1. Course Description and Required Texts
This course offers an introduction to the study of human rights through literature, creative non-fiction, testimony, and documentary and dramatic film. The course is divided into three units—one on foundational texts for understanding human rights ideals and dilemmas (including grappling with both bystanders’ complicities and perpetrators’ injustices), a second that considers the uses and limits of dramatic and documentary film in raising awareness about human rights stories and crises, and a third that focuses on two recent refugee crises. We seek to understand a number of questions, including: the connection between the modern notion of the individual and the ideal of human rights; why some bystanders and spectators develop empathy and others instead rationalize their complicities; what blocks awareness and guilt among perpetrators who commit inhumane acts; what are the uses and limits of documentary and dramatic films in representing human rights issues; and how refugees—adults and children—have become central protagonists informing much human rights literature today.

Required Texts (available on Amazon or at the NYU Bookstore):
Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*
Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*
*I, Rigoberta Menchu, An Indian Woman in Guatemala*, ed. Elisabeth Burgos-Debray
J. M. Coetzee, *Waiting for the Barbarians*
Wendy Pearlman, ed., *We Crossed a Bridge and It Trembled*
Valeria Luiselli, *An Essay in Forty Questions*

2. Assignments and Grade Percentages
A. Reading & Research Presentations—15%—All students are required to lead one reading/research presentation with a partner from class (10 minutes per presentation, Google slides to be shared before class).

These presentations entail the following:
1) Undertake a close analysis of an assigned primary text to identify a conceptual problem and pose 2 debatable questions for our consideration and discussion. Cite and analyze evidence from the text to surface the implications and complexities of the
conceptual problem. Over the course of the discussion, ask us to consider other related passages that expand or complicate what we must consider to respond to it.

ii) Frame your close reading of the text with evocative contextual research from 2-3 credible researched sources (you may consider history or a theory, a critical or scholarly discussion of the text’s representation of the problem, or some controversy about the text, etc.). Use your selected contextual materials to frame and deepen our understanding of the problem and to inform your analysis. Please consult books and articles from Bobst on-line databases, not just webpages found in a Google search.

At least a week before your presentation, each group should meet to discuss how to share the labor. One person might take on the task of researching a controversy/critical discussion about the text, and another might investigate a theory about the subject (e.g. slave narratives, genocide, etc.) or history informing the text; then, you should work together to deepen and develop a more specific, narrower focus for your reading/research presentation—one that offers a close analysis of a key problem or pattern from the text informed by some (but not all) of this contextual knowledge.

Please also meet with me a few days before the presentation to talk over focuses, passages, and possibilities. Then, meet again with each other to make slides and discuss strategies for and try out the presentation.

B. Conceptual Analysis/Reader Response Papers (complete 2 out of 4)—30% (15% each, 3 pages, double-spaced)—For 2 of 4 units (regarding human rights origins, the complicities of bystanders and mindsets of perpetrators, indigenous resistance, and refugee experiences), you are required to write analytic response papers. For each paper, analyze closely a problem from a primary text, illuminating the significance of the author’s thinking/argument/inquiry via a close reading of several passages, and respond by developing reflections of your own (and, if you choose, applying contextual research to your analysis). See daily schedule for due dates.

C. Reviewing-in-Contexts Essay—25% (7-8 pages)—You will research and write an essay that reviews and makes an interpretive argument about the contextual significance of a human rights film (documentary or drama). You will assess the film’s significance when seen on its own terms and in light of at least four contextual sources that you use in your argument.

Proposal and Annotated Bibliography—5% (2-3 pages)

D. Op-Ed—15% (3 pages)—Drawing on one of the texts about refugee experiences (from Central America and Syria), research a more specific current problem in this crisis, and write an op-ed for a public audience that raises awareness and advocates for a way forward or a change. For this assignment, you will again work collaboratively with a partner. Aspire to publish your op-ed.

