

Nostradamus

After the terrible events on September 11th in New York and Washington, people around the world immediately started looking for the reasons as to why this could happen. Inevitably, there were those who looked to prophecies from the past to see if this disaster had been written in the stars and foretold. The following was posted on the internet hours later, attributed to the sixteenth century prophet Nostradamus:

"In the year of the new century and nine months,
From the sky will come a great King of Terror
The sky will burn at forty-five degrees.
Fire approaches the great new city."

"In the city of York there will be a great collapse,
Two twin brothers torn apart by chaos
While the fortress falls the great leader will succumb
The third big war will begin when the big city is burning."

NOSTRADAMUS 1654

A chilling prediction from hundreds of years ago, if true. However, while the first verse certainly contains elements of his prophecies, the second verse seems to have been created to fit the details of this tragedy. Furthermore, Nostradamus died in 1566, which makes this particular prophecy impossible.

Michel de Nostradame was born in 1503 in St. Remy, France, and educated in Avignon. In his early years, he found success locally in his herbal remedies and method of combatting *The Black Death*, a bubonic plague. Despite his successes, his wife and children fell victim to the plague and died in 1537. For the next six years, he wandered aimlessly around Europe, during which time he discovered his prophetic powers and adopted the Latin name Nostradamus.

In 1543 he helped the people of Aix-en-Provence in their struggle against the ravages of the plague. They were very grateful and offered him a pension for life. In 1547 he remarried and went on to have three daughters and a son. He filled his study with the same soothsaying tools that the oracles at Delphi used, and in 1550 published his first almanac of prophecies.

Between 1554 and 1558 he published *The Centuries*, a collection of ten volumes. Each *century* consisted of 100 *quatrains* (4-line poems). Each *quatrain* prophesies the events of one year, so his prophecies cover a thousand years from the year they were published. Written in a mixture of languages as riddles, puns and anagrams, his cryptic verses have been the subject of much speculation.

Here are some genuine extracts from *The Centuries*, translated into English, which may be seen as having relevance to recent events in the United States.

Century 1, Quatrain 87

Earth-shaking fire from the centre of the Earth.
Will cause the towers around the new city to shake:
Two great rocks for a long time will make war,
And then Arethusa will colour a new river red.

Century 2, Quatrain 89

One day the two great leaders will become friends,
Their great power will be seen to increase:
The new land will be at the height of its power,
To the bloody one the number reported.

Century 4, Quatrain 16

The free city of Liberty made servile,
Made an asylum for corrupt ones and dreamers:
The King changed, to them not so vehement:
From one hundred will become more than a thousand.

Century 5 Quatrain 65

Suddenly arrived, the terror will be great,
The principal players in the affair are hidden away:
And the lady in the hot coals will no longer be in sight,
Thus little by little will the great ones will be angered.

Century 6, Quatrain 97

At five and forty degrees, the sky will burn,
Fire approaches the great new city,
Immediately a huge, scattered flame leaps up,
When they want to have verification from the Normans.

Century 8, Quatrain 17

Those at ease will suddenly be cast down
The world put into trouble by three brothers,
The enemies will seize the marine city,
Famine, fire, blood, plague, all evils doubled.

Century 8, Quatrain 59

Two times put high, two times put low,
The East also the West will weaken:
Its adversary after several battles,
Driven out by sea will fail at the time of need.

Century 9, Quatrain 81

The sly King will understand his ambushes,
From three fronts the enemies assail,
A strange number, tears from the hooded men,
The brilliance of the translator will come to fail.

Century 10, Quatrain 49

Garden of the world near the new city,
In the path of the hollow mountains:
It will be seized and plunged into the Vat,
Drinking by force the waters poisoned by sulphur.

Century 10, Quatrain 74

The year the great seventh number is accomplished,
Appearing at the time of the games of slaughter:
Not far from the age of the great millennium,
When the dead will come out of their graves.

Work in pairs or small groups. Discuss the following questions.

1. Do you believe events can be predicted?
2. Can you see any lines in the *quatrains* above that relate to the tragedy in the United States and the results of that tragedy?
3. In what ways do you think what happened in the United States will change the way we live?