Loyola University New Orleans
Violence and Society (SOCI-X152-Z51) – Spring 2009
Second 8-week Session – Begins Monday, March 16th and Ends May 4th

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Office Hours: M 3:00-5:45 p.m. or by appointment

Course Meeting Information:
Bobet Hall 216
Mondays 6:00-10:00 p.m.: 03/16/09, 03/23/09, 03/30/09, 04/06/09, 04/13/09, 04/20/09, 04/27/09, 05/04/09.

Blackboard: All students are expected to sign up on Blackboard and routinely check for announcements and course materials associated with each class. Class handouts will be posted under “course materials”. Students will be asked to post their PowerPoint class presentations on the “discussion board” (see course requirements below). In the event that there is an interruption to our course due to the cancellation of classes by the university as a result of a storm or other emergency, we will continue our course on Blackboard.

Course Description:

This course is designed to help students develop a broad understanding of the complexities and controversies surrounding the problem of violence. The course is interdisciplinary in nature drawing upon sociology, anthropology, psychology, biology, political science, philosophy, economics, and history as well as professional specialty areas including criminal justice, law, public health, and social work. The course encourages students to apply critical thinking techniques in assessing various databases, theories of causation, different social policies and solutions to violence. It emphasizes the development of an appreciation for the nature and value of empirical data and logical analysis of evidence in forming conclusions. Special coverage will be given to social policies that are intended to prevent and control violence, paying particular attention to the underlying theoretical assumptions and political motivations. The relationship between science and social policy as well as the ethics and politics of theory and research will be considered in light of their expression in various programs that address violence as a social problem on state, national and international levels. (Please see “Course Goals and Objectives” on page 10 of this syllabus.)

Required Readings:

Course Decorum:

- Students are expected to come to class prepared and to actively participate in class.
- Questions and discussions are encouraged in class. Superior contributions to discussions and outstanding class presentations may result in extra credit points added to the final grade.
- **Assignments:** All assignments must be submitted in typed form in hardcopy (do not email assignments). Proofread and polish all work prior to submission. Assignments must be handed-in on their designated due dates. Late submissions will result in grade penalties or failure. **Due to strict scheduling this semester, there will be no opportunity to make up any missed scheduled class presentations.** A missed presentation may lead to failure or necessitate withdrawal from the course.
- If for reasons of serious illness or other emergency you are unable to complete the course requirements as scheduled, you must speak with the professor regarding approval of a grade of “I” (Incomplete). Please note that grades of “I” change to “F” automatically if the course is not completed and the grade changed by the sixth week of the subsequent term, excluding summer terms. The resulting “F” grade remains the permanent grade for the course.
- Students with disabilities who believe that they may need accommodations in this class are encouraged to contact the Office of Disability Services at 504-865-2990 as soon as possible to ensure that such accommodations are implemented in a timely fashion.
- The **University Honor Code** will be strictly enforced. All work must represent each student's own efforts.
- **Attendance:** Individuals are expected to be punctual and regular in their class attendance. Excessive absences (more than 1 class per term) will result in grade penalties or failure.
- All students are encouraged to come to office hours, Mondays 3:00 - 5:45 p.m. or by appointment. My office is in Stallings Hall, Room 109.

Summary of Course Requirements:

I. **Class Presentation** (The topic and date of individual presentations will be assigned during the first class) - 25% of final grade; 10 minutes in length, including submission of hardcopy of PowerPoint slides and corresponding references/bibliography (see more details below).

III. Violence Log and Analysis of media portrayal of violence - 25% of final grade; including approximately 15-20 newspaper or popular journal clippings/electronic transcripts along with an analysis (approximately 5 double-spaced typed-pages) (see further details below). Due on Monday, May 4, 2009 in 537 Monroe Hall.

IV. Comprehensive Take-home Final Examination - 25% of final grade; covering assigned readings, class lectures and materials, student presentations, and media presentations. Due on Monday, May 4, 2009.

V. Optional Experiential Project with a community agency in substitution for the final examination will be offered. Details will be forthcoming.

