

**HIST 4DD6**  
**HUMAN RIGHTS IN AFRICA: HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES**

Department of History  
McMaster University  
Fall/Winter 2007/8

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**Class Time:** F11.30

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(or by appointment)



**Course Description**

The subject of human rights has become a theme of popular academic interest and has become the dominant language for public good around the world. It has become the language of choice for making and contesting entitlement claims, spawning what has been described as a global human rights revolution. In this course, we examine human rights in Africa from a historical perspective. We begin with a discussion of the concepts and theories of human rights such as the debate over universalism and cultural relativism. We then proceed to examine various themes in African history from a human rights perspective -- the slave trade, European missionary activities, colonialism, nationalism, independence and post-colonial nation-building. We examine the debates over "native" and "aboriginal" rights in the colonial Africa. In the Post-colonial context, we examine how independence has shaped human rights conditions in the continent, focusing on major themes such as the legal framework for human rights protection, Apartheid in South Africa and the Rwandan genocide.

The course is intended as a comparative study of human rights. Although our focus is on Africa, we will compare human rights discourses and experiences in Africa with other parts of the world. The objective is to enable the student to develop values of critical, objective and balanced examination of facts relating to Africa, its people and societies. The course is also intended to provide students with an understanding of African historiography and human rights theory as well as the ability to conduct independent research in these fields. The course is based on a combination of seminar readings and discussions directed by students on a rotating basis. It will also draw on primary and secondary historical sources, literary works and short film clips.

**Required Texts**

- 4DD6 Courseware

**Recommended Texts**

- Bonny Ibhawoh, Imperialism and Human Rights.
- Erik Gilbert and Jonathan T. Reynolds, Africa and the World: From Prehistory to the Present
- Kevin Shillington, History of Africa.

**Internet Resources**

- <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/africa/africasbook.html>
- <http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/africa/features/storyofafrica/>
- <http://allafrica.com/>
- <http://www.doj.gov.za/trc/>

**Course Requirements**

Seminar Presentation/Reflection papers (10% x 2)	20% (Due one week after presentation)
Seminar Participation	20%
Historiographic Review (Term 1)	20% Due Nov. 22
Research Paper (Term 2)	40% Due March 14

## **Course Policies**

### **Seminar Presentation/Facilitation**

Each student will sign up for 2 seminar topics (1 each term) during the first two weeks of the term and will be required to make a seminar presentation on the selected topic and readings. The presenters (usually two for each week) will be responsible for leading the seminar discussion for the week focusing on the main issues or ideas covered in the readings and raise questions for the class to discuss. The actual presentation should take no more than 30 minutes and ample time should be left for class discussion. The presenter/facilitator will subsequently write and submit a 2-3-page reflection paper outlining his/her own interpretations of the assigned readings and class discussions. Reflection papers are due in class a week after the presentation.

Assessment of seminar presentation will be based on both oral presentation and reflection paper following these criteria: evidence of preparation and understanding of the material, coverage of the material, clarity of thought and expression, quality of discussion/questions and time management.

*Weight: 20%*

### **Seminar Participation**

Active and meaningful participation is expected of all students. All students are expected to do the assigned readings and come prepared to for class discussions on the topic of the week.

Assessment of seminar participation will be based on the frequency, quality and relevance of contributions and questions. *Weight: 20%*

### **Historiographic Review**

If history is the study of “man” through the evidence of the past, historiography is the practical and philosophical process of recovering that past. In this course we will concern ourselves not only with the African past but also the process of recovering that past. In the first term students will find 2 books and 2 academic articles from peer-reviewed *historical* journals that address specific themes in African history upon which they intend to write their second term research paper. Historiographic reviews should not simply be summaries of the author’s arguments. Reviews should explore the manner in which historians have approached and examined the subject, the different points of view or schools of thought that they have advanced, and the ways that historians have interpreted available evidence to support their arguments. Attention should also be paid to any connections or contrasts between the reviewed books and articles. Materials already assigned for this course are not eligible for review. For a list of journal on African History available at McMaster Libraries see page 7 of this outline. You need not limit yourself to these journals. Historiographic reviews should be approximately 2500 words (10-12 pages) and are due on **Nov. 22**. *Weight 20%*

### **Research Paper**

This is the major writing assignment for this course. Research papers should be on a topic on any aspect of this course but must be approved by the instructor. In writing the paper, it is expected that some primary sources will be used and references drawn from the historiographic review undertaken in the first term. Papers should be no more than 5000 words long, typed originals in 12-point font, double-spaced. Pages within the body of the paper must be numbered. The student should keep a back up electronic and paper copy to guard against loss or computer malfunction. Students are also encouraged to keep their research notes. Assignments are to be handed to the instructor in class. Assignments submitted after the due date will be reduced by 5 percent per day (including weekends) unless an extension had been granted PRIOR to the due date. Research papers are due on **March 14**. *Weight 40%*