E. Participation—10%—attendance, preparedness, contributions to discussion that deepen or counter a point, collaboration with peers, reflections on learning, workshopping and conferencing of your writing and presentations, and general good citizenship. Exceptional participation improves your grade, adequate participation does not change your grade, and insufficient or unconstructive participation lowers your grade. If you feel that you are having
difficulty participating, please come see me so we can discuss some low-stakes ways for you to contribute more meaningfully and often.

3. Daily Schedule

Introductions: Human Rights Literature—Declarations and Founding Narratives

Week 1, Wednesday, January 29th
Read: Douglass, Narrative, preface-chapter 7 (pp. 29-87)
In-class: UDHR

See: Hotel Rwanda, Friday, January 31 at 5:00pm

Week 2, Wednesday, February 5th
Read: Douglass, Narrative, chapter 8-appendix (pp. 89-159); Arendt, Eichmann, Chapter 1 (pp. 3-20), Hunt, introduction, Inventing Human Rights
Reading/Research Presentation: ________________

Draft of Conceptual Analysis /Response Paper 1 due Thursday, February 8th, by 8:00pm—written feedback or conference available for Friday, February 9th; final version due, Sunday, February 11th, by 8:00pm (2 of 4 required, but everyone must do at least 1 of first 2)

Genocide and Its Complicities

Week 3, Wednesday, February 12th
Read: Arendt, Eichmann, chapters 2-3 (20-55), 6-8 (83-150), 14 (221-233)
Reading/Research Presentation: ________________

See: One Child Nation, Thursday, February 13th at 6:30pm

Week 4 Wednesday, February 19th
Read: Arendt, Eichmann, an excerpt from Chapter 15, the Epilogue, and an excerpt from the Postscript (244-89); and Gourevitch, “After the Genocide”, The New Yorker, 12.10.95 (35 pp.) (pdf); Vice documentary on Charlottesville
Reading/Research Presentation: ________________

Draft of Conceptual Analysis Paper 2 due Thursday, February 20th, by 8:00pm—written feedback or conference optional for Friday, February 21st; final version due, Sunday, February 23rd, by 8:00pm (2 of 4 required, but everyone must do at least 1 of first 2)

Indigeneity, Dispossession, Resistance, and Testimony

Week 5, Wednesday, February 26th
Reading/Research Presentation: ________________

See: *When Mountains Tremble*, Wednesday, February 26th, at 5:00pm

**The Mind of Perpetrators**

Week 6, Wednesday, March 4th
Read: *I Rigoberta Menchu*, chapters 31-34 (259-289); Coetzee, *Waiting for the Barbarians*, chapter 1-2 (pp. 1-56)
Reading/Rigoberta controversy: ________________

See: *The Act of Killing*, Sunday, March 8th, 5:00pm

Week 7, Wednesday, March 11th
Read: Coetzee, *Waiting for the Barbarians*, chapters 3-7 (pp. 57-156)
Reading/Research Presentation: ________________

Draft of Conceptual Analysis Paper 3 due Friday, March 13th, by 5:00pm—written feedback optional over spring break; final version due, Monday, March 23th, by 8:00pm (2 of 4 required)

Spring Break, March 18th

**Human Rights Films: Review in Contexts**

Week 8, Wednesday, March 25th
See: *Persepolis* (juxtaposed with Szymon Barylski, *Fleeing Death* (2016))
Read: Danticat, “Children of the Sea,” *Krik! Krak?* (pp. 3-29); Berger, “Hiroshima”; Dawes, storytelling; sources on *Persepolis*; how to start a research project and write a prospectus

Week 9, Wednesday, April 1st
Read: Nash, “Films that Bring Human Rights to Life”, *Public Cultures* 2018, 393-412 (pdf)
Workshop on drafts of the Prospectus; posing a research question and deepening research
First Draft of Prospectus due, March 31st by 8:00pm
Final Draft of Prospectus due, April 2nd by 6:00pm

Week 10, Wednesday, April 8th
Guest Speaker: Nanfu Wang, *The Ethics and Craft of Human Rights Films*
Reading: ethics of witnessing and human rights visual arts (Sontag, Dawes, Hesford); deepening your contextual research
Draft of Reviewing Essay due, Sunday, April 12th, by 8:00pm

