

HIST 9110 – History of the Future Essay Topics

1. When did humans first become aware of time and how did this awareness shape the evolution of early civilizations?
2. Compare and contrast afterlife beliefs and burial practices of at least TWO different ancient civilizations.
3. What role does a belief in a finite future play in the Old and/or New Testament?
4. What role did prophets and prophecy play in the consolidation of Judaism in the period c. 500 BC – AD.
5. How did a belief in the apocalypse, as foretold in the Book of Revelations, shape early Christian cultures in western Europe?
6. How did the so-called 'Scientific Revolution' of the 16th and 17th centuries challenge dominant Christian notions of the future in western Europe?
7. Explain the enduring significance of and interest in the prophet Nostradamus more than 400 years after his death.
8. How did visions of the future shape the wave of political revolutions that swept across England, America and France in the 17th and 18th centuries?
9. How, why and when did the notion of progress become linked to visions of the future?
10. Compare and contrast the works of TWO utopian writers in the early modern period (c. 1500-1800) and explain how and why their visions of the future differ.
11. What impact did the industrial revolution have on 19th-century utopian writers and their visions of the future?
12. How did the standardization of time in the 1800s alter popular conceptions of the future?
13. How did the advent of 'clock time' revolutionize the lives of workers and their families in the 1800s?
14. What is the difference between utopian literature and science fiction?
15. Why did science fiction emerge as a literary genre in the mid-1800s and how did it portray the future?
16. Were the 'utopian socialists' of the late 1700s and early 1800s backward-looking reactionaries or forward-looking visionaries?
17. What role does a vision future play in the 'scientific socialism' of Karl Marx?
18. Is Marxism the last of old religious prophecies or the first in a new age of scientific predictions?
19. How and why did America come to represent an alternative future for western civilization in the 1800s?
20. Can economics – or economists – accurately predict the future?
21. To what extent do meteorologists predict future weather patterns?
22. What is meant by 'economic determinism' and what are its implications for the idea of an indeterminate future?

23. How did the discovery of 'deep time' in the 1800s shape not only our perceptions of the past but our anticipation of the future?
24. To what extent was World War I predictable?
25. What the main aims of the Futurist Movement in the early 1900s and why did it welcome the outbreak of World War I
26. When and why did utopian visions of the future give way to dystopian visions of the future in western civilization?
27. What are the key differences between utopian and dystopian literature?
28. Compare and contrast the future visions of **THREE** of the following authors: H.G. Wells, Yevgeny Zamyatin, Aldous Huxley, George Orwell, Ray Bradbury, and Margaret Atwood.
29. How and why did 'futurism' emerge as a cultural industry in the 1950s-70s?
30. How did science fiction television programs of the 1960s-70s portray the future, and why?
31. Compare and contrast *The Jetsons* to *Futurama*. What does this tell us about the changing way in which North America viewed the future over the past two generations?
32. What are the strengths and weaknesses in which Hollywood has portrayed the future on film over the past 30 years? Discuss with reference to at least **FOUR** specific movies.
33. What are the dominant themes in post-war popular science fiction novels in the way that they have portrayed the future?
34. The years celebrated by the novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the TV series *Space: 1999*, and the film *2001: A Space Odyssey*, are all now history. What are the dangers and/or advantages in attaching a specified year to cultural portrayals of the future?
35. What is meant by the term 'secular millenarianism' and how was it manifest in the lead-up to the year 2000?
36. Did Nostradamus predict the terrorist attacks of September 2001? If so, why did nobody act on his warning?
37. How sure can we be about the ultimate fate of life on Earth and the eventual death of Earth itself? How does this affect our more short-term concerns for the future?
38. Can a study of the past serve as a guide for the future? If so, how? If not, what's the point?
39. Write an imaginative essay on the likely shape of human civilization in the year 5000.
40. Do we live in the past, present or the future? Explain your choice.