VI. Extra Credit: Fieldtrip to Angola State Penitentiary in Angola, Louisiana. Detail will be forthcoming.

Description of Course Requirements:

I. Class Presentation: Each student will be assigned to one of the forms of violence, which will be considered during this semester (e.g., criminal violence, family/intimate violence, organized crime, violence within institutional settings, collective violence, or political violence). A 10 minute class presentation based on library research conducted on the assigned topic will be expected from each student on an individually appointed due date (i.e., April 6, 13, or 20). The following points should be covered in each presentation:

- Authoritative definition of the form of violence (including legal definitions, if appropriate);
- Measurement and extent of the problem (including a discussion of quality of statistics);
- Description of typical perpetrators/victims and patterns of behavior/events (including a consideration of the social construction of reality related to the specific form of violence);
- Relevant causal theories (including a consideration of which perspectives dominate);
- Consideration of common myths (including any factual misconceptions);
- Solutions: prevention, treatment, or control;
- List of all cited references/bibliography;
- Questions and answers (Q&A).

Your main task is to provide an informed and well-documented overview of your topic and to dispel some of the myths associated with your topic. Be sure to document all of your statistical and factual data - keep your statistics current! It is important that you cite references corresponding to your major points and statistical information in your slide presentation. Also, be sure to review and cite the appropriate sections or chapters of the assigned readings, i.e., Brownstein’s *The Social Reality of Violence and Violent Crime*;
Derber’s *The Wilding of America*; and Eller’s *Violence and Culture*. A brief period of questions and answers (Q&A) will follow each presentation. Prior to each class presentation, students will be asked to place their PowerPoint presentation slides on Blackboard so that each member of the class can download a handout and prepare questions for the Q&A. In addition, a hardcopy of the PowerPoint slides with notes and a comprehensive bibliography (in correct style and format) must be handed in to the professor on the day of the presentation. Grades will be determined on the basis of the quality of the information presented, the comprehensiveness of the bibliography, and overall effectiveness of the presentation (including any handouts). The bibliography should be representative of the scope and breadth of your literature review (i.e., do not depend on one or two sources for your presentation). While popular magazine and newspaper articles and electronic data sources may be included among your sources of information, be sure you do not rely on such information exclusively. Your bibliography should be mainly comprised of authoritative books, monographs, government reports, and articles from scientific or professional journals (e.g., *Criminology*; *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology*; *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*; *Homicide Studies*; *American Journal of Sociology*; *American Journal of Psychology*; *Journal of Medicine*; *Journal of Trauma, Injury, Infection and Critical Care*; and *Violence and Victims*, etc.). The Monroe Library has a wide range of professional journals and books on your topic as well as updated statistics, government documents and studies.

Please remember that due to strict scheduling this semester, there will be no opportunity to make up any missed scheduled class presentations. Failure to do a presentation may lead to failure or necessitate withdrawal from the course.

II. Critical Review: With a fascinating twist of perspective, Charles Derber in his book, *Wilding in America: Money, Mayhem, and the American Dream* (4th ed.) reveals startling links between criminal wilding on the streets, emotional wilding in families, economic wilding on Wall Street, political wilding in Washington, and other forms of "legitimate" sociopathic behavior. He argues that while morally these actions may be different, socially they reflect the unbridled pursuit of rampant self-interest. Please explain fully Derber's concept of wilding (i.e., its meaning and its pervasiveness). What are the roots of wilding? What is the evidence of the trends of wilding? Is wilding more serious today than in the past? Is wilding primarily an American phenomenon? Are there any solutions for the spread of wilding? Do you think Derber's concept of wilding has merit? What are the strengths and weaknesses of his analysis of wilding? Please describe some current event(s) that may serve to illustrate Derber's concept of wilding, e.g., Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath or the recent financial crisis? (Be sure to provide documented evidence when you discuss “Wilding and Katrina” or “Wilding and the Financial Crisis” or another selected example.) Your critical review of Derber's book should be approximately 5-8 pages in length. Be sure to address all of the questions and include a bibliography. The Critical Review is due in class on Monday, March 30, 2009.

