

# **International Human Rights: Latin America**

Thursday: 6:00 – 9:00 p.m. Spring Semester 2013

**G10:1048**

**Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies  
New York University  
53 Washington Square South, Room 404W**

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## **Course Summary:**

In this graduate seminar, students will study international human rights standards, topical case studies in Latin America, the role of international and local NGOs in the human rights movement, popular resistance and social movements in the Latin American human rights movement, the role of media and representation in reporting and promoting human rights, educational initiatives for human rights, and the many choices society has after collective violence.

## **Course Description:**

Latin America presents a fascinating area for the study of contemporary human rights. Many countries are still considered “emerging democracies” after years of oppressive military rule. And although these countries have a history of violating a broad range of human rights, including military/police violence and involvement in extrajudicial killings, violence against and exploitation of minors, and general impunity for human rights violators, the last two decades have brought about substantial constitutional, legislative, and institutional changes in respect for civil liberties and the integrity for human dignity. These changes include governmental support of human rights groups to investigate and report their findings and new legal guarantees promoting freedom for political rights and freedom of speech and press.

This last two decades have also stood out as a period of reckoning and bearing witness of past atrocities. In the wake of serious violence, Latin America countries continue to struggle with issues of justice, reconciliation, truth, remembering, and healing. Over the years there have been many different responses to collective violence in Latin America and these strategies continue to evolve and change. This course will study the range of these responses not only to reconcile human rights violations of the past but also to build a culture of human rights and peace in the future.

The first few weeks of the course will establish some of the guiding principals for the study of human rights. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and related United Nations covenants are key cornerstones. At stake here is the difference between so-called universal rights versus local, cultural conceptions of rights. At this stage, we will also discuss the different conceptual frameworks of human rights as well as the different generations of rights with special emphasis on how national human rights become transnational cases.

From this point, the course will introduce some of the major human rights themes in Latin America that includes many of the violations that occurred during the military dictatorship period but also contemporary problems such as drug wars, economic human rights, gender and human rights. Here we will also initiate a discussion on the politics of representation because how human rights information is transmitted and received in print, visual media, and via the Internet is crucial today. As the course moves into topical case studies, each section will have a two-week block where we focus on particular area. The first week will examine the violations and the second week will convey how the region remembers and tries to reconcile this memory. The second week will cover strategies such as human rights reports, oral history, visual representations such as photography and film, contemporary artists and the poetics of witnessing, tribunals and truth commissions, and non-violent social movements for change.

An international perspective of human rights in Latin America offers several important benefits for students. First, many students have not been introduced to human rights concerns nor have they been encouraged to view themselves as studying or working within a human rights tradition. In fact, many Latin American studies programs already incorporate human rights issues but are seldom placed within a framework of international human rights. This connection is crucial if students are to discover what roles educators, scholars, artists, NGO workers, and the public can provide in the full development of human dignity. By studying international human rights, students will learn that different conceptions of human rights arise from specific cultural and historical traditions but that there also exists a common core of universal human rights. Thus, they will formulate a definition of human rights with respect to local and global standards. They will discover programs and educators/scholars to emulate. And they will discover how the study of human rights relates to traditional subject areas in Latin American studies.

## **COURSE TOPICS AND READINGS:**

### **Jan. 31: Introduction to Human Rights in Latin America:**

The Major United Nations Human Rights Documents: The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the related covenants.

### **Feb 7: History of International Human Rights**

Robert Drinan. 2001. *The Mobilization of Shame: A World View of Human Rights*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Web Site: *The Peoples Decade for Human Rights Education*. <http://www.pdhre.org>

**Feb. 14:                   The Aftermath of Collective Violence: Trials, Truth  
Commissions, Amnesty, Reparations, and Facing History**

Martha Minow: 1998. *Between Vengeance & Forgiveness: Facing History after Genocide and Mass Violence*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Felisa Tibbitts. 2002. "Understanding What We Do: Emerging Models for Human Rights Education." *International Review of Education*. 48 (3-4). 159-171. [In Reader]

**Feb. 21:                   Torture and Politics of Memory**

Jacobo Timerman. 2002. (1981) *Prisoner Without a Name, Cell Without a Number*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

Visual Presentation: Marcelo Brodsky's *Buena Memoria* and the Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo's *The Identity Project*.