Revolution, Crackdown, & Testimony

Week 11, Wednesday, April 15th
Read: Pearlman, *We Crossed a Bridge and It Trembled* (Parts III-V, pp. 51-172)
In-class writing workshop; paired conferences with peer review, April 13th-15th
Reading/Research Presentation: ____________________

Final Reviewing Essay due, Sunday, April 19th, by 8:00pm

Borders, Refugees, and Exile

Week 12, Wednesday, April 22nd
Read: Pearlman, *We Crossed a Bridge and It Trembled* (Parts VI-VIII, pp.173-285)
Reading/Research Presentation: ____________________

Week 13, April 29th
Read: Luiselli, *An Essay in Forty Questions* (pp. 7-108)
Reading/Research Presentation: ____________________

Draft of Conceptual Analysis Paper 4 due Thursday, April 30th, by 8:00pm; written feedback optional; final version due, Sunday, May 3rd, by 8:00pm (2 of 4 required)

Week 14, May 6th
Guest Speaker, Human Rights Watch (advocacy research and writing) presentations, op-ed workshop
final celebration
May 11th, op-ed due
May 13th, revision to either the reviewing-in-contexts essay or one response paper due (optional)

4. **Ground Rules**
A. **Attendance, preparation, participation, conferencing, and class citizenship.**
   Attendance will be taken. You must be prepared and ready to participate at each class meeting. Arrive in class on time. Turn off and put away your cell phone when you enter our classroom.
   Complete all reading assignments. Bring the right texts to class. Speak regularly and intelligently during class, striving to be curious and thoughtful (instead of right or passive). Please do not routinely set up your laptop during discussions or presentations. Take notes with a pen in a notebook. When we have researching or writing time in class, you will be able to take out your laptop.
Only 1 unexcused absence is allowed. If you miss 3 classes without documented excuse, a full letter grade (B+ to C+) will be deducted. If you miss more than 6 or more classes (half of our meetings), you cannot pass this course. Repeated lateness will also result in a poor participation grade. Religious observance and documented medical illness are grounds for an absence to be excused. In all cases, communicate with me as soon as possible about an absence.

B. Policies for submitting final response papers and the reviewing essay: Your written work for this class needs to be typed and double-spaced with page numbers on each page. Use familiar typefaces and standard margins. Use correct Modern Language Association formatting for citations and documentation. Consult the Purdue OWL for details.

https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/mla_style/mla_formatting_and_style_guide/mla_formatting_and_style_guide.html

Deadlines are absolute. Final papers and essays that are submitted beyond a day late will be marked down one step for each two-day period there are legitimate, mitigating circumstances, or I grant you a brief extension (beyond a day). When papers are due on days other than when we meet, please attach your final papers as a PDF or Word.doc to an email, sending it to me by the time indicated on the assignment (or syllabus).

C. Getting feedback on your writing: Since you will share writing with your peers for feedback, please draft work that you feel comfortable.

I will hold required conferences with you about your reading/research presentation and your draft of your review in contexts essays. Other conferences may be scheduled as needed. Please just let me know when you’d like to meet.

In addition, NYU’s Writing Center is a valuable place to get an informed perspective and supportive feedback on how to develop your ideas or improve your writing. You can find more information about the Writing Center here: http://cas.nyu.edu/ewp/writing-center.html. You can schedule an appointment up to two weeks in advance here: https://nyu.mywconline.com.

In addition, I will comment on some drafts and all final versions of your graded writing.

D. Academic integrity: NYU is “a community of scholars who value free and open inquiry.” In this class, we work with ideas, evidence, and language. It is important to keep track of which of those you have developed (in dialogue with classmates, sources, professors, friends, and so on) and which of those have come to you from others (classmates, sources, professors, friends, the internet, and so on). To quote the CAS statement on academic integrity: “Academic honesty means that the work you submit—in whatever form—is original.” Please see the whole CAS policy about academic integrity here: https://cas.nyu.edu/content/nyu-as/cas/academic-integrity.html.

