

“Master Metaphor”

Environmental Apocalypse and the Settler States of Emergency

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On October 27, 2016, Ammon Bundy and other members of the Citizens for Constitutional Freedom (CCF) were acquitted of all charges stemming from their armed takeover of Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in Oregon. While at Malheur, CCF's occupiers declared the rule of law unconstitutional, a state-of-emergency summons supported by right-wing militia groups invoking apocalyptic fears of white genocide.¹ In contrast, on the same day of the acquittal verdict and with the visual drama of an apocalyptic dystopian film, a militarized police force arrested 141 water protectors in Standing Rock, North Dakota—an area secured by the 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty and by the state of emergency that the Standing Rock Sioux Tribal Council declared in August 2016.² Though many decried the unequal consequences of each occupation, the disparity was not an isolated occurrence, nor is it limited to rural or reservation boundaries. Rather, its incongruence continues a racialized distinction fundamental to the state of emergency itself. The state of emergency's implicit inequality is entrenched in apocalyptic appeals that rely on its logic, reinforcing the ongoing emergency of settler colonial capitalism even when they aim to disturb it.

The uses and abuses of apocalyptic rhetoric are, by now, regularly acknowledged. Narratives of apocalypse too often overwhelm, immobilize, and instill a sense of futility. However, these criticisms frequently fail to consider the diverse and even divergent aspects of the literary mode. Rather than asking whether to apocalypse or not, this essay investigates by what means and to what ends. Placing the emergent subfield of catastrophe studies into conversation with political theory, this

essay parses the apocalyptic for problematic pivots around an emergency event. In a comparison of the 2016–17 Malheur occupation and the #NoDAPL movement at Standing Rock, this essay finds that apocalyptic stories of single disastrous moments shelter the settler state of emergency, protecting the logic of the settler colonial capitalism's continuous creation of and dependence upon the emergency event.

This comparison clarifies the master metaphor lurking in the apocalyptic state of emergency—the ways apocalyptic emergency appeals reinforce the exclusionary violence and ecological devastation they so often seek to diagnose and disrupt. Ultimately, I suggest the exigency of an event-versus-structure distinction in apocalyptic environmental storytelling. Following Indigenous and Black feminist futurisms' invocations of apocalypse, which indict the structure of the settler state(s) of emergency, I suggest that stories that both summon and see beyond the structures of settler colonial capitalism's past, present, and future ends of worlds constitute a state of emergence for an antiracist politics of storytelling in the context of climate change.³

Emergency Now

In the chaos of changing climates, the racialized extinction imperatives of the state of emergency become even more literally, and literarily, evident. The disparities attending the state of emergency are frequently implied in the literary mode of apocalypse as it habitually links to crisis, catastrophe, and environmental disaster. From the Greek word *apokalypsis*, meaning “something revealed or uncovered,” the apocalyptic mode of storytelling is often associated with a Judeo-Christian tradition that narrates revelation and judgment day, the promise of the end of the world and a new beginning for a *particular* people. This genealogy of apocalypse tellingly traces the same colonial and capitalist epistemologies associated with the anthropocentric Western literary tradition that Amitav Ghosh recently credited with the lead role in “our” tragic failure in the face of global climate chaos.⁴ Though Ghosh diagnoses this as a universal epistemological deficit he deems *The Great Derangement*, the insufficiency is more precisely placed within the story of catastrophe that is, according to René Girard, a formula bound to the martial logics of Western politics.⁵ In truth, while the apocalypse can refer to an immense variety of storytelling traditions, in the one specific to Western

literature, apocalypse remains exceptionally consistent with the racialized realities of the state of emergency.

