Violence & Human Rights

This course surveys theory and observations bearing on violence and human rights as cultural constructs; human rights claimed by people regardless of national or international governing bodies, sometimes through violent means; and cultural variation in how people think of and act in forms of violence that range from war, genocide and terrorism, to street crime and domestic violence. We conclude with a critical examination of the assumptions that underlie current prevention, deterrence, and intervention policies inside and outside the ‘human rights’ establishment. My grandson Maquah, as an 11 year-old, announced to his mother “I wish I had the magic to stop war.” Think of this class as a search for that magic.

Any theory that assigns responsibility for events to individuals fundamentally misconstrues how the world works. Individuals can’t do anything independently of cultures, and their success or lack of success will reflect the cultures in which they participate. Therein lies the importance of cultural anthropology, as Alfred Kroeber, Leslie White, and others suggested beginning early in the 20th century. As anthropologists work out precisely the implications of this finding, we shall come to understand the cultural institution characteristics that make possible (as one example) achievements like Norman Borlaug’s Green Revolution. We shall thus improve our chances of equivalent future achievements, like those identified by the U.S. National Academy of Engineering or the Grand Challenges in Global Health program:

- make solar energy economical
- create a single staple plant species that contains a full range of optimal nutrients
- reverse engineer the brain
- create a needle-free delivery system for anti-viral drugs

This course thus avoids (like the proverbial plague) the decades-long practice highly favored by cultural anthropologists of talking about how people talk – despite having no warrant to think that anything people say bears on any real world problem or question. We substitute the question ‘How does the world work?’ for the prevailing question, ‘How would we like our world to work?’ We distinguish empirical generalizations from make-believe. Alternative anthropologies emerge once we abandon the latter to pursue the former. One such anthropology examines the possibility that violence depends on cultures. Understanding how will tell us how to design cultures that effectively suppress violence.

Nine learning modules make up the course:

1. You will learn that it takes specific conditions to kill someone.
2. You will decide who should exercise what specific forms of responsibility for specific acts of violence.
3. You will describe how honor cultures kill.
4. You will describe how religions, Asian as well as Abrahamic, rationalize violence.
5. You will describe how cultures make you do things.
6. You will assess the violence suppressing effects of guns and gun controls.
7. You will differentiate the effects of personal characteristics (the 'rotten man' hypothesis) from the effects of power differentials ('I beat her because I can').
8. You will differentiate defensive violence from predatory violence, or discover that you can't.
9. You will explore where rights come from so you may better understand what has to happen to effectively extend human rights.

REQUIREMENTS: Active participation in 9 online and class discussions (12 pt font, single spaced, 1,000 word limit for any one contribution – unless you receive permission to make it longer) and a paper (12 pt font, single spaced, 3,000 word limit – unless you receive permission to make it longer). You may draw on earlier papers and discussion board commentary for subsequent discussion board comments or essays – the more, the better, and remember to cite people as well as literature properly. I expect each written contribution to integrate ideas and perspectives that you develop earlier in this class. Your last assignments will thus count as your Final, from which I will evaluate your mastery of the concepts and skills that are part of the course.

DISCUSSION CONTRIBUTIONS: For purposes of class discussion, paste your submissions into the discussion space given you on HuskyCT no later than Wednesday before class. Use HuskyCT as a means to engage both issues and classmates. Send me the discussion you submit for a grade pasted into an email.

FINAL: Send me your final paper pasted into an email no later than noon, the last day of Finals Week.

You must write acceptably well or you will fail this course. I expect correct spelling, punctuation, and grammar in all written communication – that includes emails. Write for adults who may want to know what you’ve learned, like your parents or grandparents. That means lots of specifics, examples, details, and clearly laid out arguments. Adhere to this rule and you’ll do fine: Write concisely with active verbs. Use Strunk & White’s The Elements of Style as your guide to good writing. Consult the writing center for additional help.

