

Media, Politics and Intervention: Responding to Human Rights Abuses

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Wednesday 6:30pm-9:20pm

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Course Description

There is a belief that media attention can shame people into stopping human rights abuses. Yet, when examining reality: from past “genocides” to current “unexplained killings” to ongoing systemic “abuses” - we know that media attention alone is not sufficient. This course will explore how intervention – by individuals, domestic/international advocacy groups and governments – does or does not occur. The focus will be on the successful and unsuccessful combinations to provoke and sustain tangible respect for human rights.

Course Rationale

The vast majority of Columbia Students are future media makers and thus need to explore the effectiveness and limitations of publicity when covering political and social upheaval. This course will examine a variety of case studies where the American and international media played a significant role in covering various issues including: genocides in the 20th century; the “U.S. and European” military response in Kosovo; the international communities response to the American juvenile death penalty, the role that of religious communities/solidarity movements in response to “mass killings” in Central America and Sudan and youth lead alternative media in “countries of transition.” The course will also examine the rise of “indigenous-media” in reaching out to publicize “real time” human rights abuses (Indi-media, Chiapas Media Project, e-listserves), thus speaking directly to the international community without using formal journalists as intermediaries. This course will look at both American and international media – both traditional and underground. Various courses at Columbia including “Human Rights: History, Ideology and Spin,” introduced students the concepts, terminology and frameworks employed in the human rights field - this course will now take the issue when step further in devising multilateral strategies for intervention. In exploring the role of publicity, we will also critically examine the subsequent efficacy in promoting real change: introducing a human rights framework, publicizing specific abuses, offering solutions and ensuring that perpetrators are held accountable.

LAS Core Objectives:

This course bears Liberal Arts and Sciences (LAS) credit for Social Sciences. By taking this course you will complete three (3) of the required Culture, Values and Ethics credits

needed to graduate from Columbia College. In addition, the course will assist you in achieving the following LAS core objectives:

- Read for comprehension and pleasure
- Write as both a communicative and expressive practice
- Conduct research and as part of that process, learn to measure, evaluate and assess
- Reflect on and appreciate human endeavor across cultures and eras
- Consider and examine, historically and comparatively, human behavior, ethical issues and social institutions
- Utilize various tools of analysis to enable critical thinking
- Express themselves orally in a clear and effective manner

Course objectives:

- To critically analyze the role of media and their own power as future media makers to evoke social change
- To have a more complex understanding of international relations, transnational actors and individual activists in provoking large scale change
- To better understand the role of economics, politics, and culture when analyzing human rights abuses and responses
- To use critical thinking in exploring historical and contemporary case studies
- To conduct an independent research project regarding analyzing human rights abuses

Prerequisites:

Must have completed composition II **and** either Human Rights: History, Ideology and Spin, Contemporary European Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict, The Holocaust, US Foreign Policy, Urban Images in Media and Film, Interpretive Reporting, International Reporting, Culture, Race and Media, Documentary II **or** with permission of instructor

Required Texts (available at bookstore):

Power, Samantha, "A Problem from Hell: America and the Age of Genocide", Perennial Books, 2002

Ignatieff, Michael, "Virtual War: Kosovo and Beyond," Picador USA, 2000

Downing, John D. Downing, "Radical Media: Rebellious Communication and Social Movements," Sage 2001.

US Human Rights Network, "Something Inside so Strong: A Resource Guide on Human Rights in the US" 2003 (**will be provided by instructor**)

Excerpts and Articles (will be provided by instructor)

Power, Samantha, "Dying in Darfur," *The New Yorker*, August 2004

Khagram, Riker, Sikkink, "Restructuring World Politics: Transnational Social Movements, Networks and Norms," University of Minnesota Press, 2002

Bernstein and Santora, "Ayslum Seekers Treated Poorly," New York Times, February 8, 2005

Bunting, "Humiliated Once More," The Guardian, July 4, 2005

Shohat and Stam, "Unthinking Eurocentricism," Routledge, 1994

Chomsky and Herman, "Worthy vs. Unworthy Victims," in Manufacturing Consent, Pantheon Books, 1988

Academic Integrity:

Columbia College Chicago prohibits the following conduct: all forms of academic dishonesty including cheating, plagiarism, knowingly furnishing false information to the college, forgery, alteration, or fraudulent use of college documents, instruments, or identification.

Attendance Policy:

Attendance at all classes and sections, including all films and guest lectures, is *mandatory*. Students are expected to attend all classes and read the assignments so as to be prepared for class discussion. Experience shows that there is a direct relation between attendance and performance in the course. **If you have more than three absences, excused or unexcused, your grade will be severely affected. An excused absence means you contact the instructor, me, prior to your absence (barring an emergency and then you contact me as soon as possible) and I confirm your absence. You can reach me via email or phone. You are responsible for any class work or homework we go over/is due during your absence.**

Participation:

Active involvement in this course is imperative. We will be discussing many volatile issues, and it is vital that students do the assigned readings before the class, as well as be prepared to talk intelligently about it with others.

Syllabus is subject to change on based on the needs of the class and the assessment of the instructor.

