

# **Human Rights and the Crisis of the International Order, 1945-2024**

Winter Semester 2025

**Michael Ignatieff**

Professor

Historical Studies Department, CEU

A master's level course in the history of human rights explaining the post 1945 construction of a new framework of international law: the Universal Declaration, the Nuremberg and Tokyo prosecutions for crimes against humanity, the Genocide Convention, the Geneva Conventions, and the Refugee Convention. Next, the course will look at the right to self-determination and its role in dismantling European colonialism in Africa and Asia. Two classes will be devoted to the 'rights revolution' in Western societies, civil rights in the US, feminism and gay liberation. A further class will consider how the language of human rights empowered resistance to Soviet rule in Eastern Europe in the 1980's. In the post 1989 period, a class will be devoted to the human rights costs of the 'war on terror'. Another class will examine 'humanitarian intervention' and the 'responsibility to protect' and the course will conclude by examining the crisis of the rules-based international legal order, the 'end times of human rights' and the re-emergence of claims of difference—by nation, race, creed, gender, and class-- that contest the authority of international law and the status of universal rights claims.

## **Biography**

Michael Ignatieff is Rector Emeritus and professor of historical studies at CEU.

He came to CEU after serving as Edward R. Murrow Chair of Press, Politics, and Public Policy at the Harvard Kennedy School. He served in the Canadian Parliament and was Leader of the Liberal Party. His books include *The Rights Revolution* (2000), *Human Rights as Politics and Idolatry* (2001), *The Lesser Evil: Political Ethics in an Age of Terror* (2004), *Fire and Ashes: Success and Failure in Politics* (2013), and *The Ordinary Virtues: Moral Order in a Divided World* (2017). His latest book is *On Consolation: Finding Solace in Hard Times*.(2021

**Class: Thursdays,10.50am-12.30pm**

All readings are available on Moodle. Class attendance is mandatory. Students are expected to do the reading and contribute to class discussion. Please inform the instructor if illness or urgent family matters require you to miss a class.

## Assignments

**30%** A 1000-word critical book report on one of the readings. **Due February 27, 5:00pm on Moodle.**

**50%.** A 3000-word essay on a human rights theme of your choice. An office hour meeting on the choice of topic is advisable. **Due Thursday April 10, 5:00 pm on Moodle.**

**20%.** Fifteen-minute group presentations, in the last 30 minutes of class on a theme related to the week's readings. Groups must meet with instructor or TA prior to presentation.

## Plagiarism

All work submitted by students must be written by them in their own words. Students must footnote all use of words, phrases or sentences taken from other sources. Students who pass off the work of others as if it were their own are guilty of plagiarism. The sanction for plagiarism is a failing grade in the course and a disciplinary proceeding.

The history department allows use of generative AI—Chat GPT, Bard, Bing etc—but students are responsible for declaring any use they make of it. Failure to do so is presumptive evidence of plagiarism. If generative AI is used at any stage in the composition of a text, the prompts used as input for the AI and a digital copy (pdf) of the AI's answer or output must be submitted along with any written work. The final version of written work must show clear evidence of expansion and elaboration regarding its academic form, content, and intellectual engagement with the subject.

## Office Hours After Class Thursday or by appointment

**B-205**

[ignatieffm@ceu.edu](mailto:ignatieffm@ceu.edu)

**TA**

[Mard\\_Sophia@phd.ceu.edu](mailto:Mard_Sophia@phd.ceu.edu)

## Syllabus

### **Week 1. Jan. 9. Human Rights Foundations**

Michael Ignatieff *Human Rights as Politics and Idolatry*, (1999), ps. 3-48

Moyn, Samuel. *The Last Utopia : Human Rights in History* (Harvard: 2010), epilogue.

### **Week 2. Jan 16. UDHR and the Genocide Convention**

Johannes Morsink *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights: Origins, Drafting, Intent* (1999), introduction, chapter 1, ps. ix-35

Mark A. Lewis' "The Genocide Convention: The Gutting of Preventative Measures, 1946–48" in *The Birth of the New Justice: The Internationalization of Crime and Punishment, 1919-1950* (2014) (pp. 181–228).

### **Week 3. Jan 23. Crimes Against Humanity: Nuremberg and Tokyo**

Gary Bass *Judgment at Tokyo* (2023), Introduction and ch. 29 "I am wholly dissenting."

