

The End of the World



Billionaires, Bunkers & Apocalyptic Ideologies

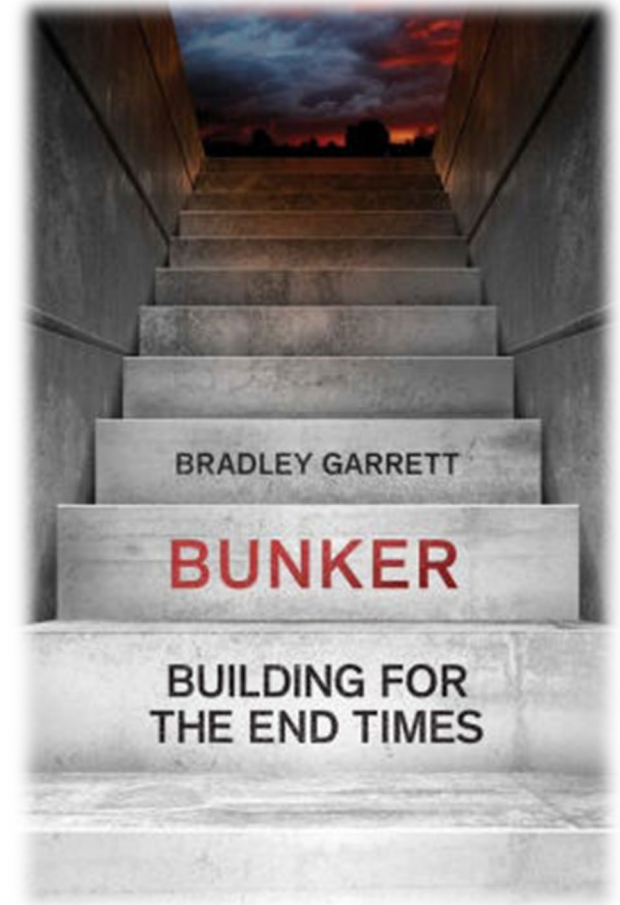
Week 4 Lecture | Professor Crews
RELS 357 W

As Bradley Garrett makes clear in his book *Bunker*, the end of the world fears that drove the first and second doom booms are alive and well today. This mix of fear and dread helps explain some of the current obsession with underground bunkers, from Trident Lakes in Texas to lost Tasmanian hideaways and media-hyped billionaire doomsday bunkers such as Oppidum.

Trident Lakes and other exclusive bunkers appear to be catering to a small group of political and economic elites who place absolute trust in technology.

Here we see the flip side of the technology issues discussed last week with examples like Gorgon Stare and a desire to hide from technological surveillance. For the founders of Trident Lakes, technology is a tool to help survive a doomsday scenario and not something to be feared.

This makes sense when we recall how important techno-libertarian and Silicon Valley elites and their associated philosophies have been in forcing disruptive new technologies into society (Apple, Amazon, Facebook, PayPal, Twitter, YouTube).



Apocalypse and Social Upheaval

To understand some end of the world fears that drive people to prepping and underground bunkers, we need to explore the cultural ideology shaping them.

One important cultural influence comes from a book called *The Fourth Turning* by William Strauss and Neil Howe, in which they proposed a “Generational Theory” of societal upheaval and change every 80-100 years.

This cyclical idea is embraced by many preppers and survivalists who believe the collapse of our current society is inevitable (and even desirable for some).

As Garrett argues, **“Throughout human history, when civilizations have reached what seems to be a stagnant phase, apocalyptic thinking surfaces.”**



A Fourth Turning Prophecy (circa 1997)

“The next Fourth Turning is due to begin shortly after the new millennium, midway through the 2000 decade. Around the year 2005, a sudden spark will catalyze a Crisis mood. Remnants of the old social order will disintegrate. Political and economic trust will implode. Real hardship will beset the land, with severe distress that could involve questions of class, race, nation, and empire. Yet this time of trouble will bring seeds of social rebirth.

Sometime before the year 2025, America will pass through a great gate in history, commensurate with the American Revolution, Civil War, and twin emergencies of the Great Depression and World War II. The risk of catastrophe will be very high. The nation could erupt into insurrection or civil violence, crack up geographically, or succumb to authoritarian rule.

