Course Description
This course will explore the political dimensions of catastrophe, both human-made calamities and so-called “natural” disasters. Some of the questions that we will address are the extent to which catastrophes are social and political events: what is “natural” and what is “social” about “natural disasters;” the intersection between nature and history in interpreting catastrophic events; and the role of images of catastrophe in the constitution of political life. By looking closely at how the ethical and political import of catastrophe has been construed, we will also address questions related to the politics of history, science, and representation. In lieu of these questions and concerns, we will ask how narratives of catastrophe are produced and reproduced, who does the producing, to what extent, and to what political effect. This course combines the study of theoretical texts with historical examples such as earthquakes, genocides, climate change and plagues in order to ponder the aforementioned questions.

Course Schedule
ALL sessions will be held asynchronously. Make sure that you READ the Introductory Remarks and LISTEN to the Lectures posted on Blackboard every Monday. These would introduce the week’s reading and provide some guiding questions that would facilitate your weekly reading.

Week 1  M. Mamdani, “The Politics of Naming” (Blackboard); F. Jameson, “The Dialectics of Disaster” (Blackboard)

Week 2  Selections from Voltaire, Candide (Blackboard) and “Poem on the Lisbon Disaster” (Blackboard); and J. J. Rousseau, “Letter to Voltaire” (Blackboard)
Response Paper Due on Friday (1/29)

Week 3  C. F. Walker, “Lisbon and Lima: A Tale of Two Cities and Two Catastrophes” (Blackboard)

Week 4  Selection from Thucydides, The Peloponnesian War (Blackboard); and D. Defoe, A Journal of the Plague Year
Response Paper Due on Friday (2/12)

Week 5  Cont. D. Defoe, A Journal of the Plague Year
Week 6  Selection from M. Davis, *The Monster Enters* (Blackboard)  
**Response Paper Due on Friday (2/26)**

Week 7  L. Testot, *Cataclysms*, Part I

Week 8  L. Testot, *Cataclysms*, Part II  
**Response Paper Due on Friday (3/12)**

**SPRING BREAK**  March 13–March 21

Week 9  L. Testot, *Cataclysms*, Part III & Conclusion

Week 10  M. Davis, “Who Will Build the Ark?” (Blackboard)  
**Response Paper Due on Friday (4/5)**

Week 11  E. Traverso, *Fire and Blood*, 1-63

Week 12  E. Traverso, *Fire and Blood*, 64-126  
**Response Paper Due on Friday (4/16)**

Week 13  E. Traverso, *Fire and Blood*, 127-218

Week 14  E. Traverso, *Fire and Blood*, 219-276  
**Response Paper Due on Friday (4/30)**

Week 15  Selection from M. Mamdani, *Neither Settler Nor Native*  
(Blackboard)

**Final Paper: TBA**

**IMPORTANT DATES**
This course begins on **January 18, 2021** and ends on **May 3, 2021**.

**Required Texts**

- E. Traverso, *Fire and Blood* (Verso, 2016)

These texts can be purchased online, either at the Rutgers University-Newark Bookstore  
([http://newark-rutgers.bncollege.com](http://newark-rutgers.bncollege.com)), or any other online vendor.

All other readings can be found on the Course Blackboard:  
[https://blackboard.newark.rutgers.edu](https://blackboard.newark.rutgers.edu).  
Please download all readings from BB when you register for the course, to be prepared in the event of a service disruption.
TECHNICAL PROBLEMS
In the online environment, there is always a possibility of technical issues (e.g., lost connection, hardware or software failure). Many of these can be resolved relatively quickly, but if you wait to the last minute before due dates, the chance of these glitches affecting your success are greatly increased. Please plan appropriately. If a problem occurs, it is essential you take immediate action to resolve the problem. Technical questions should be directed to the Student Help Desk at:
help@newark.rutgers.edu
973-353-5083
Hill Hall 109
http://ncs.newark.rutgers.edu/hd

ONLINE COURSE SITE
This course can be accessed through Blackboard: https://blackboard.rutgers.edu.

