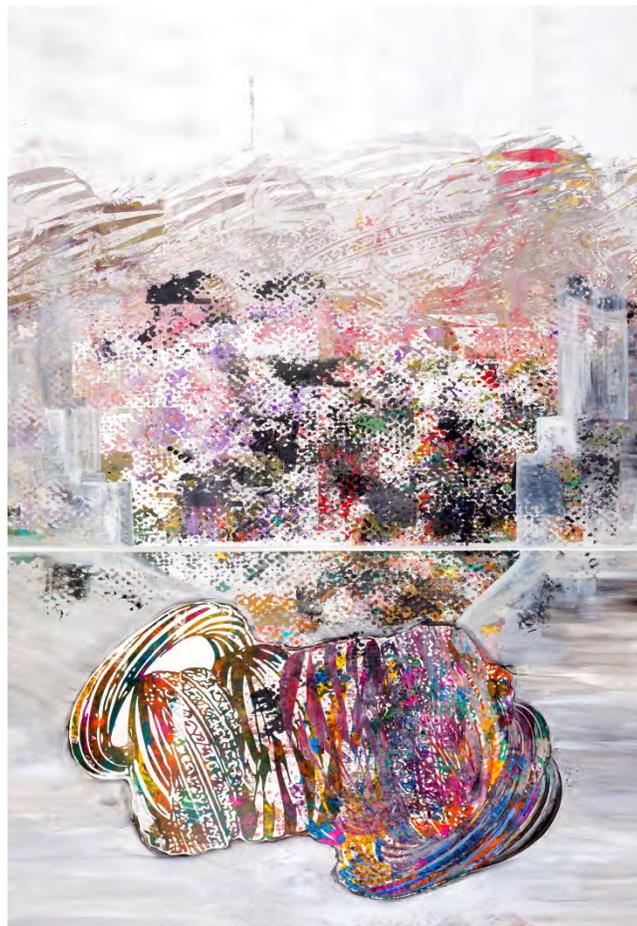


# RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

## Introduction: Radical Teaching About Human Rights Part II

by Michael Bennett and Susan O'Malley



IN THE SERIES ASSOCIATED PRESS, AMANDA HUGHEN MINES THE PRINT EDITION OF THE NEW YORK TIMES TO EXAMINE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN GEOPOLITICS, CLASS, IDENTITY, AND LUXURY GOODS. FOR THE PAST YEAR, HUGHEN HAS WORKED PRIMARILY WITH IMAGERY FROM A SINGLE EDITION: THE JANUARY 6, 2015 PRINT EDITION OF THE NEW YORK TIMES. THE HEADLINE PHOTO THAT DAY WAS A LARGE COLOR PORTRAIT OF AN AFGHANI MAN WHO, SINCE LOSING BOTH SONS IN THE CONFLICT, SPENDS HIS TIME FERRYING DEAD BODIES BACK TO THEIR FAMILIES ON BOTH SIDES OF THE WAR. ON THE NEXT PAGE, A2, JUST BEHIND HIS PHOTO, WAS AN AD FOR A WEMPE GOLD RING THAT MIMICKED THE FORM OF THE TURBAN OF THE MAN ON THE COVER.

In our introduction to the first of these two issues of *Radical Teacher* devoted to "Radical Teaching About Human Rights," we cautioned that all forms of Human Rights Education (HRE) are not radical. The problem, we pointed out, with rights discourse is that it can mask the politics of how rights are defined, whose rights are recognized, and how they are enforced. This problem becomes evident when HRE is bound up with a neoliberal, or worse than neoliberal, perspective that points fingers at others and rallies troops for supposedly humanitarian interventions while eliding the role of the United States as an imperializing settler colonial state. Fortunately, we have once again received several essays that seem to us to be aware of this danger and provide admirable examples of radical teaching about human rights.

While most educators would turn to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as the founding document for HRE, we noted that those who shared our radical perspective were more likely to draw on later developments in human rights discourse, such as the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and non-UN-based indigenous or internationalist political movements. We also highlighted the radical potential of the *United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training*, which insists that HRE needs to be *about, through, and for* human rights. This description mirrors our understanding of radical teaching as not a matter of authority figures depositing knowledge in empty vessels (what Paolo Friere called the "banking system" of education), but as a mutual process of awareness and empowerment (what Friere called "conscientization"). The problem with even well-intentioned teachers leading students to predigested epiphanies reminds us of what Eugene Debs said when asked why he advocated for democratic socialism rather than authoritarian political forms: "If I led them into the promised land, someone else could lead them out again."

Our belief that radical teaching is a matter of form as well as content led one in-house reviewer of Rosemary Blanchard's "Mainstreaming Human Rights Education: What's Radical About That?" to answer the question with: Not enough. This reviewer was concerned by Blanchard's assertion that "to the extent that content standards and performance standards govern public education, HRE needs to be there." We were likewise uncomfortable when Blanchard wrote that "It isn't a question of whether or not standards or particular configurations of standards are a good idea" because this has been a big question for us. Past issues of *Radical Teacher* have strongly opposed the movement for core standards and Learning Outcomes Assessment as reducing the process of education to "teaching to the test," sacrificing form on the altar of content.

However, as co-editors, we appreciated Blanchard's willingness to engage with our concerns and even foreground her disagreement with some of the assumptions made in *Radical Teacher's* previous issue on HRE and in our call for papers. Blanchard's essay maintains that American illiteracy about human rights and international humanitarian law standards contributes to the

climate in which the United States preaches human rights to its perceived opponents while refusing to apply these universal principles to itself. Blanchard's admirable experience with HRE in a variety of formats has led her to believe that from the failure to incorporate into the American educational structure the cultural and linguistic rights of Indigenous peoples and ethnic, linguistic and religious minorities to the refusal to submit to the same standards of international humanitarian law which apply to all combatants, U.S. political and military leaders have been able to rely on the unfamiliarity of most Americans with the fundamental principles of human rights and international humanitarian law to insulate them from effective public scrutiny and meaningful challenge. Blanchard concludes that we need to mainstream human rights education at all levels of public education so it becomes a part of the educational experience of every child and, thus, part of the background of every adult because the risks of having HRE co-opted are dwarfed by the risks of having HRE sidelined.

***The problem with even well-intentioned teachers leading students to predigested epiphanies reminds us of what Eugene Debs said when asked why he advocated for democratic socialism rather than authoritarian political forms: "If I led them into the promised land, someone else could lead them out again."***

John Hammond's "Teaching Human Rights: Confronting the Contradictions" shares our concern that the risks of HRE being co-opted need to be kept in view while trying to delineate a radical approach to teaching about human rights. This approach means taking on a series of controversies over what human rights are, how they are determined, and how they are (or are not) upheld. Hammond refers to the "possession paradox" that often human rights are declared but many, or even most, people do not actually enjoy them, arguing that in teaching human rights we must convey both the promise of human rights and the discrepancy between that promise and their fulfillment. Hammond reviews a number of controversies in the current application of human rights, many of which arise from that discrepancy. He suggests the use of literary works and simulation games that can sometimes convey meanings more effectively than expository material.

Alexandra Schultheis Moore's "Teaching Mohemadou Ould Slahi's *Guantanamo Diary* in the Human Rights and Literature Classroom" and Sarah Hamblin's "The Form and Content of Human Rights Film: Teaching Larysa Kondracki's *The Whistleblower*" each focus on how one text can be taught from a radical perspective on HRE. Moore's essay provides a case study of teaching Slahi's *Guantanamo Diary* in order to demonstrate how a literary approach can contribute to the study of human rights by both demonstrating the necessity of human rights

discourses and the ways in which they must be reconsidered in the current geopolitical moment. More specifically, Moore argues that reading the book in its larger legal and political context unveils the ideologies that promote torture in the name of state security. And, it offers a rebuttal to those ideologies through a critical analysis of the distribution of legal personhood and literary subjectivity in the context of Guantánamo. Sarah Hamblin argues that the consistent association of human rights film with historical accuracy as a means of raising awareness has led human rights education to focus on filmic content, with fiction films being used primarily as case studies about particular atrocities or as opportunities to discuss more general ethical issues. While the subject matter of human rights films is certainly a major component of human rights education, Hamblin maintains that this singular focus prohibits students from examining how a film is situated within a specific matrix of geopolitical power relations and cultural presuppositions. This presumption of truth thus normalizes a westernized worldview, obscuring its ideological foundations and the geopolitical structures that give human rights discourse its universality and function. Using Larysa Kondracki's *The Whistleblower* as a teaching case study, Hamblin demonstrates how an attention to stylistic and generic conventions helps us understand how a film may educate about a particular human rights issue while at the same time propagate the very logics of geopolitical inequality that are implicated in its emergence.

Martha Saxton's "Teaching Human Rights in Jail" and Marissa A. Gutiérrez-Vicario's "More than a Mural: The Intersection of Public Art, Immigrant Youth, and Human Rights" explore radical teaching about human rights in environments that extend beyond the traditional classroom. Saxton discusses the differences between teaching human rights in an elite college and graduate school compared with teaching the same material to incarcerated students inside the prison. The inside students experience the dramatic absence of rights, both in jail and often as well in their previous lives, which almost inevitably were marked by poverty and deprivation. Saxton demonstrates how the different life experiences of the majority of incarcerated students as compared with the majority of college and graduate students position them very differently when they study human rights together inside the prison and think about the implications of particular rights and learn from each other. She concludes that the incarcerated students' discussions tend to be concrete, personal, and sometimes transformative, while the elite college students at first are more theoretical, less personal, and more skeptical. Gutiérrez-Vicario is interested in exploring the construction of global citizenship and engagement around human rights

education of immigrant youth through the arts, particularly public art in the form of muralism. She uses the work of Art and Resistance Through Education (ARTE), an organization that engages young people around human rights through the arts, as a case study. Gutiérrez-Vicario discusses the involvement of immigrant youth, predominately from Latin America, in various art projects, as they explore their own sense of identity and belonging in New York City through a project on racial discrimination and immigrant rights.

Finally, Steven Jones's "Stealth Radicalism: Teaching Refugee Rights as Human Rights" describes a human rights course focused on refugee rights through a service-learning project with a refugee resettlement agency. Jones describes his own approach to "radical teaching," his objectives for the course, the course itself, and the impact of the course on the students. One of these impacts, he hopes, is to provide students with a personal point of reference from which to critique U.S. human rights and refugee policies.

Such efforts are necessary and important in this time of a growing refugee crisis. As refugees stream out of Syria and other war-torn parts of the planet, we see various nation states asserting their sovereignty and closing their borders. In the United States, Donald Trump's surge to the front of the pack of Republican presidential aspirants seems to be based largely on his nativist and jingoist (if not racist and fascist) pledge to seal the borders against migrants and refugees, while rounding up those of Muslim faith who have already made it to these shores (or were here to begin with). Clearly, now more than ever, the assertion and protection of universal human rights (and the need for radical forms of HRE) are crucial for people who are left stateless or made to feel that way.

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# RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

## Mainstreaming Human Rights Education: What's Radical About That?

by Rosemary Ann Blanchard



GRAPHICS COURTESY OF AUTHOR

## Introduction

This article approaches the place of human rights education in radical pedagogy from a perspective that is both radical and mainstream. For many years, I have promoted the modest proposal that the fundamental principles of human rights and international humanitarian law become a part of every child's educational experience, particularly through the core social studies curriculum offered at every grade level of public school education. The reasons for this proposal and the steps undertaken to date to help bring it to reality provide the basic subject of this report. Initially, however, I want to explore some of the concerns and even the urban legends that tend to hover around human rights education (HRE) within the minefield that is social studies education in the United States.

The first *Radical Teacher* issue on HRE (Vol 103, 2015) has provided a range of approaches for this exploration, looking at the global movement for universalizing human rights education, strategies for using the human rights framework and discourse as emancipatory educational models, and the challenges to authentically liberating education through the HRE lens in a society which so often links HRE and humanitarian discourse to global and domestic policies that are hegemonic, power-driven, and coercive. As Nancy Flowers noted in her review of the global HRE movement, "propaganda can easily disguise itself as HRE" (11). Of course it can. This paper argues, however, that a more universal familiarity with human rights concepts, language, and development is far more useful in resisting such propaganda than the near universal ignorance of HRE and humanitarian law that prevails in American civil society.

## Human Rights – the Bastard Stepchild of Civic Education

In its initial call for papers exploring human rights education from a radical pedagogical perspective, *Radical Teacher* posed important foundational questions about the whole enterprise of human rights education. The call posed generative questions designed to explore the opportunities for both emancipatory engagement and co-opting oppression within the same identified categories of educational content and method, namely human rights education (HRE). The CFP problematized HRE as a possible vehicle for western hegemony and potentially an excuse for "humanitarian intervention," etc., a very legitimate concern given the selective references to "protecting human rights" that so often embellish U.S. military policy. Yet, in referencing the supposed relationship between HRE and the Common Core State Standards, the CFP repeated a claim dear to the hearts of many far-right-wing critics of the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts. This is the claim that "The Common Core has developed a human rights component." (*Radical Teacher* website, CFP)

In researching this claim (which is, in fact, not true of the Common Core State Standards interstate document, whatever individual states may or may not have mandated in their own CC-related laws and regulations<sup>1</sup>), I encountered a truly amazing number of articles, blogs, and dire warnings that the "Common Core" was actually the United Nations Common Core and was mandating a UN-based common education that included United Nations-controlled human rights curricula. Emblematic of this claim was an article by a leading Federalist Society writer presenting human rights education as "the United Nations takeover of K-12 education in America" (from an article by Jim Kelly, Director of International Affairs for the Federalist Society for Law and Public Policy Studies<sup>2</sup>).

***Like any value-based construct, human rights education and the very phrase "human rights" can be co-opted in support of a variety of political/social/cultural/economic agendas.***

These dire warnings and conspiracies were quite familiar to me. I have been dealing with them for several years in trying to bring human rights education and humanitarian law education into the mainstream of American social studies. Colleagues more experienced than I have struggled against the "foreign takeover" gremlin for decades.

During the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, significant historical and cultural developments of international and domestic law and policy occurred through which precepts of universal human rights became more generally recognized and mechanisms for their expression developed. Yet, given both the politics of human rights and the politics of public education in the United States, reflected both in the concerns expressed in the *Radical Teacher* CFP and the concerns of the Federalist Society writer, these historical trends and their expression in treaty, policy, and practice have too often found no acceptable niche in U.S. civic and history education. The phrase "human rights" has been contested far more than the concepts included within that phrase have been studied.

Like any value-based construct, human rights education and the very phrase "human rights" can be co-opted in support of a variety of political/social/cultural/economic agendas. We live in an interdependent world in which the United States, through its military and economic power, has a forceful and often destabilizing impact on various cultures, communities, nations, and peoples. This interdependence, combined with the predictable hegemonic cooptation of the language of international law, certainly has led to a virtual codebook of "human rights" and "humanitarian" terms justifying military interventions, economic models of dominance, and culturally oblivious invasions of non-Western community systems. And yet, examined through the lens of fundamental respect for the human worth of individuals—

and the validity of the lifeways of families, groups, and peoples, which forms the essential human rights framework—this hegemonic “Newspeak” is incapable of integrating its own internal contradictions. Indeed, it self-deconstructs.

The “Newspeak” of human rights and humanitarian law survives, I would argue, because most adults (and school children) in the United States know so little about what the various international human rights documents and humanitarian law treaties actually say (and even less about their theoretical frames) that they have no basis for evaluating the truth or falsity value of the HR-toned propaganda that surrounds them. Nor have they, in most instances, any practice in applying an HR analysis domestically—to issues like universal health care, police violence in minority communities, punitive discipline of children in schools, etc. This interplay of citizen human rights illiteracy with hegemonic use of HR code phrases and international expectations make it particularly urgent, and particularly difficult, to introduce the concepts, values, historical developments, etc. of human rights and humanitarian standards into the core experience of education in U.S. public schools.

I have introduced themes from universal human rights and humanitarian law to younger children as the occasional class guest and more professionally in college and university courses, which I have created and taught. What I hear from the students at every level (especially those in postsecondary education) is “I had no idea.” “I’ve never heard that the Geneva Conventions say that.” “You mean, the United States doesn’t recognize a constitutional right to education, but the UDHR does?!” And, especially, “Why didn’t anybody teach us anything about this when we were in grade school?” Why, indeed?

## A Personal Path to Human Rights Education Advocacy

I am retired from an eclectic set of careers that included college and university teaching, practicing law, disability rights advocacy, and working for the Navajo Nation in its education division. At the point of retirement, however, the opportunity arose to pursue my consuming interest in bringing the study of human rights and humanitarian law into the mainstream of American social studies. I will explain what has arisen from this opportunity a little later in this piece. Just now, I want to describe two categories of seminal events that drove me from interested bystander to passionate advocate where human rights and humanitarian law education are concerned.

My interest was initially piqued in the 1980s and 1990s when I worked for the Navajo Nation on a number of education-related issues that involved engaging with the Congress, state legislatures, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and various state departments of education. Earlier research into international education law had revealed that the right to education in one’s national or indigenous language was recognized by countries all over the world and that preservation and development of the Navajo language was itself protected by international treaties.

Indeed, during my years working with the Navajo Nation and Navajo educational bodies, one of these treaties with particular relevance to indigenous education in the United States was ratified by the United States with approval of the U.S. Senate—the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. In its approval, the U.S. Senate solemnly promised that the ICCPR would be implemented not only at the federal level but at every level of the federal system, including state and local government levels (Congressional Record 102<sup>nd</sup> Congress, Senate, April 02, 1992, Page: S4781).

***This interplay of citizen human rights illiteracy with hegemonic use of HR code phrases and international expectations make it particularly urgent, and particularly difficult, to introduce the concepts, values, historical developments, etc. of human rights and humanitarian standards into the core experience of education in U.S. public schools.***

Of course nobody had told the states or the school districts or the Bureau of Indian Affairs (as it was characterized at that time) or the tribal governments. Therefore, despite the Presidential approval of the ICCPR in 1977 and its full ratification in 1992, neither proponents nor opponents of Navajo control of Navajo education or education for Navajo fluency even considered the implications of Article 27 of the ICCPR<sup>3</sup>, which recognizes a right to culture for ethnic, linguistic, and religious minorities.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, on all sides, reference to international human rights agreements appeared to be way outside the zone of legitimate discourse about American Indian education (a situation which has been transformed for American indigenous educators by the critical consciousness [*conscientização*] surrounding the adoption of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples).

A few years after my direct employment by the Navajo Nation, but while I was still very involved in Navajo education, I attended a public hearing with Arizona state officials regarding state and tribal cooperation in education. I raised a question about how the right to culture under the ICCPR might inform Arizona’s relationship with the various American Indian nations situated in the state and was informed (by the Governor, no less) that this was an “American” question, and only “American” law was needed to deal with it. Interestingly, the Arizona official’s position was accepted by all sides, including tribal representatives. Yet special rapporteurs appointed by the UN Human Rights Commission to study the meaning of the “Right to Culture” under the ICCPR had concluded several years previous that Indigenous peoples had an absolute right to control the education of their children, to have that education provided in their own language, and to rely upon the nation states in which they were situated to provide the structures and resources to assure such a tribally-grounded education

(Francisco Caportorti, 1979; Miguel Martinez Cobo, 1986). I wondered: If a human right collapsed in a forest and nobody knew about it, would it ever have existed? Apparently not.

Some years after United Nations-supported "special rapporteurs" Caportorti and Martinez Cobo wrote their expansive studies of the minimum requirements for protecting the right to culture among ethnic and linguistic minorities and indigenous peoples under the ICCPR, and two years after the U.S. ratification of the ICCPR, the *Journal of American Indian Education* published a special edition devoted posthumously to the writings of Dr. G. Mike Charleston, a Choctaw Indian, professor of educational administration, and the project director of the Indian Nations At Risk Task Force under the U.S. Department of Education. Charleston had issued a passionate final report to the INAR Task Force study, *Toward True Native Education: A Treaty of 1992*, in which he called for a new "Treaty of 1992 to end the secret war of assimilation waged against Native peoples through public schools and other means"<sup>4</sup>. An introduction to Charleston's article in the *JAIE* recounted that despite his position as project director, Charleston's report was withdrawn as too "radical" by Education Department managers and even some prominent Native American members of the Task Force. If the *Journal of American Indian Education*, under Dr. Karen Swisher's leadership, had not published Charleston's call for "True Native Education" it would be utterly lost to us. As it is, Charleston's vision is very difficult to locate, especially if you don't already know that it exists. It is particularly ironic that Charleston's "Treaty of 1992" was disappeared the very year that the ICCPR, with its Article 27 protection of the Right to Culture was finally ratified by the United States.

***Yet Charleston's heroic call for authentic native-led and culturally grounded education of American indigenous children was squelched by both colonizer and colonized as too "radical" to even be printed.***

Charleston's call for "True Native Education" was actually not as far-reaching as the conclusions of the two special rapporteurs regarding the plain meaning of the right to culture, as enshrined in Article 27 of the ICCPR for indigenous peoples. Yet Charleston's heroic call for authentic native-led and culturally grounded education of American indigenous children was squelched by both colonizer and colonized as too "radical" to even be printed. No reference was made by Charleston or his later defenders to the international consensus on the rights of indigenous peoples in regard to education of their own children or to the legal enshrinement of that right in the ICCPR. My own experiences at that time would suggest that neither proponent nor opponent was aware of the connection. After all, where in the education of any of the participants in this drama would the subject of culturally-protected education as a human right ever have arisen?

A couple of career turns later and post 9-11, I was teaching school law to future school administrators at Sacramento State University when I read a *Newsweek* article about U.S. soldiers in Iraq. The soldiers' quoted language and conduct were troubling because they were so insulting toward Iraqi families and their Muslim religion. At the time, I was less familiar with the Geneva Conventions than I was with the human rights treaties based upon the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. But I did know where to look for answers to my discomfort. When Iraqi men were insulted by being called "Hadji" by American soldiers, this insult stood in clear contravention of Articles 5 and 27 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, the convention regarding the treatment of civilians by occupying military forces<sup>5</sup>, which require respect for the local religion and culture. Who knew? The soldiers? Their commanding officers? The International Committee of Red Cross/Red Crescent Societies knew (Schmitt, 2003; Stahelin, 2003); Amnesty International knew (AI, 2003); The Secretary General of the United Nations knew (Fowler, 2003). And they said so. However, their warnings were dismissed by American officials and were certainly missing from American media and discourse. So, I was worried and I wrote a paper for a civics conference saying I was worried (Blanchard, 2003). Then Abu Ghraib happened.

The young Americans who bore the brunt of prosecutions for the crimes of Abu Ghraib and other sites of torture were in many cases recently out of high school. They were thrown into a culture of authoritarianism and violence (the military) and socialized to the world of soldiering in an occupying army. What did these young soldiers know, understand, and believe before they were thrust into the maelstrom of Iraq and Afghanistan that might have provided them with some awareness of the standards that should apply to treatment of Iraqi civilians? What did they learn in school? They may have had lessons in character education and been socialized to accept the importance of racial harmony within the United States, but what did they learn that they could take with them into a hostile environment in an unfamiliar culture, that they could take into combat?

An article published in an online edition of *The Nation* in 2007<sup>6</sup> sheds disturbing light on this question. What American troops did hear once they arrived in Iraq or Afghanistan was often brazenly hostile:

*Spc. Patrick Resta, 29 . . . recalled his supervisor telling his platoon point-blank, "The Geneva Conventions don't exist at all in Iraq, and that's in writing if you want to see it." (The Nation, supra)*

What did Spc. Resta or most of the other troops know that could allow them even internally to question such a claim? Again, what had they learned in school?

One thing that was notable, at least to me, in the *Nation* article was the absence of human rights vocabulary, even in the case of those troops who were repulsed by what they saw and refused to take part in it. They could describe what they saw; they could describe their personal

feelings of revulsion. However, they could not access the discourse of human rights and humanitarian law standards to help them characterize what they had seen through terms for which both international and domestic law provides specific definitions and remedies. In one case, a soldier described the scenes he observed at Abu Ghraib prison, which eventually led to his seeking and obtaining conscientious objector status. His vocabulary in this account was very generic as he described the wrongdoing he observed:

*Prisoners at the notorious facility [Abu Ghraib] rioted on November 24, 2003, to protest their living conditions, and Army Reserve Spc. Aidan Delgado, 25 . . . was there. Unlike the other troops in his unit, he did not respond to the riot. Four months earlier he had decided to stop carrying a loaded weapon.*

*Nine prisoners were killed and three wounded after soldiers opened fire during the riot, and Specialist Delgado's fellow soldiers returned with photographs of the events. The images [including one of a soldier appearing to scoop out some of a dead prisoner's brains with his mess kit spoon] . . . shocked him. "It was very graphic," he said. . . . "And I said, 'These are some of our soldiers desecrating somebody's body. Something is seriously amiss.' I became convinced that this was excessive force, and this was brutality."(The Nation, supra)*

It was also a "crime against humanity" under the Nuremberg principles and a clear violation of General Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions, but these landmark advances in international humanitarian law were apparently unknown to Spc. Delgado or his unit or its immediate commanders.

Meanwhile, on the home front, White House Counsel Alberto Gonzalez advised President Bush that:

*In my judgment, this new paradigm renders obsolete Geneva's strict limitations on questioning of enemy prisoners and renders quaint some of its provisions.<sup>7</sup>*

Mr. Gonzalez' memorandum was leaked to *Newsweek* magazine, which published it in an edition dedicated to exploring "The Roots of Torture" in May of 2004, after Seymour Hersh in the *New Yorker* (Hersh, 2004) and the television news program *60 Minutes* (CBS News, 2004) had each released photographs revealing gross abuses of Iraqi prisoners at the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq by American military personnel (and, quite likely, civilian intelligence personnel as well). By now, the pictures from Abu Ghraib should have focused national attention on the need to apply recognized humanitarian standards in the treatment of Iraqis. Sadly, the response was and continues to be surprisingly muted.

As an educator and advocate I was appalled, not by what had been done in Abu Ghraib, not even by the

Orwellian justifications from the White House, but by what had not been done in years and years of public education for which I, as a teacher of school administrators, bore at least some responsibility.

These stories highlight the essence of my rationale for working to bring human rights and international humanitarian law education into the mainstream social studies core. The fundamental concepts of HRE and IHL need to be introduced starting in the elementary grades and increasing in complexity of presentation and engagement as students progress through school (Blanchard, Senesh and Patterson-Black, 1999).

The United States, for all its ambivalence, has actually ratified some important human rights treaties and approved some important declarations. Sometimes, the United States has played a major role in constructing these statements of international law. For example, the American delegation to the Diplomatic Conference of Geneva of 1949 proposed specific language regarding abuse of "protected persons" in the power of an occupying civilian or military authority:

*The contracting parties specifically agree that each of them is prohibited from taking any measure, which has as an object the physical suffering or extermination of protected persons in its power. The prohibition of this Article extends not only to murder, torture, corporal punishment, mutilation and medical or scientific experiments not related to the necessary medical treatment of the protected person, but also to any other measures of brutality whether applied by civilian or military administrators. (Diplomatic Conference of Geneva of 1949, Vol. II, p. 647, 2004)*

This American language became Article 32 of the 4<sup>th</sup> Geneva Convention. Yet the American population has been kept in such profound ignorance about these agreements and about the active part their own government has played in their development that on the whole the populace has had no foundation for assessing the truth or falsity value of statements like that of Mr. Gonzalez. When it comes to human rights and humanitarian law, we are uneducated as a people.

In 2011, the American Red Cross commissioned a survey of knowledge and attitudes toward the Geneva Conventions. Their findings illuminate the gap in basic knowledge of humanitarian law and suggest that it may be becoming worse:

- More than half of adults (55 percent) feel they are familiar with the Geneva Conventions and IHL. For youth 12-17 years old, one in five feel familiar with these rules and laws.
- Veterans, reservists, or active duty military are more familiar with Geneva Conventions and IHL than those with no military experience.
- Adults (55 percent) are more likely than youth (44 percent) to believe that rules and laws governing

actions in war are a good way to reduce human suffering.

- Youth are more likely than adults to believe that torturing captured enemy soldiers is either always acceptable or acceptable in some circumstances.
- Youth are more likely than adults to believe that the torture of a captured American soldier is either always acceptable or acceptable in some circumstances.
- Adults are more likely than youth to believe that those who break the rules of war should be put on trial and punished.
- Nearly 8 in 10 youth believe that the U.S. should educate youth on the laws and rules of war. (American Red Cross, 2011)

My own experience suggests that the Red Cross figures are optimistic. In many years of teaching at the university level, including two years since retirement teaching about human rights and international humanitarian law as part of a peace studies program, I rarely find even one student who knows what the Geneva Conventions require or who knows what the Universal Declaration of Human Rights actually addresses, let alone the role of Americans like Eleanor Roosevelt in its adoption or the rights protected either by the HR treaties that the United States has since ratified or in the many still under review. The origins of some of the UDHR language in the programme of the French Resistance in WWII (Hessel, 2010, 2011) and the decolonizing participation of non-Western diplomats (Glendon, 2002) are totally outside their experience. "Why am I just learning this now?" is a consistent student comment when they encounter the basic story of Universal Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law.

## Breaking Into the Mainstream— Normalization as a Radical Act

Recently a group of human rights educators and advocates came together to draw up some recommendations for the United States to better meet the human rights obligations it has agreed to in the world community. The occasion was the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process undertaken in a regular cycle by the United Nations Human Rights Council to review the human rights records of every country and to make recommendations for their improvement. 2014-15 was the United States' UPR season. In formulating the rationale for their recommendations the educators noted:

- Only 39 states even mention "human rights" in their social studies standards, and among them, only 22 contain the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Very few state standards include specific international human rights or humanitarian treaties, obligations, or mechanisms.
- Where implemented, human rights education tends to focus on civil and political rights and omit

or minimize references to the full range of human rights, including social, economic and cultural rights.

- The predominant historical content approach to teaching human rights does not facilitate connections between human rights responsibilities and personal behavior through social and emotional learning (SEL), such as critical thinking, inquiry, making connections, and learning about international affairs.<sup>8</sup>

What these educators proposed is that human rights education become so common that every child encounters it and that the methodologies through which human rights behaviors are developed and responsibilities undertaken become a standard and familiar part of every child's schoolhouse experience. This would be a significant change in the way in which social studies education is experienced by public school students. It would be radical in the definitional sense of affecting the fundamental nature of social education. At the same time it would be conventional in that it would integrate human rights education into the existing social studies and school environmental programs of the various schools.

For such a normalization of human rights education to take place, a number of things have to happen. Mainstream organizations that act as gatekeepers for so much of the content of public education need to accept human rights education into the fold of the recognized education core. This means that to the extent that content standards and performance standards govern public education, HRE needs to be there. It isn't a question of whether or not standards or particular configurations of standards are a good idea. Rather, the threshold requirement is that whatever standards exist or assessments of accomplishment are imposed, HRE has to be there. In the United Kingdom, questions about the Geneva Conventions appear on every comprehensive exit exam from the secondary education level<sup>9</sup>. Whether such exams are a progressive requirement or not, when they exist, they define "what matters." HRE and IHL need to be there.

I have been working since my retirement with a community of human rights educators and activists to bring about such a normalization of human rights education. One stage in the normalization process involved engaging with one of the mainstream educational associations that is considered a gatekeeper of sorts for the social studies field, the National Council for the Social Studies. Within the NCSS structure it is possible to establish "Communities." These are officially recognized special interest groups within the larger organization. They have no budget, but they do have voting membership in the NCSS House of Delegates and can recommend resolutions to the NCSS Board of Directors through that body.

Through informal networks and word of mouth, the necessary number of NCSS members petitioned for the establishment of a Human Rights Education Community. Early in 2013, the NCSS Board of Directors approved. By

the annual NCSS Fall Conference, the new HRE Community was represented in the House of Delegates. Next the HRE Community networked with a civil society organization outside of NCSS that was also just forming, Human Rights Educators USA. Together we drew on the collective expertise and experience of our newly connected members and drew up a resolution to the NCSS House of Delegates asking that NCSS adopt an official position statement endorsing human rights education as a necessary part of the social studies core. At the 2013 Annual Conference, the NCSS House of Delegates unanimously approved the resolution supporting human rights education as a core component of social studies education at all grade levels.

The House of Delegates resolution was really a request to the NCSS Board of Directors to adopt the resolution just approved by the Delegates. That was the next step. A few months later, the NCSS Board did approve the resolution sent to them by the Delegates. However, this was still not the official position statement we needed. The resolution only said that NCSS would adopt a position statement. The Board members asked the HRE Community to prepare a draft. Again, the network of human rights educators within and outside NCSS worked together to come up with a draft and to vet it through as many human rights educators as we could get to read, comment, edit, and propose. In September 2014, the NCSS Board of Directors adopted the Position Statement on Human Rights Education proposed by the HRE Community. It is now an official position of a major social studies association that:

*The National Council for the Social Studies affirms that Human Rights Education, in both its civil and its humanitarian aspects, is a necessary element of social studies programs and should be integrated throughout the educational experience of all learners from early childhood through advanced education and lifelong learning.*

*...Social studies educators in the United States have a special opportunity and a responsibility to contribute to this growing movement by integrating the fundamental concepts of universal human rights and international humanitarian law into a nurturing and yet rigorous education that prepares students to be compassionate, aware, and effective citizens and to work together to build a more livable world.<sup>10</sup>*

When a professional education organization like NCSS takes a position on human rights education, the efforts of human rights educators and advocates receive a definite shot in the arm. However, for the NCSS position to have an actual impact on the educational experience of most public school students, a lot of other things need to happen. NCSS devoted the May/June issue of its journal *Social Education* (Vol. 79, No. 3) to the new HRE position statement and to practitioner articles on teaching and learning about human rights at elementary, middle, and high school levels. Clearly, however, a great deal more will have to happen if human rights education is to be integrated into the social studies core at every grade level.

NCSS is not set up to be a clearinghouse for the resources needed to carry out the very positive goals listed in its position statement. Nor does human rights education enjoy a status in state standards that would support its incorporation into the “approved” texts and supporting materials that can be purchased with state funds. This limitation may actually be a strength, since it is hard to imagine a standardized textbook doing justice to the rich and nuanced field of human rights education, particularly in



its economic, social, and cultural dimensions. What is needed is a school district commitment to include HRE in its curriculum and effective public domain materials, alignable with whatever content standards are currently in play, which can be easily put into the hands of classroom teachers.

Fortunately, a newly established civil society HRE advocacy organization, HRE USA<sup>11</sup> has been able to secure some limited funds for professional assistance and the support of some highly skilled volunteers to create a website with a capacity for gathering, cataloguing, and providing online access to a wide variety of human rights education curricula that address both the content and the social and emotional learning domains of HRE. The site also provides links to public domain materials and guides.<sup>12</sup> While still a work in progress, HRE USA and its website will hopefully become a place where educators of all sorts can contribute their own resources and network

with each other about creative and alternative ways of connecting HRE with students' lived experiences.

