The confluence of religion and violence in the modern world has become a common theme in mass media. News outlets regularly carry stories of individuals or groups engaging in violent behavior that is presented – by either the perpetrator or the media – as religious in nature. This class will examine the relationship between violence and religion, questioning how intimate that relationship is, what factors might explain it, and whether popular understandings of the relationship are accurate. The intention of the course is to raise challenging questions about religious violence and to suggest various theories that attempt to explain it.

Some of the questions we will address include:
- What are the causes of religious violence?
- Is violence an inherent possibility of all religions? If so, why?
- If there is no inherent connection between religion and violence, why do some people think that to be the case?
- Are there any discernible patterns or recurrent themes that characterize all or most religious violence?

Class Information:
Professor: Dr. Jason Blum
Class Meetings: Mondays, Wednesdays, & Fridays, 11:30-12:20
Classroom: CUNN 111 (Cunningham Theatre Center)
Office: Sloan B016
Office Hours: Tuesdays, 1:00-3:00 & Wednesdays, 2:00-4:00

If you would like to come to my office hours, please email me beforehand.
E-mail: jablum@davidson.edu (please contact me via email, not through the “Messages” function in Moodle)
The following texts are required reading for this class. They are all available at the Student Store:


**Instructional Goals**

Though the specific reading, writing, or research projects assigned across the many sections of Writing 101 courses vary by professor, all sections of the course embrace four learning outcomes:

1. Read texts closely and critically for analytic and rhetorical purposes.
2. Make fair and effective use of the work of others.
3. Draft and revise arguments.
4. Draw upon multimodal and archival resources (visual, auditory, textual, digital) to serve specific rhetorical goals.

**Student Responsibilities:**

Participation & Attendance: This portion of the grade is based on class attendance, response questions (more on that shortly), and contributions to class discussion. Especially as this is a seminar-style class, each student must read the assigned material before class and be prepared to discuss it in an informed manner at each class meeting. If you miss a class, it is your responsibility to copy class notes from 1 (or 2) of your classmates.

Note: After 3 unexcused absences, each additional unexcused absence results in 5 percentage points being subtracted from your final grade. An absence is only excused if I have told you that it is excused. Sending an email to tell me that you will miss class does not mean that an absence is excused. Should there be a conflict between any class session or major assignment and a religious holiday or observance, please let me know of your personal needs ahead of time.
**Initial Thoughts Paper:** This short, ungraded paper is due on the second day of class. You will write a brief (roughly 1.5-2 page) paper outlining your initial response to this prompt: “What (if anything) is the relationship between religion and violence? Both world history (think of the Crusades) and contemporary current events (terrorism) present us with numerous examples of the confluence of religion and violence. Why does this confluence exist, and what might explain it?”

You should not perform any research for this paper. Simply reflect on the question and write a brief paper detailing your initial thoughts in response to it. Students should bring a hard copy to class on the 24th and be prepared to share it.

**Response Questions:** For each class meeting during which we will discuss a reading assignment, you should email me one response question before class (ideally, at least 2 hours before we meet). Response questions may be brief – a couple sentences to a paragraph or so. They should engage substantively with the readings assigned for that day, demonstrating thoughtful reflection on them while also raising questions or issues that reflect your own ideas with regard to the readings. Response questions are not graded, but are part of your participation grade, and I may choose to share them with the class. Think of them as a way to develop your own thoughts before coming to class.

**Discussion Papers:** As a seminar-style course, class time will be spent primarily in discussions in which we will all participate. In order to facilitate these, every class meeting where we discuss readings will have two discussion leaders assigned to it (see the Discussion Paper Schedule on Moodle). Discussion leaders should prepare discussion papers with the expectation that they will be shared with the class. Discussion papers should be approximately 2 pages in length, and will do more than merely summarizing the reading in general:

*Directions for discussion papers 1 & 2:* Your first 2 discussion papers should focus on one or two particular claims or ideas that arise out of the readings and which you believe to be especially provocative, insightful, or problematic – in other words, worthy of class discussion. Discussion papers should summarize the particular idea or ideas on which you would like to focus (being sure to include citations) and explain why you find this claim or concept worthy of our attention. They should also include at least one question (but possibly more) to pose to the class as a whole.

