

Advanced Themes in Human Rights  
International Studies 345-01, Macalester College, 4 Credits, Spring 2008

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The idea of human rights is inextricably bound up with human experience, both positive and negative. On the one hand, it reflects an illuminating vision of human potential. On the other, the codification of these rights after World War II responded to the most devastating human brutality and destructiveness in history. Thus, in seeking to make possible the conditions for every person's flourishing, human rights must also protect us from ourselves, from those who would deny others their humanity. And while the importance of this project cannot be overstated, its failures have been profound. Enumeration of rights has not prevented their cruel, large-scale, and continuing violation.

In this course, we explore three sets of difficult questions confronting, and often confounding, those who hope to develop human rights into truly global norms, respected by both states and individuals. First, how should the purposes of human rights be defined, and is it possible to do this in a universally acceptable way? Second, and equally fundamentally, how can we understand the motivations and behaviors of the actors involved in serious, large-scale human rights violations? What factors lead people to initiate and participate in them? Why do some stand by and do nothing, and still others aid the victims, often at great personal risk? And third, how can we begin to understand the situation of the victims? How do some survive, and by what means might they heal? How can they bear witness to what happened to them and others, and what does their testimony accomplish? What role can—or should—forgiveness play in the aftermath of terrible violation? Ultimately, how can humanity be restored where it has been denied?

Required Texts:

Dave Eggers, *What is the What*, New York: Vintage, 2007.

Michael Ignatieff and respondents, *Human Rights as Politics and Idolatry*, ed. Amy Gutmann, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003.

Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, New York: Picador, 2004.

James E. Waller, *Becoming Evil: How Ordinary People Commit Genocide and Mass Killing*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed, 2007.

Simon Wiesenthal, *The Sunflower: On the Possibilities and Limits of Forgiveness*, New York: Schocken Books, 1998.

Grade components:

1. **Participation:** Worth 20% of the grade. This is not a lecture course; careful, well-prepared participation in discussion is very important. As you do the readings, make sure to write up one or two discussion questions for each period, which we will draw on from time to time.
2. **Short writing assignments:** There will be three such assignments (see explanations and due dates in the schedule). These are designed to engage you with the material and prepare you for productive discussions. Worth 10% each (total 30% of the grade)
3. **Case study:** Working in a small group, you will contribute to a case study using one of our key authors' works (see schedule). You will write up your own short paper (and so will receive an individual grade). Worth 10% of the grade.
4. **Final paper:** You will write a 12-to-15-page paper on a topic that engages with one or more of the course's central themes through exploration of a real-world case (or a comparison of cases). You should draw on at least four of our readings in framing your study. Further instructions will be offered later in the semester, and a paper proposal is due before spring break. Worth 25% of the grade.
5. **Presentation:** in the final weeks of the course, you will each share your final paper with the class. Worth 15% of the grade.

Grading scale:

100-94: A	89-87: B+	79-77: C+	69-61: D+
93-90: A-	86-83: B	76-73: C	60-59: D
	82-80: B-	72-70: C-	58-55: D-

- "A" work 1) is on time; 2) accomplishes the assigned tasks fully; 3) is clearly and engagingly written using proper grammar, spelling, and punctuation; 4) well-organized; 5) correctly cites all sources used; 6) is carefully and thoroughly researched, if research is required; 6) and shows a superior level of creativity, thoughtfulness and insight into the topic at hand.
- "B" work competently accomplishes requirements 1-5 listed above, and is generally well done, but shows lower levels of creativity, originality, and/or insight.
- "C" work offers a minimum level of competence on some or all of requirements 1-5, but contains serious flaws in argument, writing, research, and/or organization.
- "D" work does not competently realize most or all of requirements 1-5 and contains many serious flaws

**Note:** Plagiarized work will not be accepted and will incur significant penalties. If you are using someone else's ideas, words, or research, you **MUST** cite them properly.

You may have 1 unexcused absence over the course of the semester. After this, absence will result in grade deduction.

Unless you have arranged an extension on a paper **before** the due date, each day late will incur a deduction of one letter grade.

Barring medical or family emergency, **incompletes** must be negotiated **before** the end of classes, and the paperwork filled out by the last day of class.

**Final papers must be delivered in hard copy – NOT email.**

Schedule (subject to change as necessary)

### ***Introduction***

**Tues, Jan 29:** Welcome to the course, and viewing of *Night and Fog*, (French with subtitles), 1955, directed by Alain Resnais.

Writing assignment 1, Part A: In no more than one single-spaced page (1.5” margins, double spaces between paragraphs), reflect on *Night and Fog*. Describe your internal/emotional response. What images or elements of the narration, in particular, elicited this response, and why? And, importantly, what questions did the film leave you with? Make sure to articulate at least three, explaining what in the film prompted them. We will discuss these on Thursday.

**Thurs, Jan 31:** Discussion of *Night and Fog*.

**Tues, Feb 5:** Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*

Writing assignment 1, Part B: In a single-spaced page, relate Sontag’s book to your own response to *Night and Fog*. Choose one particular element of her argument (drawing on her text for support), and explain how your reaction to the images in the film supports, complicates, or disputes that argument. The entire assignment (now 2 pages, including Parts A and B) is due Feb 5 at class time.