David Luban "The Legacies of Nuremberg" in G. Mettraux (ed) *Perspectives on the Nuremberg Trial*, (Oxford, 2008), pp. 638-672

James Mark, Phil Clark "Not Nuremberg—Histories of Alternative Criminalization Paradigms, 1945–2021: An Introduction" *Humanity*, 15, 1, 2024, ps. 41-57

### **Week 4. Jan. 30. The Geneva Conventions and International Humanitarian Law**

Boyd Van Dijk *Preparing for War*, pp. 30-51.

Amanda Alexander "A Short History of International Humanitarian Law", *EJIL*, 26, 1, 2015, ps. 109-138

### **Week 5: Feb. 6 "The Right to have Rights" and the Refugee Convention**

UN International Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (1951)

Arendt, Hannah. *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, pp 267-302

*Abuya, Edwin O.; Krause, Ulrike; Mayblin, Lucy (2021) : The neglected colonial*

*legacy of the 1951 refugee convention*, International Migration, . 59, 4, pp. 265-267, (2021)

K. Kirisci “The 1951 Convention is Falling Short of its Mission” *Brookings*, July 26, 2021 <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-1951-refugee-convention-is-falling-short-of-its-mission-could-the-global-compact-on-refugees-help/>

### **Week 6. Feb. 13. Self-Determination and the End of Empire**

Burke, Roland. *Decolonization and the Evolution of International Human Rights*. The University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010; pp. 149-167

William Schabas “The International Legal Order’s Color Line” (2023)

Martin Luther King “The Birth of a New Nation,” Sermon Delivered at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church April 7, 1957.”

B.R. Ambedkar “Speech at Mahad” (1927)

### **Week 7: Feb. 20. Human Rights and the Cold War, 1975-89**

Foot, Rosemary. “The Cold War and Human Rights.” In *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, edited by Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad, 3:445–65. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010)

D.C. Thomas *The Helsinki Effect* (2001), ps. 257-288

Vaclav Havel “The Power of the Powerless” (1978)  
<https://hac.bard.edu/amor-mundi/the-power-of-the-powerless-vaclav-havel-2011-12-23>

## **FIRST ASSIGNMENT ASSIGNED**

### **Week 8: Feb 27 Human Rights and US Exceptionalism**

Sam Moyn *The Last Utopia*, prologue

Michael Ignatieff “American Exceptionalism and Human Rights” pp. 1-26

David Forsythe “Human Rights in U.S. Foreign Policy: Retrospect and Prospect” *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 105, No. 3 (1990), pp. 435-454

## FIRST ASSIGNMENT DUE

### Week 9: March 6. Gender Rights

Martha Nussbaum "Women's Progress and Women's Human Rights" *Human Rights Quarterly*, 38,3, August 2016, pp. 589-622

Laura Belmonte *The international LGBT rights movement: a history*, (London: 2021), pp. 107-70

### Week 10. March 13. Human Rights and Terrorism

Michael Ignatieff *The Lesser Evil: Political Ethics in an Age of Terror* (Princeton, 2004), pp. 1-24

Louise Richardson *What Terrorists Want*, (2007), pp. 3-20; pp. 71-103

### Week 11. March 20. Human Rights and 'Humanitarian Intervention'

International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS), 2001. *The Responsibility to Protect: Report of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty*. Ottawa: The International Development Research Centre. <https://undocs.org/pdf?symbol=en/A/57/303>

Annan, Kofi "Secretary-General Reflects On 'Intervention' In Thirty-Fifth Annual Ditchley Foundation Lecture | Meetings Coverage and Press Releases." 2021. Un.org. 2021. <https://www.un.org/press/en/1998/19980626.sgs6613.html>.

### Week 12. March 27. The End Times of Human Rights

Hopgood, Stephen. "Challenges to the Global Human Rights Regime: Are Human Rights Still an Effective Language for Social Change?" *International Journal of Human Rights*, (2014)

Kathryn Sikkink *Evidence for Hope: Making Human Rights Work in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, (Princeton, 2021), ps. 3-21

G. John Ikenberry "Why the Liberal World Order Will Survive", (2018)

J.J. Mearsheimer "Bound to Fail: The Rise and Fall of the Liberal International Order" (2019)

**Final Assignment Due April 10, 5:00pm**

