Many observers see intransigent ethnic conflicts as the greatest contemporary threat to peace. While some of these conflicts, such as in Sri Lanka or Northern Ireland, are long-term disputes, others develop an unexpected intensity in a very short time. Clearly there is widespread interest in understanding the origin, escalation, and peaceful settlement of ethnic conflicts. While a number of frameworks exist for the examination of ethnic conflict, the one developed here emphasizes the role of culture and identity in these conflicts. It focuses on the power of symbolic phenomena such as the language of street signs in Montreal and Bratislava, Orange Order marches in Northern Ireland, and religious sites and imagery in the Jerusalem. Underlying this emphasis is the central hypothesis that identity and threats to identity that are embedded in cultural practices are at the core of many ethnic conflicts. This hypothesis says that successful conflict resolution must consider cultural, as well as political, dynamics if it is to be successful. To examine the role of culture in ethnic conflict this course will ask general questions about the importance symbolic and ritual in the definition of the concrete interests and culturally rooted interpretations that drive ethnic conflicts. Through the case studies the course will develop an analysis of how culture offers constraints and opportunities to governments and leaders to move ethnic conflicts from contention to cooperation.

The goal of this course is analyze approaches to culture (and symbolic and ritual action) for understanding both the escalation and deescalation of ethnic conflict. Some weeks the readings and class discussions will emphasize theoretical questions such as the nature of ethnic identity and culture while other weeks we will consider the role of culture in specific long-term ethnic conflicts. However, what is the semester long focus is to develop connections between theory and specific cases. The readings and discussions will introduce a number of relevant cases from many parts of the world; however, students many have an interest in other cases that are not covered and you are encouraged to bring them into the discussions and to do their term paper on any case in which culture plays a core role in an identify conflict.

**Expectation and assignments.** There is a good deal of reading assigned and classes will be focused discussion based to explore ideas in the readings, student reactions to them, and the link between theory and the cases authors present. Students will write two or three short papers and a term paper. (Co-authored term papers are encouraged but not required.) In addition, students will prepare biweekly ungraded (but required) comments in response to the readings or any other issues which are relevant to the course’s questions. These comments are to be a paragraph to a page in length and are to be handed in at the beginning of each class and will be used to help structure the discussion for that day. Grading will be based on contributing to class discussions and getting in the biweekly comments on time (30%), the short papers (30%), and the term paper (40%).

**REQUIRED BOOKS**

BLACKBOARD ELECTRONIC RESERVE READINGS

Political Science 348-3


**READING ASSIGNMENTS**

Week 1: January 16-18: **Introduction**

January 17: **The Political Psychology of Canadian Identity** (film)

January 19: **Why and How Do Groups Fight About Culture?**
2. Eric Hobsbawm, “The nation as invented tradition”

Consider the role of culture in the conflict in ethnic conflict. What is culture and why does cultural expression become the focal point of bitter disputes? Why does one group care what language others speak? how others celebrate a holiday? what another group’s religious practices are? A central argument this semester is that while on the surface culture is what people fight about that cultural conflicts are so intense because they represent deeper identity issues that invoke fear and threat to groups and individuals. This means that culture and cultural differences don’t cause conflicts; people do, so how do people use culture when they fight with each other? Rudolph and Rudolph provide a dramatic example from India, while Ross’ article considers various approaches to the study of culture and politics arguing that questions of identity should have a central role.

Week 2: January 23-25: **The Intersection of Culture, Identity, and Ethnic Conflict**

2. Donald L. Horowitz, “The Primordialists”

If identity is at the core of bitter ethnic conflicts, it is important to be clear what we mean by ethnicity and what is the nature of ethnicity as a social identity. Horowitz offers a wide-ranging discussion to help you understand the nature of ethnicity. Smith connects ethnic identity, beliefs about descent and the idea of the nation. Volkan’s discussion of Serbian identity and their loss at the Battle of Kosovo in 1389 illustrates quite well Smith’s points and demonstrates the psychocultural dimensions of ethnic identity and its power in political conflict. Ross’ article spells out the dynamics of identity in ethnic conflict. It emphasizes the concepts of psychocultural narratives and dramas. Narratives are explanations for events and serve as reflectors, exacerbaters, and causes of conflict and shape how people respond to it. Cohen argues that
culture provides a resource for political organization and mobilization in settings where formal political organization and action is not likely to be successful.

Week 3: Jan. 30-Feb. 1. **Monuments, Memorials and Memory**


Public monuments and permanent buildings are powerful efforts to place social and political markers on a physical landscape. They assert a connection between the past, present and future making claims about sacrifice, identity, and ownership. The monuments we easily see upon a visit to a new city or country are not the only ones of relevance, however. Archeological records have become increasingly important in the assertion of group claims. Consider, however, why, for a psychocultural perspective, the past matters so much and can become such a powerful basis for ethnic claims and conflicts.

Weeks 4-5: Feb 6-15: **Museums and the Politics of Public Memory**

February 6-8: **Who controls a narrative and how do they control it?**


Once a museum is built, the narratives it recounts seem “natural.” However, as Linenthal’s account makes clear, museums are also social and cultural constructions and important decisions that make, implicitly or explicitly, clear accounts of inclusion and exclusion. In this study of the Holocaust Museum in Washington and in other books he has written, Linenthal describes the politics of memorial sites such as Gettysburg, Little Bighorn and Oklahoma City. The theme running through his works is the existence of multiple narratives in all of these situations and ways in which museums privilege certain ones over others.

