

**HR/ANTH 261: Anthropology of Violence and Suffering**  
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Why do acts of violence continue to grow in the 'modern' world? In what ways has violence become naturalized in the contemporary world? In this course, we will consider how acts of violence challenge and support modern ideas of humanity, raising important questions about what it means to be human today. These questions lie at the heart of anthropological thinking and also structure contemporary discussions of human rights. Anthropology's commitment to "local culture" and cultural diversity has meant that anthropologists often position themselves in critical opposition to "universal values," which have been used to address various forms of violence in the contemporary world. The course will approach different forms of violence, including ethnic and communal conflicts, colonial education, torture and its individualizing effects, acts of terror and institutionalized fear, and rituals of bodily pain that mark individuals' inclusion or exclusion from a social group. The course is organized around three central concerns. First, we will discuss violence as a means of producing and consolidating social and political power, and exerting political control. Second, we will look at forms of violence that have generated questions about "universal rights" of humanity versus culturally specific practices, such as widow burning in India and female genital mutilation in postcolonial Africa. In these examples, we explore gendered dimensions in the experience of violence among perpetrators, victims, and survivors. Finally, we will look at the ways human rights institutions have sought to address the profundity of human suffering and pain, and ask in what ways have they succeeded and/or failed. Readings will range from theoretical texts, anthropological ethnographies, as well as popular representations of violence in the media and film. *Class size: 22*