III. Violence log and analysis: Develop a question of study related to violence in the news media. Then gather information to empirically answer your question. You may
select any form of media (e.g., newspapers, news journals, TV news, radio news, Website news) that primarily serves to “inform” the public (not necessarily to entertain the public). Collect a sample (e.g., clips of printed "articles" or electronic transcripts or summarized reports, etc.) dealing with violence topics. Your sample selection may include a variety of violence themes covered during a set period of time or it may concentrate on only a particular type of violence over time or in particular areas or it may represent a comparison of particular themes by different types of media – you may chose how to organize your study and selection of sample; just be sure that you clearly explain your object of study and method of selection. You should have approximately 20-25 items in your Violence Log by the end of the term. Be sure to provide copies of all reports/articles. In addition, provide a summary table with the following types of information/data gathered from each report/article:

1. Source (i.e., type of media)
2. Exact date of occurrence of event
3. Type of violence (e.g., criminal, corporate, political, etc.)
4. Classification of "wilding" (e.g., expressive or instrumental; and political, economic, or social)
5. Offender profile/victim profile
6. Thematic context (purpose of article or story, is there a larger thematic context?)
7. Nature and source of statistics or factual data
8. Causal explanations
9-10. Add your own questions/variables

After you have gathered your sample and summarized your data, write a brief paper considering the following questions: What is the impression of violence that one gets from your sample? Discuss the role of the media in disseminating violence information in society. How does the media's construction of violence compare to the scientific construction of violence? Be sure to include in your discussion insights from Brownstein's *The Social Reality of Violence and Violent Crime* and the video shown in class, *The Killing Screens*. To enhance your analysis it may be helpful to conduct a review of the literature on violence in the media.

Your “Violence Log” (including a sample of 20 articles, with summary table) and accompanying analysis (approximately 5 pages in length) is due on Monday, May 4, 2009 (see instructions below).

IV. Comprehensive Final Examination: The take-home final examination will be comprised of 5 essay questions that cover the entire semester's work (i.e., class reading assignments and handouts, formal lectures and discussions, student presentations, and media presentations) (approximate length: 1-2 typed pages per question). The completed examination is due on Monday, May 4, 2009. Please deliver your completed examination and Violence Log to Ms. Joy David, Administrative Assistant, in the Sociology Department located in 537 Monroe Hall between 9:00 – 11:00 a.m. or 2:00 – 4:00 p.m. Be sure that your examination and log is stamped with the date and time
of submission. Contact Ms. Joy David at jdavid@loyno.edu if you need to arrange for a special time to deliver your work.

Tentative Course Outline

**March 16, 2009**

Defining the Concept of Violence: Setting the Parameters for the Study of Violence.

Historical Patterns of Violence in the United States

Cross-National Comparisons of Violence

**Class Discussion:** Is there evidence of a subculture of violence? Is the United States more violent than other nations in the world?


Violence as a Social Problem: Herbert Blumer's Social Process Model


**Media Presentation:** *The Killing Screens: Media and the Culture of Violence*

**Class Discussion:** How did the media affect our understanding of violence during Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath?

**March 23, 2009**

The Scientific Study of Violence

- The measurement and extent of violence
- Criteria for evaluating theories and research
- The research process
- The evaluation process
- The ethics and politics of theory and research

Theories of the Causes of Violence:

- Biological theories of violence

  **Class discussion:** Are some people born more dangerous than others?

- Psychological theories of violence

  **Class discussion:** Can individual dangerousness be predicted?

- Sociological and conflict theories of violence

  **Class discussion:** Are some places more dangerous than others?

- **Understanding the Differences among Interpersonal, Institutional, and Structural Perspectives**


**March 30, 2009**

**Continuation of our examination of various theories of violence**

**In-class Review of Derber's *The Wilding of America***

**Please note:** Your Critical Review of Derber's *The Wilding of America* is due in class today, March 30, 2009.

**Class discussion:** *The Wilding of America:* Does the concept have merit? What evidence of wilding was there during and after Katrina made landfall in New Orleans? What are some examples of wilding recently demonstrated with respect to the national/global financial crisis?

**Media Presentation:** *Bowling for Columbine*
Please note: Our class presentations begin next week on April 6th. Be sure to check the list of topics/class assignments and their corresponding dates. Also, please post your PowerPoint presentation slides on Blackboard under the discussion board (please follow instructions).

