SYLLABUS
Human Rights Activism: History, Theory, and Practice
WAGS 32 / Political Science 24
Spring 2008

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Description:
This course is intended to illuminate the challenges and satisfactions involved in the practice of human rights work as well as a critical sense of how the discourses calling it forth developed and continue to evolve. It will explore the charge, among others, that for all its claims to universalism, human rights discourses reflect the values of European Enlightenment traditions which are inimical to conceptions of rights and justice that are grounded in culture and religion. The semester will begin by exploring the historical growth of human rights doctrines in Europe and the United States, culminating in the emergence of the post-World War II Universal Declaration. We will then turn to the proliferation of these discourses through non-governmental organizations, many of them internationally based, and to expanding meanings of human rights, including new conceptions of women's human rights. We will analyze specific regional and cultural contexts in which human rights abuses of women and men have occurred, and will explore different traditions of activism in them. Throughout the course, we will present the views of rights' activists on the relationship between their work and formal human rights principles.

Course Requirements
The writing requirements for this course are two five to seven page papers, black board entries and a final take-home exam. We will distribute paper topics for the papers about a week in advance of the due dates. The first paper is due on Friday February 29th and the second paper is due on Tuesday March 25th. The final take home exam is due on May 12th.

We will only grant extensions for papers if requests are well founded and are submitted in writing at least four days in advance of the due date.

We expect you to attend class regularly and inform us by email if you miss a class.

Keeping up with and critically analyzing the readings are essential. To this end we would like you to contribute comments on the readings to the course blackboard. Each student will be responsible for contributing blackboard comments. You should make blackboard entries for the classes you've chosen by 8 pm on the day before the class (either Sunday or Wednesday). Your comments should provide a critical analysis of one of the themes that the readings for that session raise.

Several films will be discussed in class. Please be sure to view them via streaming before the class. The films are marked on the syllabus with an * on the day we will discuss them.

Evaluation
The final grade for this course will be based on the following criteria:
First paper: 25%
Second paper: 25%
Final Exam: 50%
Blackboard entries, class participation: 25%

Course Materials

Required Books

Sally Merry, Human Rights and Gender Violence
Available from Food For Thought Bookshop (106 North Pleasant St., Amherst)

Jean Quataeret, The Gendering of Human Rights
Available from WAGS office (14 Grosvenor House)

Course Packet: Vols. I and II
Available from WAGS office (14 Grosvenor House)

Course Schedule

Monday, Jan. 28 Introduction

I. The Debates

Wednesday, Jan. 30

Readings:

Monday, Feb. 4

Readings:

Wednesday, Feb. 6

Readings:
David M. Smolin, “Will International Human Rights Be Used as a Tool of Cultural Genocide?”
Will Kymlicka and Ruth Rubio Marin “Liberalism and Minority Rights: An interview”

II. The History
Monday, Feb. 11

Readings:
Johannes Moresink, The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Origins, Drafting and Intent, pp. Appendix, the Declaration.
Paul Gordon Lauren, The Evolution of International Human Rights, Chapter 1, pp.4-36.

Wednesday, Feb. 13

Guest Lecturer:
Professor Yasmine Ergas, Law School, Columbia University

Reading:

Monday, Feb. 18th The Rise of NGOs and International Human Rights Organizing

Readings:
Naomi Klein, The Shock Doctrine, pp. 118-128

Wednesday, Feb. 20th The Historiography of Human Rights

Readings:
Jean Quataeret, The Gendering of Human Rights

Monday, Feb 25th Translating Norms into Practice

Readings:

Wednesday, Feb. 27th Human Rights and Armed Conflict

Readings:

III. The Different Contexts

Monday, March 3rd Latin America

Readings:
Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, Activists Beyond Borders, chapter 3, pp. 79-120.

Wednesday, March 5th Africa

Readings:

Monday, March 10th The Middle East

Readings:
Leila Ahmed, Women and Gender in Islam, Chapter 8, pp. 144-168

Wednesday, March 12

Visit by Professor Abdullahi An-Na’im, “Why Muslims Need a Secular State”

An-Na’im, Islam and the Secular State: Negotiating the Future of Shari’a, Chapter 1, pp. 1-42

Monday, March 24th Asia

Readings:
The Bangkok Declaration on Human Rights, Appendix B, pp.390-394.
Kishori Madhubani, “Can Asians Think?”

Wednesday, March 26th Local Translations

Readings:
Sally Merry, Human Rights and Gender Violence, Chapter 1 and Conclusion

IV. The Issues
Monday, March 31st Gender, Health and Reproductive Rights

Readings:
Adetoun Ilumoka, “Advocacy for Women’s Reproductive and Sexual Rights in Africa: Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea”
Nkiru Uwechia Nzegwu, Family Matters, pp.28-37 and 199-227

Wednesday, April 2nd Women’s Human Rights

Readings:
Sally Merry, Human Rights and Gender Violence, Chapter 3
Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan, “Women Between Community and State”, Social Text 65, Vol.18, No.4

Monday, April 7th Women and Migration

* Film, Senorita Extraviada: Missing Young Woman (ITVS 2001, 76 min.) viewing format TBD

Readings:
“Mexico: Intolerable Killings…” Amnesty International
Sylvanna M. Falcon, “Rape as a Weapon of War: Militarized Rape at the U.S. –Mexico Border”, Women and Migration in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands

Corporate Rights and Human Rights in Africa

Wednesday, April 9

Guest Lecturer:
Professor Elliott Fratkin, “Oil in Africa”

Readings:
Michael Watts, “Human Rights, Violence and the Oil Complex”

Monday, April 14

Readings:

Wednesday, April 16 Transnational Struggles over Economic Rights

* Film, Life and Debt (New Yorker Video 2001, 86 minutes) streaming: 4/01/08-end of finals

Readings:

Monday April 21st Minority Rights in India

* Film, Final Solution (ACT 2004, 149 minutes) streaming: 4/01/08-end of finals

Rajeev Bhargava, Liberal, Secular Democracy and Explanations of Hindu Nationalism, “We Have No Orders to Save You” Human Rights Watch

Rwandan Genocide

Wednesday, April 23rd

* Film, Sometimes in April (HBO Films 2005, 140 minutes) streaming: 4/08/08-end of finals

Guest Lecturer:
Alison des Forges on Rwanda Genocide

Readings:
Alison des Forges, Leave None Alive to Tell the Story, pp. 1-27, 45-47, and 65-69

April 28th

Readings:
Filip Reyntjens, “Rwanda Ten Years On”

Monday, April 30th US Double Speak on Human Rights

Readings:
Juan Cole, “Double Standards, Human Rights and Democracy”
Mark Danner, The Secret Road to Abu Ghraib, pp. 26-49
Mark Benjamin, “Inside the CIA’s Notorious ‘Black Sites’”
Naomi Klein, The Shock Doctrine, pp. 25-46

Human Rights Activism At Home and Abroad

Monday, May 5th
* Film, *The Water Front* (Red Lizard Media 2007, 53 minutes) streaming: 4/28/08-end of finals

**Readings:**
- Oscar Olivera, *Cochabamba*, pp. 7-23
- Mehta, “Citizenship and the Right to Water”

**Wednesday, May 7th**

**Readings:**
- Close To Home: Case Studies of Human Rights Work in the United States, pp.44-70
- Johannes Moresink, *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, pp. 168-190
- Pratab Chatterjee, *Iraq, Inc.*, pp. 69-72