## Inconclusive Conclusions, With More to Follow

Human rights education and humanitarian law education need to get inside the mainstream arena where core concepts are taught and learned. HRE strategies for acting with freedom and respect for others need to become a mainstream part of the experience of every child in school. At every step along the way, HRE can get sidelined. It can become last year's news that nobody remembers anymore. It can get co-opted. The vocabulary of HRE can be appropriated for some very inhumane purposes. But that's the nature of the field in which the game of public education is played in this country. It is not a reason to abandon the effort.

The Stoic philosopher Epictetus (A.D. c. 55 – 135) advised his students to face up to the various ways their best efforts could go wrong decide if it was worth it and proceed accordingly:

*In every affair consider what precedes and what follows, and then...if your inclination still holds, set about the [act] (Enchiridion).*

There is no question but that HRE initiatives risk being co-opted and turned into sophistic defenses of the status quo. Any humanistic endeavor or subject is at risk of being coopted as soon as it is introduced into the public education system. If radical educators and human rights activists let this happen, we will have ourselves to blame at least as much as the officious and official purveyors of canned curricula and sanitized learning. They are doing what it is their nature to do. What is it our nature to do?

Human Rights education is a part of the learning experience of students all over the world. Internet searches and social media can open up an extremely diverse world of ideas and experiences. If the "approved" materials become canned and sanitized, there will always be those research and writing assignments that draw students out of their comfort zone and into their communities, into the larger world of ideas and experience.

Students in an effectively facilitated human rights educational setting will be able to look beyond the limitations of mandated materials if they are encouraged to do so and supported in their explorations. That's our job. It's the job of the co-optors to co-opt. It's our job to outwit them and teach our students to do the same.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> See <http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/>
- <sup>2</sup> [http://www.globalgovernancewatch.org/docLib/20130429\\_The\\_Core\\_Problem\\_-\\_Preventing\\_the\\_United\\_Nations\\_Takeover\\_of\\_K-12\\_Education\\_in\\_America.pdf](http://www.globalgovernancewatch.org/docLib/20130429_The_Core_Problem_-_Preventing_the_United_Nations_Takeover_of_K-12_Education_in_America.pdf)
- <sup>3</sup> *Article 27.* In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practice their own religion, or to use their own language.
- <sup>4</sup> *Journal of American Indian Education*, 33(2), 1-56, 1994, ERIC Number: EJ491769
- <sup>5</sup> <https://www.icrc.org/ihi/INTRO/380>
- <sup>6</sup> Hedges and Al-Arian, The Other War, <http://www.thenation.com/article/other-war-iraq-vets-bear-witness-0/>
- <sup>7</sup> *Gonzalez, 2002*, <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/torturingdemocracy/documents/20020125.pdf>
- <sup>8</sup> HRE USA and USHRN, Stakeholder Report, 2014, [http://www.hreusa.net/upload\\_image/HRE\\_USA\\_-\\_USHRN\\_Stakeholder\\_Submission\\_US\\_UPR\\_Sept\\_2014.pdf](http://www.hreusa.net/upload_image/HRE_USA_-_USHRN_Stakeholder_Submission_US_UPR_Sept_2014.pdf)
- <sup>9</sup> (British Red Cross, Justice and Fairness website, <http://www.redcross.org.uk/What-we-do/Teaching-resources/Teaching-packages/Justice-and-Fairness/About-the-resource>
- <sup>10</sup> (NCSS, 2014, [http://www.socialstudies.org/positions/human\\_rights\\_education\\_2014](http://www.socialstudies.org/positions/human_rights_education_2014)
- <sup>11</sup> See [www.hreusa.net](http://www.hreusa.net)
- <sup>12</sup> [http://www.hreusa.net/materials\\_teaching.php](http://www.hreusa.net/materials_teaching.php).



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# RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

## Teaching Human Rights: Confronting the Contradictions

By John L. Hammond



LEWIS CARROLL'S ALICE IN WONDERLAND

*"I've a right to think," said Alice sharply, for she was beginning to feel a little worried.*

*"Just about as much right," said the Duchess, "as pigs have to fly."*

Lewis Carroll, Alice in Wonderland

In Alice's quandary is the dilemma of human rights, and the dilemma of teaching human rights: Do we have rights when we claim them, or are they only real if we can take advantage of them? Human rights offer a glorious promise of a life lived with dignity for all people. This promise is inspiring and will be the core of any course in human rights.

But students will realize very quickly that the promise is often not kept. Most people who acknowledge human rights believe that all people are entitled to freedom of speech, to a decent standard of living, and to treatment that does not discriminate by gender. But there are societies where political dissent is routinely repressed, where half the population goes to bed hungry, and where women are subordinated to men in myriad ways. Those rights are promised, and are enshrined in philosophy and in formal statements like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Does that mean that people have those rights? Or do we only possess rights if we can actually exercise them? The answer is yes to both questions.

Jack Donnelly calls this the "possession paradox": we have rights, and we don't have them, simultaneously (2013: 9). Students resist accepting this; they want certainty—either we have rights or we don't. But the paradox is the key to what I have found to be a central point in a course on human rights, especially one taught from the standpoint of social science (I am a sociologist): to declare that something is a human right is to state an ideal, but while holding on to the ideal, we must examine how far reality departs from it and try to understand both the reason and the remedy for the deviation.

***In designing a course, I begin with three principles: first, the course must be normative; second, it must combine analytic and experiential learning; and third, it must be interdisciplinary.***

I have taught courses in human rights at Hunter College for about twenty-five years. Hunter College is a large public institution, a branch of the City University of New York. I have taught these courses under the rubric of sociology, Latin American studies, an honors program, and (since 2012) our new Human Rights program.<sup>1</sup> Hunter's student body is mostly women, with a large population of immigrants and children of immigrants, and a large (but decreasing) population of U.S.-born minorities. Many of them aim for careers in teaching and social service, a few in academics. They do not usually take a course in human rights for its relevance to their future careers. They have a

general notion that it will affirm and clarify values that they hold, but little or no specific knowledge of human rights.

The content of the course has varied over time with changing auspices and new priorities. My own thinking has evolved during that time as well. But there is a core that would be part of any human rights course that I would teach, and that is what I am going to describe here. My teaching is informed by my scholarship on Latin America and my experience as an activist on Latin American issues. I worked as a volunteer at the Nongovernmental Human Rights Commission of El Salvador during the civil war,<sup>2</sup> and I have served as an expert witness and volunteer translator for political asylum applicants in their immigration hearings.

I have also done work in human rights education outside the university. I wrote a book on "popular education" (grassroots education) in El Salvador during the civil war, in the course of which I collaborated with popular education organizations. I attended training courses in human rights education offered by Human Rights USA at the University of Minnesota and at Aprenderh (Acción pro Educación en Derechos Humanos), Querétaro, Mexico. I have put this training into practice as a volunteer facilitator of community engagement for the Campaign for Fiscal Equity, the organization that sued New York State for adequate funding of the public schools. The methods of popular education depart from those commonly used in the university classroom, but they have influenced my college teaching, and I draw on them somewhat in this article.

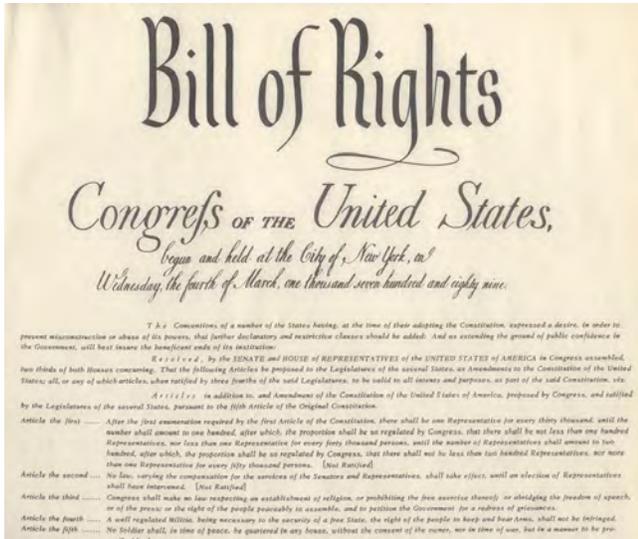
In designing a course, I begin with three principles: first, the course must be normative; second, it must combine analytic and experiential learning; and third, it must be interdisciplinary.

First, education in human rights is intrinsically normative, and is meant to convey not only intellectual knowledge but an appreciation of the value of human rights and the importance of their being respected. Sociologists, especially of my generation, were inculcated with the Weberian injunction to keep facts and values separate. While I believe that the distinction cannot be abandoned entirely, I also believe that values should not be excluded but integrated with empirical analysis.

Second, the normative content makes experiential learning important. Learning such normative principles requires more than learning a set of facts about rules and institutions. Following the principles of Paulo Freire, students must learn through active participation and the development of critical consciousness. The teaching of human rights should cultivate the values that underlie them, respect for the equal dignity of all human beings. Students' embrace of these values will depend on subjective experiences that engage them.

Third, education in human rights must be interdisciplinary because no single discipline captures the whole of the intellectual content. Traditionally, the study and practice of human rights—in the United States and Europe, at least—have been based on the disciplines of philosophy and law. To these, I will argue, must be added humanities and social science.

Each of these disciplines brings a specific perspective to the study of human rights. The main question for the philosophical approach is to identify the foundation of human rights. The main question for the legal approach is to ground human rights in international covenants and declarations and to create institutions, national and international, to protect human rights and assure their fulfillment. As I have already suggested, these approaches



are limited if they treat the ideals as if they represented reality.

In the humanities we encounter literary works such as novels and memoirs that convey emotional content and can communicate, better than any dry analysis, the depth of feeling that is evoked when human rights are violated and when they are enthusiastically affirmed and practiced. I say more below about how I integrate literary works into my course

For the social sciences, the point is to study actions related to human rights as forms of behavior and to explain them theoretically and empirically; to determine under what conditions rights are claimed, recognized, honored, and violated and violators are held accountable. Putting human rights into the context of social science necessarily means confronting ideals with empirical reality—Alice's dilemma—recognizing the disjunction between rights as moral claims and as actual practice.

Elements of each of these approaches must be present, at least to some degree, even in a course offered in one discipline. But I will emphasize the contributions of the social sciences, and specifically sociology, a discipline that has been unduly neglected by human rights scholars in the past.

## Sociological Perspectives on Human Rights

Here is the relation I see between sociology and the study of human rights: sociology studies human behavior, so we examine human rights from the perspective of human behavior; human rights standards define forms of

behavior by which people honor, violate, promote, and enjoy human rights, and we can study these behaviors sociologically.

In that study, we sometimes assume that we know what human rights are. We accept the formal definition as contained in the UDHR and the covenants; we define behavior that corresponds to the fulfillment, promotion, and violation of those rights. We can then investigate empirically the prevalence of such behavior and its determinants. (I call this the positivist approach.) There is much research on human rights topics that is not labeled "human rights" in comparative government, penology, public health, media studies, and other fields. We can take advantage of this research to answer empirical questions about the state of human rights.

An alternative approach assumes that the definition of



FRENCH DECLARATION OF THE RIGHTS OF MAN AND CITIZEN.

human rights is a social construction: it changes over time and is contested at any point in time. For this approach, which I call the constructivist approach, the study of human rights tries to determine why and under what conditions certain norms come to be recognized as human rights norms.

The origin story of human rights lays heavy emphasis on two historical moments, the Enlightenment and the aftermath of World War II. The Enlightenment brought formal definitions of rights in the American Bill of Rights and the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen. 1945 saw the creation of the United Nations, today the headquarters of the formal system of international human rights, enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the human rights covenants, and enforced, or at least monitored, by the various bodies of

the United Nations system and the regional bodies in Europe, Latin America, and Africa. The United Nations includes all but a handful of the world's countries, and they have all nominally sworn to uphold and protect human rights as defined by that system. Many have gone further and voluntarily subscribed to the covenants protecting specific rights or the rights of specific groups and outlawing practices that violate human rights. So it might appear that there is a genuine international consensus among the world's cultures and its political systems supporting human rights.

## Issues in the Fulfillment of Human Rights

But this apparent consensus hides a number of contentious issues. Many human rights principles are contested. Even if there is agreement on widely shared values, the application of those values is often not straightforward. Some issues arise from the (contested) nature of human rights itself, while others derive from the intersection of human rights with issues of especial salience in the contemporary world. When we teach human rights, those issues should be confronted.

Because of the normative content, most if not all questions are simultaneously empirical and political questions. They have an objective content, but beyond the determination of facts lie differences of fundamental values regarding what upholding human rights actually requires. Many of these questions are related to Alice's dilemma, the disparity between declaration and fulfillment. Must economic and social rights yield to budgetary priorities? Do kids have rights, or should they be treated as dependents of their parents? Is it right to prosecute Slobodan Milosevic in an international tribunal, or should the Serbs be left to settle their own affairs? Is the death penalty permissible? To each of these questions, a human rights perspective seems to dictate only one possible answer. But there are arguments—legitimate and illegitimate—about what the observation of human rights demands. In the remainder of this article I will lay out a few of these issues.

**Universality.** Human rights advocates claim that human rights are universal, that is, all people are entitled to the same rights, regardless of nationality, status, or culture. In 1993 the UN-sponsored World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna produced a ringing Declaration and Program of Action in its final document, which declared that human rights are "universal, indivisible, interdependent, and interrelated" (World Conference on Human Rights, 1993). These are strong claims which need to be examined. I will discuss the first two. (Interdependence and interrelatedness are slight variations on indivisibility.)

First, are human rights universal? With all the diversity of cultures in the world, can we agree on a set of values that are applicable to all of humanity? If the rights claims are stated at a high level of generality, perhaps so, leaving room for cultural variation as to specifics. Still, there are provisions within the UDHR that do not gain universal assent from all peoples. Gender equality and protection of citizens against the claims of states are examples.

**Indivisibility.** The Vienna Declaration also posits that human rights are indivisible. That claim specifically addresses the distinction between civil and political rights, on the one hand, and economic and social rights, on the other. If they are indivisible, neither has priority over the other. The distinction pervades the literature on human rights. It is enshrined in the separation between the two main covenants, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights. Civil and political rights are sometimes called "first-generation rights," because they were the rights first acknowledged in the seventeenth century. The covenants were meant to make the UDHR enforceable, but the adoption of separate covenants was a response to Cold War politics. Civil and political rights were privileged by the West, which emphasized those rights as a cudgel to denounce the lack of freedom in the Soviet bloc. The Soviet bloc replied that it honored people's economic and social rights by assuring that everyone had work and could achieve a decent standard of living.

To call human rights indivisible is to affirm that neither set of rights can be fully realized without the other. Some reject that claim. On one side, there are those who say that economic and social rights are not genuine human rights because they are not easily enforced, as civil and political rights (allegedly) are. On the other side, some argue that the fulfillment of economic and social rights may come only at the cost of civil and political rights: economic growth requires the suppression of basic liberties, leaving the government free to take coercive measures intended to stimulate economic development which will improve the economic well-being of the population. The protection of civil and political rights, in this view, can be an obstacle to the realization of economic and social rights. Proponents of indivisibility reject both claims: people cannot take advantage of civic liberties, they say, if their material needs are not met, and the full exercise of freedoms is



necessary to assure government responsibility for the welfare of the people.

**Economic Inequality.** One aspect of the relation of economic and social rights to human rights generally is the question of economic inequality. There has been a dramatic escalation of inequality in income and wealth in the United States in the last generation; other developed countries have experienced similar increases. It can be argued that inequality in itself is a violation of human rights because such disparities are a denial of equal human dignity; it can further be argued that economic inequality adversely affects conditions in ways that are themselves violations of human rights, including physical and mental health, political power, provision of public goods, and economic development.

The arguments against recognizing inequality as a violation of human rights include the claim that while human rights guarantee a satisfactory minimum material standard for all, any discrepancy between the least well off and everyone else is not, or should not be, a target of public action or human rights advocacy; that redressing serious inequalities would violate the individual rights of the otherwise privileged; and that the degree of state intervention necessary to reduce the trends toward growing inequality would have negative effects that outweigh the claims of human rights.

**A human rights utopia vs. achievable standards.**

Some students learning about the idea of human rights for the first time become so enamored of the concept that they want to apply it to all the world's problems, and decide that human rights are only fulfilled if states and societies guarantee the best possible life to everyone on the planet. This is a worthy goal, shared by some professionals and advocates who believe that human rights are aspirational and a model of what we strive for; it does not matter if declared rights go beyond the limit of possibility. Others argue that this "proliferation" or "inflation" of rights can actually impede the effort to set realistic standards that all people can enjoy and all societies can achieve. Rights, in this view, should only be declared if they are within the realm of feasibility.

**Human rights and political struggle.** The history of human rights shows that their definition has changed over time. The changes, moreover, often respond as much to the relative power of political groups as to the refinement of principles. The recognition of human rights arises out of social struggles; in the West, there are several important moments: the rise of the state from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century, in which it took the American and French Revolutions to get rights recognized; the acknowledgement of social rights of citizens and the establishment of a welfare state, largely due to the struggles of the labor movement in the emerging capitalist economies in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; the creation of a human rights regime in the United Nations and the acceptance of human rights as a valid component of international law, in response to the Second World War.

Does this mean that rights are not truly universal? Again, the possession paradox must be kept in mind. The struggles that we learn about, moreover, remind us that many people have fought and sacrificed to make these

rights a reality, some of them famous as historical figures, and many more whose names are not known but who participated in struggles to make a better world. Together they are responsible for the progress that has been made in securing those rights. From their example, we learn that we too can contribute to progress.

**"Special" rights.** At times the protection of the human rights of subordinate groups may be pursued by special protective measures. Are they necessary, or are those groups best served by assuring equal treatment? The implications of this question are different for groups whose culture and aspirations are essentially the same as those of the dominant group, on the one hand, and for groups whose culture embraces a very different view of the good life, on the other.

Women's rights in the western world are an example of the first case. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979) seems contradictory on close reading. It calls for an end to discrimination against women, especially in the labor market, but also endorses temporary special measures (that is, affirmative action) to overcome historical discrimination. It recognizes that the social position of women in many societies is itself discriminatory and calls on governments and societies to remedy those discriminations, but it is silent on issues of sexual abuse and exploitation. Still, in general, international women's human rights can be understood as pursuing the long term objective of achieving equality between men and women, whatever the means chosen.

***The arguments against recognizing inequality as a violation of human rights include the claim that while human rights guarantee a satisfactory minimum material standard for all, any discrepancy between the least well off and everyone else is not, or should not be, a target of public action or human rights advocacy.***

The second case is that of oppressed groups sharing a culture that is at variance with the culture of the dominant group. Any remedies for oppression must make allowances for their cultural claims. Consider the situation of indigenous communities in the Americas (Hammond, 2011). Some rights cannot logically be enjoyed by individuals; language rights, for example, must be enjoyed by the group as a whole or not at all. In other cases the rights of individuals will suffer if the claims of a community or people are not recognized. Territorial integrity is a clear example. The right to territorial integrity cannot be satisfied by assuring that each person possesses a plot of land; it requires a large contiguous territory preserved as the homeland of the whole group. Many indigenous groups in the Americas, moreover, do not value economic growth as the society at large does. The environmental degradation that often accompanies it threatens not only

their livelihood but their entire culture. Any threat to a group's territorial integrity, whether by dispossession or environmental degradation, may threaten the group's survival. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007) is unique among human rights covenants and declarations in its emphasis on rights held communally and collectively.

Some cultures emphasize adherence to group norms over respect for individual choices. This becomes a problem for human rights when group claims and individual choices conflict. The conflict between cultural rights and the dominant western tradition of individual rights then intersects with a conflict within the group itself. Any conflict must be resolved in a way that respects both the



rights of the individual and those of the group.

**Global free trade and workers' rights.** In the last three or four decades, a global production network has produced consumer commodities in poor Third World countries for sale in the chain stores of multinational corporations in the United States and Europe. These goods are cheap, thanks to the workers' low wages and (often) sweatshop conditions in the factories and repression of worker organization. Unsafe working conditions, leading to injuries, fires, and building collapses, have killed thousands of workers. Many countries where the factories are located offer no protection; they lack regulations or have lax enforcement, whether because of shortage of resources or to attract foreign capital.

Defenders of this system argue that it provides thousands of jobs to people for whom substandard wages are better than none at all, and that it can be a steppingstone to development of the poor countries' economies. Others say it is unfair for people in the wealthy countries to enjoy cheap consumer goods at the expense of these exploited workers, and that consumers, retailers, and governments in the wealthy world should refuse to import, buy, and sell goods made in factories where workers do not enjoy living wages and at least minimum standards of safety.

Some people try not to buy anything made under exploitative labor conditions. This is a great goal, but the problem is that most of us cannot go off the grid entirely and produce everything for ourselves, and many things that we need—whether coffee, clothing, or computers—will be hard to find with a guarantee that they have been made by workers who have been fairly treated and fairly compensated.

We can harness our unwillingness to buy these products for maximum effect, however, by joining campaigns that reach beyond the individual consumer. There are organizations that send monitors into factories and pressure retailers to pledge to buy only from factories



certified for adequate working conditions. Among them is United Students Against Sweatshops (online at <usas.org>), which organizes to get college stores to buy college-branded merchandise such as sweatshirts and caps only from certified manufacturers.

**Organizations defending human rights.** Social movements and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) play a major role in the defense and promotion of human rights worldwide. They range from the very large—Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, working worldwide and protecting the whole range of human rights—to small, local volunteer organizations focused on a specific right or defending a specific oppressed group and working in a single place. Though the contribution of these organizations is major, their forms of organization, support, and legitimacy all raise questions. How they appeal to the public, the consciousness of human rights that they promote, and the sources of their funds are all important issues.

The so-called "iron law of oligarchy"—the tendency of organizations to be more concerned to thrive as organizations than to promote their original cause—is far from an iron law, but it is often true that social movements that arise from human rights defenders' fiery and single-minded determination to fight abuses, if they last, become bureaucratized and devoted to self-preservation. They may become too cozy with governments or choose issues that make for attractive fund-raising appeals. Transnational activist networks make possible strategies to defend rights internationally, but since there are more, and bigger, organizations in the wealthy countries, they have sometimes been denounced as a form of cultural imperialism. In these and other ways, organizing to defend human rights can create new contradictions.

Distressingly, only a few of my students have been active in any social movement. They are often skeptical that movements can do any good or that they themselves can contribute anything. A few have participated in neighborhood associations or service projects, and I draw on them heavily to talk about their experience and the rewards (and frustrations) it has brought, and remind them all of the history of the civil rights movement and other



recent movements that they have learned about but do not see as something to emulate for their own goals. Everyone has been taught about Martin Luther King and Rosa Parks, but they need to be reminded that the civil rights movement depended on thousands of brave, anonymous activists who marched, demonstrated, and took risks, and that without their participation the victories would not have been won.

**Humanitarian intervention.** There is another issue that arises more forcefully with globalization. Brutal repression and civil strife have often given rise to massive human rights violations in the past, but in the age of globalized communication, they can be viewed in real time in government offices and living rooms around the world. The call for military "humanitarian" intervention (recently rebranded as the "responsibility to protect") in situations of grave violations of human rights has become part of the lexicon of human rights since the 1990s, when the collapse of the Soviet Union removed one of the principal obstacles to western intervention in small, poorer countries. The United States and its allies have often contemplated military action to protect innocent victims.

The massacre of some 800,000 people in Rwanda in 1994 was one case where calls for military intervention went unheeded. With the breakup of Yugoslavia, communal violence led to massive slaughter and NATO-sponsored military intervention. On a smaller scale, NATO intervened in Libya in 2011 to aid rebel forces seeking to oust Muammar Qaddafi. According to some, the need to stem the human rights abuses of Saddam Hussein was a valid reason for the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003. Emergencies affecting the lives and safety of tens of thousands in Darfur and Syria also led to calls for intervention.

The question of military intervention raises fundamental issues in international human rights. These massive abuses shock the conscience and seem to present a situation so extreme that it is incumbent on outside powers to do whatever they can to stop them. On the other hand, military intervention brings collateral damage and the risk of exacerbating the conflict. Precedents of intervention may encourage opposition forces to start or provoke a civil conflict that they are not capable of sustaining in the hope that outside powers will intervene in their favor. Who decides when intervention is called for? In the present era a resolution by the UN Security Council is

seen as sufficient warrant, but some object that on matters of intervention the permanent members, and especially the United States, exercise the dominant influence in the Security Council and often respond more to geopolitical interests than to human rights concerns.

Above all, the Hippocratic principle of doing no harm may need to be invoked here: countries or alliances considering intervention in other countries should carefully consider whether intervention is likely to improve the human rights situation or make it deteriorate further.

**The role of states.** The United Nations, the official arbiter of international law and custodian of the world's human rights, is an organization made up of states. As members of the UN, states are sworn to honor human rights and many of them have ratified the array of human rights covenants, promising to uphold them. But human rights violations are rife in many countries and in some cases government is the worst perpetrator. Or states, whether or not themselves major violators, may manipulate human rights claims to defend their interests and mystify their populations with accusations of violations by their adversaries. Once again, the disjunction between the promise and the reality of human rights is glaring.

When we teach about and advocate for human rights in the United States, it is especially incumbent on us to examine our country's role. The record of the United States is far from the worst, but it has not ratified most of the major covenants and has imposed significant reservations on the few that it has ratified, so that these covenants have no legal force (whereas in some countries, people have gone to court and won enforcement of their rights based on their government's ratification of human rights treaties).

Worse, the United States commits significant and systematic violations at home and abroad. Internationally, the so-called War on Terror has entailed invasion, arbitrary detention, interrogation, torture, and the Obama administration's signature extrajudicial assassination by drone. Domestically, the criminal justice system is rife with abuses. We are increasingly aware of tragic police killings since the killing of Eric Garner on Staten Island in 2014, but routine police treatment of people, especially young nonwhite men, on the streets is also abusive. Finally, the United States has often used human rights rhetoric in public affairs as a justification for invasion and as a tool for criticism of unfriendly countries, while whitewashing the human rights records of our allies. The United States is the most powerful country in the UN and a permanent member of the Security Council; if it can extract a Security Council resolution argued with a human rights justification, this resolution has the force of international law.

On the other hand, there is much in the country's human rights record in which we can take justified pride. In the last half of the twentieth century the United States underwent a rights revolution beginning with the movement for the civil rights of African Americans and expanding to other racial and ethnic groups, women, gays, and the disabled. In each of these cases, spearheaded by a vigorous popular movement and backed by courts, legislation, and public opinion, the definition of rights and of the bearers of rights expanded, not without struggle and opposition, but that is an essential part of the history of rights.

**Students confront their own prejudices.** These dilemmas lie within the realm of human rights, but students also experience dissonance when the promise of human rights clashes with the assumptions prevailing in the culture of the United States, in which they (even those from immigrant families) have been steeped at home and which they have usually absorbed unreflectively, for example, that our culture and political system are superior to those of other countries, that the fate of individuals is determined by their own efforts, and that victims are responsible for their deprivation and punishment. Students must work through the clash of these assumptions with the universal moral worth of all human beings and recognition of the ways in which the United States has sometimes undermined human rights around the world.

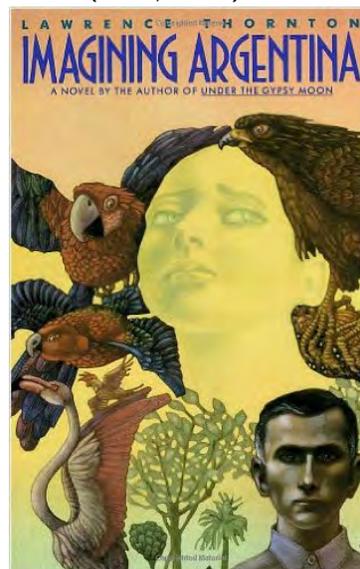
As I have shown, human rights principles are themselves subject to interpretation, so that most questions do not have a single, absolutely correct answer. While I have strong feelings about the issues I have discussed here, I generally do not confront students'

prejudices directly, but prefer to stimulate dialogue among students with different opinions. I believe that a vigorous discussion exposing alternative points of view is more likely to make them question their assumptions than a dictated conclusion.

## Experience and Learning

I want to return to the issue of experiential learning. I incorporate it into my classes in the form of literary works and simulation games—for light relief, but at the same time for serious pedagogical objectives. The normative content of human rights makes experiential learning important. Freire teaches that learning requires more than studying facts and procedures, theories and evidence. Studying a subject like human rights cannot be a purely intellectual exercise; in any field in which the purpose is not only to teach a set of intellectual ideas but also, and possibly more important, a way of thinking and a set of commitments, the student must experience the kind of situation that produces the commitments. A course must engage students' emotions and values as well as their intellect.

Literary works like fiction and memoirs provide an important complement to the more analytical material because they engage the emotions. They describe personal experiences of people involved in situations that engage human rights, especially situations where they are massively violated. Though for the reader these experiences are vicarious, they can have a more profound impact than abstract analysis. In the words of the British fantasy writer Philip Pullman, "'Thou shalt not' might reach the head, but it takes 'Once upon a time' to reach the heart" (Miller, 2005). The reader sees individual people



(historical or fictional) responding to situations where human rights are challenged and can empathize with them.

I have found that students become intensely involved in a class devoted to a novel or a few poems. It is also a welcome relief from the denser, more content-heavy classes based on more analytical writings. One novel that I have used with great success is *Imagining Argentina* by Lawrence Thornton (1991), about the dirty war in Argentina in the 1970s. Though the author is North American, it is written in the Latin American tradition of magic realism; its elements of fantasy ease the burden of reading about the brutality. Responses have been intensely emotional. There are many poems and poetry collections (e.g. Forché, 1993) relating to human rights, often about the intense experiences of persecution and imprisonment. In condensed form they

convey and arouse the emotions that such experiences provoke. For a geographical and cultural balance to *Imagining Argentina*, I have used poems by Bertolt Brecht, Langston Hughes, the Palestinian Mahmoud Darwish, and Paul Celan, the Romanian-French poet of the holocaust. Films have even more immediacy for most students. A well-chosen film can inspire deeply felt reactions.

Simulation games ask participants to deal with human rights challenges. These games may also call on them to play the role of someone whose values are different from their own, itself a valuable vicarious learning experience. (Indeed, since I assign the roles, some outspoken students have accused me of deliberately casting them against type.) Simulation games are necessarily oversimplified versions of reality, but I have found that students generally become very involved and often express themselves more freely than they do in a class with a more conventional methodology.

I have used two games devised to simulate situations that require decisions based on human rights, one involving a large colony of Roma who show up and camp out in a German town where they are a generally despised group, the other involving police-minority relations at the community level when various constituency groups and town officials attempt to resolve a dispute arising from a confrontation. Most students have never encountered any Roma and know little about them; the second game is also somewhat foreign to them because it is not stated explicitly where it takes place or what minority group is at issue.

***Simulation games ask participants to deal with human rights challenges. These games may also call on them to play the role of someone whose values are different from their own, itself a valuable vicarious learning experience.***

Nevertheless students play the roles earnestly and enthusiastically enter into processes of negotiation between competing constituencies and, implicitly, competing value systems.<sup>3</sup> These games are especially important because as students take the role of members of a despised minority or (in their roles) express negative stereotypes toward members of such a minority, they can acknowledge their own prejudices and deal with them in dialogue.

There are other sorts of games commonly played in popular education for children and adults, brief, intense physical activities that do not necessarily carry specific human rights lessons but are important for group process and group integration. They serve a variety of purposes. They combine physical and mental activities. For adults who have left school behind long ago, they can overcome the intimidation which is a heritage of many people's early experiences of schooling. Games integrate participants into a group both by making the process more congenial and by making participants more willing to join in. Most of these

games would be highly unusual in the college classroom, but some lessons can be learned from them.<sup>4</sup>

## Don't Fall into the Gap

Most of this article has addressed the gap between the ideals of human rights and the reality of their (lack of) realization. There is a reason for that: we are more concerned about human rights when they are violated than when they are routinely honored. But too much emphasis on the inadequacy of realization and the hypocrisy of those charged with protecting human rights can leave students cynical or despairing. As I have mentioned, few of them start out with much sense of their own efficacy or the possible value of their own contribution. It is important, therefore, to show that the human rights regime can be both an ideal for which we strive, even if we know we will not achieve it completely, and a resource to help us in that effort.

People who learn about and deplore abuses of others' human rights should also learn that there are things they can do. We all, including student groups, can take small actions, like responsible consuming, protesting our own government's actions, and writing letters on behalf of political prisoners around the world. We can also collaborate with organizations working on a larger scale. For those on college campuses, the anti-sweatshop movement is a logical vehicle. The existence of a human rights regime is itself an important resource. The fact that these norms exist and are officially sanctioned validates our efforts to promote them and our protest against violations. It can also be an incentive to keep up our efforts. Learning about the gap between ideals and reality should not discourage us but instead should spur us to greater efforts to close it.

Pigs may never fly, but Alice does, after all, have a right to think. Teaching and learning about human rights should make us think about the world's problems, however seemingly intractable, and then help us to find ways to address them in the classroom and in life.



INDIGENOUS WOMEN OF PERU  
COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR

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- Forché, Carolyn, ed. 1993. *Against Forgetting: Twentieth Century Poetry of Witness*. New York: W.W. Norton.
- Hammond, John L. 1998. *Fighting to Learn: Popular Education and Guerrilla War in El Salvador*. New Brunswick; Rutgers University Press.
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- World Conference on Human Rights. 1993. Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action.

<<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/Vienna.aspx>>.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Hunter College offers an undergraduate minor and a certificate (comparable in scope to a major) in human rights <<http://www.roosevelthouse.hunter.cuny.edu/hrp/>>.
- <sup>2</sup> Interested readers can learn about my experience being detained by the Salvadoran army during my time at the Human Rights Commission (Hammond, 1998: 214).
- <sup>3</sup> These two games were devised by the European NGO Humanity in Action. They and other games can be consulted at [http://www.humanityinaction.org/knowledgebase?article\\_type=teaching\\_tool](http://www.humanityinaction.org/knowledgebase?article_type=teaching_tool)>. Two other sources of games that can be played for human rights applications are the Global Justice Game, with several variations, from Boston College <[www.globaljusticegame.mrap.info](http://www.globaljusticegame.mrap.info)> and *The Bells of Freedom*, from Action Professionals Association for the People (Addas Ababa, Ethiopia) <[www.hrea.org/erc/Library/Bells\\_of\\_Freedom](http://www.hrea.org/erc/Library/Bells_of_Freedom)>.
- <sup>4</sup> I describe these games in detail elsewhere (Hammond, 1998: 175-78).

Below is a recent syllabus. Not all of the issues discussed in this article appear on it, because the semester is not long enough to include all of them.

