

**HIST 1635 (S2024)**  
**Histories of Religion & Violence**  
*An SNF Paideia Program Course*

Location TBD  
 T/Th 3:30-5

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*Frans Hogenberg Engraving of "Massacre dans la Ville de Paris", c. 1572.*

**Course Description:**

Is there any historical basis for thinking that religion and good citizenship can coincide? The American political project was designed, according to many of its original activists as well as contemporary theorists across the political spectrum, both to establish a safe haven for free religious practice \*and\* to protect the public from religious violence. That second concern may have been waning as the 21st century ushered in what was famously described as "A Secular Age", but in the following decade some sociologists observed a new surge in Global Religion. With religion hardly on the brink of extinction, it is worthwhile for modern citizens to

re-examine the diverse narratives about religion and violence that have structured modern politics.

While this class will prioritize the exploration of accounts of medieval and early modern religious violence that were pivotal to highly influential theories of American democratic government, it will also consider both more ancient and more contemporary histories, such as religious origin stories, 19th century histories of "the warfare between religion and science", and 21st century accounts of global religious violence, religious non-violence, and state violence against religion. It also will lead students to reflect both critically and constructively about fundamental theories of religion and violence as they engage in an interdisciplinary and collaborative investigation of primary sources, sacred texts, local sites of contestation, and contemporary controversies. In the process, students will develop vital capacities for civic engagement within our religiously (and non-religiously) pluralistic polity, especially as religious and political identity become increasingly intertwined and follow alarming trends of polarization.

**No Pre-requisites, Distribution Reqs Fulfilled:**

This introductory seminar may be taken to fulfill the following requirements for Penn History Majors: Pre-1800, SEM, Transregional, and Intellectual History Concentration.

**Readings:** Approximately 50-60 pages per week with selections from primary sources and scholarship, including (for example) from the Bible, Quran, and Bhagavad Gita; accounts of martyrs and crusaders; Roman law and inquisition records; Aquinas's *Summa Theologiae* and Las Casas's *Defense of the Indians*; the Aztec *Annals Cuauhtinchan* and FBI records; John Rawls' *Political Liberalism* and William Cavanaugh's *Myth of Religious Violence*; Martin Luther King, Jr., and Mahatma Gandhi; René Girard and Natalie Zemon Davis.

**Attendance, Assignments, Grading:**

This class meets in-person: attendance at each session is necessary for the health of the seminar and the developments of the civil discourse skills that we will be pursuing. Assignments and Grade Distributions are sketched provisionally as follows:

- Participation (incl. Weekly Discussion Questions & shared Sacred Text Database): 35%
- Midterm Exam (2/29): 25%
- Final Presentation (4/30) & Paper (7-10pp, due 5/10): 40%

**Guest Speakers & Excursions:** This new SNF Paideia course is intended to offer students distinctive opportunities to engage with guest speakers who will bring together some of the field's most eminent thinkers with newer scholarly voices. The course is also meant to include a visit to the Penn Museum as well as to the museum district of Old City Philadelphia.