

17.523: Ethnicity and Race in World Politics-Fall 2005

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Lecture 15: The Emergence of International Human Rights (Contd.)

Current Events

- Read NYTimes article: Golden, Tim and Eric Schmitt. "Detainee Policy Sharply Divides Bush Officials," *New York Times*, November 2, 2005.
 - How effective is torture?
 - Al Qaeda are trained that if they're caught, they don't talk.
 - The information may not even be correct. It's secured under duress - if the prisoner actually talks during torture.

Human Rights

- Human Rights
- Moral Rights=a shared notion of a good life.
- Presume acceptable behavior. For example, murder isn't acceptable behavior.
- Human rights are based on an optimistic view of human nature and the idea that things can be better.
- Human rights are aspirational.

Three broad views of the nature of human nature

- Marxist: human nature is a result of historical processes.
- Behavioralist: human nature is a result of social conditioning.
 - Why do girls do certain things and boys others?
 - Why do Americans behave different from say, the Chinese?
- Utilitarian: humans are self interested and maximize their own needs.

These views aren't mutually exclusive.

- The pursuit of the maximization of happiness might be balanced with a sense of maximizing communal happiness.
- There isn't a philosophical consensus but what is important is the idea that people should be treated as ends and never as means only (Kant's categorical imperative).

What does it mean to treat people as ends and not means?

- Student: Not using people for some grand end.
- A respect for human rights says that you can't use people to achieve some grand end.
- What about the army? Does the military simply use people? What is the desired end?
 - People have to go fight for their country.
 - Does a volunteer army change the notion?
 - Student: It's not a violation of human rights.
- What about suicide bombers.
 - Student: communities that encourage suicide bombers are frequently impoverished. Sometimes it's the middle class as well, and they just want recognition.
 - For middle class, it's more of a community norm and pressure to do it.

- The listing of human rights specifies what that means.
- The most important point, then, is that there isn't a philosophical consensus on human rights, there is a political consensus. The U.N. charter.
- On. P. 6 of the "International Human Rights." The author lists enumerated human rights.
- There is a disagreement as to whether these are human rights and whether economic, political, and social rights are all human rights.

Can you use human rights as a way to leverage power?

- Human rights allows oppressed people to bypass the limitations of their government and appeal to the international community.
- What are the responses of the international community?
 - Sometimes they're good, sometimes they're bad.

"The Light at the end of the Tunnel" article:

- Migrants are trying to get from Paris to England.
- The article provides a sense of the great lengths people go to escape from of bad situations.

What is going on in these countries that pushes them out?

- Largely political (e.g. Afghanistan)

What obligations to countries accepting immigrants have in terms of accepting them?

- Are having open borders a political human right?
- Immigration laws have a certain amount of human rights elements to them.
- Arguments against immigration: If you let too many immigrants in, the host country will change drastically and won't have the same character as before (e.g. Huntington).

The U.S.

- Philosophically, what informs our basic policy on immigration
 - Mostly an open immigration policy with the exception of the beginning] to mid - 20th century (1925-1965).

In general, what is the connection between human rights and U.S. foreign policy?

- For most of the 20th century (end of WWII until late 80s), American's foreign policy was largely dominated by anti-communism and American exceptionalism.
- The idea that the U.S. is different from nearly all other countries in the world because of its tolerance of individual freedoms and strength of the American political system.
- These views are deeply rooted in our national sense of identity.
- Arguments against American exceptionalism: many countries have made great contributions to humankind and are exceptional too. Exceptionalism is really chauvinistic.
- In the 18th century, there was a strong tendency for isolationism.
- Individual rights are compatible with human rights by extension.
- Communism is by definition against human rights because it denies individual rights.

- Therefore: if we are against communism, we are in effect fighting for human rights.
- Others argued that social rights are by extension human rights. They downplay civil and political rights.
- Whereas the West emphasizes economic and civil liberties and aren't as interested in social rights and rights that promote economic equality, other countries (e.g. USSR) stressed social rights.
- Both countries were violating human rights in some way. Holes in both their domestic and foreign policies.

In the U.S. it is true that given the power of exceptionalism, Americans see human rights violations as happening elsewhere and not in the U.S. This view makes the suffering of American citizens as political issues and possibly personal problems, but not human rights.

- Lack of healthcare is seen as a policy failure and not a human rights issues
- Police brutality isn't looked at as human rights violations. The world might look at it very differently.
- Americans don't look at it in terms of human rights because the body of domestic law should and presumably can deal with it.