

**Sociology of Human Rights**  
**Spring Semester 2009**  
**Time: Thursday, 7:10-10:00 PM**  
**Location: SO 105**

**Professor: Dr. Mark Frezzo**  
**Office Hours: Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday, 5:00-7:00 PM (in SO 391 C)**  
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### **Course Description**

In recent years, sociologists have joined political scientists, legal scholars, and philosophers in debating the nature and scope of human rights. In keeping with their training, sociologists explore not only the *social conditions* under which human rights legislation is drafted, interpreted, enforced, and violated, but also the relationship between the human rights canon and institutions designed to implement human rights. Moreover, sociologists examine how the conferral of rights affects the conduct of societies, communities, and individuals. In the process of explaining how rights—understood as claims made on national governments and other institutions—“circulate” among different social actors, this course examines a series of questions. How has the human rights canon—understood as a collection of proclamations, laws, scholarly texts, and common wisdom—evolved from ancient times to the present day? How have inter-governmental organizations (IGOs), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and social movements promoted human rights? What is the connection between human rights and democracy? What are the prospects for a rights regime on a global scale? In historicizing struggles over human rights, the course places particular emphasis on the period stretching from the Enlightenment revolutions to the age of globalization.

### **Course Objectives**

This course introduces students to the sociology of human rights—a growing field in academia. Recently, the American Sociological Association and the International Sociological Association founded sections on human rights to match those of the professional organizations in political science, law, anthropology, and international studies. In becoming conversant in the scholarly debates on human rights, you will acquire a technical vocabulary: first-generation rights (pertaining to liberty); second-generation rights (pertaining to equality); and third-generation rights (pertaining to solidarity). In addition, you will learn how to place the problem of human rights in world-historical perspective. Finally, you will learn to apply the tools of sociology to the following phenomena:

- Historical conflicts over human rights
- Human rights, development, and US hegemony
- Networks of IGOs, NGOs, and movements pushing for new rights
- Advocacy of human rights and processes of democratization
- Proposals for a human rights regime on a global scale

In addition to being cross-listed with Comparative Studies, this course counts toward the core requirement for the Graduate Certificate in Peace Studies. Accordingly, it offers a *sociological* approach to peace studies.

### **Course Requirements**

The course will combine lectures and class discussions. It is important for you to complete the reading, attend class regularly, and participate diligently in class discussions. The class discussions will be designed to cultivate your skills in textual analysis, problem solving, public speaking, and argumentation. Consisting of a take-home exam and a research paper, the coursework is designed to develop your skills in sociological research and writing.

Based on the first two books (Ishay 2007, 2008), the take-home exam will cover the major events in the history of human rights. Its purpose is to make sure that you have mastered the rudiments of the field. In addition, the take-home exam will include a proposal for your research paper. The proposal will guide your work for the remainder of the semester. The purpose of the research paper is to give you practice in designing, executing, and revising a manuscript for publication in a scholarly journal. You will be expected not only to engage the course material (e.g., by adopting a world-historical approach to the problem of human rights and by referring to the books by Ishay, Turner, Wallerstein, Smith, Somers, and Falk), but also to connect the material to your previous research. I will explain both assignments in detail at the beginning of the semester. Your overall grade will be calculated as follows:

· **Take-Home Exam (February 26) = 35% of the Final Grade**

· **Research Paper (April 30) = 45% of the Final Grade**

· **Class Participation = 20% of the Final Grade**

In accordance with the norms of graduate school, regular attendance and active participation are expected. Each class session will begin with a lecture by the professor, continue with a structured discussion of the reading material, and end with a summation.

Throughout the semester, I will upload discussion notes, announcements, summaries, and other useful items to the **Blackboard site**. Login instructions: <http://blackboard.fau.edu/webapps/portal/frameset.jsp>. You are expected to use the site on a regular basis. In addition, you are encouraged to post your questions, comments, and reflections on the discussion boards. After each class session, I will post a summary on a discussion board marked “**Professor’s Blog.**” You are urged to read the blogs carefully—especially in preparing for the exams.

Before each session, I will send an e-mail reminder to the entire class. Since the Blackboard site allows professors to send e-mail messages only to FAU accounts, you are urged to check your FAU account frequently.

My **office hours** are as follows: Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday, 5:00-7:00 PM. My office is located in SO 391 C. In addition, you are welcome to make an appointment to meet at another time. If you have any questions about the reading material or any other aspect of the course, you should not hesitate to visit my office.

