

Revealing Race, Racing Revelation: Exploring the Intersections Between Race and Apocalypticism

Isabella Mynatt, Prof. Matthew Goff

Introduction

Apocalypse, hailing from the Greek word *apokalypsis*, means revelation. This may seem unlike the modern consideration of the term. Before Roman Christianity, apocalyptic beliefs were not associated with the battle of good and evil, heaven and hell, or the end of the world. After the spread of Christianity over Western civilization, apocalyptic beliefs began to be associated with these 'battles' and destruction. The spread also solidified a specific Western cultural unity of thought. Furthermore, premodern racial theory has established that the concept of race is not modern, and racial groups can form through religious and cultural systems.

Studies that engage in antiquated apocryphal beliefs rarely tend to dive deeply into racial discourses. Many premodern racial studies tend to overlook the connection between apocalyptic and/or religious symbolism and the effect it can have on racial hierarchies.

- Primary purpose of study:**
- Understand and examine how apocalyptic ideologies influence:
 - Racial classifications
 - Resistance and acceptance of racialization
 - Societal hierarchies (within racial groups and between different ones)
 - Connect religious and critical race studies.
 - Show the importance of religious symbolism in the creation of racial identities.
 - Prove the importance of interdisciplinary racial studies.



Death on a Pale Horse (1796) by Benjamin West. (Photo: Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons)



Lochner, Stefan. The Last Judgment. Circa 1435. Oil on oak panel. Wallraf-Richartz-Museum & Fondation Corboud, Cologne.

Results

- Apocalyptic traditions across history are connected to constructions of race.
- Black religious leaders (Maria Stewart and Florence Randolph) used apocalyptic biblical texts (such as Daniel and Revelation) in sermons to address racism, gender inequality, and social injustice.
- Apocalyptic literature historically incorporated ethnographic frameworks that mapped peoples, geography, and imperial power structures (for example, Enochic traditions).
- Mormonism - "lived eschatology," where racialized apocalyptic expectations shaped community identity and historical development.
- Ancient Jewish apocalyptic texts contributed to the formation of race and identity (in later traditions).
- Apocalyptic discourse - resistance to oppression and globalization of cultural knowledge for imperialism.

Main themes:

- **Apocalypticism is social, political, and racial.**
- **Apocalyptic narratives can be used to interpret present suffering and spark future hope.**
- **Race and imperialism/empires are recurring themes across ancient and some modern apocalyptic traditions.**

Significance:

The research has shown that apocalyptic thought is founded in real social and racial contexts; it is not just theology. In fact, ancient apocalyptic traditions and modern religious movements have been connected through their struggles for social change. The research has revealed that marginalized voices, especially those of black religious leaders, are among the most important interpreters of these traditions. Apocalypticism shapes resistance and identity.

Strengths:

- Interdisciplinary approach
- Ancient and modern textual/experience research
- Diverse case studies across history

Limitations:

- Reliant on secondary literature, rather than primary fieldwork
- Case studies are primarily focused on Western practices
- Limited geographic scope (in some areas)