Thus might the next Fourth Turning end in apocalypse— or glory. The nation could be ruined, its democracy destroyed, and millions of people scattered or killed. Or America could enter a new golden age, triumphantly applying shared values to improve the human condition.

We cannot stop the seasons of history, but we can prepare for them.”

Social Crisis and Politics

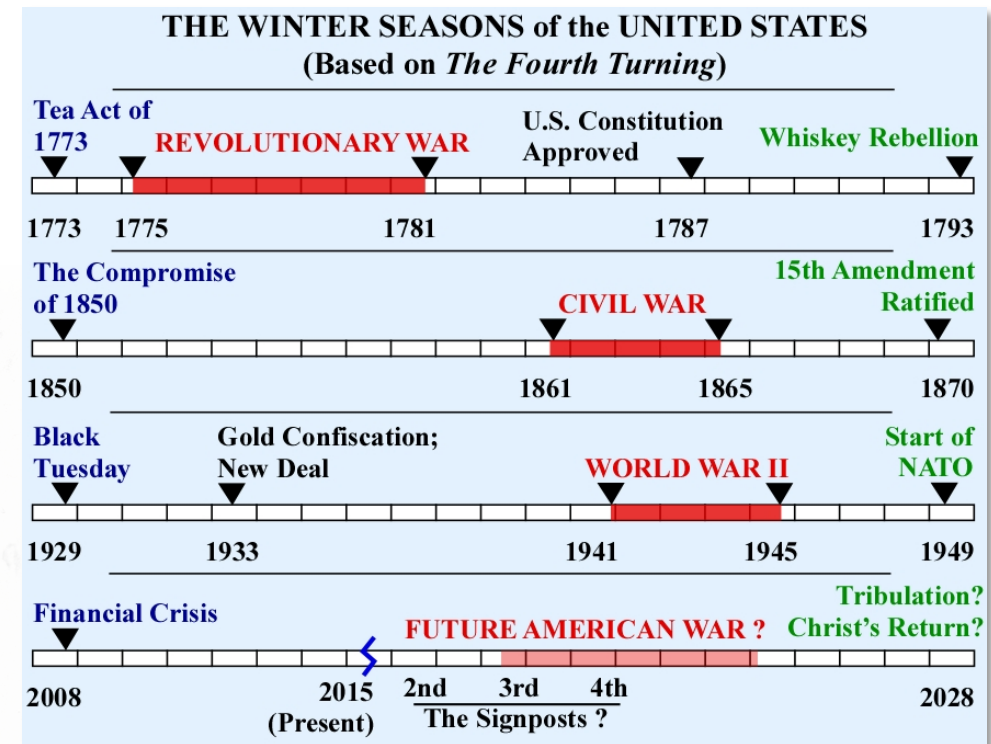
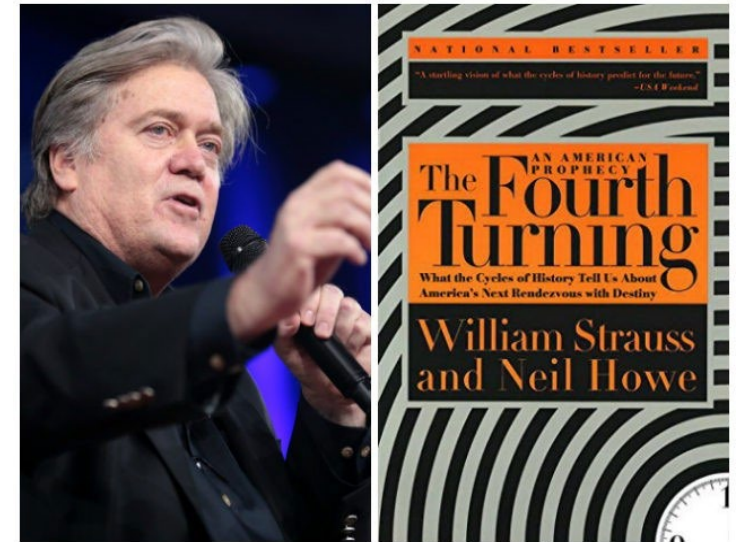
This theory of cyclical change has been promoted by both populists and political elites, including former Trump political advisor and media strategies Steve Bannon.

