

History 215.001 (Honors)
Fall 2015
Tu Th 10:00-11:30am (2401 MH)

Douglas Northrop (northrop@umich.edu)
Office hours (Tisch 1029-J):
Thursdays, 8:30-10:00am (by appointment)

CATASTROPHE: THE HISTORY OF DISASTER

There have been and there will be many and divers destructions of mankind, of which the greatest are by fire and water, and lesser ones by countless other means. – Plato

Pompeii. The Black Death. London's Great Fire. Earthquakes in San Francisco. Monsoon flooding in Bangladesh. Natural disasters may appear to be a constant of life on earth, but human responses to, and interpretations of, such "acts of God" have varied dramatically. And while on the surface these calamities bring only death and destruction, they also reveal much that otherwise would remain hidden. How do human societies interact with (and explain) "nature" and its hazards? Why have some groups and places been – or become – more vulnerable than others? By creating an apparently (and tragically) blank slate, too, calamity also creates opportunities. The history of disaster is as much about what happens afterwards, about how men and women respond, both immediately and in the longer term: to develop religious or scientific explanations for what happened, to criticize state responses or ill-preparedness, to debate questions of responsibility and blame. Catastrophes make it possible to reorganize social relations, to rethink personal priorities, and to rebuild structures and cityscapes in new ways.

This topical, comparative course ranges widely through space and time to explore the history of natural disasters: fires, floods, famines, hurricanes, tornadoes, epidemics, tsunamis, earthquakes, blizzards, volcanoes, and more. Obviously we can't do it all! But we will consider how such episodes can (and should) be represented, how concerns about natural hazards and (inevitable?) catastrophes have changed over time and by place, and how people have used such episodes to consider nature, the universe, and their place in it. Why has it been so important to describe some disasters as "natural," and others not? In the end I hope we emerge with a better sense of what historians can learn from studying such extreme, apparently atypical moments of cataclysm and crisis.

This is an Honors class; as such, it will demand high-level work and performance. The number "215" should not be taken to suggest anything different! You'll need to invest substantial time, effort, and energy. Readings are extensive and sometimes difficult (they average 80-100 pages per class, although this figure fluctuates). I have, however, made every effort to distribute the workload: there is less reading towards the end, to give more time to focus on the papers. Please be aware that this is primarily a discussion class: you will hear few if any lectures. I emphasize this shared character of our meetings because the success or failure of this course derives largely from what you, individually and collectively, put into it. Every student will lead class meetings; all of us will teach each other. I intend to maintain as low a profile as possible.

The Fine Print: All assignments and due dates are subject to change, but anticipated requirements include the following:

1. Class participation and attendance (25%). All students are expected to arrive prepared at every meeting and to engage actively in discussion – everyone will take turns facilitating the conversation. And each of you (or I) may call on anyone! Your **classroom contribution** – thoughtful, well-informed, constructive, insightful – makes up most of these points. **Bring 2-3 meaty questions, IN WRITING, to class every day.** As noted below, there will also be regular quizzes, tests, and/or timed writings. Although it has no set point value, **attendance is required.** Beyond the obvious impact it has on your ability to participate, excellent attendance carries a bonus; absence, by contrast, will bring quick (adverse) consequences. Three absences are permitted without penalty; thereafter, each missed class (for whatever reason) reduces your overall **course grade** by two points. Please alert me to any problems right away: after eight absences the cost goes up to five points each. Late arrivals are disruptive; after ten minutes they count as half an absence.

Please note the **laptop policy**. All students are expected to take notes – primarily for your own edification, but also for exams (oh, yes, that). Some may prefer to take these notes on a laptop or tablet; those so inclined have a presumptive, but probationary, access to electronic devices in class. However, **WIFI MUST BE TURNED OFF, and sound muted; cellphones need to be turned off.** (Wifi creates a “cone of distraction” that can harm your class performance – and, even more, that of those around you.)¹

2. Tests (25%). Rather than one long, possibly (!) stressful final exam, we’ll use regular shorter tests, quizzes, and timed writings along the way: these will let you show mastery of core concepts and, especially, readings – analyzing them creatively, critically, and with sophistication.

