

Human Rights in Africa:

Historical and Anthropological Perspectives

Kenyon College

Spring 2002, Mondays 7-10 pm

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The tension between respect for "local cultures" and "universal rights" is a pressing concern within human rights activism. In the past decade, anthropologists have been increasingly involved in these discussions, working to situate their understandings of cultural relativism within a broader framework of social justice.

This course explores the contributions of anthropology to the theoretical and practical concerns of human rights work. We begin the semester by reading a number of key human rights documents and theoretical texts. These readings will be drawn from religious traditions, classic and contemporary philosophy, anthropology, and critical theory. The second half of the semester is devoted to two in-depth case studies from Africa, and will draw heavily on ideas and themes presented in the first half of the course. The first case is historical: the rubber trade in the Belgian Congo, circa 1900, and the development of what Adam Hochschild has called "the first modern human rights campaign," led by Roger Casement. The second case is anthropological: the current debates in southern Africa over homosexuality and human rights, in which we will pay particular attention to the ways in which activists both for and against rights of sexual orientation frame their understandings of "humanity" and "African culture." Students will be asked to relate their understandings human rights to the historical and cultural dimensions of these two cases, addressing such questions as the nature of humanity, historical conceptions of the individual, gender and sexuality in the colonial context, the limits of relativism, and the relationship between human rights in theory and in practice.

Required Texts Available in the Kenyon College Bookstore and in Olin Library

- (1) Ishay, Micheline, ed. (1997) *The Human Rights Reader: Major Political Essays, Speeches, and Documents from the Bible to the Present*. New York: Routledge.
- (2) Hochschild, Adam (1999) *King Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa* New York: Mariner Books.
- (3) Conrad, Joseph (1983) *Heart of Darkness* New York: Penguin.
- (4) Gevisser, Mark and Edwin Cameron, eds. (1995) *Defiant Desire: Gay and Lesbian Lives in South Africa* New York: Routledge.
- (5) Palmberg, Mai and Chris Dunton (1996) *Human Rights and Homosexuality in Southern Africa* (second edition) Uppsala: Nordic Afrika Insitut.
- (6) RESERVE READINGS *Reserve readings (marked by R in the syllabus) are available in Olin Library, either on ERES or 2-hour reserve.*

Suggested Text Available on Reserve in Olin Library

- (1) Lauren, Paul Gordon (1998) *The Evolution of International Human Rights: Visions Seen*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

January 14

Introductory Lecture: What are human rights?

Film: "Hopes on the Horizon" Directed by Onyekachi Wambu (in class)

January 21 The Modern Articulation of Rights

Lauren, Paul "Transforming Visions into Reality: Fifty Years of the Universal Declaration" **R**

Universal Declaration of Human Rights (in Ishay, pp. 407-411)

African Charter on Human and People's Rights (in Ishay, pp. 473-479)

Vienna Declaration (in Ishay, pp. 479-490)

Beijing Declaration (in Ishay, pp. 491-505)

January 28 Religion and Morality

Lauren, Paul "My Brother's and Sister's Keeper: Visions and the Birth of Human Rights" **R**

Excerpts from the Pentateuch (in Ishay, pp. 1-4)

Description of a Bodhisattva (in Ishay, pp. 4-9)

Excerpts from the Koran (in Ishay, pp. 41-55)

Gandhi, Mahatma "Passive Resistance" (in Ishay, pp. 349-351)

February 4

Film: "The Role of Forensic Anthropology in Documenting Human Rights Abuses"

A lecture by Clyde Snow, Kenyon College, January 1994

February 11 The Enlightenment

de Las Casas, Bartholomé *In Defense of the Indians* (in Ishay, pp.65-72)

Paine, Thomas *The Rights of Man* (in Ishay, pp. 134-137)

Kant, Immanuel *Perpetual Peace* (in Ishay, pp. 160-161)

Kant, Immanuel *The Metaphysics of Morals* (in Ishay, pp. 161-174)

Wood, Alan "Kant's Project for Perpetual Peace" **R**

February 18 Contemporary Debates

Lukes, Steven "Five Fables about Human Rights" (in Ishay, pp. 233-246)

Habermas, Jürgen "The Public Sphere" **R**

Howard, Rhoda and Jack Donnelly "Liberalism and Human Rights" (in Ishay, pp. 268-277)

Rorty, Richard "Human Rights, Rationality, and Sentimentality" **R**

Robbins, Bruce "Sad Stories in the International Public Sphere: Richard Rorty on Culture and Human Rights" **R**

