging parties from Salem to keep her own people from starving, and she and her medico (midwife, herbalist, and nurse), Judy, go on the road to assess the Change. The men are not the ones tasked with building the community's fortifications and training their first crop of archers. Juniper is regarded by the "mad pope" Leo of the PPA as the "witch queen" of the valley, and her power is his justification for running an Inquisition to ferret out (and burn) all the pagans he can.

But these are not the only strong and dominant women in the novels. Signe Larsson becomes regent for her son after Mike Havel's death, just as Sandra Armingier serves as regent for her daughter Matilda after Norman's death. In fact, Sandra begins changing the balance of power between sexes and liberalizes gender roles gradually after her husband's death; her two best intelligence agents and assassins are Tiphaine d'Ath and Katrina Georges, gymnasts and Girl Scouts who survive the collapse (a swipe at the victimization of Niven and Pournelle's Girl Scouts). Astrid is changed by her near-rape and the trauma of her mother's death; she had been an obsessive fan of the fantasy genre, especially Tolkien's novels, before the Change and afterward she develops preternatural fighting abilities and seems a little "mad" because she chooses to interpret the changed world in terms of Tolkien's "histories" and epics. In her mid-teens she and Juniper's daughter, the much better grounded Eilir, form the Dúnedain Rangers. In the changed world, the Changelings—those who were prepubescent or born after the Change—adapt the best: Astrid and Tiphaine are the foremost warriors among all the societies of the

Willamette, with the single exception of Rudy Mackenzie, who was born after the Change and becomes the High King of Montival (the post-change kingdom that begins to replace the US).

Although Octavia Butler includes a homosexual man and two women who perform as lesbians in prison in her *Parable of the Talents*, both episodes incorporate elements of shame and punishment. Over the course of Stirling's series, sexuality helps define several characters, but more importantly, he recognizes the fluidity of sexual identity and draws distinctions between sex as practice and as essential identity. Under the control of Norman Arming, heteronormative practices are required and the Inquisitors of Pope Leo are used to "out" homosexuals and lesbians, conflating them with the "demonic" pagans and their "lascivious" practices. This same Inquisition ignores Arming's stable of sex slaves and the harems of other male "nobles," emphasizing the unequal sex/gender dynamic. Regardless, two of the best fighters and the best operatives—espionage and assassination—are a lesbian couple raised in the PPA and trained and shielded from the Protector and Pope by Lady Sandra. When Katrina is killed, there is no overtone of punishment or condemnation regarding her sexuality, and her lover, Tiphaine goes on to form a marriage-of-convenience with an equally capable, gay male knight (who is also closeted). The only other gay man is Aaron, of the Bearkillers, but unlike the PPA, he is not only open about his sexuality, but is affectionately teased about his dates and boyfriends because they look like Mike Havel—his unrequited love. The Wicca-inspired Mackenzies are tolerant and accepting of all forms of sexuality, and it is among the clans that Stirling establishes several bisexual characters (as well as Tiphaine's lover in the PPA, Delia), however, perhaps as a calculated awareness of the

primary audience of the series—straight male fans—there are no male bisexuals in the series. The most recent book, *The Tears of the Sun* (2011) is the first to present a strong, sympathetic gay male character, Sir Rigobert (“a model of blazing macho hotness”<sup>112</sup>) which may suggest that older prejudices are fading among fans, but definitely signals that authors are not ignoring the changing society about them, not in an era where gay and lesbian soldiers are finally permitted to be open about their sexuality.

### **Battlestar Galactica (BSG)**

There was a time – I know I was there – when men were men, women were women and sometimes a cigar was just a good smoke. But 40 years of feminism have taken their toll. The war against masculinity has been won. Everything has turned into its opposite, so that what was once flirting and smoking is now sexual harassment and criminal. And everyone is more lonely and miserable as a result.

Dirk Benedict, *Starbuck: Lost in Castration*<sup>113</sup>

As the actor who portrayed the original Starbuck in the “classic” *Battlestar Galactica* in the late-1970s, Dirk Benedict expresses the shock and horror of many (male) fans when they were told (or saw) that Starbuck was now a butch, blond woman in the reimagined miniseries. Benedict passionately argued that the easy-going, womanizing Starbuck was a casualty of political correctness and “metro-sexual moneymen” in Hollywood—another sign of the emasculation of the great heroes of the American past like Ronald Reagan and John Wayne, and an indicator of the decline of family, morality, and American values.<sup>114</sup> Perhaps more shocking to older and more socially conservative fans, *BSG* not only integrated its entire military (officers, pilots, Marines, and deck crew) but also flipped the sexes of another two characters from the original series: Boomer/Athena (Sharon Velerii/Sharon Agathon) and Admiral Cain. *BSG* is the only

series in this discussion that frequently neutralizes gender roles, making them inconsequential to many of the plot points and character developments. It is among the most progressive of the examples in this chapter by treating women wholly as equals.

