ENGL653  
The Violent Aesthetic

COURSE DESCRIPTION:
While the representation of violence has been remarkably common in modern cultural and aesthetic practices, it has rarely been studied carefully unless it is either to condemn or promote its representation. Cultural critics convey a common worry about the moral and political repercussions of represented or aestheticized violence. Yet the practice of presenting violence in aesthetic form is nearly ubiquitous. Rigorous study of violence and its repercussions promises to yield a renewed understanding of the multiple and complex intersections of political and artistic culture. Some of the questions this course will address will include: What draws the victims and perpetrators of violence to record or give voice to the experience of brutality? And why is violence aesthetically compelling for audiences?

TEXTS:
Susan Sontag: Regarding the Pain of Others  
Toni Morrison: Beloved  
Ruth Kluger: Still Alive  
Primo Levi: Survival In Auschwitz  
Leslie Marmon Silko: Almanac of the Dead  
Bruce Robbins: Perpetual War: Cosmopolitanism from the Viewpoint of Violence  
Bapsi Sidhwa: Cracking India  
Tim O’Brien: The Things They Carried  
Yusef Komunyakaa: Dien Cai Dau  
Arundhati Roy: The God of Small Things  
Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie: Purple Hibiscus  
Helon Habila: Waiting for an Angel  
Slavoj Zizek: Violence  
Cathy Caruth: Literature from the Ashes

ASSIGNMENTS:
Each student will be asked to write four assignments: three brief and in preparation for weekly meetings, the last lengthier, an opportunity to practice writing for journal publication. 1) Students will write an introduction to a text studied that week and distribute that introduction via eCampus in advance of the class meeting. Students will also circulate discussions topics and research questions. 2) The discussion topics will ask students to think about how they would teach a text through student discussion by proposing topics that would further students understanding of literary and cultural analysis. 3) The research questions assignment will encourage students to think about pursuing research in thematic and methodological terms as well as by pursuing article by book titles and author names. 4) At the end of the term, students will submit a first draft of a prospective journal article (approximately 15 pages).