### **Academic Integrity**

*Statement of Academic Integrity and Dishonesty:*

McMaster University and the Department of History state unequivocally that it demands scholarly integrity from all its members. Academic dishonesty, in whatever form, is ultimately destructive of

the values of higher learning; furthermore, it is unfair and discouraging to those students who pursue their studies honestly. Academic dishonesty consists of misrepresenting by deception or by other fraudulent means and can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: "Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty"), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university. It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty. For information on the various kinds of academic dishonesty please refer to the Academic Integrity Policy, specifically Appendix 3, located at: [http://www.mcmaster.ca/senate/academic/ac\\_integrity.htm](http://www.mcmaster.ca/senate/academic/ac_integrity.htm)

## **COURSE SCHEDULE AND SEMINAR READINGS**

### **TERM 1**

#### **1. September 7**

##### **Introduction to the Course**

#### **2. September 14**

##### **Africa in History**

How do we approach the study of African history?

- Eric Gilbert and Jonathan Reynolds, "Preface: Notions of Africa" in Africa in World History (p. 3).
- "The Uses and Abuses of History," The Economist (p. 7)  
(These readings are central to our historiographical discussion in this class)

#### **3. September 21**

##### **Conceptual and Theoretical Debates: What are Human Rights? - 1**

What are human rights? Upon which principles and ideas is the concept of human rights based?

- "Human Rights Law: The Conscience of Mankind" The Economist (p. 15)
- Evelyn Kallen, "The Human Rights Perspective" in Social Inequality and Social Injustice (p. 19).
- Sayom Brown, "Introduction," Human Rights in World Politics (p. 37).

#### **4. September 28**

##### **Conceptual and Theoretical Debates: What are Human Rights? - 2**

What are the major conceptual and theoretical debates in the field of human rights?

- Alison Dundes Renteln, "The Concept of Human Rights" in International Human Rights (p. 25)
- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (p. 45). [Research the history of the UDHR]

#### **5. October 5**

##### **The African Perspective on Human Rights - 1**

Are human rights universal or are they culturally relative? If they are culturally relative, can we argue for an African concept of Human rights?

- Bonny Ibhawoh, "Restraining Universalism: Africanist Perspectives on Cultural Relativism in the Human Rights Discourse," in Human Rights, the Rule of Law and Development in Africa (p. 57).
- Josiah A.M. Cobbah, "African Values and the Human Rights Debate: An African Perspective", Human Rights Quarterly (p. 67).

#### **6. October 12**

##### **The African Perspective on Human Rights - 2**

What are the attributes of the "African Concept of human rights?" What are its strengths and limitations?

- Bonny Ibhawoh, Imperialism and Human Rights, Chapter 1 (The Subject of Rights and the Rights of Subjects)
- Kwasi Wirdu, “An Akan Perspective on Human Rights” in Human Rights in Africa (p. 91).

## **7. October 19**

### **Slavery and Human Rights - 1**

Can the institution of Slavery and Atlantic Slave trade be examined and understood from a human rights perspective?

- Philip Curtin, “The Tropical Atlantic in the Age of the Slave Trade,” in Islamic and European Expansion: The Forging of a Global Order (p. 103).

#### *Primary Documents*

- “Olaudah Equiano (1745-97), in Pan African History (p. 133).
- Olaudah Equiano, The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa the African (excerpts). (p. 137).

## **8. October 26**

### **Slavery and Human Rights - 2**

What are the legacies of the Slave Trade? What are their implications for contemporary human rights?

- Bonny Ibhawoh, Imperialism and Human Rights, (The Antislavery Movement/ The ‘Native House Rule’ Debate). pp. 44-54.
- Rhoda Howard-Hassmann and Anthony Lombardo, “Framing Reparations Claims: Differences between the African and Jewish Social Movements for Reparations,” African Studies Review. (p. 211)

#### *Primary Document*

- Affonso of Congo, “Evils of the Slave Trade” in The African Past (p. 129).  
- *Film: The Bible and the Gun (Examines the Atlantic Slave Trade)*

## **9. November 2**

### **Rights and Liberties under Colonial Rule - 1**

How did colonialism operate? What were the conditions and discourses about human rights under colonial rule?

- Adu Boahen, “The Operation of the Colonial System” in African Perspectives on Colonialism (p. 145).
- Theresa Barnes, “Am I a Man?” Gender and the Pass Laws in Urban Colonial Zimbabwe, 1930-80,” African Studies Review (p. 163).
- Bonny Ibhawoh, Imperialism and Human Rights, Chapter 3 (Stronger than the Maxim Gun)

## **10. November 9**

### **Rights and Liberties under Colonial Rule - 2**

How did colonial economic and social policies affect individual and collective rights and liberties?

