HIST 4994W-003– The United States and Human Rights

Monday 1:25-3:55 pm

Professor Brad Simpson, 213 Wood Hall

Bradley.simpson@uconn.edu

Course Description and Objectives: This class will examine human rights in modern international history. It will explore the emergence and spread of human rights ideas, institutions, debates and activism from historical, philosophical, legal, and cultural perspectives. Together we will consider the roots of human rights ideas in political theory and philosophy in the pre-20th century period, the emergence of human rights as a transnational idea in the last century, the institutionalization of human rights norms in the United Nations and other international bodies, debates over the universality of human rights, human rights and U.S. foreign policy and human rights in the context of processes of ‘globalization.’

This is a research seminar, and so the focus of the course will be on the researching and writing of a substantive paper, based on primary sources and engaging with relevant secondary literature, that expresses personal arguments on an important question in the history of human rights. In order to prepare for this project, each student will write a series of brief arguments and responses to arguments of other scholars.

Readings and such: You will want to purchase:

Mark Bradley, The World Reimagined: Americans and Human Rights in the Twentieth Century

Bringing Human Rights Home: A History of Human Rights in the United States. Edited by Cynthia Soohoo, Catherine Albisa, and Martha F. Davis

Akira Iriye, Ed. The Human Rights Revolution An International History

Any other readings and documents will be available on blackboard and can be accessed by going to the "Course Documents" section and clicking on each week’s readings. The readings for this course start out heavy and taper over the course of the semester as you work more on your paper. The goal of the readings is to familiarize you with a wide range of issues and approaches, not necessarily to master content, so you can skim as you need, though you need to read enough to effectively participate in discussion.

Learning Opportunities:

This will be a discussion-based class. Class participants will be responsible for coming to class prepared to discuss each week’s readings and engage in conversation with colleagues. At several points early in the semester we will write brief responses to weekly readings. Finally, over the course of the semester, students will research and write a substantial paper (15 pages) exploring a question of interest in the history of the US engagement with human rights.
Class Project: You need to begin conceptualizing and researching your paper at the start of the semester in order to bring it to successful fruition by the end. I have provided a few examples of accessible materials you may want to consult in your research on the project page. I also encourage you to consult with me or with a research librarian about specific sources on your topic. The key is to get out and start digging early in the quarter.

Writing: Full requirements for the final paper will be detailed soon. Here I will simply suggest that you work steadily throughout the semester on committing your thoughts to writing. Your paper is the centerpiece of this course and it is expected to be a polished piece of work, so please DO NOT leave it to the last minute!

Evaluation:

The final grade will assess students’ ability--as reflected in written and oral work--to draw and defend historical conclusions, to think historically, and to apply that thinking to the issues raised in the course, as well as to their own writing. This will break down roughly along these lines:

Short essays (including preliminary paper steps): 25%

Class participation: 25%

Class project (Rough and Final Drafts): 50%

SCHEDULE

Week 1 January 23 Course introduction –

What are Human Rights? Where do they come from? Why do people abuse them?

Mark Bradley, The World Reimagined, Introduction and Ch. 1

John Sheestack, “Philosophical Foundations of Human Rights” (Blackboard)

Mitchell, “Economic and Political Explanations of Human Rights Abuses” (Blackboard)


Week 2 Jan 30 Human Rights as History

RESEARCH AT THE DODD CENTER – meet at Dodd Center


Week 3  Feb 6 —  Ideas, Origins and the United Nations

Bradley, The World Reimagined, Chapter 2-4

Akira Iriye, Ed. The Human Rights Revolution An International History, Ch. 2-5, 15


Week 4  Feb 13 Human Rights and Decolonization

Akira Iriye, Ed. The Human Rights Revolution An International History, Ch. 8

Bradley, The World, Reimagined, Chapter 4


http://hhr.hypotheses.org/121 - please read the review by Jan Eckel and the two responses by Fabien Klose and Roland Burke at this site.


Week 5 – Feb 20 – Human Rights and Anti-Apartheid Activism – A Case Study


Week 6 Feb 27 – NGOs and Human Rights


Week 7 March 6 Human Rights in the 1970s, part I

Mark Bradley, *The World Reimagined*, Chapter 5-6


Week 8 March 13 – Human Rights Politics in the 1970s and 1980s

*Kathryn Sikkink*, *Mixed Signals*, 106-180

Mark Bradley, *The World Reimagined*, Chapter 7-8

Week 9 March 27 – Gender and Human Rights
Jocelyn Olcott, “Cold War Conflicts and Cheap Cabaret: Performing Politics at the 1975 United Nations International Women’s Year Conference in Mexico City”, Gender and History, vol. 22 no. 3 (November, 2010), pp. 733-754


Quartaert, Advocating Dignity, 149-182

Week 10 April 3 Economic, Social and Cultural Rights – US Case Studies


Week 11 April 10

Week 12 April 17 – Rough Draft Due

Week 13 April 24 Student Presentations of Research

Week 14 May 1 Student Presentations of research

Monday May 8, Final Papers Due