Garrett argues Bannon and others saw the 3rd turning, what Strauss and Howe called the “Unraveling”, as a moment to seize political power before devolving into the 4th turning or “Crisis”, when political unrest leads to social breakdown.

Out of this chaos a new political order emerges (grounded in ‘Law and Order’ for conservatives), the 1st turning “High”.

As Strauss and Howe wrote in 1997:

"History is seasonal, and winter is coming..."



Prepping for the Apocalypse

Garrett argues there are strong links between apocalyptic right-wing populism and end of the world prepping circles that subscribe to Fourth Turning cycles.

These ideas have come together in what SurvivalBlog.com founder and influential survivalist author James Wesley, Rawles calls the American Redoubt.

This same area is described by Radio Free Redoubt as an “[Emerging Safe Haven and Refuge for God-Fearing, Liberty-Loving Patriots.](#)”

So it is no coincidence that many of the religious doomsday cults and armed militia movements we have considered so far are clustered around this area of the country. (It’s worth noting there is also a sister “Appalachian Redoubt” centered around the Cumberland Plateau region).

The ‘American Redoubt’

Some members of survivalist groups are moving to parts of five sparsely populated northwestern states.





The Voice of the American Redoubt
The Emerging Safe Haven and Refuge for God-Fearing, Liberty-Loving Patriots



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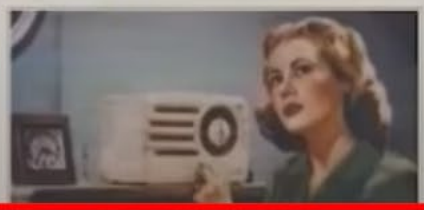
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Idaho Patriot Event Schedule

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Episode 13-23 In Case of Emergency

September 15th, 2013 | 1 Comment



HIGHLIGHTS & RESOURCES Sunday 15 September 2013
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Climate Change & Prepping

But these fears are not limited to the US. Bradley Garrett also takes us down under to look another important issue that has come to frame end of the world debates—climate change. As he notes, the February 7, 2009 fires in Australia (“Black Saturday”) were a climate change omen that caused over \$4.4 billion in economic damage and losses.

Inaction over the subsequent decade showed just how unprepared most Australians were for disaster, a point driven home during the catastrophic 2019-20 fires (“Black Summer”) that ravaged the country.

The fires caused an estimated \$100 billion in economic damages, destroyed nearly 6,000 structures, and killed over 30 people and an estimated 1 billion animals.

With 89% of residents living in urban areas vulnerable to fire and supply line disruptions, Garrett argues “Australia is teetering on the brink” of disaster.



Visualization of bush fires
(May 2019-May 2020)

Australians are now facing longer dry seasons combined with rising temperatures which are causing desert areas to expand. This will increase fire frequency and allow them to spread into more areas. Complicating matters is the fact that climate change is beyond the control of everyday Aussies, even if they wanted to act. To date, coal and mining interests have stopped actions to address climate change.