3. Written work (50%). I’ll ask you to write **two papers**. One is a critically constructive book review (approximately 1250 words) of *Winds of Change*, *Late Victorian Holocausts*, or *Acts of God* (your choice, 10%; I recommend choosing one early in the term!). The larger project involves hands-on work: an investigation of Karanis, via artifacts at the Kelsey Museum (2500-word source analysis, 20%, and 4-sided exhibit card, 20%). This project involves constructive engagement with your colleagues’ work too (in a peer-review process). More details will be forthcoming, but please talk about your ideas as they take shape – with me, with your classmates, and with Cathy Person (cperson@umich.edu) at the Kelsey. Consider sharing drafts ahead of time – in this and all of your classes. Every paper improves with revision! I can’t serve as an editor, nor provide a checklist to guarantee a particular grade – but I’m happy to discuss your work in progress. I ask only that you do so in advance; any draft should be turned in at least ten days ahead of time.

¹ www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/03/08/AR2010030804915.html. See also: www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0360131512002254 and chronicle.com/blogs/languafranca/2014/08/25/why-im-asking-you-not-to-use-laptops/.

Other policies: for the sake of fairness to all, there are no extensions on papers. Late book reviews are NOT ACCEPTED. Late source essays are accepted, but marked down one-half grade for every day (or fraction thereof) late – that is, a B+ paper receives a B if it is an hour late. This drops to B- if it is more than 24 hours late, C+ after 48 hours, etc. **Finally, please note:** be sure to acknowledge fully your use of others' words or ideas. It is generous and courteous to credit others, and this helps highlight your own contributions, originality, and creativity; it is also required by the practices and ethics of academic work. Plagiarism of any kind will not be tolerated; this includes using websites and online resources without attribution. Apparent misconduct will be referred to the Dean of Student Affairs for investigation, with penalties (depending on the case) ranging from a simple zero on an assignment all the way up to expulsion. If you have questions – even minor ones – about attributing material or citing quotations, paraphrases, or more generally about how to use others' work, all you need to do is ask ... BEFORE submitting your paper!

For more detail, please see the History Department's and LSA's online resources: www.lsa.umich.edu/academicintegrity/ and www.lsa.umich.edu/history/undergraduate/courses/guidelinesandpolicies.

The following books are **required**. You may purchase a copy of each, or read on two-hour reserve at the UGLI. All articles are **free** via C-Tools – see “Resources.” Please **annotate** all articles & books – and bring these copies to class. These will occasionally be collected, as hard copy or (annotated!) pdfs, as part of your participation grade.

Required texts include:

Terry Wilfong, *Karanis: An Egyptian Town in Roman Times* (ISBN 0974187305) –at Kelsey: www.lsa.umich.edu/kelsey/research/publications/kelseymuseumpublicationseries
 Alison Cooley, *Pompeii* (only pp 17-62 – also on reserve) (ISBN 0715631616)
 Steven Biel, *American Disasters* (5 of 13 essays – also on reserve) (ISBN 0814713459)
 John Aberth, *The First Horseman* (ISBN 0131893416)
 Mike Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts* (ISBN 1859847390)
 Alessa Johns, ed., *Dreadful Visitations* (ISBN 0415921759)
 Louis Pérez, *Winds of Change* (ISBN 0807875651)
 Ted Steinberg, *Acts of God* (ISBN 9780199838912)

COURSE OUTLINE:

I. INTRODUCTIONS, FRAMEWORKS, QUESTIONS

1. **(8 September) Introductions.**

Reading to be done for today: none. (0)

START WORKING ON PERSONAL NARRATIVES.

