

Human Rights and Media, SIS 395-005 and COMM 396
American University, Fall 2005
Thurs. 5:30pm-8:00pm
Professor Julie Mertus

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Office hours:

Thurs: 3:00-5:20 (in office)
Wed: 2:30-4:30, with later hours by request

Syllabus

Course Description:

Through the close study of documentary films and other audio-visual material, this course introduces the concept of human rights issues. The course features close study of films and readings, with guest speakers drawn from the fields of documentary and human rights to explore specific human rights issues, such as the development of human rights strategies in U.S. foreign policy, the use of military force in the name of human rights, the role of the United Nations in human rights promotion, and the changing nature of human rights activism. Students examine how audio-visual material, especially the documentary form, play a global watchdog role and both inform and persuade human rights stakeholders. "Information intervention" thus is seen through the lens of human rights principles.

Course Goals:

This course is designed to help students hone their analytical thinking and writing skills. In addition, after having taken this course, students should be able to:

- Understand key concepts on human rights;
- Think critically about the role of the media in human rights promotion;
- Identify ethical dilemmas facing journalists, filmmakers and other media professionals;
- Discuss current topics on human rights with greater understanding and skill.

Grading and Assignments:

- 20% -- Attendance and participation. Quality of participation counts more than quantity. When possible, please refer to readings and films with specificity.
- 25% -- In-class exam on human rights concepts in first third of class.
- 25% -- Take-home exam on films and readings in first two-thirds of class.

- 30% -- Take-home final (either design advocacy campaign or choose two out of three take-home questions).

Readings:

Nearly all readings will be on Blackboard or the Web. The exceptions are the following books which you may wish to purchase, borrow or read on library reserve:

Erlick, June Carolyn, *Disappeared: A Journalist Silenced*, ISBN: 1580051138

Gregory, Sam et. al., eds, *Video for Change: A How-to Guide* (Pluto Press, 1995---not available until Oct.)

Kassenoff, Miriam Klien and Meinbach, Anita Meyer, *Studying the Holocaust Through Film and Literature: Human Rights and Social Responsibility*, ISBN: 1929024762 (note: we will use only about a quarter of this book)

Mertus, Julie, *Bait and Switch: Human Rights and U.S. Foreign Policy*

Price, Monroe E. (Editor), Thompson, Mark (Editor), *Forging Peace: Intervention, Human Rights, and the Management of Media Space* ISBN: 0253215730 (relevant sections on reserve)

CLASS SCHEDULE

Sept. 1 -- Intro to Human RIGHTS – part one

Reading/Assignment:

Merry, Sally Engle, “Rights Talk and the Experience of Law: Implementing Women's Human Rights to Protection from Violence,” *Human Rights Quarterly*, vol. 26, n. 4

Mertus, Julie, *Bait and Switch: Human Rights and U.S. Foreign Policy*, ch. 2

Consider the following questions before class:

What are human rights? Why does “human rights discourse” wield so much power these days? How does a person come to understand his or her problems in terms of rights? How do movements like the battered women's movement rely on rights awareness to advance their goals? How does a government come to understand their problems in human rights terms? What has been the role of human rights in U.S. foreign policy?

In-class: no film; exercises and powerpoint

Sept. 8 --Intro to Human RIGHTS – part two

Reading/Assignment:

Mertus, Julie, *Bait and Switch: Human Rights and U.S. Foreign Policy*, chs. 3, 4, 5

Consider the following questions before class:

What are the various ways in which human rights are enforced? What role does the U.S. military play in human rights enforcement? The role of religious groups? Single-issue advocacy campaigns? Multi-issues nongovernmental organizations? How could human rights enforcement be made more effective and consistent?

In-class: no film; exercises and powerpoint, guest speaker

Sept. 15 -- THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE MEDIA TO WITNESS

Reading/ Assignment:

Basoli, A.G., “Redefining Human Rights: The Human Rights Watch International Film Festival” (An article from: Cineaste)

Hamelink, Cees J., “Introduction: human rights and the media” (An article from: Critical Arts]

Additional reading to be assigned based on specifications of guest speaker

****ASSIGNMENT:** Surf the Web for examples of human rights advocacy. Choose one organization and analyze the approaches taken. Who is the primary audience for this organization? How does the group try to reach its audience? To what extent is media involved? What are your suggestions for future use of media by this organization.

In-class: Guest speaker from HRW/MDRI, Film TBA

Sept 16, 2pm – Special Event -- Filmmaker Jos du Putter (Weschler auditorium) –

Extra credit for attendance and completion of 3-4 page reaction paper. (A well-done paper excuses one missed class or, if perfect attendance, raises any exam grade by up one mark – i.e., B+ to A-).

Sept 22 – STUDYING THE HOLOCAUST THROUGH FILM

Reading/Assignment:

Studying the Holocaust Through Film and Literature: Human Rights and Social Responsibility (topic 3, pp. 45-58; topic 4, pp. 59-74; topic 7, pp. 111-238; topic 9, pp. 151-164)

Consider the questions contained in the text and the teaching methodology. Which exercises are most effective and why? What suggestions would you make for a teacher using film as a way of encouraging high school students to think about the lessons of the Holocaust?

In-class: Guest from Holocaust Museum; and film: Legacy of Nuremberg

Sept. 29 -- JOURNALIST AND ACTIVISTS AS TARGETS

***IN-CLASS EXAM – FIRST HALF OF CLASS**

Reading/Assignment:

Erlick, June Carolyn, *Disappeared: A Journalist Silenced*
Come prepared to discuss the book in depth.