After the first three seasons of the new series, Carla Kungl argues that Katie Sackhoff's portrayal of Starbuck is "exhibiting strength and vulnerability, a humanity that successfully moves women characters onto new ground."<sup>115</sup> She also notes that the response of many fans (including Benedict) are gender and sex essentialist/constructivist in nature and comply with the particular conservatism of a great deal of SF in assuming and enforcing limits to masculine and feminine behavior aligned with biological sex.<sup>116</sup> But Starbuck is far more than a female actor in a male role even if she riffed on Benedict's earlier portrayal (anti-authoritarian, devil-may-care, gambler, and hard drinker), turning his womanizing into her own heterosexual sexual aggression. Starbuck's story also encompasses other women's issues including rape, reproductive control, and motherhood. On Caprica, in the Cylon laboratory, Starbuck is almost artificially impregnated and connected to the same life-support apparatus as other female prisoners to serve as a "baby factory." Starbuck—Kara—realizes her doctor is a Cylon, kills him, and frees herself. Once free, one of her fellow prisoners begs Starbuck to destroy the machine, which will kill her and the other human subjects, but also free them from a lifetime subject to Cylon control as captive wombs for their genetic experiments.<sup>117</sup> Later, after the occupation of New Caprica, Kara is imprisoned by one of the Leoben (Number Two), who repeatedly assaults her as part of his attempts to convince her of his love. Each time she fights and kills him; and each time he resurrects. Right before the

Galactica and Pegasus attack to free the Colonists, Leoben appears with a child, Casey, whom he says is Kara's daughter (from "The Farm"). The lie is only revealed when Kara accidentally encounters the real mother on the Galactica after the rescue.<sup>118</sup> Kara is already damaged when the series begins, but after her imprisonment and rescue, she becomes an alcoholic and disrupts the unit cohesion of her squadron as well as imperils Lee Adama's marriage. Some critics could argue that these are manifestations of contemporary fears of the effect women will have within active duty military units, but these are not endemic to all of the female warriors and are used to emphasize Starbuck's decline before her apparent death near the end of the season in "Maelstrom."<sup>119</sup>

Starbuck is only one of several major (and prominent) female characters in the reimagined series. However, in terms of traditional gender roles and characters who have female bodies, the series offers multivalent and complex interpretations of gender issues: the significance of mothers and motherhood, the efficacy of women as secular and religious leaders, women and men as warriors and politicians, and it deals sympathetically with issues of rape, sexual assault, and reproductive control. The sexual reversal of Starbuck and Boomer from male characters to female was initially rejected by a number of fans, but over the course of the series Grace Park's portrayal of several different "models" of the Number Eight allayed this response and arguably created the most complex set of characters other than Jessica Helfer's portrayals of the Number Sixes. Park excels in the exceptionally difficult task for a young actor: playing multiple characters that are often at odds with each other, and sometimes in the same scene. As Boomer, she plays the fallen woman—after her attempted assassination of Adama, she is



shot by Cally, and then becomes one of the allies of Caprica Sixes in their attempts to end the war. But after the failed occupation of New Caprica, she turns against the rest of her line and, for a time, works with the Cavils to exert control over all the Cylons. It is Cavil's near-dissection of her "sister's" baby, Hera, that makes her desert the Cylons and return to the *Galactica*, where Athena (also a Number Eight played by Park) kills her for the final time.

Athena's story is one of painful redemption; she is jailed after returning to the fleet with Karl "Helo" Agathon, and after months in a holding cell finally gives birth to a human/Cylon hybrid only to be told that her baby died. When the *Pegasus* appears, Athena/Sharon is not just confiscated as a prisoner from the *Galactica*, but she is also subjected to the same dehumanizing treatment as other Cylon prisoners: rape and torture that underscores contemporary issues such as the prisoner scandal at Abu Ghraib and rumors regarding Camp X-Ray. Unlike the Six, Gina, who is raped and tortured repeatedly for months, Athena's rape is interrupted by Chief Tyrol and Helo, who are almost executed in reprisal. Gradually, Sharon recovers and becomes a pilot, returning to what she did, if not who she was, before she was activated as a sleeper Cylon—resisting the unifying traits of the Eights, and rejecting the collective mind control of the Cylons. She develops free will. During the eighteen-month occupation of New Caprica she marries Helo, becoming Sharon Agathon, and earns the callsign "Athena" from Adama. She then attempts to infiltrate the Cylons on New Caprica in order to aid in the rescue mission. It is only months later that she learns from another Cylon—a Six—that Hera is not only alive, but held by the Cylons and Sharon asks her husband to kill her so that she can resurrect and attempt a rescue. Since the Cylons are cyborgs, *BSG* is the only post-

cataclysm in this study that can legitimately employ the discourse of postmodern identity as Haraway and others have framed it. It is perhaps ironic then that Hera, as the hybrid child of Cylon and human, plays a pivotal role in the survival and development of humanity in the final episode of the series, as the “mitochondrial Eve.” Regardless, Athena’s story is that of an individual, not a sex, a gender, nor a species and she reasserts the agency of all women in contemporary SF narratives, providing a positive example for the advancement of women in American society.

In the original *BSG*, the patriarchal leader of the fleet is Commander Adama, played by Lorne Greene (who was trading in on fourteen years as “Pa” Cartwright on *Bonanza*); his role often marginalized the political leaders including the Quorum and Twelve and the President. However, in the reimagined *BSG*, Mary McDonnell portrays a President Laura Roslin, who is an integral character for the entire series. During her tenures as President, Roslin engages in an attempt to rig the election in her favor against Gaius Baltar, outlaws abortion, justifies torture, and approves of an attempt to commit genocide against the Cylons, all of which is addressed in Chapter Three.<sup>120</sup> In the process of coping with terminal breast cancer she begins to follow a fundamentalist religion, going so far as to divide the fleet in an effort to recover the Arrow of Apollo—a relic that her religious adviser tells her will lead the fleet to Earth. Even after her adviser’s death on Caprica, she continues to look for signs that align with the prophecies in the Scrolls of Pythia, troubling an assumed separation of church and state. In terms of extending the role of women, while she does outlaw abortion, she knows it will cost her the election and does so because she sees human extinction on the horizon and believes

that the survival of the species trumps personal choice. This decision most of all reflects Mary McDonnell's interpretation of Roslin:

Laura Roslin's presidency was unique in that she became president during war and cataclysm without the energy of ambition fueling her decisions. This was a woman who hadn't a clear political ambition. This made her very different from the women in power that we see on TV. Her story was one of a woman grappling with untapped, literally unrecognized, qualities classically male, in order to achieve one paramount goal—the survival of the Human Race.