**Feb. 28:                   The Archives of Torture**

Lawrence Weschler. 1990. *A Miracle, A Universe: Settling Accounts with Torturers*. University of Chicago Press.

Susan Sontag. 2004. "Regarding the Torture of Others." *New York Times Magazine*. May 23. [In Reader]

**March 7:                   State Violence in Central America**

Mark Danner. 1994. *The Massacre at El Mozote*. Vintage Books.

**March 14:                Human Rights Reports and Photojournalism**

Francisco Goldman. 2007. *The Art of Political Murder: Who Killed the Bishop?* Grove Press.

Screening: *Pictures From a Revolution: A Memoir of the Nicaraguan Conflict*. 1992. Dir. Susan Meiselas, Richard Rogers, & Alfred Guzzetti. Kino Video.

**March 21:               Spring Break**

**March 28:               Colombia & The Legacy of Kidnappings**

Gabriel Garcia Marquez: *News of a Kidnapping*. 1996. New York: Penguin.

**April 4: Colombia and Human Rights Violations**

Garry Leech. *Beyond Bogota: Diary of a Drug War Journalist in Colombia*. 2009. Beacon Press.

**April 11: Fiction in Latin America and Human Rights**

Jose Donoso. 1966. *Hell Has No Limits*. Green Interger. (El Lugar Sin Limites).

Jose Zalaquett. 1999. The Need for Moral Reconstruction in the Wake of Past Human Rights Violations: An Interview with Jose Zalaquett. In: *Human Rights in Political Transitions: Gettysburg to Bosnia*. Ed: Carla Hesse & Robert Post. Zone Books.

**April 18: Memory and Chile.**

Steve J. Stern. *Remembering Pinochet's Chile*. Duke University Press.

Screening: Chile Obstinate Memory. 1997. Patricio Guzman. Kino.

**April 25: Social, Economic, and Cultural Rights in the Amazon.**

Andrew Revkin. 1990. *The Burning Season: The Murder of Chico Mendes and the Fight for the Amazon Rain Forest*. Island Press.

**May 2: Environmental and Indigenous Rights in the Amazon.**

J. Timmons Roberts & Nikki Demetria Thanos. 2003. "Bio-Splendor, Devastation, and Competing Visions in the Amazon" & "Indigenous Peoples, Development Megaprojects, and Internet Resistance." *Trouble in Paradise: Globalization and Environmental Crises in Latin America*. New York: Routledge.

Daniel Eilemberg. 2007. "Diamonds of the Amazon." *Hispanic*. Dec/Jan 2007.

Scott Wallace. 2007. "Farming the Amazon." *National Geographic*. Jan. 2007.

Screening: *Iracema: Uma Transa Amazonica*. 1974. Dir. By Jorge Bodanzky. Video Filmes.

**May 9: Memory, Truth, and Reconciliation in Latin America**

Screening: *State of Fear*. 2005. Dir by Pamela Yates. New Day Films.

## Monday, May 13: Final Papers Due

### Required Books:

Robert Drinan. 2001. *The Mobilization of Shame: A World View of Human Rights*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Martha Minow: 1998. *Between Vengeance & Forgiveness: Facing History after Genocide and Mass Violence*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Jacobo Timerman. 2002. (1981) *Prisoner Without a Name, Cell Without a Number*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

Lawrence Weschler. 1990. *A Miracle, A Universe: Settling Accounts with Torturers*. U. Chicago Press.

Mark Danner. 1994. *The Massacre at El Mozote*. Vintage Books.

