

# **HUMAN RIGHTS & MEDIA**

NINT 5213 / CRN 6008 / 2008

International Affairs Program, The New School

Tuesdays, 8:00 pm - 10:30 pm

Room: TBA

Peter Lucas

[lucasp@newschool.edu](mailto:lucasp@newschool.edu)

Tel: 347-563-7787

## **Course Description:**

In this graduate course, students will study the international human rights movement with an emphasis on the crucial role that media plays in representing and responding to critical human rights issues. In the last decade, the convergence of new media technologies with the human rights movement has had a profound impact. This transformation has enabled the globalization process of human rights activism through the rapid distribution of web-based news, research, and visual representation. Digitalization has also crossed over with traditional media (television, print, film, photography, and radio) enhancing both the production and the distribution of human rights reports. The emerging interactivity between producers and consumers of human rights information is also changing as people once considered as objects of human rights reports are becoming subjects who are now creating, manipulating, and challenging dominant paradigms of media representation. This growing diversity has had serious social and cultural implications on how human rights information is received, engaged, and transformed.

The contemporary mediascape of human rights has now become a sub-field of the larger movement involving researchers, educators, journalists, film makers, photographers, writers, visual artists, web designers, and many other types of media workers. This course will study human rights through the lens of the media in order to critically understand the changing nature of human rights representation and how to better prepare for becoming involved in representing human rights.

## **Course Outline:**

There are 14 weeks in the course. The first weeks have been set up to establish a critical scholarly base to understand and reflect on the media and representational strategies of human rights. For the first three weeks, we will introduce international human rights as the main conceptual framework for the course. Students will be exposed to the international standards, the historical generations of human rights, and the basic conceptions and

distinctions of human rights. From a historical perspective, we will especially note how technological advances in media have facilitated widespread changes in the international movement for human rights.

From there, we will focus on the role of the media, exploring new media technologies, media events, and how mass media influences both the production and reception of human rights. Visual media is especially important today and during the middle weeks of the course, we will study the contemporary role of photography and documentary film and human rights witnessing. We will also study the representation of atrocity and war news through mainstream media with a critical emphasis on the reporting from Iraq. In nearly each class we will have a film screening or partial screening to compliment the themes.

In the final third of the class, we will turn our attention to how NGOs and community activists document human rights abuses, train other NGOs for media activism, close the digital divide, promote visual inclusion, and how media educators are working with young people to develop their capacities and skills to create their own media representations.

## **COURSE TOPICS AND READINGS:**

### ***Jan 22: International Human Rights & Media***

Introduction to Human Rights and Media.

### ***Jan 29: Contemporary Human Rights***

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

Website Review: The People's Decade for Human Rights Education: [www.pdhre.org](http://www.pdhre.org)

### ***Feb 5: Global Media & Human Rights Education***

Peter Steven. 2003. *The No-Nonsense Guide to Global Media*. New York: Verso.

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 12: Global Information Society & Human Rights***

Rikke Frank Jorgensen. *Human Rights in the Global Information Society*. MIT Press

Faye Ginsburg, Lila Abu-Lughod, Brian Larkin. "Media Worlds: Introduction." *Media Worlds: Anthropology on New Terrain*. University of California Press. [In reader]

**Feb 19: *Visualizing Suffering and Caring for Others***

Sontag, Susan. 2002. *Regarding the Pain of Others*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Elaine Scarry: "The Difficulty of Imagining Other Persons." *Human Rights in Political Transitions*. Zone Books.

**Feb 26: *Complex Emergencies and the Media***

Susan Moeller. 1999. *Compassion Fatigue: How the Media Sell Disease, Famine, War and Death*. New York: Routledge.

Screening: *Afghanistan Year 1380*. Directed by Fabrizio & Alberto Vendemmiati. Please see film website: <http://www.pbs.org/pov/pov2002/afghanistanyear1380/>

**March 4: *Photo-Journalism and the Ethnographic Other***

Catherine Lutz & Jane Collins. 1993. *Reading National Geographic*. University of Chicago Press.

Screening: *National Geographic's The Photographers*. National Geographic Video

**March 11: *War and the Media***

Philip Seib. 2004. *Beyond the Front Lines: How the News media Cover a World Shaped by War*. Palgrave Books.

Screening: *Hearts and Minds*. 1974. Directed by Peter Davis. Criterion Collection.

**March 18: *Spring Break***

***March 25: The Ethics and Practices of Documentary Film***

Bill Nichols. 1991. *Introduction to Documentary*. Indiana University Press.

Screening: *The Scavengers*. 1998. Dir. Eduardo Coutinho. Video Filmes.

***April 1: Documentary Filmmakers***

Liz Stubbs. 2002. *Documentary Filmmakers Speak*. Allworth Press.

Screening: TBA

***April 8: Video Activism***

Sam Gregory, Gillian Caldwell, & Ronit Anni. (Ed.) 2005. *Witness: Video for Change: A Guide for Advocacy and Activism*. Pluto Books.