Fictional appeals to the apocalypse that rely on a state-of-emergency logic are wedded to the exceptionalism of the white settler state. The state of emergency is more often than not the primary political cover for the unequal distribution of resources, the disproportionate deployment of militarized police in fights over fossil fuel extraction, and the uneven consequences of armed occupation. The state of emergency extends, and makes more acute, the political stakes of a literary tradition often only understood to emerge with the same colonial history. As the primary descriptive template for both fictional and factual accounts of accelerating climate chaos, as well as the increasing visibility of white nationalism, the emergency event perniciously endures. The seeming ubiquity of emergency appeals suggests that what Toni Morrison deemed American literature's "literary whiteness"—where whiteness is consistently, invisibly, implied—applies to spaces beyond the figurative—the racialized realities of the state of emergency lurk in the literary mode of the apocalypse.⁶ When fixated on the emergency, apocalyptic appeals entrench Western political structures, limiting our landscapes to the narrow slats of settler sovereignty continuously whitewashed in the economies of racial capitalism.

Much about the Malheur occupation exemplifies the ways Western apocalyptic appeals erase, embolden, and ultimately acquit the white violences of settler colonial capitalism. The occupation maintained some of its most intimate affiliations with the "apocalyptic manhood" of the Far Right, continuing a history of government-militia clashes that stretch from the "apocalypse-minded white separatist" Randall Weaver (of the 1992 Ruby Ridge incident) forward to LaVoy Finicum, CCF spokesman of the Malheur takeover and author of the postapocalyptic novel *Only by Blood and Suffering: Regaining Lost Freedom*.⁷ Finicum's title substitutes "suffering" for "soil," thinly disguising its eugenicist dog whistle in part of the plausible deniability created in "the speculative fiction of the paramilitary right."⁸ The novel narrates the "standoff at the Apocalypse Ranch of Finicum's imagination," a fictional allegory for the apocalyptic fervor fueling fantasies of "the white republic," to echo Alyosha Goldstein's characterization of the standoff.⁹ Lengthening the shadow of Weaver's legacy with Finicum's fiction and Ammon Bundy's

claims to divine revelation, the occupation acted out an anointed quest to reclaim white freedom, at once lost and yet still under threat.

The Malheur occupiers took further inspiration from two fringe Mormon apocalyptic texts, *The Nay Book* and the white horse prophecy, two texts that link the occupiers' apocalyptic habit to the white nationalist innocence secured through the state of emergency.¹⁰ Though denounced by the Mormon Church, *The Nay Book* is a collection compiled by Keith Allen Nay, a Bundy family friend and fellow rancher. It offers religious justification for rejecting federal rule of law through "a scrapbook mix of letters, founding documents of both the United States and the Church of Latter-day Saints of Jesus Christ mixed with ideas that have existed in the antigovernment 'Patriot' movement for decades."¹¹ The book is often associated with the white horse prophecy, a disputed Latter-day Saints text that tells of an imperiled, divinely inspired US Constitution saved by Latter-day Saints elders riding on the white horse of the four horsemen of the apocalypse from the Book of Revelation.¹² Both the white horse prophecy and *The Nay Book* have close ties to the John Birch society, a Far Right white supremacist organization that boasts Fred Koch among its first eleven members. Koch was one of its primary financial backers and the father of the billionaire funders of climate change denial David and Charles Koch, who were themselves John Birchers.¹³ This network is exemplary of the apocalyptic narrative's political, racial, and environmental analogs.

Within this apocalyptic habitus, the armed Malheur occupiers marshaled the rhetoric of frontier masculinity, anxieties about federal overreach, and subtextual fears of white genocide to bolster declarations of their own sovereign authority over the homelands of the Burns Paiute.¹⁴ In their apocalyptic prophecies and state-of-emergency declarations, the occupation performed a type of "settler apocalypse"—stories that tell of the end of the whole world but are, in reality, specific to white settlers.¹⁵ While it is important to avoid collapsing all paramilitary activity under the label of white nationalism, it is equally vital to recognize the ways the rhetoric of apocalypse, especially the state of emergency that often defines its logic, works to secure the innocence of its white settler subjects, even as they reject state power.¹⁶ That recognition clarifies how the state of emergency, or state of exception, functions as the legal paradigm for a "settler move to innocence," what Eve Tuck and K. Wayne

Yang call an “attempt to deflect a settler identity, while continuing to enjoy settler privilege and occupying stolen land.”¹⁷ The occupiers were, after all, found innocent. Their acquittal suggests that the blamelessness of settler sovereignty is not merely a story; it is structured into the legal and political landscapes of the settler state.

