Syllabus*

Enduring question: How do we end violence?

Course Description

The challenge of violence has been a human question since the beginning of written history. The story of Cain and Abel in the Bible, symbolizing the first homicide, is seminal in three of the major religious traditions of the west, and the Hindu Bhagavad Gita, which ponders the warrior's violent life purpose, has been one of the most influential texts of the eastern world. Despite the attention given to violence over the ages, still violence is not fully understood, and whether violence can be effectively eradicated from the world is an ongoing question. The current world seems in many ways inseparable from the ancient world: the world presents us daily with terrorism, murders, and even massacres or kidnappings of children, the innocents of the earth. The current world also continues in its racism, oppressive regimes, and genocidal actions. Despite ongoing attempts to heal humanity, the question persists: How can violence be put to an end?

Responses to this question have come from many different disciplines including criminal justice, human rights, peace studies, religious studies, psychology, anthropology, sociology, and medicine. In this course we will examine how pioneers from some of these various fields have helped clarify the nature of violence, and what kinds of solutions they can propose to help rid the world of this disease.

Please note that the class will include presentations of select response papers as well as presentation of a final project. Please expect that the class will be discussion-based, and will require participation in in-class group work and other kinds of exercises as platforms for experiential learning, inquiry, and dialogue.

Assessment:

- Reflection papers and/or assignments on the readings for Modules 1 through 4. Each assignment will be approximately 3-4 typed, double-spaced pages in length. (15 points each)
- Final Project, Write-up, and Presentation (worth 40 points)

*Draft syllabus—readings subject to change.
Module 1: Some Ancient and Medieval Perspectives
The goals of this module are to examine violence from select ancient and medieval perspectives that provide very different points of view on what causes violence, whether violence is justified, and how to control or eradicate violence. While the ideas are not presented systematically in the ancient texts themselves, each text presents a core attempt at understanding violence that becomes developed in modern scholarship.

The medieval view we will look at categorizes violence. Examining the seven deadly sins is one way of understanding how violence can be categorized. Dante in particular offers a more nuanced view that not only presents varied kinds of sin, but also how they stack up in terms of their gravity. For Dante, the most treacherous of sins are those not of outright physical violence, but of betrayal. This module will be a discussion of Dante’s levels of violence (i.e. rings of hell), and whether they correlate with how we analyze and punish violence in the modern era.

Required Reading:
- The Hebrew Bible, Genesis 2-3; Genesis 4.1-16; Exodus 17.8-16; 1 Samuel 15
- The Qur’an, Surah 2
- The Bhagavad Gita, excerpt
- Sun Tzu, The Art of War, Laying Plans
- Excerpts from Dante, The Inferno
- Paul Chevigny, “From Betrayal to Violence: Dante’s Inferno and the Social Construction of Crime”

Module 2: Systemic Violence and the Cycle of Disenfranchisement
In this module, the history of blacks in the United States will be used to unravel what systemic violence is and how it functions in the formation of identity over generations inside the cycle of disenfranchisement. Examples of redlined maps will be explored together. Class time will include an experiential exercise on Social Diversity Profiles to build personal connection to the module’s content. Other aspects of diversity will play into our conversation and exercises.

Time permitting, this module will also include a section on poverty as structural violence, focusing on Gary Haugen’s The Locust Effect.

Required Reading:
- Allan Johnson, excerpts from Privilege, Power and Difference
- Excerpts from Gary Haugen, The Locust Effect
- Additional reading and/or viewing TBD

*Draft syllabus—readings subject to change.
Module 3: Violence as Scapegoating Ritual
This module will explore how both ancient religious ritual and modern justice systems alike employ "good" violence to control "bad" violence, making violence the very foundation of culture. Scapegoating in the form of religious sacrifice or political propaganda and genocide will be discussed. We will examine the theory of rivalry as the basis of scapegoating violence, and possible ways to transform cultures of violence to non-violence informed by this analysis.

Required Reading:
- Rene Girard, Violence and the Sacred, select chapters
- Story: “The Lottery”
- Excerpts from Kenneth Westhues, Eliminating Professors
- Additional reading TBA

Module 4: The Psychology of Violence and Violence as a Medical Epidemic*
This module will first move from systemic violence to individual violence. We will conduct an examination of shame and egotism as the deep causes of violence. The class will look at select psychological profiles to get at some of the deepest psychological roots of violence, and some possibilities for what can be done for both individuals and society in response.

We will then move in the afternoon to explore the understanding of violence through a medical paradigm. Dr. Gary Slutkin worked around the world for the World Health Organization for over 10 years towards containing contagious diseases. He returned to the United States to “take a break” and was stunned by this country’s violence. He started speaking about violence as a contagious epidemic that can be controlled by a similar process as contagious diseases. We will hear from Dr. Slutkin this week, read some articles about his work, and watch a film on interrupting gang violence in Chicago, a project utilizing the contagious disease paradigm Slutkin advocates.

Required Reading:
- James Gilligan, Violence
- Excerpts, Dignity
- Selections, Roy Baumeister, Evil: Inside Human Violence and Cruelty
- Additional reading TBA

Required viewing: Gary Slutkin, Curing Violence: violence as an epidemic disease, video clips

Film viewing in class: “The Interrupters”

*Field trip associated with this module, specific location TBA.

Module 5: Visions of an End to Violence

*Draft syllabus—readings subject to change.
This module will begin with religion-inspired visions of the new era of non-violence. We will explore the characteristics of these visions, and how they relate to the various frames and models we have discussed throughout the course. The module will then move into specific examples of non-violent peacemaking from around the world, to illustrate the forging of cultures of peace. The class will reflect on: What is peace? What are the characteristics of cultures of peace? Do the strategies used to create peace address the causes of violence according to the other sources we have studied? Why or why not? How does religion play into the cure for violence and the creation of peace?

Required Reading:
- Excerpts from sacred texts
- Entry “Culture of Peace” in The Encyclopedia on Violence, Peace and Conflict
- Peacemaker portraits from Peacemakers in Action
- Additional reading TBA

Presentation of Final Projects
Each student will put together a final project and presentation for the final class. For the final project, the students will create a demonstration of their vision of the end of violence, which must be attended by a strategic action plan to attain their vision within their particular locale. It must be clearly informed by one or more of the modules studied, and should be enhanced with additional research. The student’s project may consist of artwork, a scrapbook, music, film, poetry, narrative, or other type of creative piece. Along with the creative piece, the student must submit a 4-5 page formal explanation and rationale. The creative pieces and their explanations will be displayed in a gallery format, and each student shall present their own piece and strategy. All creative pieces must be the students’ original work.

*Draft syllabus—readings subject to change.