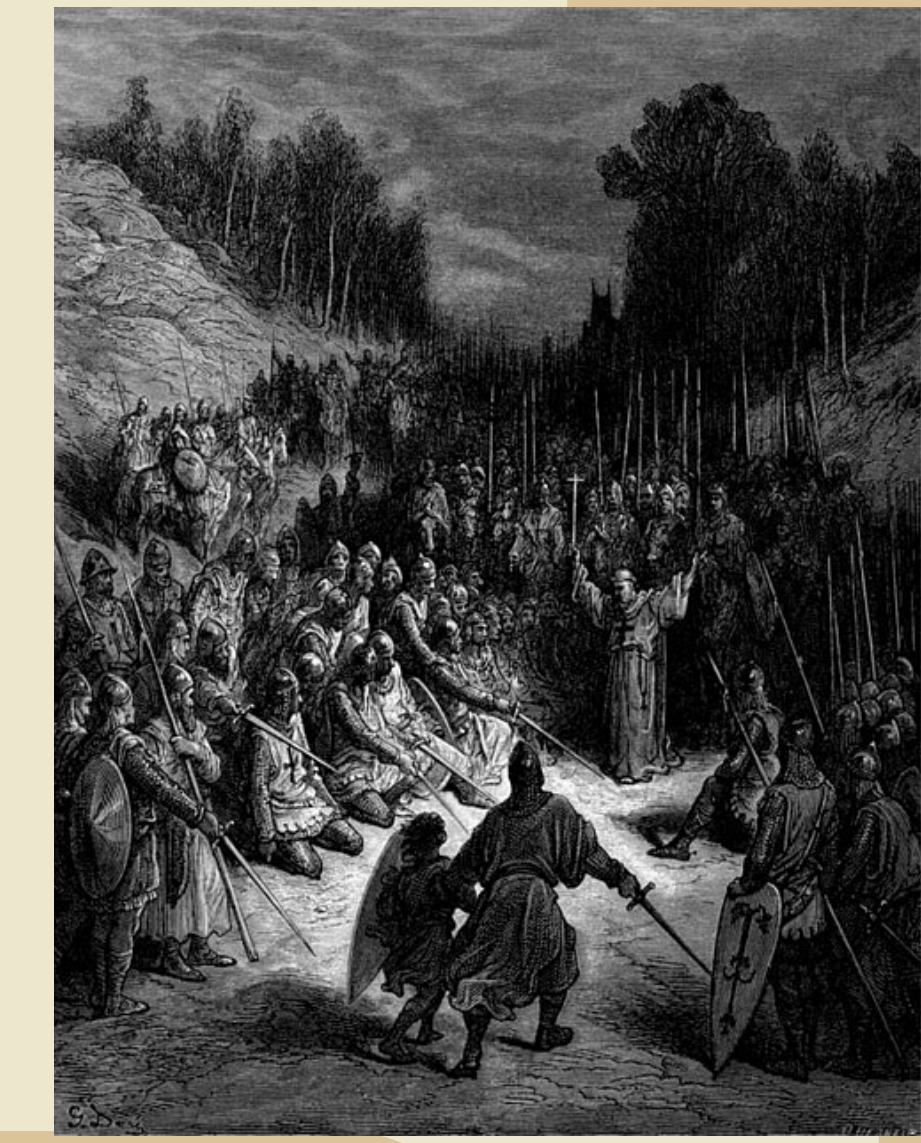
Future Considerations

This research is ongoing; further research could focus on contemporary ethnographic studies of apocalyptic communities and non-Western religious traditions, and on the examination of apocalyptic ideology in various modern political movements (civil rights, namely). Additional attention should be paid to gender and intersectionality in apocalyptic interpretations.

