

Sociology 3034-010: Perspectives on Violence

Autumn 2006

Syllabus

Any fool can destroy trees. They cannot run away; and if they could, they would still be destroyed, chased and hunted down as long as fun or a dollar could be got out of their bark hides, branching horns, or magnificent bole backbones. Few that fell trees plant them; nor would planting avail much towards getting back anything like the noble primeval forests.

- John Muir, naturalist, explorer, and writer (1838-1914)

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Purpose: We will be using the lens of the science of sociology (and other disciplines) to think critically about the topic of violence. We will be learning how to think critically, an art and science that will bode you well in life. We will also be grappling with an important fact of life. Violence is a many faceted idea and reality, many of which we will explore. With wars, crime, and terrorism defining the advent of a new millennium (so what's new), understanding violence is critical for those of us who wish to do something about it. But violence has other dimensions as well. Is clear-cutting a forest or leveling a mountaintop in pursuit of the raw materials of life violent, environmental violence? How about the violence the environment inflicts on us? Is poverty violence? Does our capitalist ideology lead to violence? Can violence be a good thing? Is the death penalty an effective way to deal with violence or does it perpetuate violence? Is Brittany Spears' bellybutton an overt act of cultural violence – Usama seemed to think so? Does violence have a valid part to play in entertainment or the arts or does it have a deleterious effect on the young? The old? Are we safer in today's society than they were in the good old days? (Was there ever "good old" anything?) Is the fear of violence, crime, terrorism, Brittany Spears something that gives those in power the ability to take away our freedoms unnecessarily? What we will do this semester is examine violence from a number of perspectives. We will use the power of critical thinking to facilitate this experience in the hope that understanding and knowledge will result. Even if you don't intend dealing directly with the problem of violence in society, say as a police officer or abuse counselor, you are a citizen who has the power of the ballot, free speech, and the truth to help address real problems in society. Education can provide the tools to bring about meaningful social change.

Readings: Your texts are *Violence and Culture: A Cross-Cultural and Interdisciplinary Approach* by Jack David Eller and *The Culture of Fear* by Barry Glassner. They are available at the bookstore or from the usual places (where you might get a better deal). You will be provided with other readings via email. I would strongly suggest subscribing to *The New York Times* (free on the internet).

Assignments: To keep our class interesting and on track, I will provide resources for discussion. (And, yes, it will be on the exam. You are responsible for what goes on in class, everything. You are also responsible for knowing all the information that is assigned to you including readings – whether we discuss them in class or not.) If you miss class, it is your responsibility to find out what you missed. Get to know someone in this room; they might be able to provide you with notes should you need them. **Do not depend on me!**

Section 1	Introduction, Sociological concepts Understanding Violence, Theories I	Eller, <i>Violence and Culture</i> : chapters 1, 11
Section 2	Perspectives on Violence, Theories II Criminal Violence, Juvenile Delinquency	Eller, <i>Violence and Culture</i> : chapters 2, 3
Section 3	Governmental/Institutional Violence Corporate, Environmental, Military, Religion	Eller, <i>Violence and Culture</i> : chapters 6 7 8 9
Section 4	Framing Violence: The Fear Factor Violence Narratives	Glassner, <i>The Culture of Fear</i>

Section 5	Violence in Entertainment Media & the Arts, Pornography, Sports	tba
Section 6	Future Games & Solutions Nonviolence or Ultra-violence	tba

Exams: There will be a series of exams throughout the semester. These will follow the sections and will be discussed in class. They will be announced at least one week in advance, though you should have a pretty good idea from the progress we are making in class. There will also be a final. If you miss an exam, an excuse (per university policy) must be provided. You must make the exam up within one week. The final exam is Wednesday, December 20th, 10:30 AM. No, I did not pick the time.

Papers: This will be discussed in recitation. Writing is an integral part of your education. And future.

Grades: Sixty percent of your grade is from lecture. The exams will be averaged – that’s it. Forty percent is from recitation. This will be discussed in your recitations.

Attendance: *Attendance is required.* In order to have a class that works to everyone’s advantage, we all have to be there. If absences are insufficiently documented, a zero will be given for missed work. We will also be using audio-visual material. **If you miss a class, it is your responsibility to obtain notes from one of your classmates.** Please do not even think about asking me to provide you with notes. You are responsible for everything that is discussed in class as well as all the readings, whether we discuss them or not. This includes any announcements that might be made regarding assignments, exams, papers, quizzes, or the price of tea in China. It is my feeling that a large part of our learning experience comes about as a result of the dynamics we generate in the classroom. In order to reach the dynamic density (as Emile Durkheim would say) necessary to generate this phenomenon, we all have to be there – prepared to participate.

Classroom conduct: Unfortunately, due to behavior in other classes, I must mention this for the record though it clearly is not necessary for this class. In the interest of not interrupting the educational experience of others in the classroom, please do not read newspapers, carry on private conversations, interrupt others who have the floor, monopolize the conversation, or participate in any disruptive behavior during class. We will be discussing material that is controversial, sometimes offensive, and always intriguing. Topics will be addressed that may make you uncomfortable. You may disagree with others which is fine, but if you voice your concerns, please do so respectfully no matter how full of it you might think they are. Look at it as a growth opportunity. Please show up for class on time. If you are going to be late, please enter the classroom quietly, but be sure to come! Treat others with respect. By all means, participate in the discussions, share your thoughts, raise objections, ask questions, and make the most of your learning experience. You (or someone) paid good money for your education – use it, enjoy it! And, ***do your readings regularly.*** It is by far the best way to do well in this class. Well, staying awake in lecture helps.

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All this was inspired by the principle - which is quite true in itself - that in the big lie there is always a certain force of credibility; because the broad masses of a nation are always more easily corrupted in the deeper strata of their emotional nature than consciously or voluntarily; and thus in the primitive simplicity of their minds they more readily fall victims to the big lie than the small lie, since they themselves often tell small lies in little matters but would be ashamed to resort to large-scale falsehoods. It would never come into their heads to fabricate colossal untruths, and they would not believe that others could have the impudence to distort the truth so infamously. Even though the facts which prove this to be so may be brought clearly to their minds, they will still doubt and waver and will continue to think that there may be some other explanation. For the grossly impudent lie always leaves traces behind it, even after it has been nailed down, a fact which is known to all expert liars in this world and to all who conspire together in the art of lying. These people know only too well how to use falsehood for the basest purposes.

~ A. Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (Murphy translation, page 134)