Prof. William Morgan  
Office: 411 Lafayette St., Room 425  
Email and office hrs.: wm32@nyu.edu; Thurs., 1100am-100pm, and by appt.

*You must allow a 24-hour window for an email response (48 hours over weekends); if I don’t respond within these time frames, feel free to reach out again to me.  
*All meetings (even during office hours) must be scheduled in advance.

Literature and Film of Human Rights

Writing Center webpage: [http://cas.nyu.edu/ewp/writing-center.html](http://cas.nyu.edu/ewp/writing-center.html)  
Writing Center online scheduler: [https://nyu.mywconline.com](https://nyu.mywconline.com)

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, 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*  
Edwidge Danticat, *Krik? Krak!*  
J. M. Coetzee, *Waiting for the Barbarians*  
Valeria Luiselli, *An Essay in Forty Questions*  
Wendy Pearlman, ed., *We Crossed a Bridge and It Trembled*

2. Assignments and Grade Percentages
A. Reading & Research Presentations—10%—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:
  i) Undertake a close analysis of an assigned primary text to identify a conceptual problem, examine 2-3 different pages closely where it is at stake, 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. During 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 some contextual research from 1 or 2 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.

Sometime in the week before your presentation, each group should meet to discuss how to share the labor. You should work together to develop and deepen 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—that you could alone. Also, you might divvy up the task of researching a critical discussion about the text, investigating a theory about the subject (e.g. slave narratives, genocide, etc.) or some of the history informing the text’s work, etc. Then, you craft 3-4 slides to accompany your presentation that you upload to our course’s Google drive folder before class. Include your discussion questions as 1 of the slides.

If you’d like to meet, I will be available in the days before your presentation to talk over focuses, passages, and possibilities. Just write me to schedule a time (likely on Monday or Tuesday).

B. Analytic Response Papers—40% (13.33% each, 3 due, 3-4 pages each, double spaced)—You are required to write 2 analytic response papers (regarding human rights origins and hero narratives, the complicities and mindsets of perpetrators, women and children, and/or refugee experiences). For each paper, analyze closely a conceptual problem from a primary text, illuminating the significance of the author’s thinking/inquiry into the issue via a close reading of 1-2 passages. Also, respond to that writer’s work by using at least 1-2 other sources (usually a film and a critical text) to help you deepen your analysis and deepen your own reflection on the significance of the writer’s account of the problem. See daily schedule for due dates.

C. Reviewing-in-Contexts Essay—30% (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 mostly likely choose your film from among those we watch together and may discuss before spring break. Your research essay 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, Annotated Bibliography, and Scene Representation—5% (3 pages)

E. Participation—15%—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 Heroic Narratives
Week 1  Read: Douglass, *Narrative*, preface-chapter 7 (pp. 3-50)
In-class: UDHR

See: *Sonita*

Week 2  Read: Douglass, *Narrative*, chapter 8-appendix (pp. 51-115); Hunt, introduction, *Inventing Human Rights*, pages 26-34
Reading/Research Presentation:

Ordinary Perpetrators, Bystanders, and their Complicities

See: *One Child Nation*

Week 3  Read: Arendt, *Eichmann*, Chapters 2 (20-36, plus pages 48-54 of chap. 3), 6-8 (83-150); (optional-- excerpt from the Milgram experiment)
Reading/Research Presentation:

Tbd, draft of Analytic Response Paper # 1 due (peer tutor feedback & conference required)
Tbd, Final Analytic Response Paper #1 due


Class Visit, human-rights film director

The Psychologies of Survivors and Perpetrators

Week 5  See: *Capernaum*

Reading/Research Presentation:

Week 6  Coetzee, *Waiting for the Barbarians*, chapter 1-3 (pp. 1-87)
Reading/Research Presentation:

