The Sociology of Human Rights
Soc 595 – Spring 2005

Professor Daniel Levy
Office Hours (Room S-435): Tuesday 4:15-5:15 (and by appointment)
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Course Description:
Since the end of the Second World War we observe the consolidation of a Human Rights Regime that manifests itself along three central dimensions: through the formation of nation-transcending legislation (e.g. International Tribunals and the institutionalization of supra-national Courts); a politics of restitution that seeks to compensate former victims; and the institution of truth and reconciliation commissions. The latter modes of coming to terms with difficult national pasts, are particularly salient to states facing transitional conditions, but can also be found in the context of established democracies. Based on those developments, this is a course for advanced graduate students with an interest in: the sociological significance of Human Rights norms and their various effects on international and domestic politics. The aforementioned proliferation of Human Rights Regimes and their institutionalization will serve as an analytic prism to explore their relative impact on: Migration patterns, War Crime Tribunals, Genocide prevention and the monitoring of Ethnic Cleansing and other aspects of restitution politics. We will also analyze how these developments relate to the potential reconfiguration of state-society relations, and the role both non-state actors (such as NGOs, INGOs, TSMs) as well as supranational organizations play in this emerging constellation.

Course Requirements:
In addition to your active participation, you are expected to write short analytic reaction papers on the reading materials. Your final project will take the form of a research paper on a Human Rights subject of your choice. Your final grade is composed of 15% for the reaction papers, 15% for participation and 70% for the final paper.

Required Books:


All books are available at Stony Books and the University Book Store. The other readings will either be placed in a folder in the reading room, for you to Xerox (X) or can be accessed on-line (E). The required books are also on Reserve at the Melville Library.
A) Conceptual and Historical Agenda

I. INTRODUCTION: THE SOCIOLOGY OF HUMAN RIGHTS (1/25)

II. HUMAN RIGHTS THEORIES (2/1)


III. HUMAN RIGHTS IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE (2/8)


Jack Donnelly (2003) “Cultural Relativism and International Human Rights” (57-123)

B) Institutional and Political Dimensions

IV. LEGAL DIMENSIONS OF HUMAN RIGHTS (2/15)


**V. CASE STUDIES (2/22)**

Movie: Gacaca, Living Together Again In Rwanda? (55’)

Movie: “The Trials of Henry Kissinger” (80’)

**VI. INTERNATIONAL POLITICS (3/1)**


**VII. DOMESTIC POLITICS AND CHANGING STATE-SOCIETY RELATIONS (3/8)**

a) Sovereignty Revisited?!


b) Politics of Restitution


c) (Anti)-Terrorism and Human Rights


Michael Ignatieff “Lesser Evils” New York Times, 2 May 2004 (E)

C) Project Presentations

VIII. Student Research Projects (3/15)

IX. Student Research Projects continued (3/29)

D) Sociological Dynamics: Economic, Social and Cultural Dimensions of Human Rights

X. Economic Dimensions of Human Rights (4/5)


Movie: “Globalization and Human Rights” (56’)

XI. New Social Movements and Human Rights (4/12)

Guest Lecture: Rachel V. Kutz-Flamenbaum “Broad Agendas and Inclusive Frames: The case for ‘Women’s Rights’ as ‘Human Rights’”


XII. Media and Human Rights (4/19)


Movie: “Seeing is Believing” (60 minutes).

XIII. Migration, Gender and Human Rights (4/26)


E) Final Projects

XIV. Final Research Presentations (5/3)