The Study of the Patterns and Extent of Specific Types of Violence:
Student class presentations will be given April 6, April 13, and April 20, 2009 (check your assigned topic and date). For your presentation please follow the outline below:

A. Definition of the problem  
B. Measurement and extent of the problem  
C. Description of the typical perpetrators and victims  
D. Relevant causal theories  
E. Common myths  
F. Solutions: Prevention and control  
G. Bibliography  
H. Q&A

April 6, 2009

Criminal Violence:

- Homicide (national patterns, New Orleans patterns, international comparisons)  
- Multicide (mass murder, serial murder)  
- Rape (stranger, acquaintance)  
- Robbery (general/bank robbery)  
- Assault/Battery (general trends, not domestic related)

Domestic/Intimate Violence:

- Abuse of Children  
- Abuse of Spouses/Intimates  
- Abuse of Siblings  
- Abuse of Elderly  
- Murder in the Family  
- Suicide

April 13, 2009

Organized Violence:

- Juvenile Gangs (historical forms, contemporary forms)  
- Organized Crime (e.g., Mafia, etc.) (historical forms, contemporary forms)

Media Presentation: History of Organized Crime in America
Institutional/Occupational Violence:
- Law Enforcement: (as victims/as perpetrators)
- Prisons: (inmates/correction officers)
- General Hospitals/Nursing Homes/Mental Health Hospitals or Facilities (patients/medical personnel)
- Schools/Universities
- Workplace/Corporations
- Religious Institutions

April 20, 2009

Collective Violence/Social Movements:
- Collective/Crowd Violence (overview)
- Protests/Demonstrations: American Labor, Civil rights, Anti-war
- Sports Violence (participants, spectators)
- Cyber Violence

Political Violence:
- Capital Punishment (historical trends, contemporary trends)
- Terrorism (historical forms, contemporary forms)
- Militarism (historical forms, contemporary forms)

April 27, 2009

The Metaphor of Violence

Violence Trends and Violence Studies in the Future

Experiential Project Presentations

Concluding Comments

May 4, 2009

Please note: Since you have a take-home examination, we will not have a class on Monday, May 4th. Your take-home Final Examination and your Violence Log project are due on or before May 4, 2009. Please bring your completed work to Ms. Joy David in the Sociology Departmental Office in Monroe Hall 537 (be sure that Ms. David stamps the date and time of submission on your exam and log). Ms. David will be available to collect exams/logs between 9:30 - 11:30 a.m. and 2:00 – 4:00 p.m. on May 4, 2009. If you need to arrange for another time, please contact Ms. David at jdavid@loyno.edu.
Course Goals and Objectives

I. Cognitive Skills

This course should enable students to:

A. Understand the cultural, legal, and scientific conceptualizations of violence.
B. Assess the American history of violence thesis.
C. Assess the subculture of violence thesis.
D. Understand aspects of American violence in relation to cross-national comparisons of violence.
E. Understand different approaches to violence and policy implications:
   1. Criminological
   2. Criminal Justice
   3. Public Health
F. Identify various bodies of data pertaining to different forms of violence, summarize information, and determine relative strengths and weaknesses.
G. Understand the biological, psychological, and sociological theories of violence, including the nature of scientific evidence supporting various perspectives.
H. Understand the nature and extent of various patterns of violence (i.e., note special conceptual and data differences, identify victims and offenders, and identify common causes and solutions):
   1. Criminal: murder, rape, robbery, and assault and battery
   2. Domestic and intimate
   3. Organized (mafia)
   4. Institutional
   5. Collective/social movements
   6. Political
I. Understand the fundamental elements of conflict resolution and be able to apply the elements to mitigating or preventing different types of violence.

II. Critical and Analytical Skills

This course should enable students to:

A. Formulate critical questions when examining a position, especially with respect to:
   1. Empirical quality of argument - fact vs. opinion
   2. Cause and effect relationships - cause vs. correlation
   3. Information distortion - bias, faulty analogy, oversimplification, stereotyping, and faulty generalizations.
B. Understand the structure of social scientific thinking, various research methods, strengths and limitations of scientific evidence, and the ethics and politics of theory and research, including the ability to:
   1. Assess the validity and reliability of different forms of violence data.
   2. Assess the scientific merits of different causative theories of violence.

III. Knowledge Base and Resources for the Study of Violence

This course should enable students to:

A. Uncover and access various forms of information, data, and research findings related to different forms of violence.
B. Run literature searches and use journal abstracts located in the University Library and online.
C. Develop personal bibliography on various topics.