## Human Rights 200. Introduction to Human Rights (Spring 2014)

Jack Hammond      Phone: 772-5573  
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This course will examine the foundations and practices of international human rights. The course will be interdisciplinary, bringing to bear philosophical, legal, and social-science approaches to human rights. We will discuss the history of human rights, international treaties and documents about human rights, the implementation of human rights by intergovernmental organizations, individual states, nongovernmental organizations, and movements to protect human rights. Special topics will include torture, workers' rights, women's rights, and rights of indigenous people.

We will play a simulation game about a real-life human rights situation and the pressures that different parties experience in struggling for human rights or trying to avoid their responsibilities.

### COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

This is a writing-intensive course and meets the college's writing requirement. That means there is a lot of writing, graded and ungraded. Since most of the writing is based on reading, there is also a lot of reading. You must plan to do the reading and assignments on time and come to class prepared to talk intelligently about them.

The following assignments will be required:

1. A short paper due February 5. This assignment will be read but not graded.

2. Every other week, each student will prepare a short essay based on the readings and post it on Blackboard. Posts are due before midnight Monday. The class will be divided into two groups, Group A and Group B. Each week, all the members of one group will post comments, the two groups in alternating weeks. (See last page of syllabus for schedule.) The first comment from group A is due Monday, February 3.

Read all the essays before class on Wednesday and bring them to class. Be prepared to discuss them. Any student can feel free to post a response to anyone else's comments, or to post your own comment even if it is not your week.

3. A short paper on an assigned topic. Details of the assignment will be posted.

4. Research paper on a topic of your choice. A proposal stating your thesis and discussing the evidence you will need to prove it is due March 26. The final paper will be due May 14.

5. On April 30 we will play a simulation game about a real-life human rights situation. Attendance is required.

6. A portion of the grade will be based on class participation in general discussions and small group discussions. Participation means contributing constructively to discussions based on your reading of the assignments and your personal knowledge of the topic being discussed. It does not mean always knowing the answers. A question can be as valuable as a statement; admitting that you are confused just means that you are more honest than most people, and can give rise to a clarification that others need too.

7. Final exam.

### REQUIRED BOOKS:

Goodhart: *Human Rights: Policy and Practice* 2nd ed. (Oxford University Press)

Nickel: *Making Sense of Human Rights* 2nd ed. (Wiley; do not get first edition.)

Thornton, *Imagining Argentina* (Bantam)

1. Introduction (January 29)

Universal Declaration of Human Rights; International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (in Goodhart, 397-424 or Nickel, 191-242)

Roth, Silver Lining: The Year 2013 in Human Rights. Democracy Lab, December 30, 2013.  
<[http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2013/12/30/silver\\_lining\\_the\\_year\\_2013\\_in\\_human\\_rights](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2013/12/30/silver_lining_the_year_2013_in_human_rights)>

University of Minnesota Human Rights Resource Center, A Short History of Human Rights.

<<http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/edumat/hreduseries/hereandnow/Part-1/short-history.htm>>

## 2. The Idea of Human Rights (February 5)

Goodhart, "Introduction: Human Rights: Politics and Practice," in Goodhart, 1-7

Langlois, "Normative and Theoretical Foundations of Human Rights," in Goodhart, 11-25

Nickel, *Making Sense of Human Rights*, 1-52

(February 12: no class)

## 3. The Philosophical Basis and Historical Origins of Human Rights (February 19)

Nickel, 53-105

Short, "Sociological and Anthropological Approaches," in Goodhart, 91-168.

Tilly, Where do Rights Come From? In *Democracy, Revolution, and History*, ed. Skocpol, 55-72.

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), in Nickel, 213-242

## 4. Legal foundations of human rights: international law (February 26)

Bilder, An Overview of International Human Rights Law. In Hannum, ed., *Guide to International Human Rights Practice* (3d ed.), 3-18

Smith, "Human Rights in International Law," in Goodhart. 59-74

Government of the Republic of South Africa vs. Grootboom <http://www.saflii.org/za/cases/ZACC/2000/19.pdf>>

Idasa, "The Grootboom case and women's housing rights." <[http://hrbportal.org/wp-content/files/1244045760budget\\_brief\\_111.pdf](http://hrbportal.org/wp-content/files/1244045760budget_brief_111.pdf)>

Read the Idasa Brief on the Grootboom case. In the court's decision, read pp. 14-28; skim the rest. Pay particular attention to the bases of the decision in the South African Constitution.

## 5. Explaining human rights violations (March 5)

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (review)

Cardenas, Human Rights in Comparative Politics, in Goodhart, 75-910

Landman, Measuring and Monitoring Human Rights, in Goodhart, 303-79

Zimbardo, The Psychology of Evil. <[http://www.psichi.org/pubs/articles/article\\_72.aspx](http://www.psichi.org/pubs/articles/article_72.aspx)>

## 6. Literary approaches to human rights (March 12)

Mignone, "Beyond Fear: Forms of Justice and Compensation." Pp. 250-63 in *Fear at the Edge: State Terror and Resistance in Latin America*, edited by Corradi, Weiss Fagen, and Garretón

Thornton, *Imagining Argentina* (complete)

Poems to be distributed

## 7. Economic and social rights (March 19)

Cassidy: 6 charts on inequality <<http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/johncassidy/2013/11/inequality-and-growth-what-do-we-know.html>>

Fukuda-Parr, "Human Rights and Politics in Development," in Goodhart, 161-178

Neier, "Social and Economic Rights: A Critique," Human Rights Brief, Vol. 13, No. 2 (2006)  
<<http://www.wcl.american.edu/hrbrief/13/2neier.pdf?rd=1>>

Nickel, 123-53

Vienna Declaration and Program of Action of the World Conference on Human Rights (online)

ICESCR (review) and Optional protocol to the ICESCR <[http://www.crin.org/docs/filemanager/icescr\\_op.pdf](http://www.crin.org/docs/filemanager/icescr_op.pdf)>

8. Social movements to claim and protect rights (March 26)

Brysk, "From Above and Below: Social Movements, the International System, and Human Rights in Argentina." *Comparative Political Studies* 26, No. 3 (October, 1993), 259-285.

Loveman, "High-Risk Collective Action: Defending Human Rights in Chile, Uruguay, and Argentina." *American Journal of Sociology* 104, No. 2 (September, 1998), 477-525.

Salamon, "The Rise of the Nonprofit Sector." *Foreign Affairs* 73, No. 4 (July-August, 1994), 109-22

Stammers, "Social Movements and the Social Construction of Human Rights." *Human Rights Quarterly* 21, No. 4 (November, 1999), 980-1008.

9. Workers' rights (April 2)

AFL-CIO, The Silent War: The Assault on Workers' Freedom to Choose a Union and Bargain Collectively in the United States (June, 2002). [http://www.nlg-laboremploy-comm.org/media/ProjSolidarity\\_EFCA\\_Res-IssueBrief\\_TheSilentWar.pdf](http://www.nlg-laboremploy-comm.org/media/ProjSolidarity_EFCA_Res-IssueBrief_TheSilentWar.pdf)

ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work. 86th Session, Geneva, June 1998. [http://www.ilocarib.org.tt/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=1152&Itemid=1216](http://www.ilocarib.org.tt/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1152&Itemid=1216)

Lichtenstein, "The Rights Revolution," *New Labor Forum* 12:1 (Spring 2003), 60-73

10. Women's rights as human rights (April 9)

Ackerly, "Feminist and Activist Approaches to Human Rights," in Goodhart, 27-41

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (on line)

Gould, "Conceptualizing Women's Human Rights," chapter 6 in *Globalizing Democracy and Human Rights*, 139-55

Okin, "Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?" *Boston Review* Oct-Nov 1997. <http://bostonreview.net/BR22.5/okin.html>

(April 16: no class)

11. Self-determination: the rights of indigenous peoples (April 23)

Hammond, "Indigenous Community Justice in the Bolivian Constitution of 2009," *Human Rights Quarterly*, 33 (August, 2011), 649-681.

Hannum, "The Right of Self-Determination in the Twenty-First Century." *Washington and Lee Law Review*, vol. 55, no. 3, Summer 1998.

Havemann, "Indigenous Peoples' Human Rights," in Goodhart, 237-54

Nickel, 154-84

Sen, "What Clash of Civilizations?" *Slate*, March 29, 2006. <[http://www.slate.com/articles/news\\_and\\_politics/politics/2006/03/what\\_clash\\_of\\_civilizations.single.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/politics/2006/03/what_clash_of_civilizations.single.html)>

United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (on line)

12. Human Rights Education (Simulation game: attendance required, on time) (April 30)

*The Bells of Freedom*, 2-16. <<http://www.apapeth.org/Docs/BELLS%20OF%20FREEDOM.pdf>>

Hammond, *Fighting to Learn: Popular Education and Guerrilla War in El Salvador*, 175-78.

Simulation game readings (TBA)

13. Torture (May 7)

Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (on line)

Nickel, 106-22

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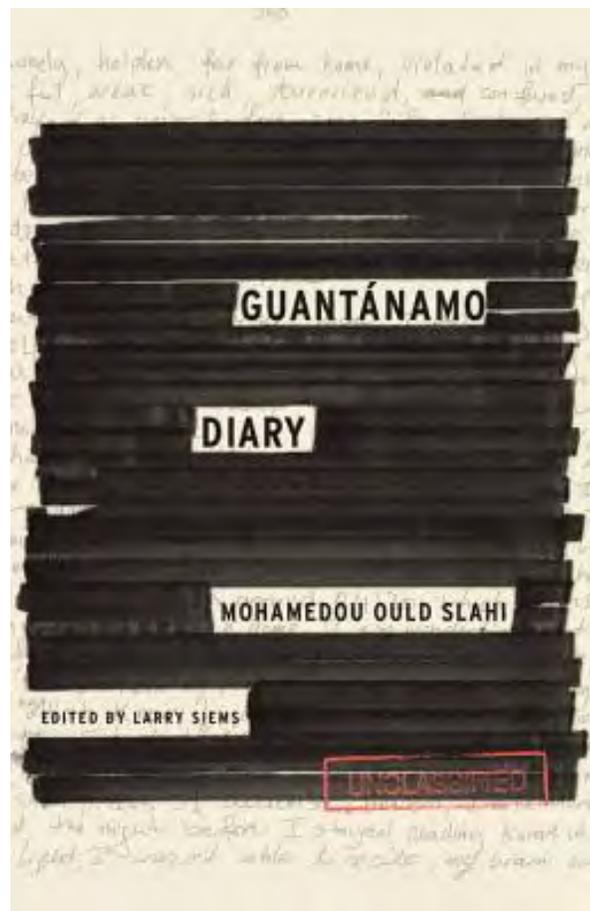
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# RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

## Teaching Mohamedou Ould Slahi's *Guantánamo Diary* in the Human Rights and Literature Classroom

by Alexandra Schultheis Moore



The interdisciplinary field of human rights and literary studies has a broad historical and theoretical scope that carries significant pedagogical challenges. First, there is the challenge of teaching human rights as at once a dynamic juridical framework, one whose principles and effectiveness are subject to strenuous debate, and as salutary cultural discourse with widespread appeal. Second, we must understand violations in the *longue durée* of their geopolitical and historical contexts rather than see them as short, exceptional events. And, third, teaching human rights in the literature classroom may require fundamentally shifting student expectations. Students often come to the material with the assumption that literature is ennobling—that it will raise awareness of human rights abuses and generate sympathy for persons (real or imagined) who suffer those abuses. Thus, it can come as a surprise when we turn to literature and literary analysis for other purposes: not to foreclose exposure to the emotional weight of suffering and the perpetration of violence where it is represented, but to understand the narratability, limitations, and imaginative possibility of human rights stories. What kinds of stories and violations



GUANTANAMO PRISONERS COURTESY OF THE GUANTANAMO MEMORY PROJECT

legal legibility related? Toward what ends does the literary logic—its form, structure, suppositions, and voice—seem to be working? To answer these questions, we analyze the formal strategies, production, and circulation of literary and other human rights discourses for the ways they help to shape the cultural imaginary in relation to legal instruments. In this essay I focus on how a literary approach to Mohamedou Ould Slahi’s *Guantánamo Diary* (2015)—the only account of Guantánamo from a current detainee—might address these pedagogical challenges and, in doing so, inspire both active reading and critical thinking. Reading the book in its larger legal and political context unveils the ideologies that promote torture in the name of state security. And, it offers a rebuttal to those ideologies through a critical analysis of the distribution of legal personhood and literary subjectivity in the context of Guantánamo.

Whereas the study of human rights typically falls under the purview of philosophers, legal scholars, political scientists, and historians, literary scholars have much to contribute. As Peter Brooks argues, “What the

interpretative humanities have to offer the public sphere is ultimately and basically a lesson in how to read—with the nuance, complexity, and responsibility that we practice most of the time in our classrooms” (Brooks 2008, 35). He turns for evidence of the stakes of responsible reading to the Torture Memos generated within the George W. Bush administration, which ultimately condoned the use of torture and illegal detention in what was called the “global war on terror.” Tracing the labyrinthine logic employed by then Assistant Attorney General Jay S. Bybee and Deputy Assistant Attorney General John C. Yoo in their 1 August 2002 memorandum, Brooks demonstrates how the administration justified the abrogation of international law (specifically the Third Geneva Convention and the Convention Against Torture) through irresponsible, poor reading of common usages and definitions of words such as “severe” (as in “severe pain”) and “prolong” (“prolonged mental harm”), among others (Brooks 2008, 36). Brooks concludes his short essay with the charge to scholars and teachers in the humanities to “promote and enforce responsible reading” (38). Whereas enforcement belongs in the public sphere, when we hold public officials responsible for the words, logic, and forms of discourse they employ, the promotion of responsible reading can also take place in the classroom. What might responsible reading of Slahi’s *Guantánamo Diary* entail and how does it relate to elucidating the promise and contradictions of human rights as well as to fostering students’ ability to think, write, and speak critically and creatively? I begin with a brief overview of the book and the class contexts, and then discuss the ways in which a literary approach might address key questions about the manipulation of legal personhood used to advance state priorities over human rights and Slahi’s response to that manipulation. Whereas the Bush administration promoted a polarized, “with us or against us” (Bush 2001) ideology in the name of American values and at the expense of international law after the attacks of September 11, Slahi rejects that false opposition and the subject positions it recognizes. Instead of representing himself as an abject victim, liberal subject, or terrorist/enemy combatant, Slahi employs elements of dialogic structure—addressing the Dear Reader with questions and comments about whether his story is comprehensible—to underscore human dignity and its subject positions as relational and mutually constitutive. To the extent that he succeeds in engaging the reader, Slahi establishes himself as at once an individual and transnational subject whose claim to human rights is staged in conversation with, rather than in opposition to, his readers.

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*Guantánamo Diary* is the published form of a 122,000-word manuscript that Slahi handwrote in English, his fourth

language, in 2005. Deemed classified information, the manuscript was only released after nearly seven years of legal wrangling and significant redactions. Author and human rights activist Larry Siems edited the redacted manuscript for publication by streamlining the prose for clarity as well as by offering a formidable response to the redactions through footnotes drawn from publicly available information about Slahi's case. In the published text, Siems has retained the redactions whose black bars regularly and often extensively interrupt Slahi's narrative, either wittingly or unwittingly telling their own story of the state's fears and priorities in the process. The result is a layering of Slahi's story, the government's redactions, and the editor's footnotes, which together lay bare the ideological foundations that sustained Slahi's torture and continued detention. Detailing his experiences from January 2000 to 2005, the story begins with his "extraordinary rendition" from his home in Mauritania to Jordan, Afghanistan, and finally Guantánamo; circles back to his two and half years in Mauritania (after study abroad and work in Germany and Canada) prior to his kidnapping; and then concludes with the escalation of torture under the "special interrogation" techniques authorized by Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and the compounded, quotidian violence he continues to suffer even after his formal interrogations have ended. This nonlinear structure is complicated by the uncanny experience of reading about events that have passed, yet persist beyond the limits of the book and into the reading present as its author remains in the same cell in Camp Echo in which he wrote in 2005. Adding layers of context, the central narrative is situated within multiple paratextual frames, including scans of Slahi's handwritten manuscript (the complete handwritten, redacted text is available on the book's website, [www.guantanamodiary.com](http://www.guantanamodiary.com)), a timeline, notes on the text, and an editor's introduction and acknowledgments as well as a final author's note. Thus the reader enters the story as a participant in a complex and ongoing drama. As Siems writes toward the end of his introduction:

*Thirteen years ago, Mohamedou left his home in Nouakchott, Mauritania, and drove to the headquarters of his national police for questioning. He has not returned. For our collective sense of story and of justice, we must have a clearer understanding of why this has not happened yet, and what will happen next. (xlix)*

Slahi is one of Guantánamo's "forever prisoners"—held in Indefinite Law-of-War Detention and not Recommended for Transfer ("The Guantánamo Docket"), yet never charged with a crime; whose *habeas corpus* petition was granted in 2010 and then appealed by the Obama administration and sent back for rehearing; and who remains at Camp Echo. Echo, rehearing, indefinite detention, forever prisoner, forever war (Filkins 2008, Danner 2016)—the language that gestures only obliquely toward the material grounding of *Guantánamo Diary* nonetheless derails the progressive narratives of both "Mission Accomplished" (Bush 2003) and normative human rights discourses that would transform the victim to claimant and then activist. The book enters that rift, asking

readers to look backward to the legal underpinnings of rendition and special interrogation techniques and then, once clouds of euphemism have been dispersed by the force of Slahi's narrative, toward an unresolved future for human rights and national security.



HOISTING THE U.S. FLAG AT QUANTANAMO ON JUNE 17, 1898  
COURTESY OF THE QUANTANAMO MEMORY PROJECT

I teach *Guantánamo Diary* at the end of the semester, once students have learned about the modern history and paradoxes of human rights and have practiced reading legal and literary works in tandem. Although specific texts, assignments, and human rights topics that lead up to the book vary, certain foundational pedagogical goals remain constant: I introduce normative human rights as a particular set of legal instruments that arose and continue to be shaped by historical and geopolitical circumstances and whose narrative structures reflect those circumstances. I ask students to wrestle with the ways in which universal human rights are tethered to and delimited by constructions of legal personhood (e.g., Butler 2004) and what Samera Esmeir has called "juridical humanity" (Esmeir 2012) in a colonial context. And I ask students to think carefully about the ethical stakes of the aesthetic representation of atrocity (e.g., Dawes 2009). By happenstance, our reading this fall also coincided with the terrorist attacks in Paris, the release of Shaker Aamer (the last British resident held at Guantánamo), and the passage of the US National Defense Re-authorization Bill that included provisions making it more difficult to close the detention facility (the bill was vetoed once by President Obama and then a revised version—still containing the same Guantánamo provisions—passed both Houses with veto-proof votes and was signed into law in November 2015). This immediate context made *Guantánamo Diary* more urgent and compelling for my students, but did not, of course, predetermine their responses. Indeed, analyzing *Guantánamo Diary* asked students to think critically about how (and why) they respond to ostensibly competing calls for security and human rights and how they might refuse that false choice. Thus, it was crucial for our class discussion to be equally open to the military veteran, the recent refugee, the Saudi Arabian exchange student, and

the New Yorker who watched one of the World Trade Center towers collapse from her kindergarten playground.

## Building Context

### History

For the majority of my students, “9/11” has rhetorical currency, although they lack familiarity with specific referents such as Guantánamo or Abu Ghraib or, for some, even the year of the attacks. Establishing a shared historical and legal framework as well as a shared lexicon is essential for substantive work to follow. I begin with the Guantánamo Memory Project ([www.gitmomemory.org](http://www.gitmomemory.org)), an impressive website that provides an historical overview of the site from a human rights perspective. At a minimum, students can see how the facility has been used to further U.S. imperial interests and as a detention center housing Cuban, Haitian, and then HIV-positive Haitian refugees (see also, Braziel 2006 and Kaplan 2005). This historical background precludes a view of the current Guantánamo detainees as anomalies who are solely the products of a “new kind of war,” as several of the Torture Memos argue. Instead, the multimedia website documents a legacy of detention coupled with rightslessness at the base, which itself serves as gatekeeper of American interests and fears.

A second aspect of Slahi’s larger historical context that needs mention is what Steve Coll has termed “the Cold War jihad alliance” (Coll 2004, 224): an alliance funded largely through Pakistan and Saudi Arabia of U.S. and anti-communist, often radical Islamist, groups in Afghanistan from the mid-1980s to 1992 to force the Soviet withdrawal and the fall of the communist Afghan government of Najibullah. Slahi had joined this effort in 1991 and 1992, first at an al-Qaeda training camp and then under the command of Jalaluddin Haqqani, who had long benefited from covert CIA support. Slahi’s loyalty oath to al-Qaeda in 1991 continually condemns him in the eyes of his American interrogators. Therefore, in reading the allegations against him, students need to remember what his interrogators refuse to countenance: that al-Qaeda is an erstwhile ally turned foe in the post-9/11 era.

### The Law

Giorgio Agamben, following Carl Schmitt, has famously theorized sovereignty in relation to a state of exception wherein sovereignty is precisely the power to suspend the law that grounds its legitimacy, in the name of protecting that same legal order (Agamben 1998 and 2005). For many social theorists, the Guantánamo detention facility exemplifies the abusive paradox of the state of exception that reinforces absolute sovereignty at the expense of, yet in the name of, the law. Although the state of exception offers a conceptual framework that can help students grasp the legal and even geopolitical paradoxes of Guantánamo, it forecloses analysis of legal reasoning used to build and sustain the camps and to guide the treatment of its inhabitants as well as the ways in which Guantánamo fits within larger systems of racialized abuse. As Joshua Comaroff has argued, “Precisely what is interesting in the endless memos that have circulated among the president, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, Vice President Dick

Cheney, and Attorney General Alberto Gonzales is that they express a need for *legal* tactics to defend such ideas as the ‘enemy combatant’ and detention without trial, in the face of eventual challenge from the judiciary” (Comaroff 2007, 385). In addition, approaching Guantánamo as a paradigmatic state of exception in effect denies the possibility of reading the detainees as anything other than what Agamben theorizes as bare life—the life that may be taken with impunity and without sacrifice in the state of exception, the political life that is nonetheless beyond the reach of the law and therefore demonstrates the power of sovereignty and sovereign violence.

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To turn the focus back toward how the law variously constitutes its subjects, I begin with the international legal instruments that should protect detainees and to which the Torture Memos respond or, in the case of the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (adopted 2010, not ratified by the U.S.), which the administration’s treatment of suspected enemies seems to demand. Discussing the Third Geneva Convention not only details the rights accorded to prisoners of war, it also allows students to consider that there are legal and illegal ways of conducting war. Most importantly, this discussion illuminates the stakes of categories such as “prisoner of war” versus “unlawful combatant” through which the detainees are legally recognizable. We turn to a close reading of Articles 1 through 4 of the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT, adopted 1984, ratified by the U.S. 1987) to understand the precise legal definition of torture—particularly the components of severity, intentionality, and official consent, and for the reminder that “No exceptional circumstances whatsoever, whether a state of war or a threat of war, internal political instability or any other public emergency, may be invoked as a justification of torture” (Article 2). We also look closely at Article 3, outlawing the transfer of a person to a state where torture is likely, and the Optional Protocol to CAT (adopted in 2002, not ratified by the U.S.), which aims to increase the effectiveness of CAT by guaranteeing visits to detention facilities by “independent international and national bodies” (Optional Protocol, Article 1). Slahi spends 2002 first in Jordan, where he endures harsh treatment and is hidden from the view of International Red Cross observers, before he is flown to the U.S. Bagram Air Base in Afghanistan and then the U.S. Naval Base at Guantánamo Bay. Finally, to follow up on Article 4 of CAT that directs signatory states to adopt parallel domestic criminal law, we briefly examine 18 U.S.C. §2340 (1994) for how its definition compares to that in CAT (particularly the U.S. code’s inclusion of “the threat of imminent death” and whether it stands as an independent criterion or a

qualifying clause in the definition of torture). These close readings provide students with a framework for evaluating the treatment Slahi describes as well as illuminate the key principles that the Torture Memos address. In addition, the review of adoption and ratification dates encourages students to think critically about the U.S. government's commitment to international law.

In terms of teaching human rights more generally, this close reading of international law also reveals some of human rights' foundational paradoxes addressed earlier in the semester, including the ways in which its ostensibly universal principles are only recognizable within the nation-state system (see, for instance, Douzinas 2000 and Brown 2002). As Greg Mullins has written, "if human beings have universal and inalienable rights, why do human beings need to be protected from the state, and more pointedly, why must they be protected by the very state they are being protected from?" (Mullins 2012, 121). One student traces that paradox and its implications for detainees in her analysis of CAT:

*In the preamble it states that its rationale recognizes "that those rights derive from the inherent dignity of the human person," and that its ultimate goal is "to promote universal respect for, and observance of, human rights and fundamental freedoms." However, in the articles it immediately transitions into legal language, putting the power of recognizing and enforcing torture violations into the hands of "state parties." This rhetorical contradiction, of making the motivation behind the document one of personal human dignity, and yet putting ultimate power in the hands of institutions, leaves room for many of the legal arguments of the U.S. torture memos.*



GUANTANAMO FROM THE AIR COURTESY OF THE GUANTANAMO MEMORY PROJECT

Another approach I take to the question of how the law constitutes legal personhood in multiple, possibly contradictory ways is to consider whether or not detainees figure as the subjects or objects of the laws at hand. Notwithstanding the slide from human dignity to state power in CAT, identified above, clearly the intention behind CAT, the Convention Against Enforced Disappearance, and related instruments is to detail the rights accorded human rights claimants. These non-derogatory rights define and defend the dignity of the subject to whom they are attached, although they may only be claimed by the legal person. Noting how the law seeks to constitute dignity and legal personhood through rights is helpful before turning to legal discussions of what is lawful to do to those swept up as enemies or threats in the administration's response to

the September 11, 2001 attacks, or, to state it slightly differently, how the presumption of legal personhood might be dismantled to render the detainee the object of state power rather than the subject of human rights law.

Perhaps the most challenging class leading up to *Guantánamo Diary* is that spent deciphering the Torture Memos. In my experience, students initially find them impenetrable, and I invite students to consider *why* the memos are often so obfuscatory, rather than to feel inadequate themselves. Using the *New York Times*' "Guide to the Torture Memos" and its links, we work in groups to provide close readings of core documents. I ask students to identify the speaker, his office, his audience, and the date in order to make visible the institutional priorities that the rhetor (in its more recent sense of a speaker with persuasive intent) advances and how the memos present an initial debate (Yoo, Gonzales, Powell, and Taft), its resolution (Bush's Directive), and its implications and attempts at clarification (Bybee and Rumsfeld). Next students pull out the central argument of each memo, the logic that sustains it, and, finally, any questions that the argument raises for them. One student asked in her close reading of one of the memos, "If we do not protect detainees from human rights violations[,] do we consider them 'human'?" Raising such questions engages students in the difficult work of translating between abstract principles and specific situations. It also allows us to consider the appeal of human rights in the rhetorical context of fear, which seeks to define rights and security as mutually exclusive. Another important strategic divide is that articulated in President George W. Bush's Directive on the Treatment of Detainees (7 February 2002), although in this case the rhetoric seeks to mask rather than to entrench the rooting of opposites. In the Directive, Bush seeks to reaffirm a sense of U.S. moral authority and political power, despite

concluding that the Geneva Conventions have only limited applicability to Taliban and none to al-Qaeda detainees. He nonetheless insists, "our values as a Nation . . . call for us to treat detainees humanely[, and . . .] to be a strong supporter of Geneva and its principles" ("Guide to the Torture Memos"). This false syllogism reinforces a human rights ethos at the moment its legal foundations are removed. Whether or not students find Bush's reasoning compelling in the context at hand, it can open a broader discussion of the efficacy of human rights as a legal versus moral framework.

Each stage of close reading the Torture Memos can be a challenge: students may be unfamiliar with the information in letterhead and how it is organized and need to pause to consider why, for instance, officials in the

Departments of Defense, State, and Justice might disagree on the applicability of the Geneva Conventions due to the interests of their respective departments as well as legal reasoning. By mapping the context and argument of each memo (in chronological order) on the boards around the classroom, students can see—spatially—how the debate from Rumsfeld, what it might mean to translate these decisions to U.S. military personnel and interrogators around the world. This mapping also highlights the importance of the redefinition of torture in the Gonzales memo of 1 August 2002, which, in Diana Taylor’s words, makes torture “synonymous with death rather than torment” (Taylor 2007, 731). Instructors seeking a more complete record of the memoranda and reports concerning the legal status of detainees, approved military, CIA and FBI interrogation techniques, and what protections, if any, detainees hold could consult *The Torture Papers* (2005), edited by Karen J. Greenberg and Joshua L. Dratel.

Although Slahi’s narration in *Guantánamo Diary* concludes in 2005, the book as a whole inevitably raises questions about his current status. If time allows, a close examination of subsequent laws and legal casework is productive in looking at the ways in which legal personhood can be incrementally constructed where it is first denied. I provide a brief overview of key laws and legal decisions that came toward the end and subsequent to the central narrative (although students frequently do additional research and close readings of these texts on their own): the Military Commissions Acts of 2006 and 2009, *Rasul v. Bush* (2004), *Hamdan v. Rumsfeld* (2006), and *Boumedienne v. Bush* (2008). With the exception of the Military Commissions Act of 2006, these cases and laws enhanced the legal standing of the detainees, including by recognizing their right to *habeas corpus* petitions (a right Slahi exercised after *Boumedienne v. Bush*) and reiterating the principles of the Geneva Conventions and U.S. Uniform Code of Military Justice. Even this brief overview demonstrates for students that, as Angela Naimou has effectively argued, the legal options are not solely between the full rights of citizenship and the negation of Agamben’s bare life; rather, what lies between them “is an enormous range of particular legal identities” (Naimou 2015, 33). For more information about Slahi’s legal initiatives, the American Civil Liberties Union docket on *Slahi v. Obama* provides a legal history and current information on his case (<https://www.aclu.org/cases/slahi-v-obama-habeas-challenge-guantanamo-detention>).

### Language

Parsing words and logic in the Torture Memos as well as analyzing how a political agenda can subvert common meanings in favor of ideologically-driven interpretations both invite a larger consideration of the role of euphemism in discourses surrounding terrorism, Guantánamo, and the international network of black sites which Slahi’s story includes. To give students a sense of the lexical context of the detainees, beyond their designation as unlawful combatants and Guantánamo as a detention facility and not a prison, I assign a news article on the official U.S. rhetorical switch from the “Global War on Terror” to “overseas contingency operation” (Burkeman 2009, see also *The Economist* 2007). A close reading of selections

from Fred Halliday’s *Shocked and Awed: A Dictionary of the War on Terror* or of terms simply pulled from major news media—e.g., “rendition,” “terrorist,” “Jihadi,” “fanatic,” “detainee,” “unlawful combatant,” “enemy combatant,” “prisoner of war,” “special” or “enhanced interrogation,” and “actionable intelligence”—can also be helpful in making available for scrutiny the language used to characterize detainees. Tracing the meanings of like terms, for instance, highlights the ways in which distinctions between them often collapse or are infused with ethnocentric connotations in everyday and official discourse in order to polarize the rhetoric surrounding detainees. In addition, these detailed, close readings of law and language translate into more nuanced discussions in class (and later in their written work), as students become increasingly careful about their own language use.

**After two to three classes devoted to the book’s context, I assign *Guantánamo Diary* over two weeks (four class periods), in each meeting examining elements such as voice, the use of literary devices, the construction of credible authorship, the representation of atrocity, character development, and genre. Especially after analysis of how the arguments permitting detention without charge, trial, or conclusion were initially staged, this attention to the literariness of *Guantánamo Diary* allows us to consider how Slahi tells his story as well as how that story responds to the arguments that have, at least temporarily, legalized rightslessness.**

### *Guantánamo Diary*

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legible subject positions that have been foreclosed—disturbs the normative distribution of rights (Rancière 2004). Rancière describes this process in terms of staging dissensus: “Dissensus is not a confrontation between interests or opinions. It is the demonstration (*manifestation*) of a gap in the sensible itself. Political demonstration makes visible that which had no reason to be seen” (Rancière 2010, 38). In *Guantánamo Diary*, Slahi does not claim the rights he has been denied so much as re-orient the political field in which rights and the process of political subjectivization that activates them are negotiated. Through his narration, he emerges as a political subject whose very constitution is bound up with that of his readers and, thus, who has a claim on readers’ engagement.

### Credibility and Authorship

To analyze how the book stages dissensus, we begin by thinking about the purpose of the paratextual frames in structuring the reader’s approach to the text. Why are there eight doors leading to the central narrative? How does passing through those doors shape our willingness to enter into Slahi’s story? Images of Slahi’s redacted, handwritten manuscript pages underscore the conditions under which it was produced as well as invite comparison with the edited version. These visual referents, combined with the dramatic black bars visible in both the original and typescript versions, emphasize the struggle for control over the story that follows. They also provide a layer of transparency to the editing process that the redactions seemingly resist.

Larry Siems’ introduction also serves multiple purposes, many of which we return to in relation to later chapters in the book. Although, as noted above, students may have widely differing views on whether or not the response to the attacks of 9/11 warrants the sacrifice of human rights, they can identify the strategies Siems uses to build the credibility of the narrative that follows. Among the most effective strategies is including the perspective of Senior Prosecutor from the Office of Military Commissions, Lieutenant Colonel Stuart Couch, who led Slahi’s prosecution for nine months from 2003 to 2004 (Slahi has never been charged with a crime). Motivated to return to active service following the death of a fellow Marine who was a co-pilot in the hijacked plane that hit the second World Trade Tower, Couch was pleased to be assigned to seemingly “high value” detainees. However, he withdrew after suspecting that the lengthy confessions Naval Criminal Investigative Service relayed to him could only have been obtained under suspect conditions. In an interview, Couch slides from past to present tense in disclosing his growing unease:

*With Slahi I noted, as we went on into the fall of 2003, he was being very prolific with what he what he [sic] was saying. And there were a lot of reports coming out. And just the volume—I got to the point where I just couldn't keep up with what everything he was saying. I've got in the back of my mind what I had seen [of the conditions of the Guantánamo detainees] on that first trip. And I've also been told that Slahi is under special project.*

*All of that's kind of coming together. And I'm thinking, okay, why is he being this prolific? What's going on? Are they—are they, you know, is it physical coercion? (Interview 2007)*

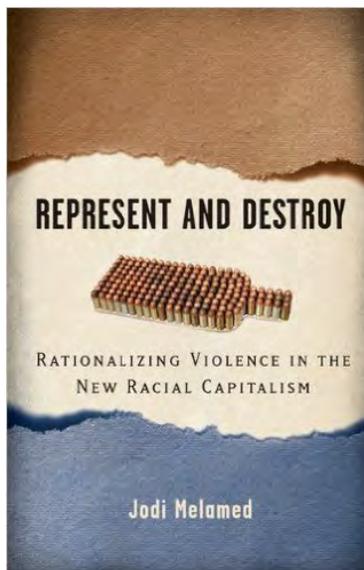
Couch explains his decision to withdraw from Slahi’s case in both legal and religious terms—because of the inadmissibility in court of evidence obtained through torture (CAT Article 15) and feeling complicit in the violation of human dignity such that, “I’m not honoring God by prosecuting a man with this type of evidence” (Interview 2007). From this, we can ask, what do the book’s framing devices, and Siems’ strategic use of Couch’s testimony in particular, presume about the audience for the book? My students find Couch credible and crucial to their willingness to read Slahi’s story because Couch is a Marine, military prosecutor, loyal friend and comrade, and Evangelical Christian. This list, generated in class, leads us to ask if are there any specific traits that we would look for in Slahi to maintain that trust in the narrative.

