

HIST 303w/403 – GSWS 296/496 – International Human Rights

History Department, University of Rochester, Spring 2025

Professor Jean Pedersen, office hours at the times and locations below, and by appointment:

Mondays, 2:00 p.m.–4:00 p.m.

Rush Rhees Library 447

585-275-3616

email: jpedersen@esm.rochester.edu

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 10:00 a.m.–11:00 a.m.

Eastman Theatre 607

585-274-1019

I'm happy to meet in person or on zoom.

Course Librarians

Lara Nicosia, History

https://www.library.rochester.edu/profile/lara_nicosia

Justina Elmore, Women's Studies

https://www.library.rochester.edu/profile/justina_elmore

Course Description

What does it mean to be human? What different kinds of rights might be part of different people's working definitions? How should we act on any or all of those different definitions today? This course will look at both

- a) the historical development of conflicting theories of human rights and
- b) more contemporary debates about their ideal extent, their practical exercise, and the preferred means of their necessary enforcement.

Special topics will include discussions of rights and religions, debates over the meaning of the American and French Revolutions, the fight to design an International Declaration of Human Rights in the aftermath of World War II, the history of organizations such as Amnesty International and institutions such as the International Criminal Court, on-going questions about the role of humanitarian intervention and the evolution of the responsibility to protect, and continuing controversies around UN events such as the 1995 World Conference on Women in Beijing, the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development in Rio de Janeiro, and the 2010 Summit on the Millennium Development Goals in New York City.

Required Books (on sale at the Bookstore and soon to be on reserve at Rush Rhees Library)

Jack Donnelly and Daniel Whelan, International Human Rights (6th ed, Routledge, 2020)

Micheline Ishay, History of Human Rights from Ancient Times to the Globalization Era (2nd ed., University of California, 2008)

Mary Ann Glendon, A World Made New (Random House, 2002)

Cynthia Enloe, Twelve Feminist Lessons of War (University of California, 2023)

Additional required readings for the course will be available on reserve at Rush Rhees Library, on e-reserve through Blackboard, and/or in other locations as noted in the syllabus below.

Optional Recommended Book (on sale at the Bookstore and on order for Rush Rhees Library)

Micheline Ishay, ed., The Human Rights Reader (3rd ed., Routledge 2022)

Note: Our readings in Ishay's reader are required, but you should also be able to find all the necessary documents on-line by searching the websites of the United Nations, the Avalon Project at Yale University, and other similar locations instead.

Film Screenings (We will watch these films together in class as noted in the course schedule.)

“Long Night’s Journey Into Day” (Frances Reid and Deborah Hoffmann, 2000;
<http://www.irisfilms.org/films/long-nights-journey-into-day/>)

“The Reckoning: The Battle for the International Criminal Court” (Paco de Onís, Peter Kinoy, and Pamela Yates, 2009; <https://skylight.is/films/the-reckoning/>)

Required Assignments:

Class participation – 40%

*Reading in advance of class

*Preparing weekly written reflections on the reading – 1-2 double-spaced typed or hand-written pages each. If you miss more than 2 weekly responses, your grade in class participation will decrease by 1/3 of a grade for each one. (details on separate sheet)

*Participating in class discussion. If you have to miss a class, you may make it up on the class discussion board. If you miss more than 2 classes without making them up, your grade in class participation will decrease by 1/3 of a grade for each one.

Seminar paper – 50%

*Research paper on a topic of your choice related to human rights (details on separate sheet)

Oral presentation on the topic of your seminar paper (details on separate sheet) – 10%

University Policies:

A note for students with disabilities:

The University of Rochester respects and welcomes students of all backgrounds and abilities. In the event you encounter any barrier(s) to full participation in this course due to the impact of disability, please contact the Office of Disability Resources. The access coordinators in the Office of Disability Resources can meet with you to discuss the barriers you are experiencing and explain the eligibility process for establishing academic accommodations. You can reach the [Office of Disability Resources](#) at: disability@rochester.edu; (585) 276-5075; Taylor Hall.

