

HR 101: Introduction to Human Rights

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An intensive introduction to contemporary discussions of human rights in a broad historical and theoretical context. We will examine the philosophical background of these contested categories, "human" and "right," and explore the political, social, cultural, and aesthetic dimensions of claims made in these terms. What are humans and what count as rights, if any? Where does the idea come from? We will ask about the foundations of rights claims; about legal and violent ways of advancing, defending and enforcing them; about the documents and institutions of the human rights movement; and about the questionable 'reality' of human rights in our world. Is there such a thing as "our" world? We will look at debates over the universality of rights, over humanitarian intervention and war crimes, over the limited or illimited character of rights, over terrorism and democracy, and over the links between rights and globalization, among other topics. Using contemporary news media sources, including screenings and the Internet, we will examine some difficult cases and troubled places, including our own. Readings from J.-J. Rousseau and Immanuel Kant, Nuruddin Farah and Hannah Arendt, David Rieff and Michael Ignatieff, Human Rights Watch and the American Civil Liberties Union.