Human Rights in History : Michael Ignatieff

A course in the history of ideas, focused on the changing fortunes of human rights as the bearer of the claim—as well as the hope—that what human beings have in common outweighs their differences.

The course will begin with the emergence of Christian universalism in the Pauline gospels, then focus on the languages of human equality that arise in the Protestant Reformation and culminate in the French Revolution. In the 19th century the focus will be upon the abolition of slavery and the slave trade, as a case study in the complex interaction between universalist moral claims, economic interests and political pressures. In the 20th century, the course will examine fascism as a counter-revolution against the claims of human universality and chart the revival of human rights in the post war era. The course will then explore the role of the human rights doctrine of self-determination in the dismantling of imperialism, apartheid and Jim Crow after 1945. In the post 1989 period, the focus will be upon the brief revival of humanitarian intervention and the ‘responsibility to protect’ and conclude in the 21st century with the supposed ‘end times of human rights’: the apparent exhaustion of human rights and the re-emergence of claims of difference—by nation, race, creed, gender and class-- that contest the status of universal rights claims.

Assignments and Grading:

30%. Class attendance. Attendance is mandatory, so is attendance at one office-hour; a single or group presentation is also required.

30%. A book report of 500 words on one of the readings

40%. A 3000 word essay on a human rights theme in a historical context. An office hour meeting on the choice of topic is mandatory.

Office Hours

B-205

Wednesday 2-3pm

Contact:

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Instructor's Biography

Michael Ignatieff is Rector Emeritus and professor of history at CEU.

Ignatieff came to CEU after serving as Edward R. Murrow Chair of Press, Politics, and Public Policy at Harvard University’s John F. Kennedy School of Government.

He received his doctorate in history from Harvard University and has held academic posts at Kings College, Cambridge, the University of Toronto and the University of British Columbia. He served in the Canadian Parliament and was Leader of the Liberal Party. His books include The Needs of Strangers (1984), Scar Tissue (1992), Blood and Belonging (1993), The Warrior’s Honour (1997), Isaiah Berlin (1998), 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.