

## **Caltech-Huntington Humanities Collaboration Module: Violence and Order Past and Present**

This document describes the two-year research module, under the umbrella of the Caltech-Huntington Humanities Collaborations (CHHC) program, on violence and order in historical perspective. This multidisciplinary module will bring together scholars from the California Institute of Technology, The Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens, and other institutions to study the various roles that violence could play in political and social order, as well as the possible norms and cultural attitudes that governed its use. The module will focus to a large degree on the pre-modern world and especially pre-modern Europe. It will nevertheless contribute in important ways to broader discussions of violence in the modern world, discussions that are limited by an incomplete grasp both of modern violence's historical roots and the historical contingency of the terms and assumptions that scholars bring to the table as they try to understand it.

The module will treat violence in a number of forms and from a number of perspectives. The term "violence" as currently used comprises the direct application of force with actual or intended destructive consequences. It can also encompass rhetorical violence, e.g., invective, polemic, or propaganda, as well as emotional violence, e.g., the use or threat of physical violence in order to provoke terror. Violence is not, however, a static, atemporal concept; understanding it requires understanding the social and cultural matrices in which it is used. The effort raises a series of very important questions. What did people in the past mean by the term "violence," if they used it at all? How did they describe actions that we would call violent? How did violence fit into their worldviews? What acts of violence did they think were wrong, and what were acceptable, even positive? By what standards did they make these judgments? Laws? Social norms? Both? Did the norms of violence available to them all match, or did they compete with or even contradict each other? How was violence itself exercised, i.e., by what methods or through what media (e.g., weapons or literature), through what political institutions (e.g., governments or other organized channels for wielding and experiencing political power) and/or through what social and cultural structures (e.g., social hierarchies and conventions, ideas about honor or right order)? How did all of this change over time? Finally, and perhaps most important, did violence of necessity undermine or disrupt order, or could it serve or help to maintain it?

In short, this CHHC module will explore a crucial aspect of the history of power and the competition for power, as expressed through violence but also in law and other kinds of norms, in politics, government and other kinds of institutions, and in beliefs and ideologies. Just as, or perhaps more important, however: it will contribute significantly to

the current scholarship on violence and political/social order in modern societies. This is a subject that has drawn a great deal of attention recently, to some degree within established social science disciplines but most prominently in the burgeoning field of terrorism studies. Much of the current work in this field draws on examples from the past to help it understand the present with, however, mixed results. Political scientists, economists and other social scientists, as well as students of international relations and terrorism, all too often do not understand the past societies to which they look for inspiration, or rely on outdated literature for information about them. As a result they often, frankly, get it wrong.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, they tend to treat their categories of analysis as timeless absolutes; their work is too often shaped by modern western assumptions about proper order and legitimate behavior, and even about what constitutes violence. They are therefore poorly equipped to understand other possible attitudes and sets of norms that might underlie the behavior of non-western or non-state actors. This makes it more difficult for them to grasp the full range of human attitudes towards and uses of violence.

The study of violence in the past by those who work on the past provides a necessary corrective. This module's work will be anchored in pre-modern Europe, especially the centuries between classical antiquity and the Protestant Reformation. The thousand years or so between the end of the Roman Empire in the West and the Reformation were ones of dynamic and creative change, in which different uses and understandings of violence rose and fell or competed with each other, in contexts shaped by often profound political, social, and economic transformations. They saw what from the modern perspective might seem like stateless societies, as well as the development of political structures that over time began to resemble the modern state with its claim to a monopoly on the use of violence. They saw changes over time in the meaning of law and its relationship to other social norms and the development of a broad variety of legal and judicial institutions that interacted with extra-legal practices in complex ways. They saw profound changes in the available media through which political combatants could wield violence both physical and rhetorical, and influence the behavior of political actors. It is in the course of these developments that the conditions, institutions, and norms that govern modern western attitudes towards violence began, slowly, unevenly, and not without considerable resistance, to emerge. In short, pre-modern Europe presents the material to study a uniquely broad range of attitudes towards violence and order, while at the same time highlighting both the origins and historical contingency of modern assumptions about them.

