

**Department of Political Science
Rutgers University-Newark
Catastrophes, Crises & Political Life
Spring 2018**

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Office Hours: Monday & Wednesday, 11.30-1.00pm, and by appointment

This course explores the political implications of narratives of catastrophe, from human-made calamities to so-called “natural” disasters. Some of the questions that will be addressed 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; the role and complicity of state-forms in both the advent and mitigation of catastrophes; and the role of images of catastrophe in the constitution of political life. By also looking closely at how the ethical and political significance of catastrophe has been construed, we will 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 political effects. This course combines the study of theoretical texts with historical examples of earthquakes, ethnic cleansing, famines, genocides and global warming in order to ponder the aforementioned questions.

Course Schedule:

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| 1/17 | Introduction: What is a Catastrophe? |
| 1/22 | M. Mamdani, “The Politics of Naming” (Blackboard); and F. Jameson, “The Dialectics of Disaster” (Blackboard) |
| 1/24 | NO CLASS |
| 1/29 | Voltaire, Selections from <i>Candide</i> (Blackboard) and “Poem on the Lisbon Disaster” (Blackboard); and J. J. Rousseau, “Letter to Voltaire” (Blackboard) |
| 1/31 | C. F. Walker, “Lisbon and Lima: A Tale of Two Cities and Two Catastrophes” (Blackboard) |

Response Paper Due 2/5

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| 2/5 | D. Defoe, <i>A Journal of the Plague Year</i> |
| 2/7 | Cont. D. Defoe, <i>A Journal of the Plague Year</i> |
| 2/12 | E. Kolbert, <i>The Sixth Extinction</i> , Prologue, chaps 1-4 |

2/14 E. Kolbert, *The Sixth Extinction*, chaps 5-9

2/19 E. Kolbert, *The Sixth Extinction*, chaps. 10-13

Response Paper Due 2/21

2/21 M. Davis, "Who Will Build the Ark?" (Blackboard)

2/26 C. Bonneuil and J. B. Fressoz, *The Shock of the Anthropocene*, chap. 1

2/28 C. Bonneuil and J. B. Fressoz, *The Shock of the Anthropocene*, chaps. 2, 4

3/5 C. Bonneuil and J. B. Fressoz, *The Shock of the Anthropocene*, chaps. 9-10

Response Paper Due 3/7

3/7 C. O Gráda, *Famine*, 1-3

SPRING BREAK 3/10 to 3/18

3/19 C. O Gráda, *Famine*, 4-6

3/21 C. O Gráda, *Famine*, 7-9

3/26 Mann, *The Dark Side of Democracy*, chaps. 1-3

3/28 Mann, *The Dark Side of Democracy*, chaps. 4-6

4/2 Mann, *The Dark Side of Democracy*, chaps. 7-9

4/7 Mann, *The Dark Side of Democracy*, chaps. 11, 14-15

Response Paper Due 4/9

4/9 E. Traverso, *Fire and Blood*, 1-63

4/11 E. Traverso, *Fire and Blood*, 64-126

4/16 E. Traverso, *Fire and Blood*, 127-167

4/18 E. Traverso, *Fire and Blood*, 168-218

4/23 E. Traverso, *Fire and Blood*, 219-276

4/25 **Last Day of Classes**

Final Essay TBD

Required Texts:

Daniel Defoe, *A Journal of the Plague Year* (Modern Library, 2001)
Christophe Bonneuil and Jean-Baptiste Fressoz, *The Shock of the Anthropocene* (Verso, 2016)
Elizabeth Kolbert, *The Sixth Extinction* (Picador, 2015)
Michael Mann, *The Dark Side of Democracy* (Cambridge, 2004)
Cormac O Gráda, *Famine* (Princeton University Press, 2010)
Enzo Traverso, *Fire and Blood* (Verso, 2016)

The required texts are available for purchase at the Rutgers-Newark University Bookstore (<http://newark-rutgers.bncollege.com>). These books are also easily available in online stores (www.amazon.com, www.bn.com, www.abebooks.com). **No phones, laptops, or electronic books are allowed; you must bring a hard copy of the assigned reading to class. You'd lose 2% of your final grade every time you show up to class without the reading in hand. Make sure that you show me the reading when I call your name at the beginning of each class.**

Course Requirements

All students are responsible for the required readings and for participation in class discussions. Your written work consists of four 1-2 page response papers; and a final 4-6 page essay. Each response paper comprises 15% of your final grade (four response papers comprise 60% of your grade); and the final comprises 30% of your grade. The remaining 10% of your final grade will consist of participation/attendance. This is how the 10% for participation/attendance works: if you participate, your grade will be raised (5 points overall); if you violate the attendance policy, your grade will be lowered (5 points overall). Namely, you get 5 points for attending, and an additional 5 for participating. You are permitted three absences for the semester. Any additional absences will result in the aforementioned penalty. A pattern of unexcused absences will result in the student failing the course (you will get an "F" as your final grade). **I reserve the right to conduct oral examinations on your written work.**

Response Papers & Papers

The structure of your response papers is simple enough: each response paper consists of a short reflection on one of the scholarly works considered in class. Students would get a chance to rewrite the response paper after I offer comments on both the substance and the structure of your response. We are going to spend time discussing the structure of an adequate response paper, as well as what is expected in your analytical final paper

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 texts under scrutiny are sometimes dry, difficult, and dense, therefore, it is important that you have your thoughts together when you work your way through these texts. As a piece of

advice, I encourage you to do the readings when you are awake and in an environment conducive to study, otherwise it will be difficult for you to keep up with the class.

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 quotes, 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>

Disability Accommodations

Students requiring special accommodations for disabilities are welcome and should provide reasonable prior notice so we can make needed arrangements.

Miscellaneous

Our classroom discussions are open, frank, and casual. Please respect the perspectives and inquiries of your peers and instructor. Do not interrupt someone who is speaking and refrain from deliberately demeaning language or intimidating behavior. Do not read newspapers or other unrelated materials during class. **Students found doing so will be dismissed. Please make sure that cell-phones are turned off. If your cell-phone rings during class you will be dismissed. There are No exceptions to this rule. All written work is to be typed and double-spaced. Incomplete grades will NOT be automatically given; these will be granted only in reference to particular situations and at the instructor's discretion.**