I will assign grades as points (e.g., 2.0=C, 3.0=B, 3.3=B+, A=4.0, B+/A-=3.5). Use a 12 pt font and single space. I look for evidence that someone (1) read the material/watched the films, (2) processed the information, and can (3) use that information creatively and thoughtfully to address questions (4) concisely and (5) clearly. Evidence for the first criterion = appropriate citations/quotes. Evidence for the second criterion = accurate reporting and description of issues. Evidence for the third criterion = judicial selection of specifics to illustrate subtleties not just the obvious. Evidence for the fourth criterion = overwhelming preference for active verbs and no extraneous words. Evidence for the fifth criterion = simple words used to make descriptions with detailed specifics.

Produce arguments, not opinions. Opinions don’t count because we have no reason to think they’re any more than your fantasy. Arguments count to the extent that they (1) contain no logical fallacies and (2) provide evidence (the stronger the better) that a claim corresponds with a set of observations. Critically evaluate your own argument, and those of others. Critical evaluations thus do not consist of statements like

➢ “I don’t believe you” – without evidence, no one cares what you 'believe,' or
➢ “I don’t understand” – it’s your responsibility to get the information you need so you do understand; or
➢ “you should have written on something else” – it’s not your business to tell someone else what topic to write on; or
➢ “but that doesn’t account for this contradictory example” – instances do not invalidate generalizations.

Critical evaluations require you to identify the assumption(s) and quality of evidence on which an argument rests, and will consist of statements like “This argument doesn’t make sense, and here’s why – [cite and explain the logical fallacies and/or evidence weaknesses],” or “This argument makes sense, and here’s why – [cite and explain its strengths in logic and evidence].”

**Buy these books** (Amazon usually ships faster than alternative online sources):


Find all other reading online on HuskyCT.

I will assume college prep levels of knowledge and skills to find the answer to questions, like ‘What counts as plagiarism?’ I will give you an F for the course if I see you submit someone else’s work as your own. No one can achieve their best without help and I urge you to help one another do better. In the process, you will use someone else’s ideas or words. Give them credit for helping you! Citations to others, including to the readings, count heavily in all assignments.

In summary, your course grade will come from the following:

- 70% from 9 Discussion Board contributions
- 30% from a Final paper

I will answer questions in class and online, either with email or Skype conversations.

**VERY STRONG RECOMMENDATION:**

You will do your best if you frame your reading and writing as a means to achieve the stated ‘learning goals.’ You handicap yourself if you focus only on the assignments.
WHO AM I?

Penn Handwerker graduated from Willamette University in 1966 with a B.A. and from the University of Oregon in 1971 with a PhD. I taught at the University of Oregon, Washington State University, and Humboldt State University before coming to the University of Connecticut as a Professor of Anthropology in 1994. I trained as a general anthropologist with an emphasis on the intersection of biological and cultural anthropology, and have published in all five fields (applied, archaeology, biological, cultural, and linguistics) of anthropology. I have conducted field research in

- West Africa (~3 years residence in Liberia, with short excursions to Sierra Leone, Ghana, Cote d'Ivoire, during 1968, 1969-70, 1977-78, 1984),
- Moscow (1993, 1994) and the Russian Far East (Chukotka in 1995),
- and various portions of the contemporary United States (Oregon, California’s North Coast, Connecticut, and Alaska).

I developed new methods with which to study cultures while I studied topics that included the causes and consequences of entrepreneurship in both food production and marketing, corruption, human fertility, and both inter- and intragenerational power differences. My current research focuses on the possibility that the most effective collective action for community sustainability reflects the cultural assumption that each person knows what’s best for him or herself. See http://www.anth.uconn.edu/faculty/handwerker/ for more information.

WHO ARE YOU?

Please use HuskyCT to tell us a little about yourself.
Module 1:
What Does Violence Look Like and How Does it Feel?

Learning Goal 1: Learn that it takes specific conditions to kill someone.