ASSESSMENT
The course is designed to help students develop the reading, writing, and oral skills they need in order to precede through the university:

1. Conscious and critical reading: We will discuss effective reading strategies (to find “main arguments” or identify evidence, for example). We will practice effective reading approaches to theoretical texts.

2. Clear and effective writing: This course will help students to improve their ability to express themselves clearly on paper. It will provide students with the opportunity to practice revising their written work in order to improve the organization and presentation of their ideas. In writing, they will work toward being able to use evidence appropriately in order to deal with and apply complex ideas accurately.

3. Critical thinking: In writing or speaking, students will learn to be active, critically informed individuals. This course will teach students how to approach interpretative challenges by providing them with a range of intellectual resources that will allow them to respond critically to these challenges. Among these intellectual resources are the socio-cultural background, the historical context, and the knowledge of critical concepts related to the texts under study. These intellectual resources will foster a climate of critical inquiry.

4. Self-assessment: Students will work on becoming conscious of the strengths and learning skills they already have, and they will set goals for improving their skills. At various points during the semester, students will evaluate their progress in improving their learning skills by reviewing the work they have completed thus far during the term.

COURSE POLICIES
Students are also expected to read the material assigned in the course; log in to the course at least three times per week to ensure you do not miss pertinent postings, messages, or announcements.
LATE SUBMISSIONS
Unless otherwise noted, all written assignments are due at the time and date listed in the syllabus. If you experience an unavoidable personal situation that prevents you from completing work on time, please inform the professor prior to the date the work is due. Late work will result in points taken off, a lowering of the assignment grade, and/or an “F,” depending on the assignment.

EVALUATION
I. Essay
Students will write one essay (8-10 pages) in which they should critically address a question formulated by the professor about the texts under study. The answer to this question must be in the form of an academic essay. Grades on the essay will be based on how students:

1. develop an argument about the text and state it clearly in their thesis;
2. support that argument with evidence from close reading of the text;
3. use the proper academic vocabulary with precision;
4. bring curiosity about language and concepts;
5. write responsibly using the dictionary;
6. do it all in clear and precise English.

FORMAT: 8-10-page double-spaced Times New Roman, point 12, Chicago Style:
http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide/citation-guide-1.html
Essay Topics/Prompts will be made available on Blackboard two-weeks before the Essay is due.

II. Response Papers
Students are responsible for the required readings and for handing in a 1-2 page response paper/summary of the readings addressing the questions posted as part of the introductory remarks formulated during the week the essay is due. Make sure that your papers are well organized, clearly and carefully argued, as well as textually supported. You are expected to accurately represent the content of the chapters in question, and to address the question posed in the Introductory Remarks for the week in question. To be considered on-time, response papers need to be submitted through Blackboard on the day these are due. Unless you are under documented-extenuating circumstances, LATE Response Papers will not be accepted.

These Response Papers constitute your class participation. Accordingly, you must demonstrate in your discussions that you read the text assigned for the course and that you did your homework. FORMAT: 1-page double-spaced Times New Roman, point 12, Chicago Style:
http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide/citation-guide-1.html
EVALUATION RUBRIC

Response Papers (10% each) 70%
Final Essay 30%

Cautionary Note/Important Advice
There are several things that you should keep in mind to avoid unpleasant surprises. I expect students to critically ponder the arguments each thinker presents and to make an effort to understand these arguments with the goal of developing a rigorous and informed critique. Second, the text under scrutiny is sometimes dry, difficult, and dense, therefore, it is important that you have your thoughts together when you work your way through these texts. I encourage you to do the readings when you are awake, and in an environment conducive to study, otherwise it will be difficult to keep up with the reading.

Academic Integrity
All work you submit for the course is expected to be your own. Cheating or plagiarism (using someone else’s words or ideas without proper citation) will lead to failing the course and action from the University. Whenever you quote, closely paraphrase, refer to or make use of arguments or examples from other sources in your written work, you must cite the appropriate source in a footnote, endnote, or in parentheses at the end of the sentence, depending of what citation style you are using. Please see the university’s guidelines on student conduct:
http://studentconduct.rutgers.edu/university-code-of-student-conduct

Multimedia presentations about academic integrity may be found at
http://www.scc.rutgers.edu/douglass/sal/plagiarism/intro.html and
http://wps.prenhall.com/hss_understand_plagiarism_1/0,6622,427064,-00.html

Grading Response Time
Assignments should be graded within one week of the due date. Assignments that are lengthy may take longer to grade.