A note on academic honesty:

All assignments and activities associated with this course must be performed in accordance with the University of Rochester's Academic Honesty Policy. Cheating and plagiarism are serious offenses and will be treated as such. Anyone who engages in such activities will be turned over to the College Board on Academic Honesty for disciplinary action. Please click this link to study the policy and take the associated quizzes: <http://www.rochester.edu/College/honesty/>.

For a more specific discussion of how historians define plagiarism, see Michael Rawson’s chapter “Defining Plagiarism,” which he wrote for the American Historical Association: <https://www.historians.org/resource/defining-plagiarism/>. Any questions? Ask me!

A note on generative AI, e.g. chatGPT and other such programs and applications:

I am interested in your intelligence, not artificial intelligence! I expect you to do your own course reading, research, and writing. For further guidance, please see both the Academic Honesty links above and the instructions that I distribute with each writing assignment. Any questions? Ask me!

Schedule of Readings and Deadlines

Please see the final page for information on credit hours.

Please note that our course readings may change as the world changes.

Introductions and Definitions

January 24 Introductions and Definitions
Note that our first session is on “Rochester Monday” i.e. on Friday!

Donnelly and Whelan, International Human Rights
Introduction
Chapter 1, Human Rights in Global Politics
Chapter 2, Theories of Human Rights
Problem 1, Democracy and Human Rights
Problem 4, Human Rights, Hierarchical or Indivisible?

Charlotte Bunch and Samantha Frost, “Women’s Human Rights: An Introduction,”
in Routledge International Encyclopedia of Women: Global Women’s Issues
and Knowledge, eds. Cheris Kramarae and Dale Spender (Blackboard)

Human Rights Reader, ed. Ishay, selections from Part VI, Chapter 15
Universal Declaration of Human Rights (15.8)
UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide (15.7)
UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against
Women (15.16)
UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (15.17)

Historical Perspectives

January 27 Historical Controversies about Human Rights

Ishay, History of Human Rights
Preface to the 2008 Edition
Introduction
Chapter 1, Early Ethical Contributions to Human Rights
Chapter 2, Human Rights and the Enlightenment
Appendix, A Chronology of Events and Writings Related to Human Rights

Plus an ancient religious or secular text of your choosing, which you should read with
an eye to its possible relevance for human rights and plan to present to the class
and submit in written form to me.

Pick your own text, or browse through the starting suggestions in Part I of
Ishay’s Human Rights Reader, chapters 1, 2, and 3.

See separate sheet for guidelines on how to prepare and submit the related
response on religion in its relationship with human rights.

February 3 ***Preliminary paper topics due***
(see more details on separate sheet)

Paradoxes of Human Rights

Human Rights and Revolutions, ed. Wasserstrom et al

Lynn Hunt, “The Paradoxical Origins of Human Rights” (Blackboard)

Jeffrey Wasserstrom, “The Chinese Revolution and Contemporary Paradoxes” (Blackboard)

Ishay, History of Human Rights

Chapter 3, Human Rights and the Industrial Age

Chapter 4, The World Wars

Wasserstrom and Cunningham, China in the Twenty First Century

U.S./China Misunderstandings (Blackboard)

Human Rights Reader, ed. Ishay, selections from Chapters 6 and 15

Magna Carta (15.1)

English Bill of Rights (15.3)

Declaration of Independence (15.4)

Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen (15.5)

Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Citizen (6.8)

Declaration of Sentiments (from the Women’s Rights National Historical Park:

<http://www.nps.gov/wori/historyculture/declaration-of-sentiments.htm>)

February 10 Challenges to Human Rights

Glendon, A World Made New

especially Preface, Chapters 1-5 and 10-12, Epilogue, and Appendix 7

Niraja Gopal Jalal, “Hansa Mehta: An Early Indian Feminist,” LSE Blog

<https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/lsehistory/2024/03/06/hansa-mehta-an-early-indian-feminist/>

Makau wa Mutua, “Savages, Victims, and Saviors: The Metaphor of Human

Rights,” Harvard International Law Journal 42 (Winter 2001) (Blackboard)

Association of African Women for Research and Development, “A Statement on

Genital Mutilation,” in Third World, Second Sex, ed. Davies (Blackboard)

Human Rights Reader, ed. Ishay, selections from Chapter 15

United Nations Charter (15.6)

