

The Department of History

is proud to present

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Professor Riedl's research interests is the comparative history of religion, with a focus on the relation of religion and politics. He is a guest lecturer with the Faculty Exchange Program between Purdue University and Central European University

“Apocalyptic Violence: The Desire for Universal Destruction and Its Historical Origins.”

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11:30am-12:30pm

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The analytical category of "apocalyptic violence" has been frequently applied in recent studies of terrorism, sectarian violence, and revolutionary action. As the psychologist Robert J. Lifton put it: "Apocalyptic violence denotes the readiness to cause enormous destruction in the service of spiritual purification. A world must cease to exist in order to make space for a better one." However, as the paper will discuss, the category is by no means self-explanatory, since apocalyptic literature is traditionally deterministic and dissuades the readers from taking action. A historical overview will demonstrate that revolutionary and violent forms of apocalypticism emerge only in early modernity, when mystical and humanist influences undermine the determinist creed. The paper therefore argues that apocalyptic violence, despite its references to an ancient symbolic tradition, is a decidedly modern phenomenon.



“The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse by Russian born