Grading Scale
All grades will be posted to Blackboard. The final average will determine the final grade, with letter grades corresponding to the levels of achievement established in the college-wide policy determined by the University’s Faculty Senate, as follows:

A 90-100 achievement that is outstanding relative to the level necessary to meet course requirements.
B 80-87 (88-89 B+) achievement that is significantly above the level necessary to meet course requirements.
C 70-77 (78-79 C+) achievement that meets the course requirements in every respect.
D 60-69 achievement that is worth of credit even though it fails to meet fully the course requirements.
F/N 0-59 represents failure (or no credit) and signifies that the work was either:
(1) completed but at a level of achievement that is not worthy of credit; or
(2) was not completed and there was not agreement between the instructor and the student that the student would be awarded an I (incomplete).

Communication Policy

- **Course announcements.** Announcements will be posted on Blackboard and e-mailed to students. You are responsible for providing the instructor with a current e-mail address that you check regularly, and for reading all announcements posted by the instructor. You should log into our course and your e-mail at least three times per week to check for new announcements and/or messages.

- **Course-related questions.** Please post course-related questions to the Questions and Answers Discussion Board on Blackboard. Asking course-related questions in this way allows other participants with the same question to benefit from the responses. For this reason, please make sure you review this forum prior to posting a question; it may have already been asked and answered in previous posts.

- **Personal and/or confidential matters.** For personal and/or confidential matters, please e-mail the instructor at a.vazquez@rutgers.edu. For course-related questions, please use the Questions and Answers Discussion Board within the course. Except for weekends and holidays, the instructor typically will respond to email messages within 24 business hours.

Netiquette

“Netiquette” is network etiquette, the dos and don’ts of online communication. When posting to our discussion board or communicating with others in our class, please remain courteous. Below are the guidelines we will follow in this course (adapted from http://www.indiana.edu/~icy/netiquette.html#rules):

1. Make your messages easier to read by making your paragraphs short and to the point.
2. Use normal capitalization. TYPING IN ALL CAPS IS CONSIDERED SHOUTING ON THE INTERNET. Messages in all lowercase letters can be difficult to read.
3. Avoid using slang and abbreviations because they can lead to misinterpretation. Be careful when using sarcasm and humor. Without face-to-face communications your joke may be viewed as criticism. When being humorous, use emoticons to express humor. (tilt your head to the left to see the emoticon smile) :-) 
4. Never give your userID or password to another person. System administrators that need to access your account for maintenance or to correct problems will have full privileges to your account.
5. Respect the fact that the class list is a closed discussion; do not forward mail from your classmates to others without their permission.
6. Be professional and courteous. In an online forum or newsgroup, debate is welcome, but be tactful in responding to others. Remember that there’s a person (or a whole class) at the receiving end of your post.

7. Keep your questions and comments relevant to the focus of the discussion group. Information intended for an individual or small group of individuals should be emailed to those people directly.

8. If you are responding to a message from someone else, briefly summarize her or his post.

9. When posting a question to the discussion group, request that responses be directed to you personally. Post a summary or answer to your question to the group.

10. If you quote a previous post (by using the reply function for example), quote only enough to make your own point.

11. Include your signature at the bottom of Email messages when communicating with people who may not know you personally or broadcasting to a dynamic group of subscribers.

12. Be respectful of other points of view. Remember that these discussions are “public” and meant for constructive exchanges. Treat the others on the list as you would want them to treat you.

13. If you want to get in touch with only one person in the class, send a message to that individual’s e-mail address, not to the entire discussion list.

14. When replying to a message posted to a discussion group, check the address to be certain it’s going to the intended location (person or group). It can be very embarrassing if they reply incorrectly and post a personal message to the entire discussion group that was intended for an individual.

15. Think and proofread before you submit!

**Time Commitment**

To be successful in this course, you will need to commit to an estimated average of 9 hours of coursework per week for the fifteen-week semester. (Some weeks will require more time, some less.) This is the same amount of time that you would need to commit to in a traditional, face-to-face three-credit class.

