

FYWS 151: Thinking About Violence, Writing About Peace: A History of Non-Violent Resistance

Prof. Jansen
(23319)
Office: 404 Haliburton, 843-3764
Clough
Office Hours: W 12-1; TR 12-2

MWF 10-11

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jansenj@rhodes.edu

Course Overview

What should people do, both individually and collectively, when others bring violence upon them? Do humans have a right to self-defense, even if that means meeting violence with more violence? When we turn to history for answers, the most common opinion from the societies of the ancient Mediterranean world to Medieval Christendom to contemporary America is that force must be met with force. Some would interpret this almost universal support of self-defense as an indication that humans have an inalienable right to use force to defend themselves. Yet, there have been some notable dissenting views, beginning with Socrates and Jesus and continuing in the modern period with Thoreau, Tolstoy, Gandhi, and Martin Luther King Jr. In this course, you will examine and write thoughtfully about the various forms of non-violent resistance that these thinkers espoused, contextualizing them in the violent histories of their times. By confronting the radical nature of their political and social projects, which vigorously challenge the status quo of their societies, you will also confront and develop your own views about violence and non-violence, all the while sharpening your critical thinking skills and enhancing the quality and persuasiveness of your writing.

Objectives

This course aims to achieve three objectives:

- To give you a concise history of non-violent protest by investigating the texts of some of the world's most ardent and articulate proponents of the philosophy of non-violence.
- To help you read and analyze these texts critically.
- To help you express yourself with concise and methodical arguments in clear and precise prose.

Course Requirements

Participation. It goes without saying that your success in this course depends greatly on your daily attendance and participation. Effective writing hinges upon meaningful and insightful conversations with people who have different viewpoints from your own and can challenge your ideas. A good amount of class time will be devoted to a guided discussion of our readings and informal writing exercises. So please come to class prepared; prepared means that you have brought your texts with you and actively and thoughtfully read the day's assignment (e.g., by writing in your reading journal, taking detailed notes with references to specific page numbers, and even re-reading difficult or

thought-provoking passages). Each unexcused absence will result in third of a letter grade deduction from your participation grade.

Journal Entries. For each reading that is designated in the schedule with an asterisk you will write a journal entry (ten total). The information you record will provide crucial documentation about your interaction with the readings and guide you during class discussion by helping you focus your thoughts on what you think are the most interesting and problematic aspects of the readings. Your journal entries should be typed and contain the following items:

- Title of reading with your name prominently displayed.
- A 150-word abstract summarizing the essential points and/or thesis of the reading in your own words but without injecting any of your own ideas or opinions.
- One thought-provoking question that demonstrate your awareness of some problematic and/or curious aspect(s) of the readings; you will be asked to share one of these questions with the class to facilitate discussion.

Please write each entry as a separate document and print it out and bring it with you to class on the day we discuss the reading. I will collect five of these entries at random times throughout the semester. Your overall journal grade will depend on these five entries. However, please turn in all ten entries with your final paper.

Papers. There are five formal papers, which vary in length from 500 to 2000 words. They are all designed to help improve your thesis-governed writing. One of these will be a substantial research paper. Please see the separate document, "Writing Assignments," which walks you through each of the paper requirements. Please note well that **I do not accept papers submitted via email.** All papers are due in class on the date listed on the schedule. Moreover, incorrectly formatted papers and/or papers that do not conform to the guidelines in *Rhodes College Guide to Effective Writing* will be marked down one whole letter grade. Consistent failure to correct writing mistakes on subsequent papers, which the instructor has noted in his hand-written comments on previously graded papers, may result in a grade of "F" for that paper! All drafts of papers must be turned in with the final version.

Your final grade for the course will be derived as follows:

Participation (10%)
Journal (10%)
Paper 1 (10%)
Paper 2 (10%)
Paper 3 (15%)
Paper 4 (30%)
Paper 5 (15%)

Required Texts

Finlayson, R. 2012. *Rhodes College Guide to Effective Writing*.

Gandhi, M.K. 2001. *Non-Violent Resistance (Satyagraha)*. Dover.

King, M.L. Jr., 1992. *I Have A Dream*. Harper.

Kurlanski, M. 2008. *Non-Violence: A History of a Dangerous Idea*. Modern Library