

LECTURE / DISCUSSION / DEBATE
CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE AND POLITICAL VIOLENCE

Terms and concepts to know:

Civil disobedience vs. lawbreaking
Conscientious refusal
Political violence and liberalism
Terrorism and political violence
The state and political violence

Democracy and obedience
The Civil Rights Movement
Salmi's 4 types of political violence
Marx, Lenin, and Mao
Force / violence distinction

Study and discussion questions:

1. Does the fact that a law was passed through a democratic process give us a special reason for obeying it?
2. Can a person who engages in civil disobedience give a coherent answer to the accusation that 'if everybody did that, there would be a collapse in social order'?
3. Is there a valid distinction between civil disobedience and conscientious refusal?
4. Was the U.S. Civil Rights Movement really an example of civil disobedience?
5. Chris Hedges argued back in the summer of 2012 that the Occupy movement would return as a force of civil disobedience. However, this has not as yet materialized. Do you believe it will? What do you think it will take?
6. Explain why Martin Luther King may have come to the conclusion that the white moderate's devotion to order has been "the Negro's greatest stumbling block" rather than the persecutions of the White Citizen's Council or the Ku Klux Klan.
7. Is it possible to distinguish between a practitioner of political violence and a freedom fighter?
8. What role does the liberal tradition play in defining political violence? Is it correct to regard the state itself as a violent institution?
9. Do you agree with the argument that the war on Iraq has exacerbated rather than reduced the problem of political violence?
10. In a short article by Kellie Jackson, it is argued that political violence is downplayed (or sanctified) in modern public education. Do you agree? What did your K-12 education stress?
11. Ginsberg argues that violence works and points to several instances where this has been the case (especially in the American history of imperialism). This goes against a lot of what we learn, at least rhetorically. Are there any weaknesses in his argument? If so, where?

Readings:

Hoffman and Graham: Chapters 19 and 20.

Video:

The Weather Underground. A documentary on 1960s radical movement.