

**David W Fletcher, *Apocalyptic Rhetoric in the Old Southwest* (Doctor of Arts  
Dissertation; Murfreesboro, TN: Middle Tennessee State University, 2007)**  
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MIDDLE TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY

APOCALYPTIC RHETORIC IN THE OLD SOUTHWEST

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO  
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IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE  
DOCTOR OF ARTS

BY

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MURFREESBORO, TENNESSEE

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APOCALYPTIC RHETORIC IN THE OLD SOUTHWEST

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TO MY FAMILY

FOR THEIR SUPPORT & ENCOURAGEMENT

RHONDA

SETH, ADAM, & JARED

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## ABSTRACT

### APOCALYPTIC RHETORIC IN THE OLD SOUTHWEST

*Apocalyptic Rhetoric in the Old Southwest* inquires how end-of-the-world and millennial language was used by those who inhabited or visited the nation's southwest frontier in the early 1800s. Emphasis is placed on the use of apocalyptic language in relation to two key events—the revivals of 1800 and the New Madrid earthquakes of 1811-1812—and the social and political changes of the early antebellum period, particularly in Tennessee. During the early nineteenth century, apocalyptic language in the Old Southwest came predominantly from Protestant or Christian sources, and its use by non-Christian sources was negligible. What is argued chiefly is the inherent ambiguity of apocalyptic language as represented by antithetical interpretations of the same event. This uncertainty is to be expected, because apocalyptic rhetoric is religious language filled with symbol, metaphor, and hyperbole. The fluidity of apocalyptic thought also illustrates the complex evolution of opposing millennial ideas, religious and political, that developed during the antebellum era. Eight illustrations, seven examples of primary texts, and a bibliography are included.

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