

New York University  
Liberal Studies Program  
Global Topics Course  
11:00-12:15 194M 209

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12/28/2015 revisions

## **International Human Rights**

***“Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world...”Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948***

***“The idea of human rights must be voiced through compelling forms of communication to construct political will for solidarity. Once we recognize suffering, we must speak rights to power.” Alison Brysk, *Speaking Rights to Power*, 40.***

***“Desaparecido/a (noun. Something that or someone who disappeared).”  
Marguerite Feitlowitz, *A Lexicon of Terror: Argentina & the Legacies of Torture****

The course traces the development and mechanisms of human rights norms and agencies in the post World War Two world through exploring the politics, history and cultural dimensions of human rights. And, in doing so, this multidisciplinary GLS topics course continues themes from Social and Cultural Foundations from concepts of human nature to ideas of how to construct a better society. How are human rights issues represented and identified on the local and global level? How does this link with how human suffering has been viewed and represented by a range of writers, photographers, activists and others? Are human rights universal? How do international human rights norms such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Convention on Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) frame rights and what is the gap between ideology and praxis, between the global and local? What has been the genesis and impact of more recent norms such as the right to a sustainable environment, to peace and to development and the responsibility to protect? How effective are UN agencies and other institutions in addressing human rights?

This is a seminar and student participation in discussions based on readings is an integral part of the course. Together, we will read and analyze a number of UN conventions, histories and testimonies related to human rights violations including forced starvation, terror, torture, disappearances and genocide. One of our goals is to look beyond popular representations of human rights issues and explore their complicated, complex realities and the challenges of seeing and addressing such human wrongs. Readings range from: different aspects of modern global slavery in Southeast Asia; disappearances and extrajudicial killings in Argentina and the Southern Cone; China & human rights, forgetting and remembering genocidal killing to U.S. foreign policy and exceptionalism, the “war on terror” and human rights violations. We will analyze works to see what is recorded and constructed and what is left out and the use of language and form. What

events are forgotten and why, and what mechanisms can be used to highlight issues framing human rights in ways that harness public support?

There will be several field trips: to the UN, Tamiment Archives and Cardozo Law School.

Sept. 2: **Introduction. The Human Rights Revolution in Perspective;** Was there a human rights revolution? What historical triggers created a series of new norms and institutions using rights based criteria? What were the push and pull factors involved and in what ways did the human rights regime break with past ideologies and state power, and to what degree were they a continuation? What is distinct about the modern human rights perspective; what is rooted in particular histories and cultures? How do different societies and cultures view rights; what is the tension between individual and communal rights?

Read and Bring to class copies of: *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UDHR); (available at [www.un.org](http://www.un.org)) bring in an article on any human rights related topic of interest and be prepared to discuss critically.

Critical Analysis of Syllabus, Course Requirements. Sign up for Convention for next class.

Sept. 9: **Introducing Human Rights**

**Read:** Freeman, chs. 1-3 & ch.9.

Sept. 14: **Theories of Human Rights** Read: Freeman, ch. 4; analyzing human rights norms such as the International Bill of Human Rights

Group assignment: read one convention carefully: sign up ahead: Intl Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Conv. Against Torture, Convention on Rights of Child, Convention on Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) bring document to class.

Written assignment: **hand in two page analysis commenting on aspects of the convention such as: When was the Convention ratified? How does the Convention legitimate itself through past history/documents? What is the right/wrong defined? What are the implementation mechanisms? Does the Convention seem to have universal application? What do you evaluate as a strength/weakness of this particular Convention? Any other analysis of document of interest such as form of language, emphasis on individual versus group rights, etc.**

Sept. 16 Read: Freeman, chs. 5- 6 and Sashi Tharoor, Cultural Relativism, Are human rights universal?

“Are human rights universal?” <http://www.worldpolicy.org/journal/tharoor.htm> or just google in title/author.

September 18: Tour of the UN meet outside at 10:35 to get tickets of tour, then go through security, group tour leaves promptly at 11:00

Sept. 21: Read: Freeman, chs. 7-8 Politics and Globalization, Development and Poverty Read and bring in “Right to Development” [www.un.org](http://www.un.org)

Sept. 23 No Class

Sept. 28: **Viewing Rights:** Whose rights and wrongs count? Visible and Invisible Wrongs and their Representations: Read Sontag. Regarding the Pain of Others. Bring in one photo that depicts human rights/wrongs and be ready to discuss in terms of Sontag's arguments. How do we view the suffering of others? What are the relationships between language and viewing others' suffering?

**Two page essay** analyzing several key ideas from Sontag's essay and link to photo selected, human rights and Sontag's essay.

Sept. 30: **Speaking Rights: Read: Brysk, Intro: Rhetoric for rights, and chs. 1-4**

Oct. 5: Read: Brysk, chs. 5-8 How to frame the claim? **two page essay analyzing aspects of Speaking Rights to Power** including at least one reference to discussions in chapters 7 or 8; include an image to illustrate your analysis.