Indeed, Slahi proves a compelling narrator because he is a well-rounded character who maintains his own humanity—reflected in his love and concern for his family, empathy for the suffering of others, curiosity, knowledge, understanding, religious devotion, emotional range, sense of humor and irony, and desire to engage the reader—even in those moments when he is most dehumanized and abused by those around him. Again and again, he relates his own objectification in order to illuminate its all too human costs: “I was treated like a UPS package. I cannot describe my feelings: anger, fear, powerlessness, humiliation, injustice, betrayal” (Slahi 2015, 135). These moments also reveal both individual and systemic facets of abuse. On the one hand, Slahi represents the individual characteristics, human failings, and occasional kindnesses in his interactions with guards and interrogators. Even the briefest descriptions include references to the human drama of his detention: “Humiliation, sexual harassment, fear, and starvation was the order of the day until around 10 p.m. Interrogators made sure that I had no clue about the time, but nobody is perfect; their watches always revealed it” (233). On the other hand, Slahi’s close attention to how people speak, their understandings of themselves in the world, and the relative power of the camps’ personnel to one another also allows him to identify patterns of behavior and belief that point to the systemic racism (layered onto Islamophobia) underlying his treatment.

In *Represent and Destroy: Rationalizing Violence in the New Racial Capitalism*, Jodi Melamed argues that the Bush administration justified indefinite detention in part by utilizing multicultural discourses at once to defend American values and to rationalize abuse. Through a process of “neoliberal racialization,” “neoliberalism’s beneficiaries [are cast] as worthy multicultural global citizens and its losers as doomed by their own monoculturalism, deviance, inflexibility, criminality, and other attributes deemed antisocial” (Melamed 2011, 138). At Guantánamo, according to Melamed, this policy in effect recognizes the religious beliefs and cultural practices of the detainees and uses that recognition to construct a

monocultural caricature of detainees that “justified torture” (153). *Guantánamo Diary* reverses the logic of monoculturalism. Although Slahi is regularly denied his right to religious practice (there is little evidence in the book of the multicultural dimension of Melamed’s argument, although one can examine aspects of it, such as the practice of Ramadan at Guantánamo through other sources), he is nonetheless always already guilty. “In the eyes of the Americans, you’re doomed,” one interrogator tells him. “Just looking at you in an orange suit, chains, and being Muslim and Arabic is enough to convict you” (220). Another tells him, “To me, you meet all the criteria of a top terrorist. When I check the terrorist check list, you pass with a very high score” (192). Rather than represent Slahi’s perspective in relation to that checklist, *Guantánamo Diary* reveals the interrogators’ racist comments to be reflective of their own monoculturalism, not Slahi’s. By comparison, Slahi, writing in his fourth language with references to American films, European history, the Bible and the Koran, Mauritanian folktales, and countless other cultural allusions drawn from experiences in Mauritania, Senegal, Germany, Afghanistan, Canada, Jordan, and Guantánamo resists polarizing identification.

Given Slahi’s capacious and detailed memory of the individuals he has encountered en route to and at Guantánamo, it is perhaps no surprise that the censors have attempted to render them unrecognizable by redacting many of their identifying markers. The redactions raise key questions about the authorship and credibility of the book that we take up in class. What principles seem to guide the redactions [and, once those principles are identified, how well are they followed]? Who or what do the redactions seem to be protecting and to what end? Do the redactions enhance or detract from Slahi’s credibility? Thinking about the redactions in one chapter, what is the story—according the editor’s footnotes and the larger context—that the redactions intimate and how does that story relate to the narrative in the chapter as a whole? Joseph Slaughter has written about redacted Guantánamo documents, “the unnarrated, which was once narrated, draws attention to itself as a political absence” (Slaughter 2015, 115). To some extent this is certainly true; however, I also encourage students to read the redactions as constitutive of Slahi’s story as opposed to places where narrative fails or is absent. That the redactions in the book are often inconsistent, self-defeating, and masking information available from other public sources oftentimes refigures the black bars less as signifying the political absence of the speaker than the presence of authoritarianism that seeks unsuccessfully to control what it does not understand. Siems’s decision to include the redactions makes visible the process of narrative construction and, with it, the process of Slahi’s political subjectivization. Together Slahi’s narration and the redactions thus make visible the staging of dissensus.



## On the Close Reading of Torture and Institutional Racism

The ethical stakes of narrative control are particularly clear in the representation of torture. In “Human Rights in Literary Studies,” James Dawes identifies several paradoxes inherent in a literary or cultural approach to human rights, one of which is the paradox of suffering: “How do you resolve the paradox that your audiences hunger for images and stories of human calamity both because they want to understand their world and their moral responsibilities in it and because they are voyeuristic? What, ultimately, are the psychic costs of storytelling to the storyteller, the audience, and the person whose story is being told? And perhaps most important, what makes these acts of storytelling more or less effective in changing the world?” (Dawes 2009, 401-02). I take this quote as a point of departure for examining how Slahi writes about his experience of egregious suffering and why it matters. Although Slahi relates the cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment he receives throughout the book, the intensification of abuse occurs in chapters five and six, when Rumsfeld approves a “special interrogation plan” for Slahi (Committee on Armed Services 2008, 135-41) and Lieutenant Richard Zuley is placed in charge of his interrogation team.

### ***The representation of torture in Guantánamo Diary raises larger questions about torture’s uses and effects.***

To begin this discussion, we turn back to the introduction, which includes a note Slahi wrote to his attorney in 2006 in which he identifies the summer of 2003 as the time “where my brake broke loose. I yessed every accusation my interrogators made. [. . .] I just wanted to get the monkeys off my back. I don’t care how long I stay in jail. My belief comforts me” (xvii). I ask students to consider what “my brake broke loose” means and how the reams of confession that Slahi generated during this period, whose quantity overwhelmed Lt. Col. Couch, might compare to the way in which Slahi describes his experience. Students sometimes find it initially challenging to see the “how” rather than the “what” of writing. In order to facilitate this analysis, we talk about whether Slahi seems to want us to understand what torture *feels* like and whether such a feeling might be possible through the medium of the text and across the many distances between our and Slahi’s respective geopolitical, psychological, and linguistic positions. This discussion also asks students to think critically about their own readerly desires. In addition, we turn briefly to *The Guardian (London)*’s article on Shaker Aamer’s psychiatric evaluation of 2013 by Dr. Emily Keram, who reported, “at numerous times during the five-day evaluation he became visibly agitated and interrupted himself when discussing the severe maltreatment he’s experienced. At those times, he

either stopped talking or repeatedly engaged in apparent efforts to distract himself from painful and disturbing memories by suddenly and loudly singing” (reported in Cobain 2015). Without conflating Slahi and Aamer’s responses to torture, Keram’s report can help attune students to the different strategies one might adopt to narrate the unnarratable. Looking at specific examples in *Guantánamo Diary*, students note the restraint with which Slahi writes; his desire to share how he felt without tantalizing the reader with a phenomenological description of torture; and his pattern of recounting moments of relief during even the most brutal treatment. With each of these strategies, he wards against the spectacularization of his own suffering. Instead of depicting himself solely as the object of state violence, in these passages he retains control not of the ostensible confessions given when “my brake broke loose”—which, given that Slahi has never been charged with any crime, are evidently of no legal value, but of an alternative form of “actionable intelligence” readers are invited to share: the process of his own political subjectivization that the book represents and makes possible, that takes place in the context of torture and degradation, and that asks readers to re-evaluate their own subject positions in relation to his.

The representation of torture in *Guantánamo Diary* raises larger questions about torture’s uses and effects. Is the purpose of torture to demonstrate the power of the state and the powerlessness of the tortured (Scarry 1985), to yield valuable intelligence (as in the popularized “ticking bomb” scenario), to punish? How can we understand the use of torture in relation to other modes of exercising state power? Darius Rejali’s magisterial research demonstrates, for example, that “police and military in the main democratic states were leaders in adapting and innovating clean [leaving few physical marks] techniques of torture,” and that cleanliness is essential to broadening public acceptance of their use (Rejali 2007, 5, 2). Although *Guantánamo Diary* cannot answer those questions about the purpose of torture, the book both presents them and, in Slahi’s case, allows readers to situate his experience in the larger contexts of democratic government and of structural and systemic racism. Melamed’s argument about neoliberal racism and monoculturalism discussed above provides one example. Delving into the footnotes about Lt. Zuley’s role in orchestrating Slahi’s torture reveals another dimension to the ideologies that sustain indefinite detention and abuse. Here it is helpful to mark passages in the book that speak to racism of guards and interrogators—the taunts Slahi receives, his careful analysis of the relative authority of white and black personnel, the way guards and interrogators’ casual racism suggests an ignorance about the dynamics of race (and slavery) in Mauritania, and Slahi’s own comparisons of himself to a slave. To make visible the ways in which racism has an institutional presence, I then turn to Spencer Ackerman’s exposés of Lt. Zuley’s decades of work as a police detective in Chicago, where he honed his abusive interrogation techniques on poor, predominantly non-white Americans in an urban “black site” before he transferred to Guantánamo. Ongoing practices in and investigations of Homan Square can disclose ways in which the treatment of detainees corresponds to police brutality addressed in

#blacklivesmatter and related campaigns. These patterns of abuses figuratively resituate Guantánamo from the edges of American empire to its center.

### Literary Form and Genre

Whereas the U.S. government has defended its treatment of detainees in the name of national security and the search for “actionable intelligence,” Mark Danner, in his review of *Guantánamo Diary* for the *New York Times*, writes that “the vast and brutal American interrogation mechanism, stretching around the globe in an archipelago of black sites housing hundreds of detainees at the mercy of untold numbers of interrogators, transformed itself into an intricate machine for generating self-reinforcing fiction” (Danner 2015). Slahi agrees: “Torture doesn’t guarantee that the detainee cooperates. In order to stop torture, the detainee has to please his assailant, even with untruthful, and sometimes misleading, Intels” (Slahi 2015, 255). If torture coerces the production of fiction, how might we categorize the narrative Slahi voluntarily shares, its redactions notwithstanding, in *Guantánamo Diary*? I conclude my unit on the book with this question because *literary forms and genres provide guides to how we read—they shape authorial intention as well as readerly expectations. Thus, the question of literary classification becomes a question about active reading, and my objective is not to promote a specific label for the book but to ask students to take responsibility for their own reading practices.*

There are many possible responses to the question of the book’s literary form and genre. For Siems, *Guantánamo Diary* is “an epic for our times” (Slahi 2015, *xlix*). Its recursive structure, “lexicon about the size of the one that powers the Homeric epics” (*xi*), scope of its story, and Slahi’s repetition of “formulaic phrases for recurrent phenomena and events” (*xii*) are all characteristics of an epic. Students also describe the book as a thriller, memoir, autobiography, imagined diary (addressed to Dear Reader, rather than Dear Diary), individual and institutional memoir (that tells Slahi’s story and/as that of systemic, transnational racism), and as literary testimony. We talk about what reading through the lens of these different designations entails and how the terms structure the relationship between reader, author, editor, censor, and text.

### Conclusion

At the end of the book, Slahi writes, “What do the American people think? I am eager to know” (372), and that question, whether or not students are American, invites a rejoinder. Moreover, the conclusion reiterates Slahi’s rejection of the terms through which he remains (il)legible to the U.S. government and his rejection of the argument that torture—as opposed to the use of dialogue, description, and imagination—produces knowledge. The book, with its regular address to “Dear Reader,” shifts the discursive context from the violence of interrogation to the conversation of the book. Reading *Guantánamo Diary* through literary and contextual analysis engages Slahi not as an interrogatee, a ghost of our political life, or simply a suffering body, but as a political subject who awaits our reply and whose future we share.

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# RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

## The Form and Content of Human Rights Film: Teaching Larysa Kondracki's *The Whistleblower*

by Sarah Hamblin



## The Emergence of Human Rights Film

The founding of the Human Rights Watch International Film Festival in 1988 firmly established film as a principle medium for human rights advocacy and as an avenue for the broad dissemination of the values and ideals of human rights discourse. Since then, activists and educators have turned with increasing frequency to both documentary and fiction films as a means of representing and promoting the urgency of human rights issues. Today, there are innumerable resources for the distribution and study of human rights cinema; the last two decades have seen the global expansion of a flourishing film festival network specializing in human rights, from community and college festivals to major international events, and the emergence of numerous online directories and databases of human rights films, many of which are accompanied by lesson plans, discussion guides, and links to related resources.

At the same time, since the commercial and critical success of *Hotel Rwanda* (George 2004), there has been a noticeable increase in mainstream cinematic engagements with a variety of human rights issues: war and genocide [*In the Land of Blood and Honey* (Jolie 2011) and *Machine Gun Preacher* (Forster 2011)]; oppressive political regimes [*Red Dust* (Hooper 2004), *The Last King of Scotland* (MacDonald 2006), and *The Kite Runner* (Forster 2007)]; global capitalism [*The Constant Gardener* (Meirelles 2005) and *Blood Diamond* (Zwick 2006)]; and human trafficking [*The Whistleblower* (Kondracki 2010) and *Sold* (Brown 2014)]. As Sonia Tascón argues, the increasing popularity of film as a means of engaging human rights issues signals both the dominance of visual culture in contemporary communication and the potential of the cinematic medium to foster knowledge of and investment in human rights around the world ("Considering Human Rights" 865). This increasing investment in visual culture and the concomitant prevalence of human rights-oriented films has, unsurprisingly, affected human rights curriculums. Documentaries and feature films are appearing with increasing frequency on high school and college syllabi and, following in the footsteps of major human rights organizations like Amnesty International, Witness, and Human Rights Watch, campus advocacy groups hold regular film screenings as one of their primary methods of engaging the larger student body in human rights-related activism.

***Such an emphasis on accuracy and truthfulness is bound up with a belief in the transformative potential of cinema: in exposing human rights violations film has the power to instigate action for change.***

Film, then, has emerged as a mainstay of human rights education due to its unique representational capacities. Indeed, as scholars like Sharon Sliwinski have shown, visuality has always been central to the formation

of human rights awareness, and campaigns have long included evocative descriptions and detailed illustrations as a means of engaging their audience. This is because, as Safia Swimelar points out, rights are most clearly comprehensible when they are seen being violated (416). Or, as Peter Lucas puts it, human rights habitually "remain 'paper rights' or one-dimensional without concrete forms of presentation. It's always representation and the tradition of narrative that brings the themes of human rights to life" (109). Lucas highlights the narrative capacities of film to animate human rights; not only can it help engage audiences by particularizing and humanizing an abstract, universal right, it can, as Elizabeth Goldberg similarly argues, provide the necessary context for audiences to develop a deep understanding of the issue and to potentially act in response to it (12).

## Truth, Accuracy, and Content

The ability of a human rights film to foster this kind of concrete knowledge is predicated on the deep-seated assumption that it is grounded in truthfulness. Indeed, prevailing definitions of human rights film put forth by activists, festival programmers, and scholars all emphasize a film's capacity to deepen its audience's understanding of human rights issues, which is fundamentally tied to the supposition that the film, whether documentary or fiction, is realistic and historically accurate. In this vein, Human Rights Watch characterizes its festival programming as films that "bear witness to human rights violations" and "brin[g] to life human rights abuses through storytelling." Similarly, Daan Bronkhurst, Maria-Eugdnia Freitas (28), Bruni Burres (330), and David Lucas (111) all reference the reciprocal notions of accuracy and awareness in their discussions of the nature of human rights film. The Human Rights Film Network perhaps offers the clearest articulation of these essential traits, defining human rights cinema as "films that reflect, informs [sic] on and provide understanding of the actual state of past and present human rights violations, or the visions and aspirations concerning ways to redress those violations."

Such an emphasis on accuracy and truthfulness is bound up with a belief in the transformative potential of cinema: in exposing human rights violations film has the power to instigate action for change. Human rights cinema is thus imbued with an evidentiary capacity that positions it as an indirect mode of witnessing. Indeed, the idea of witnessing is one of the founding logics of human rights activism, which explains the preference for documentary. While fiction films are not granted quite the same attestant power as documentaries (they are not used as legal evidence, for example), they are still held to a comparable standard of truthfulness, and their status as successful human rights films is evaluated according to their ability to raise informed awareness of an actually existing issue.

This consistent association of human rights film with accuracy and awareness has led human rights education to focus on filmic content. As Shohini Chaudhuri states, "post-screening panel discussions at human rights film festivals, for example, are dominated by the issues raised by a film, rather than its aesthetic concerns" (4). This preoccupation

with content extends into the classroom and, all too frequently, discussions of human rights films in high school and college are similarly limited to analyses of the issues raised by the narrative. Indeed, online lesson plans, like those provided by Amnesty International USA's Human Rights Education Program or the CCL Human Rights Film Awards, emphasize historical context and use films as case studies about particular atrocities or as opportunities to discuss more general human rights issues in relation to specific historical and/or geographical contexts. Within this framework, films are useful teaching aids to the extent that they help students identify certain rights and/or understand the contours of a particular historical case of human rights abuses.



THE WHISTLEBLOWER IMPLICATES CULTURES OF MISOGYNY IN BOTH THE US AND BOSNIA IN THE PERPETUATION OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING.

## The Power of Form

While the subject matter of human rights films is certainly a major component of human rights education, this singular focus overlooks the mutually constitutive relationship between form and content and fails to take account of the ways by which our understanding of a particular issue is fundamentally shaped by the stylistic and generic parameters of the film that represents it. While a focus on content may provide students with the opportunity to discuss the nature of rights or our legal and ethical obligations as individuals and nations, it elides issues of representation, assuming film to be a neutral conduit that channels the world as it is rather than an agent through which our understanding of the world is constructed, circulated, and reinforced. Recently, scholars like Tascón and Chaudhuri have drawn attention to this blind spot, arguing that the preoccupation with truth prohibits audiences from examining how the film is situated within (or perhaps against) a specific set of geopolitical power relations and cultural presuppositions. This presumption of truth thus normalizes a westernized worldview, obscuring its ideological foundations and the geopolitical structures that give human rights discourse its universality and function.

Our perceptions of the world are shaped as much by art and media as by our experiences, and many of our base assumptions are founded on the impressions we

develop from literature and visual media. This is particularly the case with human rights education, where, as Swimelar demonstrates, the recent proliferation of documentaries, feature films, and festivals dedicated to human rights indicates the extent to which our understanding of and reaction to these issues is visually mediated (422). It is imperative, then, that we begin to interrogate the production of these images rather than treat them as neutral testimony. Instead, we must ask who is representing, what they are representing, and how they are doing so in order to understand how our normative perceptions are constructed. In short, as Chaudhuri calls for, we must bring the questions of film studies to bear on our discussions of human rights cinema and be open to the ways they may complicate some of our principal assumptions about human rights representation in relation to western privilege (4). In other words, to see how a film shapes rights—what they are; where, how, and by whom they are violated; who has the right to claim them and how they may be claimed; our response to their violation; our responsibility and ability to act on behalf of those whose rights have been violated; and our implication in this suffering to begin with—necessitates an engagement with both film form and film content and the ways by which the dictates of one impact our experience of the other.

***Our perceptions of the world are shaped as much by art and media as by our experiences, and many of our base assumptions are founded on the impressions we develop from literature and visual media.***

## Teaching Form and Content: *The Whistleblower*

To illustrate the importance of an engagement with the form as well as the content of human rights film, I'd like to explain my approach to teaching Larisa Kondracki's *The Whistleblower*. The film recounts the real-life experience of Kathy Bolkovac, a Nebraska police officer who applied for a six-month peacekeeping mission in Bosnia with a private military contractor in 1999. Once there, Kathy discovers that the peacekeeping forces are colluding with UN personnel and the local police to traffic Eastern European women as sex slaves. Kathy launches an investigation only to be met with bureaucratic obstacles, institutional resistance, blackmail, and threats of physical and sexual violence. Despite being fired, she succeeds in smuggling evidence out of the country and goes public, but, under the protection of diplomatic immunity, none of the peacekeepers or UN officials involved is indicted. Framing Kathy's investigation is the story of Raya, a young Ukrainian woman trafficked by her uncle. After enduring horrific physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, Raya is murdered when Kathy raids the bar where she is being held.

Kondracki's film is a popular choice among human rights educators for teaching about sex trafficking partly because the detective-thriller format and casting of high-

profile actors (Rachel Weisz, Vanessa Redgrave, David Strathairn, Benedict Cumberbatch) make the film appealing to students, but mainly because, although technically fiction, it is based closely on actual historical events. Indeed, everything that happens in the film is taken either from Kathy's own experiences or from the extensive research that Kondracki and her scriptwriter compiled in the two years they spent interviewing NGOs, human rights lawyers, and victims of sex trafficking in Europe; even some lines of dialogue are taken directly from the recordings that Bolkovac made and her interview with BBC's *HARDtalk*. By aligning its narrative so closely with historical events (Bolkovac and Madeleine Rees, then head of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Bosnia, proofed the scripts), *The Whistleblower* meets the key human rights film criterion of accuracy in service of raising awareness, and it paints a harrowing picture of the brutality of human trafficking and the moral bankruptcy of the UN and various NGOs. However, while at the level of content the film succeeds in helping students understand the history of this particular human rights scandal, the problems of diplomatic immunity, and the human rights abuses associated with sex trafficking more generally, its generic and stylistic characteristics betray certain ideological preconceptions that impact the kind of awareness the film seeks to raise, which complicates any straightforward acceptance of the reality it presents.

## The Whistleblower Day One: Content

I currently teach at a large research institution with an incredibly diverse student body and a sizeable international population. As such, my students tend to be globally aware and already interested in human rights issues. At the same time, I typically teach *The Whistleblower* either in a "Women and Film" class or as part of an introductory course focused on representations of human rights, so the students I teach come to the film prepared to discuss it within the context of human rights. To this end, they are typically quite adept at engaging the film's content, but analyzing its form poses some challenges. In order to best explore this tension, I like to split discussion of *The Whistleblower* over two days. In preparation for our first class, which focuses on unpacking the complex international network that enables sex trafficking, I ask students to do some background reading. In order to comprehend the factual, historical basis of the film, students read excerpts from Bolkovac's memoir and an interview with the director that explains her research methods and the source material for the film's content. To help students understand the historical context and some of the issues that the film alludes to, I also assign a handout about the cultural and economic history of the Yugoslav Wars and a short reading about sex workers and the American military, as well as two fact sheets about diplomatic immunity and UN involvement in sexual abuse.

We begin our first day discussion by exploring the very concept of human rights, and I ask students to identify the rights at stake in *The Whistleblower*, as well as what makes what we've watched a question of human rights rather than criminal activity. This is a surprisingly difficult

question for students to answer, as they take human rights to be self-evident and transcendental concepts rather than historically constructed legal designations. I explain to students how the rights laid out in the UN Declaration evolved over the last few hundred years in response to shifting definitions of the self, revolutions in systems of government, and changing relationships to religious authority. My aim here is to challenge their assumptions about the universality of rights as well as to establish the critical approach that will frame our discussion for the next two days.



THE MONITORING FUNCTION OF THE UN AS WELL AS THE BUREAUCRACY OF INTERNATIONAL AID AGENCIES ARE SIMILARLY CONNECTED TO HUMAN TRAFFICKING.

After this initial philosophical inquiry, I ask students to explain what *The Whistleblower* is trying to do as a human rights film. The course context and my students' general investment in human rights issues make this a fairly straightforward question, and based on their readings and viewing experience, they quickly state that the film is trying to raise awareness of the UN scandal and give audiences a sense of how human trafficking works, as well as the horrific experiences the women go through (Kondracki says as much in her interview). From here, I ask students to first identify the various groups involved in trafficking in order to understand the extent of this criminal network as it extends across international borders. This is also fairly straightforward as the film clearly lays out the different players and their roles, and we talk about how the film makes it relatively easy for the audience to comprehend how such an elaborate operation functions. From here, I ask my students to try to identify the economic conditions and cultural attitudes that facilitate human trafficking. This is a much more challenging question, so I ask students to look at the principle groups we've identified as being involved in trafficking—the trafficked women, the johns, the criminals who run the operation, and the corporations and institutions that ostensibly support it—and to use the film and the readings to think about how and why each becomes embroiled in it.

Generally speaking, my students are able to discuss six overlapping factors that the film presents as contributing to the existence of sex trafficking: desperate economic conditions that prompt people to take risks, to engage in criminal behavior, and to maintain the illusion of deniability that their actions aren't that bad or that

dangerous; misogynistic attitudes and accepted domestic violence that combine with ethnic, religious, and racial intolerance to further objectify and victimize women; the historical relationship between western military forces and sex workers that institutionalizes the objectification and abuse of women; the dehumanizing effects of war, wherein the ethical treatment of humans gives way to a culture of violence and self-interest; the logic of non-intervention that similarly dehumanizes those who suffer so that peacekeepers are less compelled to intervene, distancing themselves from any abuses they witness so they are less likely to feel responsibility to report corruption; and the bureaucratic structures of international law that make prosecuting international crimes almost impossible, protect peacekeepers through diplomatic immunity, restrict the rights of trafficked women by classifying them as illegal immigrants, and allow NGOs to profit from such instability.

At the end of our discussion, we return to the question that began the class, and I ask students whether they feel *The Whistleblower* succeeds in helping its audience develop an accurate and sufficiently complex understanding of human trafficking. The answer has, so far at least, always been a resounding yes; students comment on how shocked they are to learn how immunity has been used to absolve criminal behavior and that an institution like the United Nations would be complicit in such human rights abuses. At the same time, students also often remark on the way the film implicates Americans, which challenges the frequent assumption that human rights abuses are perpetuated by others elsewhere.

***I often find myself emphasizing how we are at least now aware of what actually needs to occur before meaningful change can be realized and that developing this knowledge is a necessary first step towards effective action, but I'm not convinced that this is of any comfort to these students.***

*The Whistleblower* makes it relatively easy for students to perceive the complex array of factors that combine to enable sex trafficking, and in mapping out these various forces I'm always happy that most of them move away from the "few bad apples" defense towards an awareness of the structural conditions that enable such abuses. However, there are always a number of students who are dismayed by the film's lack of resolution (either legal or moral), and they express their frustration with this emphasis on a complex system over individual culpability as they struggle to imagine how anything could ever change given the historical, cultural, legal, political, and economic scope of the problem. I frequently encounter this issue when teaching about structural oppression as students wrestle with the difference between punishment and prevention and the limits of the former in relation to meaningful social change. I often find myself emphasizing how we are at least now aware of what actually needs to occur before meaningful change can be realized and that

developing this knowledge is a necessary first step towards effective action, but I'm not convinced that this is of any comfort to these students. I see helping students develop this kind of structural awareness as one of the key learning goals of my class, but I also worry that a repeated emphasis on how complex things are can push students towards apathy as they become increasingly convinced of the impossibility of change.

Rather than dwelling in the difficulty of imagining change in light of structural oppression, I try to steer the conversation back to an analysis of the film by returning us to the goals of *The Whistleblower* and reminding the class that the film is invested in teaching us about the realities of human trafficking, not developing international policy to combat it. Once we've reaffirmed this goal, I ask my students to consider the nature of the "reality" that the film produces. The class turns to their reading about the Yugoslav Wars to focus on the consequences of the NATO bombings and Clinton's doctrine of humanitarian intervention, and we discuss how these military campaigns conspired to produce the desperate economic conditions that *The Whistleblower* indicts as partly responsible for the emergence of human trafficking in the region. Here, I ask students to think about what it means that the film elides this historical context and how its absence impacts our ability to identify with Kathy as the western moral crusader. Going back to the interview with Kondracki, I also draw attention to the fact that certain details were omitted or cut down because they did not ring true to western test audiences. Kondracki states that her research uncovered much worse atrocities than the film represents, but these events could not be "decently or believably" shown in the film (West 10), their inclusion coming across to audiences as "terrible writing" (13). By highlighting these omissions and rewrites, I encourage students to think about how cinematic conventions actually come to define what we consider to be realistic. By looking at historical omissions and viewer expectations, I push my students to begin questioning the human rights assumption that film acts as an objective recorder of reality, and we focus instead on how such films operate as the very means by which our sense of reality is constructed and our normative perceptions reinforced.

## The Whistleblower Day Two: Form

Despite our discussion of the film's omissions, at the end of our first class, my students are all generally in agreement that *The Whistleblower* is a successful human rights film that presents an intricate and accurate representation of the various layers of corruption, complicity, and profiteering that permit human trafficking. My goal for our second class is to further complicate this position by examining the extent to which the film's generic and narrative structures unwittingly position the film within a colonial power dynamic. To prepare students for this discussion, I assign a few pages from Tascón's *Human Rights Film Festivals* where she discusses the humanitarian gaze and sections from Elizabeth Goldberg's *Beyond Terror* where she defines the genre of counterhistorical drama.

***I pose a series of questions that prompt students to consider how *The Whistleblower* operates as a counterhistorical drama and the degree to which it reproduces the colonial logic that Goldberg associates with it.***

We begin our second class by reminding ourselves of the aims of *The Whistleblower* that we began with, and I set up the focus of our discussion as exploring whether the desire to teach audiences about the UN scandal and the way that trafficking works conflicts with the desire to give voice to the experiences of trafficked women. We then turn to Goldberg, and I ask my students to summarize her definition of counterhistorical drama. Goldberg explains this genre as consisting of films that tell stories of historical violence through the narrative conventions of war films, adventure, romance, suspense, and courtroom drama. Goldberg argues that these films present “a counternarrative to an official version of history or to a perceived silence surrounding a historical event,” and that they typically incorporate elements of the bildungsroman where audiences are directed to identify with a white, western protagonist working in a foreign environment whose struggle drives the narrative (29). This dynamic is problematic for Goldberg for the ways in which it positions the struggles of other people as the backdrop for the protagonist’s personal growth and utilizes the violence of this struggle as “an element of adventure emplotment to heighten audience suspense for [the protagonist’s] safety and well-being, rather than [...] as witness to the material conditions they signify” (34). For Goldberg, the issue with counterhistorical dramas isn’t their fidelity to history but the ways in which their narrative logic reaffirms the hegemony of a white, western point of view.

Once we’ve established the contours of counterhistorical drama and the problems attendant to its generic formula, I pose a series of questions that prompt students to consider how *The Whistleblower* operates as a counterhistorical drama and the degree to which it reproduces the colonial logic that Goldberg associates with it. My initial questions ask students to consider the dual storylines and how much the desire to highlight the involvement of the UN and the peacekeepers draws our narrative attention away from the experiences of the trafficked women: Is the inclusion of Raya’s story enough to give voice to the victims of trafficking, or does *The Whistleblower* remain primarily about a white, western protagonist? To help explore this issue, I prompt students to think about the title of the film and its casting, as well as how the detective tropes it employs align our point of view and experience with Kathy. I also encourage students to consider Kathy’s backstory and the ways in which her failed marriage and fears of being a bad mother impact her response to the abuses she witnesses: to what degree does the narrative become a bildungsroman about Kathy’s journey to be a better wife and mother?

The film’s conclusion is a key element of this discussion. I ask students to think about the use of Raya’s

story as a frame narrative and the decision to flashback at the end of the film to the night where Raya makes the decision to travel with her friend. Knowing at the end of the film that this choice, made reluctantly and against her mother’s wishes, is the action that leads to her being trafficked, raped, tortured, and murdered renders this flashback to a happy time intensely tragic, but does this attempt to provoke an emotional response end up narratively assigning blame to Raya? Does it prompt us to



KATHY SEES PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE TRAFFICKED WOMEN BEING ABUSED. WHENEVER SHE MAKES A KEY DISCOVERY THE AUDIENCE SHARES A POINT OF VIEW SHOT WITH HER.

think that if she just hadn’t given into her friend and had instead listened to her mother, none of this would have happened? And if so, does this narrative device undermine the structural critique that the film’s content is at pains to communicate by reducing the systematic problem of trafficking to the individual consequences of one bad decision? Here, I prompt students to consider how the Hollywood preference for individual protagonists eclipses the systematic nature of human rights violations by focusing on individual rather than collective experiences and thus presenting these abuses as isolated incidents rather than structural problems. At the same time, I propose the idea that Kathy’s inability to deliver justice for these women actually highlights the inability of the individual to incite change, thus highlighting the inadequacy of the Hollywood convention of an individual protagonist with whom we can identify to respond to the ethical demands of human rights advocacy. In its reliance on these conventions, does *The Whistleblower* undermine its investment in educating its audience about the

structural and systemic issues that allow human trafficking to persist?



THE TRAFFICKED WOMEN ARE FORCED TO WATCH AS RAYA IS BRUTALLY RAPED AS PUNISHMENT FOR TALKING TO KATHY. WHILE THE AUDIENCE IS SIMILARLY POSITIONED TO WITNESS THIS ACT OF VIOLENCE, THEY DO NOT SHARE A POINT OF VIEW SHOT WITH ANY OF THE CHARACTERS

I also ask students to consider the divergent conclusions to each of the three storylines. That Kathy manages to escape Bosnia to expose the scandal and start a new life with Jan contrasts significantly with Raya's murder and with the unresolved nature of the scandal. Does the traditional narrative closure assigned to Kathy's story privilege her subject position and, as Goldberg argues of counterhistorical drama, reaffirm her identity as safe and separate from the ongoing, irresolvable struggles of the trafficked women who have disappeared and whose families cannot find justice? In prioritizing Kathy's story and granting her safety and happiness back in the Netherlands, does *The Whistleblower* reiterate the importance of the western individual over the suffering of others and thus reaffirm "an identity politics that mirrors the general global distribution of safety and harm from a human rights perspective" (Goldberg 32)?

Building on these questions of narrative priority, I then ask students to analyze the generic structures that organize the film's detective and thriller elements in relation to its presentation of the violence of human trafficking. Here, I prompt students to discuss the extent to which the violence that we witness functions as testimony

to the events themselves, thus giving voice to the experiences of trafficked women, and the extent to which it serves to drive Kathy's story, inspiring her ethical development and providing the dramatic backdrop that makes us fear for her safety. Does the violence that the film alludes to stand on its own or is it primarily significant for the ways in which it relates to Kathy? Here, I push students to really think carefully about how Kathy's character organizes the narrative and how Raya's storyline and the violence associated with it intersect with this primary plotline.