The state of emergency’s white-innocence-making mechanics were thrown into sharp relief by the rhetoric of apocalypse, ongoing emergency, and continuous resistance that circulated at Standing Rock. Standing Rock Sioux leadership shared their prophecy of apocalypse, telling of a time when the Zuzeca Sapa, the black snake, would slither across the earth, poisoning water before destroying the world.¹⁸ Recognizing this prophecy in the fossil fuel flowing through the Dakota Access Pipeline, elders, water protectors, and their allies galvanized to defend their people and the other eighteen million living downstream.¹⁹ The protests, then, belong to a long narrative tradition guiding Indigenous resistance to the “apocalyptic death worlds of rape, genocide, poaching, trespass, theft, and smallpox” that have always accompanied the extraction economies of the settler state, to follow Nick Estes account in *Our History Is the Future: Standing Rock versus the Dakota Access Pipeline*.²⁰ Estes situates these apocalypses in the broader conditions of Indigenous refusal, because “while the Black Snake prophecy foreshadows doom, it also foreshadows historic resistance and resurgent Indigenous histories.”²¹ As typical of this dynamic, the #NoDAPL movement surged after “Jack Dalrymple declared a state of emergency on August 19, 2016—to safeguard the pipeline’s final construction.”²² Estes notes that Dalrymple used the Emergency Management Assistance Compact, which grants powers typically reserved for natural disasters but, tellingly, were also deployed in Baltimore “to crush a black-led uprising for justice for Freddie Gray.”²³ Pairing #NoDAPL and #BlackLivesMatter, Estes describes, but does not draw out, the state of emergency insulating extraction economies through the creation and maintenance of racialized threats to the settler state.

Indeed, in Malheur, Standing Rock, and Baltimore, alike, the state of emergency secures white settler innocence, even or especially amid its fuel-thirsty apocalypses.²⁴ In stark proximal contrast, only a week after Dalrymple’s August 16 declaration, on August 26 the Standing Rock Tribal Council declared a state of emergency to protect their rightful

claim to land based on the 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty with the United States.²⁵ Soon after, prayerful water protectors were met by state and federal police and privately contracted mercenaries, all clad in riot gear. Drones and planes constantly surveilled; guns scoped over warlike barricades. This spectacle compelled many media outlets to compare the illegal, armed, and violent threats of the Malheur occupation with the unarmed Oceti Sakowin and allies in order to highlight the incommensurable responses from local and federal officials.²⁶ Many called the Bundy occupation an instance of “white terrorism” deserving of a militarized police response.²⁷ Still, only the water protectors at Standing Rock have been charged with terrorism or targeted by the FBI terrorism taskforce.²⁸ These disparities were, and remain, foreseeable.²⁹ They are embedded in the functions and fictions of the state of emergency in the settler state.

Emergency Politics

Theoretically, the state of emergency exists for a nation to protect itself from imminent threat. If universally true, the Standing Rock Tribal Council’s declaration should have strengthened Lakota sovereignty and protected the protectors from the concussion grenades, freezing water cannons, and felony charges. It did not. That same declaration, however, provided a legal barricade for the state and extrastate militia already hiding behind those cannons. So, too, at Malheur, where the state of emergency seemed to shield the illegal occupiers as they lived out scenes seemingly straight from dime-store westerns.³⁰ If the function of a state of emergency is to protect a nation, this apparent inconsistency is easily resolved once we acknowledge that the real function of the state of emergency is to mark racialized populations as perpetual threats through the same exceptionalist discourse that renders the terror of white conquest innocent. The safety-through-perpetual-threat paradox lurks in US law but emerges explicit in Western political theory.