Film: *Veronica Guerin* (2003)

Taut, true story from director Joel Schumacher ("Phone Booth") stars Cate Blanchett as the title heroine, a journalist for Dublin, Ireland's Sunday Independent. The film chronicles the events that led to her 1996 murder, after she cultivated key underworld sources in order to pursue powerful drug dealers and mobsters, which she exposed in her newspaper. Gerard McSorley, Ciaran Hinds also star. 98 min.

Oct. 6-- Filmmakers Challenging State Terror

Reading/Assignment:

Human Rights Watch, When Tyrants Tremble: The Pinochet Case
<http://www.hrw.org/reports/1999/chile/>

Amnesty International, Pimochet Page,
<http://www.amnesty.org/ailib/intcam/pinochet/>

****ASSIGNMENT** : Use the Web to investigate the latest on the Pinochet case and come prepared to discuss it.

Film:

State of Fear by Paco de Onís, Pam Yates and Peter Kinoy

A gripping and beautifully-crafted story of the creation of President Alberto Fujimori's terror state in Peru, with lessons for a world grappling with the problem of stability in the face of terror. The feature-length documentary, by the celebrated filmmakers of ***When the Mountains Tremble***, shows how the Shining Path guerrilla movement led to military occupation and government corruption in the name of protection from terrorists. Filmmakers Paco de Onís and Pam Yates will be present to discuss the film.

Oct. 13—ETHICAL CHALLENGES TO MEDIA PROFESSIONALS

Reading/Assignment:

See articles on Media Rights Web page -- <http://www.mediarights.org/> -- Identify three instances in which ethical dilemmas arise. Explain the nature of the dilemmas. How does the media make hard choices concerning coverage of human rights issues?

Film:

Amandla!: A Revolution In Four-Part Harmony (2002)

The profound effect of music on the eventual dissolution of apartheid in South Africa is the subject of this stirring documentary. Interviews with those on both sides of the conflict, as well as archival footage of Nelson and Winnie Mandela, F.W. de Klerk and Jesse Jackson, are used to illustrate the crucial role protest songs played in the nearly 50-year struggle of the nation's black citizenry. 103 min.

Oct. 20-- MEDIA INTERVENTION (state intervention to control media).

***TAKE-HOME EXAM HANDED OUT (it includes material up to and including Oct. 20)**

Reading:

Price, Monroe E. (ed.) and Thompson, Mark (ed.), *Forging Peace: Intervention, Human Rights, and the Management of Media Space* (chapter focus TBA)

Consider before class your position on “media intervention” and be prepared to debate it.

Film: ***Sometimes in April***

Written and directed by Raoul Peck

In April, 1994 in Rwanda, nearly one million people were massacred over one

hundred days by Hutu nationalists trying to exert power over their countrymen, the Tutsis. The fiction film, *Sometimes in April*, focuses on the consequences of this atrocity on two Hutu Brothers, one reluctantly in the military, and the other a nationalist radio personality. By jumping back and forth between the present and 1994, this chilling drama explores both the extent of human brutality, and courage under overwhelming pressure, as well as the West's lack of action while the genocide was taking place.

Oct. 27-- The power of storytelling

***TAKE HOME EXAM DUE ***

Film:

Videoletters - by Katarina Rejger and Eric van den Broek

Whether it's a young man looking for his lost childhood friend or a mother looking for her children's graves, these short TV programs show the reconciling power of storytelling across borders. Dutch filmmakers worked in the Balkans with former friends and neighbors, who were separated as a result of war. Videoletters reunited them, and those dramatically-charged half-hour TV shows told the world about them. The TV series has created waves in the ex-Yugoslavia, where five national TV stations unprecedentedly agreed to air them simultaneously and where talk shows, internet kiosks and a bus tour of rural areas extended the storytelling.

Nov. 3 --Witnessing and Social Change Activism

Reading: Video for Change

Film: *Human Rights in Burma*. WITNESS is the pioneering nonprofit organization that uses video for social change, links film and video to the Internet, and that has changed how human rights activists think about film and video! This collection of short videos showcases the best of WITNESS's latest strategies, and shows what's happening under Than Shwe and the SPDC's brutal military dictatorship in Burma.

Nov. 10 -- REPORTING ON TORTURE

Reading: Weschler, *A Miracle, an Universe* (excerpt)

Film: Either "**Interrogation**" (Poland) or "**Missing**" (Chile)

Nov. 18, 2pm – Special Event -- Filmmaker Patricio Guzman (Weschler auditorium) –

Extra credit for attendance and completion of 3-4 page reaction paper. (A well-done paper excuses one missed class or, if perfect attendance, raises any exam grade by up one mark – i.e., B+ to A-).

Dec. 1 – Education for Change/ Return to Activism

TAKE-HOME FINAL HANDED OUT

Reading: (TBA), Dave Johnson, Guest speaker

Film: *Born into brothels*

Academy Award-winning documentary from Zana Briski and Ross Kauffman presents portraits of children whose mothers work as prostitutes in the red light district of Calcutta, India. After the filmmakers give the adolescents cameras to photograph their views of the sordid world around them, they discover how beauty can be found in the underbelly of society. 95 min.

Dec. 8 – Wrap-Up and Synthesis

***TAKE-HOME FINAL DUE**

Film- *In this world* (2002)

From director Michael Winterbottom ("24 Hour Party People") comes a shattering docudrama concerning a pair of Afghan boys who attempt to flee their refugee camp in Pakistan. Suddenly thrown into a dangerous world of human trafficking, the boys courageously face countless obstacles as they travel through Iran, Turkey, Italy, and France with hopes of finding a better life in England. Jamal Udin Torabi, Enayatullah, Imran Paracha star. 88 min.