Finally, I ask students if they think the form and style of *The Whistleblower* affirm the humanitarian gaze. Tascón defines this gaze as a system of looking that reaffirms geopolitical power relations by naturalizing the oppositions of helper/victim, benefactor/supplicant, and watcher/watched (*Human Rights* 35). Here, I ask students to consider not only the narrative structures that we've talked about so far, but also the way that the camera is used to establish a system of looking that maps onto the power relations that Tascón identifies. To this end, we rewatch the scene in the bar where Kathy first discovers the photographs of sexual abuse and the room where the women are kept, and we talk about how the scene uses a point-of-view shot to align us with Kathy as she uncovers the evidence that prompts her investigation. My students are usually quick to point out that this scene intentionally puts us in Kathy's position so that we witness the abuse as she does and will thus stand against it as she does too. I ask students to interrogate this familiar human rights logic and to think about the power relations embedded in these structures of looking: what does it mean that we only share point-of-view shots with Kathy? How does the omniscient camerawork in the rest of the film position us in relation to knowledge? How do these systems of looking objectify certain people and structure the agency of others? For Goldberg, this narrative point of view privileges the western observer/participant, "resulting in the illusion that there is no story—no historic event—unless it is witnessed, shaped, and experienced by western agents" (32), while for Tascón the humanitarian gaze perpetuates the cultural and political superiority of the west as benefactor to the perpetually suffering other (*Human Rights* 204). I ask my class to explore how the familiar narrative and stylistic conventions exemplified by *The Whistleblower* perpetuate this privileged viewing position, and the extent to which it reaffirms our superiority as global actors and universal adjudicators.

The focus of our discussion on the second day thus moves away from a judgment about the film based on its historical accuracy to an analysis of the degree to which its presentation of that historical reality is embedded in and reaffirms colonial power relations and to what extent the implication of the west in this human rights abuse is undermined by our identification with Kathy as the white savior. Although I have my own ideas about the film and ask students pointed questions that challenge them to complicate their interpretations, the answers are not straightforward. Indeed, *The Whistleblower* is so productive to talk about in relation to human rights representation precisely because it isn't a textbook example of a

counterhistorical drama, and there are myriad ways by which it attempts to mitigate the humanitarian gaze. As such, I find that discussion of this film particularly does not come to an easy resolution; for some students, the film reinforces the hegemonic perspective of western privilege, while for others its indictment of the UN includes Kathy as one of its agents and thus undermines her privileged position. Others still argue that Kathy really does not develop in the mode of a traditional bildungsroman—she is an ethically motivated character from the start and the conclusion of the film highlights her failure rather than her growth.

***My goal in drawing attention to the ways by which human rights film may be imbricated in colonial power structures isn't to provide a moral critique of human rights cinema.***

The film makes room for all these various interpretations, and I encourage students to disagree with each other as they develop their own analyses. As much as possible, I urge them to explore the complexity of the film and to avoid reducing it to either a positive or negative value judgment. This is difficult, and my students are often eager to reject *The Whistleblower* as a failed human rights film by this point. To some extent, the structure of my lesson plan encourages students to do this as we move from a discussion of content to a critique of form, but I try hard to remind the class that the formal issues we've debated are best understood as part of the ethical dilemma inherent in the very project of speaking about the suffering of others. Indeed, the last few times I've taught this film, a number of students have wanted to dismiss the issue of form entirely, arguing that you have to have this kind of protagonist and narrative structure if you want a western audience to watch this kind of film. I try to explain how this response is actually consistent with the humanitarian gaze and push these students to look back at the Tascón reading where she explains how the ability of the audience to look away is the very mark of western privilege—we must be appealed to and appeased in order to take an interest in the suffering of others. But the fact that this is a privileged position only underscores its importance, and these students are right to claim that if the film seeks a large western audience to help get its message out in this commercial climate it will inevitably require capitulating to the Hollywood trope of the individual, white, proactive protagonist. If the choice is between a flawed representation with an audience and a more ideologically consistent presentation that no one watches, which is preferable given the aim of human rights film to prompt awareness and action? There is no easy answer to this question, so what I try to encourage instead is not an evaluative judgment of the film as a success or failure, but a deeper awareness of the values and power relations fundamentally embedded in human rights representation that, at the same time, does not diminish the need for it.

## Being Watchful

Human rights films are popular teaching tools because they directly engage us in the process of judgment at the heart of human rights. Visual images, and film in particular, mobilize this kind of judgment by giving face to juridical concepts and encouraging students to ethically respond to these situations as they see the impact of abstract concepts on human experience. But in doing so, they are not neutral, and we must examine how we are positioned in relation to these judgments and take account of the representational aspects of human rights films to see how they shape our responses and reaffirm normative perceptions. Indeed, at the level of content *The Whistleblower* appears to be everything we could want from a human rights film, but attention to form reveals how it is implicated in the global distribution of power that structures the contemporary discourse on human rights. Taking the film at face value prohibits us from seeing that this face value is itself ideologically determined within a normalized western ethical framework.

My goal in drawing attention to the ways by which human rights film may be imbricated in colonial power structures isn't to provide a moral critique of human rights cinema. The solution to the issues revealed through this mode of analysis is not to condemn these films and stop watching them. Indeed, not looking at human rights abuses would be worse. Rather, our classrooms need to engage what Mark Ledbetter calls the "ethical integrity of voyeurism" (3). That is, we need to consider the power and politics of looking when dealing with representations of human rights in order to complicate our engagement with these films and ask to what extent they act as a testimony to suffering and to what extent they perpetuate the victimization of those who suffer, as well as the degree to which they elide our responsibility for this suffering. In doing so, our students become more critical consumers of the image culture in which they are immersed and thus more capable of understanding the ideological presuppositions that structure our experience of reality.

Visualizing human rights is fundamental to our understanding of the concept; we cannot do without it. As such, photographs, film, and video will and should remain a central component of human rights education. What we must recognize, however, as Chaudhuri does, is that "all images aestheticise, mediate, transform. A non-aestheticising alternative does not exist" (9). Our goal as educators, therefore, is to make our students aware of these processes of mediation so that they no longer accept as natural or given the systems of power that structure contemporary human rights discourse and its modes of visualization. As Tascón argues, we must not let the urgency of human rights advocacy prohibit us from critically examining the tools that we use to promote awareness and change. ("Considering Human Rights" 882).

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# RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

## Teaching Human Rights in Jail

By Martha Saxton



COURTESY OF THE INSIDE/OUT PROGRAM

I have taught human rights in three settings, as an elective in an elite liberal arts college, in a master's program at an (elite) university for students going on to work in the field, and in a jail in rural Massachusetts with half incarcerated men and half college students. I found the first two experiences similar to most of the teaching I have done: the same pleasure when students found the material exciting, the same frustrations and disappointments when they zoned out, let others carry the discussion, or did the bare minimum to get a respectable grade. In these contexts, teaching human rights, despite the frightening or horrifying content of some of the material and the profound questions it poses, was not very different from teaching my regular history courses: sometimes exciting and satisfying, more often an uphill struggle to make the issues feel real and relevant.

On the other hand, teaching in jail, in a depressing visiting room, where everyone sits on scratched plastic chairs, and half the students wear regulation navy blue sweats, while a surveillance camera hangs in the middle of the room and open phone booths with plexiglass windows line one wall, showed me the transformative potential of teaching human rights. The classes I taught in jail were through the Inside/Out Program, developed by Lori Pompa at Temple University and the Graterford Prison Think Tank, and were composed of half "outside" or Amherst College students and half "inside" or incarcerated students. For a variety of reasons, which I will discuss below, both groups of students brought their best to the class: their interest in one another, their interest in the subject and, more strikingly, they brought themselves fully to the classroom. Most inside students had lost many of their human rights by being incarcerated. Most outside students had little direct experience of rightlessness. The resulting mixture of intensely alert students in a grim location produced some uniquely pointed and powerful discussions of human rights, civil and social.

Although many outside students bring idealism with them into the jail visiting room, they also bring considerable fear of incarcerated people, haunted by dangers accumulated from years of media images. Mostly they find poor people who are afraid of *them*. Inside students fear they won't be able to compete with people who have been in school all their lives, or they think that the college kids will see them as failures or stupid. Most inside students remember school as a series of humiliations, punishments, and missed opportunities. College students (with some notable exceptions like those who are the first members of their family to go on to higher education) are likely to bring to their own education a mix of aspirations that include acquiring a credential, engaging in a rite of passage, satisfying their family, learning about and discussing important issues, and partying hard before entering adulthood—not necessarily in that order. Inside students (with the few exceptions of those who have been to college, or those whose education is in hiatus) bring a different set of notions that include engaging in an activity that was not part of their family's plan or their school's expectation for them. They regard their struggles with reading comprehension as evidence of their ongoing "stupidity," not lack of practice or the failing

schools they attended. Students on the inside, unlike college students, do not assume that teachers and fellow students will respect their ideas and opinions or that professors want them to succeed.

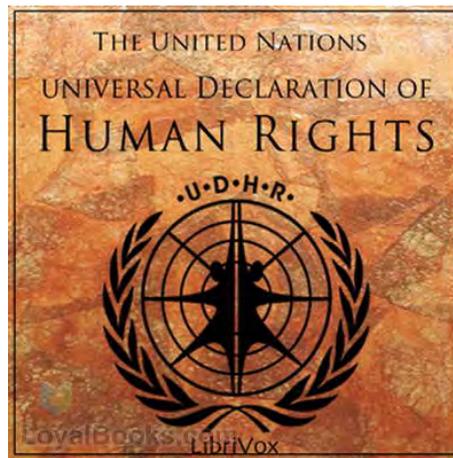
It did not escape anyone in the class that the vast majority of the students who had managed to go to school rather than jail had parents who had good jobs and who guided them to higher education, and who lived in neighborhoods with safe, academically demanding schools. Almost to a man, inside students had come from dangerous neighborhoods, had attended schools that offered little and had no ambitions for them, and did not have the money to go on to higher education. Many of them had found in belonging to a street gang the trust and confidence their families had not provided. Poverty and discrimination had distorted nearly all of their lives.

Outside students get over their initial fears of the individual men they meet inside, and typically make some friends. Replacing the fear of their classmates is a growing knowledge of the jail with its particular gloom, humiliating rituals, and infinite number of randomly enforced rules that succeed in both deadening and injecting anxiety into life inside.

***Teaching in jail, in a depressing visiting room, where everyone sits on scratched plastic chairs, and half the students wear regulation navy blue sweats, while a surveillance camera hangs in the middle of the room and open phone booths with plexiglass windows line one wall, showed me the transformative potential of teaching human rights.***

Outside students are usually taken aback when they are stopped at the gate for breaking the dress code by wearing the wrong earrings or pants the color of which might make them look like guards or a t-shirt with too deep a neckline or even open-toed sandals. They are also surprised when a different guard waves them through the next week, even though they know they *have* transgressed the dress code. They resent not being able to give a classmate a highlighter to mark their assignments. They are distressed when a guard suddenly, inexplicably, removes ("lugs") a fellow student, and they never see him again although his research and leadership have been central to their final project, and they never receive any reliable information about him or his offense. Incrementally, they develop a set of feelings about this place and what institutional assault on autonomy and self-esteem looks like.

When college and graduate students decide to study human rights, particularly in a penal institution, the idea has usually fired their imaginations because of the potential of assisting others less fortunate. Lynn Hunt and other scholars have linked early humanitarian movements, like prison reform and abolitionism, to the Enlightenment's



enthusiasm for empathy, or sensibility, as Enlightenment writers would have said. Writers like Hume linked sociability and the capacity for fellow feeling to virtue. Rousseau's readers felt ennobled by the sadness his fictional evocations of the suffering of others induced. And, indeed, human rights teachers assume in students a feeling for the suffering of others and try to educate it and give it direction. I am neither criticizing nor condescending to excited empathy—it is where a student's journey toward understanding, and perhaps activism, starts.

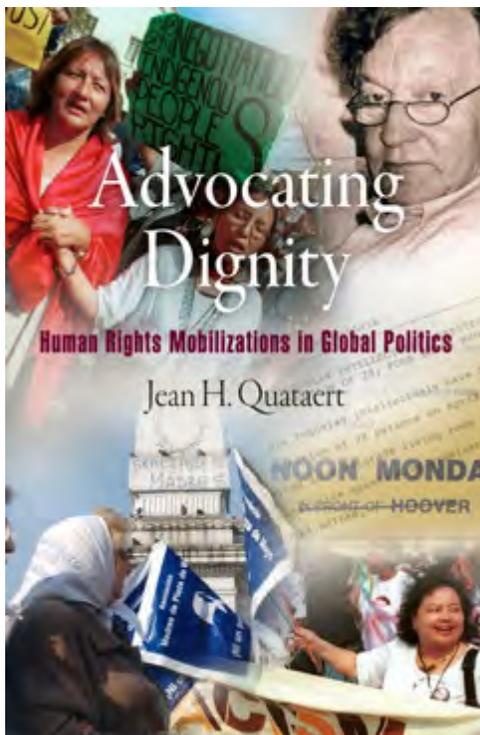
However, classroom empathy, while necessary for understanding the plight of others, does not inevitably, or even usually, produce radical transformation. It usually remains an exercise of the imagination, not a break in the student's understanding of himself and his situation. In my experience, prison is where this kind of change *can* happen.

The learning that takes place in the Inside/Out Program happens intellectually, of course, but also emotionally and socially as these disparate groups teach each other about themselves through their reactions to the course material and to each other. Inside and outside students discuss the reading materials in small groups, and later the whole class goes over the material together. Each week everyone writes a one- to two-page paper on an aspect of the readings. Toward the end of the semester, small groups, again mixed inside and outside students, work together on a final project of their own devising, researched with the help of the outside students who have access to the college library, which they present on the last day of class.

My human rights class began with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and then took a historical perspective, starting with Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points and the founding of the League of Nations. Simply reading the

Universal Declaration and a few accompanying conventions inside a jail can unsettle an Inside/Out class in different ways. The Declaration's prohibitions of racial, gender, and religious discrimination, its insistence on the right to political participation, to an education, to housing, food, and security of person crackle with immediate significance and the skepticism born of personal experience to the incarcerated students. American incarceration has had very little to do with rehabilitation since the 1960s and almost everything to do with punishment. That priority gives the transmission of knowledge, but most particularly the transmission of knowledge of rights, an excitement and intensity that it rarely achieves in more common educational settings. Discussing these readings starts to wake up the outside students to the plight of their classmates.

In an effort to introduce students to the social activism behind important movements for human rights, we read a few sections from Jean Quataert's *Advocating Dignity*, including a narrative of the activities of the Madres of the Plaza de Mayo.<sup>1</sup> Students uniformly admired their courage and the ways they employed the junta's violation of the family to indict it. Although there were feminist outside students, none was critical of the deployment of maternal stereotypes as potentially limiting for women, whereas in graduate school that is often a sticking point for politicized women.



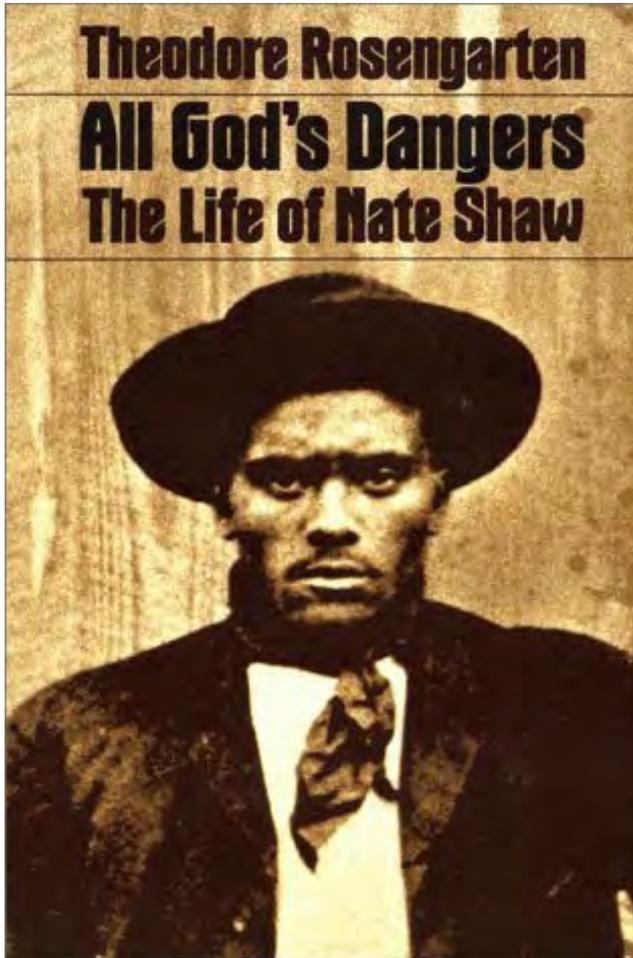
In fact, gender equality as a measure of human rights seemed to hold little importance in our discussions. The jail I teach in just houses men, so the only women were outside students, and they seemed not to wish to highlight women's rights. This may have been because, in the presence of men without rights, they were reluctant to bring up their own struggles, or simply as a numerical minority in the class, they were uncomfortable expressing concerns about

themselves. Or it could have had to do with their youth and relative protection from gender discrimination thus far in their lives. Many women students shy away from what they see as the negative connotations of “feminist” even as they understand that it simply means equality between men and women. Outside men and women students enjoyed without comment pictures of inside students’ girlfriends as well as “baby mammas.”

In general, the inside students are more politically conservative than their outside classmates and consider the latter’s more liberal views, particularly on punishment, an outgrowth of their general naiveté. For example, in discussing Argentina and the era of the disappearances, some of the inside students found Reagan’s ruthless *realpolitik* in supporting them sensible, while outside students by and large were dismayed. More immediately, I have never met an inside student who believes in the abolition of prisons. No inside men whom I have taught doubt the need for jail. Among outside students an abolitionist occasionally shows up. Recently an inside student, discussing sex between an intoxicated man and woman, commented with typical commitment to incarceration that it was rape and that the man belonged in jail. Sometimes inside students feel their sentences are too long—several cited the disparity between crack and cocaine sentences before it was changed—but none has argued that he shouldn’t be in jail or that jail is itself a violation of fundamental human rights.

Inside students have generally been raised more punitively than most college students. In a class I taught on the history of incarceration, we read a selection from *All God’s Dangers: The Life of Nate Shaw*, in which a sharecropper recalls his father’s brutal whippings and his long days as a little boy plowing while his father went hunting. The men, particularly but by no means exclusively the African Americans, were very moved by the reading and all found that Shaw’s father was acting for the boy’s own good. And yet, in a course I am teaching now on gender equality and violence, several inside students see holding their sadness and hurt feelings inside as a cause of violent behavior. One man speaks movingly about his 9-year-old son and letting him cry, not telling him to buck up and be a man as his own grandmother told him. Another talks about avoiding violence through communicating.

Thinking about international human rights leads us to talk about systematic, institutional violence. Talking of the human rights of children throws us all to paddling around in our harbors of contradictory memories and feelings. Many inside men have a welter of confused feelings about their childhoods. They have trouble telling a story that not only honors the poverty and discrimination their parents faced but also includes with some degree of understanding the violent fallout from drugs and alcohol that surrounded them as children. Many have had their own bouts of addiction, which helps them empathize with their parents but not necessarily help themselves. Inside men in my classes want to change, but they do not want to condemn the people that raised them, however painful their early years were.



The stark differences between most inside and outside students haunted the discussions of the human rights perspective on child welfare. Many college and graduate students had grown up free from discrimination, from abuse, having adequate shelter, food, health care, and a free education so that they could develop in a wholesome environment and look forward to a life of dignity. One inside student mentioned being born to an imprisoned mother, marveling at her strength and ability to survive. Another had been in and out of detention homes and other penal institutions since he was six. Numerous inside students have had experience of the foster care system but rarely talk about it. In my human rights class, an outside student related a painful incident about her foster parent, drunk and unable to show up at a court date. She managed to explode the inside students’ stereotypes

about the privileged kids that studied with them every week, while giving an opening to others to talk about their own childhoods. These had little to do with the international conventions and ideals of dignity and freedom from abuse.

One concept some students took from these conversations was that there was no point in separating political, civil, and economic and social rights. This was true for both inside and outside students, but this did not mean that everyone was in favor of our welfare state such as it is. Many inside students have contempt for welfare and despise the idea of paying taxes so, as they see it, other people don’t have to work. Some inside students, who know the welfare system intimately, think it should be

much more generous and much less punitive. But many inside students don't really make the link between the abstract idea of economic rights, which they think is a good thing, and the United States welfare system. Their experiences and information about welfare have poisoned it so thoroughly that it does not even seem to qualify as an attempt at economic rights. When inside and outside students study together, most understand that efforts to reduce inequality, and provide the needy with improved housing, nutrition, health care, and education are indispensable to being able to participate as citizens. They see that fiscal austerity makes it even less likely that the poor will ever exercise the full panoply of their human rights. Outside students see welfare as a feeble attempt in that direction, but the propaganda and racialization campaigns against welfare have largely destroyed its credibility as a program for potentially addressing inequality and restoring human rights in the eyes of inside students, especially white ones.

Incarcerated African Americans and Hispanics in my classes were likely to point to race, as well as class, as the source of their own problems and the ones we discussed. Although white inside students were generally from poor neighborhoods, they were not eager to discuss class or race. White privilege had little meaning for them. Unlike in urban and state prisons in Southern New England, the population of this rural jail was predominantly white, although many men had come from state institutions before winding up in this jail, known for its rehabilitation programs. An African American student, describing his experience in a violent state prison, spoke facetiously about the "chess club" he joined and how, after that, he never felt unsafe any more. A white student, who had been at a similar institution, remembered inadvertently sitting down at a cafeteria table where blacks were eating and learning later that he almost lost his life for his mistake.

Conversations about the Rwandan genocide broke down along racial lines in that inside African American students believed that the United States failed to respond to the genocide because the victims were black Africans. A female outside African American student was more skeptical. There were no outside male African American or Hispanic American students and, with one exception, have never been any in my years of teaching in prison. The exception was the child of immigrant parents who may have felt less implicated by the huge black prison population, that may soon include one third of his cohort of young African American males, than would an African-American male student from a family that lived through the consolidation of the prison industrial complex. In any case, in my experience, some young black and Hispanic women, some with friends or with relatives inside, wish to learn more about incarceration. Young black and Hispanic men stay away.

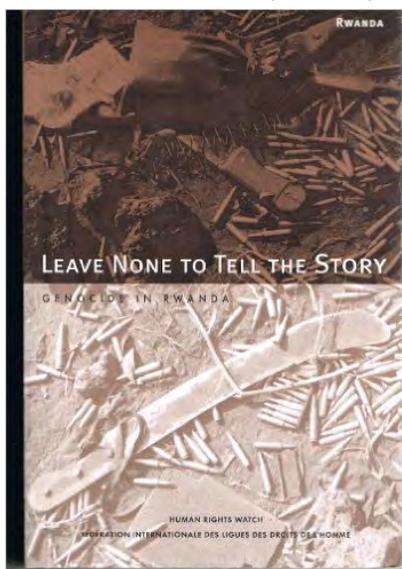
The discussion of Rwanda, based on Alison des Forges's *Leave None Alive to Tell the Story* (Human Rights Watch), surprised students who had heard something about the catastrophe, but had no idea that it was a politically generated and precisely planned event with some of its origins in European colonial rivalries. This reading, along with selections from Samantha Power's *A Problem from Hell*, and *Machete Season* (Jean Hatzfeld), a series of interviews with perpetrators, provoked wide-ranging discussions of responsibility, motivation, and understanding of this atrocity.

Several inside students saw ignorance of the growing crisis in Rwanda as an excuse for inaction. Knowing and not acting disgusted some, while others took the view that rescuing people from their own country's oppression was not our responsibility. A couple of women (outside) students took the position that we were all responsible for not doing enough to stop the killing. They felt passionately about their position, and it motivated their political activities. Most did not embrace this broad view of responsibility, but all the outside students and some inside students did feel discomfort about our country's failure to intervene.

In discussing *Machete Season*, inside students, led by an Iraq veteran, were more willing to speculate about what circumstances might persuade them to kill. Outside students, in general, resisted the notion that need, coercion, political manipulation, the activities of their friends and neighbors, and underlying suspicion of another group might combine to turn them into killers. Generally less touched by need and violence, they tended to bring more idealism to discussions, and rejected the idea that they might become killers given a certain set of conditions.

In general, the most potentially transformative revelations in Inside/Out classes are close to home, like the ways students understand and enact the human right of acquiring an education. An incarcerated person's growing understanding of his or her right to an education as well as what an education can mean in his life can change him. One of my students had been inside for several years. He did well in two Inside/Out classes, and was released not too long after completing his second college course. He is currently finishing college, one of a number of Inside/Out students to go on for further education. His life has opened up.

That education is a human right made some students reflect critically on their secondary schools. A group of students, inside and out, whose birth languages included Spanish, Vietnamese, and Polish, researched bilingualism and bilingual education for their final class project. Learning more about the developmental and intellectual values of bilingualism, struggles of minorities to retain their native languages, and their own positive memories of the rare bilingual offerings in their schools made this group



consider how the right to education also means the provision of meaningful education.

Some inside students had received their GEDs inside. Others had been in juvenile facilities where they learned nothing. The hunger of some of these students to understand the materials, the amount of time they spent on their weekly reading and writing assignments, and the ways in which they treated the course, as the jail staff did too, as a privilege not a right, had a powerful effect on many of the outside students. They did not, overnight, lose their own ambivalence about school work, but the curiosity, ambition, and pride of learning that infused the inside students offered many outside students a missing and tonic perspective on their own educations. At least during class time, an enthusiasm for learning, for discussion, and for exchanging ideas liberated the class from the constraints of boredom, fear, and the default disengagement that can pervade a classroom.

***A group of Inside/Out students worked on a final project focusing on felony disenfranchisement and discovered that it not only personally deprives men and women, sometimes for life, of their right to have a say in the political process, something that is not the rule in other countries, but also that it can affect the outcome of elections.***

Perhaps the very literal and grounded quality of the discussions of education, felony disenfranchisement, the rights of children, and the right not to be tortured, for example, explains why the conversations in Inside/Out and my college and graduate classes are quite different. For example, the question of whether human rights are simply another version of western colonialism stirs passions among college and graduate students. In essays by Sally Merry Engle we read examples of successes and failures in translating rights concepts into local idioms as well as struggling over the more intractable issues of women's rights in cultures where there are no easy translations. Inside/Out classes are more likely to return to the prisoners' experiences as a baseline for oppression. Students do not make the assumption, common in other classes, that many will go on to try to ameliorate the rights of others elsewhere. This grounds these classes and gives them a particular immediacy.

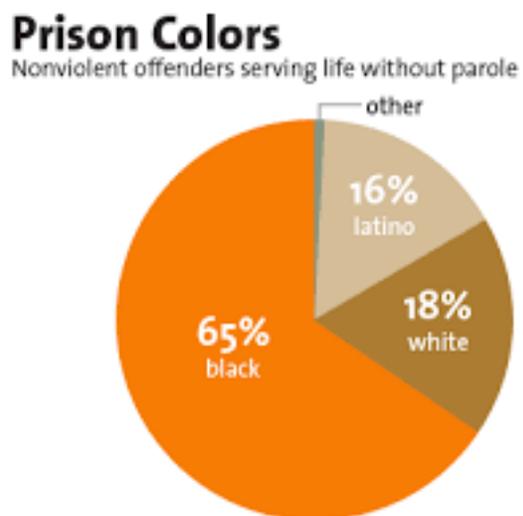
In the same vein, conversations critical of the rights discourse tend to have little appeal in a place where the legal system is an obvious tool for improving conditions. Arguments that point out the individualistic nature of pursuing legal solutions and the possibly enervating effect on local communities of using rights rather than other strategies and symbols for resisting oppression do not make much headway among groups of incarcerated Americans. To rightless Americans the human rights discourse seems like the articulation of just principles that

should underlie the system that stripped them of their rights. The discourse seems radical, not foreign or coercive or conducive of passivity.

Among the most obvious rights that incarcerated students lack is the vote. Fall 2008 was an election year of great significance for students, inside and out. Unlike the outside students who were excited to exercise the franchise for the first time in a national election, the inside students followed political events as closely as they could given the sparse reading and news they could access, but they were not going to vote.

Before 2000, Massachusetts had been one of the few states, along with Maine and Vermont, that did not disenfranchise felons. But in 2000, a referendum took that right away, although the state restores the franchise after an incarcerated person finishes his or her sentence. (Massachusetts, oddly, has gone against the trend to liberalize these restrictions, a trend that began in about 1997. At the moment we have about 5.8 million felons and former felons who can't vote. This includes the 2.2 million in jail but also those under some form of state or federal surveillance, either on probation or parole or people who haven't been able to pay off all the fines and fees associated with their cases.) Because of the disproportionate number of African Americans in prison, disenfranchisement affects African American men at a rate seven times that of other American men. Given current rates of incarceration, three in ten of the next generation of black men can expect to be disenfranchised at some point in their lifetime. In New York, 80% of the people disenfranchised are Black.

A group of Inside/Out students worked on a final project focusing on felony disenfranchisement and discovered that it not only personally deprives men and women, sometimes for life, of their right to have a say in the political process, something that is not the rule in other countries, but also that it can affect the outcome of elections.



Source: American Civil Liberties Union

Mother Jones

Students reported on studies that showed that the nation's level of disenfranchisement has probably been decisive in 7 senatorial elections, and, of course, in the

2000 presidential election in Florida. Students also researched the fact that in apportioning representation, incarcerated men and women are counted in the states in which they are serving their sentences, rather than where they come from, although they usually don't come from the districts in which they are imprisoned, and often don't even come from the states in which they serve their sentences. As students pointed out, this gives the rural areas where prisons are often located extra electoral clout and further diminishes the impoverished urban areas where many of the imprisoned lived and would have voted. This kind of cooperative student report on a human right denied half the class, a right that most countries do not deny felons, had a significant impact on both inside and outside students. Both felt the injustice of the denial and thought that only a few felonies, like treason, might justify taking away a convicted person's right to vote on the grounds of breaking the social contract. Possession of a drug did not, in the eyes of most students, qualify. And the apportioning of representation made students feel that something uncomfortably like the three-fifths clause was in operation: a confined population counted for the purposes of increasing the numbers in places where the counted would not benefit, while the counted population was left voiceless. Felony disenfranchisement and the apportioning of representation had the effect of showing students how the denial of a human right to one group usually had repercussions for others.

Teaching human rights inside presents a particularly down-to-earth and bitter "teaching opportunity." U.S. jails impose a wide range of restrictions on inmates' human rights, from regulating their choice of companionship and sexual expression to coercing their labor: a particularly egregious example has been occurring in a GEO (a private corporation) prison, where six inmates were threatened with solitary confinement if they would not accept payment of \$1 an hour to clean bathrooms.<sup>2</sup> Incarceration drastically interferes with the right to education; in most states it interrupts, sometimes permanently, the rights of citizenship including the right to vote, the right to public housing, and access to other governmentally funded programs; and in the case of private and sometimes public prisons, it interferes substantially with the right to adequate health care. None of these denials of rights is necessary to segregating a person convicted of a crime from society. None of these has anything to do with rehabilitating someone who has committed a crime.

At its best, an Inside/Out human rights class can be a semester long process of radicalizing students. At a minimum, it humanizes incarcerated students and their college classmates. Diminished fear permits learning of many kinds. Some outside students get their first deep

lungful of the fetid air of inequality. For a few, this will mean activism. Realistically, it is probably also for a few a form of tourism. In between those poles, many positive changes can happen.

In considering poverty and deprivation, a mix of inside and outside students come to the radical realization that want can affect their moral views. These students achieve a consciousness that is crucial to a human rights perspective: that deprivation, capped in many cases with racial discrimination, would make them likely to have little belief that the law's fierce attention to protecting inequality was legitimate. They grasp a radical notion of humanity that we are very much the same and capable of the same kinds of actions.

All inside students get "good time" or time off their sentences, so self-interest can color their attitude to the material. For some, human rights remain so many pies in the sky, like so much else in their lives. They are drawn to stories of violations, not successes, and see the international movement as naive. But many will engage with tangible rights like education, voting, and physical and mental health for the incarcerated. One petitioned successfully against solitary confinement as a punishment for an infraction. Selective activism is a powerful, achievable outcome.

Teaching human rights inside has made me more committed to teaching the Inside/Out model because of the potential power of the exchanges. It has also made me somewhat impatient, like my inside students, with the debates that occupy much time in graduate teaching. Debates about cultural colonialism and the legacies of imperialism have value, but they also create academic careers and publishing opportunities in a field where theory seems to me to be outstripping grounded work. I do not support cultural insensitivity or continuing imperial domination, but I do feel that working on our own stateside inequality, discrimination, and increasing reliance on criminalization is what I am best suited for.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo is a group of Argentine mothers whose children were "disappeared" during the Dirty War of the military dictatorship between 1976 and 1983. Since 1977 every Thursday the mothers demonstrate at the Plaza de Mayo near the government palace in Buenos Aires.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.browardpalmbeach.com/news/geo-group-sued-by-inmates-forced-to-do-janitorial-work-7116628>



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# RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

## More than a Mural: The Intersection of Public Art, Immigrant Youth, and Human Rights

by Marissa A. Gutiérrez-Vicario



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**Dedication:** For Clare, for Michaela, and for all our students, in pursuit of a better future, for themselves, but also for all those that will come after them

*What makes somebody an American is not just blood or birth, but allegiance to our founding principles and the faith in the idea that anyone from anywhere can write the next great chapter of our story. (U.S. President Barack Obama)*

*I would describe it as an unforgettable experience because I was never [before part of a] mural like we did....This will make me understand the position of immigrants here and I can teach others about human rights. (ARTE student participant, Franklin, 18)*

## Introduction

The disciplinary fields of the arts and human rights may seem disparate. For instance, at the university level, international human rights and fine arts are taught in distinct schools where students are traditionally awarded separate degrees. Yet, upon further examination, there are rich intersections between the two, particularly for adolescents. In many cases, this intersection causes a bold and powerful dialogue that enhances both fields allowing for growth and reflection, nurturing and providing differentiated modes of learning and expression, and increasing cultural tolerance in the classroom. Furthermore, critical democratic pedagogy, alongside the arts, provides students with an opportunity to “intellectually engage with the world so that they become less dependent on external authorities.” Critical pedagogy through the arts also promotes a “critical analysis and probing of diverse societal issues,” that includes a pursuit of social justice and an awareness of both human rights injustice and advocacy.<sup>1</sup> Or, as the “Voice Our Concern” curriculum of Amnesty International Ireland states, “Art affords the artist the unique ability to register the horror of an event, in a way that statistics cannot. Its function is to remain forever as a reminder that this inhumanity or injustice occurred.”<sup>2</sup>

On a very simple level, art has the capacity to touch the human spirit in an emotional, arguably spiritual, way, creating an opportunity to share stories of the full spectrum of human existence, including the upholding or denial of human rights. bell hooks describes this as “work ... not merely to share information but to share in the intellectual and spiritual growth of [one’s] students.”<sup>3</sup> Through reflecting on art and the process of art-making, students are given the opportunity to be seen as “whole human beings with complex lives and experiences rather than simply as seekers after compartmentalized bits of knowledge,”<sup>4</sup> making it easier for them to connect on a deeper level with individuals within and outside their community around human rights injustices.

