

# Politics and Nonviolence

## **POL 300Y1 (Y)**

Thursdays 12:00 -2:00 p.m.

**Professor Ramin Jahanbegloo**

### **Introduction**

Over the past hundred years, nonviolent action by ordinary people has accomplished massive social change, toppling dictators, overthrowing colonial governments, ending participation in unjust wars, rewriting oppressive laws, reconciling victims and perpetrators, and healing families and communities. Nonviolent action requires leadership, intelligence, creativity, moral and physical courage, self discipline, and brilliant strategy. Why then, do so many people believe that a nonviolent response to injustice or attack is unworkable, or “too idealistic”? Every major religion: Buddhism, Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, and Judaism, councils its followers to sanctify human life and treat all human beings as family. Why, then, do we continue to train young people to kill, maim, and terrorize others? Why do we support a military budget that is three times that of our major adversaries combined? Why do we call our country’s aggression “just” and “noble,” and our enemies’ aggression “unjust,” “mindless,” and “evil”? Why do we caricature and dehumanize people of other races as a prelude to our aggression against them? Why are we so reluctant to investigate the root causes of violence: poverty, oppression, ignorance, and fear?

### **COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

This course focuses on powerful, nonviolent strategies that have been used successfully by people all over the world to respond to global and local conflicts. This course will provide students with an opportunity to explore theories of nonviolence. "Nonviolence" is a nebulous, frequently misunderstood, frequently abused term. As we will see in this class, it can be used in very narrow or broad constructs and can be based on a wide variety of philosophies and practices. We will examine several of the main currents of nonviolent thought and practice (Gandhian, Christian, Buddhist, Muslim etc.) as approaches that have much to offer. Our approach to the works that we read will be simultaneously (or alternately) appreciative and skeptical. We will examine the theory and principles of nonviolence as well as the religious and philosophical underpinnings of their commitments. This course will address the issue of politics, social change and nonviolence through films and texts. Several films on the issue of nonviolence will be screened in class as preparation for discussions and response papers.

## **Course Goals**

- To understand some of the philosophies that motivate nonviolent action, including tenets of five major religions
- To learn how nonviolent social movements have worked in countries around the world
- To learn and practice some of the methods and strategies of nonviolent action
- To learn to respond to arguments that justify war and aggression
- To practice nonviolent action in the community, teach peace, and/or contribute to a nonviolent social movement

**Pre-requisites:** An interest in the study of nonviolence and other approaches to peace.

## **Course Requirements:**

Students are expected to attend all class meetings. They will be held responsible for all the material covered in readings and lectures. To ensure class participation and to spread out the work a bit, each student is required to be part of the group work (presented in class) concerning one of the topics listed in the syllabus in which they are interested. Each student is also expected to write a 15 to 20 page (typed, and double-spaced) research paper on one of the following related topics:

Martin Luther King  
Nonviolent Political Movements  
Mohandas Gandhi  
Nonviolence in the Face of War  
Abdul Ghaffar Khan  
The Peace Corps  
Civil Disobedience  
Thomas Merton  
Criminal Justice and Capital Punishment  
Leo Tolstoy  
Nonviolent Strategy  
Utopian Societies  
The Nobel Peace Prize  
The Traditional Peace Churches  
19<sup>th</sup> Century Peace Movements  
Mother Theresa  
Albert Einstein  
Nonviolence in Extraordinary Situations  
Albert Schweitzer  
Violence Against Animals

**Paper is due on January 28, 2009**

**No late papers will be accepted. The due date is a deadline**

Everyone must screen films critically and carefully. You are responsible for writing **one** response paper at home (minimum 5 pages, double-spaced) discussing and analyzing the approach to nonviolence in films screened during the course. There will be 4 screenings during the year, **BUT ONLY ONE RESPONSE PAPER. The response paper (5 pages only) should be handed in by March 25.**

**A NOTE ABOUT TEAMWORK:** Part of the class load is learning to work in teams. You will be taking responsibility for your learning as you read the course materials, follow the lectures and prepare *to* be active in in-class discussion. *Students will work in groups of five to complete a project* involving studying the topic of nonviolence in a "real-life" organization; some class time is provided for presentations of the group work. *Each presentation of five students should not be more than 30 minutes.* You can concentrate your group work on contemporary political issues (Chile, South Africa, Iran, Israel, Palestine, etc.) or develop one of the topics mentioned previously for the research paper:

**You cannot write your research paper and do your group work on the same topic.**

The Following Questions will be discussed in class:

*Define "violence" and "nonviolence"*

*Can Gandhi's nonviolent methods to promote social change be separated from his spirituality?*

*How did Martin Luther King, Jr. become a leader? Did his training prepare him for it?*

*What was King's understanding of nonviolence? Was it a tactic or a way of life?*

*How did it differ from Gandhi's nonviolence?*

*What are the opportunities and pitfalls in mixing religion and politics?*

*What is the relationship between individual nonviolence conversions and political nonviolence? Does Waging conflict nonviolently through advocacy and activism ideally ripens the conditions for transforming relationships and structures while stopping the cycle of direct and structural violence?*

**Grading Criteria:**

Response Papers	10%
Group Work	25%
Research Paper	25%
Final Exam	40%

**Required Readings:** ( you can find them at U of T bookstore)

Martin Luther King, Jr., I Have a Dream (writings and Speeches)

M.K Gandhi, Hind Swaraj, Or Indian Home Rule