

Sociology 202
An Introduction to Human Rights

Fall 2006
Professor Thomas Cushman

The idea of human rights is one of the most powerful ideas in the modern world. This course offers an overview of the central ideas of human rights from the time of the French Revolution to the present, and the various ways in which these ideas have been put into practice in various societies, both historically and in the present. It explores the history of the contemporary human rights system, its underlying philosophy, and its growth and development over the last few decades. This includes the diversification of rights to include social, economic and cultural rights and the collective rights of indigenous peoples as well as a growing role for non-governmental organizations. The course examines the ongoing controversy between human rights' claims to universalism in contrast to assertions of cultural difference. Special topics include critical sociological analysis of global bureaucratic systems which purport to promote human rights, the uses and abuses of the idea of human rights in political life, and the institutionalized forms for the alleviation of human vulnerability.

Required Books:

Orend, Brian, Human Rights, Concept and Context.
 Broadview Press, 2001

Lynn Hunt, ed., The French Revolution and Human Rights,.
 Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press, 1996

Jane K. Cowan, Marie-Benedicte Dembour, and Richard A. Wilson (eds.). Culture and Rights: Anthropological Perspectives, Cambridge University Press, 2001.

Bryan S. Turner, Vulnerability and Human Rights:
 Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006.

Clifford Bob, The Marketing of Rebellion: Insurgents, Media, and International Activism, Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Michael Ignatieff, Human Rights as Politics and Idolatry,
 Princeton University Press, 2001.

Additional required articles will be available on the electronic course reserve on the general course conference

on First Class. In some cases I will add readings/materials to the syllabus, but this will be quite limited.

Grading Policies: Attendance and participation is required for all classes. The course grade is based on the following:

1. Two papers of five to seven pages: 25 percent each. Guidelines will be distributed in class.
2. Take-home final examination: 30 percent. You are responsible for all class lectures and readings on the examination and you will be provided with a set of review questions. Since our time is short in lectures, we cover only the main points of the readings, so you should take careful notes on your own readings of the assigned texts.
3. Attendance and participation: 20 percent. Short written assignments, which will be the basis of class discussions will be given approximately once every two weeks.
4. Students should come to class having read all the material for each class period. To facilitate class discussions, the professor will, from time to time, call on people in class. If you are not present, this will be noted.
5. Late papers are accepted, but on a very simple basis: 1/2 a letter grade penalty for every day late, unless you have a valid medical or family emergency. This policy is strictly enforced.

Statement on Open Discussion of Controversial Issues: This course deals with contemporary issues which can be provocative and controversial. A requirement of the class is a willingness to listen to and debate others' points of view. There is no requirement to accept any view, but toleration is crucial. All students in the class, as well as the instructor, have their own political and ideological views: the classroom is for consideration of a diversity of views even if we might hold this or that one very strongly. If you are not comfortable with lively and vigorous debate, in which your views will be challenged and in which you may freely challenge others' views (including the professor's), you should not take this class, nor any other sociology class, since the basis of sociology is the challenging of conventional wisdom and the willingness to engage in critical examination of what you think you know and what others think they know to be true.

Part I: The History and Philosophy of Human Rights

September 7-14 : **Definitions, Concepts, and Ideas of Human Rights**

Orend, Chapters 1-4

September 18- October 5: **Classical Perspectives and Narratives on Human Rights**

Orend, Chapters 7 and 8

Morton Winston, "Philosophical Conceptions of Human Rights" (ER)

A. Belden Fields, "The Birth of the Human Rights Idea" (ER)

Thomas Hobbes, "The Leviathan" (ER)

John Locke, "Second Treatise on Government," (ER)

Jean Jacques Rousseau "The Social Contract" PHR pp. 80-87 (ER)

Thomas Paine, "African Slavery in America" (ER) and at: <http://www.libertystory.net/LSDOCPAINESLAVERY.htm>

Thomas Jefferson, Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom" at:

<http://usinfo.state.gov/usa/infousa/facts/democrac/42.htm>

The American Declaration of Independence (ER)

The US Constitution Bill of Rights (ER)

Hunt, The French Revolution and Human Rights, in entirety

Mary Wollstonecraft "A Vindication of the Rights of Women" (ER)

Mary Cady Stanton, "The Seneca Falls Declaration" (ER)

Classical Critiques of the Idea of Human Rights:

Orend, Chapter 6

Jeremy Bentham, "Anarchical Fallacies" (ER)

Edmund Burke, "Reflections on the Revolution in France" (ER)

Karl Marx, "The Jewish Question" (ER)

First paper in class on Thursday, October 5

Part II. Culture and Rights: Universalism and Cultural Relativism

October 12-23 **The Universalism/Relativism Debate**

Cowan, et.al., Culture and Rights, Introduction and chs. 1-5.

Cultural Rights and Indigenous Rights in Practice.

Cowan, et. al. Part II.

Part III. Vulnerability and Human Rights: Toward a Normative Theory of Human Rights

October 26-November 2: Bryan S. Turner, in entirety

Second Paper due November 6 in class.

Part IV: Human Rights as a Social Institution

The Structure of the Modern Human Rights System: UN Conventions and Treaty Bodies

November 6: Sally Engle Merry, "Constructing a Global Law - Violence Against Women and the Human Rights System." (ER)

November 9: The Role of NGOs and the North/South Divide

Claude E. Welch, Jr. "Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch: A Comparison." (ER)

Mutua, Makau. "Human Rights International NGOs: A Critical Evaluation." (ER)

November 13: The United Nations Commission on Human Rights and the New Human Rights Council: History, Function, and Sociological Critique

See also congressional report, very important addition

Human Rights Watch, "Libya Should Not Chair the Human Rights Commission," at:

<http://www.hrw.org/press/2002/08/libya080902.htm>

"U.S. voted off U.N. Human Rights Commission," Facts on file. 61, no. 3153, (2001): 342.

"Libya to chair U.N. Human Rights Commission." Facts on file : 3241, (2003): 26 (1 pages)

Libraries Worldwide: 2022

(both above articles can be found at Lexis-Nexis on the Wellesley College Library page)

Anne Bayevesky, "A Dictator's Dream" at:

<http://www.nationalreview.com/script/printpage.p?ref=/bayefsky/bayefsky200504260802.asp>

Freedom House Press Release, at:

<http://www.freedomhouse.org/media/pressrel/041905.htm>

Joseph Laconte, "The United Nations and Human Rights: A Strategy for Meaningful Reform", at:

<http://www.heritage.org/Research/Religion/tst041905a.cfm?renderforprint=1>

Readings on Human Rights Council to be announced

Please note, on Wednesday, November 15, Wellesley's most prestigious annual lecture, the Wilson Lecture, will be given by the Right Honourable Ann Clwyd, MP, UK Special Envoy to the Prime Minister on Human Rights in Iraq. Attendance is mandatory, and is part of our course curriculum.

Part V: Sociological Critiques of Human Rights Movements and Politics

November 16-27: **Human Rights Activism, Social Movements, and Transnational Elites**

Read, Clifford Bob, *The Marketing of Rebellion*, in entirety

November 30 - December 11: **The Strengths and Limits of Human Rights.**

Michael Ignatieff. Human Rights as Politics and Idolatry, in entirety