This paper will focus on the work of Art and Resistance Through Education (ARTE), a non-profit organization founded in 2011 and based in New York City. ARTE “uses

art, design, and technology to empower young people to develop creative solutions and bring awareness to local and global human rights challenges, fostering leadership opportunities to train and organize other young people in their own communities.”<sup>5</sup> ARTE works with diverse communities of color, including a large percentage of immigrant youth, providing them an education on human rights through an arts-based curriculum. Ranging between 15 and 18 years of age, the students are mainly Spanish speaking with varying skills of English. Among the human rights topics that we have explored are workers’ rights, children’s rights (focusing on the Convention on the Rights of the Child), immigrant rights, racial discrimination as a violation of rights, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, LGBTQ rights, the right to housing, and women’s rights.

The critical component to learning about human rights in our curriculum is the reflecting on and making of art that focuses on human rights. Students learn about human rights through the process of reflecting on artists who focus on human rights and through the process of their own art making on human rights issues. Students learn about and experiment with a wide variety of art media that include collages, mosaics, poetry, mask-making (and accompanying theatrical performance), sketching and basic architectural design, infographic creation, and comics. Art educator Claudia Angelica Narez states utilizing the arts gives students the opportunity to “dissect different forms of expression and analyze the different messages and effectiveness ... for each individual.”<sup>6</sup> Her students, like ARTE students, focus on the human rights issue of immigration; students analyze the messages of different pieces of art and later create their own art. Narez’s students were able to connect the human rights issues to their own experiences. In this way art engages young people inspiring them to become critical thinkers, empowered creators, and democratic citizens.

## Background on Immigration and Immigrant Rights in New York City

*[Because of ARTE] I got a scholarship that will help me in college. I thank you for giving me a scholarship and giving me an opportunity of painting the mural. It was a great experience for me. (ARTE participant and scholarship recipient, Miram, 17)*

Immigration is one of the most complex and important human rights issues that affect millions of lives in the United States, significantly in New York City. In 2013, the immigrant population of the United States was estimated to be at 41.3 million, or 13% of the country’s population of 316.1 million. New York City has around 4.4 million immigrants<sup>7</sup> and over 3 million foreign-born immigrants, more than any other city in the world, and larger than the entire population of the city of Chicago.<sup>8</sup> For many immigrants, especially those who are undocumented, their human rights are at risk; according to Amnesty International USA, over 30,000 immigrants are in detention

on any given day in the U.S.<sup>9</sup> Undocumented students face a wide variety of problems, including lack of access to resources to pursue higher education. For instance, once undocumented immigrant youth graduate from high school, they find themselves without the financial means to pursue further studies, even though they may have excelled in their academic courses in high school and have expressed an interest in continuing their education.

Despite the challenges that immigrant youths face in the United States, their role, outside of economic contributions, is a valuable one. According to Krzysztof Wodiczko, the immigrant is an “unintentional prophet,” or rather “someone who has a vision of a better world.”<sup>10</sup> Artist Marc James Leger believes that “Immigrants, like the homeless, are agents who spread the visibility of the condition of democracy.”<sup>11</sup> How individuals within a nation treat their immigrants is telling of the larger national narrative around democracy, social justice, and human rights.

***Teatro Campesino originated by performing short skits on the picket lines of the Delano Grape Workers Strike to demonstrate the injustice suffered by the workers.***

For these reasons ARTE remains committed to partnering with organizations and institutions that support immigrant youth, both documented and undocumented. Pan American High School (PanAm) in Flushing, Queens, New York City, describes itself as “a diverse learning community of recently-immigrated English Language Learners (ELLs) that is committed to creating an environment that values students’ cultures, native languages and individual differences, while preparing them for success as they navigate a changing world.”<sup>12</sup> Housed in a building with two other schools, the PanAm school has about 350 students; 99.9% of its students are Hispanic, and 88% of these students are considered English Language Learners, individuals who are in pursuit of learning English along with their native language(s).<sup>13</sup>

ARTE understands that its students have a wealth of knowledge and personal experiences to bring to the program and are able to relate to the human rights topics presented. As Jody Sokolower, who teaches globalization and migration, states, “I believed that starting with my students’ own immigration experiences would push them to a deeper emotional level. In my experience, deep emotions lead to deep learning.”<sup>14</sup> In her curriculum, there are no better experts on immigration than the students who conduct interviews with their parents and collect massive amounts “of experience and knowledge.”<sup>15</sup> This knowledge collected by the students pushed “class discussions to a deeper level,” which combined with the course material, helped “build class community.”<sup>16</sup>

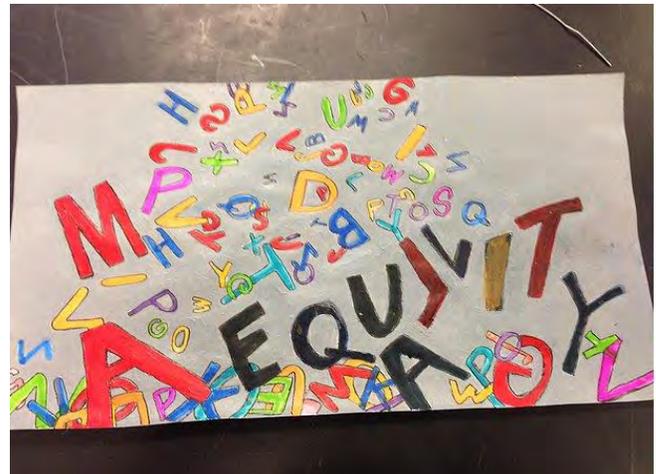
In ARTE we also want to cultivate an authentic class community by creating a space where youth feel comfortable talking about relevant human rights issues and by using art to create what bell hooks refers to as

“knowledge that is meaningful.”<sup>17</sup> We remain dedicated to providing students with information that is directly connected to “what they are learning and their overall life experiences.”<sup>18</sup> Such an example of “knowledge that is meaningful”<sup>19</sup> is our introduction to the work of Latino migrant communities involved in *Teatro Campesino*.

## Introducing Teatro Campesino: Mask-Making and Theater Performances

ARTE worked with a PanAm class of 25 students during the first semester, supported by an in-class teacher from the school, and two ARTE facilitators. (In the second semester, due to school scheduling changes, the class was reduced to 8 students who had not been involved in the previous semester). Class was held five days a week for 45 minutes; at least twice a week two ARTE facilitators would support a full-time teacher. Class visits were supplemented with guest speakers and occasional field trips. Each ARTE program, including the PanAm class, involves a basic introduction to human rights. This introduction includes an in-depth exploration of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Following these introductory weeks, students are exposed to a variety of different human rights issues and different art forms and artists from around the world.

*Teatro Campesino*, a dramatic performance group



founded in 1965 and based in San Juan Batista, California, served as the basis for one of the first ARTE lessons. *Teatro Campesino* originated by performing short skits on the picket lines of the Delano Grape Workers Strike to demonstrate the injustice suffered by the workers.<sup>20</sup> ARTE facilitators crafted a curriculum based on their work including a slideshow, a handout, and brief YouTube clips on the puppetry of the theater group. After learning about the human rights issues of workers’ and immigrant rights, students were given guidelines to create their own masks, using various art supplies such as tissue paper, paper mache, glue, feathers, construction paper, and paint. In addition, students were given a human rights scenario, or an example of a human rights violation, that they had to perform in a theatrical skit. One example was the following:

*Each and every day, you pass by a big factory on your way to school. You have never seen anyone come in or come out of the building. One day, on the news, you learn that that same factory actually uses child labor. Police investigators have found out that the factory employed children as young as 7 years old to make clothing for a famous sports company.*

Students were then assigned to a team, and using the masks they had created, performed a role as part of a skit. Once the skits were created, each group shared them with the class, and their peers provide feedback on the performances of their fellow students.

The facilitators noticed that students were hesitant to perform in front of their peers. A few students, who were more comfortable with performance, acted as leaders encouraging their group members to move to the front of the class to perform. We quickly realized, however, that students were very interested in the background of *Teatro Campesino*, given that they were founded by a group of Mexican immigrants and that their name was Spanish. In subsequent lessons, we found that while students were interested in learning about cultures that were different from their own, many gravitated toward artists or issues that directly affected Latin America or were Spanish. Examples were when the ARTE curriculum exposed students to the issue of women's rights and focused on Spanish hip-hop artist *La Mala Rodriguez* or the Puerto-Rican hip-hop duo, *Calle 13*. Arguably, students' interest may have been piqued due to the artistic medium involved (i.e. hip-hop), but we also believe that they felt most comfortable being exposed to artists that shared their common language.



Lesson plans that we had originally developed took much longer than we had anticipated. This can partially be attributed to a large class and some behavioral issues (mostly over-talking) that had arisen but also to the fact that most students were English Language Learners. It took longer than the curriculum had allowed to expose students to basic human rights language. For instance, while students might fully understand the concept of what a "sweatshop" is, they might not know the word in English. Thus, facilitators would make a point of breaking down the word by using simpler language terms, i.e. "a place with

poor working conditions," and showing pictures of sweatshops and the children who work in them. While these techniques increased the amount of time that a lesson took, facilitators felt it necessary in order to create a valuable and rich learning environment.

During this process ARTE asked students to share the knowledge they had on the human rights issue under discussion. Thus, the educators were forced to reevaluate the language that they use in describing key human rights issues, places, stakeholders, and violations. This exercise created a more level playing field, where the adult facilitators became students in the process of introducing material to their students in the truest Freirean sense. In this way, Arte educators engaged in what Claudia Angelica Narez considers "a cultivation of culturally relevant ideas, conversations, and critical thinking about the way we live and experience culture in our communities."<sup>21</sup> There were two cultures explored in depth throughout the program: one was the exploration of immigrant culture and another the development of a culture around human rights as it revolved around immigrant and racial discrimination as intersecting oppressions.

## Examples of Racism, Global Understanding, and the Use of Art

*I will see art differently and so will others.  
(Iveion, 13)*

*It is a great experience. I have never done  
anything like this before. (Nalah, 16)*

As immigrant youth of color, ARTE students have experienced a variety of different oppressions in the United States. Understanding the oppressions of others or the intersectionality between different oppressions manifests itself in different ways. One way is school segregation, as an omnipresent reminder of institutional racism. UCLA's Civil Rights Project has found that New York City is "home to the largest and one of the most segregated public school systems in the nation."<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, as evidence of the injustice of the United States education system, "40% of students expelled each year are Black,"<sup>23</sup> a reality that perpetuates the school-to-prison pipeline. This creates not only an unfair educational system for youth of color but also creates institutional barriers to success.

PanAm has an exceptionally well-trained administration and staff that help support its Latino students with whatever challenges emerge for them such as having to take on after-school jobs to support their families, interruptions to formal education in their native countries, and lack of family resources to excel. In their home and academic life students may have limited interactions with community members outside of their own culture. For instance, they may rarely interact with other communities of color, including Black youth. Unfortunately, these limited interactions may further perpetuate stereotypes around Black youth and internalized racism toward other people of color.

An example of these stereotypes occurred during a lesson focusing on child soldiers. Students were asked to watch a short YouTube video clip, *Soldiers of Peace*, documenting the lives of former child soldier Ishmael Beah of Sierra Leone and former gang member Dashaun "Jiwe" Morris of Newark, New Jersey, both introduced to war as soldiers at an early age. After viewing the video clip of the two black men, one student from Colombia asked, "Why are all black people in gangs?" The facilitators took this as a teachable moment, understanding that the students did not yet understand the nuances of systematic racism and the role of the media in perpetuating racist stereotypes of people of color, particularly black men, within the United States. The facilitators asked the student and the rest of the class to discuss why they believed this to be true and to think of instances where this might not be true (i.e. the fact that gangs come from all racial, socioeconomic, and cultural backgrounds). They also asked students to consider how and why these stereotypes are perpetuated in the media.

This example highlights the racial stereotypes at play, but also demonstrates how the ARTE curriculum can be used to further understanding between different groups of individuals. Immigrant youth often see themselves as individuals whose rights have been violated, but they may not understand that the rights of others are violated as well, or may not see the connections between the two groups. Throughout our curriculum, students were invited to discuss their experience of racism, institutional racism, and racism in the context of the #blacklivesmatters, #blackspring, and other valuable social movements spreading across the country.

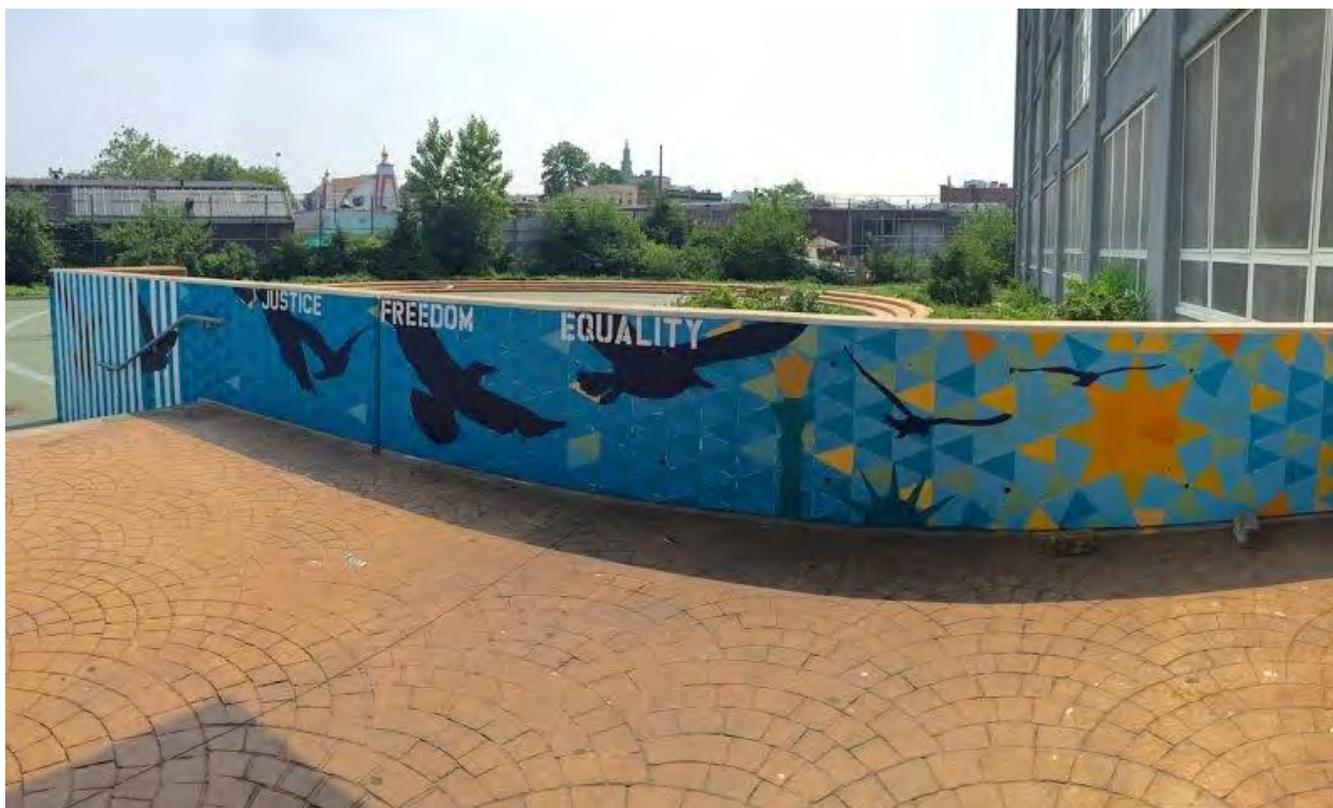
## Constructing More Democratic Spaces for Human Rights Through Mural-Making

*It was a great experience in learning about discrimination and human rights. I learned a lot of things and doing the mural was good because we are giving a message to people and I feel proud of it .... The mural will always be there where people could use and reflect about the meaning of the mural.... (Miriam R., 18)*

*My experience with ARTE class was very exciting because I had never painted a mural before – it was a great experience. (Miriam, 17)*

*It was an awesome opportunity that I had. I would choose to do another mural because you get to experience how people paint them. This is a great opportunity of showing people what you can do. (Miran, 17)*

The highlight of the ARTE school program took place during the months of January – June, when facilitators and the in-class teacher worked with eight students to complete a mural on the outdoor wall of the PanAm building. Each day, the 350 PanAm students, their teachers and the school administration, and the students in the two other schools that occupied the building passed by the mural. Given that we wanted students to have a sense of ownership over the mural and that it was also easier to prepare for painting outside, the ARTE facilitators and in-class teacher thought it was valuable to have the painting in an area where students would pass by each day.



Between March and April 2015, the students chose a human rights issue that most resonated with them and that they felt that would engage the community. Based on the personal experiences of the students and the human rights education they had learned in class, they decided to focus on the intersection of Racial Discrimination and Immigrant Rights. Leading up to late May and early June 2015, ARTE facilitators created guided research opportunities for students on the selected topics and in the process helped students design and paint the mural.

Through a series of classroom sessions with the ARTE facilitators and under the artistic vision and leadership of the full-time teacher as the final mural designer, students worked to find a design that best visually interpreted the chosen human rights issues. After a series of sketches and student discussions, the group decided that their mural design would be a series of geometric triangles. These triangles took the shape of a flock of white birds, escaping jail-like bars, flying towards the Statue of Liberty, near the sun, or "freedom." Students decided that the only words on the mural would be "Freedom," "Equality," and "Justice." Students worked with the teacher to design the mural to include these images of birds to represent immigrants, who have escaped the cage or jail bars (representing various challenges, detainment, racism), in order to fly towards the sunlight and Statue of Liberty. These images represented their journey towards justice and equality and all of the rights guaranteed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to human beings.

***The mural was a public way to engage members of the students' community to learn about an issue together, especially one that directly affects many of the students and their families.***

It is important to note that images were selected after students had been exposed to several artists who have used art not only to increase awareness but also to mobilize political change around human rights issues. One such artist is Favianna Rodriguez, a self-described transnational interdisciplinary artist and cultural organizer, most famous for her "Migration is Beautiful" project. Using imagery of butterflies, Favianna Rodriguez focuses on immigration, given her desire to "humanize and empower communities who are impacted by inequality and racism."<sup>24</sup> As an organizer, Favianna Rodriguez's work was also especially key in mobilizing communities in Arizona against SB 1070 in 2012.<sup>25</sup> Ana Teresa Fernández, who launched an artistic project with 30 volunteers to "erase" a stretch of the Mexico-United States border near Nogales, Sonora,<sup>26</sup> is another artist introduced to the students. At various parts of the border, Fernández painted the fence "a light blue hue to camouflage it against the sky." Both artists raise important questions on the subject of immigration as a human rights issue.

These two examples of the "artist as activist" reminded students and educators that while the mural was

a critical component of the ARTE program, it is only one aspect of a larger human rights awareness campaign that directly affects the community. On June 10, 2015, when the mural was finally completed, ARTE, through the support of the PanAm Parent Coordinator and the rest of the Pan Am administration, organized a community unveiling during a parent meeting day. Students educated their family, friends, and teachers about the human rights issue they had chosen and shared poetry, dance, and musical performances around their topic. Involving human rights organizers at Amnesty International – USA, at the event, the ARTE class introduced a campaign advocating against the use of detention against families fleeing violence in Central America. This action was critical: both ARTE students and educators considered it important to use art to educate their community on the ways that individuals can take action to achieve human rights. The mural was a public way to engage members of the students' community to learn about an issue together, especially one that directly affects many of the students and their families. In addition, the mural was a celebration in which families could honor the work of their children that they may not have been aware of.

## Constructing More Democratic Spaces for Human Rights Through Digital Media

One aspect of ARTE's mission remains a work in process, as the organization seeks to develop its own praxis, or theory in action, as popularized by philosopher and educator Paulo Freire. "Critical reflection and action" is not only for the sake of "a better learning environment but also for a better world."<sup>27</sup> Part of this *praxis* was demonstrated at the community mural unveiling, where students mobilized around the arbitrary detention of families fleeing violence in Central America. ARTE hopes to further train young people, especially those who have already been through the program and have completed a mural, in digital media organizing. ARTE is interested in learning how to better equip young people to use digital media tools (e.g. social media) in order to organize far-reaching and important advocacy campaigns that would engage members of their own communities to create democratic spaces where youth have a voice with the power and potential to connect with other youth across the globe.

## Conclusions

When the artwork was presented to the community at the mural unveiling, two students who had demonstrated active involvement in the ARTE program and had completed an application detailing what they had learned about human rights and how they would use it to make positive social change, received an educational scholarship. The award was named in honor of the immigrant rights activist and acclaimed artist, Favianna Rodriguez. During the painting of the mural, one of the students, usually very shy and reserved, reflected on her experience as an undocumented immigrant traveling to the United States. She turned to one of the ARTE facilitators and shared the

story that she remembered of crossing the border: the difficulty of the journey, the courage of her family, and her future aspirations as an immigrant living within the United States. Her story was incredibly powerful and gave ARTE facilitators the opportunity to better understand the world of the students involved in the creation of the mural. In other words, it brought the mural to life. In bell hooks' words, our student helped create a "place where teachers grow, and are empowered by the process."<sup>28</sup> This could not have happened if the facilitators "refuse[d] to be vulnerable while encouraging [our own] students to take risks."<sup>29</sup>

Such a student is just one example of other students who have similar stories to share. Through this transformative experience of art and art-making, ARTE views this as an opportunity to invite students to share their own stories about human rights. Through the work that ARTE engages in, we hope to create a culture where students do not feel that they need an invitation to speak, but realize it is their own space to share their stories as frequently as they wish. In this space, students and teachers are partners, utilizing the arts for reflection and growth to foster authentic expression. At this intersection of critical pedagogy and the arts ARTE believes a democratic space can and will exist.

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# RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

## Stealth Radicalism: Teaching Refugee Rights as Human Rights

By Steven Jones

In this essay, I describe a Human Rights course in which I focused on refugee rights through a service-learning project with a refugee resettlement agency, which I will refer to as Genesis. I will summarize my own approach to “radical teaching,” my objectives for the course, the course itself, and the impact of the course on the students. Ideally, I would describe the impact on the refugees with whom the students interacted, but I was not able to collect narratives in that regard.

I taught this course in the Spring semesters of 2007 and 2008. The course was offered as a special topics course in political science at a large, urban, public research-intensive university in a relatively conservative Midwestern state. For this reason, I have titled my essay “stealth radicalism” because I have found in teaching to relatively conservative student populations that a direct radical approach is often self-defeating. Conservatively-minded students tend to resist teacher-directed challenges to their worldviews. On the other hand, when experience and course content challenge their worldviews, such students tend to be less threatened and can be more open to taking a critical stance to long-held beliefs. That was the strategy I applied in this case.

Although I probably fit the description “radical” in my personal beliefs, I am a pragmatist when it comes to teaching. My teaching experience in college courses, which began in 1983, has convinced me that students in my courses are politically oriented in one of three ways. They are ideologically conservative, ideologically liberal (though rarely radical), or they are politically and ideologically indifferent. Consequently, in teaching political science courses, I have found that stealth approaches that nudge conservative students to re-examine their positions are more productive in helping them develop self-critical approaches to their assumptions than direct confrontation from me. This approach is similarly true for the politically indifferent students. I also ask the liberally-minded

students to likewise examine their beliefs and they are either radicalized or they find confirmation of their values and beliefs.

### Description and Context of the Course

During the period in which I taught this course, the Bush administration was still heavily entrenched in the Iraq war and the detainment of “enemy combatants” was in full swing at Guantánamo. Given this context, I had several goals for the course. One was to examine human rights in the context of the war on terror and the degree to which the war had undermined U.S. and Western commitments to human rights, particularly political and civil rights. Another was to examine human rights through the perspective of refugee rights. The city in which I taught this course was a refugee resettlement location, and a local non-governmental organization was the only organization in the area that focused on refugee resettlement. Students worked directly with refugees through a service-learning project with this organization. Both of these goals were explicitly stated objectives for the course. The full set of course objectives is listed in Appendix 1, the course syllabus.

Another of my objectives for the course was not explicitly stated for the students: conscientization of the students through their experiences with refugees. By conscientization I mean Paulo Freire’s concept by which the individual gains a “critical comprehension of man [sic] as a being who exists *in* and *with* the world” and “[is] able to achieve the complex operation of simultaneously transforming the world by their action and expressing the world’s reality in their creative language” (Freire, 1998, 499). Thus, I wanted my students to understand their place “in and with the world” as not only rights-bearing individuals under current human rights norms and laws, but as duty-bearing individuals capable of consciously

changing social reality with respect to human rights in general, and refugee rights in particular. I also hoped that their “creative language” would evolve over the period of the course such that they understood their own power to address the social injustices imposed on refugees by U.S. policy, and to help them empower refugees and their agents as well.

***I have found that stealth approaches that nudge conservative students to re-examine their positions are more productive in helping them develop self-critical approaches to their assumptions than direct confrontation from me.***

Another of my implicit goals for the course was to provide students with opportunities to critically evaluate their own values and beliefs, particularly with respect to U. S. policies related to the war on terror and refugee resettlement. This is another aspect of conscientization; one cannot understand one’s relationship in and with the world without this kind of self-analysis. Otherwise, one is merely a recipient of the values, norms, and beliefs imposed by others (Freire, 1998). I wanted the students to critically evaluate the war in Iraq, the war on terror, and U.S. refugee policies in light of the human rights and humanitarian standards we would be studying.

These opportunities came primarily through students’ service-learning experiences and their personal reflections on those experiences. In their reflections, I asked students to address the following questions:

- Is the United States doing enough with respect to refugee assistance, particularly with respect to refugee resettlement? Why or why not?
- In what ways does your work with Genesis [a pseudonym for the actual organization] help you better understand Martha Nussbaum’s concept of capacities, or Galtung & Wirak’s concept of basic human needs?
- How does your work with Genesis affect your definition or thinking about duty-bearers with respect to human rights? Who are duty-bearers?
- How does the specific work of Genesis compare with the general descriptions of NGOs provided by Forsythe in Chapter 7 and Claude in Reading #31 in the Claude and Weston text? For example, is Genesis more like an advocacy organization or a relief organization, as defined by Forsythe? Which of the functions described by Claude does Genesis perform? How does your work with Genesis help you understand the role of NGOs in protecting human rights?<sup>1</sup>

## About Service-Learning and the Service Learning Project<sup>2</sup>

For those who are unfamiliar with service-learning, it is a pedagogical technique through which students develop a deeper understanding of course concepts and skills through organized, community-identified service activities that provide mutual benefits for the server and the served and in which students reflect on their service experiences in terms of personal, academic, and social development. Service-learning as a pedagogy is not without its critics. For example, Butin (2006) argues that service-learning in practice can reinforce the power distance between server and served and is a pedagogy that frequently serves the interests of campus administrators to provide “transformational” experiences for students rather than pursuing social justice for marginalized communities. Morton (1995) notes that the prevalent model of service-learning is a “charity” model in which students do for or to individuals and communities, maintaining a dependent relationship between server and served. He contrasts this with a “social justice” approach in which server and served are engaged in equitable, mutually beneficial partnerships, for which the ultimate aim is the empowerment and liberation of marginalized individuals and communities.<sup>3</sup> Notwithstanding such critiques, I am a proponent of service-learning as a pedagogical approach to radical teaching so long as the following provisos are met:

- Service-learning activities are planned with the community partner and the community partner has a voice in the implementation and evaluation of the activities.
- Students are given as thorough an introduction as possible to the population being served and are asked to reflect on their assumptions, preconceptions, and potential biases and stereotypes relative to members of that population.
- Students are required to examine their stereotypes and biases prior to the service experience and are continuously required to reflect on their biases and stereotypes throughout the experience, particularly with respect to issues of power and power distance.

I tried to meet these provisos by holding an in-class, pre-service orientation with the director of the refugee settlement agency to provide an introduction to the agency and its clientele; by showing a documentary film about a refugee family, its life in a camp, and the difficulty of the transition from camp to residence in the United States; and by requiring students to examine their beliefs and stereotypes about refugees through their reflection essays.

The service-learning component of the course required students, either individually or in groups, to provide services to refugee families as directed by the agency. Such services included helping individuals and families register for social services, including registering children in local schools; helping families with navigating the

bureaucracy of setting up utilities for their apartments; helping families transition to life in the United States by engaging in “typical” activities like going to movies or going out to eat; accompanying individuals to physician’s appointments; and assisting with English as a Second Language classes for refugees. I required students to provide a minimum of fifteen hours of service to the agency, but several students provided much more. Indeed, several students continued volunteering for the agency long after the semester ended.

## Impact of the Service-Learning Experience on Students

In the section that follows, I analyze the impact of the experience in relation to my stated goals through examining selections from students’ reflections. A total of twenty-seven students completed the course over its two offerings. Of those, twenty-two were female and five were male. I have selected the reflections from four students, whom I will call Frank, Melissa, Karen, and Laura (not their real names), as representative examples of students’ reflections. Frank is representative of the conservative student, Melissa the politically indifferent student, and Karen and Laura the liberal students. The impact of the service-learning experience on my students based on the goals I stated above was mixed. Some students did critically evaluate their own perspectives on human rights and U.S. human rights policy, and others ended the course with the same attitudes and beliefs that they had at the beginning.

## Impact of the Course on Students’ Understanding of the Impact of the War on Terror on Human Rights

As the reader can see from the reflection questions and Appendix 3, I did not ask students to directly relate their service-learning experience to the war on terror. Most of those connections were made through in-class discussions of the course readings, particularly the essays collected in Wilson (2005). One of the final exam questions asked the students:

*Neil Hicks claims that the post 9/11 ‘war on terror’ has done damage to the international human rights system, resulting in ‘the erosion of state respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms, and the rule of law. The pretext of counterterrorism has sparked a race to the bottom in compliance by states with their human rights obligations.’ (Hicks in Wilson, 2005. p. 221). Based on the authors we have read, what evidence exists to support Hicks’s claim? What evidence is there that the state of the international human rights system may not be as badly damaged as Hicks claims?*

This question allowed students to critically evaluate the impact of the war on terror on human rights from multiple perspectives.

Laura’s response to this question reflects a conclusion reached by several of the students in the course:

*Human rights should be the fundamental concern for nation-states. However this viewpoint is not always shared within or between nation states . . . Richard Falk [2005] and Richard Goldstone [2005] both agree that the war on terror has done damage to human rights standards. U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan noted that, “When human rights are violated, all our rights are put in jeopardy and all of us are made less safe” (Hicks in Wilson, p. 210). I agree with this quote because to violate one human right, opens a playing field to other human rights violations.*

She continues:

*The “age of terror” has placed security at the center of the U.S. political agenda, devaluing important issues like poverty, globalization, AIDS, pandemics, global warming, and human rights issues (Dr. Jones lecture 04/17/07). The U.S. is known as a superpower in the world; if they choose to devalue human rights than they are setting a global agenda to do the same. This is a bad trend to begin because how can human rights as well as these other issues be successfully addressed, if they in fact are not being addressed at all? There have been some trade-offs for increased securities, but have these trade-offs made anyone more secure? There is no promotion of human rights, no collective consciousness, and the movement towards international realization of human rights is not robust by any means.*

Laura’s comments reflect the idealistic and liberal orientation of many of her classmates.

In addition to reflecting on course readings, students in the Spring 2007 course also had the opportunity to attend a lecture by Kevin Yee, the Army chaplain that had served at Guantánamo who was wrongly imprisoned as an “enemy combatant.” During his lecture, Yee described the mistreatment of prisoners at Guantánamo as well as the direct injustices he personally experienced. Prior to attending Yee’s lecture, students read David Rose’s (2004) journalistic exposé of conditions at Guantánamo. In her analysis and reflection on Yee’s lecture, Karen observed that not only did the policies associated with the U.S. war on terror lead to the violation of detainees’ rights, they were ultimately counterproductive in combatting terrorism:

*According to the Guantanamo book we are reading [Rose, 2004], there was no evidence that some of the detainees ever carried arms, and they were not captured at any battlefield. International treaties clearly show that they deserved humane*

treatment. (But even if they were terrorists, they shouldn't have been treated in that manner.) Personally, I was disgusted at the extent to which this "war against terror" was being carried out at the expense of human rights.

This presentation also brought what Freeman [2005] was talking about to reality for me. He lists several actions taken out by the U.S. government after 9/11 that may lead to some resentment in the "rest" of the world. These are

1. Doctrine of preventive self-defense.
2. The willingness to resort to war.
3. Reluctance to submit to international regulations, even on human rights and arms control
4. The substitution of 'coalition of the willing' for multilateral action
5. Disregard for inconvenient international laws

I think we see some evidence of a backlash as a result of all the military actions that are being taken in the name of fighting terrorism. Ignoring the very basic human rights that this country advocates it stands for and associates with its very inception, would not produce the desired result, ridding the world of terror.

As these excerpts indicate, as a result of their readings and discussions students were able to critically evaluate the impact of the U.S. "war on terror" on human rights. Implicit in their comments was a recognition of the gap between the U.S. stated values with respect to democracy and human rights, and the reality of U.S. actions at home and abroad in its execution of the war on terror. However, as I note below, not all students believed that the gap was unbreachable.