Research undertaken in the United States by Rebecca Floor and equivalent research in Denmark, Israel, South Africa, and Colombia by Ben Purzycki, Rich Sosis, Andre Swier, and Vanessa Garcia reveal a consistent order by which people generally experience violence:

### FIRST EXPERIENCE

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<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Experience Type</th>
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<tr>
<td>Shot or shot at - Done to me</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chased or stalked - Done to me</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Shot or shot at - Seen done to others</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physically attacked by armed (gun, knife, other weapon) person</td>
<td>Done to me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family member or friend killed - Done to me</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stolen from or attempted to steal from by force - Seen done to others</td>
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<tr>
<td>Break-in or attempted break-in - Done to me</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Physically attacked by unarmed person</td>
<td>Done to me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physically threatened by armed (gun, knife, other weapon) person</td>
<td>Seen done to others</td>
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### LAST EXPERIENCE

Where are you on this list of violence experiences?
Readings:

Col Jeff Cooper (pp. 24-26, *To Ride, Shoot Straight, and Speak the Truth*) We are told from all sides that if one wins a lethal encounter, he will feel dreadful. It is odd that no one seems to have felt dreadful about this until very recently. Throughout recorded history the winning of a fight has generally been considered a subject for congratulation. It is only just now that it has become presumably tainted. . . a predatory felon who victimizes innocent non-combatants on the streets is a proven goblin, sentenced by his own initiative. Some men may be upset by killing him, but not anyone I have met.

Discussion 1: What does it take to kill someone, given what appears to be a natural resistance to killing?
Module 2:
When, if ever, Do Victims Not Vicrimize Themselves?

Learning Goal 2: Who should exercise what specific forms of responsibility for specific acts of violence?

Readings:
- Gracie – http://packingpretty.com/2012/02/01/a-breakdown-of-the-us-marine-corps-rules/

Films:
- Home Invasion: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jey1pBl8AY&feature=related
- Another Home Invasion: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DuhKCiY-lu0&NR=1

Discussion 2: How do individuals contribute to their own victimization?

Consider examples like a rape victim, Osama Bin Laden, George Armstrong Custer, Jews or Roma (Gypsies) or overseas Chinese (in Singapore or the USA), or the people Ward Churchill called 'little Eichmanns’ who died because they worked in the World Trade Center on September 1, 2011.
Module 3: How Do Cultures Produce Violence?

Learning Goal 3: Learn how honor cultures kill.

Basic characteristics of cultures:

- consists of shared assumptions, shared understandings about what we should and not not do (which we call cultural norms), and coordinated patterns of behavior – plus bodies of knowledge about how to make things happen.
- identifiable only by reference to specific assumptions, norms, and patterns of behavior
- individuals embody multiple cultures, some named, some not, some global, some local
- the assumptions, norms, and coordinated patterns of behavior that make up a specific culture accomplish goals.

BACKGROUND:

Perhaps the most important characteristic of human nature is that we cannot opt out of creating, living as a part of, and changing cultures. In this sense, cultures are built into us. Our brains produce them in the normal course of their operation. We can't wish cultures away. You may hate the idea of money, for example, but without it you'll be hard pressed to survive. You live your whole life enmeshed in cultures. When you go to class, for example, you see and engage in a series of coordinated activities: you (a) take a seat, (b) take out writing materials with which to take notes, (c) listen to the instructor and the comments or questions of other students, (d) take notes, and (e) participate in class discussions. You see other things as well. Plus you may not do things you know you probably should – like read assigned books before you come to class.

Almost certainly, however, you do not yell obscenities while you jump up on the desk and drop your pants. Neither does your instructor, nor do secretaries who help you with information and appointments or bursars who take your money. Each of these others engage in their own behavior. Taken together, the coordinated activities of students, professors, secretaries, bursars and others run what we call a cultural institution that we call a 'college' or 'university.' If we coordinate our behaviors well (think of this as a well-oiled team), you will 'graduate' from college with a 'degree,' which will help you acquire employment that pays better than you would otherwise get.

