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, which has often involved situating 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 by reading a number of key human rights documents and theoretical texts. These readings are followed by selections in anthropology on the concepts of relativism and culture. Students will then be asked to relate human rights to the historical and cultural dimensions of particular cases, addressing such questions as the nature of humanity, historical conceptions of the individual, colonialism and imperialism, the limits of relativism, and the relationship between rights in theory and in practice. Case studies this year will include: gay rights in southern Africa, the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, and state violence in Guatemala.

**Assessment Essays**

Assessment essays are part of the examination for the course and are required from undergraduate students for all courses in anthropology. MSc students are not required to submit assessment essays.

Late assessment essays will NOT be marked. If an extension of an assessment essay deadline is required, application must be made in writing via your tutor to the Chair of Examiners BEFORE the deadline. Permission may not be given unless there are extenuating circumstances.

NO EXTENSIONS WILL BE GIVEN FOR REQUESTS RECEIVED AFTER THE ESSAY DEADLINE WHICH IS 4.00 PM ON 12 JANUARY 2004 (THE FIRST DAY OF LENT TERM). YOU ARE REQUIRED TO HAND IN 2 COPIES OF YOUR ESSAY TO ROOM A605.

**A Note on Readings**

Readings marked with ** are required readings. Suggested readings are also given for each week.

Many of the readings in the first few lectures are taken from:


Students with a longstanding interest in human rights may consider purchasing Ishay's book, although copies will be available in the Course Collections of the BLPES.

Students interested in web resources on anthropology and human rights may find the following sites helpful throughout the course. (This list is not exhaustive, but should give students an idea of the kinds of resources available; most of them contain links to other sites, and the AAA's site has files of reading lists on particular subjects.)

* [http://www.hrw.org/](http://www.hrw.org/) (Human Rights Watch) *
* [http://www.cidh.org/](http://www.cidh.org/) (Inter American Commission on Human Rights) *
* [http://www.ictr.org/](http://www.ictr.org/) (International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda) *
* [http://www.kubatana.net/](http://www.kubatana.net/) (Online Community for Zimbabwean Activists) *

**LECTURE 1 A BRIEF HISTORY OF HUMAN RIGHTS**

This lecture introduces some of the key human rights documents to emerge in the wake of World War II. The lecture and discussions will focus on a close reading of the UDHR, as well as the historical and political contexts in which it was produced.

*Students need to familiarize themselves with the following human rights documents, which will be referred to throughout the course. These are available in literally hundreds of books and on hundreds of websites. The parenthetical citations here are for the Ishay volume referenced above (and available in the Course Collections):*

* 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) *

LECTURE 2 RIGHTS BEFORE HUMAN RIGHTS: RELIGIOUS AND PHILOSOPHICAL TEXTS
This lecture explores the concept of rights before the UDHR, and before the emergence of a "human rights culture." Readings are drawn from a number of seminal philosophical and religious texts, all recognized as important precursors to the modern articulation of human rights.

The following readings can be found in the Ishay volume:

* Description of a Bodhisattva (in Ishay, pp. 4-9)
* Excerpts from the Koran (in Ishay, pp. 41-55)
* Mahatma Gandhi, excerpts from "Passive Resistance" (in Ishay, pp. 349-351)
* Bartholomé de las Casas, In Defense of the Indians (in Ishay, pp. 65-72)
* Thomas Paine, excerpts from The Rights of Man (in Ishay, pp. 134-137)


**Paul Lauren

**Alan Wood

Michael Perry

Eric Hobsbawm

Alain Supiot

LECTURE 3 ANTHROPOLOGICAL INTERVENTIONS (PART I)
This lecture focuses on classic debates in anthropology over universalism and relativism, which (particularly over the past decade) have helped set the stage for anthropological work on human rights.

**Clifford Geertz

**Ernest Gellner

**Steven Lukes

**Stanley Jayaraia Tambiah

Franz Boas

Ruth Benedict
1934 Patterns of Culture. Boston: Houghton Mifflin. [Read Chapter 1]

Clifford Geertz

George Stocking
Lecture 4 Anthropological Interventions (Part II)

This week, we turn to work that has explicitly addressed the concept human rights. Attention is drawn to historical shifts within anthropology as to the importance of relativism as a perspective. To show how anthropological concerns are connected to larger debates, we focus as well on the ways in which American pragmatism can be used to situate anthropological theory on human rights.

**American Anthropological Association**


**Julian Steward and H.G. Barnett**


**American Anthropological Association**


**Terence Turner**


**Sally Engle Merry**


**Richard Rorty**


Marie-Bénédicte Dembour


Elizabeth Zechenter


Ellen Messer


Karen Engle


Robin Fox


W. Penn Handwerker


Adam Kuper


Nancy Scheper-Hughes


Clifford Geertz

LECTURE 5 VIOLANCE AND THE STATE IN GUATEMALA

This lecture introduces students to the history and anthropology of Guatemala, with a focus on state violence against Mayan peoples, the role of ethnic revivalist movements in human rights work, and the impact of colonialism.