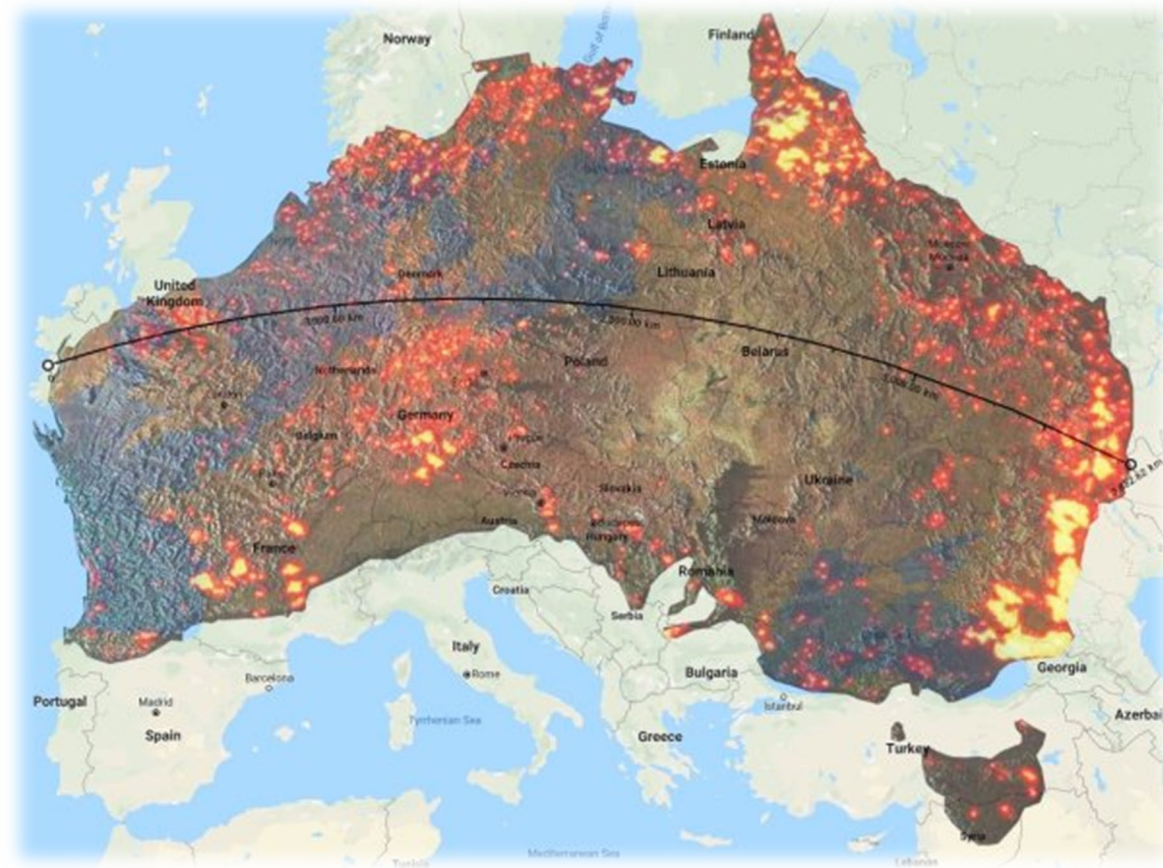
This is a prime example of a “Wicked Problem”.

By 2020 “extreme fire days” will increase by 65%

By 2050 “extreme fire days” will increase by 300%!

Some parts of rural Australia may be more resilient (particularly Aboriginal areas) because they have been dealing with bush fires for much longer and locals are more adapted to long trips across remote areas with limited supplies.

As Garrett notes, with such dynamics it’s no wonder that more Australians are getting into prepping.



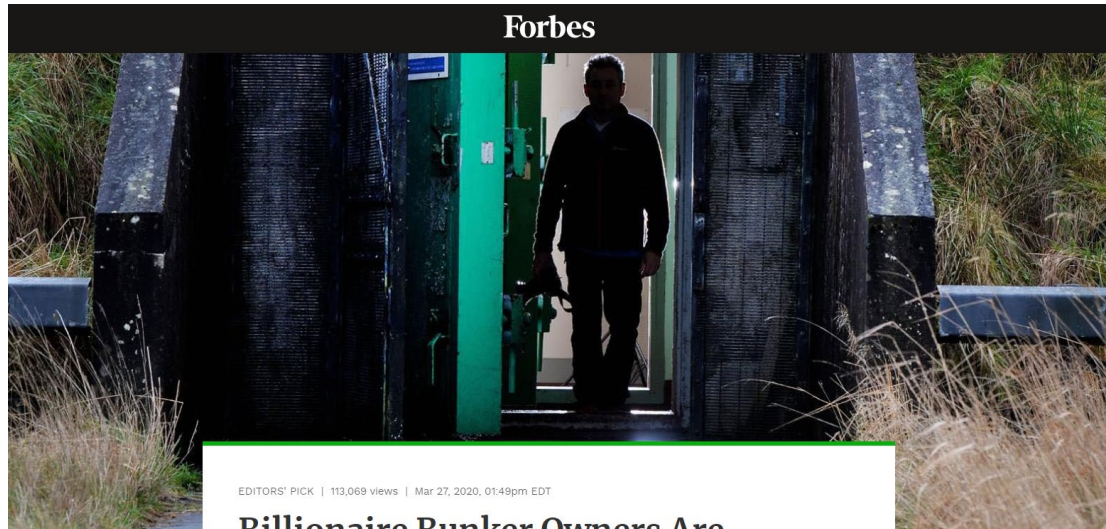
2019-20 fires in Australia overlaid on Europe/Central Asia

Another issue Garrett explores in places like Australia, Tasmania, and New Zealand is the media focus on economic elites planning to “bug out” to secret, million-dollar bunkers, such as the story of wealthy US attorney Martin Polin fleeing nuclear war fears in the 1970s as part of the “first doom boom”.

