

**Humboldt State University
Department of Social Work**

**Beyond Left and Right –
the non-violent social action of Michael Moore**

SW 494 / THEA 393 / SOC 480

1 unit (credit/no credit)

Spring, 2004
Saturday, April 17
Saturday, April 24
Saturday, May 1
12:00pm-3:30pm

Science B 135

Instructor: Ronnie Swartz
Office: Library 19
Phone: 826-4562
Email: swartz@humboldt.edu

Office Hours:
Tuesdays, 1:00pm-3:00pm

There are a lot of things to be concerned about, even outraged about, in the United States today. Moving from talking about social conditions to doing something about social conditions is not as challenging as some might suggest.

Through the films of Michael Moore, we will explore contemporary social issues related to crime, violence, unemployment, welfare, corporate personhood, free trade, racism, gender equity, and labor. Following this exploration we will consider ways to engage in social action and social change with a commitment to non-violence. Workshop participants will then be able to implement strategies in their lives and relationships that will bring about the worlds they envision.

Book

Ingram, C. (1990). *In the Footsteps of Gandhi: Conversations with Spiritual Social Activists*. Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press.

Blackboard

Except for the book, the readings for class are accessible through Blackboard under “Readings”.

There are six “Discussion Boards” available in Blackboard. These are places to post messages, ask questions, raise concerns, make announcements, etc., *that relate to the topic of the Discussion Board*. There is one for before class starts, one for general postings after the class begins, one for each film, and one for the subject of non-violence.

To use Blackboard, go to blackboard.humboldt.edu and use your HSU email address (before the “@humboldt.edu” part) as your username and your *new HSU ID* number as your password (unless you’ve already changed this).

Credit

If you follow the guidelines I’ve outlined for the paper below, and you come to each of the three classes (unless you make arrangements with me *prior to the first class*) you will receive credit for the class.

Paper

People who are taking the class for credit will need to write a paper that is *at least 3 pages, single-spaced*, which reflects on the following questions:

- What are you personally committed to?
- How would people know this about you?
- Where does this commitment come from?
- What are the issues in relation to this commitment, such as research, other people's work, and personal stories?
- What can you do to engage in non-violent social action around this commitment?
- Name four people that you'd like to have review this paper so you have an audience to bear witness to your commitment.

After you've completed the finished product, print out four copies besides the copy that you will hand in to me. Share these copies of your paper with the people you noted at the end and *get at least two of these people to sign something that you attach to the copy you hand in to me* attesting to their having reviewed this document of your commitment. **The paper, having been read and reviewed by two other people, is due in my box by 12:00pm, Friday, May 14.**

The thinking around this process is twofold. One: it will not be possible for me to offer detailed responses to each of your papers as there are too many people in this class for me to do so. Two: purposes, commitments, and intentions we have in life are made richer by publicly announcing them to a community of witnesses. Having an audience like this within which positions are circulated allows for the performances of meaning. Here we have *thought into action*.

April 17 - Roger & Me

Reading:

- *In The Footsteps of Gandhi*, pages 1-122.
- Kupfer, D. (2003). The Progressive Interview: Utah Phillips. *The Progressive*, September, 2003, 35-39. [On Blackboard].

Topics for Discussion:

- Labor, workers' rights, and living wages
- Corporate personhood
- (Un)employment and "social problems" (e.g., homelessness, alcohol and other drug abuse, crime, mental health)

April 24 - The Big One

Reading:

- *In The Footsteps of Gandhi*, pages 123-200.
- Browse the "Michael Moore debunking" websites on Blackboard

Topics for Discussion:

- Free trade
- Welfare (e.g., social and corporate)
- The Environment

May 1 - Bowling for Columbine

Reading:

- *In The Footsteps of Gandhi*, pages 201-284.
- "Worldometers," osEarth. [On Blackboard].
- "What the World Wants," osEarth. [On Blackboard].
- "What steps can I take to create change?" [on Blackboard]

Topics for Discussion:

- Violence
- Militarism
- Racism and gender equity