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, P. Kurrild-Klitgard and G. Tinggaard Svendsen, "Rational bandits: Plunder, public goods, and the Vikings." *Public Choice* 117 (2003): 255–272; D. C. North, J. J. Wallis, and B. R. Weingast, *Violence and Social Orders: A Conceptual Framework for Interpreting Recorded Human History* (Cambridge, 2009).

To explore violence in this period, the module will bring together people from a variety of disciplines. History and literature will form the primary axis, reflecting the current population of Caltech and The Huntington. The module will be shaped initially by the current work of Caltech's Assistant Professor of English Jennifer Jahner and Professor of History Warren Brown. Jahner is completing a book on literature and law as weapons in political conflict in twelfth and thirteenth-century England and their role in provoking and directing the often vicious physical violence that characterized struggles for power.<sup>2</sup> Brown has written a book on the norms governing violence from the end of Roman late antiquity to the fifteenth century and has recently embarked on a new project on the prehistory of terrorism.<sup>3</sup>

From this basis, the module will draw in other scholars from Caltech and from outside institutions to enhance and expand it to encompass different eras and parts of the world. Caltech already enjoys the presence of Philip Hoffman, the Rea A. and Lela G. Axline Professor of Business Economics and Professor of History, who recently completed a book on the West's development of the technology of violence and its ramifications for the modern global landscape of political and cultural power. William R. Kenan, Jr., Professor of History and Social Science Morgan Kousser works on modern American legal and constitutional history and is very interested in political conflict. Caltech's incoming (summer 2016) Assistant Professor of History Maura Dykstra is working on nineteenth and twentieth century China to learn how efforts to control taxation by central governments triggered resistance and conflict in local communities and how this in turn shaped both local societies and central authority. At The Huntington, where the slate of fellows changes from month to month and from year to year, the module's activities will include any interested Huntington fellows working on these or related issues in any context during the relevant time frame.

In addition to the scholars already present in Pasadena and San Marino, this module also will include two senior scholars in residence at The Huntington for one year each and a postdoctoral instructor at Caltech for two years. In addition, several short-term visitors are expected for periods of up to four weeks throughout the module's term. Activities will encompass a seminar series and short-term workshops at Caltech and a conference at The Huntington.

The senior fellows at The Huntington will be selected from applicants at the Assistant or early Associate Professor levels. The Huntington has a battery of resources that will be available to these fellows. Its collections are especially rich in manuscript materials

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<sup>2</sup> *A Conjured Realm: Politics and Poetry in the Era of Magna Carta* (forthcoming).

<sup>3</sup> *Violence in Medieval Europe* (Longman, 2011); "Instrumental Terror in Medieval Europe," in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Terrorism* (Oxford, 2013); "The Prehistory of Terrorism," in *The Oxford Handbook of Terrorism* (Oxford, forthcoming).

related to the English common law; it also contains sources on customary law in France and on medieval canon law. For scholars interested in heresy and political responses to it, The Huntington boasts an important collection of documents concerning the 14<sup>th</sup> century English reformer John Wycliffe. In addition, The Huntington's incunabula and early print collections offer great resources on violence, religion, and territorial conflict into the early modern period. Those who apply to join this module would therefore most likely work on high or late medieval legal history, either in England or in France, with a focus on politics, religion, territorial conflict, and violence in the high and late middle ages, and possibly even into the early modern period.

Alongside the senior fellows, a postdoctoral scholar will be in residence at Caltech for two years; in addition to working within the context of the module, he or she will teach two ten-week courses at Caltech that reflect the module's preoccupations. The search here encompasses the entire pre-modern world, including the Mediterranean both Christian and Islamic, Eastern Europe and Scandinavia, and possibly even China and Japan.

The module will end with a major conference at The Huntington, to present both to the scholarly community and the wider public what has been done during the module and its implications for our understanding of the various roles that violence can play in political and social order as well as disorder.