Oct. 7: Read: *Human Rights in Our Own Backyard*, Intro and Economic Rights, 1-46

No Class: NYU closed: Oct. 12

Oct. 13 Read: *HR in Our Own Backyard*, ch. 4 groups: ch. 5-8 social rights, 9-10 cultural rights

Oct. 14 Read *HR in Our Own Backyard*, Part IV, bring in connecting article with human rights violation carried out in other countries or globally; Part VII and select one other essay of interest with one page synopsis of that chapter.

## **Human Rights & Wrongs: Case Studies and Themes**

### **Modern Global Slavery: The Disposable**

Oct. 19 Slavery: Commodification and Brutalization: a System of Human Cargo  
Read: Bales *Disposable People*: original intro and preface to the 2012 edition, Ch. 1-2 The New Slavery and Appendix 2 Excerpts from International Conventions on Slavery. **Bring in a typed description of several paragraphs defining Modern Global Slavery** based on these readings: include a series of distinct features defining slavery and modern global slavery and be prepared to discuss why you chose attributes you did. Slavery and the "human right to evil."

Oct. 21 Class Visit to Tamiment Archive and Abraham Lincoln Brigade Collection meet at (ALBA), Meet at Bobst Library, Curator, Kate Donovan focus on archival materials; including posters of Spanish Civil War; connect with Sontag. Ideas for final paper topic from archive collection and other related topics.

Oct. 26: Bales, read, ch. 3. Group Assignment/Presentation in class Bales Readings: chapters on Brazil, Pakistan and India and be prepared to discuss key aspects of assigned chapter; also read Bales, ch. 7 What can be done?

### **Political Violence: US Exceptionalism and Latin America: Disappeared and Tortured**

Oct. 28 Globalizing Latin American studies of state violence: The roots and theoretical underpinnings

Read: Esparza, et. al: Introduction and chapters 1-2 and 7. How does Feierstein argue that the “national security” doctrine in Argentina lead to political violence with genocidal characteristics? What does Aguila’s description of state violence and repression in Rosario during the Argentine dictatorship explain about the dynamics on the micro and meso level?

**Due: final paper project: Topic and 1-2 paragraphs and 2 sources: What issue/s do you want to examine and how does this link to human rights?**

Nov. 2: Read: ch. 4 on Chile and ch. 5 on Guatemala. Carefully read on the mechanisms of violence in Latin America: Ch. 5 on Operation Condor and Ch. 6 On Torture. What patterns do you see across countries? What role does the U.S. play directly and indirectly?

Nov. 4: read: *The Great Chinese Famine* (selections) Guest Speaker, Stacy Mosher

Nov. 9 **In Class Mid-term**

Nov. 12: read: Lecture: Levene, Genocide, Scarcity and Environment Cardozo School of Law, Lemkin Award 6:00 PM

### **Genocide the “crime of crimes” and Crimes Against Humanity Targeted Violence against Groups of People: Genocide and Massacres**

Direct and Indirect Methods of Destruction: With Intent to Destroy

Nov. 16: Why is genocide often described as “the crime of crimes”? Handout: Social science definitions of Genocide, look again at UNGC; read and bring to class your own written definition of genocide; paragraph/s or series of elements listed that describe the crime. Methods of Destruction: Creating and increasing vulnerability; Direct and Indirect Processes Read:, Barkan on “Indigenous Peoples” and De Frieze “Simply Bred Out” *articles available on-line at NYU classes*. How do the authors describe the range of destructive processes? What has been the ongoing impact on indigenous peoples of past policies of violence and of domination?

Nov. 18: Impact of colonialism and Whose bodies count? Lemarchand, *Forgotten Genocides*, read: Intro, Essays 1 and 2; Congo and Burundi and link with Rwanda. Bring in an article on violence in Congo---the third world war.

Nov. 23: Lemarchand, *Forgotten Genocides*, read: Chapter 3 on Herero and Chapter 5 on Tibet and each group choose one other chapter and be prepared to discuss in class. Hand in draft of Research Paper.

Nov. 25 Thanksgiving Break: No Class

### **Literature and Representations of Human Rights:**

Nov. 30 Human Wrongs: Coetzee, *The Life and Times of Michael K.*

What does Michael K. represent? How does the concept of dignity and human rights play out in the novel? Link themes in the novel with concepts of “dignity” and rights. 2 page essay on Coetzee (optional) Link the novel and character of Michael K. with issues of human rights and dignity. Or make up your own question/s on the novel linked to human rights and write a two page essay in response.

### **Refugees, Internally Displaced Peoples: The Uprooted**

Dec. 2 Read: Agier, Read: *On the Margins of the World*. Preface-ch.3  
Recommended: Craig Calhoun, “The Imperative to Reduce Suffering” (NYU Classes)

Dec. 7 Read: Agier, *Internally Displaced Peoples*, ch. 4-end. The Responsibility to Protect and the Syrian refugee crisis. Bring in an article and be prepared to discuss that links Syrian refugees with aspect of Agier.