In political philosophy, the state of emergency remains the constitutive declaration of Western sovereignty from its formalization within both American and German contexts of genocide. The primary theorist and proponent of the state of emergency was Carl Schmitt, who canonized Western sovereignty as the *Nomos of the Earth*. Schmitt cited sovereignty’s beginning in the colonization of the Americas,

where “empty space” becomes the *nomos*, or original spatial ordering, of modern political law constituted through declarations of the state of exception and emergency.³¹ For Schmitt, America was the paradigm case for exceptionalist politics—a United States of Emergency, as it were. In conceptualizing a political order founded on American colonialism, Schmitt, the editor in chief of the Nazi newspaper for lawyers, theorized Adolf Hitler’s 1933 pronouncement of a permanent state of emergency.³² This state of emergency was first used to suspend the rights and freedoms guaranteed under a country’s basic law, such as the right to life and freedom from arbitrary deprivation of liberty, slavery, torture, and ill treatment. Today, Article 4.1 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights states that the “public emergency which threatens the life of the nation” cannot discriminate based on race, sex, language, or religion.³³ However, the state of emergency retains the structural inequalities of its origin. It continues to rely on settler colonial white supremacy as its social structure and genocide as its ordering logic.

Contemporary political theorists have exposed Western sovereignty’s necropolitics in ways vital to the stakes of such state-of-emergency declarations today. Giorgio Agamben, Robert A. Williams Jr., Achille Mbembe, Michael Dillon, and Mick Smith all draw on Schmitt to show how the state of emergency is used to suspend civil and political rights.³⁴ They expose Schmitt’s universalization of a state of exception as a technology particular to political exclusion, genocide, geopolitical inequalities, biopolitical security practices, and environmental extraction. Others have nuanced Agamben’s formative claim that the modern world is in a permanent state of emergency, with the concentration camp its paradigm, correlating the state of emergency with the varied and everyday racialized violences propping up US settler sovereignty. For example, Mark Rifkin argues that the state of emergency is a discursive field that transmutes “Indigenous peoplehood into bare life,” life that is killable and ungrievable but that first must be rendered, as the water protectors were at Standing Rock, unprotected.³⁵ The phenomenon Rifkin evidences is comparatively articulated by la paperson, who charges, “The settler is a site of exception from which whiteness emerges,” where “the native is a site of exception” that exists before law and before rights, while “anti-blackness is the normalized

exception upon which Western politics, theories, and institutions are erected.”³⁶ These racialized realities of the state of emergency find a concise sum in Fred Moten’s consideration of “the ongoing state of racial emergency.”³⁷ Emergent within Western sovereignty’s emergency, in other words, is its necropolitical death drive. Dillon summarizes this thanatopolitical reality as “the emergency of emergent life itself,” which defines Western politics’ inherently antithetical orientation to radical political change.³⁸ These thinkers theorize what the State of Emergency Mapping Database has quantified, data showing a “negative correlation between emergency powers and the freedom of movement as well as association.” More often than not, emergency declarations rely on “clean slate” claims to install “emergency management” regimes that redefine space as militarized zones, suspend the rule of law, and further entrench existing power structures.

The differential consequences of the Malheur occupation and the #NoDAPL movement at Standing Rock caution us to move critically in the valleys of apocalyptic ashes and illuminations, especially once contextualized within the politics of collapse, climate change, and global capitalism. Scholars like Betsy Hartmann trace appeals to catastrophe, apocalyptic doom, and the like that tend to benefit powerful vested interests such as the national security state.³⁹ Eddie Yuen applies these lessons to the environmental movement and catastrophism, arguing that the primary mode of apocalyptic rhetoric is fear, which “can be a very effective platform from which to launch a campaign of populist xenophobia or authoritarian technocracy under the sign of scarcity.”⁴⁰ Scarcity politics drives the supposed shortages of disaster capitalism, parrotting the logic of emergency that shields the status quo and further displaces exploited communities. “Emergency” thus marks a historical cycle of colonial capitalism as it extends into the expanse of anticipated futures.⁴¹ The political realities of the state of emergency must be brought to bear on the literary lessons of apocalypse. In the intersection, the white settler exceptionalism embedded in the state of emergency is recapitulated in a Western literary tradition that narrates the end of the world as a singular event, not an ongoing structure of the settler state. Narrations of a disastrous past, present, or predicted event protect the racial and environmental extraction necessary to the continuous consolidation of US settler capital.

