Violence and Revolutionary Uprisings: A History

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Bulletin description 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.

Detailed description 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. 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.
Course Calendar/Schedule

Week 1: Violence as Revolution: Philosophical Approaches

Readings


Week 2: Virtue and Terror: Maximilien Robespierre and the French Revolution

Readings

*Maximilien Robespierre, *Virtue and Terror* (Online)


Week 3: Slaves against Masters: The Haitian Revolution and Toussaint L’Ouverture

Readings


Week 4: Emiliano Zapata, Pancho Villa and the Mexican Revolution: Violence as Justice

Readings


Week 5: Mao Zedong, Guerrilla War and the Reception of Maoism Abroad

Readings

*Mao Zedong, On Guerrilla Warfare (Selections, Online)


Week 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)

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

*Ileana Rodriguez, Women, Guerrillas, and Love: Understanding War in Central America (University of Minnesota Press, 1996)

Week 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)


Excerpts from Al Jazeera’s PLO: History of a Revolution (2009)
Week 8: The Red Army Faction and the Weather Underground: Violence in Affluent Societies

Readings


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

Week 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)


Week 10: Malcolm X, the Black Panthers and the Defense of Violence: The Restoration of Dignity

Readings


Week 11: The Red Brigades: Political Kidnapping and the Rejection of Diplomacy

Readings


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

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Week 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)


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Week 13: Fusako Shigenobu’s Japanese Red Army

Readings


Film Excerpts from *Children of the Revolution* (Shane O’Sullivan, 2010)
Week 14: Arab Spring, Black Lives Matter & the Umbrella Movement

Readings


Week 15: Female Suicide Bombers

Readings


Film Excerpts from *The Attack* (Ziad Doueiri, 2012)

Bibliography


Gérard Chaliand, Arnaud Blin eds., *The History of Terrorism: From Antiquity to Al Qaeda* (University of California Press, 2007)

Caron Gentry, ed., *Women, Gender, and Terrorism* (University of Georgia Press, 2011)


Rosa Luxemburg, *Reform or Revolution* (Dover, 2006)

Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political* (University of Chicago Press, 2007)

Frantz Fanon, *Toward the African Revolution* (Grove Press, 1994)


Tanya Narozhna, *Female Suicide Bombings: A Critical Gender Approach* (University of Toronto Press, 2016)


Paco Ignacio Taibo II, 68 (Seven Stories, 2004)