## Impact of the Course on Students' Sense of Solidarity with Refugees

One of the potential positive impacts of service-learning is that students have contact with the lived experiences of individuals and groups who would otherwise be abstractions, as in the case of "refugees." Through their interaction with our partner agency and the refugee families with whom they worked, the students gained insights into the refugee experience that they probably would not have developed through course readings or films. For example, Frank noted the potential cognitive dissonance that refugees face as they adjust to life in the United States:

*the experience has as mentioned before, made me think about the perceptions of not only other countries but also of peoples throughout the world who may misunderstand our nation's goals or view on foreign policy due to seeming inconsistencies and some may even claim in the U.S. that there are a good many inconsistencies. I may find it believable that someone from Burma*

*who comes to the U.S. and is graciously helped by Americans may find it odd later on that we are at war throughout the middle-east and have military policing all over the world. The strict order and military strength over the people in Burma may lead a refugee to question a lot of the relation or mentality that may or may not be similar to the government in Burma and the one here.*

Melissa, who helped in the English as a Second Language classes for refugees, began to realize the limitations of U.S. refugee assistance programs given the challenges refugees face:

*Although I see my group of clients improving with their English, it is evident that the process of adapting to American culture and the English language is something that will take a considerable amount of time. Unfortunately, Genesis only is able to assist the refugee families for six months after they arrive in the U.S., and then they are either on their own or transitioned to another organization to provide continued assistance. Due to limited resources and volunteers, organizations such as Genesis find it difficult to sustain efforts to help refugee families adapt to a new culture, government, and way of life. This dilemma poses questions about the current situation in the international community and how it treats or should be responsible for human rights and refugees.*

Melissa's growing awareness of the gap in U.S. policy between professing support for human rights and unwillingness to provide material support for these rights creates a possible space for developing a more radical perspective on human rights in theory and practice.

***As a result of their readings and discussions students were able to critically evaluate the impact of the U.S. "war on terror" on human rights. Implicit in their comments was a recognition of the gap between the U.S. stated values with respect to democracy and human rights, and the reality of U.S. actions at home and abroad in its execution of the war on terror.***

## Impact of the Course on the Conscientization of Students

In his final reflection, Frank noted, "I do not think my perceptions have changed so much [from the beginning of the course] . . . when it comes to U.S. policy on resettling refugees." However, he went on to note the problems with U.S. refugee policies:

*I found it interesting that religious persecution is a category in itself and it is apparent that our foreign policy keeps that at the top in every section where it is referenced on the [U.S. State Department] report. I overall always had the impression from class and from past studies that the U.S. focuses on helping refugees that are in very volatile areas that have been relocated due to oppression and tyranny which seems fitting and almost inherent in what many think of "America" and that is clearly evident by the thousands of refugees we have resettled from Somalia, Sudan, Burma, etc. The other thing that is . . . clearly evident is the political bias in the numbers and places where we are taking refugees which is also evident in the numbers such as China compared to Cuba. China seems like it is at least equally oppressive as Cuba if not more and China cannot fairly be compared in size of population to Cuba and yet there are more from Cuba than China? This is an example of where our foreign policy encompassing refugee resettlement becomes evident that there are some statements being made politically. Overall this is the impression I had of U.S. refugee policy; yes we help out those in crisis situations around the world, but we also keep in mind what may be more politically advantageous to our established foreign policy.*

Implied in Frank's reflection is the realization that U.S. refugee policies, however humanitarian, are guided by values based on security and political interests and not necessarily in the interests of refugees. Acknowledging that a policy that he initially believed was beneficent was actually motivated by national self-interest is an awareness of the discrepancy between the world as we believe it is and the world as we learn that it is. To me, this is part of the process of conscientization, similar to what John Dewey (1910, 10-11) referred to as perplexity.

Melissa also experienced conscientization as a result of her direct experience with refugees and her growing familiarity with the international norms and laws related to the protection of refugees. For example, in one of her earlier reflections on who are duty-bearers with respect to refugee rights, she wrote, "Although states are usually seen as responsible for ensuring the protection of human rights, this does not mean they are obligated to step in when it comes to the protection and assistance of refugees." In my feedback, I asked her to re-examine that claim in light of her service experience and a review of the pertinent international norms and treaties regarding refugees. In her final reflection, she re-answered her question regarding states' obligations with respect to refugees:

*According to "Recommendation D" in the introductory note of the Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees issued by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, "The conference, considering that many persons*

*still leave their country of origin for reasons of persecution and are entitled to special protection on account of their position, recommends that Governments continue to receive refugees in their territories and that they act in concert in a true spirit of international cooperation in order that these refugees may find asylum and the possibility of resettlement."<sup>4</sup> Therefore as members of the international community, states are seen as responsible for the fair treatment and protection of refugees. However, even though there are international norms and laws addressing human rights concerns such as the treatment of refugees, a major concern is that often these laws and/or norms are not effectively enforced.*

However, conscientization does not simply mean gaining new understanding in light of new information, of which Melissa's experience is an example. It means recognizing the possibility and potential for remaking the world: not simply understanding the world as it is, but understanding the world as it can be and taking action to remake the world. Melissa's reflection on who are duty-bearers with respect to refugee rights delves deeper into the role of non-governmental organizations and the responsibility of everyday citizens. She concludes by noting that once one understands the international norms and laws protecting refugees and the actual lived experiences of refugees, then one does have an obligation to provide support to refugees:

*What I have learned and witnessed so far at Genesis has given me insight as to who should be responsible for refugees. We need to remember we are all people and we should consider how others are affected by political and economic turmoil, because we do not know if someday we may be in a similar situation. Before this course, I was not aware of the Burmese population in town and I wish I would have known more about it before now because it seems there could have been much that I could have done to assist with their process in transitioning to American life.*

This growing awareness of the need to put theory into practice, what leftist thinkers refers to as praxis, is perhaps another goal of the stealth radicalism of the course.

## Impact of the Course on Students' Self-Evaluation

I submit that some of the student reflections that I have already referenced provide evidence of the selected students' ability to examine their own beliefs and values with respect to U.S. policies relative to the war on terror, human rights, and refugees. In some cases, as noted in the reflections from Frank and Melissa, students came to see that what they had initially believed was "good" about U.S. refugee policies was problematic. In other cases, students had a renewed sense of how to act on their beliefs

and values relative to human rights. For example, Laura, in her final reflective essay noted:

*I look to my future and can see how programs like Genesis help to give a start to refugee families. I think that this class has helped me to see what I am really passionate about and to not sit around while human rights need to advance into the future. I do not understand how a person or group of people can violate human rights but it needs to stop. One of the good things that I can walk away with is the refugees that I have worked with are showing that life does go on. Maybe America is their destination and I am glad they escaped their prior life experiences, but I feel that they should not have had to experience those events. As knowledgeable people we all should be looking towards how we can make a difference and enhance human rights. To see how much you have and how little others have not only materially but as individuals rights, I know that there can be more that all can do for the benefit of others. It is one thing to say you will do something but we should take that next step and actually do, by doing we will see the positive changes in the fight for human rights.*

Laura's experience shows how the service learning component of class on refugee issues as human rights can move students beyond a passive acceptance of the status quo.

Laura realized that she was "passionate about" human rights in a way in which she could align her values with action. This is the apex of conscientization through which one realizes not only one's place in the world, but one's ability to act on and shape the world as opposed to being shaped by the world. I am proud to say that I have maintained contact with Laura since this class. Following graduation from the university, she spent a year working in one of the Native American nations as a school teacher. She is currently pursuing a graduate degree in rural development, where she can put her passion for human rights into concrete strategies to work with and empower the rural poor.

## Conclusions

As I reflect on this course and its effect on my students, several conclusions come to mind. On the one hand, I believe that, overall, my goals for the course and for the students were satisfied. Students did critically evaluate U.S. policies with respect to the war on terror and its negative impact on human and refugee rights. Students developed solidarity with the refugee population with which they worked. Students achieved varying degrees of conscientization as a result of their course readings, classroom discussions, and service experiences with refugees. And students critically examined their own beliefs

and values in light of course materials, discussions, and service experiences.

Nevertheless, based on my review of the students' reflections, those cited and those not cited, I cannot truthfully say that students were "radicalized" as a result of the course. Three troubling themes emerged as I reread and reflected on their essays.

First, although confronted with overwhelming evidence of U.S. abuses of human rights and inadequate refugee policies, many of the students maintained a naïve optimism relative to future changes in U.S. policies. For example, in her final exam response to the essay question about the negative impact of the "war on terror" on human rights protections, following a masterful summary of the evidence in support of that premise, Karen concluded by stating:

*Even though it was easier to find support for Hicks' claims, I cannot help but be optimistic towards the possibility of policy changes that will result in the promotion of human rights today. What these authors fail to recognize is the fact the exposure of these policies to the American public have led and will continue to lead to putting the spot light on the government and to force it to improve its policies concerning national and international respect of human rights. These are evident in cases brought against those individuals and their superiors that are suspected of violating human rights in the many parts of the world. These include officers from Abu Ghraib prison. Supreme Court decisions denouncing the detention of individuals without charges is also worth mentioning. Although I do not deny the damage that was done, there is still room for improvement and America is still in a position, as the leading power of the world, to right the wrongs that were carried out and to make sure that they do not happen again.*

A second theme that emerged was an unquestioning belief in liberal democracy as the type of government best-suited for the protection of human rights. This belief is implicit in the conclusion of Karen's exam essay. Laura also notes the superiority of liberal democratic forms of government, even with respect to ensuring and protecting social, cultural, and economic rights, noting, "As a democratic liberal country I think that standards of economic, cultural and social rights are what the government should strive to meet. A government that respects the economic, social and cultural rights can actively assist those rights that people are unable to enjoy." Although part of the course was devoted to a comparative analysis of national and regional human rights approaches, students clearly believed that U.S.-style liberal democracy was superior to those alternatives, even in light of evidence to the contrary.

The third theme that emerged was the students' commitment to belief in the power of individuals to make a difference. This belief was not only applied to themselves in their belief in their power to make a difference in the

lives of the refugees with whom they worked, but in the individual power of the refugees to make a difference in their own lives. For example, referring to the benefits she received from her interactions with the refugees, Laura wrote:

*I feel so great when I can offer my assistance to these refugees. I have received such happiness that has resonated throughout my life. I know that this is the beginning of an enriching experience. I can take my increasing knowledge on refugees and apply that to my want to help others. By interacting with some members from Burma I have realized how they enjoy being accepted. I can share my experiences with my friends and family as a way to spread conversation and action on human rights.*

In applying Nussbaum's capabilities approach to his reflection on his work with the refugees, Frank observed, "It is important, regarding the capabilities approach to help the refugees understand their potential and capabilities [as individuals] before we or the government can help transition them to be able to attain these." I do not dispute the students' conclusions about the roles and responsibilities of individuals in promoting and supporting refugees. What troubles me in my review of their reflections is their seeming inability to recognize and reflect on the larger structural and cultural factors that also come into play.

What these themes indicate to me is that I did not sufficiently challenge my students to identify and question their fundamental beliefs in the "rightness" of U.S.-style

liberal democracy and its concomitant focus on the power of individuals and self-reliance and self-sufficiency. Even among the students that I identified as politically liberal, these beliefs were firmly entrenched. This conclusion therefore leads me to question my "stealth radicalism" approach. Should I be satisfied with the results that I did achieve, or should I take a more direct approach to challenging students' unquestioning confidence in the ultimate goodness of the United States and the superiority of individualism over collectivism? How will I overcome the resistance that I expect will result from direct challenges to those beliefs? Perhaps I tried to accomplish too much in this course and should have focused exclusively either on refugee rights or the effects of the war on terror on international human rights. Would a more focused emphasis in the content have made a difference? These are questions with which I still struggle.

One aspect of the course that I would not change, however, is the service-learning component. I do believe that the impact of the course would have been minimized had it not been for the students' direct contact with refugees and our partner organization. Before this course, students did not know that their home city had a significant refugee population. Nor would they have known that refugees had legal residential status in the United States. Nor would they have known that many refugees spend years in "temporary" camps waiting for placement in a permanent host country. They would not have known how difficult and challenging the transition is from living in a refugee camp to living in the United States. Most importantly, they would not have had a personal point of reference from which to critique U.S. human rights and refugee policies

## Notes

1. The sources referred to are Nussbaum, 2006; Galtung & Wirak, 1977; Forsythe, 2006; and Claude, 2006.
2. For a full description of the service-learning project, see Appendix 2.
3. See also Himley, 2004; Mitchell, 2008; Purpel, 1999; Saminathan, 2007; Westheimer and Kahne, (Eds.), 2007; and Varlotta, 1997.
4. The Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees can be found at <http://www.unhcr.org/3b66c2aa10.html>.

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# Appendix 1

## Syllabus

Course: POLS Y380, Section 400, Special Topics in Democratic Government: Human Rights

Required Texts: *Human Rights in the World Community*, Eds. Prichard Pierre Claude and Burns H. Weston (hereafter Claude and Weston); *Human Rights in International Relations*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, by David P. Forsythe (hereafter Forsythe); *Human Rights in the "War on Terror"*. Ed. Richard Ashby Wilson (hereafter Wilson); and supplemental readings as assigned. Supplemental readings will be available through the Oncourse site under the Tools tab.

Description: The study of human rights is by nature interdisciplinary, bringing together elements of philosophy, history, political science, anthropology, and international law. Although our focus will be seen through the political science lens, these other disciplines will appear in our readings, particularly international law. The course is structured around three themes. The first theme has to do with the evolution of human rights' definitions and practices since the end of World War II. The post-World War II era of human rights significantly expanded the definitions of human rights from an emphasis on political and civil rights, to the articulation of economic and social rights, and more recently to so-called "third generation" rights, which emphasize a variety of collective rights. As definitions of human rights expanded, so too did the laws and institutions designed to protect those rights. During the first half of the course we will focus on that evolution.

The second theme has to do with the impact of the "war on terror" on both the definition and protection of human rights. This issue raises important philosophical and practical matters dealing with state sovereignty, the role of armed, non-state actors, and the degree to which national and international laws and institutions are equipped to support both a nation's right to self-defense and the protection of universal human rights. The issue forces us to ask such questions as

--Do "terrorists" have human rights?

--If so, what human rights' laws and institutions apply to them?

--Do human rights laws apply only to nation-states, or do they apply to individuals?

--Is there a way to balance the state's right to defend itself from internal and external terror and the state's obligations under international human rights laws?

--Should nation-states approach terror from a "law enforcement" approach or from a "war" approach? What's the difference between those approaches and what impact does that distinction have on human rights protections?

The third theme has to do with the real-world protection of human rights. One component of the laws and institutions designed to protect human rights deals with refugees. Refugees are individuals who enjoy a particular type of legal status due to severe threats to their lives because of civil war or other types of political and civil violence ongoing in their home countries. Under international law, other nation states have legal obligations to provide refugees with safe harbor. We will examine the role of international, national, and non-governmental organizations in protecting refugees through readings, discussions, and service learning. Service learning is a learning activity in which students engage course material through focused community service. For this course, you will provide community service to xxxxx, a non-profit organization that helps with the resettlement process of refugees who have been relocated to xxxxx by the U.S. State Department.

## Learning Objectives

As a result of this course you will be able to

--Define human rights from a variety of philosophical and legal perspectives;

--Describe the key elements of 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> generation human rights;

--Identify the international treaties and institutions designed to protect those rights;

--Describe the interaction of international organizations, national governments, and non-governmental organizations in protecting human rights;

--Explain the political, historical, and social circumstances that contributed to the evolution of human rights;

--Define "refugee" from a human rights perspective;

--Describe the processes by which individuals receive refugee status;

--Describe the role of international governmental organizations (IGOs), national governments, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in assisting refugees;

--Evaluate the work of IGOs, national governments, and NGOs in assisting refugees;

--Explain why refugee assistance is or is not a key element of international human rights protection;

- Explain the impact of the war on terror on contemporary definitions of and protections for international human rights;
- Evaluate the U.S. response to the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks from the perspective of international human rights law.

#### Assignments and Course Grades

**Service Learning Project:** Service-learning is a teaching technique in which course material is explored through individual or group service to a community organization. Each member of the class will provide no less than fifteen hours of service to Genesis, Inc. Service opportunities with Genesis are described on their webpage, which can be accessed in the Resources section of our Oncourse site.

To connect this project to course material, we will be reading and discussing documents from the United Nations and the U.S. State Department related to refugees and refugee programs. Through our discussions and your written reflections, you will also connect your work with refugees to broader human rights concerns. Your grade for this component of the course will be determined by your participation in the project and by the quality of your reflective essays, guidelines for which are available in the Resources section of the Oncourse site. Your participation and journal grades will be worth up to 300 points.

## Appendix 2

POLS 380 Human Rights

### Service-learning project with Genesis

**What:** Provide a minimum of fifteen service hours to Genesis. Genesis provides a variety of programs in furtherance of its mission to "support the victims of persecution, injustice, and war, as they rebuild their lives and *regain basic human rights* and needs." (Italics added)

#### Why should I provide fifteen hours of service and what does this have to do with this course?

Service learning is a widely recognized teaching strategy that integrates academic study with organized student service. Classroom study on its own helps students gain some understanding of academic content, but frequently that content remains in the realm of the abstract. Your service learning experience with Genesis will make real many of the abstract concepts we will study in this course. For example, it will allow you to become part of what political scientists refer to as **an international regime** by participating in an international human rights **network**—in this case, a network that assists with the relocation and resettlement of families and individuals who face grave physical danger in their own countries and, frequently, from their own governments. It will also allow you to see firsthand the important role that **non-governmental organizations (NGOs)** play in implementing **national and international policies** with respect to **nation states' human rights obligations**. Without having this service learning experience, these highlighted terms would simply be concepts to be studied through lecture and reading, but they would probably not have much personal or emotional significance. For most, if not all of you, your experience with Genesis will provide "real" meaning to the words you read and hear as part of the course.

## Appendix 3

### POLS 380: GUIDELINES FOR THE ANALYTICAL SUMMARY OF SERVICE-LEARNING EXPERIENCE

Your analytical summary (5-7 typewritten pages) should be in three sections and should address the following questions.

#### I. Description

- Describe your service-learning activities. What did you do, how often, in what settings?
- What challenges/problems did you encounter in fulfilling the service-learning requirement?
- What did you do to resolve those problems?

#### II. Integration

- Review the following report to find out about the U.S. State Department's plans for refugee resettlement for 2008:

[Report to the Congress: Proposed Refugee Admissions for 2008](#)

The report is easier to read if you click on the link to the PDF version. This report is also available under the Tools tab. Pay particular attention to the section dealing with Priority Admissions. After you have reviewed the content of the report, answer the following questions:

Based on the information in the report, have your perceptions of whether the U.S. does enough to support refugees changed? Why or why not? What specific information or experience(s) changed/confirmed your perceptions?

Do the countries of origin prioritized by the U.S. for refugee resettlement reflect the areas of greatest humanitarian crisis and need? On what information do you base your conclusion?

Based on your experiences working with Genesis, what do you consider to be the strengths and weaknesses of the State Department's refugee resettlement goals?

How does "the war on terror" impact U.S. refugee policy?

### III. Evaluation

- What did you learn about Genesis and its role in working with refugees?
- How are its programs contributing to the integration of refugees into local and national life?
- What did you learn about yourself, about your own strengths and limitations?
- How would you change the service-learning experience to make it a more valuable learning experience? In what ways could I as an instructor have been more effective in facilitating your learning from this experience?
- Has your experience made your classwork and reading more meaningful/relevant? Why or why not? Please refer to specific concepts and authors in your response.



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# RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

## A Night For Human Rights

by Julia Lourie

Human Rights Watch recently launched its Young Professionals Network with an event, "A Night For Human Rights", to call attention to urgent human rights violations including America's mass incarceration epidemic and the current Syrian refugee crisis. The centerpiece of the evening was a contemporary art auction, co-curated by Marc Mayer, the Toronto-based Director of the National Gallery of Canada, and myself. The auction offered works by artists ranging from freshly emerging talents to successful late-career practitioners. I paid particular attention to young artists, and out of the 5 I included, 4 of them were under age 25; the outlier was 86-year-old Adelie Bischoff, a veteran painter of the Bay Area Figurative Movement.

I intentionally chose artists whose works had social, political, and existential dimensions to them in order to create a window through which people could enter a realm of compassion. Belenky's work *"Study for Buttered Steel"* features many dripping tea bags glued to the painting's surface, suggesting victimized bodies, mass loss of life, and dripping remainders of the things we've lost and those we miss. Briffa's photo-collage piece *"Designed-In Danger (My Corvair)"*, spoke to the fragility of human life, and the physical risks we put ourselves in every day, whether by driving in cars on a highway or by using technology we know is under surveillance.

The artworks on display also helped open up topics related to human suffering, such as Nepalese artist Arpana Rayamajhi's handmade necklaces (from her *"Wanderlust"* and *"I Wanna Go To Africa"* series, respectively), which are constructed out of vibrant colors in protest of the patriarchal, subjugating tradition in Nepal that a women must only wear black once her husband dies. This, even,

was a step back from their former tradition that a woman must self-immolate after her husband dies.

In many ways the event became a temporary forum for progressive social thought. However, it would be overly simple, though not incorrect, to say that "A Night For Human Rights" featured contemporary art because that type of art holds social cache. Was is it a carrot-and-stick maneuver to include art? Lure young, well-off individuals to an "art" event only to try and get them to care about social issues? Perhaps there was a bit of this, but smartly so. HRW leveraged contemporary art's cache to gain access to an audience that, with their money and influence combined, actually can make very measurable positive impacts on civil society.

***The artworks up for auction helped open people's hearts to what it means to be human, to create, to feel love, and to suffer like any other.***

In the end, the art did serve as an entry point for young folks to engage with the organization- but in a vastly more important sense, the art was included because the pieces speak about our present time. The artworks up for auction helped open people's hearts to what it means to be human, to create, to feel love, and to suffer like any other. It is my sincere hope that when the patrons who purchased artworks that night look at the pieces hanging on their walls that they are reminded of the power our actions have to affect others lives for the better, and the responsibility we all have to do so.



ELLA BELENKY,  
*HI - CONVERSATION WITH THE SPIRIT OF A SUIT (2012)*



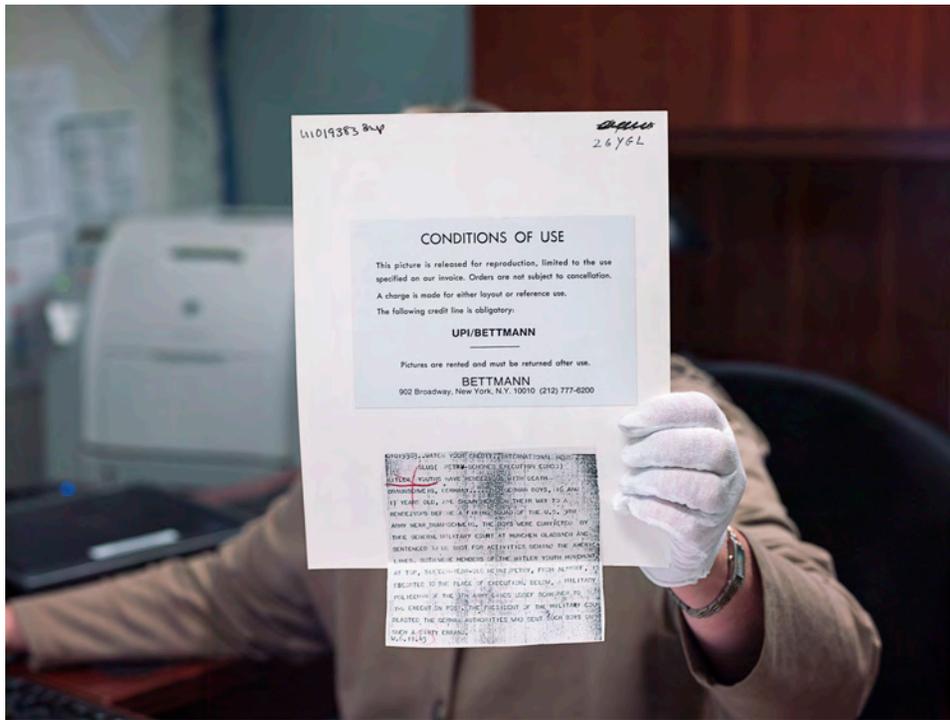
AFGHAN 10 (010615A1A2 FROM ASSOCIATED PRESS), INK AND ACRYLIC PAINT ON PAPER, 72H X 37.75W IN., 2015

In the series *Associated Press*, Hughen mines the print edition of the *New York Times* to examine connections between geopolitics, class, identity, and luxury goods. For the past year, Hughen has worked primarily with imagery from a single edition: the January 6, 2015 print edition of the *New York Times*. The headline photo that day was a large color portrait of an Afghani man who, since losing both sons in the conflict, spends his time ferrying dead bodies back to their families on both sides of the war. On the next page, A2, just behind his photo, was an ad for a Wempe gold ring that mimicked the form of the turban of the man on the cover.



ARPANA RAYAMAJHI  
 "I WANNA GO TO AFRICA", AND WANDERLUST", BOTH 2015.

"Back home in Nepal color is a symbol of celebration, has deep religious significance, and is an integral part of everyday life. Growing up in a Hindu society where women are banned from wearing color upon the death of their husband, especially shades of red, is something that has affected me since I was a child. After losing my father, my mother's decision to wear red was criticized by many people, including women. I see the culture of stripping a woman from wearing color as a practice that is misogynistic and regressive. Color then seems to be a symbol of life, and in a way, not letting a woman wear color is telling her that her life, her identity, is completely linked to her husband's and therefore, she has no identity for herself. I am a woman, and I will use color whenever I want."



LUCAS BRIFFA, OPEN FOLDER (NAZIS) AND PETRY/SCHONER EXECUTION COMBO, BOTH 2014, ARCHIVAL INKJET PRINT, 32" X 24"

"Hitler Youths have rendezvous with death. Braunschweig, Germany....Two German boys, 16 and 17 years old, are shown here on their way to a rendezvous before a firing squad of the U.S. 9th army near Braunschweig. The boys were convicted by the general military court at Munchen Gladbach and sentenced to be shot for activities behind the American lines. Both were members of the Hitler Youth Movement. At top, 16-year-old Heinz/Petry, from Alsdorf is escorted to the place of execution. Below, a military policeman of the 9th army binds Josef Schoner to the execution post. The president of the military court blasted the German Authorities who sent such boys on such a dirty errand."



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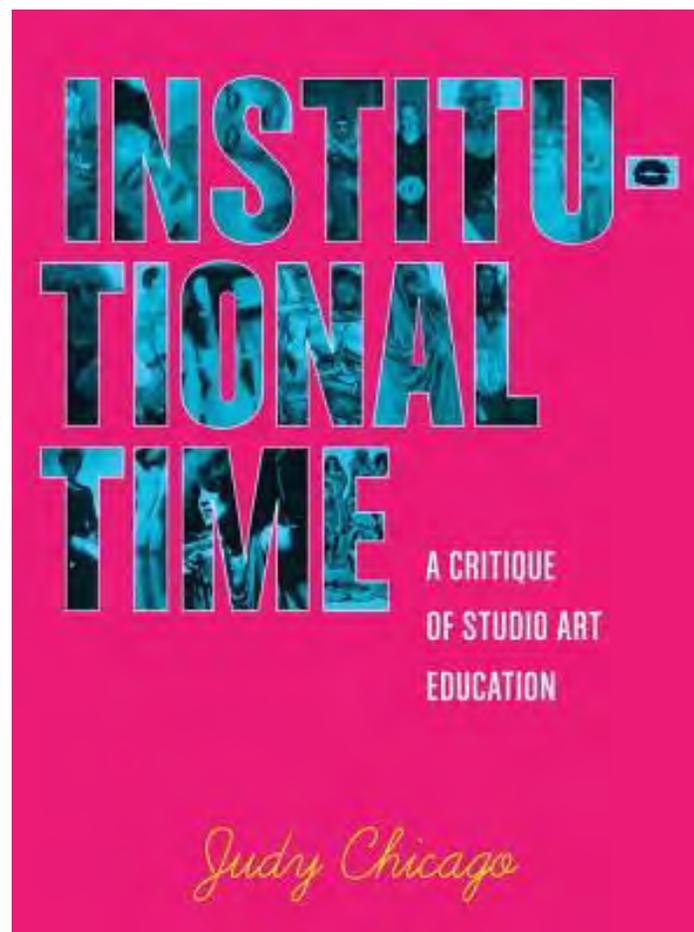
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# RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Review: *Institutional Time:  
A Critique of Studio  
Art Education*  
by Judy Chicago

Reviewed by Christopher Kennedy



***Institutional Time: A Critique of Studio Art Education*  
by Judy Chicago (The Monacelli Press, 2014)**

*I am a woman....I want to produce feminist art and...express what it feels like living in this society as a female . . . and not be labeled a 'Feminazi.'* (University of Indiana Student, 1999)

As a celebrated artist central to the feminist art movement, Judy Chicago has spent her career challenging a male-dominated art world, creating large-scale collaborative projects, paintings, sculpture and performance art exploring the unique experience of women. While her pioneering work as a feminist artist is well-known, Chicago has also spent nearly four decades working as an educator in universities and with community-based organizations across the United States. In her latest book, *Institutional Time: A Critique of Studio Art Education*, she reflects candidly on her teaching experience, weaving together an autobiographical account that details the development of several studio art programs for women and the evolution of a pedagogical approach linked closely to the tenets of democratic and student-centered learning.

Through first-hand accounts and historical analysis, Chicago argues that art education is still male-dominated and continues to focus on a formalist conception of art and art practice. She recounts lingering forms of sexism still present today, noting that the history of female artists and feminist art are often relegated to special interest topics rarely required in most curricula. As a consequence most students do not take "pride in women's heritage . . . [and] continue to labor under the notion that to be identified as a feminist is something heinous" (p. 15-16). Chicago also details the complicated negotiations that unfold between universities which desire more community-based experiences for students and visiting artists who are given little funding, resources and time to create something meaningful. While her accounts are timely and refreshing, Chicago does not directly address the corporatization of academia, omitting a crucial discussion on the neoliberalization of higher education, the current adjunct crisis, and the overwhelming burden of paying for art school. However, Chicago does provide some discussion of workforce representation, namely the unequal number of professional working artists that are women. But issues of class are not theorized in relationship to the feminist histories and aesthetic approaches explored. Chicago instead uses her own personal narrative and some historical research to highlight the possibilities of feminist art pedagogy, and the challenges female students still face in many university settings.

Graduating from UCLA in 1962, Chicago began her work as an educator at California State University at Fresno. Noticing that most of the women were not participating as much as her male students, she proposed a new studio course for women. This evolved into the Fresno Feminist Art Program, which provided a space for female artists to meet, discuss and make art. Chicago used this program to experiment pedagogically with what she describes as a "circle methodology," asking students to sit

in a circle and share personal stories in ways they had never done before. While this foray into democratic and student-centered learning may be common today, Chicago explains that her approach was a drastic departure from studio programs that were often cutthroat and focused on individual mastery of art technique and form, rather than critical thought. Over time Chicago's students became comfortable with sharing stories and personal truths, which she admits, at times frightened her:

*. . . I was often scared to death of what I'd unleashed. Images and ideas were pouring out of the students; they were so powerful that they sometimes frightened me.* (p. 31)

As the Fresno program evolved, performance art became a way to channel many of the experiences unearthed by students, including the *Cock and Cunt Play*, which explores the complexities of gender and femininity through satiric role-play. In 1971, Chicago relocated her work to CalArts. With some initial seed money she started Womanhouse with Miriam Shapiro, "one of the first visual expressions of women's feelings about their domestic lives" (p. 37). The works generated by students through this program were provocative and expressive of a particularly vibrant time in both the feminist and performance art movements in the United States. Chicago's art practice evolved around and within these movements, integrating new artistic forms and cross-disciplinary collaborations.

***Through first-hand accounts and historical analysis, Chicago argues that art education is still male-dominated and continues to focus on a formalist conception of art and art practice.***

Visually Chicago's early work plays with minimalism and unconventional materials to create deceptively simple paintings and sculptures that reference women's bodies and sacred geometry. Vivid pastel colors combined with bold shapes initially shocked some audiences with their brazen use and critique of the female form. In the 1970s, Chicago began to incorporate site-specific response, pyrotechnics, photography and staged performances to challenge the role of women in society. In 1974 she began work on arguably her best-known piece, *The Dinner Party* (1974-79), a celebration of 1,038 women central to the history of Western Civilization. Currently on permanent display at the Brooklyn Museum's Elizabeth Sackler Center for Feminist Art, the work features 39 place settings representing famous women arranged along a triangular table with the remaining 999 names carved into tiles on the floor.

In Part Two, Chicago provides an historical context for the depiction of women as artists, and their access to fine arts training. With very few opportunities to train as artists or exhibit work, women experience an entrenched gender bias implicit in what Chicago describes as a "Eurocentric focus on our educational system . . ." (p. 70). She

explains, not until the latter half of the 20th century did schools like Moore College of Art and Design, the Slade School of Fine Art, the Bauhaus or Black Mountain College offer a real space for women. Tracing some of the histories of female artists and educators through the latter half of the 20th century, Chicago argues that because most American colleges were founded on a British or Prussian institutional model, a “male-centered curriculum was pretty well set in stone” early on (p. 68). Despite a number of movements, both artistic and civic, Chicago explains that the recognition of women as autonomous agents and cultural producers is still an ongoing struggle. Chicago notes that higher education is heavily implicated in this phenomenon, explaining the focus on the Western “artist-as-genius” male archetype still diffuses through the cracks of even the most progressive art schools and institutions today.

As Chicago’s narrative unfolds, she describes her university teaching experiences at Indiana University in Bloomington, at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina, at Western Kentucky University in Bowling Green, and at Vanderbilt in Nashville among others. Although her pedagogical approach evolves with the site and group of people involved, it often draws from community-based and site-specific practices anchored in the collective experiences and concerns of students. However, as Chicago points out, she is not interested in merely focusing on the personal growth of students, or overemphasizing the form and composition of visual artworks. Rather she is more interested in helping students develop a subject matter for their work:

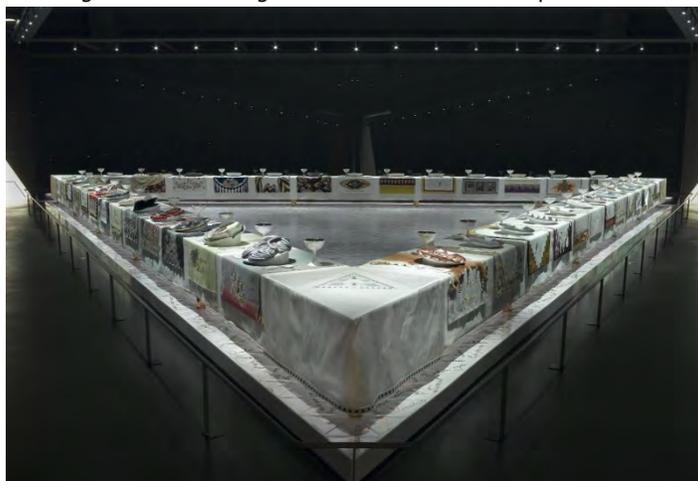
*I see my role as a teacher in a very different way . . . my focus is to help participants transform personal experience into content-based expression in the tangible form of visual art (p. 190).*

Chicago explains that the capacity of the work to tell a compelling story, to communicate an idea, or transport the viewer into poetic or literal engagement with the content of the work is her basis for evaluation and assessment.