2. **(10 September) Narrative, Folkway, Myth: Prehistoric Disasters.**

*Reading: (C-Tools) “Gilgamesh,” in William W. Hallo, *The Context of Scripture*, 458-60; Michael Simpson, ed., *The Metamorphoses of Ovid*, 13-18; excerpts from *Genesis and Exodus* (NIV). (23)*

3. **(15 September) Packaging: Narrating, Recasting, Retelling Disaster.**

Reading: Sheila Hones, "Distant Disasters, Local Fears: Volcanoes, Earthquakes, Revolution, and Passion in *The Atlantic Monthly*, 1880-84," in Steven Biel, ed., *American Disasters*, 170-96; (C-Tools): Laura Ingalls Wilder, *Little House on the Prairie*, 274-85, *On the Banks of Plum Creek*, 192-205 and 260-7, and *The Long Winter*, 212-15, 225-7, and 230-9; Ben Kartman and Leonard Brown, eds., *Disaster!*, 120-30, 235-9, 267-71, 301-9; Michael Barton, "Journalistic Gore: Disaster Reporting and Emotional Discourse in *The New York Times*, 1852-1956," in Peter N. Stearns and Jan Lewis, eds., *An Emotional History of the United States*, 155-72. (125)

4. **(17 September) Theories and Definitions: What is a Disaster?**

Reading: (C-Tools) Anthony Oliver-Smith & Susanna Hoffman, "Introduction: Why Anthropologists Should Study Disaster," in Hoffman and Oliver-Smith, eds., *Catastrophe & Culture*, 3-13; Kenneth Hewitt, "The Idea of Calamity in a Technocratic Age," in Hewitt, ed., *Interpretations of Calamity*, 3-32. (55)

UPLOAD PERSONAL NARRATIVES BY FRIDAY, 8PM, TO C-TOOLS FORUM

5. **(22 September) The Uses of Disaster.**

Reading: (C-Tools) Paul Susman et al., "Global Disasters, a Radical Interpretation," in Hewitt, ed., *Interpretations of Calamity*, 263-83; Susanna M. Hoffman, "After Atlas Shrugs: Cultural Change or Persistence After a Disaster," in Oliver-Smith and Hoffman, eds., *The Angry Earth*, 302-25. (45)

CATASTROPHE IN THE PREMODERN WORLD

Cosmologies of death and power

6. **(24 September) Disaster in the Ancient World.**

Reading: (C-Tools) Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, 76-83; Tacitus, *The Annals of Imperial Rome*, 360-7; Suetonius on Rome, in Lewis H. Lapham with Peter T. Struck, eds., *The End of the World*, 32-3; Harald Sigurdsson, *Melting the Earth*, 51-70; William H. McNeill, "Infectious Alternatives," in Robert Cowley, ed., *What If?* (1999), 3-12; Lester K. Little, "Life and Afterlife of the First Plague Pandemic," and Michael Kulikowski, four sermons as an appendix, in Little, ed., *Plague and the End of Antiquity*, 3-32 and 160-70. (89)

7. **(29 September) Pompeii (MEET AT THE KELSEY MUSEUM TODAY!)**

Reading: Alison Cooley, *Pompeii*, 17-62; (C-Tools) Nappo, *Pompeii*, 8-15. (53)

8. **(1 October) The Black Death in Europe, China, and the Middle East.**

Reading: John Aberth, *The First Horseman*, 11-46; and (C-Tools) Giovanni Boccaccio, *The Decameron*, 6-17 (excerpts also in Aberth); William H. McNeill,

Plagues and Peoples, 140-75, Samuel K. Cohn, Jr., "The Black Death: End of a Paradigm," *American Historical Review* (June 2002), 703-38. (120)

9. **(6 October) Karanis (MEET AT THE KELSEY MUSEUM TODAY!).**

Reading: Terry Wilfong, *Karanis*. (XX)

10. **(8 October) The Great Fires of Istanbul and London, 1660 and 1666.**

Reading: (C-Tools) Marc Baer, "The Great Fire of 1660 and the Islamization of Christian and Jewish Space in Istanbul," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (2004), 159-81; *Diary of Samuel Pepys*, 7:267-87; Walter Bell, *Great Fire of London*, 313-38; Stephen Porter, *The Great Fire of London*, 32-59. (97)