### ***Part 1: Philosophical foundations of human rights***

**Thurs, Feb 7:** Michael Ignatieff, “Human Rights as Politics” and “Human Rights as Idolatry” in *Human Rights as Politics and Idolatry*

**Tues, Feb 12:** Responses to Ignatieff by K. Anthony Appiah, David A. Hollinger, Thomas W. Laqueur, and Diane F. Orentlicher, and final response by Ignatieff, in *Human Rights as Politics and Idolatry*

Writing Assignment 2: In no more than two double-spaced pages, explain which response to Ignatieff you find most compelling. What core argument does the respondent address (if more than one, choose one), and what makes the response strong? In explaining this, try to further substantiate the response by identifying your own supporting examples or drawing out unstated implications of the respondent’s argument.

**Thurs, Feb 14:** Martha Nussbaum, “Capabilities as Fundamental Entitlements: Sen and Social Justice,” *Feminist Economics* (2-3), 2003 (on Moodle).

**Tues, Feb 19:** Viewing of 20-minute segment on *Nightline* about the Fauziya Kassindga case

Corinne Kratz, "Circumcision Debates and Asylum Cases: Intersecting Arenas, Contested Values, and Tangled Webs," in *Engaging Cultural Differences*, Richard Shweder, Martha Minow, and Hazel Rose Markus, eds., Russell Sage Foundation, 2002 (on Moodle).

Richard Shweder, "What About Female Genital Mutilation? And Why Understanding Culture Matters in the First Place," in Shweder, Minow, and Markus (on Moodle).

SKIM: U.S. Department of Justice Executive Office for Immigration Review Board of Immigration Appeals Decision in Fauziya Kassindga case (on Moodle)

***Part 2: Examining the motives and behavior of key actors in human rights violations: perpetrators, bystanders, and those who helped the victims***

**Thurs, Feb 21:** Peter Schotten, "Hannah Arendt's Eichmann Reconsidered," *Modern Age*, Spring 2007 (on Moodle)

John M. Darley and C. Daniel Batson, "'From Jerusalem to Jericho': A study of Situational and Dispositional Variables in Helping Behavior," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 27 (1), 100-108, 1973 (on Moodle).

Case studies, prep day 1: During the final half hour of class, we will divide into small groups, and each will choose a case to which they will apply Waller's model of how ordinary people commit genocide and mass killing (see his chart on page 138). In the following days, each person should then find three sources on that case (cross-checking with one another to avoid duplication of sources), which they will summarize in a couple of paragraphs to share with the others via email.

**Tues, Feb 26:** James Waller, *Becoming Evil*, Part 1: "What are the origins of extraordinary human evil?"

Case studies, prep day 2: Today, during part of the class, the small groups will meet to discuss the case and to assign each member one aspect of Waller's model, which they will be responsible for relating to the case.

**Thurs, Feb 28:** Waller, *Becoming Evil*, rest of book

Case studies: presentations to class.

**Tues, Mar 4:** "*The Good Old Days*": *The Holocaust as Seen by Its Perpetrators and Bystanders*, ed. Ernst Klee, Willi Dressen, and Volker Riess, Old Saybrook, CT: Konecky & Konecky, 1988, (excerpt on Moodle)

Write-up of your aspect of the Waller case study due (2-pages, double-spaced).

**Thurs, Mar 6:** Jean Hatzfeld, *Machete Season: The Killers in Rwanda Speak*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005 (excerpt on Moodle)

Scott Straus and Robert Lyons, *Intimate Enemy: Images and Voices of the Rwandan Genocide*, New York: Zone Books, 2006 (excerpt on Moodle)

**Tues, Mar 11:** Film: *Weapons of the Spirit*, Pierre Sauvage (French with subtitles), 1989, and discussion.

Final paper proposal due.

**Thurs, Mar 13:** Samuel P. Oliner and Pearl M. Oliner, *The Altruistic Personality: Rescuers of Jews in Nazi Europe*, New York: The Free Press, 1988 (excerpt on Moodle)

**March 15-23: SPRING BREAK!**

***Part 3: The victims: surviving, healing, witnessing, and questions of justice and forgiveness***

**Tues, Mar 25:** Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The aftermath of violence—from domestic abuse to political terror*, New York: Basic Books, 1992 and 1997, (excerpt on Moodle).

**Thurs, Mar 27:** Susan Brison, “Trauma narratives and the remaking of the self,” in Mieke Bal, Jonathan Crewe and Leo Spitzer (eds.), *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present*, Dartmouth: University Press of New England, 1999, pp. 39-54 (on Moodle).

Marita Sturken, “The aesthetics of absence: Rebuilding Ground Zero,” *American Ethnologist*, 31 (3), 311-325 (on Moodle).

**Tues, Apr 1:** Eric Stover, *The Witnesses: War Crimes and the Promise of Justice in the Hague*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005 (excerpt on Moodle).

**Thurs, Apr 3:** Dave Eggers, *What is the What*, first half

**Tues, Apr 8:** Eggers, *What is the What*, second half

**Thurs, Apr 10:** Simon Wiesenthal, *The Sunflower: On the Possibilities and Limits of Forgiveness*, Book 1: The Sunflower

Writing assignment 3, Part A: In one single-spaced page, answer the question at the end of *The Sunflower*. Discussion will incorporate your answers.

**Tues, Apr 15:** Wiesenthal, *The Sunflower*, Book 2: The Symposium

Writing assignment 3, Part B: In one single-spaced page, identify which of the authors in the Symposium offers an answer most similar to the one you gave in Part A and which author differs the most, making sure to explain the nature of the similarity and difference. Parts A and B, together, due today.

**Thurs, Apr 17:** Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, *A Human Being Died that Night: A South African Story of Forgiveness*, New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2003 (excerpt on Moodle).

**April 22 and 24: no class;** I'll be in Norway

**Tues, April 29:** presentations of final papers

**Thurs, May 1:** presentations of final papers

**Tues, May 6:** course wrap-up; paper due