

Columbia University

Literature and Human Rights

Fall 1998 - ComplLit W4905x - M 11:00-12:50, 315 Hamilton Hall

Prof. J. S. Peters

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This course will look at the literature of human rights, -- both legal texts that shape formal conceptions of rights and literary texts (classic and contemporary, fiction and non-fiction) that elucidate situations in which rights are at issue. Addressing the various critiques of legal accounts of "human rights," the course explores how literature (broadly construed) grants us a deeper understanding of what we might mean by such concepts as "freedom of expression," "due process," "torture," and "genocide."

Readings:

You will be asked, as well, to read various sections of the documents included in 25 Human Rights Documents. The syllabus may change as the semester progresses.

Key:

- HRR = The Human Rights Reader, ed. Micheline R. Ishay (Routledge).
- x = xeroxed (in coursepack, available in 602 Philosophy Hall; most readings are excerpts from longer works).

1. Rights Before a Human Rights

- Aeschylus, *The Oresteia*(458 B.C.) (x)
- Magna Charta (HRR)
- Jonathan Swift, *A Modest Proposal*(1729) (x)
- Thomas Paine, *The Rights of Man*(1792) (HRR)

2. Slavery

- John Locke, *Second Treatise of the State of Nature / Slavery*(1690) (x + HRR)
- Testimonials (x)
- *The Dred Scott Case*(1856-7) (x)
- Toni Morrison, *Beloved*(1987)

3. Liberalism and the Industrial Revolution

- John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*(1859) (x)
- Charles Dickens, *Hard Times*(1854) (x)
- Upton Sinclair, *The Jungle*

4. Socialism and the Totalitarian State

- Karl Marx, *Communist Manifesto*(x) *On the Jewish Question*(pp.194-99) (HRR)
- George Orwell, *Animal Farm*(1945)
- George Orwell, *1984*(1949)

5. Genocide I: The Holocaust

- Primo Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz*(1958)
- Eli Wiesel, *Night*

Film Segments:

- Night and Fog;
- The Nuremberg Trials

6. Torture

- Cesare Beccaria, *Treatise on Crimes and Punishments*(1766) (HRR)
- Franz Kafka, *In the Penal Colony*(1914) (x)
- Ariel Dorfman, *Death and the Maiden*

7. Trials and Due Process

- Franz Kafka, *The Trial*(c.1921)
- Thiongs Ngugi-Wa, *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*

Film Segments:

- Trials

8. Detention and Forced Labor

- Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (Doc)
- Alexander Solzenitsyn, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*(1962)
- Wole Soyinka, fr *The Man Died*(x)

9. War and Crimes

- Lieber Code (x)
- Hague Conventions, Geneva Conventions & Protocol I (x)
- Bao Ninh, *The Sorrow of War*(1991)
- fr *War Zones: Voices from the World's Killing Fields* (x)

10. Censorship, Freedom of Expression, and Dissent

- Vaclav Havel, *Protest*
- PEN Testimonials
- *The Rushdie Affair*(x)
- Cases (x)

11. Colonialism and Apartheid

- Franz Fanon, fr *The Wretched of the Earth*(HRR)
- Athol Fugard, *Master Harold and the Boys*
- Jamaica Kincaid, *A Small Place*

12. Gender Discrimination/Violence

- Vienna and Beijing Declarations (1993, 1995) (HRR)
- Marilyn French, *The War Against Women*(x)
- Nawal El Saadawi, *Woman at Point Zero*
- Alice Walker, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*(1992)

13. Genocide II

- Roy Gutman, fr *Witness to Genocide*(1993) (x)
- Philip Gourevitch, fr *We Wish to Inform You...* (1998) (x)
- Testimonials (x)
- Cases (x)

14. Conclusion

Requirements

The course will be run as a combination lecture/seminar. Students are expected to participate in discussions and may be asked to give brief presentations. There is a 5-7pp. paper due on Tuesday Nov. 24 in 602 Philosophy Hall at 5:00pm, and an exam (a range of possible essay questions will be predistributed; some of these will appear on the exam). Students may opt to take the exam for credit only, and write a long research paper in addition, with the permission of the instructor (one-paragraph proposal due Oct. 26th in class).

Books

The following books have been ordered at Labyrinth Books, 536 W. 112th St. (Bwy/Amst):

1. *The Human Rights Reader*, ed. Micheline R. Ishay (Routledge)
2. *Doc = 25 Human Rights Documents*(Columbia Center for the Study of Human Rights)
3. *Beloved*, Toni Morrison, NAL/Dutton
4. *The Jungle*, Upton Sinclair
5. *1984*, George Orwell
6. *Survival in Auschwitz*, Primo Levi , Simon & Schuster
7. *Night*, Eli Wiesel
8. *Death and the Maiden*, Ariel Dorfman, Viking Penguin
9. *The Trial*, Franz Kafka, Schocken or Random House
10. *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, Thiongs Ngugi-Wa
11. *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, A. Solzenitsyn, NAL/Dutton
12. *The Sorrow of War*, Bao Ninh, Berkeley Publishing Grp
13. *Protest*, Vaclav Havel
14. *Master Harold and the Boys*, Athol Fugard
15. *A Small Place*, Jamaica Kincaid
16. *Woman at Point Zero*, Nawal El Saadawi
17. *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, Alice Walker, Pocket Books