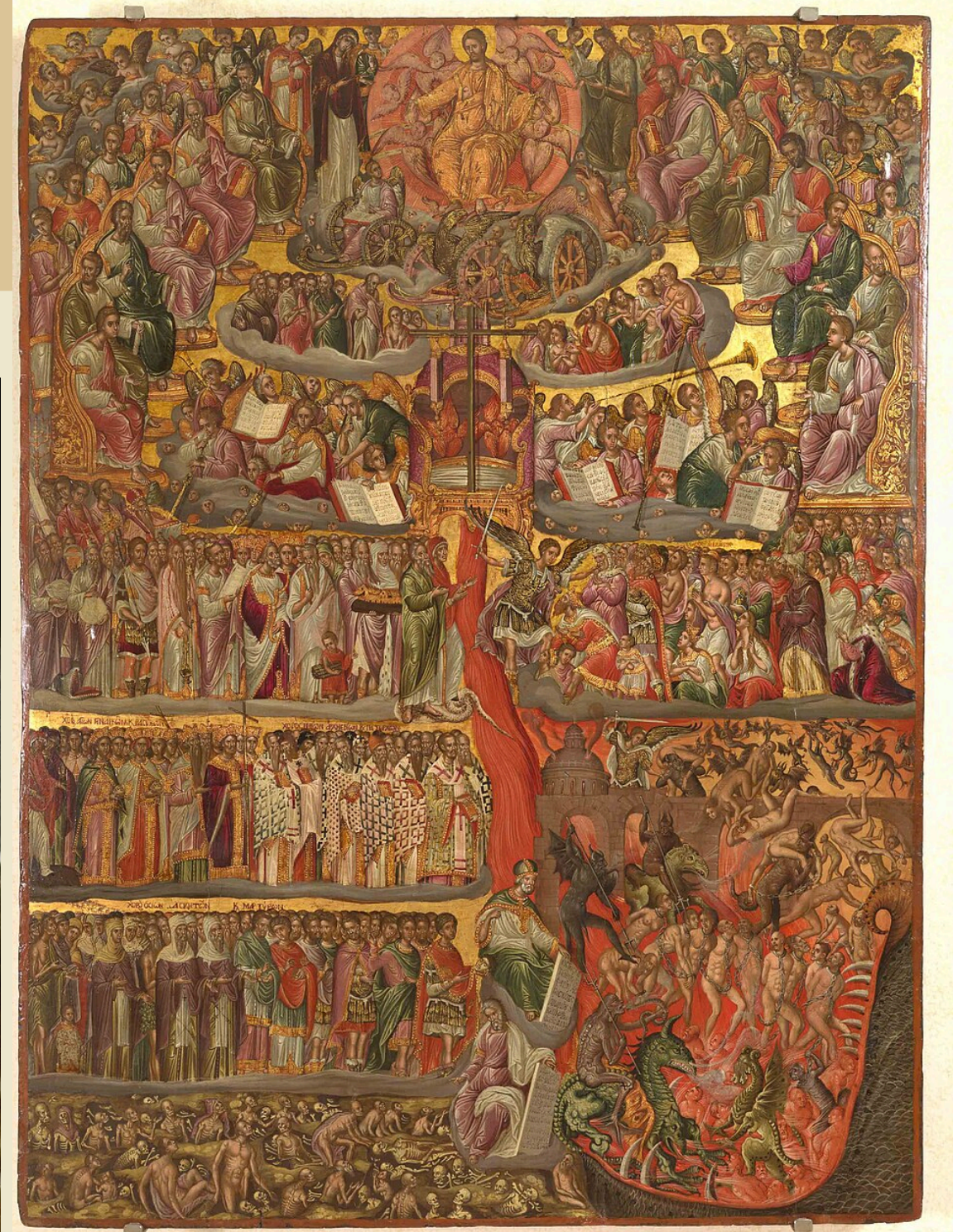
Methods for an Interdisciplinary Project in the Humanities

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>Subjects of Analysis-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jewish and Christian apocalyptic texts • Theological discourses (Premodern, majority) • Cultural narratives of race and social hierarchy <p>General Procedures and Data Analysis -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thematic analysis • Comparative analysis (on case studies, ethnographies, and premodern religious literature) • Theory (religious, critical race) application to various historical materials • Pattern identification and linkage of apocalyptic ideologies and the formation of racial groups | <p>Theoretical Frameworks-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Religious studies methodologies • Interdisciplinary study of historical, anthropological, and sociological approaches • Premodern Racial Studies • Critical race theory <p>Major themes studied -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good vs. evil apocalypticism • Salvation and damnation, based on racial subgrouping • Social and moral hierarchies • Narratives of premodern racialization and resistance to said grouping. |
|--|--|

Peter the Hermit preaching the Crusade, Gustave Doré



The Last Judgment, Eastern Orthodox icon on the Second Coming of Christ by Georgios Klontzas (c. 1580-1608), Hellenic Institute of Venice, Italy



References

This is ongoing research; the materials used in the research have not yet been published! I have therefore linked some sources that are interesting reads on the subject, as well as information on some terms/concepts discussed in the poster. Here is a link:



Bob Adelman, Birmingham, Alabama, May 1963. Photograph showing protesters being sprayed with fire hoses during the Children's Crusade. Courtesy of the Bob Adelman Estate.

Implications

Apocalypticism is socially embedded, not purely doctrinal.

Apocalyptic ideologies function as:

- **Resistance against oppression**
- **Reinforcement of cultural or imperial identities**

The research has collectively shown that apocalyptic traditions adapt to the current crisis, maintaining recognizable themes (death vs living, destruction, survival). There have been limitations, including somewhat inconsistent methodological approaches across research and no uniform data. Future research would require historical analysis and ethnographic fieldwork.

Overall, the implications of the research suggest that apocalyptic thought influences modern social movements, religious identity, and politics, just as premodern apocalyptic thought did.