The Master Metaphor

The event-versus-structure distinction is vital to understanding the ways the “master metaphor” of apocalypse consolidates relations of power in the context of climate change. Today, stories of environmental apocalypse fill mainstream film plots and news headlines, ostensibly reverberating with Lawrence Buell’s formative claim that apocalypse is “the single most powerful master metaphor that the contemporary environmental imagination has at its disposal.”⁴² Yet this explosion of appeals to the apocalyptic coincides with the removal of all mentions of climate change from US government websites, just as the *Horsemen of the Apocalypse* (Robert F. Kennedy and Dick Russell’s titular term for fossil fuel moguls) escalates their speed, voracity, and creativity in extraction methods.⁴³ Indeed, notwithstanding the tireless efforts of the climate justice movement, US culture at large does seem in dangerous, demented denial—the great derangement, as Ghosh calls it. Echoing Buell’s belief in the metaphoric power of environmental apocalypse, Ghosh does not correlate the inaction he diagnoses with the white innocence associated with apocalyptic exceptionalism.

Inaction and innocence are welded together in the exceptionalism of Western settler sovereignty, naturalized through its event-obsessed apocalyptic environmentalism. This event-versus-structure distinction is a crucial insight suggested in Patrick Wolfe’s definition of settler colonial capitalism as a structure, not an event, one increasingly vital in the context of climate change. In this climate chaos, stories of disaster events tend to telegraph a threatened Western sovereignty, a political philosophy that bakes in racial hierarchy, environmental injustice, and, as Jedediah Purdy tells it, climate denial. According to Purdy, denial of climate change is “about who has claims on you and who rules you . . . a way of rejecting the claims of foreigners, international institutions (more imagined than real), and the global poor, and holding onto a narrow sovereignty that the tides are threatening to wash away.” The slight, susceptible sovereignty that Purdy describes merely extends “colonial prejudices about race and climatic determinism” into landscapes changing amid climate chaos.⁴⁴ Stories of apocalyptic climate change events perpetuate this looming loss, dog whistling the disappearance of patriarchal white sovereignty, which courts climate denial and inac-

tion or, for nearly the same reason, foments ecofascist blood-and-soil ideologies.⁴⁵

Ecofascism is a political philosophy that deploys ecological themes to justify the necessity of totalitarian violence for survival. It depends on stories of past, present, or predicted apocalyptic environmental events—a once idyllic and pure but now threatened nature demands population control, fortification of walls, and the elimination of certain groups. Ecofascism has long been associated with deep-ecology movements and Garrett Hardin’s lifeboat ethics, though its roots reach into soil shared with the state of emergency in Nazi Germany as well as German romantic nationalism.⁴⁶ Attending to this common history exposes an even older history, emerging through American colonial violence, as Schmitt’s genealogy of sovereignty suggests. Ecofascism is the bedrock of American environmental thinking, as nature’s nation nationalized a nature tradition that relied on claims of the naturalness of racial hierarchies and romantic appeals to “natural law” to justify genocide. American ecofascism parallels, if not precedes, Germany’s *Blut and Boden*. American ecofascism is metaphorized through “nature,” quantified in blood quantum and one-drop rules, and legislated in sterilization and immigration laws, and tellingly, it populates the ecofascist canon with many early American conservationists.⁴⁷