DISASTER AND THE PRODUCTION OF MODERNITY
"Nature," "progress," and new regimes of power

11. **(13 October) Lisbon: Interpreting a Shaking Earth, 1541-1797.**

Reading: (C-Tools) Félix Gutiérrez and Ernesto Ballesteros, "The 1541 Earthquake: Dawn of Latin American Journalism," *Journalism History* 6:3 (1979), 79-83; Maxine Van de Wetering, "Moralizing in Puritan Natural Science: Mysteriousness in Earthquake Sermons," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 43:3 (1982), 417-38; T.D. Kendrick, *The Lisbon Earthquake*, 24-42; Anonymous and Voltaire in Lapham, ed., *The End of the World*, 114-19; Voltaire, "Poem on the Lisbon Disaster," 99-108; Voltaire letter to Jean-Robert Tronchin, 127. (63)

12. **(15 October) Lisbon (and Its Like) Rebuilt.**

Reading: Stephen Tobriner, "Safety and Reconstruction of Noto After the Sicilian Earthquake of 1693," and Charles F. Walker, "Shaking the Unstable Empire: The Lima, Quito, and Arequipa Earthquakes, 1746, 1783, and 1797," in Alessa Johns, ed., *Dreadful Visitations*, 49-77 and 113-44; (C-Tools) John R. Mullin, "The Reconstruction of Lisbon Following the Earthquake of 1755: A Study in Despotism," *Planning Perspectives* 7 (1992), 157-79; Matthew Mulcahy, "Urban Catastrophes and Imperial Relief in the Eighteenth-Century British Atlantic World," in Geneviève Massard Guilbaud et al., eds., *Cities and Catastrophes* (2002), 105-20. (100)

20 OCTOBER – NO CLASS – FALL BREAK

13. **(22 October) Death Walks Among Us: Plague in Europe.**

Reading: Daniel Gordon, "Confrontations With the Plague in Eighteenth-Century France," in Johns, ed., *Dreadful Visitations*, 3-29; (C-Tools) Defoe in Lapham, *The End of the World*, 105-8; plague materials and Foucault, "Panopticism," in Paula R. Backscheider, ed., *Daniel Defoe: A Journal of the Plague Year*, 208-28 and 244-50. (69)

14. (27 October) Plague, Imperial Power, and the Body Colonial.

Reading: John Aberth, *The First Horseman*, 76-114; and (C-Tools) Kenneth Kiple, "Cholera and Race in the Caribbean," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 17 (1985), 157-77; Julio Ramos, "A Citizen Body: Cholera in Havana (1833)," *Dispositio/n* 19 (46) (1994), 179-95; David Arnold, "Touching the Body: Perspectives on the Indian Plague, 1896-1900," in Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, eds., *Selected Subaltern Studies*, 391-426. (132)

15. (29 October) Caribbean Hurricanes.

Reading: Louis Pérez, Jr., *Winds of Change*, 5-155; Matthew Mulcahy, "'A Tempestuous Spirit Called Hurri Cano': Hurricanes and Colonial Society in the British Greater Caribbean," in Biel, ed., *American Disasters*, 11-38. (179)
(THOSE CHOOSING WINDS OF CHANGE FOR BOOK REVIEW MUST SUBMIT THEIR ESSAY TODAY – ON C-TOOLS – BEFORE CLASS.)

16. (3 November) Famine and the Making of the Modern World (I).

Reading: David Arnold, "Hunger in the Garden of Plenty: The Bengal Famine of 1770," and Alan Taylor, "'The Hungry Year': 1789 on the Northern Border of Revolutionary America," in Johns, ed., *Dreadful Visitations*, 81-111 and 145-81; also continue reading Davis. (69)

(LATE VICTORIAN HOLOCAUSTS REVIEWS ARE DUE BEFORE CLASS 17.)

