Special Topics in Anthropology: Human Rights in Cross-Cultural Perspective

ANG 6930-8098
R 8-10
RNK 0210

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Increasingly, social justice movements around the world are framing their issues in the language of human rights and drawing on the instruments of international and transnational human right regimes. This seminar will examine this phenomenon through the prism of anthropology's complex and contradictory relationship with human rights as a multiplex site of theoretical engagement, discourse, and the intended and unintended consequences of rights-claiming processes. The seminar will address anthropologists' role in a transnational conversation that has largely been led by legal scholars, political scientists, and philosophers. Our principal focus will be on how anthropologists have begun to rethink, reframe, and recontextualize human rights as well as concretely confront their violation through advocacy and activism. The literature we will read and discuss explores the vexed relationship between culture and rights, the enabling and regressive or cooptive aspects of rights regimes, the process of translating ideas from transnational human rights arenas into local cultural practices, shifts in subjectivities due to the vernacularization of human rights consciousness, women's rights as human rights, the impact of globalization and, in the past few years, the War on Terror on human rights, and the human rights implications of human-exacerbated natural disasters like Katrina.

TEXTS:
Required


PLUS other readings accessible via JSTOR & AnthroSource.

Recommended

REQUIREMENTS
Participation—30% (or 30 points)
Three short essays—30%
Seminar paper—40%

GRADING
Based on the total number of points accumulated. The scale will be the following:
A 93-100, B+=87-92, B=80-86, C+=76-79, C=70-75

SEMINAR SCHEDULE
08.24  Introductions and Expectations
Homework assignment 1: Spend the first anniversary of Hurricane Katrina watching Spike Lee’s HBO documentary, “When the Levees Broke: A Requiem in Four Acts” on 08.29 at 8-12 pm.

Homework assignment 2: Do some web research on human rights Organizations (e.g., AI, Human Rights Watch, Global Rights, Physicians for Human Rights, The Carter Center of Emory University, Madre, Cultural Survival, Derechos, Congressional Human Rights Foundation, etc.). Do they take a position on Katrina as a human rights issue?

08.31  Viewing Human Rights through the Prism of Film & Organizations
Segment 1: Discussion on Katrina, the documentary’s representation of it, and the approach human rights organizations have taken to the disaster.

Segment 2: Discussion on the key concepts, instruments, and organizations that constitute the human rights domain or regime

09.07  Viewing Human Rights through the Prism of Anthropology


Essay #1 due

09.14  Understanding Human Rights through New Registers of Knowledge

Mark Goodale, “Introduction to “Anthropology & Human Rights in a New Key”

Jane K. Cowan, “Culture and Rights after Culture & Rights
Mark Goodale, “Ethical Theory as Social Practice”
Sally Engle Merry, “Transnational Human Rights & Local Activism: Mapping the Middle”
Annelise Riles, “Anthropology, Human Rights, & Legal Knowledge: Culture in the Iron Cage
Shannon Speed, “At the Crossroads of Human Rights & Anthropology: Toward a Critically Engaged Activist Research”
Richard Ashby Wilson, “Afterword to... : The Social Life of Human Rights”

09.21 Views and Practices of Activist Anthropologists

09.28 Human Rights & Human Security in the Age of Terrorism

10.05 Genocide and its Aftermath

Essay #2 due

10.12 Analyzing the Artifactual and Physical Remains of Repression & Genocide
Guest presentation by Dr. Michael Warren, forensic anthropologist

10.19 Confronting Violence against Women
Sally Engle Merry, 2006. Human Rights & Gender Violence: Translating International Law into Local Justice

10.26 Performing Human Rights as Repertoires of Public Protest & Dissidence

11.02 Student Presentations
Essay #3 due

11.09 Student Presentations

11.16 Student Presentations

11.23 THANKSGIVING DAY HOLIDAY

11.30 Student Presentations.
Seminar papers due