*Directions for discussion papers 3 & 4:* For your second 2 discussion papers, extract at least 2 (but possibly 3) passages from the reading that you see as related to each other in some way. These passages might: address the same problem or concept; offer substantiating evidence for a particular claim; represent diverging
positions on a particular issue; or even seem to contradict each other. Explain what you see as the relationship between these passages and why they should be brought to our attention. Then pose at least one related question (but possibly more) for class discussion.

Questions posed in discussion papers will serve to launch discussion during that class meeting. Students should feel free to raise any questions they want in discussion papers: you may challenge an author’s conclusions, suggest that some concept needs further development or explanation, argue that a particular idea is especially perceptive or helpful, voice doubt about an assumption on which the text seems to rely, question the utility or application of a concept to the subject matter, apply a concept to an example beyond the text, etc. Students should email their discussion papers to the class (including the professor) the night before class meetings, as well as bring a hardcopy to class to be shared aloud. I encourage you also to think of the discussion papers as preparatory writing exercises; feel free to build on them (and the feedback they receive in class) for your course papers.

Since discussion papers play an important role in fostering class discussion and the schedule of them is set ahead of time, they cannot be submitted late. On the days that students serve as discussion leaders, they need not submit response questions (i.e., discussion papers replace response questions).

Course Papers: There are three major papers for the class. Directions for each paper are included below, at the end of the syllabus. Course papers should be approximately 7-8 pages long, double-spaced, written in 12-size Times New Roman font with normal margins, and have proper citations. Please use Chicago style citation (here is a helpful link: http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html).

Neither rough drafts nor final drafts of course papers may be submitted late. Failure to submit a rough draft (either to the professor or for peer review) results in ten percentage points being subtracted from the grade for that project. Late final drafts will be penalized ten percentage points per day late. Both rough and final drafts must be brought to class as hard copies on their due dates.

All written work must abide by the university’s honor code: https://www.davidson.edu/about/distinctly-davidson/honor-code

Plagiarized work will not receive credit. I recommend that you visit the Writing Program’s webpage dealing with the proper use of sources if you have any questions or concerns: http://davidsonwriter.redbrickroad.net/ethical-use-of-sources/. Also, do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions about the proper use of others’ work in your own writing.
**Grade Breakdown:**
- Initial thoughts paper: (ungraded)
- Discussion papers: 10%
- Participation & Attendance: 15%
- Course Paper #1: 25%
- Course Paper #2: 25%
- Course Paper #3: 25%

**Class Schedule**

Aug. 22 (Mon) – course intro

Aug. 24 (Wed) – initial thoughts papers

Aug. 26 (Fri) – Schwartz: introduction

Aug. 29 (Mon) – Schwartz: chap. 1, p. 15-25

Aug. 31 (Wed) – Schwartz: chap.1, p. 25-38

Sep. 2 (Fri) – Schwartz: chap.2, p. 39-55

Sep. 5 (Mon) – Schwartz: chap.2, p. 55-76

Sep. 7 (Wed) – Schwartz: chap.3, p. 77-97

Sep. 9 (Fri) – Schwartz: chap. 3, p. 97-119

Sep. 12 (Mon) – Schwartz: chap. 4, p. 120-133

Sep. 14 (Wed) – Schwartz: chap. 4, p. 133-142

Sep. 16 (Fri) – Schwartz: chap. 5, p. 143-159

Sep. 19 (Mon) – Schwartz: chap. 5, p. 159-176

Sep. 21 (Wed) – Juergensmeyer, introduction

Sep. 23 (Fri) – Juergensmeyer, chap. 1

Sep. 26 (Mon) – Juergensmeyer, chap. 2
Sep. 28 (Wed) – Juergensmeyer, chap. 3

Sep. 30 (Fri) – Juergensmeyer, chap. 4

Oct. 3 (Mon) – Juergensmeyer, chap. 5 / course paper #1: rough drafts due

Oct. 5 (Wed) – Juergensmeyer, chap. 6

Oct. 7 (Fri) – Juergensmeyer, chap. 7

Oct. 10 (Mon) – no class (fall break)

