When the idea of human rights began to emerge, it assumed the exclusion of women, people of color, and LGBTQ people. Since then, however, the idea has been transformed in fundamental ways. Today, it underpins state and institutional responses to injustice around the world, including injustice rooted in gender and sexuality. In this course, we trace the history and sociology of human rights in relation to gender and sexuality around the world. How did human rights frameworks develop? How have theorists and activists challenged the fundamental assumptions of human rights frameworks and articulated them in new ways? How have human rights conflicted with, coexisted with, or superseded alternative visions of justice? How have human rights ideas been adapted around the world, and what conflicts have emerged in this process?

Human rights mean many things to many people. In the first part of the course, we will situate human rights in the history of Western social and political thought, and explore some of the debates that shaped human rights as we know it today. The second part compares distinct approaches to the relationship between human rights and gender. In the final part, we will consider major gender and human rights struggles in the United States—such as racial justice, reproductive rights, LGBTQ rights—as well as global human rights struggles over violence against women, labor rights, health and human rights, and militarization.

As we move through the course, we will use social science literature to consider each case broadly before delving into the complex task of articulating what a human rights analysis of the topic might look like. We will use a lens that tries to be attentive to the dynamic relationship between gender, sexuality, race, class, and geopolitics. We will read sociologists, anthropologists, political theorists, historians, and legal scholars in conversation with one another. This course does not seek easy solutions, but rather rigorous analysis, careful reading, and creative questions.

**LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

By the end of this course, you should be able to:

- Explain the history of human rights as a concept
- Analyze and situate major debates over the content and limits of human rights, and recognize ways in which these debates play out in the discussion of contemporary problems
- Apply a gendered lens to the social world that integrates gender, race, class, and sexuality
- Read, write, and speak comfortably about theoretical writings
- Understand key topics in gender and human rights in a multifaceted way
- Conduct careful, rigorous research on human rights and gender issues
COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. **Attendance and Participation (20%)**
   
   Class attendance is mandatory! You are allowed 2 absences during the semester. For each additional absence, I will deduct 10% from your attendance grade. It is your responsibility to sign in at the beginning of every class, or you may be considered absent. It is also your responsibility to find out what you missed and make up any missed work. Keep in mind that if you repeatedly arrive late to class, you may be marked absent.

   Participating means engaging actively with ideas from readings, lectures, and your peers. You might participate in a number of ways—sharing your own ideas and critiques, working collaboratively in small groups, listening and responding to your classmates, asking thoughtful questions, bringing in relevant articles, or talking to me in office hours. Speaking comfortably about gender, politics, and human rights topics is an important part of your learning in this class.

   If you feel uncomfortable speaking in a classroom environment, I encourage you to see me about it early on.

2. **Reading Responses (10%)**

   Ten times during the semester, you will submit a 200-word response to the readings. Reading responses are due by 11:59PM on the Monday before class that week. I will post one or two potential writing prompts on Latte to guide your response, but you are also welcome to write your own response to the week’s readings. Regardless of which option you choose, I expect you to refer directly to at least one of the readings for the week in your response, with page numbers. You may write your response about any of the readings assigned for the week, either for Tuesday or for Friday. Use the reading response to help you pull together your thoughts, questions, and immediate reactions to the readings. What provoked, inspired, angered, puzzled, or resonated with you? Your reading responses will be graded pass/fail.

3. **In-Class Presentation (15%)**

   Once during the semester, you will give a 20-minute presentation at the beginning of class on the topic of the readings for the day. Presentations will be held during the third part of the course, starting on October 11th. Your presentation must summarize and pose questions about the readings for the day’s class to guide discussion. In addition, feel free to draw on outside material—film, music, TV, group activities, guest speakers, and your own life are all fair game, as long as they are relevant to the day’s topic in a reasonably obvious way. You may work in groups or on your own. Please choose a topic that interests you. I will pass around a sign-up sheet for presentations in the third week of the semester.

4. **Mid-Term Examination (25%)**

   This course includes one in-class mid-term examination on Friday, October 7. The exam will consist of a series of short essays based on the theoretical readings from the first two parts of the course.

