

**Sociology 202**  
**An Introduction to Human Rights**

**Fall 2007**  
**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 attempt 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:**

Jack Mahoney, The Challenge of Human Rights: Origin, Development, and Significance. Blackwell, 2007

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

Bret L. Billet, Cultural Universalism in the Face of the West: The Plight of Women and Female Children, Palgrave MacMillan, 2007

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.

Patrick West, Conspicuous Compassion: Why Sometimes It Really is Cruel to be Kind (Civitas, 2004)

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 evidence of attendance and the basis for class discussions, will be given approximately once per week. These will be assigned a numerical score from 1-3 (1 being average, 2 being good, 3 being excellent).
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.

---

## Introductions and Overview of the Class: September 6

---

### Historical and Philosophical Background of Human Rights

September 10-13: Mahoney, Chapter 1, 2  
 Morton Winston, "Philosophical Conceptions of Human Rights" (ER)  
 A. Belden Fields, "The Birth of the Human Rights Idea" (ER)

---

### Classical Perspectives on Human Rights

September 17-24 John Locke, excerpt from "Second Treatise on Government," (ER)  
 Jean Jacques Rousseau, excerpt from "The Social Contract" PHR pp. 80-87 (ER)  
 Thomas Hobbes, excerpt from "Leviathan" (ER)

---

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

---

Lynn 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:

September 27-Oct. 1    Jeremy Bentham, "Anarchical Fallacies" (ER)  
 Edmund Burke, "Reflections on the Revolution  
 in France" (ER)  
 Karl Marx, "The Jewish Question" (ER)

---

### **The Social Construction of Reality and The Social Construction of Human Rights**

October 4-15                Mahoney, Chapter 3. 4  
 (no class on 10/8)        Peter Berger and Thomas Luckman, "The Social  
 Construction of Reality" at:  
<http://www2.pfeiffer.edu/~lridener/courses/REALITY.HTML>

### **Social Constructions of Rights: Positive, Negative, Social, Economic, Cultural, Individual and Group Rights**

October 18-25             Mahoney, Chapter 3  
                                   Isaiah Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty"  
                                   (ER)  
                                   Will Kymlicka, "The Good, The Bad and the  
                                   Ugly" (ER)  
                                   Cynthia Kaufman (review of Olin), "Is  
                                   Multiculturalism Bad for Women?" (ER)

<h2><b>First Paper Due in Class Thursday, October 11</b></h2>
---

### **Human Rights Universalism and Cultural Relativism**

October 29-Nov.1         Mahoney, Chapter 5  
                                   Jack Donnelly, "Cultural Relativism and  
                                   Universal Human Rights"

November 5-12    Bret Billet, Cultural Relativism in the Face  
 of the West, in entirety

### **Minimal Moralities, Human Frailty and Vulnerability**

November 15-19

Bryan S. Turner, Vulnerability and Human Rights., in  
 entirety

Second Paper due Thursday, November 19 in  
class

## Human Rights as a Social Institution and Social Process

November 26-29: **The Sociology of Non-Governmental  
Organizations**

Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, excerpt from  
Activists Beyond Borders (ER)  
Claude E. Welch, Jr. "Amnesty International and Human  
Rights Watch: A Comparison." (ER)  
Makau Mutua, "Human Rights International NGOs: A  
Critical Evaluation." (ER)  
David Kennedy, "Is the International Human Rights  
Movement Part of the Problem?" (ER)

December 3-6 : **Human Rights Activism, Social Movements,  
and Transnational Elites**

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

December 10: Wrap Up and discussion, please read Patrick  
West, Conspicuous Compassion, in entirety (it's a short  
essay!)