17. (5 November) Famine and the Making of the Modern World (II).

Reading: Mike Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts*, 1-209. (210)

18. (10 November) Famine and the Making of the Modern World (III).

Reading: Mike Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts*, 213-393. (181)

19. (12 November) Urban Disaster and Renewal: The Chicago Fire, 1871.

Reading: Carl Smith, "Faith and Doubt: Imaginative Dimensions of the Great Chicago Fire," in Biel, ed., *American Disasters*, 129-69; (C-Tools) Karen Sawislak, *Smoldering City*, 21-67. (88)

***** (KARANIS SOURCE ESSAYS ARE DUE FRIDAY NIGHT, 13 NOVEMBER) *****

FILM: See *San Francisco* (1936) before class #20.

20. (17 November) Days that Shook the World (I): San Francisco.

Reading: Ted Steinberg, *Acts of God*, 25-46; Kevin Rozario, "What Comes Down Must Go Up: Why Disasters Have Been Good for American Capitalism," in Biel, ed., *American Disasters*, 72-102; (C-Tools) Nayan Shah, *Contagious Divides*, 120-56 and 292-302; Jack London in Lapham, ed., *The End of the World*, 191-6; Carl S. Smith, "Urban Disorder and the Shape of Belief: The San Francisco

Earthquake and Fire," Yale Review (Autumn 1984), 79-95. (103) (Also review Disaster!, 120-30, from class #3.)

21. (19 November) PROJECT WORK SESSION: MEET AT THE KELSEY TODAY!!

22. (24 November) Days that Shook the World (II): Tokyo, Tangshan, Mexico City.

Reading: (C-Tools) Spectator in Lapham, ed., The End of the World, 222-3; Victoria Peattie, "The Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923," Journal of Asian Culture 5 (1981), 163-76; J. Michael Allen, "The Price of Identity: The 1923 Kanto Earthquake and Its Aftermath," Korean Studies 20 (1996), 64-93; Jeffrey Hanes, "Urban Planning as an Urban Problem: The Reconstruction of Tokyo after the Great Kanto Earthquake," Seisaku Kagaku 7:3 (2000), 123-37. (61)

26 NOVEMBER – NO CLASS – THANKSGIVING

DISASTERS TODAY
and the lessons of history

Finished Karanis exhibit cards must be posted on C-Tools Forum by 10pm on DECEMBER 1.

23. (1 December) Environments of Disaster (I): Bangladesh & Sub-Saharan Africa.

Reading: John Aberth, The First Horseman, 115-58; and (C-Tools) Mohammad Q. Zaman, "Vulnerability, Disaster, and Survival in Bangladesh: Three Case Studies," in Oliver-Smith and Hoffman, eds., The Angry Earth, 192-212; Rosalind Shaw, " 'Nature,' 'Culture,' and Disasters: Floods and Gender in Bangladesh," in Elisabeth Croll and David Parkin, eds., Bush Base: Forest Farm, 200-17. (82)

*Please post your article choice for final class readings in C-Tool Forum **before class #24.***

24. (3 December) Environments of Disaster (II): USA.

Reading: (C-Tools) Mike Davis, Ecology of Fear, 151-94; Eric Klinenberg, Heat Wave, 1-36. (81)

TWO COPIES OF KARANIS PEER REVIEWS DUE TODAY

25. (8 December) Politics, Ecology, and Technology of Modern Disaster.

Reading: Ted Steinberg, Acts of God, complete; Patricia Bellis Bixel, " 'It Must Be Made Safe': Galveston, Texas, and the 1900 Storm," in Biel, ed., American Disasters, 223-46. (207)

(ACTS OF GOD REVIEWS ARE DUE IN CLASS TODAY.)

26. (10 December) Decade of Disaster: Fukushima, Aceh, Katrina, climate change.

Reading: articles assigned by you, on one of these recent/ongoing events.

***** (KARANIS EXHIBIT CARDS, & COMMENTS, DUE AT CLASS ON 10 DECEMBER) *****