February 13-15: **Museums and Monuments in the New South Africa**


What happens when a racialized society like South Africa is transformed into a democratic “rainbow nation”? What is to be done with the old regime’s memorials, museums, and street names? In the former Soviet Union the answer was clear—they were removed. In South Africa a different decision was made and these articles discuss the transformation of older Afrikaner sites and the construction of newer post-Apartheid ones. The long-term question is the extent to which the two can successfully coexist and contribute to a democratic South Africa.

Week 6: February 20-22: **Symbolic Conflicts over Parades and Festivals in the British Isles**


Jarman provides an excellent description of the contentious nature of parades and other visual displays in Northern Ireland. Why is it that parades are so conflict laden there? How are parades an expression of the long-term conflict in the region? What does Jarman mean by the “performance of memory”? How do groups stake claims to territory, assert political dominance, and articulate their identity through symbolic and ritual actions such as parades, wall murals,
and the recovery of a dying language? Cohen’s chapters come from his larger study of the Notting Hill carnival in London and its evolution over a 20-year period. Consider how the carnival helps West Indians articulate their identity in Britain which is related to an argument he has made for a long time that cultural organization is a mechanism to achieve political goals in many contexts. Consider the wider relevance of Cohen’s argument especially with regard to the politics of music and art.

Week 7: February 27- March 1: Clothing and Bodily Displays of Identity: Islamic Headscarves in France
1. Marc Howard Ross, “Dressed to Express?: Islamic Headscarves in French Schools”
2. Sarah V. Wayland, “Religious Expressions in Public Schools: Kirpans in Canada, Hijab in France”

For over 15 years now France has experienced a series of psychocultural dramas over the question of school girls wearing Islamic headscarves. In 2003 the country made it illegal for students to wear conspicuous religious signs in school. What is at stake? Why have issues such as when is a bandanna a religious sign so preoccupied a country that seemingly has no dress code? One answer is that the issue has engaged two competing narratives concerning the nature of the French nation and that neither side can relax its position because core issues of identity are at stake. Wayland, in comparing Canada and France, outlines a striking contrast between two different ways to manage multicultural expressions.

SPRING BREAK

Week 8: March 13-15: Language, Identity, and Conflict in Catalonia

As in Quebec, in Catalonia, a focal point of conflict is the status and use of a regional language as a small nation without a state seeks to maintain its identity and existence. In both cases the outcome is very similar but followed a very different historical path. The Keating and Laitin articles provide important details about Catalan-Spanish relations, while Hargreaves and Ferrando offer a striking case of cultural contestation around identity issues that never turned violent and in the end produced a good enough outcome for all parties. Language use is sometimes an explosive issue—just think about the US debate about bilingual education and “English Only” policies. Why is the politics of language so emotionally charged?

Weeks 9-10: March 20- March 29: Sacred Spaces and Ethnic Conflict

March 27-29: Contesting Jerusalem’s Sacred Spaces
4. Al-Quds University. “Jerusalem History.”

Many see Jerusalem and particularly its holy sites as the epicenter of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This set of readings introduces the concept of sacred places asking how the narratives
surrounding them are central to group identity, examining why conflicts around these spaces are so intense, and considering what each side does in making its case. In Jerusalem, this takes us to issues of history, archaeology, and politics and leaves us with the puzzling question of when, if ever, groups can either develop more inclusive narratives or develop arrangements for sharing sacred places.

NO CLASS MARCH 22

Week 11: April 3-5: Religious Sites and Ethnic Conflict in South Asia


Friedland and Hecht make the case for many parallels between Jerusalem and Ayodhya where ethno-religious conflict is as bitter in today as it is anywhere. In India and Sri Lanka religious based violence is a regular occurrence. In India the destruction of the Mosque at Ayodhya and the rise of the BJP are associated with the transformation of an effort to transform what was ostensibly a secular state into a Hindu one. Sovereignty (whatever that means) is what each group says they want. On what basis might competing claims be decided? Or is this the wrong question? Is there a need for a redefinition of the issue and the development of a solution in which the core of each side’s claims are recognized? Can holy sites be shared and if so, what would be required for this to occur?

Week 12: April 10-12: Race and America’s Symbolic Landscape

1. Carolyn Marvin and David W. Ingle, “Dismemberment and Reconstruction: The Domain of the Popular and its Flag,”
3. Brian Black and Bryn Varley. "Contesting the Sacred: Preservation and Meaning on Richmond’s Monument Avenue"

Groucho Marx reportedly asked Sigmund Freud, “When is a cigar just a good smoke?” The same question sort of question can be asked about flags and monuments and archaeological findings. Are they ever just a piece of cloth, stone or metal? Consider how these objects evoke the powerful feelings around the issues of race and slavery in the United States and how these disputes are part of much deeper conflicts in American society.

Weeks 13-14: April 17-26: Synthesis and conclusions and discussion of student projects