Yet this trend appears to be more media hype than reality. Garrett notes the 2012 arrest of Megaupload founder Kim Dotcom inside his New Zealand panic room, and the 2012 Mayan calendar ending myths, created a media obsession with economic elites building secret bunkers to survive the end of the world.



This media craze over billionaire bunkers appears to have been driven by companies like *Forbes* magazine, which regularly features the lifestyles and obsessions of the ultra wealthy. For example, Forbes did a series of features on the secretive Czech bunker complex known as The Oppidum, which as Garrett argues, is a mythical bunker that was never built, yet it was marketed as real through elaborate smoke & mirror pr campaigns, slick CGI renderings, and news features.



EDITORS' PICK | 113,069 views | Mar 27, 2020, 01:49pm EDT

Billionaire Bunker Owners Are Preparing For The Ultimate Underground Escape

Forbes

Billionaire **Battle Plans**

Under siege from all sides: how TorchStone helps the rich protect the home front.

BY STEVEN BERTONI

ACTION-STAR SKILLS

CLOSE COMBAT: TorchStone sends chauffeurs, security guards and the tycoons themselves to self-defense guru Tom Patire of CDT Systems to learn non-lethal techniques that can stop and detain a threat without inflicting permanent damage—and incurring lawsuits.



EVASIVE DRIVING: Vehicle Dynamics Institute has taught billionaires how to identify and shake a tail plus car-chase-scene tricks like tire-burning bootlegs and J-turns that would make Steve McQueen smile.



PIMP MY RIDE: Armored vehicles are a little overboard in the U.S. But billionaires have equipped their cars with run-flat tires and added panic buttons to their dashes. Some even have a panic button and an emergency cellphone installed in the trunk in case they're tossed in.



FORTRESS OF SOLITUDE

INVISIBLE SHIELD: Electric fences, barbed wire and guard towers do the trick, but who wants a \$30 million mansion to look like a federal supermax prison? FLIR thermal cameras create acres of secure perimeter without planting a single fence post. Cameras pick up body heat in the pitch black. Algorithms filter threats—say, sorting a burglar from a bunny. Suspicious character detected? The system triggers alarms, alerts police and sends an image of the intruder straight to the billionaire's iPad.



ARMAGEDDON READY

ESCAPE FROM NEW YORK: Billionaires have SUVs ready 24 hours a day on the ground floors of parking garages for a quick exit. They're stocked with provisions, escape routes, satellite phones, radiation detectors and fold-up bikes in case they need to go off-road.



SAFE HOUSE: Tycoons have turned their mountain estates and gentleman ranches into well-stocked hideouts, with power generators, independent water sources, foodstuffs, medicine, satellite phones and shortwave radios. If society completely breaks down, the most battle-ready billionaires are set up for farming and animal husbandry in case they need to grow their own.



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As we have seen, this obsession with building bunkers is not new, and it attracts diverse social and economic groups that bring a variety of end of the world concerns to the table, from economic collapse and social unrest to climate change and nuclear war.

Two of the largest bunker building companies in the US that Garrett features are Hardened Structures and Rising S (a third discussed later is Atlas Shelters). As these businesses illustrate, there continues to be a booming market for underground shelters and bunker, and not just in the American Redoubt.

The screenshot shows the homepage of Hardened Structures. At the top, there is a navigation bar with the company logo, contact information (PHONE: +1 757-486-0084), and a 'FREE CONSULTATION' button. Below the navigation bar, there are icons for various threats: BIOLOGICAL, CHEMICAL, NUCLEAR, EMP/HEMP, and EARTHQUAKE. The main content area features a large image of a fortified structure under construction, with the text 'HARDENED STRUCTURES' and 'A World Leader in the delivery of Underground Shelter Systems'. Below the image, there are icons for Nuclear, Biological, Chemical, Earthquake, and EMP, with the text 'Threat Mitigation'. At the bottom, the text reads 'Hardened Structures Hardened Shelters LLC' and 'A World Leader in the design/construction of Hardened Shelter Systems'.