One of the things that critics and fans alike responded to in Laura Roslin was the utter lack of sentimentality in her writing. There was no romanticizing the woman in power and I think the audience stayed with her even when they disagreed with her.<sup>121</sup>

Because so many of her actions as President can be read as regressive and anti-feminist, Roslin is an example of a character whose actions and decisions are driven by her beliefs and passions, and not made to advance agendas of sex or gender. As with Stirling's inclusion of a strong gay male character, Roslin's political decisions and mistakes are not overt political statements, nor are they constrained by the political and social expectations of fans, but function as part of an attempt to deal with real world problems through a fictional lens.

## **Conclusion**

More than almost any other subgenre of SF, post-cataclysms deal with the weakness and failures of the American Dream and the reality of inequities in terms of sex, gender roles, and sexual freedom and identity. In fantasy (tales of swords and sorcery), magic and deific intervention can mitigate biological differences in size and strength, and in future or alien societies, technology can do the same as well as granting

greater or absolute control over pregnancy and other biological processes. In post-apocalyptic worlds the dystopias require that the liberty granted by such control or equality be forgotten. But in post-cataclysms the memory persists and in some instances the technology remains but cannot be reproduced, and when it is exhausted, women return to subordinate and dependent statuses as in *Earth Abides*, and *Lucifer's Hammer*, and to a slightly lesser extent in *Alas, Babylon*. The post-cataclysms of the 1980s seem uncertain regarding women—they appear in minor roles, like *The Wild Shore*, or their attempts to move beyond the reconstructed domestic sphere, as in *Warday* and *The Postman*, are overwhelmed by the lingering damage of the Cataclysm or the threats spawned by a return to a nature read in tooth and claw and male aggression. Not to confuse characters with authors, Brin notes the danger that women experience when they range beyond the protection and apprehension of their men, but he does not decry their desire or ability to do it, and both Emma Bull and Octavia Butler argue that the efforts of women may be the only way to escape a cycle of violence and victimization. Although network TV is inherently more conservative than cable TV, the expectations of male audiences seem to be the common denominator for the more limited roles given to women in *Jeremiah* and *Jericho*, both instances where motherhood and redemption are recurrent threads. Such themes persist in both the *Emberverse* and *BSG*; however, women come into their own as complex characters who are not defined by their biology or desire, but who navigate complex arrays of fears and dreams to contend with the threat of violence and the need to fight as often, if not more, than men. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, women of the post-cataclysm stand at the final bridge between being protected and subordinate or moving forward as individuals who are entirely responsible

for their ambitions, choices, and actions without recourse to social restrictions in America.

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<sup>1</sup> Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle, *Lucifer's Hammer*, (New York: Fawcett, 1977), 395.

<sup>2</sup> Patricia Melzer, *Alien Constructions: Science Fiction and Feminist Thought*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006), 5.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>5</sup> Adam Roberts, *Science Fiction: the New Critical Idiom*, (London: Routledge, 2006), 74-75.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>7</sup> Entries include: "Disaster", "End of the World", "Holocaust and After", and "Survivalist Fiction" in John Clute and Peter Nicholls, *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, (London: Orbit, 1993).

<sup>8</sup> Specific monographs and collections that discuss the role of spectacle, F/X, and visual objectification of women in SF media include: M. Keith Booker, *Science Fiction Television*, (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004); Christine Cornea, *Science Fiction Cinema: Between Fantasy and Reality*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2007); Annette Kuhn (ed), *Alien Zone: Cultural Theory and Contemporary Science Fiction*, (London and New York: Verso Books, 1990); Annette Kuhn (ed) *Alien Zone II: the spaces of science fiction cinema*, (London and New York: Verso Books, 1999); Sean Redmond (ed) *Liquid metal: the science fiction film reader*, (London and New York: Wallflower Press, 2004); Vivian Sobchack, *Screening Space: The American Science Fiction Film*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004); and J.P. Telotte, *Science Fiction Film*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

<sup>9</sup> Kim Newman's analysis of end-of-the-world movies, in particular his discussion of "warriors of the wastelands" ties in with Clute and Nicholl's analysis, but Newman goes much further. The macho violence and sexual titillation are only part of the megatext in his analysis, although he is disappointed in the superficial political commentary of many American films, and the lack of socio-political engagement in a number of films, especially the Italian low-budget radioactive westerns. Kim Newman, *Apocalypse Movies: End of the World Cinema*, (New York: St. Martins Press, 1999), 174-95.

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<sup>10</sup> Margaret Walters, *Feminism: A Very Short Introduction*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 114-15.

<sup>11</sup> Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, (New York; Routledge, 1991), 149-81.

<sup>12</sup> Veronica Hollinger, "Feminist theory and science fiction," in *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction* edited by Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 125-136; 126.