5. **Final Research Project (30%)**

   The final project is a 10-12 page, double-spaced research essay on a topic of your choice related to gender and human rights. This essay asks you to draw on the theoretical perspectives from the first part of the course to develop an original analysis of a human rights issue. You should draw on appropriate scholarly references to write your paper. This is not a project that can be completed at the last minute. You should really be thinking about your project throughout the semester. I encourage you to discuss your chosen topic with me as early in the semester as
possible. You will be asked to submit a one-page summary of your project topic in Week 8, on Tuesday, October 18th, and this summary will count as one of your weekly reading responses. The final paper is due in class on Tuesday, December 6th. No extensions will be granted except in cases of documented disability or health emergency. In our final class, you will discuss your paper with your classmates. This is not a formal presentation, but rather just a chance for you to learn from your classmates’ expertise.

COURSE POLICIES

Office Hours. If you are unable to attend my regular office hours, feel free to email me to set up an appointment and I'll do my best to accommodate you. Please come and see me at least once.

Email. I will (try to) respond to emails within 48 hours. If I can't answer your question in a sentence, office hours are best. I cannot answer questions about course material over email.

Grading. If you'd like me to reconsider a grade, you must submit a detailed written explanation. A request for a grade change can result in a higher or lower grade.

Gadgets. Use of laptops and cell phones is not allowed in class.

Writing. For support with writing, one place to start is the Writing Center (http://www.brandeis.edu/writingprogram/writingcenter/index.html). Feel free to talk with me about it if you have specific concerns or goals related to your writing.

Academic Integrity. Don’t plagiarize. If you feel overwhelmed by the material or by an assignment, come and see me instead. The University’s policy on academic integrity can be found in the Rights and Responsibilities Handbook at http://www.brandeis.edu/studentaffairs/sdc/rr/. Plagiarism can carry severe consequences, including failing the course and/or suspension.

Classroom Environment. We will discuss difficult topics in this class, and it will take all of our trust, sensitivity, and maturity to create an inclusive and safe environment for conversation. Please remember that your classmates have a range of experiences and be thoughtful when you speak and listen. If you have any concerns about your ability to participate actively in class, because of personal experience, trauma, or something else, please do not hesitate to talk with me about it—the earlier in the semester, the better.

Accommodations. If you have been issued a letter of academic accommodation from Disabilities Services and Support, please see me in the first two weeks of the semester to work out the necessary arrangements. If you need an accommodation and have not yet obtained one, please set up an appointment with Beth Rodgers-Kay (brodgers@brandeis.edu), in the Undergraduate Academic Affairs Office (x63470, access@brandeis.edu).

Readings. All articles and excerpts will be posted on Latte. However, you may find it useful to buy the following books, which are also on reserve at the library:


COURSE SCHEDULE

I. HUMAN RIGHTS AND ITS DISCONTENTS

Human rights as an idea is usually thought to have its roots in liberal political and social thought that developed in the 18th century in Europe and North America. But the “rights of man” of liberal thinkers has undergone some transformations as it has moved toward the “human rights” of the world after World War II. In the first three weeks of the course, we study the history of human rights, reading the work of political theorists as well as historians. We will trace the ways in which “rights” have and haven’t changed through 18th century liberal thought and international agreements after World War II. We will look at feminist responses to the “rights of man” and human rights to ask how gender is (and is not) part of human rights frameworks. By reading key debates about the relationship between human rights, culture, and social justice, we will lay the foundations for our discussions about human rights for the rest of the course. Who is the “human” of human rights? Are human rights built on European assumptions? Can they be adapted to new cultural contexts? Are they universal?


Friday 8/26 Introductions

Tuesday 8/30 Rights and Liberalism in 18th Century Europe and the United States


Further Reading


Friday 9/2 Liberalism and Feminism in 18th Century Europe and the United States


Further Reading


**Week 2: Human Rights in the 20th Century**

**Tuesday 9/6 Human Rights as Postwar Project**


Read Prologue & Chapter 1 (1-43)


**Friday 9/9 Human Rights as Postwar Project (and its Limits)**


Read Chapter 2 (44-83)