The screenshot shows the homepage of Rising S Company. At the top, there is a navigation bar with the company logo, contact information (sales@risingscompany.com), and social media icons. Below the navigation bar, there are icons for various threats: BIOLOGICAL, CHEMICAL, NUCLEAR, EMP/HEMP, and EARTHQUAKE. The main content area features a large image of a fortified structure under construction, with the text 'We have multiple units ready to ship immediately!' and 'Call Us At (903) 804-3774 For More Information.'. Below the image, there is a large graphic of a coronavirus particle with the text 'WE ARE UP AND RUNNING!' and 'We are building shelters and will not cease to do so! We are doing everything we can to get shelters out as quickly as possible!'. Below this, there is another large graphic of a coronavirus particle with the text 'WE WILL NOT CUT CORNERS!' and 'We will not cut corners to get shelters out faster. We now also sell an economical filter system designed to protect against coronavirus! Call for info - (903) 804-3774'. At the bottom right, there is a logo for Rising S Company.

A man wearing a dark cowboy hat and a dark jacket with "SINCH" written on the back is looking down at a set of blueprints. He is in a dimly lit room with a textured wall. Another person in a red cap is visible in the background.

SALES OF LUXURY BUNKERS SPIKE AFTER TRUMP ELECTED

NIGHTLY
NEWS



CBS

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As Bradley Garrett argues, the secret billionaire bunker building craze is more hype than reality, but the underlying logic of the merchants of dread, or what author Naomi Klein calls “disaster capitalism”, is a powerful force that thrives on technological disruptions, social instability, and political conflicts.

“The paradox in any truth behind the stories was that the tech giants of Silicon Valley—or some of them, anyway—were making a fortune from the systems they felt might trigger a disaster...Certain quarters of techno-libertarian philosophy map onto prepper philosophy, where they seem to see crises not simply as inevitable risks to mitigate but as necessary and productive periods of resetting and renewal.”

Consider some of leading figures in Silicon Valley and the philosophy that shaped their activities:

Peter Thiel (Paypal) \$2.1 Billion – Create a digital currency to replace the dollar.

Elon Musk (Tesla/Space-X) \$79.4 Billion - If things are not failing, you are not innovating enough.

Mark Zuckerberg (Facebook) \$98 Billion – Move fast and break things.

Jeff Bezos (Amazon) \$183.8 Billion - If you’re going to invent, you’re going to disrupt.