African Charter on Human and People’s Rights, known as the Banjul Charter (15.17)

African Protocol on the Rights of Woman, known as the Maputo Protocol (from

the African Union: <https://au.int/en/treaties/protocol-african-charter-human-and-peoples-rights-rights-women-africa>)

February 17 ***Paper topics and preliminary bibliographies due***
(see more details on separate sheet)

Human Rights and Women's Rights

Ishay, History of Human Rights

Chapter 5, Globalization and Its Impact on Human Rights

Katherine M. Marino, Feminism for the Americas: The Making of an International Human Rights Movement

Chapter 8, The Latin American Contribution to the Constitution of the World (Blackboard)

Jocelyn Olcott, International Women's Year: The Greatest Consciousness-Raising Event in History

Introduction (Blackboard)

Aili Mari Tripp and Balghis Badri, "African Influence on Global Women's Rights: An Overview," in Women's Activism in Africa: Struggles for Rights and Representation, ed. Baldis Baldri and Aili Mari Tripp (Blackboard)

Ping-chun Hsiung and Yuk-lin Renita Wong, "Jie Gui—Connecting the Tracks: Chinese Women's Activism Surrounding the 1995 World Conference on Women in Beijing," in Feminisms and Internationalism, ed. Mrinalini Sinha et al (Blackboard)

Rosalind P. Petchesky, "Spiraling Discourses of Reproductive and Sexual Rights: A Post-Beijing Assessment of International Feminist Politics," in Cathy J. Cohen, ed., Women Transforming Politics: An Alternative Reader (Blackboard)

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (Blackboard)

Beijing Declaration (pp. 7-11) and Critical Areas of Concern (pp. 33-34)

Browse UNWomen for the latest updates here: <https://www.unwomen.org/en>

February 24 Human Rights and International Affairs

Donnelly and Whelan, International Human Rights

Chapter 5, Global Multilateral Mechanisms

Chapter 6, Regional Human Rights Regimes

Chapter 7, Human Rights and Foreign Policy

Chapter 8, Human Rights in American Foreign Policy

Chapter 9, Transnational Human Rights Advocacy

Problem 5, US Ratification of Human Rights Treaties

Problem 6, Mass Appeals in Human Rights Advocacy

Cynthia Enloe, Bananas, Beaches and Bases, 2nd edition (e-book available through DiscoverUR)

"Gender Makes the World Go Around: Where are the Women?"

March 3

Outlines and updated bibliographies due

(see more details on separate sheet)

Human Rights and International Justice, Part 1:
The End of Apartheid – Truth and Reconciliation

In-class screening of “Long Night’s Journey Into Day” (Frances Reid and Deborah Hoffmann, 2000; in addition to the readings below, please prepare for the screening by consulting the film-makers’ website at <http://www.irisfilms.org/films/long-nights-journey-into-day/>, especially the sections on “Stories,” “Filmmakers Q and A,” and “History”)

Donnelly and Whelan, International Human Rights
Review Chapter 8, especially Section 8.5, U.S. Policy Toward South Africa

Martha Minow, “Breaking the Cycles of Hatred,” in Breaking the Cycles of Hatred: Memory, Law, and Repair (Blackboard)

Contemporary Dilemmas

March 10 *Spring Break – No Class*

March 17 Human Rights and International Justice, Part 2:
Prosecuting Genocide, Crimes against Humanity, and War Crimes

In-class screening of selections from “The Reckoning: The Battle for the International Criminal Court” (Paco de Onís, Peter Kinoy, and Pamela Yates, 2009; see associated website <https://skylight.is/films/the-reckoning/>)

Donnelly and Whelan, International Human Rights
Review Chapter 5, especially Section 4-C, International Criminal Court

Claire Klobucista and Mariel Ferragamo, “The Role of the ICC,” Council on Foreign Relations, last updated 22 November 2024, <https://www.cfr.org/background/role-icc#chapter-title-0-7>

Browse the website of the ICC for the latest news here: <https://www.icc-cpi.int/>

We will most likely have some additional readings on the ICC and the controversies around its actions as events unfold over the course of the semester.

