Human Rights on Film
Sociology 319
Spring 2020

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Office Hours: M, R 2:30-4:00

Class: W 6:00-9:00

Course Objectives and Student Responsibilities:

This course is designed to introduce students to the concept of international human rights through the medium of film. At virtually all levels of politics, from the local to the international and across both geographic and cultural divides, “human rights” have entered the political discourse. Perhaps it is fair to say that a virtual “revolution” in human rights has occurred over the previous few decades. Until recently, how states treated their citizens was largely nobody else’s business. However, there now exists an extensive array of international laws protecting citizens from abuse and, in some cases, providing them legal remedies to abuse. There is also a generally accepted “norm” against the most serious abuses of human rights. In spite of this revolution, massive abuses persist and billions of the world’s citizens are effectively left without sufficient protections. In this course we will discuss both the successes and limitation of current efforts to protect and promote human rights. We will focus on topics ranging from the nature and origins of human rights, to the motives for abuse of these rights, to the remedies available to redress these abuses. Throughout the course, we will seek to answer a question that continues to plague people interested in human rights: If we all basically agree that abuse is terrible, why are we so often unable to stop it?

Format and organization: I believe that one of the most effective ways to provoke interest and debate on issues related to human rights and human security is through the medium of film. The usefulness of films is that they engross us and allow us to connect concepts about which we read to the very real (often very painful) experiences of individuals. We can see ourselves (or friends or family) in characters in ways we cannot when we read about historical events, legal cases, or abstract theories in a classroom. I have therefore chosen to structure this course around a select group of exceptional films that I believe help illustrate core issues in international human rights.

Make no mistake. This is a course on human rights and not simply a “movie class”. Each film is paired with a set of required readings. Completing these readings is essential because they provide the theoretical, legal, and policy perspectives necessary to understand and discuss the core concepts introduced in the course. In addition, you will be graded on your ability to discuss and reflect upon these readings and their connection to the films we view.
Books:


Evaluation: Your final grade will be based on the combination of the activities outlined below:

Papers (20% each [60% total]): During the semester, students will write two (2) formal papers a rewrite of the first paper. Each paper (5-6 double spaced pages) will address a different topic, which will be announced in advance of the due date. I will discuss the papers in greater depth later in the course.

Blackboard Discussion Forum (25%): Active contribution to the online discussion forum represents a significant portion of your grade. For each film we view in class you will be required to participate in the discussion by responding to a previously posted question on the reading/film or introducing a new question. Responses will be graded on content rather than length. Your responses need not be long, but they should directly address the themes of the course and should draw together the readings and the films.

Class Participation (15%): Active participation is essential to the success of the course. You should be sure to ask questions and contribute to class discussions. Attendance is expected, and a portion of your grade is based on attendance. Since this is a once a week class, missing more than one class will adversely affect your grade. More than two unexcused absences will result in a score of “0” for this component of your grade. Frequently arriving late or leaving early will also adversely impact your attendance and participation grade.

Overall Participation Rubric

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Description</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A+/−</td>
<td>Participates more than once each class session as indicated above. Remains awake, attentive, and respectful during class. Consistently demonstrates high effort and engagement with course material.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+/−</td>
<td>Participates at least once each class session as indicated above. Remains awake, attentive, and respectful during class. Frequently demonstrates high effort and engagement with course material.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C/−</td>
<td>Participates occasionally in class sessions as indicated above. Is awake, attentive, and respectful during most classes. Occasionally demonstrates high effort and engagement with course material.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D+/−</td>
<td>Participates infrequently or never in class sessions as indicated above. Fails to be awake, attentive, and respectful during class. Infrequently demonstrates high effort and engagement with course material.</td>
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Late assignments (those that are turned in after 4:00 pm the day the assignment is due) will receive a letter grade deduction each day late.

**Academic Integrity**: Students are expected to read, understand, and comply with University standards for academic integrity and the policy on plagiarism. Violations of the Code in course work may lead to grade penalties including failure of the course. Class papers should conform to the *Chicago Manual of Style* guidelines for source citations and references. A complete set of endnotes (or internal citations) and a bibliography should be included for all papers.

**Appropriate Behavior.** Most weeks we will watch a film (documentary or feature) that reflects specific core human rights issues. We will then discuss the film as well as the relevant assigned readings. Given the topic of the course, many of these films necessarily deal with mature subject matter and may include graphic imagery, *including but not limited to killing, torture, rape, sexual violence, and other degrading or inhumane treatment*. Viewing these films may (and probably should) cause you some discomfort. Many of the films are quite simply difficult to watch, though they are all exceptional films. However, if you are terribly uncomfortable with this subject matter or believe you will be unable to address/discuss these issues in a mature and respectful manner, this may not be the course for you.