**Dropping the Course**

In order to withdraw from a course, it is not sufficient to stop posting assignments or contributing to discussion. In accord with university policy, students wishing to withdraw from a course must do so formally through the Registrar’s office. It is the student’s responsibility to complete all forms. If this is not done, the instructor must assign a grade of F at the end of the semester.

**Required technological skills**

- Ability to utilize Blackboard

**Required equipment / materials**

- Computer, Internet access, webcam with microphone OR headphones with microphone
- Software that can save a file in the format of Microsoft Word or PDF
Resources for Students
Rutgers University Newark (RU-N) is committed to the creation of an inclusive and safe learning environment for all students. RU-N has identified the following resources to further the mission of access and support:

- **Students with Disabilities.** Rutgers University welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. The Office of Disability Services (ODS) is responsible for the determination of appropriate accommodations for students who encounter barriers due to disability. In order to receive consideration for reasonable accommodations, a student with a disability must contact ODS, register, have an initial appointment, and provide documentation. Once a student has completed the ODS process (registration, initial appointment, and documentation submitted) and reasonable accommodations are determined to be necessary and appropriate, a Letter of Accommodation (LOA) will be provided to the student. The student must give the LOA to each course instructor, followed by a discussion with the instructor. This should be completed as early in the semester as possible as accommodations are not retroactive. More information can be found at ods.rutgers.edu. Contact ODS: (973) 353-5375 or ods@newark.rutgers.edu.

- **Religious Holiday Policy and Accommodations.** Students are advised to provide timely notification to instructors about necessary absences for religious observances and are responsible for making up the work or exams according to an agreed-upon schedule. The Division of Student Affairs is available to verify absences for religious observance, as needed: (973) 353-5063 or DeanofStudents@newark.rutgers.edu.

- **Counseling Services.** Counseling Center Room 101, Blumenthal Hall, (973) 353-5805 or http://counseling.newark.rutgers.edu/.

- **Students with Temporary Conditions/Injuries.** Students experiencing a temporary condition or injury that is adversely affecting their ability to fully participate in their courses should submit a request for assistance at: https://temporaryconditions.rutgers.edu.

- **Students who Are Pregnant.** The Office of Title IX and ADA Compliance is available to assist students with any concerns or potential accommodations related to pregnancy: (973) 353-1906 or TitleIX@newark.rutgers.edu.

- **Gender or Sex-Based Discrimination or Harassment.** Students experiencing any form of gender or sex-based discrimination or harassment, including sexual assault, sexual harassment, relationship violence, or stalking, should know that help and support are available. To report an incident, contact the Office of Title IX and ADA Compliance: (973) 353-1906 or TitleIX@newark.rutgers.edu. To submit an incident report: tinyurl.com/RUNReportingForm. To speak with a staff member who is confidential and does NOT have a reporting responsibility, contact the Office for Violence Prevention and Victim Assistance: (973) 353-1918 or run.vpva@rutgers.edu.
Additional resources available to students include the following:

- **Rutgers Learning Center** (tutoring services)
  Room 140, Bradley Hall
  (973) 353-5608
  [https://sasn.rutgers.edu/student-support/tutoring-academic-support/learning-center](https://sasn.rutgers.edu/student-support/tutoring-academic-support/learning-center)

- **Writing Center** (tutoring and writing workshops)
  Room 126, Conklin Hall
  (973) 353-5847
  nwc@rutgers.edu
  [https://sasn.rutgers.edu/student-support/tutoring-academic-support/writing-center](https://sasn.rutgers.edu/student-support/tutoring-academic-support/writing-center)
  Introduction: [http://www.youtube.com/embed/DaAYHC5aUHs?rel=0](http://www.youtube.com/embed/DaAYHC5aUHs?rel=0)

- **Rutgers University Libraries**
  Many library resources are available online. Assistance is available through phone, email and chat. Information about the library can be found here: [http://libguides.rutgers.edu/intro](http://libguides.rutgers.edu/intro)
  Please review this 2-minute video about the library online resources: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iJvFVqiz8Dg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iJvFVqiz8Dg)