<sup>13</sup> Patricia Melzer, *Alien Constructions*, 8.

<sup>14</sup> Robert Adams, *Science Fiction*, 76.

<sup>15</sup> Sarah Lefanu, *In the Chinks of the World Machine: Feminism & Science Fiction*, (London: The Women's Press, 1988), 33-36.

<sup>16</sup> Among the most-cited examples are Joanna Russ's "When it Changed" (1972) and *The Female Man* (1975); Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976); Alice Sheldon's (as James Tiptree, Jr.) "Houston, Houston, Do You Read?" (1976); Suzy McKee Charnas's Holdfast Chronicles, particularly the first two novels: *Walk to the End of the World* (1974) and *Motherlines* (1978). Veronica Hollinger notes these and other examples of feminist utopian fiction—not all of it post-apocalyptic—in "Feminist theory and science fiction" in *the Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction*. Vonda McIntyre's *Dreamsnake* (1978) adds to the discourse as non-utopian post-apocalyptic and feminist SF.

<sup>17</sup> Veronica Hollinger, "Feminist theory and science fiction," 128.

<sup>18</sup> Jenny Wolmark, *Aliens and Others: Science Fiction, Feminism and Postmodernism*, (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1994), 4.

<sup>19</sup> Peter Nicholls, "Survivalist Fiction" in *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*: 583.

<sup>20</sup> Suzee McKee Charnas, in "Dear Frontiers": Letters from Women Fantasy and Science Fiction Writers. Author(s): Pamela Sargent, Marge Piercy, Suzy McKee Charnas, James Tiptree, Jr., Elizabeth A. Lynn, Vonda N. McIntyre, Chelsea Quinn Yarbro, Kate Wilhelm. Source: *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (Autumn, 1977), pp. 62-78: 65. University of Nebraska Press. Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3346350>. Accessed: 06/01/2011

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- <sup>21</sup> Quoted from *The Dialectic of Sex* (1970) by Laura Mamo in *Queering Reproduction: Achieving Pregnancy in the Age of Technoscience*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 50.
- <sup>22</sup> Manfred E. Clynes and Nathan S. Kline, "Cyborgs and Space," in *Astronautics* (September 1960); 99 26-27, 74-76. PDF available: <http://web.mit.edu/digitalapollo/Documents/Chapter1/cyborgs.pdf> Accessed December 15, 2011.
- <sup>23</sup> Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto," 149.
- <sup>24</sup> Veronica Hollinger, "Feminist theory and science fiction," in *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction*, edited by Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 125-136; 133.
- <sup>25</sup> Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto," 150.
- <sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 150-51.
- <sup>27</sup> Gayle Rubin, "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality," in *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality*, edited by Carole S. Vance, (London: Pandora. 1992), 267-93.
- <sup>28</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, (New York and London: Routledge, 1990); Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender*, (New York and London: Routledge, 2006).
- <sup>29</sup> Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women's Movement Changed America*, (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), 19.
- <sup>30</sup> George Stewart, *Earth Abides*, 102.
- <sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 249.
- <sup>32</sup> Allan M. Winkler, *Life Under A Cloud: American Anxiety About the Atom*, (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 106-7.
- <sup>33</sup> Pat Frank, *Alas, Babylon*, 52.
- <sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 200.

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- <sup>35</sup> Ibid., 200.
- <sup>36</sup> Winkler, *Life Under A Cloud*, 106-7.
- <sup>37</sup> Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open*: 43-44.
- <sup>38</sup> Ibid., 65-68.
- <sup>39</sup> Ibid., 67.
- <sup>40</sup> Ibid., 71-72.
- <sup>41</sup> Ibid., 72-73.
- <sup>42</sup> Ibid., 108-10.
- <sup>43</sup> Ibid., 74-75.
- <sup>44</sup> Ibid., 76-77.
- <sup>45</sup> Ibid., 81-85.
- <sup>46</sup> Ibid., 82-84.
- <sup>47</sup> Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle, *Lucifer's Hammer*, 24.
- <sup>48</sup> Ibid., 586.
- <sup>49</sup> Ibid., 586.
- <sup>50</sup> Ibid., 536.
- <sup>51</sup> Ibid., 560.
- <sup>52</sup> Susan Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women* (15th Anniversary edition), (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2006), 142-43.
- <sup>53</sup> Ibid., 170-80.



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<sup>54</sup> Whitley Strieber and James Kunetka, *Warday and the Journey Onward*, (Kent: Coronet Books, 1983), 306.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 310.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 316.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 315.

<sup>58</sup> Adele Thompson and her leadership of Pine View: 34-38; Abby's plans, after the war ends: 313-14; Gary in Oak View on his wife and daughters: 71. David Brin, *The Postman*, (New York: Bantam, 1985).

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 269.

<sup>62</sup> Sarah Lefanu, *In the Chinks of the World Machine*, 33-35.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>64</sup> David Brin, *The Postman*, 138.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 225-26.

<sup>66</sup> Sarah Lefanu, *In the Chinks of the World Machine*, 33.

<sup>67</sup> David Brin, *The Postman*, 316.

<sup>68</sup> Susan Faludi, *Backlash*, xi.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, xiii.

<sup>70</sup> Sean Wilentz, *The Age of Reagan*, 367.

<sup>71</sup> Roger Luckhurst, *Science Fiction*, (Cambridge and Oxford: Polity Books, 2005), 231.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 232.

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 232.

<sup>74</sup> Veronica Hollinger, “Feminist theory and science fiction,” 131.