Grading:

- The final project is a strategy/research paper regarding an ongoing human rights abuse/intervention taking place and the student's proposed solution. The student will be graded on utilizing the framework of media, legal and domestic intervention along with the analysis of economic conditions, cultural myths and political implications/real politick taken into account. This will be modeled after a project proposal. **Total of 100 points.**
- There will be an oral presentation of the strategy for human rights intervention. This will be modeled after a seminar "working paper." **Total 50 points**
- There will be an ongoing reading log covering the main topics addressed in the readings and class. **Total 50 points.**
- There will be two quizzes worth 25 points each for a **total of 50 points**
- There will be two required interviews worth 25 points each for a **total of 50 points.**
- Extra Credit: I offer **up to 20 points of extra credit.** If you want extra credit, you must discuss it with me personally. **Extra credit will be due by April 26th.**

Total: 300 points

January 25

ROLE OF MEDIA IN HUMAN RIGHTS COVERAGE – Positive overview

- Civil Rights movement in the united states (power of pictures)
- Anti Vietnam War movement in the United States (power of television)
- Anti sweat shop movement in the united states (power of digital age media)

Homework – write about a human rights abuse that you learned about, either in the U.S. or internationally through the media. Did it affect your behavior at all?

February 1

ROLE OF MEDIA IN HUMAN RIGHTS COVERAGE – Passive response

- Questions
- Armenian genocide (video) – isolationism, off the radar screen
- Forsaken Cries (video) – Rwanda, wasn't strategically important
- Economic Human Rights Abuses in the United States – rhetoric/cultural spin

Homework: Read "Worthy and Unworthy Victims," (pg 37-86) in Manufacturing Consent, Powers, "Dying in Darfur"

February 8

ROLE OF SHAME VERSUS IDENTIFYING ACTORS

- Questions
- What is our belief in the power of the media? What are the limits?
- How do we receive our information about human rights abuses – how do we analyze it?
- Who is responsible for human rights abuses? Why can this get very confusing?
- How do we propose solutions?

Homework: Powers, "A Problem from Hell," Page 1-60, Khagram, Riker and Sikkink, "Restructuring world politics," Part II

February 15

BUT IT IS SO FAR AWAY – AND IT'S SO POLITICAL

- Questions
- Exploring how political alliances can color our ideas of human rights abuses
- Coverage of East Timor versus that of Cambodia – real politick (video from Manufacturing Consent)

*Homework: Powers, 87-154 and 171-254, Write questions to Andrea Wenzel
MUST MEET WITH ME TO CHOOSE HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSE TO RESEARCH*

February 22

BUT THEY HAVE ALWAYS HATED EACH OTHER

- Questions
- Exploring the role of race/ethnicity and ignorance in explaining human rights abuses
- Analyzing how human rights abuses are covered in mainstream media and in intellectual discourse
- Guest lecture by Andrea Wenzel of WBEZ

Homework: Powers, 247-328, 391-441

March 1

BUT WHAT CAN WE DO? SHOULD WE REALLY INTERFERE?

- Questions
- Somalia (get footage of the soldiers being dragged)
- Understanding why there was no response in Rwanda or Bosnia
- Break into groups – one analyzes the economic conditions, the cultural myths, the political implications/real politick, and the media

Homework: Powers, Page 60-85, 155-169, 475-516, study for Quiz (historical and factual), questions for Sita Balthazar

March 8

POTENTIALS FOR LEGAL INTERVENTION

- Quiz
- Guest lecturer by Sita Balthazar in the use of the genocide convention and the war crimes tribunals in Rwanda

Homework: Powers 440-473 and Ignatieff, "Virtual War," page 11-87

March 15

MILITARY INTERVENTION

- Questions
- Discussing Kosovo in terms of: economic conditions, cultural myths real politick and media, compare to Rwanda
- Role of shame, role of identifiable (and vilified actors)
- Response to intervention – role of nationalist media, B92, international media, war crimes tribunals, how society is now.

Homework: Finish reading Ignatieff's Page 91-215, Downing, "Radical Media," pg 75- 96.

March 22 – SPRING BREAK

March 29

CONSEQUENCES OF INTERVENTION

- Questions
- Problem of Roma in Kosovo
- Refugee Problems regarding Rwanda
- Welfare to Work in the United States

Homework: "Closer to Home," Page 44-70, Downing 23-66, Study for quiz

April 5

ROLE OF INDIGENOUS (DOMESTIC) MEDIA IN DOCUMENTING

- Questions
- Quiz (responses to human rights abuses)
- "Seeing is Believing" (film)
- Role of media as documentation, fact and propaganda

Homework: Write questions to Alex Halkin and Chris Genovanis (Chiapas Media Project and Indy Media), view www.chiapasmediaproject.org and www.indymedia.org.

April 12

PRACTITIONERS OF INDIGENOUS MEDIA

- Chris Giovaness (Indy Media)
- Alex Halkin (Chiapas Media Project)

Homework: Prepare for presentations (1/2 the class). READING LOG DUE NEXT CLASS

April 19

- Questions
- Turn in reading log
- Presentations for ½ the class

Homework: If you gave a presentation, incorporate ideas and revisions. If you didn't, prepare for presentations.

April 26

- Questions
- Presentations for ½ the class

Homework: Read "Something Inside so Strong." Read Grillo, "Mexico Blasted for Killings in Juarez," re: Ciudad Juarez versus Bunting, "Humiliated Once More," by as case studies of agency

May 3

DOMESTIC INTERVENTION – ROLE OF PEOPLE???

- Questions
- What is the role of local activists/NGOs in intense periods of human rights abuses?
- Reviewing discussions on Armenians, Holocaust, Cambodia, Iraq, Rwanda, Bosnia and Kosovo – where were the people's voices? – Break up and discuss
- Last minute questions on paper

Homework: Final strategy paper due

May 10th

TYING IT ALL TOGETHER

- Role of documentation, agitation and boomerang theory in responding to human rights abuses
- Role of international advocacy community and domestic (indigenous) community in intervention. Dependency theory.
- Going over grade