Film: Jacques Derrida and Alan Montefiore's Oxford Amnesty Lecture, 1992 (in class)

February 25 Anthropological Interventions

Boas, Franz "The Limitations of the Comparative Method of Anthropology" **R**

American Anthropological Association "[1947] Statement on Human Rights" **R**

Steward, Julian and H.G. Barnett "Comments on the Statement on Human Rights" **R**

Turner, Terence "Human Rights, Human Difference: Anthropology's Contribution to an Emancipatory Cultural Politics" **R**

Zechenter, Elizabeth "In the Name of Culture: Cultural Relativism and the Abuse of the Individual" **R**

Fox, Robin "Human Nature and Human Rights" **R**

March 4

FIRST PAPER DUE

Film: "Chef!" Directed by Jean-Marie Téno (in class)

March 11 & March 18

SPRING BREAK

March 25 Congo Rubber Trade: Horror and Abuse in the Literary Imagination

Conrad, Joseph *Heart of Darkness*

April 1 Congo Rubber Trade: Rights and History in Africa

Casement, Roger "The Congo Report of 1903" **R**

Hochschild, Adam *King Leopold's Ghost*, pp. 1-139

April 8 Congo Rubber Trade: Rights and History in Africa

Hochschild, Adam *King Leopold's Ghost*, pp.140-306

Twain, Mark *King Leopold's Soliloquy* **R**

April 15

SECOND PAPER DUE

Film: "Ken Saro-Wiwa: An African Martyr" Directed by Mark Johnston (in class)

April 22 "Homosexuality" in Southern Africa: Apartheid South Africa

Gevisser, Mark "A Different Fight for Freedom" (in *Defiant Desire*)

McClellan, Hugh and Linda Ngcobo "Those Who Fuck Me Say I'm Tasty" (in *Defiant Desire*)

Olivier, Gerrit "From Ada to Zeld: Notes on Gay Language in South Africa" (in *Defiant Desire*)

Achmat, Zackie "My Childhood as an Adult Molester" (in *Defiant Desire*)

Donham, Donald "Freeing South Africa: The 'Modernization' of Male-Male Sexuality in Soweto" **R**

Armour, Mary and Sheila Lapinsky "Lesbians in Love and Compromising Situations"

(in *Defiant Desire*)

April 29 "Homosexuality" in Southern Africa: The Zimbabwe Book Fair Controversy

Epprecht, Marc "Good God Almighty, What's This?" **R**

Palmberg, Mai and Chris Dunton *Human Rights and Homosexuality in Southern Africa*

Murray, Stephen O. "Sexual Politics in Contemporary Southern Africa" **R**

Engelke, Matthew "We Wondered What Human Rights He Was Talking About" **R**

Philips, Oliver "Zimbabwean Law and the Production of a White Man's Disease" **R**

FINAL PAPER DUE MONDAY, MAY 13 5.00 PM

Assignments and Grading

This course is an upper-level seminar, and participation from each student in the discussion is essential. Participation will count for 20% of the final grade. Students are expected to attend class regularly. Those who miss more than one class meeting will have their final grade lowered by 1/3 of a letter grade (B+ to B, C to C-) for each subsequent absence.

In an effort to create dialogues in the class among your peers, each student will be asked to give one presentation during the semester. The schedule for presentations will be determined at the first meeting. Presentations, which will be read out loud to the class, should be 5-7 typed pages and focus on that day's reading. Presenters will also facilitate discussion until the class break (approximately 8.30 pm). The presentation will count for 20% of the final grade.

There are three 7-page papers for this class. Each paper is worth 20% of the final grade:

Paper #1 will address the theoretical and documentary readings.

Paper #2 will focus on the Congo case study.

Paper #3 will focus on the Gay Rights case study.

The details of these assignments will be discussed further in class. Students will be given a list of three questions from which to choose for each paper. (For papers 2 and 3, students will be asked to relate the theoretical readings and class discussions to an in-depth analysis of the case studies.) No late essays will be accepted.

Finally, please note: If you have a physical, psychological, medical, or learning disability that may impact your ability to carry out assigned course work, I would urge that you contact the Office of Disability Services at x5453. The Coordinator of Disability Services, Erin Salva (salvae@kenyon.edu), will review your concerns and determine, with you, what accommodations are appropriate. All information and documentation of disability is confidential.

Questions or comments? We want to hear from you!
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