### **Course Readings (in order of appearance)**

Ishay, Micheline (2008). *The History of Human Rights: From Ancient Times to the Globalization Era*.

Ishay, Micheline (2007). *The Human Rights Reader*.

Turner, Brian (2006). *Vulnerability and Human Rights*.

Wallerstein, Immanuel (2006). *European Universalism: The Rhetoric of Power*.

Smith, Jackie (2007). *Social Movements for Global Democracy*.

Somers, Margaret (2008). *Genealogies of Citizenship*.

Falk, Richard (2009). *Achieving Human Rights*.

The books are available at the Campus Bookstore. You are urged to purchase your books at the *beginning* of the semester. The bookstore has a policy of returning unsold books in the middle of the semester. In addition to using the assigned books, you will be required to select a number of journal articles for your research paper.

## Course Schedule

### Part One: Human Rights in World-Historical Perspective

1. January 8: What Is the Sociology of Human Rights?
  - Lecture
  - Discussion of syllabus, course objectives, and assignments
  - \*You should begin planning your research by gathering both primary sources (documents, influential texts, etc.) and secondary sources (journal articles) relevant to your topic. Ishay's books should lead you to other sources.
2. January 15: Antecedents of Human Rights in the Ancient World
  - Lecture
  - Discussion of reading: Ishay (2008), 1-61; Ishay (2007), 1-37
3. January 22: Human Rights in the Modern World: The Enlightenment
  - Lecture
  - Discussion of reading: Ishay (2008), 63-116; Ishay (2007), 93-188
4. January 29: Human Rights in the Modern World: The Industrial Revolution
  - Lecture
  - Discussion of reading: Ishay (2008), 117-172; Ishay (2007), 189-282
5. February 5: Human Rights, Development, and the Trajectory of US Hegemony
  - Lecture
  - Discussion of reading: Ishay (2008), 173-243; Ishay (2007), 283-332
6. February 12: Human Rights in the Age of Globalization
  - Lecture
  - Discussion of reading: Ishay (2008), 245-311; Ishay (2007), 333-436
7. February 19: The Future of Human Rights
  - Lecture
  - Discussion of reading: Ishay (2008), 315-367; Ishay (2007), 437-543
  - Take-home exam distributed
8. February 26: Reflections on the World-Historical Approach to Human Rights
  - Take-home exam due
  - Discussion of research papers
  - \*Since the proposal constitutes a portion of the take-home exam, you should be prepared to discuss your research topic in the February 26 session.
9. March 5: Spring Break (No Class)

## Part Two: Contemporary Debates in the Field of Human Rights

10. March 12: Theoretical Underpinnings of Human Rights
  - Lecture
  - Discussion of reading: Turner, *Vulnerability and Human Rights*
11. March 19: Universalism and the Legacy of Eurocentrism
  - Lecture
  - Discussion of reading: Wallerstein, *European Universalism*
12. March 26: Movements, NGOs, IGOs, and Human Rights
  - Lecture
  - Discussion of reading: Smith, *Social Movements for Global Democracy*
13. April 2: Citizenship in the Contemporary World
  - Lecture
  - Discussion of reading: Somers, *Genealogies of Citizenship*
14. April 9: Proposals for a Human Rights Regime on a Global Scale
  - Lecture
  - Discussion of reading: Falk, *Achieving Human Rights*
15. April 16: Conclusion
  - Lecture
  - Round-table discussion
16. April 23: Workshop on Research Paper
  - \*The session will be devoted to trouble-shooting. You will be encouraged to discuss research and writing issues.
17. April 30: Research Paper Due (No Class)
  - \*You should place a hard copy of your research paper in my departmental mailbox and submit an electronic copy via e-mail by 7:00 PM.

### **Teaching Philosophy**

In designing and implementing courses in various domains of sociology, I follow four guidelines. First, I conceptualize the classroom as a learning community. Accordingly, I foster cooperation among students not only by carefully moderating class discussions to maximize inclusiveness, but also by designing small group exercises to maximize collegiality. Second, I treat students as sociologists. Accordingly, I encourage them not only to take their own ideas seriously (irrespective of their disciplinary backgrounds or previous experience), but also to approach problems with sociological rigor. Third, I believe that the most important aspect of teaching consists in the cultivation of critical-thinking skills. I design class discussions, group exercises, and exams with this goal in mind. I encourage relentless questioning in every course-related endeavor. Fourth, I believe that the purpose of sociology is to interrogate the contemporary period. It is my hope that students will come to think of themselves as active participants in the global public sphere.