***April 15: Reporting Crimes Against Humanity***

Fred Abrahams, Gilles Peress, Eric Stover. 2002. *A Village Destroyed: War Crimes in Kosovo*. University of California Press.

Screening. TBA.

***April 22: Youth Media***

Wendy Ewald. 2001. *I Wanna Take Me a Picture*. Beacon Press.

Screening: *Born Into Brothels*. Dir. Zana Briski & Russ Kauffman. 2005. Thinkfilm.

***April 29: New Media, Visual Inclusion & Human Rights***

Presentation of Viva Favela: [www.vivafavela.com.br](http://www.vivafavela.com.br)

Screening: Selections from Media Storm and Pixel Press and Magnum in Motion  
[www.mediastorm.org](http://www.mediastorm.org) & [www.pixelpress.org](http://www.pixelpress.org) & [www.magnumphotos.com](http://www.magnumphotos.com)

## **May 6: Final Papers Due**

### **Required Books:**

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

Peter Steven. 2003. *The No-Nonsense Guide to Global Media*. New York: Verso.

Rikke Frank Jorgensen. *Human Rights in the Global Information Society*. MIT Press.

Sontag, Susan. 2002. *Regarding the Pain of Others*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Susan Moeller. 1999. *Compassion Fatigue: How the Media Sell Disease, Famine, War and Death*. New York: Routledge.

Bill Nichols. 1991. *Introduction to Documentary*. Indiana University Press.

Fred Abrahams, Gilles Peress, Eric Stover. 2002. *A Village Destroyed: War Crimes in Kosovo*. University of California Press.

Philip Seib. 2004. *Beyond the Front Lines: How the News media Cover a World Shaped by War*. Palgrave Books.

Catherine Lutz & Jane Collins. 1993. *Reading National Geographic*. University of Chicago Press.

Liz Stubbs. 2002. *Documentary Filmmakers Speak*. Allworth Press.

*Witness: Video for Change: A Guide for Advocacy and Activism*. 2005. Ed: Sam Gregory, Gillian Caldwell, & Ronit Anni. Pluto Books.

Wendy Ewald. 2001. *I Wanna Take Me a Picture*. Beacon Press.

## **COURSE ACTIVITIES, ASSIGNMENTS/PROJECTS & EVALUATION**

## **CRITERIA:**

There will be **two papers** related to the common readings and film screenings. In addition to the writing assignments, students will participate in one **oral presentation** (of their choosing) in relation to the weekly themes. Regular attendance and thoughtful participation will also affect the evaluation of a student's overall performance. 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/screenings. The **oral presentations** should (1) provide a detailed explanation and summary of the readings/screenings, (2) a critical analysis of the material, and (3) an original thought contribution as to how the ideas in the readings/screenings affect human rights and media representation, 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/screenings 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 45 minutes to allow time for collective discussion and the screening.

In the spirit of cooperative learning and participatory teaching, student presenters are also 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, screenings and the presentations, the class will begin a number of conversations about human rights and media representation. Most likely, we will not be able to finish our talks on these diverse subjects. Therefore, the papers should provide an opportunity to extend these discussions or to explore an issue that was unresolved. The papers will also provide students a chance to question,

qualify, or refute the course themes.

**The Papers:** The first half of the course is set up to establish a theoretical base for the critical study of human rights and media representation. **The first paper, (7 pages), due right after spring break**, will be a critical review of visual culture or the media through a human rights lens. Students may choose to review a photo book, a current exhibition, a documentary or feature film where human rights violations are clearly at stake, a website, or current media coverage of breaking human rights related news. The intention of this paper is to help students develop their critical reflection and writing skills in the field of human rights and representation. The key to this paper is to read your choice through a human rights lens and to articulate the related human rights issues.

**The final paper (15 pages) is due on the final day of class** although students may hand in their paper at any time before the end of the semester to ease your writing load at the end of the term.

For your final paper, below are some guidelines. But no matter what you write or create, I want everyone to touch base with me before or after class, about your particular project. In light of the course and the readings/screenings pertaining to human rights, media, and representational strategies, students can articulate their own question and write a critical paper accordingly.

Students may also create their own representational human rights project. Students in the past have made short films, created original photographic portfolios, designed web sites, and created interactive, visual curriculum for teaching human rights. As with all final papers/projects, each student will conference with me beforehand on their ideas. Any visual project should also have a reflective explanation about how the piece is related to human rights, media, and representation.

As for experimental papers, students should feel free to write with subjectivity and from an experiential perspective. You might think about writing a reflective journal, 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 to discuss your ideas. If you have several ideas, perhaps I can help you narrow down your choices. In human rights, research, reflecting, creating, and writing are all integral components for developing a critical consciousness. So the papers/projects are a vital part to our learning process. But most of all, the final projects are intended to deepen your understanding of international human rights and help you grow as an emerging scholar of human rights and peace.