Coordinated patterns of behavior like these count as critically important parts of a culture. But we achieve coordination by enforcing consequences for violations of shared understandings about what we should do (or should not do), which we call cultural norms. When you go to class, ordinarily you should (a) take a seat, (b) take out writing materials with which to take notes, (c) listen carefully to the instructor and the comments or questions of other students, (d) take careful and thorough notes, (e) participate in class discussions, (f) prepare for the class before you arrive, and (among many other 'shoulds') (g) leave with a clear understanding of the class assignments to complete before you next meet. Similarly, you should not (a) yell obscenities, or (among many other 'should nots') (b) jump up on the desk and drop your pants. Cultural norms provide the means by which we reason about what we see going on around us. Because our cultural norms occupy our consciousness, questions about what people should or should not do provides the easiest view into a culture. However, assumptions give cultures coherence and cultural differences always rest on differences in assumptions. Classroom norms rest on the assumption that you attend class to learn. Everything you should do (e.g., take a seat, take notes) helps you achieve that goal. Everything you should not do (e.g., dropping your pants) detracts from that.
Cultures thus consist of two very different things. Assumptions & norms exist as mental constructs inside your mind. Behavior consists of all the things you do that produce material stimuli to which other people respond. The two correspond to the extent that you sanction or you face sanctions for behavioral violations of cultural norms.

You may go to class for your own reasons – to meet someone, or to avoid your coach’s ire. Those assumptions, however, generate a separate set of cultural norms and distinguish one culture from another. If those norms conflict with classroom norms, you’ll find yourself in trouble. Clashing cultures provide the most prevalent form of conflict in the world today.

Norms accompanied by no serious consequences for their violation signal points of cultural change. The absence of consequences means increasingly ineffective behavioral coordination and increasingly poor performance. A shift in consequences will create a new culture based on a different assumption and its distinctive set of norms. In short, we evolved as creatures who make assumptions and create and enforce norms to achieve goals because the shared outcome, which we call cultures, gave us a huge selective advantage.

NOTE – What You Call Values, We Call Norms

Popular culture holds that the most important differences between cultures, and between individuals, consist of differences in values. American culture, for example, places a high value on individual achievement, by contrast with Latin culture which places a high value on family achievement. The abortion debate in the US contrasts people who place a high value on life, even for unborn children, and people who place a high value on women’s ability to make their own life choices. Political conservatives place great value on freedom. Political liberals place great value on... freedom.

?

Wait. That can’t be right.

It is right, however. Ask any political conservative or liberal. Values don’t differentiate political conservatives and liberals any more than values differentiate ‘right-to-life’ or ‘right-to-choose’ advocates.

Here’s why. Values consist of all those things we think of as ‘good.’ Values research, particularly the cross-national work carried out by S. Schwartz and colleagues, has revealed ten major value categories found throughout the world. Here they are, each with examples of more specific values:

**Power:** authority; leadership; dominance

**Achievement:** success; capability; ambition; influence; intelligence; self-respect

**Hedonism:** pleasure; enjoying life

**Stimulation:** daring activities; varied life; exciting life

**Self-direction:** creativity; freedom; independence; curiosity; choosing your own goals

**Universalism:** broadmindedness; wisdom; social justice; equality; harmony

**Benevolence:** helpfulness; honesty; forgiveness; loyalty; responsibility; friendship

**Tradition:** accepting one’s portion in life; humility; devoutness; respect for tradition; moderation

**Conformity:** self-discipline; obedience

**Security:** stability of social order; health; sense of belonging
Not only do we find these values everywhere, we also find that, whether people live in urban North America or the African rainforest, whether in Shanghai or the Argentine pampas, people throughout the world agree about 98% on the order of their importance.

Which is most important? Benevolence – doing unto others as you would have them do unto you.

Which is least important? Power.

In order of their importance, here's the whole list of values.