Optional: There are also two other documentaries on the ICC that may interest you:

“Prosecutor” (Barry Stevens, National Film Board of Canada, 2010; look this up in DiscoverUR to access the on-line version from Films on Demand)

“The International Criminal Court” (Marcus Vetter and Michele Gentile, 2013; look this up in DiscoverUR to access the on-line version from Films on Demand)

March 24 Human Rights and Humanitarian Intervention

Donnelly and Whelan, International Human Rights
Chapter 10, Humanitarian Intervention
Problem 7, The War in Syria

International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty, The Responsibility to Protect,

especially Foreword and Synopsis (available on-line here:

<https://idl-bnc-idrc.dspacedirect.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/7321d402-4733-4e62-98f2-8fbed4db04c1/content>

Browse the website of the United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect for the latest updates here:

<https://www.un.org/en/genocide-prevention/>

We will most likely have some additional readings on R2P as events unfold.

March 31 Human Rights, Globalization, and Development

Donnelly and Whelan, International Human Rights
Chapter 11, Globalization, the State, and Human Rights
Chapter 12, Human Rights and Development
Problem 6, Human Rights Obligations of Multinational Corporations
Problem 9, The Global North and South and Market Redistributions

UN Sustainable Development Goals

Browse the site for the latest updates here: <https://sdgs.un.org/>

Be sure to familiarize yourself with the seventeen goals here:

https://sdgs.un.org/#goal_section

UN Women, The Gender Snapshot 2024

<https://www.unwomen.org/en/resources/gender-snapshot>

Oral Presentations: Schedule to be determined based on the number of students in the course
Plan to present for roughly 10-15 minutes, then take questions

April 7 ***Rough drafts of final paper due – deadline for graduating students***
(see more details on separate sheet)

Final presentations of independent projects – deadline for non-graduating students
(see more details on separate sheet)

April 14 ***Rough drafts of final papers due – deadline for non-graduating students***
(see more details on separate sheet)

Final presentations of independent projects – deadline for graduating students
(see more details on separate sheet)

- April 21 Human Rights and American Exceptionalism
- Donnelly and Whelan, International Human Rights
Chapter 13, (Counter-)Terrorism and Human Rights
- Ignatieff, American Exceptionalism (e-book through DiscoverUR)
Ignatieff, “Introduction”
Scheuer, “The Exceptional First Amendment”
Steiker, “Capital Punishment and American Exceptionalism”
Sunstein, “Why Does the American Constitution Lack Social and Economic Guarantees?”
Koh, “America’s Jekyll-and-Hyde Exceptionalism”
- April 28 Course Conclusions
- Donnelly and Whelan, International Human Rights
Chapter 14, What has been achieved? And how much is left to be done?
- Enloe, Twelve Feminist Lessons of War
Preface: This Is Not a Girls’ Guide to Waging War
Chapter 1: Women’s Wars Are Not Men’s Wars
Chapter 3: Getting Men to Fight Isn’t So Easy
Chapter 11: Ukrainian Feminists Have Lessons to Teach Us About War
Chapter 12: Feminist Lessons Are for Everyone
- Course Evaluations
- May 6 ***Final date to hand in the final version of the final paper***
(see more details on separate sheet and submit your paper through Blackboard)

A closing note on credit hours

The College’s credit hour policy on undergraduate courses is to award 4 credit hours for courses that meet for the equivalent of 3 periods of 50 minutes each week. Each 4-credit course, then, should include 3 academic hours of instruction, 1 additional hour of “enriched independent study, lecture, or discussion,” and 8 hours of homework each week – a total of 12 hours per week.

History 303W meets once per week for 3 academic hours per week. The course also includes substantial weekly reading assignments, weekly writing assignments, the preparation of an oral presentation, and the research and writing of a substantial research paper. These requirements taken together account for the remaining 9 hours per week.

In the early weeks of the semester, students are likely to spend more of their out-of-class time on the course readings, and less of their out-of-class time on the final oral presentation and research paper. In the later portions of the semester, students are likely to spend less of their out-of-class time on the course readings, and more of their out-of-class time on the preparation of the individual oral presentation and independent research paper. Regardless of how they divide their time, students in History 303w will spend an average of 9 hours per week on reading, research, and writing in addition to our regular class meeting time of 3 academic hours per week.