

Special Topics in Anthropology: Human Rights in Cross-Cultural Perspective
ANG 6930-8098

R 8-10

RNK 0210

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Office Hours: MW 10-noon or by arrangement

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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

Sally Engle Merry. *Human Rights & Gender Violence: Translating International Law into Local Justice*. University of Chicago Press, 2006.

Carole Nagengast & Carolos G. Vélez-Ibáñez, eds. *Human Rights: The Scholar Activist*. Society for Applied Anthropology, 2004.

Victoria Sanford. *Buried Secrets: Truth and Human Rights in Guatemala*. Palgrave, 2003.

Susan Slyomovics. *The Performance of Human Rights in Morocco*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005.

Richard Ashby Wilson, ed. *Human Rights in the "War on Terror."* Cambridge University Press, 2005.

PLUS other readings accessible via JSTOR & AnthroSource.

Recommended

Jane K. Cowan, Marie-Bénédicte Dembour, and Richard A. Wilson, eds. *Culture and Rights: Anthropological Perspectives*. Cambridge University Press, 2001.

Richard Ashby Wilson and Jon P. Mitchell, eds. *Human Rights in Global Perspective: Anthropological Studies of Rights Claims, and Entitlements*. Routledge, 2003.

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
Ronald Cohen, 1989. "Human Rights and Cultural Relativism: The Need for a New Approach." *American Anthropologist* 91(4):1014-17.
Ellen Messer, 1993. "Anthropology and Human Rights." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 22:221-49.
Carole Nagengast, 1994. "Violence, Terror, and the Crisis of the State" *ARA* 23:109-36.
Mark Goodale, 2006. "Toward a Critical Anthropology of Human Rights." *Current Anthropology* 47(3):485-511.
- Essay #1 due**
- 09.14 Understanding Human Rights through New Registers of Knowledge
Mark Goodale, guest ed., 2006. "In Focus: Anthropology and Human Rights in a New Key" *American Anthropologist* 108(1)
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
 Carole Nagengast & Carlos G. Vélez-Ibañez, eds. 2004. *Human Rights: The Scholar Activist*. Society for Applied Anthropology
- 09.28 Human Rights & Human Security in the Age of Terrorism
 Richard Ashby Wilson, ed. 2005. *Human Rights in the "War on Terror"*
- 10.05 Genocide and its Aftermath
 Victoria Sanford, 2003. *Buried Secrets: Truth & Human Rights in Guatemala*.
- 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 Repertories of Public Protest & Dissidence
 Susan Slyomovics, 2005. *The Performance of Human Rights in Morocco*.
- 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