- Alice L. Conklin, “Colonialism and Human Rights, A Contradiction in Terms? The Case of France and West Africa” The American Historical Review (p. 187).
- Excerpts from Adam Hochschild, King Leopold’s Ghost

## **11. November 16**

### **Nationalist Movements and Decolonization - 1**

What were the moral and legal foundations of anti-colonial nationalist movements? Were nationalist movements also human rights movements?

- Bill Freund, “The Decolonization of Africa” in The Making of Contemporary Africa (p. 235).
- Julius Nyagoro, “Africa’s Road to Independence” in Africana Studies (p. 259).  
- *Film: The Rise of Nationalism*

## 12. November 23

### **Nationalist Movements and Decolonization - 2**

How did WW II and post-war developments affect human rights in the colonies?

- Bonny Ibhawoh, Imperialism and Human Rights, Chapter 6 (Citizens of the World's Republic)
- Joyce M.Chadya, "Mother Politics: Anti-colonial Nationalism and the Woman Question in Africa", Journal of Women's History (Available on JSOR database)

## 13. November 30

### **Human Rights Struggles in the Post-Colonial State - 1**

What were the changes and continuities in human rights conditions after independence?

- James C. N. Paul "Participatory Approaches to Human Rights in Sub-Saharan Africa," in Human rights in Africa: cross-cultural perspectives (p. 273).
- Ahmed Thabet, "The Human Rights Situation in Egypt," in Human rights, the rule of law, and development in Africa (p. 287).



## TERM 2

### 1. January 11

#### **Human Rights Struggles in the Post-Colonial State - 2**

How have rights been addressed in the post colonial state?

- James C. N. Paul "Participatory Approaches to Human Rights in Sub-Saharan Africa," in Human rights in Africa: cross-cultural perspectives (p. 213).
- Makau Mutua, "The Banjul Charter: The Case for an African Cultural Fingerprint" in Cultural Transformation and Human Rights (p. 297).

*Primary Document*

- African Charter on Human and People's Rights in The Human Rights Reader (p. 315).

### 2. January 18

#### **Cultural Traditions and the Promotion of Human Rights - 1**

How do prevailing cultural traditions in Africa affect the promotion of human rights?

- "Survey: Human Rights Law: Controversies and Culture," The Economist (p. 325)
- Bonny Ibhawoh "Between Culture and Constitution: Evaluating the Cultural Legitimacy of Human Rights in the African State", Human Rights Quarterly (p. 331).

### 3. January 25

#### **Cultural Traditions and the Promotion of Human Rights – 2**

Do local cultures strengthen or weaken universal human rights standards?

- James Silk, "Traditional Culture and Prospects for Human Rights in Africa" in Human Rights in Africa (p. 355).
- Bissam Tibi, "The European Tradition of Human Rights and the Culture of Islam" in Human Rights in Africa (Available from instructor)

### 4. February 1

#### **Human Rights Promotion: the Role of Non-State Actors - 1**

What has been the role of "human rights defenders" in addressing human rights issues in Africa?

- Groups of students will report on the work of major human rights NGOs like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. (See websites)
- “The Power of Publicity,” The Economist (p. 377)
- Susan Waltz, “Making Waves: The Political Impact of Human Rights Groups in North Africa”, The Journal of Modern African Studies (p. 405).

## **5. February 8**

### **Human Rights Promotion: the Role of Non-State Actors - 2**

What are the successes and limitation of human rights organisations in Africa and the developing world?

- Dorothy L. Hodgson, “Women’s Rights as Human Rights: Women in Law and Development (WILDAF)”, Africa Today (p. 381).
- Makau Mutua, “African Human Rights Organisations: Questions of Context and Legitimacy,” in Human rights, the rule of law, and development in Africa (p. 429)
- Bonny Ibhawoh, “Human Rights INGOs, the North/South Gap and the Challenge of Normative and Empirical Learning” in Ethics in Action (p. 433).

## **6. February 15**

### **Case Studies in Human Rights Struggles: Apartheid in South Africa - 1**

How did Apartheid represent the institutionalization of gross human rights violations?

- Vincent Khapoya, “South Africa,” The African Experience: An Introduction (p. 445).
- Mtutuzeli Matshoba, Call me not a man, and other stories (p. 461)
- Lyn S. Graybill, “Setting up the TRC” Truth and reconciliation in South Africa (p. 467).
- Lyn S. Graybill, “Storytelling” Truth and reconciliation in South Africa (p. 473)  
*Film: Long Night’s Journey into Day / In my Country*

## **February 22 - MIDTERM RECESS**

## **7. February 29**

### **Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa - 2**

How do states and societies redress past human rights abuses? How effective are truth commissions in upholding Human Rights accountability and preventing future abuses?

