

Emily Ray, Dept. of Political Science
Sabbatical Report, Fall 2021

For my fall semester sabbatical I planned to complete work on my manuscript, entitled, *Worst Case Scenario: The politics of prepping in America*. This manuscript is co-authored with Dr. Robert Kirsch, Assistant Professor in the Faculty of Leadership and Integrative Studies at Arizona State University. At the time I proposed my sabbatical, the manuscript proposal was under consideration with Columbia University Press. I am pleased to share that the manuscript is now under contract with Columbia University Press with anticipated publication in the summer of 2022. This book provides a political history of prepping in the United States, from the late 1800s through the early 21st century. This political history includes civic organizations and dedicated governmental campaigns to manage anxieties around mass immigration, prepare for the threats of the atomic age, all the while charting the increasingly neoliberalized responses to catastrophe and the individualization of mitigating its effects. It also offers a political theory of prepping that looks beyond the methods and motivations and gets to the class and economic dimensions of its sustained prevalence in modern American society. Doomsday prepping is an under-theorized but important aspect of American politics. Theorizing doomsday prepping through its history and current incarnation as a response to climate change addresses critical political issues through a robust theoretical analysis of trends in American politics.

This sabbatical semester has given me the opportunity to make excellent progress on the manuscript and to complete related writing projects for publication. I have listed them below:

Book Chapter, Edited Volume:

I completed a book chapter entitled “Outer Space in the Anthropocene” for the edited volume, *The Anthropocene Handbook*, edited by James Martel (San Francisco State University) and Peter Burdon (The University of Adelaide), published by Routledge. This chapter challenges the literature to directly address outer space and the anthropogenic forces beyond our own planet. Literature on the Anthropocene primarily addresses climate and environmental changes here on Earth. Governments and private companies around the globe are investing in outer space technologies to advance an off-world economy of natural resource extraction and production, transportation, and future space colonization missions. To reckon with outer space I review the place of space in the literature and in outer space law, and I draw on Marcuse's *Counterrevolution and Revolt* to position outer space as a concern of the Anthropocene, as part of the natural environment, and as a critical element of the qualitative shifts necessary to create a free and just society. The chapter has been accepted for publication, anticipated in late 2022.

Conferences:

In September I virtually attended the American Political Science Association Annual Meeting, one of the most important conferences in my discipline. I presented the paper, *Caelum Nullius: Outer space and the colonial logic of property rights*, co-authored with Sean Parson (Northern Arizona University). We argue that to reimagine outer space as an enclosed privatized space requires the centralization of colonial logic. The new space policies promote a legal mechanism anchored in liberal philosophy and marks a return to *terra nullius* and to a narrow conception of land-use that determines property rights. Climate change,

resource depletion, and other ecological crises have highlighted the limits of economic growth on earth. This paper analyzes the liberal and colonial logic of property rights in a limitless environment with no prior claims through review of select outer space policies and the relationship between the state and capital. My co-author and I plan to submit this paper for review to the peer-reviewed journal *Contemporary Political Theory* in late 2022.

In October I virtually attended the International Herbert Marcuse Society Conference. I presented a version of my book chapter for the anthropocene edited volume, with emphasis on the theoretical framework anchored in Marcuse's *Counterrevolution and Revolt*. The paper has been nominated for the Best Paper Award for this year's conference.

My proposed paper for the conference, The Caucus for a New Political Science, was accepted for the upcoming meeting in February 2022 (co-authored with Robert Kirsch). The paper is entitled, *From Bunkerization to Bunkersraum: Making Fortress America at Home*. This paper excavates the doomsday bunker from the history of prepping movements from as far back as the late 19th century in the American context.

Manuscript Progress:

I have made strong progress on the manuscript over the course of this semester. I completed a draft of the chapter, "Hunker in your Bunker: The Atomic Age and the Bunker Family." This chapter explores the juxtaposition of the existential threat of global thermonuclear annihilation and the individuated responses to that threat of Americans retreating to a fully-stocked bunker in the backyard. There are two main arguments in this chapter. First is the class dimensions of Atomic Age bunkering. The bunker imaginary assumes a more or less middle-class existence - a plot of land with space for a bunker, and enough surplus money with which to keep it stocked. In some interesting ways, this catastrophic network more or less mimics the middle-class Americana generally. Second is that bunkering represents a kind of prototype of neoliberal disaster response. Bunkers were purely the family's responsibility and they actively discouraged any kind of social considerations, such as letting the neighbor in. Bunkering eschews any such social mobilization, instead asking families to resign themselves to the bleak possibility that survival is only possible in the bunker. This chapter will also explore how the Cold War mentality set the stage for the permanence of catastrophe; an ongoing preparedness for a diffuse and ever-present threat. In July 2022 I was invited as a guest on the radio program Against the Grain (KPFA) to discuss this chapter, which has since aired

I have also made progress on the introductory chapter draft. This chapter will lay out the political stakes of the core arguments and establish that the text will avoid merely cataloging or gawking at all of the ways in which preppers procure their goods. The chapter develops a theory of bunkerization and bunkersraum to diagnose the contemporary state of prepping. Rather than a single catalyzing event which necessitates fully constructed new modes of life (i.e. bunkers), the slow unfolding of ecological degradation produces bunkerization as a material mode of everyday life. The bunker moves from the backyard into the bunkerized home with attendant surveillance, fortification, and attempts at detaching from the grid. We focus on two possibilities that emerge from bunkerization: a solarpunk future with its

republican virtues, localized but scalable production, and a more democratic society; or, what we theorize as bunkersraum, a similarly decentralized project that is an apotheosis of neoliberal rationality, and one that compels homeowners to reproduce "Fortress America" on their property.

Fellowship Application:

I applied for a research fellowship at The Käte Hamburger Centre for Apocalyptic and Post-Apocalyptic Studies (CAPAS). CAPAS is a Centre for Advanced Studies at Heidelberg University which gathers international scholars and scientists to research collaboratively on ideas and experiences of the doom of worlds and their aftermath. Their mission is to encourage the dialogue between the humanities and social and natural sciences, relating to (A) the apocalyptic and postapocalyptic imaginary (ideas, images, discourses), (B) historical events that were perceived or framed as (post-)apocalyptic experiences, and (C) current, empirically observable developments that could bring about the end of the world as we know it, and its aftermath scenarios. I am pleased to share that I have been selected for a fellowship for the Spring 2023 period. This fellowship will support continued research on the politics of doomsday prepping, moving beyond the political history in the United States to develop a theory of an international bunkersraum as the prevailing approach to preparing for ongoing disasters like climate change.

Contributions to Sonoma State University:

The research projects I have completed and continued during sabbatical will become the basis for new course offerings for the department, including courses on climate change and outer space, the politics of disaster, and politics, the environment, and the nuclear age, and will be integrated into existing courses on environmental political theory and political ecology. I plan to support undergraduate students who are interested in joining these research efforts, particularly to mentor them in the challenges and necessities of cross-disciplinary research and to develop their skills in producing literature reviews, one of the most important methodological lessons in our major. I have frequently been asked to present my research and to discuss environmental politics for various fora on campus, and am happy to continue to do so with these new undertakings. Finally, participating in the fellowship will support the international reputation of Sonoma State as an institution that supports cross-disciplinary and cross-institutional research.

I would like to thank Sonoma State for granting me a sabbatical which provided invaluable time to focus on research and publishing that I hope enriches its readers and the university.