Oct. 12 (Wed) – Juergensmeyer, chap. 8

Oct. 14 (Fri) – Juergensmeyer, chap. 9

Oct. 17 (Mon) – Juergensmeyer, chap. 10 / course paper #1: rough drafts returned

Oct. 19 (Wed) – Juergensmeyer, chap. 11

Oct. 21 (Fri) – movie

Oct. 24 (Mon) – movie / course paper #1: final drafts due

Oct. 26 (Wed) – movie discussion

Oct. 28 (Fri) – Lincoln, chap. 1

Oct. 31 (Mon) – Lincoln, chap. 2

Nov. 2 (Wed) – course paper #2: in class peer review

Nov. 4 (Fri) – Lincoln, chap. 3

Nov. 7 (Mon) – Lincoln, chap. 4

Nov. 9 (Wed) – Lincoln, chap. 5 / course paper #2: final drafts due

Nov. 11 (Fri) – Library Research Workshop

Nov. 14 (Mon) – in-class debate

Nov. 16 (Wed) – Lincoln, chap. 6
Nov. 18 (Fri) – no class (AAR meeting)

Nov. 21 (Mon) – no class (AAR meeting)

Nov. 23 (Wed) – no class (Thanksgiving break)

Nov. 25 (Fri) – no class (Thanksgiving break)

Nov. 28 (Mon) – Lincoln, chap. 7

Nov. 30 (Wed) – course paper #3: in-class peer review

Dec. 2 (Fri) – course closure

Dec. 11 (Wed.) – course paper #3: final drafts due

Additional Information

Writing Resources:
Davidson College has a Writing Center that offers free tutoring for students who want to improve their writing. I encourage you to take advantage of the center with regard to any of the class assignments. Here is the link to their website:
https://www.davidson.edu/offices/ctl/students/writing-center

Davidson’s writing program also has a very helpful website called “Davidson Writer” with various tips on reading and engaging with documents, clarifying your thinking, and developing your writing, as well as guidance on revising, editing, and proofreading. I encourage all of you to spend some time on the site, familiarizing yourself with the resources offered there (you may notice that I’ve borrowed some ideas from it – it’s that good!). Here is the link:
http://composingarguments.redbrickroad.net/

Technology in the classroom:
As this class is a seminar, it is important that we are all present (both bodily and intellectually) in the classroom. Therefore, I request that no electronic devices be used during class. This includes cell phones, laptops, and tablets. Please do, however, take notes during class discussion. This can be done using paper and a pen or pencil. If you are unfamiliar with these tools, contact me and I will assist you in locating them.
Grades in this course mean the following:

A: Exceptional work that goes above & beyond the requirements of the assignment. "A" work demonstrates unusual insight and/or understanding, is extraordinarily clear and precise in its presentation, and is nearly or entirely free of technical errors.

B: Strong work that satisfies the assignment requirements entirely or nearly so. Technical mistakes and problems in presentation or argumentation are minimal, and do not substantially detract from the impact of the paper.

C: Acceptable work that adequately fulfills most of the assignment requirements.

D: Work that passably addresses some of the assignment requirements, but fails to address at least one or more major concerns, or demonstrates substantial problems in understanding, presentation, and/or argumentation.

F: Work that fails to address most of the assignment requirements, or demonstrates fundamental problems in comprehension and/or argumentation.

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Course Papers

Course Paper 1: Agenda Summary & Critique

Having read Schwartz’s *The Curse of Cain*, you will write a paper that: 1) summarizes its primary argument, making sure to highlight its main ideas, means of argumentation, and final conclusion; and 2) critiques that argument. Your first job, therefore, is to explain Schwartz’s intellectual agenda. This entails posing and answering a number of questions with regard to her work, each of which offers you leverage in terms of better understanding her text. Such questions include:

- What issues drive this essay?
- What ideas does it explore?
- What lines of inquiry does it develop?
- What is the writer trying to do in this text?
- What is the writer trying to accomplish by writing what she does?
These questions allow you comprehend the purpose and method of Schwartz’s text: how she makes her argument, what kinds of evidence she harnesses in order to make it, and what her ultimate goal is (the conclusion she seeks to demonstrate). I encourage you to visit the Davidson Writer website for further help in thinking about Schwartz’s intellectual agenda (see the subsection “Discerning a Writer’s Intellectual Agenda” under the “Responding” tab).