In sum, you may not submit work written (even in part) by someone else as though it was written by you; you also may not submit work written for this course in another course or vice versa. Sloppy noting or citing will not be tolerated in this course. Please review the Expository Writing
Program’s Statement on Academic Integrity: [http://cas.nyu.edu/ewp/writing-resources/statement-on-academic-integrity.html](http://cas.nyu.edu/ewp/writing-resources/statement-on-academic-integrity.html). We will discuss note-taking and citing in class, but it is your responsibility to develop practices that help you avoid inadvertent plagiarism. If you have a question, please ask me.

**E. Revision policy:** If you complete your response papers and your reviewing essay when they are due, you are allowed one rewrite, wherein you may revise a graded essay and resubmit it to be evaluated again (I’ll take the higher grade, but you wouldn’t get a higher grade if you didn’t rethink the piece). If you choose to undertake a rewrite, it must be submitted in person by 2:00pm on Wednesday, May 13th. In addition to submitting your revised essay, please submit the original final version of the essay with my comments on it.

**F. Moses Center for Students with Disabilities:** If you are student with a documented disability who is requesting accommodation, please contact NYU’s Moses Center for Students with Disabilities. You must register with the Moses Center to be eligible to receive an accommodation. Information about the Moses Center can be found at [www.nyu.edu/csd](http://www.nyu.edu/csd). The Moses Center is located at 726 Broadway on the second floor and can be reached at 212-998-4980.

**G. Standards for assessing papers and essays:**

**1. During the term,** I use the following standards for grading essays. Pluses and minuses represent shades of difference, as do split grades (e.g. B-/C+). I assign grades based on the overall quality of the final submitted papers and essays, not the effort or time you put into them.

A – Excellent in every way (not the same as perfect). This is an ambitious, perceptive essay that grapples effectively with complex ideas; explores well-chosen evidence; and responds discerningly to counter-arguments, other evidence, and other ideas that complicate those under consideration. The discussion enhances rather than underscoring our knowledge. The beginning opens up rather than flatly announcing the essay’s aim. There is a coherent line of inquiry linking together the development of thoughts with the presentation of evidence throughout the middle. The ending orchestrates grander reflections on implications and is not mere summary. The language and style are clean, cohesive, precise, and often elegant. Someone outside the class would be enriched by reading the essay. The writer’s stake in the material and thinking presence in the prose are obvious.

B – A piece of writing that achieves many of its aims. Most ideas are progressively explored across a clearly structured beginning, middle, and ending. However, some thin patches may require more analysis, because the writer avoids the complications of some texts or skims over the difficulties of some ideas under consideration. The language is generally precise, and the paragraphs are generally coherent, though sometimes confusing sentences and fuzzy paragraphs remain here.

C – A piece of writing that has real problems in one or more of these areas: conception (the idea is fuzzy or underdeveloped or obvious); structure (an unfulfilled plan for the essay); use of evidence (not enough evidence is used or it is not analyzed; the
interpretations eventuate in clichés); language and mechanics (the sentences are awkward or incoherent, dependent on unexplained abstractions, and/or contradict each other; patterns of error are prevalent).

D and F – These are efforts that are much shorter or less developed than they ought to be; they fail to grapple seriously or coherently with ideas; or they are extremely problematic in many of the areas mentioned above: aim, structure, use of evidence, language, etc. They do not come close to addressing the expectations for the progression and the essay.

B. At the end of term, I convert all letter grades to numbers on the CAS 4.0 grading scale, and I calculate final grades on this numerical scale. Here is the link to the CAS grading scale:

http://cas.nyu.edu/academic-programs/bulletin/policies/academic-policies.html#3

If you have a split grade (say, a B/B-), I will assign it a numerical value that is exactly half-way between the two grades on the 4.0 scale (a B/B- is a 2.834). I will calculate all of your grades for your work according to the percentages listed above.

Lastly, if your final grade turns out to be a value between numerical values for two different letter grades, I will choose the grade that is closest in value to yours and enter it as your final grade (e.g. if your final numerical grade turns out to be a 2.84, you will receive a B; if your final numerical grade turns out to be a 2.82, you will receive a B-).