<sup>75</sup> Emma Bull, *Bone Dance*, 229.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 262-64.

It is also worth noting that Josh told Sparrow that “he learned his craft by apprenticing himself to a woman who had gone to med school and had a pre-Bang practice as a surgeon.” (p. 232). Therefore, the gender divisions are not essential outside voodoo, just apparent in the characters that appear in this story.

<sup>77</sup> Sarah Lefanu, *In the Chinks of the World Machine*, 35.

<sup>78</sup> Emma Bull, *Bone Dance*, 132-33.

<sup>79</sup> Veronica Hollinger, “Feminist theory and science fiction,” 131.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 131.

<sup>81</sup> Andrea Hairston, “Octavia Butler – Praise Song to a Prophetic Artist,” in *Daughters of Earth: Feminist Science Fiction in the Twentieth Century*, edited by Justine Larbalestier, (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2006), 287-304; 293.

<sup>82</sup> Jenny Wolmark, *Aliens and Others: Science Fiction, Feminism and Postmodernism*, (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1994), 28-46; Patricia Melzer, *Alien Constructions: Science Fiction and Feminist Thought*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006): racial and gender boundary transgressions: 96-100; monstrous bodies: 101-102; and non-binary gender and sexualities: 233-41. Marleen S. Barr, *Feminist Fabulation: Space/Postmodern Fiction*, (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1992), 84-89; Marleen S. Barr, *Lost in Space: Probing Feminist Science Fiction and Beyond*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 98-104; Sarah Lefanu, Veronica Hollinger, and several other scholars also invoke Butler for her work in undermining racial and sexual stereotypes in her work as a whole.

<sup>83</sup> Octavia Butler, *The Parable of the Sower*, (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 1993), 35-36.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 143.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 310.

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- <sup>86</sup> Octavia Butler, *Parable of the Talents*, (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 1998), 223.
- <sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 200-03.
- <sup>88</sup> Melissa S. Herbert, *Camouflage isn't Only for Combat: Gender, Sexuality, and Women in the Military*, (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 112.
- <sup>89</sup> Erin Solaro, *Women in the Line of Fire: What You Should Know About Women in the Military*, (Emeryville, CA: Seal Press, 2006), 7.
- <sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 348-49.
- <sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 336-38.
- <sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 68-69.
- <sup>93</sup> Susan Faludi, *The Terror Dream: Myth and Misogyny in an Insecure America*, (New York: Picador, 2007), 279-80.
- <sup>94</sup> Erin Solaro, *Women in the Line of Fire*, 55-56.  
Seymour M. Hersh, *Chain of Command: The Road from 9/11 to Abu Ghraib*, (New York: Harper Collins, 2004), 23-25.
- <sup>95</sup> Seymour M. Hersh, *Chain of Command*.
- <sup>96</sup> "The Long Road." *Jeremiah*. Showtime. Episode 101. Air Date: March 3, 2002.
- <sup>97</sup> "Ring of Truth." *Jeremiah*. Showtime. Episode 115. Air Date: June 7, 2002.
- <sup>98</sup> "Mother of Invention." *Jeremiah*. Showtime. Episode 113. Air Date: May 24, 2002.
- <sup>99</sup> Theo does not explain that she was attacked or raped, but her explanation of the fears and experiences of prepubescent girls after the plague strongly imply that she and many others were victimized. "The Long Road."
- <sup>100</sup> "Rites of Passage." *Jeremiah*. Showtime. Episode 205. Air Date: October 31, 2003.
- <sup>101</sup> "Building Jericho," a special feature on the *Jericho*, Season One DVD collection.

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<sup>102</sup> “9:02.” *Jericho*. CBS. Episode 106. Air Date: October 25, 2006.

<sup>103</sup> “9:02.” *Jericho*.

<sup>104</sup> “One Man’s Terrorist.” *Jericho*. CBS. Episode 117. Air Date: April 4, 2007.

<sup>105</sup> One thing the show’s writers overlook is that the EMP would have destroyed all modern electronics, so while the turbines generate electricity there is the question of what they would actually supply power to. Ice: “Rogue River,” *Jericho*, CBS, Episode 108, Air Date: November 8, 2006; the idea for the turbines, “Black Jack,” *Jericho*, CBS, Episode 113, Air Date: February 28, 2007. The exchange of food and salt for the turbines manufactured in New Bern becomes the crux of the conflict and attempted invasion of Jericho at the end of the first season.

<sup>106</sup> S.M. Stirling, *Dies the Fire*, (New York: ROC, 2005), 54.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 130-32.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

<sup>109</sup> Aaron Rothman, the doctor that the Bearkillers rescue from the band of cannibals or Eaters, is gay, although this becomes a stronger part of his character in the second and third novels, where he is teased for his crush on Mike Havel and tendency to seek out liaisons and boyfriends who resemble the Bearkiller leader.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 283.

<sup>111</sup> This does raise an interesting point that all of the medical professionals are feminized to the extent that they are women and a gay man. While an interesting detail, an examination of the role of doctors and midwives is outside the scope of this study.

<sup>112</sup> S.M. Stirling, *The Tears of the Sun*, (New York: ROC, 2011), 308.

<sup>113</sup> Dirk Benedict, “Starbuck: Lost in Castration” on Dirk Benedict Central. Website. February 7, 2006. <http://www.dirkbenedictcentral.com/home/articles-readarticle.php?nid=5>. Accessed August 15, 2011. Dirk Benedict’s screed was originally published in *Dreamwatch* in 2004, after the miniseries aired, but before the series as a whole was released to the public.

