

The end of the world as we know it?

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The time has finally come. It's 2012, and according to a score of television shows and doomsday Internet countdowns, the end of the world (or a new beginning) is upon us in a matter of months. People are asking, "Did the Maya have it right? Will humanity really meet its demise (or its awakening) on Dec. 21?"



Teachers attending the Tulane Maya Symposium workshop examine an elegant Maya carved tablet from the city of Palenque, held in the collection of the Middle American Research Institute. The tablet's hieroglyphs record the 3120 B.C. birth of a deity. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

These questions and others were asked during the Tulane Middle American Research Institute's ninth annual Maya Symposium and Workshop, sponsored by [MARI](#), the [Stone Center](#) for Latin American Studies and the travel organization Far Horizons.

Anthony Aveni, professor of astronomy and anthropology at Colgate University, was the keynote speaker for the symposium's kickoff event at the New Orleans Museum of Art on Friday (Feb. 24). Aveni, author of *The End of Time: The Maya Mystery of 2012*, asked the grand question: "Why this American penchant for apocalyptic endings?"

Incorporating dry humor, Aveni skeptically assessed solar flares as proof of the coming end of time and laughed about prognosticators calling for colon cleanses to prepare for “the next cycle.”

He methodologically tackled misconceptions of impending doom or spiritual awakening, dissecting claims made by “Y12 prophets,” evangelical religious figures, and users of hallucinogenic drugs. Presenting factual information about the Maya, he explained the famous codices from a rational perspective.

Aveni said that applying Maya imagery to foretell the fate of all mankind is “arrogant and terribly misleading.”

He brushed off “blow up or bliss out” ideas as “blends of conspiracy theory and science.” Aveni concluded that “the Maya are cool enough” without constantly connecting them to the end of the world. “We need to put away our telescopes and take out a mirror,” the archaeoastronomer said. “Our future depends a lot more on us than on our stars.”

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