1. Benevolence
2. Self-direction
3. Universalism
4. Security
5. Conformity
6. Achievement
7. Hedonism
8. Stimulation
9. Tradition
10. Power

Values cannot distinguish one from another. In all essentials everyone agrees about what's good. Moreover, everyone agrees about how good something is compared with other good things. Actions that correspond with the Golden Rule are more important than safety or having fun, though they're all good things. Thus individualistic cultures differ from collectivist cultures because material success depends heavily on individual or group efforts, respectively. People on both sides of the abortion debate agree on the value of life, even for unborn children, and the value on women's ability to make their own life choices. Both count as forms of Benevolence. They differ, just like political conservatives and liberals, on what counts as what. Some people count any fertilized ovum or fetus as an unborn child. Other people count only a fetus that may live outside the womb as an unborn child. Freedom comes from the active exercise of personal responsibility, for political conservatives. Freedom comes from authoritative regulation of inequalities for political liberals.

Cultural assumptions thus distinguish one culture from another, and one individual for another. Differences in cultural assumptions produce differences in cultural norms. Cultural norms are the admonitions that tell us what we should do (or, should not do). If group efforts pay off better than individual efforts, you should work cooperatively and honor group commitments. If a fertilized ovum counts as a living being, you shouldn't kill it any more than you should kill your neighbor. To maximize freedom, you should minimize restrictions on personal choices imposed by authorities.
Readings (Cultures):

Readings:

Films:
Honor Killing: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UGtRVuNgYeY&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UGtRVuNgYeY&feature=related)

Discussion 3: How do the characteristics of honor cultures correspond with the conditions that, according to Grossman, lead up to a killing?
Module 4:
Do All Religions Promote Violence?

“That which is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow.
That is the whole Torah; the rest is the explanation; go and learn.”
Hillel the Elder, c.100 BC.

Learning Goal 4: How do religions, Asian as well as Abrahamic, rationalize violence?

Readings:
Qurb, Syed. Milestones. Introduction & Chapter 4, attached to syllabus;
http://webyoungmuslims.ca/online_library/books/milestones/hold/index_2.htm

Readings for advanced study:

Films:
Fitna: http://www.liveleak.com/view?i=216_1207467783
A Responsibility: http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_profilepage&v=0llugyMzxpg

Discussion 4: Imagine if you can what a genuine ‘religion of peace’ would look like.
Module 5:  
Why Can or Can't You Act Independently of a Culture?

Learning Goal 5: Differentiate the effects of life conditions (poverty) from the effects of cultures.

Readings:

McArdle, Megan. (12/15/11) If I Were a Poor Black Kid. *The Atlantic*

Discussion 5: Describe how a culture forces you to follow a path of crime or not, or describe how something else does this.
Module 6:  
Do Guns Produce Violence?

Learning Goal 6: Assess the violence-suppressing effects of guns and gun controls.

Violent Crime Rates by the Prevalence of Guns, USA, 2001-2004
(CCW = Permit to Carry a Concealed Weapon, Measures Standardized)

Readings:

Readings for advanced study:

Films:
- Pink Pistols: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0qxZVTNgekE&NR=1
- Barista Foils Robber: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jV1KvThjV8&feature=related
- Beer for My Horses: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oJOFhfoAD4

Discussion 6: If guns kill, why didn't we see dramatic increases in the violent crime rates in Texas, Florida, and other states after they passed laws that made it easy to legally carry a concealed handgun; and why do we find the highest violent crime rates in states with the most restrictive gun controls (MA, NJ, CA) and the lowest in states with no gun controls (VT, AK)?
Module 7: A Pack Not a Herd

Learning Goal 7: Differentiate the violence eliciting effects of personal characteristics (the ‘rotten man’ hypothesis) from the effects of power differentials (‘I beat her because I can.’).

Readings:
Opinion of Thomas, J - McDonald vs Chicago, SCOTUS opinion 2010.