<sup>114</sup> Dirk Benedict, “Starbuck: Lost in Castration”.

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<sup>115</sup> Carla Kungl, “ ‘Long Live Stardoe!’ Can a Female Starbuck Survive?” in *Cylons in America: Critical Studies in Battlestar Galactica*, edited by Tiffany Potter and C.W. Marshall, (New York: Continuum, 2008), 198-209.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 201-03.

<sup>117</sup> “The Farm,” *Battlestar Galactica*, SyFy, Episode 205, Air Date: August 12, 2005.

<sup>118</sup> “The Exodus (Part 2),” *Battlestar Galactica*, SyFy, Episode 304, Air Date: October 20, 2006.

<sup>119</sup> “Maelstrom,” *Battlestar Galactica*, SyFy, Episode 317, Air Date: March 4, 2007.

<sup>120</sup> “The Farm,” *Battlestar Galactica*.

<sup>121</sup> Kate O’Hare, “President Roslin Speaks – Q&A with ‘Battlestar Galactica’s’ Mary McDonnell, February 23, 2009. *Kate O’Hare’s Hot Cuppa TV* – blog. Accessed December 27, 2011.

## Conclusion: The End of History?

“Science fiction is not about the future; it uses the future as a narrative convention to present significant distortions of the present.

Samuel R. Delany

“Extremists sowing terror in pockets of the world. Prolonged conflicts that drag on and on. Genocide and mass atrocities. More and more nations with nuclear weapons. Melting ice caps and ravaged populations. Persistent poverty and pandemic disease.”

President Barak Obama, 2009<sup>1</sup>

In 2011, the writer and SF critic Paul Kinkaid won the British Science Fiction Association’s Non-Fiction Award for his four-part essay, “Blogging the Hugos: Decline,” in which he traces dystopic themes in three of the 2010 Hugo Awards<sup>2</sup> nominees in science fiction. Kinkaid says that images of American decline, while once rare, have become more common since the publication of William Gibson’s *Neuromancer* in 1984. Disasters did appear in earlier American SF, “but they were invariably sudden, abrupt, and usually nuclear”—ruptures and collapses rather than examples of gradual decline. Kinkaid argues that if things were bad for America in these stories, the implication is that the situation is even worse for the rest of the world. When America is defeated (by treachery, overwhelming force, or alien technology), it only sets up “the eventual restoration of American values” or scenes of “heroic American resistance to prove that the invaders are unfit to rule because of their political, religious or racial characteristics.”<sup>3</sup> But in discussing these recent fictions, Kinkaid makes the distinction

that in these worlds America is no longer the dominant culture and typically “the loss of American economic might implies the loss of military might.”<sup>4</sup> Kinkaid suggests that it is not just these three novels, but an increasing number of English-language SF texts that foresee tragedy and an imminent “downward slope” for the United States and its economic, political, and military power. However, as the texts in this study demonstrate, the idea of American decline depicted in post-cataclysmic SF is a persistent one; each of these texts responds to economic, political and social crises of its own time by envisioning an America where things could be much worse, and where the first casualty of cataclysm is the cherished American democratic ideal, the values that Kinkaid argues are meant to survive. *Lucifer’s Hammer*, *The Wild Shore*, *Warday*, *The Postman*, *Bone Dance*, *Parable of the Sower* and *Parable of Talents*, *Jeremiah*, *Jericho*, the *Emberverse*, and *Battlestar Galactica* all project a world in which America (as we know it) has not only declined or fragmented and been destroyed, but where the efforts to survive, to rebuild a sense of community and civic society rarely include the basic tenets of American ideology—life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness—suggesting that in the real world, these values may only be mirages, tantalizing but unreachable goals for modern America.

The novels Kinkaid reviewed are either set over a hundred years in the past or future, amid a twenty-year Civil War or long after the expected end of Peak Oil around 2040 CE, and are thus outside the scope of this study. But these scenes of American decline tie directly into similar scenarios of crisis that SF critic Doug Davis defines as “strategic fictions” used to influence governmental policy and planning—politicians and scientists read the implicit warnings in SF and develop their policies to deal with the

potential threats they envision. Davis contends that earlier scholars such as I.F. Clarke (*Voices Prophesying War* [1966, 1992]) and H. Bruce Franklin (*War Stars* [1988]) present strong arguments for the influence of “science fictional superweapons and catastrophic scenarios [...] to further military funding and development.”<sup>5</sup> Since 9/11, Davis argues that the administrations of George W. Bush used “speculative fictions about nuclear terrorism [...] to guide and justify its strategies of preemptive war and homeland defense.”<sup>6</sup> Although defending against potential terrorist nuclear and biological WMDs has “become more than fiction as it has been deployed by policymakers as the nation’s probable future” and is one of the “guiding principles of twenty-first century American foreign policy,” it appeared as a warning far earlier in *The Wild Shore* (1984) and *Warday* (1984), and it persists in the more recent *Jericho* (2006-2008) and is reflected in the rationale behind the Cylon attacks in *Battlestar Galactica: The Plan* (2010). Davis argues that SF, in the guise of fictions of mass destruction, is used to promote legislation and funding, and “to structure foreign policy and start wars.”<sup>7</sup> However, while Davis considers the goal of these texts to extrapolate the possible results of alarmist government planning in order to criticize them, he also operates from the perspective that these and similar fictions primarily seek to prevent such outcomes. Davis’s analysis is sound and productive, but in the context of this study these post-cataclysmic texts do not just warn of the destructive potential of such alarmist and defensive federal policies, but they also reveal the increasing insecurity of the President and military leaders. Finally, the most cynical and dystopic of these alternate worlds and futures use the post-cataclysmic aftermath and its social and political decline as an opportunity to reimagine our future



radically, based on our current reality—poverty, inequality, environmental disregard, economic decline, and the constant threat of attack.