*Given the unease that some of films and discussions may cause some students, I expect that you remain respectful of other students. I will not hesitate to ask you to leave if you fail to conduct yourself in a respectful manner.*

A few other general notes on behavior. Students are expected to show respect for the professor and other students. This means arriving a few minutes prior to the start of class, so that lectures and sections can begin on time without disruption; refraining from distracting behaviors during lectures and sections (texting, playing with your smart phone, reading the newspaper or anything not related to the course); and generally paying attention to what is being said in class. Any behavior that would be inappropriate while watching a live performance (arriving after the first act has started; leaving your cell phone on; talking during the performance) is also inappropriate for lecture. Students whose behavior is disrespectful or inappropriate may be asked to leave.

Finally, **laptops and other digital devices are not allowed during the films**. The light from these devices is very distracting to most people. During the film, notes should be taken the old fashioned way with a pen and paper. I will ask you to turn off these devices if you are using them. Repeated use will adversely impact your grade.

*If you do not understand something, please ask questions; others in the class likely will thank you for doing this! We will not be able cover every reading or idea in class; if a concept is unclear, please ask questions during lecture, in section, or during office hours.*

**Accommodations**: Your success in this class is important to me. If there are circumstances that may affect your performance in this class, please let me know as soon as possible so that we can work together to develop strategies for adapting assignments to meet both your needs and the requirements of the course. There are official forms you need to file with the university and share with me for the arrangement of certain accommodations. Please feel free to email me and arrange a private meeting to discuss this further.
Course Schedule

**Week 1: Introduction (1/22)**

**Week 2: Human Rights History and Law (1/29)**
“Universal Declaration of Human Rights”
Donnelly, Chapter 1 “Human Rights in Global Politics- Historical Perspective”
Safia Swimelar “Making Human Rights Visible through Photography and Film”
Film: “Night and Fog”

**Week 3: Whose Rights? Norms, Rights and Evolutionary Change (2/5)**
Donnelly, Chapter 2 “Theories of Human Rights”
Donnelly, “Chapter 3 “Cultural Relativism and Universal Human Rights”
Film: “12 Years a Slave” or “Amistad”

**Week 4: Genocide, Mass Killing and Crimes against Humanity (2/12)**
Film: “Enemies of the People” or “The Act of Killing”

**Week 5: Intervention and Prosecution (2/19)**
Donnelly, Chapter 10 “Humanitarian Intervention”
Film: “Sometimes in April”

**Week 6: Civil-Political Rights (Physical Integrity Violations) (2/26)** **1st Paper due**
“International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights”
“Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment”
Donnelly, Chapter 12 “(Anti) Terrorism and Human Rights”
Film: Missing or Hunger or Taxi to the Dark Side

**Week 7: Civil-Political Rights (Expression/Association) (3/4)**
Davis and Silver, “Civil Liberties vs. Security: Public Opinion in the Context of...”
Richards, “The Danger of Surveillance”
Starr et al., “The Impact of State Surveillance on Political Assembly and Association”
Film: “The Lives of Others”

**Week 8: Social, Economic & Cultural Rights (Poverty & Social Security) (3/11)**
The International Covenant on Social, Economic and Cultural Rights
Kotlowitz, There Are No Children Here
Film: “Precious”

**Week 9: Spring Break No Classes (3/18)**

**Week 10: Social, Economic & Cultural Rights (Globalization & Development) (3/25)**
Donnelly, Chapter 11, “Globalization, the State, and Human Rights”
Film: “Slumdog Millionaire”

**Week 11: Women’s Rights (4/1)**
Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
Chiseche Salome Mibenge “Human Rights, Women and Gender”
Film: “It's a Girl”
**Week 12:** Gender-based Violence and Trafficking (4/8) **2nd Paper due**
Merry, Human Rights & Gender Violence (Chpts 1 & 3)
Film: “The Whistleblower”

**Week 13:** LGBTQ Rights (4/15)
Human Rights Watch, “License to Harm”
Gwendolyn Beetham “The Human Rights of Gays, Lesbians, Bisexual and Transgender People”
Film: “Call Me Kuchu” or “We Were Here”

**Week 14:** Globalization and Environmental Justice (4/22)
Draft Declaration of Principles on Human Rights and the Environment
Dimitra B. Manou “Climate Change and Human Rights”
Adeola, “Cross-national Environmental Injustice and Human Rights Issues”
Hiskes, “The Right to a Green Future”
Film: “Crude: The Real Price of Oil”

**Week 15:** Refugees and Asylum Seekers (4/29)
Amnesty International, Left Out in the Cold
Azubike Onuora-Oguno “Migration, Refugees, Asylum and Uprooted Peoples’ Rights”
Black, “Putting Refugees in Camps”
Bhabha, “Internationalist Gatekeepers?”
Morris, “What Happens When Your Country Drowns?”
Film: “God Grew Tired of Us”