Today’s transnational ecofascist movement typically cites Madison Grant’s 1916 *The Passing of the Great Race* as its earliest popular text, though the canon could just as easily extend to colonial America’s natural history archive, which obsessively narrated a natural hierarchy ruled by white landowners perpetually under threat. More recent texts include Wilmot Robertson’s 1992 *The Ethnostate*, which “intertwined eugenic and environmentalist” discourse drawing white genocide conspiracy theories from the actual endangerment of the California redwoods.⁴⁸ Renaud Camus’s 2011 *The Great Replacement* is a transnational addition to this apocalyptic tradition, warning of a “tidal wave” of third world immigration with a title plagiarized by the 2019 the ecofascist mass murderer’s manifesto in Christchurch, New Zealand, as well as cited as inspiration for the 2019 ecofascist mass shooting in a Walmart in El Paso, Texas.⁴⁹ The El Paso manifesto tells a chilling tale of what Jodi Byrd calls the “transit of Indianness,” citing Native genocide as reinforcement for white settler sovereignty’s blood and soil territory: “The

nearly complete ethnic and cultural destruction brought to the Native Americans by our European ancestors . . . just reinforces my point. The natives didn't take the invasion of Europeans seriously."⁵⁰ In striking divergence from the denialism long associated with right-wing political ideologies, these manifestos are paradigmatic narrations of climate change as it becomes synonymous with a permanent settler state of ecological emergency requiring an ecofascist response. They exemplify the ways that stories of imminent "invasion" creep in claims like "we are the virus"—narratives not limited to "The Rise of the Coronavirus Nature Genre" but immanent in the settler state's past and present and integral to its predicted futures.⁵¹

A perpetually threatened Western sovereignty binds the political philosophies underwriting white terrorism together with mainstream environmental narratives that invoke the same emergency condition. Attention to this shared settler state of emergency highlights the danger of decrying certain thinking as deranged, as in a "disturbance in the regular order," just as many baselessly blamed the El Paso ecofascist's "mental illness."⁵² The language of mental disorders denies the structuring logic of settler colonial capitalism, its dependence on a flexible and threatened white power, and the innocence-making function of emergency events.⁵³ For this reason, too, we must reject the pathology implied in Ghosh's title, *The Great Derangement*. Attention to the political philosophy lurking inside particular apocalyptic tales reveals that paralyzed, denialist, and ecofascist responses to climate change are not disturbances but different expressions of the same ordering logic—the genocidal imperatives underwriting, reinvigorating, and envining Western sovereignty.

When read in the context of political theory, the apocalypse reveals its "master metaphor"—the metaphoric material out of which the settler sovereign makes itself master of climate change's apocalyptic realities.⁵⁴ The state of emergency becomes the metaphor that white life lives by, a state of exception that marks some as killable in order to secure the sanctity of white patriarchal sovereignty. The life and death stakes of narrating environmental calamity through this master metaphor have never been the exception. They must be the acknowledged rule—especially as the scale of catastrophe is increasingly said to include all humanity.

The Apocalyptocene

Apocalyptic state-of-emergency tales reproduce white innocence, trapping us inside the suffocating atmospherics of CO₂ colonialism through a euphemistic naturalization known as the Anthropocene.⁵⁵ The Anthropocene buries the apocalyptic realities of racialization, colonialism, capitalism, and ecocide inside the nomos of “the human,” simply the latest update to a Schmittian universalization of the state of emergency as the *Nomos of the Earth*. In its assertion of “the human,” the Anthropocene fossilizes an epistemological and systemic position that cannot imagine solving a problem any other way than cataclysmic redemption of a settled (settler) future, in yet another acquittal of white violence. Fetishizing a golden spike event, it cashes in on a catastrophic mode that renders all, so none, guilty.⁵⁶

This ongoing history of disaster, displacement, and ends of worlds should, instead, be called the Apocalyptocene, a term that indicts the particular political fiction that such an epochal term poses as universal fact. While the Kleptocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Eugenicine, and “White Supremacy Scene” offer incisive interventions into the “era of the human,” no alternative term has encompassed both the fiction and the fact of the Anthropocene.⁵⁷ The Apocalyptocene aims to synthesize scholarship on the material violences of settler colonial capitalism’s genocidal project, which encompasses literary theory and application of apocalypse, geologic distinctions, and atmospheric realities. Geologically, the Apocalyptocene acknowledges Heather Davis and Zoe Todd’s call to source the Anthropocene’s inception in the colonial period alongside Kathryn Yusoff’s redress of the epoch’s “white geology” originating in Black and brown death.⁵⁸ These apocalypses begin in what Gerald Horne calls “the apocalypse of settler colonialism” and extend into what Kristen Simmons terms today’s “settler atmospherics.”⁵⁹ In short, the dystopic bedrock of past and in-progress apocalypses is the fact and fiction out of which rises the atmospheric carbon count.