Chapter One lays out the literary framework for the heuristics developed in this study and provides a benchmark for understanding the parameters of post-cataclysmic SF. These texts merely form the basis of the study; the heuristics can be applied to host of other texts and sources, beginning with those described as “lost in the panic” in the first chapter, but extending into the veritable tsunami of cataclysmic and apocalyptic books, television, movies, and graphic novels are currently being published or produced. The major cultural issues of each chapter highlight persistent American social problems both as they exist in historical record, and how SF creators interpret them. Chapter Two details the depletion of natural resources—including oil, fresh water, and arable land—and the multiple economic crises that have plagued America during the past forty years. These are recurring issues and threaten not only our economic stability, but foretell the possibility of the US becoming an aggressor rather than a protector in the future, a frightening prospect brought to life (perhaps prophetically) in Octavia Butler’s series. The perception of an Imperial President not only persists, but became the germ for the Tea Party movement, and the influence of the military-industrial complex on executive policy that drives the US toward preemptive action abroad and the weakening of civil liberties at home lies at the heart of Chapter Three. Given the nature of recent legal action directed toward immigrants, foreign workers, and voters, and Supreme Court decisions that suggest corporations are people and have a vote (*Citizens United*), perhaps civil liberties are becoming the fiction. Driven by economic fears and political anxieties, the

ethnic and cultural divisions within America have increased and are eroding the gains of the civil rights movement, as articulated in Chapter Four. The cultural conflict between Red and Blue states, and the way political pundits and the media avoid embedded issues of race and class echo the conclusion of this chapter and argue that these divisions will only increase in the future. The one hopeful spot in this study is Chapter Five, where the analysis suggests that the gains made by women and sexual minorities are not automatically erased by cataclysm, and thereby suggest that individual autonomy, if not political and economic rights or status, continues to increase at the beginning of the twenty-first century. However, this is only within these and similar post-cataclysmic texts, and the agency of women and sexual minorities has declined in a range of related works like *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) and *Children of Men* (1992), and the recent articulation of novels of the “contraction” that feature religious fundamentalism and societies that subordinate women and erase non-heterosexuals.

Amid the space operas, high fantasy, alternate histories and new subgenres like the new weird and slipstream fiction, post-apocalyptic and cataclysmic SF has proliferated in the first decade of the twenty-first century, especially after the critical success of *Battlestar Galactica* in 2005 and 2006. Today, in the early days of 2012 these stories show little sign of abating. This study focuses on a period that begins in the mid-1970s and ends at the beginning of the Obama administration in 2009 as a moment of hope and change. But the continued frustrations of Americans over the economy, declining house values, the ongoing American presence in Iraq and Afghanistan reveal the artificiality of that benchmark. Any hope has been deferred and the changes are limited to destruction and devastation in the bombardment of end-of-the-world (in a

variety of forms) films and literature since 2009: global apocalypse is envisioned in *The Road* (2009) and *The Book of Eli* (2010); the zombie apocalypse is the focus of *Survival of the Dead* (2009), *Zombieland* (2009), the ongoing AMC series *The Walking Dead* (2010–) and the forthcoming *World War Z* (2012). The climatic threats in *Knowing* (2009) and *2012* (2009) added to the resurgence of alien invasions after the remake of *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (2008) and the critical success of the foreign-made *District 9* (2009), which seems to have inspired *Monsters* (2010), *Skyline* (2010), *Battle: Los Angeles* (2011), *Super 8* (2011), the prequel to *The Thing* (2011), and the remake of the NBC series *V* (2009–2011) as well as the ongoing TNT series *Falling Skies* (2011–). The efforts of lawmakers and Presidents have only heightened the insecurity of the average American, and even those in Hollywood have lost the earlier, subtler, message of American decline in these new stories of global destruction and invasion. Yet that thread persists, and these sources can also be evaluated with the cataclysmic heuristics because no matter how grand the scope of the catastrophe, the focus tends to remain on small groups of people—families, military units, or isolated bands of survivors. Where the threats are world-wide, as in *Falling Skies*, which narrows its scope to human resistance against the alien invaders in the vicinity of Boston, the focus is still on an American struggle to resist unexpected threats on a new, internal frontier, and still insists on a united sense of American identity grounded in democratic ideals. Although many of these new sources would like to suggest that in the event of cataclysm we will ignore and forget our differences to come together in our efforts to survive, our petty political and social divisions are not sloughed away, a hope or delusion bellied by this study.