While Chicago notes this approach may be useful and transformative for many students, it also produces a number of aesthetic challenges, namely students producing works of art that are overly representational. During her time at Indiana University she describes obstacles students faced in first identifying a subject matter and then using this as inspiration for art making. Chicago argues that the abstraction of art practice and the language artists are encouraged to express their ideas has become “virtually unintelligible,” disguised as reductive tropes and lingering

modernist tricks. She remarks, “Increasingly, understandable content in art has come to be seen almost like an infectious disease, something to be avoided” (p. 81). Through forms of storytelling and what she calls “self-presentations,” students were eventually able to use their own experiences and interests as material for art making, rather than merely focus on a particular medium, style or form. The themes explored by Chicago’s students, like those she encountered early on in Fresno, were deeply connected to cultures of oppression and inequity that are still largely ignored in educational settings—from homophobia and sexism, to issues of mental wellness and access to comprehensive healthcare, to the shifting makeup of the family unit.

In 2001, Chicago and her collaborator Donald Woodman were invited to teach a course at Western Kentucky University in the women’s studies department. The director of the program suggested a project based on the Womanhouse program that Chicago co-founded at UCLA. Intrigued by the idea, Chicago and Woodman decided to explore the concept of “home,” noticing a deep connection to place and southern culture amongst students and locals. Chicago and Woodman were offered a small house to live in while visiting and teaching at the school, eventually creating a project called *At Home: A Kentucky Project*. However, when they arrived, they realized the house wouldn’t be a suitable residence, eventually convincing the university to use the house as a studio and exhibition space instead. Chicago details the complicated negotiations with the university administration



JUDY CHICAGO, THE DINNER PARTY, 1979

and students in facilitating the project from funding shortfalls to attempted censorship of the final show. As in many of her past projects, Chicago and Woodman began the class with self-presentations where stories of rape and incest, suicide, depression, and body shame emerged from students. While Chicago was shocked by some of these accounts they would eventually become the subject matter for the final exhibition. By the end of the semester, a collection of sculptures, installations and mixed-media artworks with titles like *Rape Garage*, *Eating Disorder Bathroom* and *Prejudice Basement* filled the house, perhaps meant to distress and simultaneously inform visitors of the group’s collective struggle with a range of issues.

In the final chapter, Chicago recounts her foray into K-12 education, using *The Dinner Party*, as the focus for a curriculum exploring feminist art. In working with other arts educators, Chicago outlines some of the challenges in adapting concepts of gender, the body, and feminism to elementary and middle school audiences. Chicago explains how the Getty Center for Arts Education provided an

inspiration, using their Discipline Based Art Education (DBAE) approach to create a “flexible framework on which teachers could build” (p. 231). Although Chicago explains she intentionally tried to avoid a prescriptive approach to creating the curriculum, her embrace of DBAE as a guiding framework is curious. Ideally DBAE attempts to connect educators, artists, and school administrators with the broader world of art through a comprehensive approach to art production, art history, art criticism, and aesthetics. For many schools that adopted DBAE, this provided a coherent theoretical framework to re-imagine a wider use of art within the curriculum. However, since its adoption in the early 1980s, DBAE has been criticized for its overly structured and academic approach that often ignores diverse cultural perspectives and is used to manage and legitimize standards-based learning outcomes (Hamblen, 1987; Eisner, 1990).

In many ways, Chicago’s book comes at a time when social practice and community-based art has seen renewed interest. With increasing pressure to engage audiences and communities socially, digitally and politically, the role of civic institutions, museums and art schools has been called into question. How can art educators and institutions thoughtfully engage students in a discourse that is socially-engaged, but also builds a set of art and design skills that are aesthetically poignant and conceptually candid? Chicago’s book highlights a number of ethical considerations connected to these concerns, from issues of time and creative freedom, to the complexities of collaboration, and equitable compensation. However, there is not a consistent pedagogical or political examination of the larger socio-cultural conditions and systems of power that continue to privilege a Western and masculine conception of both art and education. Many critical pedagogues like Henry Giroux or Joe Kincheloe would argue a truly feminist and radical approach to learning requires a process of deschooling or unlearning for students to understand their positionalities and the ethical imperatives of making art that is critical of socio-cultural issues and contexts. Deschooling in particular requires more time and space to unpack and understand how the world is constructed historically as a complex system of power, privilege and social norms. The aim here is to equip students with skills to not only think critically and to “read” the world sociologically, but also to also take political action and become accountable for the decisions they make as both artists and citizens. Although storytelling and site-specific response can aid in this process, it is often not enough to inspire or sustain a critical art practice.

As Chicago’s book concludes, I was left wondering how educators and scholars like Shirley Steinberg, Maxine Greene, Elizabeth Ellsworth, and Stephanie Springgay would respond to and interpret Chicago’s use of embodied and transdisciplinary pedagogy as a kind of “post-formal” approach to education, using student-centered and everyday contexts to unstructure the learning process. In many ways Chicago’s focus on auto-ethnographic subject matter, the use of the body through performance, and the desire to connect students to their own lived experience is needed now more than ever as universities and studio art programs are pressured to link their programs to specific job-creation metrics and learning outcomes. However, without a theoretical examination of why and how these feminist pedagogical approaches resist and respond to larger systemic issues of socio-economic inequality, sexism, or racism reproduced through art schooling, they can easily be co-opted and reified into the very systems they seek to push against. This makes Chicago’s critique at times incomplete, but still useful for artists and educators alike. As a whole, Chicago’s stories and examples are candid and refreshing, revealing a deep kind of vulnerability that one rarely encounters from educators involved in the arts. This itself is perhaps reason enough to join Chicago on a journey through her entanglement with the institutions of art and education.

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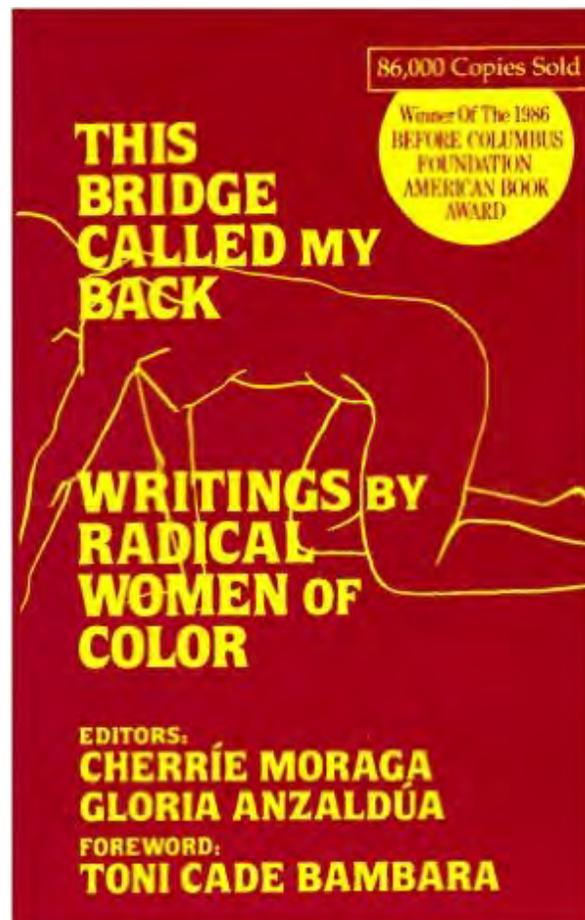
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## #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen: Hashtags as a Bridge to Feminist “Pasts”

By Mary Jo Klinker



When I first began teaching “Feminist Theories and Politics” at Winona State University—a predominantly white institution comprised of nearly half first generation students in rural Minnesota—Michelle Goldberg had just published “Feminism’s Toxic Twitter Wars.” Many students, having a stronger grasp than I did on Twitter and Tumblr feminist discussions, were familiar with the so-called “Twitter Wars”; however, they lacked a historical framework for examining the ways these dialogues tie into a longer trajectory of feminist politics and knowledge production. Teaching these present dialogues as echoes of past criticisms refutes the replication of technofetishism, which risks privileging the technological mode of communication and erases the activist and scholarly labor of feminists.

To frame the connections between these hashtags and a larger feminist archive, I assigned Becky Thompson’s “Multiracial Feminism: Recasting the Chronology of Second Wave Feminism,” which allowed me to confront progressive narratives of modernity. Many students utilize a presentism to suggest past feminisms were “racist,” while not self-reflexively examining their own relation to contemporary dialogues of social inequality.

Feminist writer Mikki Kendall launched the hashtag #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen on August 12, 2013 in response to the dismissal of racism and intersectional analysis of gender by mainstream white feminists. The dismissal stemmed from some mainstream feminists’ support of Hugo Schwyzer—a controversial male feminist and blogger—who attacked women of color on Twitter. Kendall’s hashtag builds from a strong feminist archive of critique against white racism and privilege in feminist movements. The cyclical nature of this debate highlights the importance of continuing to analyze intersecting identities and material realities, a central goal of the feminist theory classroom.

As Kendall argued in a Guardian article in August 14, 2013: “An honest conversation between feminists about feminism and its future is happening, and like every truly honest discussion of differences, it has been incredibly contentious. Hopefully, it will also be productive: despite the natural brevity encouraged by Twitter, any conversation that can span a full day must generate some change.” In fact, this conversation spans multiple generations of feminist activists from the 1977 Black feminist “Combahee River Collective Statement” to the 1981 first edition publication of *This Bridge Called My Back: Writing By Radical Women of Color*, a text intent on addressing marginalization within radical political movements. As editors Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa (1984) stated: “The women writing here are committed feminists. We are challenging white feminists to be accountable for their racism because at the base we still want to believe that they really want freedom for all of us” (1984, 62). Similarly, Kendall and Park’s hashtags challenge contemporary feminists to acknowledge racial justice as central to the demands of ending sexist oppression.

An interrogation of “solidarity narratives” that refute accountability for racism has been essential to past

feminist action and continues to be central in Kendall’s criticism. Feminist scholar Becky Thompson (2002) offers a “recasting” of feminist history that moves beyond a progressive wave narrative that privileges predominantly white, middle-class feminist voices and offers a directive for moving toward a cross-racial feminist future:

*Conversations and struggles between women of color and white women encouraged white women to think about the limits of the popular feminist slogan “Sisterhood Is Powerful.” . . . Cross-racial struggle made clear the work that white women needed to do . . . Listen to women of color’s anger. It is informed by centuries of struggle, erasure, and experience. (2002, 346-347)*

The erasure continues, but feminist hashtags offer a new site of communication to address anti-racist feminism, which furthers the need to acknowledge overlapping and intersecting histories.

As Aura Bogado posted on Twitter in August 2013, #Solidarityisforwhitewomen is when you’re sick of the hashtag for a few hours, and we’re sick of your privilege for a few centuries.” Examining the common themes between the tweets and past critiques offers contemporary lessons for coalition building. Using Thompson’s analysis of building bridges across racial difference, students mapped relations between current tweets and the words of radical women of color in *This Bridge Called My Back* and the Combahee River Collective. In doing so, they discussed how Twitter preserves the reminder of listening as a political process for building strong allyship and movements. As Thompson points out, we must constantly heed Audre Lorde’s pivotal question “Are you doing your work?” (2002, 348).

**Feminist writer Mikki Kendall launched the hashtag #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen on August 12, 2013 in response to the dismissal of racism and intersectional analysis of gender by mainstream white feminists.**

Kendall’s hashtag continues the political intent of *This Bridge Called My Back*. As explicitly stated in the foreword: “The political writer, then, is the ultimate optimist, believing people are capable of change and using words as one way to try and penetrate the privatism of our lives. A privatism which keeps us back and away from each other, which renders us politically useless” (Moraga 1984, “Foreword”). Social networking platforms have become politicized spaces for feminist media scholars and, through the examination of feminist dialogues from a multiracial standpoint, expose the continued and reverberating concerns of racism amongst feminists.

Through this examination, students were able to see the complex and contradicting history of feminism. I

challenged students to examine this resonating archive, asking: "How do these narratives challenge the progressive narrative of 'feminist waves'? What lessons might we glean from working across difference for stronger social

movements?" My hope is that our historical tracing of these contemporary debates can offer a blueprint for the necessary work of theorizing and practicing intersectional feminism.

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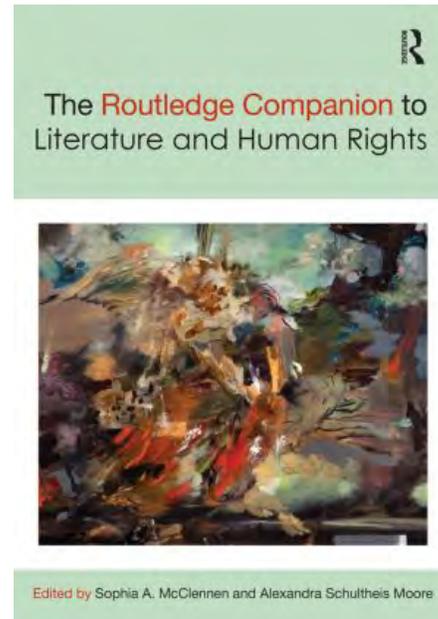
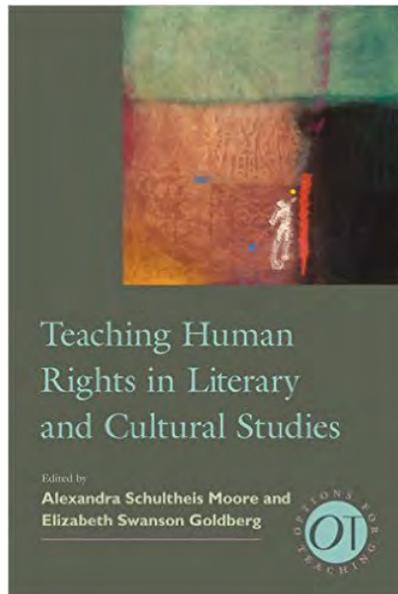
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## News for Educational Workers

by Leonard Vogt



### Two New Anthologies on Teaching Human Rights and Literature

*Teaching Human Rights in Literary and Cultural Studies*, edited by Alexandra Schultheis Moore and Elizabeth Swanson Goldberg, in the Approached to Teaching Series, published in October 2015 by the Modern Language Association.

*Teaching Human Rights in Literary and Cultural Studies* is a sourcebook of inventive approaches and good practices for teachers who want to make human rights the

focus of their courses. Writers give consideration to specific rights violations, for example, storytelling and *testimonio* in Latin America or poetry created in the aftermath of the Armenian genocide. Other essays deepen students' understanding of the stakes and artistic dimensions of human rights representations. The final section is on resources listing readings in history, criticism, theory, and literary and visual studies, and a chronology of human rights legal documents. Included in the list of contributors is Marjorie Agosin, Sophia A. McClennen, Greg A. Mullins, and Belinda Walzer.

*The Routledge Companion to Literature and Human Rights*, edited by Sophia A. McClennen and Alexandra

Schultheis Moore, in the Routledge Companion Series, published in 2016.

*The Routledge Companion to Literature and Human Rights* is a collection of 47 articles by writers, many of whom hold joint academic appointments in literature and another field such as Law, Anthropology, Life Narratives, International Affairs, or Science and Technology, and an important introduction by Sophia A. McClennen and Alexandra Schultheis Moore. Among the primary aims of this volume are 1) "to make the interdisciplinary field of human rights and literature and culture accessible to nonexperts by providing chapters that survey its core concepts, introduce major themes and issues, provide historical background, and outline a range of central contexts and literary works"; 2) "to expand the idea of human rights literature to include texts that have often been excluded from the literary such as legal texts, performances, visual culture, social media, and human rights reports"; and 3) "to denote human rights literature not as a set of texts, but as the outcome of a reading practice that focuses on the interplay of literary representation and juridical-political rights work."

The introduction discusses the historical linking of literature and human rights from Amnesty International winning the Nobel Peace Prize in 1977 and President Jimmy Carter's focusing on human rights in his 1977 inaugural address to the UN setting up ad hoc criminal courts in Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s to try people convicted of violating human rights, followed by the attacks on September 11, 2001 that opened up a discussion both for the advancement and assault on human rights, an example being President George W. Bush speaking of defending the rights of Afghan women while ordering the destruction of the Afghan state.

The *Companion* is organized in four sections loosely following the journalistic questions of "who," "what," "where," "when," and "how." Part One focuses on Subjects or the "who" of human rights and "investigate[s] the circumstances of the person, the development of the concept of the rights-bearing person, and the messy question of who counts as a bearer of rights and by whom"; Part Two takes up the "what" and the "how" of human rights by examining the *forms* of human rights expression; Part Three includes the variable *contexts* of human rights advocacy, discourses, and violations, in other words focusing on the "where" and "when"; finally Part Four focuses on the *impacts* of human rights and literature, incorporating questions of intention (why) with those of influence and power.

Among the many authors included in *The Routledge Companion to Literature and Human Rights* are Donna C. Stanton, Greg A. Mullins, Elizabeth Swanson Goldberg, Peter Hitchcock, Joseph R. Slaughter, David Palumbo-Liu, Barbara Harlow, Ban Wang, Hanna Musiol, Arturo Arias, Luz Angelica Kirschner, Belinda Walzer, and Makau Mutua.

## Racism on Campus

Colleges are once again becoming civil rights battlegrounds. In November 2015, protests by mostly

African American students at the University of Missouri forced both the college president Tim Wolfe and the chancellor R. Bowen Loftin to resign. This effort was aided by the football players who vowed to boycott games and other team activities (DemocracyNow, November 10, 2015). The Legion of Black Collegians and a supporting alliance of students including members of the football team made a number of demands prior to Wolfe's resignation: comprehensive racial awareness and inclusion curriculum throughout all campus departments; an increase by the academic year 2017-2018 of black faculty and staff campus-wide to 10 %; a 10 year plan to increase retention rates for marginalized students; increased funding and resources for the Counseling Center for the purpose of hiring additional health professionals, particularly those of color; increased funding, resources, and personnel for the social justice centers on campus (portside.org, November 10, 2015).

Following the University of Missouri's example, students on more than 100 campuses rallied against institutional racism under the banner of #StudentBlackOut and #BlackOnCampus: Columbia University, Smith College, Ithaca College, University of Kansas, Yale University and Princeton University ("Black Students Storm the Ivory Tower," *In These Times*, January 2016).



UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI LOGO

Faculty have been most supportive of their students' efforts to achieve greater campus racial equality. At Brandeis University, the African and Afro-American Studies faculty, along with other faculty, joined the student protest and held up signs saying, "We love you" and "We are listening" (*The Chronicle of Higher Education*, December 19, 2015). Faculty at Princeton University wrote a letter in support of the students: "As Princeton faculty, we write in support of our students who have occupied the President's office and those supporting them across campus. . . . students of color, particularly black students, all too often find themselves on the margins of this University. . . . So,

they are voicing their frustration and have presented demands to the leadership of our community. They have done so with passion and intelligence and we support them (portside.org, December 2, 2015). The Princeton faculty also supported the students' objections to the racist legacy of Woodrow Wilson and his connection to Princeton (for a brief history of this legacy, see *The Nation*, December 14, 2015).

## Legacy of Arne Duncan

U. S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan resigned at the end of 2015 but left a legacy (educationopportunitynetwork.org) many educators are unhappy with:

- He made the public school system a money-making opportunity
- His market-based reform vision produced mass school closures and a proliferation of standardized testing
- Schools now spend considerably more hours and money drilling students in test preparation
- Under his watch, the gulf between what poor and rich school districts offer their students has not closed
- A push for charter schools that has ended in a scandal of wasted and unaccounted for money

## Charter Schools

The Center for Media and Democracy reports that over the past 20 years the federal government has given over \$3.3 billion to the charter school industry with virtually no accountability. Charter schools are now being called a "Black Box" because so much of this federal money is being seen as going into a "Black Hole." Millions of these federal grant dollars have gone to charter schools that were closed after brief periods or, in some cases, never opened at all. Yet, Arne Duncan continued to award money to charter schools, with more than 500 new charters opened during Duncan's last year as Secretary of Education in 2014-2015 (Education Opportunity Network).

*In These Times* (November 6, 2015) conducted a three month investigation of the all-charter school system in New Orleans 10 year after Hurricane Katrina and declared it a failure. The investigation interviewed residents, students, parents, and teachers, finding severe cracks in the charter school reform "success"

narrative.

## Student Protest

In November of 2015 the Million Student March swept over 120 college campuses, with the three demands of tuition-free public universities, a cancellation of student debt, and a \$15 an hour minimum wage for campus workers (portside.org, October 31 and November 13, 2015).

"The Right to Free College" (*In These Times*, January 2016) describes the history of free college and university education in the United States, the erosion of it in the 1970s and 1980s, and the international student protest against tuition increases in such countries as Canada and Chile.

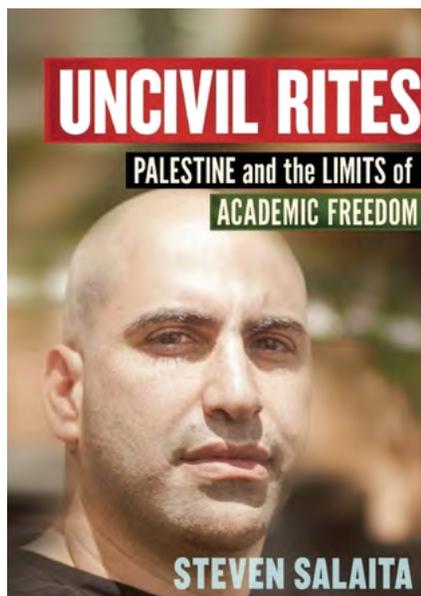
In response to the 16 bullets that hit Laquan McDonald a year ago, students at the Urban Prep Charter Academy in Chicago yelled "Sixteen shots! Sixteen shots! Sixteen shots!" during a school visit by Mayor Rahm Emanuel, prompting the mayor to abruptly leave the assembly hall (DemocracyNow, December 17, 2015).

International student protest included Ethiopia and South Africa. During a crackdown on students in Ethiopia protesting a government plan to expand the campus and cause evictions of farmers, at least five students were killed, according to the government, but as many as 30 according to student organizers (DemocracyNow, December 15, 2015). Students across many campuses in South Africa rallied in October of 2015 against tuition increases. In response to these widening protests and thousands of students who streamed into Pretoria to protest both on campus and outside his office, President Jacob G. Zuma agreed to freeze tuition fees at South Africa's public universities (portside.org, October 24, 2015).

## Israel and Education

Adapted from his new book, *Uncivil Rites: Palestine and the Limits of Academic Freedom* (Haymarket), Steven Salaita, fired from a tenured position at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, writes in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (October 15, 2015) about his firing and the debate it sparked about academic freedom, the Israel-Palestine conflict, faculty governance, and the role of social media in university life.

At the Palestine Technical University in the West Bank, the Israeli occupying army has built a firing range on campus. In a six-week period of student demonstrations against the range, 350 Palestinian students have been injured by the Israeli army. injured by the Israeli army. ([www.middleeastmonitor.com](http://www.middleeastmonitor.com))



The Independent Jewish Voices of Canada announced that a group of students at the University of Waterloo submitted a petition with over 1000 signatures to the university's Federation of Students calling on them to hold a referendum asking the undergraduates to support severing ties with Israeli academic institutions which violate Palestinians' human rights (madmimi.com, December 5, 2015).

More than 500 anthropologists have publicly joined an academic boycott of Israel. Signatories oppose "the ongoing Israeli violations of Palestinian rights, including the Israeli military occupation of the Gaza Strip, West Bank, and East Jerusalem" and are boycotting "Israeli academic institutions that are complicit in these violations" (*Haaretz*, October 5, 2014).

## Policing Education

The November 2015 video showing the brutalization of a South Carolina high school student by a sheriff's deputy assigned to the school has brought up the question of why there are police officers in classrooms in the first place. The last 20 years has seen an explosive increase in the number of police stationed in schools. As of now, an estimated 17,000 officers are assigned to schools and 28% of all schools have assigned officers. To read the history and background of this most dramatic expansion of police power in the country, read "Policing Education" (*The Nation*, November 23/30, 2015).

## Corporate Education

The Washington D.C.-based Council of the Great City School recently conducted a comprehensive two-year study on the types, uses, and frequency of D.C.'s standardized tests (in 2014 in D.C., students sat for 6,750 tests, with the average American student taking approximately 112 tests between pre-K and twelve grade). The study found that the tests are redundant, "do not tell us everything that's important about a child" and are being used "for purposes for which they were not designed" (*Jacobin*, October 28, 2015).

A new report from the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities exposed the massive underfunding that most states continue to inflict on public schools, the ways in which political leaders justify this underfunding, and the long lasting effects on poor, marginalized students (Education Opportunity Network, December 19, 2015).

Charles Koch gave \$90 million to influence higher education in the South. Western Carolina University in North Carolina recently approved an academic center funded by the Charles Koch Foundation, which funds "academic programs, professorships, scholarships, conferences, lecture series and economic centers" for the purpose of promoting the free-market Koch Brothers agenda (portside.org, December 5, 2015; [www.southerstudies.org](http://www.southerstudies.org), December 12, 2015).

## Resources

The Center for Study of Working Class Life is holding its "How Class Works—2016" Conference at State University of New York at Stony Brook from June 9-11, 2016. Some of the conference themes will be: the mosaic of class, race, and gender; class, power, and social structure; class, community, and the environment; class, public policy, and electoral politics; and class and culture. For more information on the conference, contact [michael.zweig@stonybrook.edu](mailto:michael.zweig@stonybrook.edu).

*Commie Camp* is a documentary about the legendary Camp Kinderland summer camp for children.

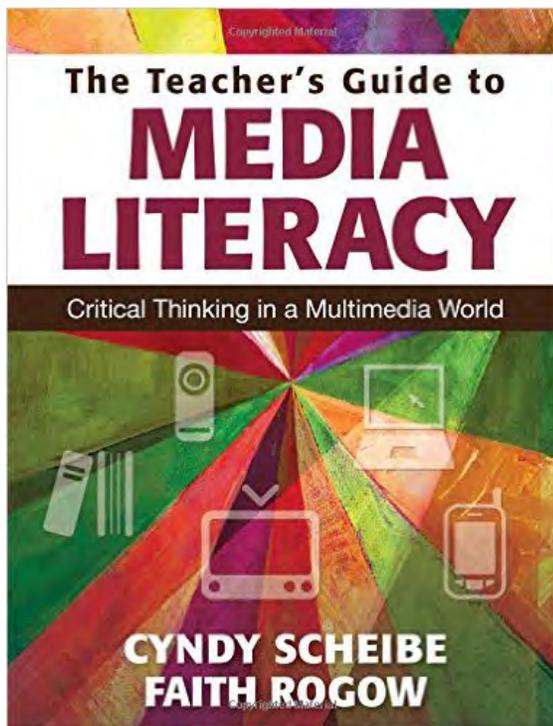


*Just Eat It: A Food Waste Story* (Bullfrog Films) shows how about 50% of America's food ends in the trash, and this in a nation where 1 in every 10 people does not have enough to eat.



*Freeway Flyer* is a film about college adjunct teachers and can be seen at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9hsMUuEpx00>.

Project Look Sharp is offering new online resources for *The Teacher's Guide to Media Literacy: Critical Thinking in a Multimedia World*. Seven complete lesson plans plus 139 lesson ideas use media literacy to teach in a wide range of curriculum areas. For more information, email [looksharp@ithaca.edu](mailto:looksharp@ithaca.edu).



## The People's Movement for Human Rights Learning

**PDHRE**, the People's Movement for Human Rights Learning, formerly The People's Decade for Human Rights Education, is an independent, international, non-profit organization promoting and providing learning about

human rights relevant to people's daily lives at all levels of society that leads to action. PDHRE was established in 1988 in an effort to respond to the unmet need for Human Rights Learning at the grassroots level. Since then, PDHRE has conducted and/or facilitated Human Rights Learning and training in communities in more than 60 countries, and produced a range of written and audio-visual pedagogical materials to support learning and dialogue for socio-economic transformation. PDHRE is convinced that imposed ignorance is a human rights violation and learning about human rights as a way of life is an imperative for meaningful human, social and economic development. There is no other way to break thought the vicious cycle of humiliation.

To achieve this vision, and mission PDHRE is facilitating the development of Human Rights Cities around the world where communities learn to use the holistic framework of human rights to re-imagine and reconstruct the lives of all women, men, youth and children—joining in societal development—belonging in community in dignity with others. [www.pdhre.org/](http://www.pdhre.org/)

*Is there a news item, call for papers, upcoming conference, resource, teaching tool, or other information related to progressive education that you would like to share with other Radical Teacher readers? Conference announcements and calls for papers should be at least six months ahead of date. Items, which will be used as found appropriate by Radical Teacher, cannot be returned. Send hard copy to Leonard Vogt, Department of English, LaGuardia Community College (CUNY), 31-10 Thomson Avenue, Long Island City, New York 11101—or email items to [lvogt@nyc.rr.com](mailto:lvogt@nyc.rr.com).*



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**Michael Bennett** is Professor of English at Long Island University (Brooklyn). He is the editor and author of four books and numerous articles on American literature, African American studies, and urban culture & ecology. His latest work has been creative, publishing poetry and short fiction. He currently serves on the editorial board of *Radical Teacher*.

**Rosemary Blanchard** is Associate Professor of Education Emeritus, College of Education, California State University, Sacramento and Adjunct Instructor in Peace Studies, University of New Mexico. She is also Chair of NCSS Human Rights Education Community and Co-Vice-Chair, Human Rights Educators USA.

**Marissa A. Gutiérrez-Vicario** is the Executive Director and Founder of Art and Resistance Through Education (ARTE), where she works with young people to create innovative art projects to bring awareness to human rights abuses. Marissa brings significant experience working for social justice on the ground and around the world: she worked on a documentary film on labor rights in Mexico and volunteered for women's rights nonprofits in Guatemala and Senegal. As a graduate from the Harvard Graduate School of Education, Marissa has a master's degree in arts education. She has also received a master's degree in public administration from New York University and a bachelor's degree in political science and international relations from the University of Southern California. Marissa is also a member of Human Rights Educators-USA.

**Sarah Hamblin** is an Assistant Professor of English and Director of Cinema Studies at the University of Massachusetts Boston, where she teaches courses on global art cinemas, political and human rights film, and graphic literatures. Her research focuses on the relationships between aesthetics, affect, and radical politics, and her articles and reviews have appeared in *Cinema Journal*, *Black Camera*, *English Language Notes*, *Film and History*, and *Studies in Popular Culture*. She is currently completing a book manuscript on global revolutionary filmmaking in the 1960s, titled *Screening the Impossible: The Politics of Form and Feeling in Global Second Wave Revolutionary Cinema*.

**John L. Hammond** teaches sociology at Hunter College and The Graduate Center, CUNY, and is a longtime human rights activist. He worked at the Nongovernmental Human Rights Commission of El Salvador during the civil war and is past chair of the Task Force on Human Rights and Academic Freedom of the Latin American Studies Association. His books include *Fighting to Learn: Popular Education and Guerilla War in El Salvador* and *Building Popular Power: Workers' Neighborhood Movements in the Portuguese Revolution*.

**Steven Jones** is Associate Professor of Political Science and Director of the Center for Faculty Development at Georgia College and State University.

**Christopher Lee Kennedy** is a teaching artist and organizer who works collaboratively with schools, youth, and artists to create site-specific projects that investigate queer identity, radical schooling, and local ecologies. He is

currently an assistant professor in the Department of Art and Design Education at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, New York.

**Mary Jo Klinker** is an Assistant Professor in the Program of Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at Winona State University. Engaging activism in the classroom is central to Mary Jo's pedagogy and also fuels her research, which focuses on the relation of queer activism and theory to feminist antimilitarist organizing and anti-imperialist critique.

**Alexandra Moore** is the Class of 1952 Distinguished Scholar and Associate Professor in the Department of English, University of North Carolina at Greensboro, where she teaches classes in postcolonial studies and human rights and the humanities. Her recent publications include *Vulnerability and Security in Human Rights Literature and Visual Culture* (2015) and four co-edited collections: *The Routledge Companion to Literature and Human Rights* (2015), *Globally Networked Teaching in the Humanities* (2015), *Teaching Human Rights in Literature and Cultural Studies* (2015), and *Theoretical Perspectives on Human Rights and Literature* (2012).

**Susan O'Malley** is on the editorial board of *Radical Teacher* and was one of its founders. After teaching at Kingsborough Community College for 36 years, she retired and is currently Vice Chair of the NGO Committee on the Status of Women/NY at the UN. Her recent article, "Macbeth's Witches: Nurses, Waitresses, Feminists, Punk Gore Groupies?" was published in *Shakespeare on Screen: Macbeth* (Publications des Universités de Rouen et du Havre) and a feminist reading of *Merry Wives of Windsor* will be published by Routledge in 2014 in a collection on the play.

**Martha Saxton** has taught human rights at Amherst College and at the Institute for the Study of Human Rights at Columbia University. An historian, she is the author of a number of reviews, articles, and four books, including most recently *The Transformation of the World is Up to You* (Steidl, 2014).

## Artists

**Ella Belenky** is an artist and educator living in Brooklyn, New York. Belenky's work lies between painting and puppetry and often draws on issues of human rights and social justice.

**Lucas Briffa** received his MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 2015. His most recent project focuses on the Corbis Image Preservation Facility in Boyers, PA where the Bettman Archive containing over 19 million images is housed. In addition to the photographs reproduced in this publication, the project contains a film that can be found at [lucasbriffa.com](http://lucasbriffa.com) titled 1 NE 3 F Boyers, PA.

**Amanda Hughen**, in the series *Associated Press*, mines the print edition of the *New York Times* to examine

connections between geopolitics, class, identity, and luxury goods. For the past year, Hughen has worked primarily with imagery from a single edition: the January 6, 2015 print edition of the *New York Times*. The headline photo that day was a large color portrait of an Afghani man who, since losing both sons in the conflict, spends his time ferrying dead bodies back to their families on both sides of the war. On the next page, A2, just behind his photo, was an ad for a Wempe gold ring that mimicked the form of the turban of the man on the cover.

**Julia Lourie** is an independent curator based out of Brooklyn, NY. She works closely with artists to create exhibitions that explore the intersections of fine art and social justice. Lourie has contributed her efforts to numerous exhibitions in the United States and abroad, including Kara Walker's *A Subtlety...* at the Domino Sugar Factory in Brooklyn (2014), *Room for Forbidden Books* by Alicia Framis at Art Basel - Parcours, Switzerland (2015), and *When I Give I Give Myself* at the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam, Netherlands (2015).

**Arpana Rayamajhi** lives and works in New York City. In addition to her fine artwork and jewelry practices, she is also the co-founder of DISPOSE, an online magazine collection of disposable photographs that narrate the day of an individual. Rayamajhi is an active advocate for animal rights, women's rights, climate change awareness, and the just treatment of all earth's creatures.



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