

Reflection paper #1
Due in class Wednesday, September 15th
Theoretical Foundations: Crowds, Ritual or Demonic Males?

The readings this week are all meant to give different perspectives of the problem of violence and focus on the phenomenon from the level of biology to the level of international relations. For example, evolutionary biological anthropologists Joseph H. Manson and Richard Wrangham present the aggressive behavior of chimpanzees and humans as an aspect of a biological and predominantly male “nature”. Violent attacks against members of the same species (conspecifics) secure resources, as well as other ends. Anthony Giddens is a sociologist known for his analysis of violence and the modern state. He posits that violence may occur when there is a challenge to the social order, whether between nations or individuals. René Girard, a French historian by training, has spent much of his career analyzing the classics of the western literary tradition. He focuses on collective violence as the result of a process of blaming others that occurs when the security of the group is threatened. Anthropologist Stanley Tambiah offers a complex perspective of collective violence as phenomenon in which crowds or mobs use violence in order to eliminate perceived social differences within or between social groups. Each piece claims that a certain rationality, psychological process, logic, or socio-cultural pattern of behavior motivates individuals, groups, nations, and even primates to attack “others,” however defined. Choose two of this section’s readings and write how the author(s) would respond to the following statement:

“Violence is a problem of the emotions rather than one of power differences in a social group.”