The elections of 2006 fundamentally realigned the Congressional balance of power, but this balance tilted again in 2008, and in 2010. Each time voters reacted against what they feared most—higher taxes or a growing federal deficit; an apparent imperial president and disregard for fundamental rights; and illegal immigrants and workers or foreign attacks. Some chose to believe the shrill warnings of pundits and surrendered individual liberties for claims of protection and security tied the renewal of the Patriot Act, the creation of the Stop Online Piracy Act (SOPA), and the National Defense Authorization Act. Others citizens have pushed for measures that potentially disenfranchise minorities and the poor by forcing them to procure new identification just to be able to vote, or have advocated introducing drug testing for those who receive welfare in states like Florida, or applauded the automatic requests for citizenship papers during traffic stops in the Southwest. Within the United States, the continued polarization of a shrinking voting public has eroded comity in the public sphere and exacerbates anxieties that include the loss of individual rights and the fear of higher taxes. Within this same context the political divisions and political shift to the right over the past twenty years has increased assaults on everything from science to sex education, the stability of *Roe v. Wade*, and most recently, in the Republican Presidential debates, even the availability of condoms.

As Samuel Delany and other authors and critics have noted, the cognitive dissonance of future extrapolations and alien worlds disrupts the emotional identification the reader or viewer has with the story; in the context of post-cataclysm this should provide the intellectual distance to apprehend crisis and to consider means of avoiding or ameliorating it. But prejudices and emotions are unfortunately resistant to logic and

rational evaluation. The heuristics of this study expose a series of interrelated issues—fears, anxieties, and doubts—that reveal a growing sense of vulnerability and highlight the weakness of some of the most fundamental characteristics of the American promise. Although the attacks of 9/11 proved a watershed moment and will continue to resonate with stories of American weakness or strength, as the heuristics show, contemporary issues of the economy, natural resources, economic, manufacturing, and military power all have their roots in the 1970s. Before the 1970s and even into the 1980s most apocalyptic or cataclysmic stories forecast the eventual recovery of the US and an American-style culture(s) among the stars. Beginning in the 1980s, humanity recovers, but it is other nations that lead the celestial diasporas, and some cataclysms echo examples drawn from the cyberpunk genre that extrapolate a fallen, crippled America left behind on the depleted carcass of the Earth.

In this study, the application of these cataclysmic heuristics suggest that the belief in American preeminence is fading, and reveals the very real worry that the future that was once so bright may be slipping from our grasp as energy prices soar, the country becomes more dependent on foreign oil and investment, and the memory of a once great manufacturing capacity fades away. The immediacy of some disasters like comet strikes and alien invasion take away the responsibility for the collapse and subsequent reversion to despotic governments from the America people themselves—these fictions argue that some choose to be comforted by excuses and finger-pointing rather than seeking compromise and effective legislation or leadership: aliens and comets may excuse the impasse within America's legislative institutions, but they no longer distract from it. Although American military technology remains the most advanced on the planet, the

impotence of the military itself in the aftermath of cataclysm is an analogy for the futility of drones, bunker-buster bombs, and multi-ton main battle tanks or battleships to stop a roadside IED, or prevent a fanatic with internet access and the right materials from devastating a city center like New York or Los Angeles. Yes, the aliens or zombies may be invulnerable to the US Army, but it is the lack of effective leadership and the inability to understand the foes of America that are the true threat to security and safety.

Now more than ever, these heuristic can be applied to American and global concerns. In the last three years, since President Obama's historic election to the American presidency in 2008 the world has teetered on the brink of cataclysm more than once, so much so that the scientists responsible for setting the "Doomsday Clock" are considering a recalculation. The Deep Water Horizon explosion in April 20, 2010, and the massive oil leak that followed, destabilized energy markets and threatened the environment. The Japanese tsunami and the flooding of Thailand in 2011 exposed the dependency of American corporations on foreign manufacturing and supply chains; globalization and the fragility of European markets and decline of the Euro also weakened the dollar and continue to extend the Great Recession. Every great empire has risen and fallen into its own ashes, destroyed by internal factors: corruption, greed, anti-intellectualism, religious fundamentalism, increasing disparity among classes of people, imperial leaders consumed by their own egos and their own idolatry. Such were the causes of Rome's fall, and, according to post-cataclysmic SF, such will be the causes of America's destruction. In the last forty years, post-cataclysmic SF has revealed the cracks in the façade of American exceptionalism, has challenged the idea of American progress

and hegemony, and has highlighted the weakness in one of America's greatest strengths—civil liberties and democracy.

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<sup>1</sup> President Barak Obama, "Responsibility for our Common Future," address to the United Nations General Assembly, September 23, 2009; quoted by Gideon Rachman in *Zero-Sum Future: American Power in an Age of Anxiety*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2011), 8.

<sup>2</sup> The Hugo Awards are given by fans of F/SF "for excellence in the field of science fiction and fantasy, and have been awarded every year since 1955. The Hugo Awards are given each year at the World Science Fiction Convention (Worldcon) and all members of the World Science Fiction Society (WSFS) are eligible to vote. This material is available on the Hugo Awards website maintained by WSFS. Accessed July 30, 2011. <http://www.thehugoawards.org/hugo-faq/>

<sup>3</sup> Paul Kinkaid, "Blogging the Hugos: Decline, part 1" Bigother.com July 14, 2010. "<http://bigother.com/2010/07/14/blogging-the-hugos-decline-part-1/>" Accessed July 21, 2010.

<sup>4</sup> Paul Kinkaid, "Blogging the Hugos: Decline, part 4" Bigother.com July 17, 2010. <http://bigother.com/2010/07/17/blogging-the-hugos-decline-part-4/> Accessed July 31, 2011.

<sup>5</sup> Doug Davis, "Science fiction Narratives of Mass Destruction" in *New Boundaries in Political Science Fiction*, edited by Donald M. Hassler and Clyde Wilcox, (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2008), 146-47.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 151.

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