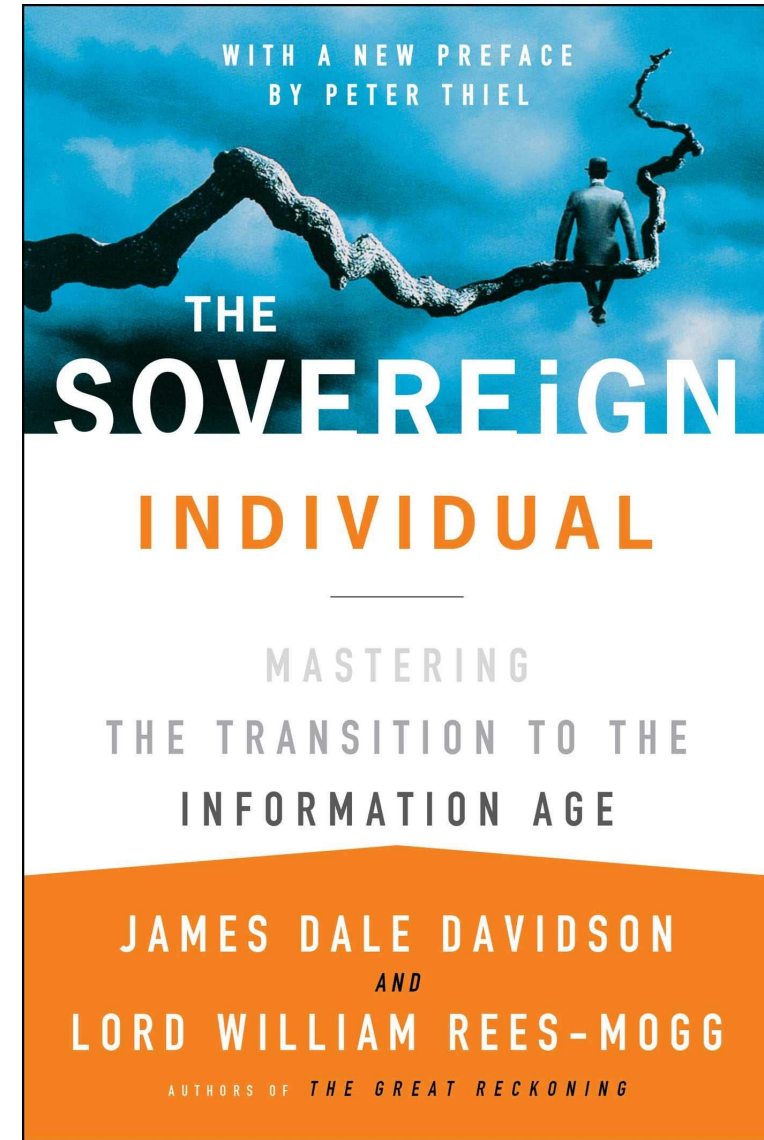
These individuals embody a philosophy first laid out in the 1997 book *The Sovereign Individual*, which sees economic and social crisis leading to the collapse of the state and the rise of a “cognitive elite.”

As Garrett argues, the rise of cryptocurrencies like Bitcoin and Libra are attempts by self-professed “cognitive elites” (like Peter Thiel) to put their techno-libertarian philosophy into practice by creating rival or alternative currencies independent of central bank or treasuries, and thus beyond the reach of government or state controls.

These philosophies have powerful echoes across the Atlantic with conservative nationalist parties in Europe, and some of the leading Brexit architects in the UK profited immensely by speculating against their currencies as they worked to ensure a Brexit political crisis.

Figures like Steve Bannon, William Rees-Mogg, and Peter Thiel embody a new kind of apocalyptic nationalism that views globalization, cultural and religious diversity, and non-European immigrants as threats to an imagined earlier golden era that must be restored to save the nation (e.g. “Make America Great Again” and “We Will Not Be Replaced”).

Such cultural fears, in addition to belief in a Biblical apocalypse, are driving religious conservatives towards prepping and bunker building. We will delve into these fears in greater detail in the coming weeks.



“Disasters Don’t Wait. Make Your Plan Today.”

September is National Preparedness Month, and this provides us a great opportunity to both think critically about questions of preparedness and assess our own preparedness for disaster.

WEEK 1

Week 1 September 1-5: Make A Plan

Talk to your friends and family about how you will communicate before, during, and after a disaster. Make sure to update your plan based on the Centers for Disease Control recommendations due to the coronavirus.

WEEK 2

Week 2 September 6-12: Build A Kit

Gather supplies that will last for several days after a disaster for everyone living in your home. Don’t forget to consider the unique needs each person or pet may have in case you have to evacuate quickly. Update your kits and supplies based on recommendations by the Centers for Disease Control.

WEEK 3

Week 3 September 13-19: Prepare for Disasters

Limit the impacts that disasters have on you and your family. Know the risk of disasters in your area and check your insurance coverage. Learn how to make your home stronger in the face of storms and other common hazards and act fast if you receive a local warning or alert.

WEEK 4

Week 4 September 20-26: Teach Youth About Preparedness

Talk to your kids about preparing for emergencies and what to do in case you are separated. Reassure them by providing information about how they can get involved.



#BeReady

Weekly Assignment Reminder

- Remember to check our class Blackboard regularly for updates, announcements, and other related class information...
- Have you done the weekly readings and watched any associated videos? Weekly readings are listed on the Class Schedule page.
- Complete the Class Activity #3, “When Disaster Strikes” simulation and weekly discussion post response. Initial post due Wed, Sept 16 by end of the day, and peer response post due Fri Sept 18 by end of day.