- Emily H. McCarthy, “Will the amnesty Process Foster Reconciliation among South Africans?” in When sorry isn’t enough (p. 485).
- Eric K. Yamamoto and Susan K. Serrano, “Healing Racial Wounds? The Final Report of the South African TRC” in When sorry isn’t enough (p. 489)
- Richard Wilson, “Challenging Restorative Justice”, and response by Bonny Ibhawoh Human Rights Dialogue, (p. 481)

#### *Primary Documents*

- “Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Amnesty Hearing: The Testimony of Jefferey T. Benzein,” in When sorry isn’t enough (p. 495)
- “Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Amnesty Hearing: Affidavit and Testimony of Bassie Mkhumbuzi,” in When sorry isn’t enough (p.497).

## **8. March 7**

### **Case Studies in Human Rights Struggles: Genocide in Rwanda - 1**

What historical and contemporary circumstances led to the Rwandan Genocide? What role did domestic and international factors play?

- UN Convention on the Prevention of the Crime of Genocide (p. 543)
- Catharine Newbury, “Background to Genocide: Rwanda”, Issue (p. 503)
- Alison Des Forges, “The Ideology of Genocide”, Issue (p. 509)
- René Lemarchand, “Rwanda: The Rationality of Genocide,” Issue (p. 539)

- Film: *Shake Hands With The Devil: The Journey Of Romeo Dallaire*

### 9. **March 14** **Research Essay Due**

#### **Case Studies in Human Rights Struggles: Genocide in Rwanda - 2**

How do societies deal with the legacies of genocide?

- Peter Uvin, "Prejudice, Crisis, and Genocide in Rwanda," *African Studies Review* (p. 513).
- Excerpts from: Phillip Gourevitch, *We Wish to Inform You that Tomorrow We Will Be Killed With Our Families* (1998)
- Excerpts from: Roméo Dallaire, *Shake Hands with the Devil: The Failure of Humanity in Rwanda* (2003)

### **March 21 - HOLIDAY**

### 10. **March 28**

#### **Gender, AIDS and Human Rights**

What historical and contemporary conditions affect the status of women's rights in Africa?

- UN Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (p. 599)
- April Gordon, "Women and Development" in *Understanding contemporary Africa* (p. 549)
- Nakazael Tenga and Chris Maina Peter, "The Right to Organise as Mother of All Rights: The Experience of Women in Tanzania," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* (p. 563)
- Bonny Ibhawoh, "A Voice for Africa: Stephen Lewis and the Race against Time," *Journal of Canadian Studies* (p. 593).

### 11. **April 3**

#### **African States within the Universal Human Rights System/ Course Review**

- Bonny Ibhawoh, "Transformations and Constrictions: Globalization and Human Rights in the Third World" in *Globalization, Development and Human Security* (p. 611)



### **Resources**

*Journals on African History Available at the Mills Library*

[Africa: Journal of the International African Institute](#)

[African Affairs](#)

[Journal of the Royal African Society](#)

[African Issues](#)

[Issue: A Journal of Opinion](#)

[African Studies Review](#)

[African Studies Bulletin](#)

[Canadian Journal of African Studies](#)

[History in Africa](#)

[International Journal of African Historical Studies](#)

[African Historical Studies](#)

[Journal of African Cultural Studies](#)

[Journal of African History](#)

[Journal of Modern African Studies](#)

[Journal of Religion in Africa](#)

[Journal of Southern African Studies](#)

### **Relevant Books**

- Abdullahi Ahmed An-Naim and Francis Deng, eds. Human Rights in Africa: Cross Cultural Perspectives, (The Brookings Institution, Washington DC, 1990)
- An-Naim, Abdullahi Ahmed, ed. Cultural transformations and Human Rights in Africa.
- Makau Mutua, Human Rights: A Political and Cultural Critique, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002.
- Phillip Gourevitch, We Wish to Inform You that Tomorrow We Will Be Killed With Our Families (1998)
- Roméo Dallaire, Shake Hands with the Devil: The Failure of Humanity in Rwanda
- Stephen Lewis, Race Against Time: Searching For Hope in AIDS-Ravaged Africa
- Hochschild, Adam, King Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror and Heroism in Colonial Africa,
- Basil Davidson, Africa in Modern History
- Phillip Gourevitch, We Wish to Inform You that Tomorrow We Will Be Killed With Our Families (1998)

**Relevant Human Rights web sites**

- The University of Minnesota Human Rights Library - <http://www.umn.edu/humanrts/>
- Amnesty International - <http://www.amnesty.org>
- Human Rights Watch - <http://www.hrw.org>
- United Nations homepage - <http://www.un.org/>