Readings for advanced study - human rights issues:

Readings for advanced study - mental mechanisms:

Films:
Calling 911: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-ExC7fE1LaY&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-ExC7fE1LaY&feature=related)
Another 911 call: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bZU1P38KJno](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bZU1P38KJno)
Beer For My Horses: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=01JOFlfoAD4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=01JOFlfoAD4)

Discussion 7: What would a ‘Culture of Intervention’ to reduce domestic violence look like? Should it, for example, consist of the following?

1. clear criteria by which to identify the boundary between acceptable and unacceptable (violent) behavior.
2. competence in at least one martial art (whether judo or the Art of the Gun).
3. social networks filled with people who assume that friends and relatives should actively protect each other.
Module 8: Is Violence Hard-Wired into Our Brains?

An armed society is a polite society. Robert H. Heinlein, 1959

Learning Goal 8: Differentiate defensive violence from predatory violence, or discover that you can’t.

On May 1st, 2011, the USA assassinated a religious leader (along with collateral damage to bystanders)—having violated the territorial integrity of a sovereign state, and based on information extracted by torture administered by CIA employees in secret foreign prisons. Are these war crimes or not?

Readings:

Films:
One Tin Soldier: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J7jHp7OchP0
Bleed Red: http://www.youtube.com/watch?NR=1&feature=endscreen&v=ww_5e38k0vA
Obsession: Radical Islam’s War Against the West: http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=7455576529516871516&hl=en#
New Again: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J7wEa8YTGhM

Discussion 8: Critically evaluate the conclusion that ALL violence is about self-defense. If some violence arises as a means of something else, how can we tell?

INDEPENDENCE
I would never invade the United States. There would be a gun behind every blade of grass. —Isoroku Yamamoto
Module 9: Where Did (Do) Human Rights Come From?

Learning Goal 9: Describe the means by which specific individuals or groups acquire specific human rights. Is it true, for instance, that "We sleep soundly in our beds because rough men stand ready in the night to visit violence on those who would do us harm?" - variously attributed either to Winston Churchill or to George Orwell.

Readings:

Recommended Film:
*Taken* (a 2008 action thriller film produced by Luc Besson, starring Liam Neeson, Maggie Grace, and Famke Janssen.)

Discussion 9: Are rights given or taken? If rights are given, doesn't that mean that rights depend on the whim of the powerful - and, if so, why would we consider them rights? If rights are taken, doesn't that mean that rights depend on violence for their defense and for their origin. Illustrate with data bearing on the specific means by which specific individuals or groups acquired specific human rights.
Oh, and FYI...

Section 311 of US Code Title 10, entitled, “Militia: composition and classes” in its entirety (with emphases added):

“(a) The militia of the United States consists of all able-bodied males at least 17 years of age and, except as provided in section 313 of title 32, under 45 years of age who are, or who have made a declaration of intention to become, citizens of the United States and of female citizens of the United States who are members of the National Guard.

(b) The classes of the militia are —

(1) the organized militia, which consists of the National Guard and the Naval Militia; and

(2) the unorganized militia, which consists of the members of the militia who are not members of the National Guard or the Naval Militia.”
FINAL:
How Can We Extend the Application of Human Rights?

Learning Goal 10: Acquire the skills that allow you to produce critical analyses of policies and programs.

Readings: Conduct a literature search.

Final Essay:
How can we extend the application of human rights?

I expect each written contribution to integrate ideas and perspectives that you develop earlier in this class. Your last assignment will thus count as your Final, from which I will evaluate your mastery of the concepts and skills that are part of the course. As you do this, pick a policy and related programs bearing on violence prevention, identify the assumptions on which that policy rests, identify an alternative (set of) assumption(s), and outline some of the policy and program implications of that alternative. All forms of violence are fair game, from war, genocide, and suicide terrorism, to domestic violence, drunk driving, street shootings, school yard bullying, and community disadvantage.