**Richard Wilson

1999 *Maya Resurgence in Guatemala*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press. [Read esp. Chapters 1, 2, 7 & 8]

**Linda Green


**Kay Warren


Charles Hale


Rachel Sieder and Jessica Witchell


Victoria Sanford


Diane Nelson


Judith Zar


Robert Carmack


Angelina Snodgrass Godoy


LECTURE 6 HISTORY, TRUTH, AND HUMAN RIGHTS: THE MENCHÚ CONTROVERSY

Building on the previous week's readings, this lecture focuses on the controversy over Nobel Peace Laureate Rigoberta Menchú's autobiography, sparked by the publication of a book by anthropologist David Stoll questioning the veracity of Menchú's account. Topics covered in this lecture include the politics of history, memory, and truth, and the intervention of anthropologists as scholars and activists into human rights debates.

**Elisabeth Burgos-Debray


**David Stoll


Arturo Arias, ed.


Jennifer Schirmer


LECTURE 7 "HOMOSEXUALITY" IN SOUTHERN AFRICA: APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA

- Adam Kuper

- W. Penn Handwerker

- Ellen Messer

- Elizabeth Zechenter


1996 President of Zimbabwe, Robert Mugabe, called homosexuals "worse than dogs and pigs." This lecture continues the themes of last week, showing how anti-homosexual violence and repression are part of a broader context of violence, including the genocide in Rwanda, and state violence in Guatemala.

...
The connection between the anti-Apartheid movement and gay rights activism in South Africa was slow to come, and highlights a number of issues connected to the construction of sexuality, race, and discourses of imperialism. This lecture focuses on key texts documenting the rise of a gay rights movement in South Africa, situating the movement in broader relation to the politics of identity.

**Mark Gevisser**

**Hugh McLean and Linda Ngcobo**

**Donald Donham**

**T. Dunbar Moodie**

Gerrit Olivier

Zackie Achmat

Mary Armour and Sheila Lapinsky

Jeremy Sarkin

Michel Foucault

**LECTURE 8 "HOMOSEXUALITY" IN SOUTHERN AFRICA: ZIMBABWE'S BOOK FAIR**

In 1995, a controversy erupted at the annual book fair in Harare, Zimbabwe over the participation of a group called Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe (GALZ). The President of Zimbabwe, Robert Mugabe, called homosexuals "worse than dogs and pigs." This lecture continues the themes of last week, showing how anti-gay rhetoric has been used by the Zimbabwean state in its vision of nationalism.

**Mai Palmberg and Chris Dunton**

**Matthew Engelke**

**Marc Epprecht**

Marc Epprecht

Marc Epprecht

Oliver Philips

Stephen O. Murray

Terence Ranger

Welshman Ncube
Lecture 9: Race, Ethnicity, and Genocide: Rwanda, 1994

In 1994, the Hutu majority in Rwanda killed an estimated one million of their Tutsi compatriots. This lecture situates the genocide in a discussion of race and ethnicity in Africa, with a particular focus on the extent to which the genocide can be explained in terms of the (post)colonial political situation in Rwanda and Burundi.

**Mahmood Mamdani


**Christopher C. Taylor


Luc De Heusch


Philip Gourevitch

1999 We Wish to Inform You that Tomorrow We Will be Killed with Our Families: Stories from Rwanda. New York: Farar, Straus, Giroux.

Mahmood Mamdani


Philip Gourevitch


René Lemarchand


Alex de Waal


Lecture 10: The Cosmology of Terror

What can anthropological research tell us about the Rwandan genocide? How can this research be used, if at all, in human rights work? Using Taylor's study as a point of departure, this lecture explores answers—however provisional—to these questions, and ends with a reflection on how such questions can relate to the course as a whole.

**Christopher C. Taylor


**Mahmood Mamdani


**Johan Pottier

2002 Re-Imagining Rwanda: Conflict, Survival, and Disinformation in the Late 20th Century. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. [Read Chapter 1]

Todd Howland


Jeremy Sarkin


Shiva Eftekhari


Farah Stockman

LECTURE 1

* * *

A Note on Readings

FIRST DAY OF LENT TERM). YOU ARE REQUIRED TO HAND IN 2 COPIES OF YOUR ESSAY TO ROOM A605.

Assessment essays are part of the examination for the course and are required from undergraduate students for all courses in anthropology. MSc students are not.

* * *

69

Suggested readings are also given for each week.