Dec. 9 **Human Rights Notebook Due**; Discussion and Dialogue on Human rights Notebook. Choose one or two terms you have written about and be prepared to discuss term/s in class

Dec. 14: Recap: Discussion/Brief Presentation of Final Projects with Critical Link to Human Rights and Humanitarianism Themes.

Beside a series of essays assigned to be read that will be located on blackboard, the following books are at the NYU Bookstore.

### **Required Books: Available in the bookstore and on reserve at Bobst Library:**

Agier, Michel, *On the Margins of the World*, Polity Press.

Armaline, Glasberg and Purkayestha, *Human Rights in Our Own Backyard*, U Penn Press.

Bales, *Disposable People*, 2<sup>nd</sup> updated ed with new introduction, UC Berkeley Press.

Brysk, Alison. *Speaking Rights to Power: constructing Political Will*, Oxford.

Coetzee, J.M., *The Life and Times of Michael K.*

Marcia Esperaza, et.al. *State Violence & Genocide in Latin America*, Routledge.

Michael Freeman, *Human Rights*, Key Concepts 2nd ed. Polity Press.

Lemarchand, Rene, *Forgotten Genocides*, Univ Penn Press.

Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Picador.

Articles by Calhoun, Levene , Barkan, and Frieze and others available at NYU classes under resources. Please download article and bring to class.

**Course Requirements: Grading will be as follows:**

Class Participation, Group Work	15%
Short Papers, Articles, Definitions, etc.	25%
Mid-term Exam in Class Nov. 9	30%
Final Term Notebook 6 pages Dec. 9	10%
Research Paper 7-9 pages Dec. 14	20%

**Written Assignments:** This course includes a range of different types of writing assignments. Papers are an important dimension of the course. There are a series of short essays that will guide our discussions throughout the course. Papers not handed in on the date due will be minused for each late day; the paper assignments will be used as the basis for that day’s class discussion. Further details on final term notebook and final research paper of 7-9 pages will be handed out in class and put on-line. Visit to the Tamiment Archives will provide additional research possibilities. Short papers will be graded on 10 point system.

**Form:** All essays and assignments must be typed, double-spaced, 12 font with one inch margins. Form and content are both integral to an effective essay, and included in the instructor’s evaluation of the essay. It is suggested that papers be edited carefully for correct grammar, spelling, etc. Try to focus in on key themes/issues/observations in your paper and to use concrete language. Often, including quotes from the text helps concretize your discussion and observation (and footnote all direct and indirect quotes). Bibliography at end of each essay includes author, title, publisher, place and year published. All papers should include this at end.

Most written assignments are critical and analytic and help serve to further focus the discussion. Language is crucial and try to craft essays to reflect specifics and to adequately convey your ideas. 25% of your grade is based on a series of short papers which you should bring to class on the day due as these essays will serve as part of the basis for that day’s discussion. Each paper will be evaluated on a ten point scale.

**Group Work/Presentation:** Students will have a number of opportunities to work together and present their findings throughout the semester in the class.

**Student Responsibility:** All students are expected to attend class with assignments read and to bring readings and notes to class.

**Class Attendance/Participation and Decorum:** All students are expected to attend class with readings done and to bring the text to class. Class participation is an essential part of learning to critically analyze the texts and to foster a community of learning. Grades will be minused after three absences or for persistent lateness (after every three) and additional points taken for repetition of pattern.

The classroom is a special environment so please do not bring electronic devices into the classroom; no cell phones or food in class; computers limited for ebooks.

Extra Credit: Students who attend at least two events/field trips about human rights related issues and who do a 1-2 page evaluation will receive extra credit.

**Moses Center:** Students with disabilities who believe that they may need accommodations in this class are encouraged to contact the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities at 212 998-4980 as soon as possible to better ensure that such accommodations are implemented in a timely fashion. For more information, see the CSD website: <http://www.nyu.edu/osl/csd>.

**Plagiarism:** NYU has strict policies on plagiarism. Unattributed quotation or paraphrase of any source, submission of someone else's work as one's own, unacknowledged use of someone else's ideas, and submission of the same piece of work in more than one course without prior permission of each instructor all constitute plagiarism. Plagiarism results not only in a zero for the piece of work in question, but may well result in failure for the course; second offenses normally lead to suspension or expulsion. Any paper found copying phrases as well as longer texts will receive an F and failure for the class. **You must footnote all direct or indirect references to receive credit.** Grammar counts as does cogency of argument. For help with grammar and clarity of writing I recommend purchasing the paperback 4<sup>th</sup> edition by Strunk and White, Elements of Style. Essays must be typed, double-spaced and aim for a coherent, well-argued and documented analysis.

**Contact Information:** Please speak to me after class or e-mail ahead at [jaa5@nyu.edu](mailto:jaa5@nyu.edu) to make an appointment to come in during office hours M-W 2:00-3:30 in my office at 726 Broadway 6<sup>th</sup> floor; or to arrange another time to meet if this conflicts with another class; and feel free to come in to discuss your work.