Atmospheres, soils, and stones cry out with the facts and fictions of the Apocalyptocene. It amplifies the historical precedents for current climate crises, following Potawatomi environmental philosopher Kyle Whyte being joined by Grace Dillon, Cutcha Risling Baldy, Zoe Todd, Lawrence Gross, Sidner Larson, Daniel Wildcat, Leanne Betasamosake

Simpson, and Robin Wall Kimmerer, among others, who all demonstrate Native peoples' survival through what many would classify as the apocalypse, including forced removal to locations with drastically different weather patterns, which meant encounters with changed climates.⁶⁰ The Apocalypticocene names the ways the future climate chaos is continuous with how settler colonial capitalism has already been experienced, marking claims that climate change will be like nothing "we" have ever experienced before as an *ex nihilo* fiction willfully ignoring the many already crying "I can't breathe." It makes visible connections between the asphyxiating atmospherics of police violence, environmental injustice, and climate chaos, laying bare "everything that fundamentally attacks the respiratory tract, everything that, in the long reign of capitalism, has constrained entire segments of the world population, entire races, to a difficult, panting breath and life of oppression."⁶¹ Stories of singular environmental catastrophes such as the Anthropocene universalize these suffocating settler states of being, enclosing imagination within CO₂ colonialism's choking atmosphere. Instead, the Apocalypticocene descriptively connects historical and current artistic production to the ongoing realities of white supremacy, settler colonial capitalism, and the sixth extinction. Where the apocalyptic Anthropocene erases power relations, the Apocalypticocene names the narrative structure in which settler capitalism simultaneously produces cataclysms for human and nonhuman worlds and finds fuel from those crises.

The Apocalypticocene troubles the tales and temporality of the emergency. It reveals the real-life massacres acquitted through fictionalized invocations of in-progress extinctions like white genocide, stories that tell the end of a white world from a perpetual present of settler futurity.⁶² Instead, the Apocalypticocene advocates for the Anthropocene to be understood as merely a geologic metaphor for the political and material reality in which, in la paperson's words, "only the bad guys build things that last forever."⁶³ The Apocalypticocene archives this paralyzed temporality in the Anthropocene account and suggests that it can be, is, and has been otherwise.

Of Apocalypses and Futures

The Apocalypticocene showcases the lived science fictions of survival lurking within the supposedly singular story of apocalypse. Just as

Jessica Hurley and Dan Sinykin note in their introduction to the special issue of *ASAP/Journal* dedicated to apocalypse, “Apocalypse gathers eschatologies derived from many traditions,” which carry their own “fissures and contradictions,” emphasizing that even “the Book of Revelation is an anti-imperial document.”⁶⁴ Early Mormon millennialism, for example, distinguished itself from protestant Christianity in its decolonial apocalypticism that prophesied an end of the white man’s rule inaugurated by Native peoples taking back their lands.⁶⁵ While Paul Reeve’s *Religion of a Different Color* shows how Mormon belief moved away from this decolonial prophecy in order to access the privileges of whiteness, the early Mormon apocalyptic tradition suggests the unlikely alliances across time and space that an Apocalypticocene can reveal.⁶⁶

