

ILLINOIS STATE UNIVERSITY

Dept. of Political Science

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SPRING 1997

Wed. 6:00-8:50, SH 309

POS 361: TOPICS IN POLITICAL THEORY

Spring 1997: "Political Theories of Nonviolence"

Course Description:

Focusing on the political and social thought of Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr., this course will introduce students to a frequently neglected theme in the history of modern political theory: non-violence & civil disobedience. Indeed, one of the central paradoxes of this "long" twentieth century of genocidal wars, concentration camps, urban riots, and ethnic strife, is the paucity of imaginative reflection on the conceptual meaning, causes and effects, and political implications of violence. Seeking to blend political, ethical, and sociocultural concerns, the course is designed to encourage students to embark on a personal examination of the connections between political power, violence, and ethically motivated forms of nonviolent resistance.

The course will be divided into four main parts. First, we will discuss the writings of three representative thinkers of the dominant "realist" discourse of Realpolitik. The next two sections will introduce the main ideas of Gandhi and King, and the last part will encourage you to investigate the pragmatic business of how non-violent direct action "works." As such an example, we will pick the remarkable story of the "Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo" in Argentina who stood up to state power despite considerable risks to their lives. As the "mothers" have shown, the test of any political theory lies in how well it can inform the concrete realm of political practice.

Let me add an important caveat: I am not interested in "selling you" on nonviolence, or to force a certain kind of morality on you. Rather, I want to critically examine long-standing assumptions about the nature of violence and political power from a cross-cultural perspective. Therefore we'll start the course by putting nonviolence on trial.

Here are the three main charges of the prosecution:

- 1) Violence is inevitable in power politics, because self-interest and self-preservation are the basic elements

of human nature.

2) Nonviolence does not work in the "real" world, for concrete political and economic interests always and by necessity supersede naive and lofty ethics of "good will" and "shared humanity."

3) Subscribing to a philosophy of nonviolence and creating nonviolent social and political structures make us more vulnerable to our violent neighbors/enemies, hence we must not neglect our social responsibility and risk the safety of our community by remaining "nonviolent."

After letting our "realist" political theorists make the case for the prosecution, we will listen to the arguments of the defense represented by Gandhi, King, and the "Mothers." At the end of the course, you--the members of the jury--will deliberate on a verdict which you will present to the judge, the Honorable Dr. Steger.

In addition, the course will raise themes such as: 1) *raison d'être*: why non-violence? 2) what is power? 3) common philosophical and moral underpinnings of Gandhi & King's respective projects; 4) religious aspects of non-violent theories; 5) the relationship between politics and culture; 6) the influence of Gandhi and King on other intellectuals and political activists like Aung San Suu Kyi, Rigoberta Menchu, Vaclav Havel, Petra Kelly, and Cesar Chavez; 7) concrete non-violent strategies for resolving political and "everyday" conflicts; 8) the building and organization of non-violent political movements; 9) violence and gender 10) the personal component: what do non-violence and civil disobedience mean to you and your own immediate context?

Course Readings (required):

- 1) Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince*
- 2) Max Weber, "The Profession and Vocation of Politics" (excerpts) from *Political Writings* (edited by Peter Lassman and Ronald Speirs, Cambridge UP, 1994)--make your own copy from course package
- 3) Reinhold Niebuhr, "The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness" from *The Essential Reinhold Niebuhr* (edited by Robert McAfee Brown, Yale UP, 1986)--make your own copy from course package
- 4) Hannah Arendt, "Part II" from *On Violence* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1970) make your own copy from course package
- 5) Raghavan Iyer, ed., *Essential Writings of Mahatma Gandhi* (Oxford UP, 1993)
- 6) Louis Fischer, *Gandhi: His Life and Message for the World* (Mentor, 1954)
- 7) James Washington, ed., *Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (HarperCollins, 1986)
- 8) Marguerite Guzman Bouvard, *Revolutionizing Motherhood: The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo*

Optional Readings (some are on reserve in library):