**Week 3. Critiques of Human Rights**

**Tuesday 9/13 Marxism and Political Theory**


Read pp. 40-46


Read “The Perplexities of the Rights of Man,” pp. 290-302

Further Reading


**Friday 9/16 The Asian Values Debate**
II. HUMAN RIGHTS AND GENDER

In the second part of the course, we turn more directly to the relationship between gender and human rights and look at distinct perspectives on the relationship between the two. Many of the theorists we read in this portion of the course address the same central questions: does human rights provide an adequate framework for thinking about gender? Is it useful for every context? What might it overlook or displace? How can it be adapted—or can it be adapted? We look at early “women’s rights as human rights” approaches and then some critiques that consider human rights inadequate for thinking about gender and sexuality. We then move into debates about multiculturalism. Finally, we look at ethnographic approaches to how human rights efforts related to gender take shape in practice.

Week 4. Theorizing Gender and Human Rights

Tuesday 9/20 Women’s Rights as Human Rights


Further Reading

Friday 9/23 Women’s Human Rights from Queer and Transnational Perspectives


Further Reading

Week 5. Human Rights, Gender and Universalism

Tuesday 9/27 Debates on Multiculturalism
Further Reading


Friday 9/30 Local Transformations of Gender and Human Rights


Further Reading


Week 6: Midterm

Tuesday 10/4 NO CLASS (Rosh Hashanah)

FRIDAY 10/7 IN-CLASS MIDTERM EXAMINATION

III. Case Studies in the Politics of Gender and Human Rights

In the final portion of the course, we look at case studies in gender and human rights. We read social science accounts of the cases as well as writings that approach them through a human rights lens. In each case, we will return to the questions from the first part of the course. As we move through the topics, we will pay careful attention to how gender, race, class, sexuality, and geopolitics interact. In some cases, we will find contentious debates about how human rights
might be applied. In others, we will find limits to human rights frameworks in analyzing a problem. We will conclude the course by looking at writings about responses to gender injustice: human rights organizations and global feminisms.

**Week 7: Violence Against Women**

**Tuesday 10/11 Violence Against Women in Transnational Agreements**

Read Chapter 5: Transnational Networks on Violence Against Women (165-198)
Read Chapter 4 (103-133)

Further Reading
Introduction (1-35) and Chapter 3 (72-101)

**Friday 10/14 Gender and Intimate Violence in the United States**


Further Reading

**Week 8: Racial Violence in the United States**

**Tuesday 10/18 Race, Gender, and Incarceration**

**FINAL PROJECT TOPIC DUE IN CLASS**

Read Chapter 5 (178-220)

Further Reading
Friday 10/21 Black Lives Matter and Human Rights

Read Chapter 5 (153-190)

Further Reading

Week 9: Factory Labor

Tuesday 10/25 NO CLASS (Brandeis Monday)

Friday 10/28 Gender, Labor, and Human Rights

Read Introduction (1-8) and Chapter 1 (9-34)
Read Chapter 2: Labor Rights as Human Rights (15-46)

Week 10: Intimate Labor

Tuesday 11/1 Domestic Work


Friday 11/4 Sex Work

Read Chapter 5: Autonomy and Consent in Sex Work (104-125)

Further Reading

**Week 11: Crisis**

**Tuesday 11/8 Militarization and Nationalism**

Read Chapter 1 (1-36)  

**Friday 11/11 Human Rights, Health, and Disease**


**Further Reading**  

**Week 12: Sexual Rights**

**Tuesday 11/15 Reproductive Rights**

Read Chapter 7 (158-191)  

**Further Reading**  

**Friday 11/18 LGBTQ Rights**


**Further Reading**
Altman, Dennis. 1996. “Rupture or Continuity? The Internationalization of Gay Identities.” *Social Text* 48:77-94.

**Week 13: Immigration**

*Tuesday 11/22 Gender, Sexuality, and Immigrant Rights*


*Further Reading*


**THANKSGIVING BREAK**

**Week 14: Human Rights Responses**

*Tuesday 11/29 Human Rights Organizations*

Read Chapters 1-2 (3-38)

Read Preface (vii-xv)


*Further Reading*


*Friday 12/2 Global Feminisms*

Read Introduction (xxi-xlvi) and Chapters 1-2 (3-30)

Further Reading

Week 15: Conclusion

*Tuesday 12/6 Discussion of Final Projects*

FINAL PAPER DUE IN CLASS