The Apocalypticocene names the epochal convergences of white supremacy, settler colonial capitalism, and the sixth extinction and amplifies the geologic and atmospheric survival imagined in Indigenous futurisms and Afrofuturisms. Indigenous futurism, a term coined by Grace Dillon and inspired by Afrofuturism, joins work in Indigenous, Black, and ethnic studies that frames settler colonialism as a set of apocalypse-inducing technologies aimed at dispossession that communities of color have been outlasting for centuries.⁶⁷ Outlasting occurs as, in Nick Estes words, “Indigenous resistance draws from a long history, projecting itself backward and forward in time,” where there is no fixed or absolute boundary between past and present, which means that the future is dependent on our understanding of the past.⁶⁸ Likewise, Kyle Whyte uses the term “spiraling time” to describe a “living science fiction” where Indigenous artists, environmental conservation and justice workers, and others acknowledge simultaneously living alongside future and past relatives in consent- and reciprocity-based relationships.⁶⁹ Science fiction scholar and *How to Survive the End of the World* podcast host adrienne maree brown likewise argues that science fiction is happening in communities that are working to create systems of justice and equity in the future.⁷⁰ Alexis Pauline Gumbs, author of *M Archive: After the End of the World*, describes a time-space continuum of “black feminist time travel” where those seeking social justice today draw on the strength of people like Harriet Tubman, whose imagination of future freedom provided a source of strength to survive and free others.⁷¹ Thus, Fred Moten’s reminder that what “survives dispossession, is there-

fore before dispossession” encapsulates a continuity in these scholars, a present-future-past capable of refusing the arresting asphyxiations of the Apocalyptocene.⁷²

Listening to, and thinking with, the specific peoples who have experienced, survived, adapted, resisted, and frustrated ecological and humanitarian Apocalyptocenes moves imagination beyond the landscapes of settler colonial capitalism, beyond the *terra nullius* topographies. These stories reveal vast and divergent models of apocalyptic storytelling that can be wielded to reject a planetary version of Western sovereignty (detailed in *Climate Leviathan*) and expose its impoverished vision of land as *terra sacer*—both “sacred and accursed,” in need of rescue and “preserve-able” with the settler steward able to decide who or what is deserving of protection.⁷³ They resist the creep of ecofascist fictions of infestation and extermination that naturalize *terra* (land) into *terrere* (terror).⁷⁴

They tell of topographies where pipelines are welded with the gendered and raced violences of settler capital but also trace the anticolonial infrastructure of resistance capable of moving our imaginations through, and beyond, the whitewashed horizons of settler time and space.⁷⁵ When water protectors declare, “This is what the prophecy looks like!” they bring the future end of white exhaustion into the present.⁷⁶ They preach a radical apocalypticism ringing from the frontlines of struggles for Indigenous sovereignty, singing the sanctity of life in the face of police violence, intoning the scales of those inspired and inspired—given breath and life—by them. They embody genocide, wielding stories of apocalypse to dismantle the plots (and pipes) of white supremacy’s genocidal genre.⁷⁷

The contrasted scene between Malheur and Standing Rock is just one plot point in the structure of the Apocalyptocene; the current COVID-19 nature genre, another. These scenic juxtapositions agitate attention so that we may witness—differently, unevenly, tentatively—the polluted exhausts of conquest suffusing much apocalyptic narrative, the whiteness of the master often suffocating the metaphor. We begin to see that as whiteness spreads over landscapes, glaciers retreat. We haltingly testify to the ways seeing whiteness is training for seeing climate change. We share then, again and again, in the Apocalyptocene’s continuous unveiling. The roots of our futures are embedded in seeing these antiracist Apocalyptocenes. They grow in the pasts that we write

and rewrite in the present, in the varied work that cultivates, fortifies, and embodies these emergent, urgent futures.⁷⁸

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NOTES

1. The occupation included Three Percenters, Oath Keepers, and Patriot networks known for white-nationalist agendas. Though Bundy avoided the term *white genocide*, the Southern Poverty Law Center cites Bundy rhetoric as exemplary of a white nationalism drenched in violent apocalypticism. Keegan Hankes, "How the Extremist Right Hijacked 'Star Wars,' Taylor Swift and the Mizzou Student Protests to Promote Racism," Southern Poverty Law Center, January 5, 2016, <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2016/01/05/how-extremist-right-hijacked-%E2%80%98star-wars%E2%80%99-taylor-swift-and-mizzou-student-protests-promote>.

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