

Human Rights  
Pol 388  
Gibney  
Spring 2009  
[mgibney@unca.edu](mailto:mgibney@unca.edu)  
Office Hours: 3-4:30 T/R

I maintain – and will do so until my dying days – that the greatest “revolution” in my lifetime (and yours as well) is the “human rights revolution.” Think about this: until a few short decades ago how a government treated its own citizens was nobody’s business. This has all changed (at least in theory), and what now exists is a universal recognition of “universal” human rights. On the other hand, we also live in a world where massive levels of human rights violations continue to exist, and where literally billions of people have been left without some form of human rights protection.

What I hope to do in this class is to feed off the passion and excitement for human rights that students invariably bring into this class. I assure you, there is no class that I teach that I do more tinkering with – and more worrying about -- than this one. Human rights is my field and I dearly hope I will be able to convey to you how and why this is. On the other hand, what I also hope to show is that human rights is more than simply singing “Kumbaya” (sp?) around a campfire.

In my view, one of the great problems with human rights is that there is a tendency for it to become quite abstract, or BORING to use a less charitable term. To help avoid that (I hope) this semester I have decided to completely change how I go about teaching this class. I have significantly reduced the amount of assigned reading and in its place I have added such things as film and outside speakers – and even a New Orleans brass band!

You should also note that I try to guard against seeing human rights as little more than distant atrocities. In that way, not only is a fair amount of the course focused specifically on human rights violations within the United States, but you will also see that in my own writing I offer a much different vision of what constitutes “responsibility” for human rights violations.

**Readings:** There are three assigned books. There is a recent book from me entitled *International Human Rights Law: Returning to Universal Principles*, which I assure you is not nearly as lifeless as its title would indicate. There is Alex Kotlowitz’s *There are No Children Here*, which is a book that you will remember the rest of your life. And finally, Paul Collier’s recently released *The Bottom Billion*, which is one of the few (perhaps only) books on international poverty that is readable.

In addition to this, there are some other reading assignment books on Moodle. I am learning about this program right now, but I have been told that it will provide you with access to these readings.

**Grades:** You will be writing a brief response paper for each of the assigned books (3 in all). Each of these will be worth 20% of your grade. In addition, you will write a paper on a research project that you might like to undertake – but will not undertake, at least not this semester. This “projected project” will be worth another 20% of your grade. The other 20% will be based on your “class contributions” (or lack thereof).

### Course Overview

Jan. 15 Introduction: The State of the World

Read Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)

Glance at <http://thereport.amnesty.org> (but note this is really for the year 2007), especially overview and facts and figures

Glance at: Political Terror Scale ([politicalterroryscale.org](http://politicalterroryscale.org))

Jan. 20 “The Ex-Mas Feast” from Uwem Akpan, *Say You’re One of Them*

Jan 22 “Darwin’s Nightmare” (107 minutes)

Jan. 27 Paul Lauren, “My Brothers and Sisters Keeper” from *The Evolution of International Human Rights*

Jan. 29 Michael Ignatieff “Human Rights as Idolatry” and Makau Mutua, “Savages, Victims and Saviors”

Feb. 3 “Terrorism” (Part I) “Arna’s Children (85 minutes)

Feb 5 class to be held on Sunday Feb. 8 and Monday Feb. 9

Feb. 8: Adina Hoffman and Taha Muhammad Ali “My Happiness Bears No Relation to Happiness: A Poet’s Life in the Palestinian Century”

Feb. 9: Peter Cole, “Things On Which I’ve Stumbled”

Feb. 10 Read: Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman and Degrading Treatment  
Susan Sontag, “Torture”

Feb. 12 The Right to Health and Children’s Rights

Howe and Covell, “Children’s Rights” from *Empowering Children: Children’s Rights Education as a Pathway to Citizenship*

Reports by Paul Hunt (former) Special Rapporteur on the Right to Health

U.N. Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, "General Comment No. 14"

Feb. 17 & 19 "Standard Operating Procedure"

Feb. 24 "Refugee All Stars" (79 minutes)

Feb. 26 class will be held on Friday Feb. 27. There will be a talk by Mindy Fullilove, author of *Root Shock: How Tearing Up Cities is Bad for America*, which is part of the series "Twilight of a Neighborhood: Asheville's East End Community," 7 p.m. Humanities Lecture Hall

March 3 & 5 Mark Gibney, *International Human Rights Law: Returning to Universal Principles*

Spring Break

March 17 & 19 Spike Lee, "When the Levees Broke" and Hot 8 Brass Band (March 20)

March 24 & March 26 Alex Kotlowitz, *There are No Children Here*

March 31 & April 2 "Terrorism" (Part II) "USA v. Al-Arian" (100 minutes)

April 7 & 9 The Death Penalty in the United States

"The Trials of Daryl Hunt" (106 minutes)/Glen Edward Chapman (former Death Row Inmate) and Pam Laughon, UNCA Dept. of Psychology

Ingle, "Last Rights"

April 14 & 16 Truth, Reconciliation – and Prosecution

"Long Night's Journey Into Day" (94 minutes)

Makau Mutua, "Hope and Despair for the New South Africa"

Horton, "Justice After Bush"

April 21 & 23 Poverty Eradication

Paul Collier, *The Bottom Billion*

April 28 "Pray the Devil Back to Hell" (72 minutes)

April 30 Report on proposed projects