Francisco Goldman. 2007. *The Art of Political Murder: Who Killed the Bishop?* Grove Press.

Gabriel Garcia Marquez: *News of a Kidnapping*. 1996. New York: Penguin.

Garry Leech. *Beyond Bogota: Diary of a Drug War Journalist in Colombia*. 2009. Beacon Press.

Jose Donoso. 1966. *Hell Has No Limits*. Green Interger.

Steve J. Stern. *Remembering Pinochet's Chile*. Duke University Press.

Andrew Revkin. 1990. *The Burning Season: The Murder of Chico Mendes and the Fight for the Amazon Rain Forest*. Island press.

### COURSE ACTIVITIES, ASSIGNMENTS/PROJECTS & EVALUATION CRITERIA:

During the semester there will be **one term paper** related to the common readings. In addition to the writing assignment, students will participate in two **oral presentations** (of their choosing) in relation to the weekly themes. **Regular attendance, preparation, informed and thoughtful participation, and engagement** will also affect the evaluation of a student's overall performance. If you miss a class, I expect notification and a follow-up email with your thoughts on the week's readings. Together the assignments and class participation will constitute the final grade. The assignments are as follows:

Each week, a small group of students will be responsible for presenting the common readings. The **oral presentations** should (1) provide a detailed explanation and summary of the readings, (2) a critical analysis of the material, (3) an original thought contribution as to how the ideas in the readings affect human rights, and, (4) the presenter/s should pose several provocative questions to the class about the material to open up the discussion. Team presentations should be a coordinated effort but teams may also choose to divide readings by individuals. The goal of the oral presentations is to allow students at least one opportunity to lead a class discussion and to influence the class in an extended manner. The overall group presentations should not exceed one hour to allow time for collective discussion.

In the spirit of cooperative and participatory learning, student presenters are welcome to use various workshop techniques during their presentations such as dividing the class into small discussion groups. Small group situations are often very constructive for discussion questions pertaining to the readings. Presenters should designate one participant in each group as a discussion leader/facilitator and someone as a reporter who will articulate conclusions reached and the reasoning that led to the conclusions. Additional class projects are also welcome but presenters should consult with me beforehand. Presenters should also type up a page or two about their presentation for the class. Handouts in the past have included additional information on related NGOs, scholarly references, or web sites where students might seek further information about the weekly theme.

With the common readings and the presentations, the class will begin a number of conversations about human rights, civil society, and Latin America. Most likely, we will not be able to finish our talks on these diverse subjects. Therefore, the final paper should provide an opportunity to extend these discussions or to explore an issue that was unresolved. The paper will also provide students a chance to question, qualify, or refute the course themes.

The **term paper:** (15 pages). **This paper is due Monday, May 7th.** However, you may hand in your paper at any time before this date to ease your writing load at the end of the term.

For your final paper, here are some guidelines. In light of the course and the readings pertaining to human rights and Latin America, you can articulate your own question and write a critical paper accordingly. You may also wish to develop specific class presentations further. But no matter what you write, I want everyone to email me a short description of his or her final project and touch base with me in person, before or after class, about your particular project.

As for experimental papers, you should feel free to write with a great deal of subjectivity and from an experiential perspective. But feel free to write a standard objective academic paper. But for experimental ideas, you might think about writing a reflective journal, very subjective, about how your perspectives have changed and developed through this course experience. As a means of tying this into the class, you should use references from the readings or class activities. You should also note how the process of writing has influenced your ideas and reflections. This is not a course assessment but rather an opportunity to integrate your own work with your class experience.

For papers or projects that don't quite fit into these themes, you might want to make an appointment with me to discuss your ideas. If you have several ideas, perhaps I can help you narrow down your choices. In human rights, research, reflecting, and writing are all integral components for developing critical consciousness. So the papers/projects are a vital part to our learning process. But most of all, I hope the final projects can deepen your understanding of human rights and help you grow as an emerging scholar in Latin American studies.