- 1) Stephen Oates, *Let the Trumpet Sound: The Life of M.L. King Jr.* (Plume, 1982)

- 2) Henry David Thoreau, *Civil Disobedience*
- 3) Catherine Ingram, *In the Footsteps of Gandhi: Conversations with Spiritual Social Activists* (Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 1990)
- 4) Robert Holmes, *Non-Violence in Theory and Practice* (Wadsworth, 1990)
- 5) Susan Schechter, *Women and Male Violence* (South End Press, 1995)
- 6) Pam McAllister, ed. *Reweaving the Web of Life: Feminism and Nonviolence* (New Society Publishers, 1982)
- 7) Staughton Lynd and Alice Lynd, ed. *Nonviolence in America* (Orbis Books, 1995)
- 8) Robert J. Burrows, *The Strategy of Nonviolent Defense* (SUNY Press, 1996)
- 9) Petra Kelly, *Fighting for Hope* (South End Press, ISBN 0-89608-216-4)

A SHORT SELECTION OF USEFUL SECONDARY SOURCES:

A) GANDHI

- 1) Raghavan Iyer, *The Moral and Political Thought of Mahatma Gandhi* (Concord: Grove, 1973)
- 2) Mark Juergensmeyer, *Fighting Fair: A Non-Violent Strategy for Resolving Everyday Conflicts* (Harper and Row, 1986)
- 3) Mark Juergensmeyer, *Imagining India* (Oxford UP, 1988)
- 4) Joan Bondurant, *Conquest of Violence: The Gandhian Philosophy of Conflict* (Princeton UP, 1988)
- 5) Dennis Dalton, *Mahatma Gandhi* (1993)

B) KING

- 1) James H. Cone, *Martin & Malcolm & America: A Dream or a Nightmare* (Orbis, 1995)
- 2) James Colaiaco, *M.L. King: Apostle of Militant Non-Violence* (St. Martin's Press, 1988)
- 3) John Ansbro, *Martin Luther King Jr.: The Making of a Mind* (Orbis, 1995)
- 4) Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years: 1954-63* (Simon and Schuster, 1988)
- 5) Adam Fairclough, *Martin Luther King, Jr.* (University of Georgia Press, 1995)
- 6) John Dear, *The God of Peace: Toward a Theology of Nonviolence* (Orbis, 1995)

Course Objectives:

It is important to me to encourage you to maintain an exploratory mind and create your own "active learning environment"--not solely interacting with me, but with each other as well. I will facilitate student discussions by creating a "safe" context that allows you to speak up freely. But I do not accept the equation of subjective experience with "truth." You must be able to confront the questions I ask, regardless of your own preferences. Most of all, I am interested in preparing you for independent research which requires a tolerant, reflective mind, best summarized by Immanuel Kant's dictum: "Sapere aude"--"Have the courage to use your own understanding!"

The course readings, assignments, and videos have been carefully selected to generate broad in-class discussions and oral presentations, ultimately guiding students to select a topic of their choice for their term paper (8-10 double-spaced, typed pages; topics must be clarified beforehand with me). Responsible participation in class discussions will be based on weekly assignments. Each student will be responsible for a

20 min. in-class presentation on the readings (including leading class in the ensuing 40 min. discussion). Moreover, you are required to write three (3) response papers (three to four double-spaced, typed pages in length). Each paper should address one well-formulated theme or problem taken from a) weeks I-IV (due end of week IV); b) weeks V-VIII (due end of week VIII); and, c) weeks IX-XI (due end of week XI). You'll pick your own theme/problem from the relevant readings of that particular section. In the paper, you should carefully explore the meaning of the theme/problem, and, with as much sophistication as possible, you should indicate how that theme/problem reveals something of political significance about the larger context from which it is taken. No book reports or plot summaries please! These short essays represent exercises in critical political thinking. No late papers will be accepted.

Term project proposals, including a small bibliography, will be due during the tenth week. I will supervise each student's progress, as well as encourage you to consult with me during office hours to discuss one draft of your term paper.

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