Your paper should also critique the text, answering the basic question: how convinced are you by her argument? This question may be addressed by considering the text’s weakest points and greatest strengths. Questions you might ask include (but are not limited to) the following:

- Does her evidence support her conclusion? Is there some way in which you think her evidence is lacking, or actually supports a different conclusion?
- On what assumptions or claims does her argument depend? Are these explicitly stated and defended in the text? Are they reasonable? Are there any unstated and/or potentially questionable assumptions lurking in the background of her writing?
- Do the text’s weak points undermine her project entirely, or could her argument be saved by making certain adjustments?
- Could her best insights be described in a different and more effective fashion?

I will comment on drafts of course paper #1, and then return them to you. Keep in mind that the closer to a finished draft your rough draft is, the more productive my comments will be for you.

Course Paper 2: Compare & Contrast

In chapters 7-10, Juergensmeyer explicates four concepts in seeking to explain the relationship between religion and violence. Which of these concepts do you think is most useful, and why? For this paper, you should reflect on the four primary concepts that Juergensmeyer uses to explain the relationship between religions and violence, and then argue for whichever one you think is most effective in explaining that relationship. This means explaining which concept has the greatest explanatory power with regard to the relationship between religion and violence.

One way to approach this project would be to revisit the case studies that comprise the first section of the book (chapters 2-6) and to reconsider them in light of the concepts elaborated on in the latter section of the text (“The Logic of Religious Violence”). Questions you might think about include:

- Do you see any of these concepts operating in all of the cases, or most of them?
Do you consider any one of Juergensmeyer’s concepts to be implicit in all or some of the others? Is it difficult to make sense of one or some of the concepts without another one that seems more central in some fashion?

Would you argue that one of these concepts is “deeper” than the others, capturing something more fundamental to the relationship between religion and violence than the others?

Another way to approach this question might be to try to order his four concepts in terms of importance, ranking each of them in relation to the others. Approaching the question in this fashion might be a useful way of considering the individual merits of each concept in relation to the other three.

Keep in mind that you need not argue that the other three concepts are entirely unhelpful or fundamentally flawed; it is likely that a more balanced argument that acknowledges the utility of at least some (or perhaps all) of his other ideas, while clearly preferring one of them, will make for a more nuanced and effective analysis of his text. Absolute claims (e.g., “Juergensmeyer’s concept of Cosmic War is completely useless…” or “Theater of Terror is the only concept we need in order to explain…”) are typically harder to defend and often over-simplify an issue.

Course paper #2 will undergo peer review in class. I will not comment on rough drafts.

Course Paper 3: Explaining ISIS

ISIS (Islamic State/ISIL/IS) is arguably the most prominent contemporary example of the confluence of religion and violence. For this paper, you will formulate and explain your own theory explaining the relationship between religion and violence in the particular case of ISIS. The paper should draw on at least 7 sources; three of these may be class texts, but they need not be. Your research should include both information on ISIS – their activities, origins, public statements, etc. – and theoretical work on the relationship between religion and violence.

Although your theory should draw on various sources, the explanation itself must be yours. You should therefore take care to explain how the ideas you draw upon relate to each other, seeking to devise a coherent and clear theory of your own. Your goal here is to convince your audience that your theory offers an effective explanation of the relationship between religion and violence in the case of ISIS. You might argue that there is some inherent connection between religion and violence, or you might argue that that relationship is instead explained largely or entirely by other factors that have nothing to do with religion per se.
Note: The internet is both a convenient and effective means of accessing vast amounts of valuable information, and a woefully misleading miasma of wild speculation, irresponsible conjecture, and outright fabrications. While you will likely use it in researching your final course paper, be careful not to be misled by bad information. If you have any doubts about a source’s reliability, please check with me. I am happy to help you sift the wheat from the chaff.

Remember that, at this point in the course, you have developed a certain degree of expertise on this topic, very likely more than that of the average citizen. Draw on that knowledge – arising from the course texts, class discussions, and your own research – in developing your paper. Some goals to keep in mind in forming your paper:

- make good use of evidence
- be clear, explicit, and precise in your reasoning
- stipulate definitions as needed
- clearly distinguish between your own voice and that of other authors whose work you use
- consider what the limits of your theory might be (explicitly identifying and discussing any limitations to your theory demonstrates a good degree of reflectiveness about your work and ultimately makes for a stronger argument).

Course paper #3 will undergo peer review in class. I will not comment on rough drafts.