The Ethics of Political Violence will explore the history of revolutionary movements from the American Revolution to the birth of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation. This seminar will reconstruct the historical origins of extreme radical organizations in Europe, Asia, Latin America and the United States. The seminar will focus on militant strategies, the adoption of violence and the ethical vision of each movement's mission. How are ethics and political violence connected? Can violence create conditions for justice and liberation? The study of the history and legacies of these revolutionary movements will enrich current understandings of political violence in the context of ongoing international conflict. In addition to political history, students will be exposed to the theory and political philosophy connected to revolutionary action and violence. Some authors that we will read and discuss in this course include Robespierre, Sorel, Fanon, Malcolm X, Hannah Arendt, Carl Schmitt, Zizek, Ho Chi Minh, Che Guevara, Ulrike Meinhof, Césaire, Memmi and Subcomandante Marcos.

Description

This course will enrich the existent curriculum in the field of international history, intellectual and cultural history, international politics and political theory. The
course is contributing to a global analysis of violence since the age of the French Revolution to the present, emphasizing the connections between violence, justice, civil disobedience and revolutionary society. Students will explore the relations between political violence and revolutionary strategy, paying attention to key writings by radical militants and political philosophers. This course will fulfill the need to offer an interdisciplinary and multi-regional study of the predominant dynamics between political ideology and collective organization, revolutionary leadership and political strategy, and the legacies of radical politics.

From Robespierre to Subcomandante Marcos, violence has been an integral part of revolutionary politics. Che Guevara refers to violence as the midwife of new societies. The deliberate adoption of violence as a means of resistance and revolution is the object of this seminar, which will begin with a discussion of Robespierre's manifesto on violence and political terror and will conclude with selected writings by Subcomandante Marcos, the head of the Zapatista movement. The relationship between political violence and social justice will recur through this study of different cases throughout time and world regions beginning with late eighteenth century France and concluding with 1990s Mexico. Is violence justified? Can violence engender a form of revolutionary morality that empowers and restores justice to the popular classes? The course's interdisciplinary approach will enlighten students on the connections between seemingly different facets in society, emphasizing the ongoing dialogues between revolutionary militancy, political manifestos, radical strategy and ethics.

Grading: The breakdown of the seminar will consist of
Active Class Participation 15%
Weekly Reading Responses and Newspaper Article Discussion 15%
Bibliography and Abstract of Final Essay 10% (2-3 pp. Due on Week 4, Session 8)
One Oral Presentation 20% (10-15 minutes, Scheduled for Week 6, Sessions 11 & 12)
Final Research Essay 40% (15-20 pages, Due: Week 6, Session 12)

Newspaper Reading
Prior to each session, you are required choose one article from the New York Times that is relevant to our topic of discussion, such as international conflict, social protests and alternative cultural trends. You will email to me your choice of article and briefly discuss the connection between our session’s topic and the contemporary issue discussed in The New York Times.

Readings: Readings will be available at Bookculture; supplementary material will be posted on the course’s website.
Texts

Georges Sorel, Reflections on Violence (Dover, 2004)


C.L.R. James, The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L’Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution (Vintage, 1989)

Jon Lee Anderson, Che Guevara: A Revolutionary Life (Grove Press, 2010)

Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth (Grove, 2005)


Ulrike Meinhof, Everybody talks about the Weather Underground... We Don’t (Seven Stories Press, 2007)

Ho Chi Minh and Walden Bello, Down with Colonialism (Verso, 2007)

Malcolm X, Autobiography (Penguin Classics, 2001)

Leonardo Sciacia, The Moro Affair (NYRB Classics, 2004)

Carl Schmitt, Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty (University of Chicago Press, 2006)

Tom Hayden, The Zapatista Reader (Nation Books, 2002)
Reading and Discussion Program

Session 1

Violence as Revolution: Philosophical Approaches

Readings

Georges Sorel, Reflections on Violence (Dover, 2004)


Session 2

Virtue and Terror: Maximilien Robespierre and the French Revolution

Readings

Maximilien Robespierre, Virtue and Terror (Online)


Session 3

Slaves against Masters: The Haitian Revolution and Toussaint L’Overture

Readings

C.L.R. James, The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L’Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution (Vintage, 1989)
Session 4

Emiliano Zapata, Pancho Villa and the Mexican Revolution: Violence as Justice

Readings


Session 5

Mao Zedong, Guerrilla War and the Reception of Maoism Abroad

Readings

Mao Zedong, On Guerrilla Warfare (Selections, Online)


Session 6

Che Guevara, Carlos Marighella: Guerrilla Movements and Anti-Imperialism

Readings

Carlos Marighella, Mini-Manual of the Urban Guerrilla (Online)

Ernesto Guevara, Guerrilla Warfare (Excerpts, Online)

Jon Lee Anderson, Che Guevara: A Revolutionary Life (Grove Press, 2010)

Ileana Rodríguez, Women, Guerrillas, and Love: Understanding War in Central America (University of Minnesota Press, 1996)
Film: Che (Steven Soderbergh, 2008)

Session 7

The National Liberation Front in Algeria: Terror and Anti-colonialism

Readings

Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth (Grove, 2005)

Martin Evans, “Undeclared War”, Algeria: France’s Undeclared War (Oxford University Press, 2013)


Session 8

The Red Army Faction and the Weather Underground: Violence in Affluent Societies

Readings

Bommi Baumman, How it all began: The Personal Account of a West German Guerrilla (Arsenal Pulp, 2012)


Ulrike Meinhof, Everybody talks about the Weather Underground... We Don’t (Seven Stories Press, 2007)

Session 9

Ho Chi Minh’s Vietcong: The Triumph of the Colonized

Readings

Ho Chi Minh and Walden Bello, Down with Colonialism (Verso, 2007)

Aimé Césaire, Discourse on Colonialism (Monthly Review Press, 2001)
Session 10

Malcolm X, the Black Panthers and the Defense of Violence: The Restoration of Dignity

Readings

Malcolm X, Autobiography (Penguin Classics, 2001)


Assata Shakur, Assata: An Autobiography (Lawrence Hill Books, 2001)

Film: White Material (Claire Denis, 2010)

Session 11

The Red Brigades: Political Kidnapping and the Rejection of Diplomacy

Readings


Leonardo Sciacia, The Moro Affair (NYRB Classics, 2004)

Giorgio, Memoirs of an Italian Terrorist (Basic Books, 2003)

Carl Schmitt, “Political Theology”, Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty (University of Chicago Press, 2006)

Session 12

Subcomandante Marcos’ War against Neoliberalism: The EZLN and Guerrilla Militancy Today
Readings


Subcomandante Marcos, “Names of the Unnamed”, “One World”, Our Word is Our Weapon (Seven Stories Press, 2007)