See: *The Act of Killing*

Tbd, draft of Analytic Response Paper 2 (peer tutor feedback & conference, optional but recommended, up to 10 people)
Tbd, March 23rd, Final Analytic Response paper # 2 due
Week 7  
Read: Coetzee, *Waiting for the Barbarians*, chapters 4-7 (pp. 89-180)

Reading/Research Presentation:

Spring Break

**Children and Refugees**

Week 8,  
Read: Luiselli, *An Essay in Forty Questions*, 7-106

Reading/Research Presentation; Moyn, “Human Rights Are Not Enough” (pdf in drive folder)

--in class, Solnit, “Hope in the Dark”


(Trigger warning: this 2019 Oscar-nominated documentary is tough to watch; children die or are brought to a hospital dead; the hospital is destroyed, etc., yet the film is evidence again and again of what Solnit calls “hope in the dark”, even though you don’t feel that ‘til the end.)

**Testimony—Revolution, Resistance, and Exile**

Week 9  

Reading/Research Presentation:

Week 10  
Read: Pearlman, *We Crossed a Bridge and It Trembled*, VII-VIII (pp. 208-286); Said, “Reflections on Exile” (pdf)

--Word picture: *For Sama* (wedding scene) or *Pianist* (Cityscape); Film in Context introduced, word picture and preliminary research assigned

_Tbd, draft of Analytic Response Paper 3
Tbd, Final Analytic Response Paper 3 due_

**Human Rights Films: Reviewing in Contexts**

Week 11  
Kate Nash, “Films That Bring Human Rights to Life” (pdf); “Rashidi, “Growing Up in Hell” (NYRB review of *Capernaum*, pdf);

--word picture and preliminary research due (google.drive)

_Library Research Session:* Brainstorming approach and doing research

Sample Prospectuses—Question, Problem, Source Network

Week 12  
_Draft Prospectus due, Tbd
Prospectus Workshop; Revised Prospectus due, Tbd
Source Network
Guest Speaker (Human Rights Watch)
Week 13  
Mini-draft with Juxtaposition or lens text due (beginnings, lens or juxtaposition)
--lens texts assigned or reassigned: Hunt, Jurecic, Solnit, Said, Coles, Coles, and Nash
-- *Mercer Street samples; critical moves*, "Not Your Average Fairy Tale” and “Fragile Conceptions”
--Enactment: al-Kateab, Wang or Polanski, Coles or Said

Week 14  
*Updraft due, tbd*
Writing Workshops, peer review in class, conferences peer tutor and/or me
*Mercer Street samples*

*final draft due, tbd*
*final course reflection due; optional revision due (one response paper), tbd*
returning your work and saying happy summer!

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 2 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 unless 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.
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 conferences with you about your reading/research presentation and your draft of your prospectus. I am happy to meet with you about developing your drafts on any assignment through the course. Please just let me know when you’d like to meet.

In addition, in this class, we are fortunate to have help from the Undergraduate Writing Tutors Program. Writing tutors are curious, well-trained peers who provide feedback to students on drafts of writing assignments. They will encourage and challenge you to strengthen your writing and clarify their ideas. Your writing tutors will support our aims, learning about our expectations for writing and listening and responding to you individually and carefully. While writing tutors are not teaching assistants and will not assess papers, they will focus writing conferences on questions that generate clearer writing and stronger thinking about the content.

You are required to confer with a writing tutor for the first analytic response paper and for your reviewing in contexts essay. You may also work with a peer tutor on your second analytic response paper (your choice). For these assignments, submit a draft of your paper on time for written feedback and attend a scheduled, 30-minute long, one-on-one conference. Writing tutors should receive complete drafts. Late submission of drafts and missed conferences are reported to the me, and I may reduce your grade on the assignment as a consequence.

Lastly, NYU’s Writing Center is a valuable place to get additional 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 .

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 . 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 reviewing essay when they are due, you may revise a graded essay and resubmit it to be evaluated again at the end of term. I’ll
take the higher grade, but you won’t get a higher grade if you don’t rethink the piece. If you choose to undertake a rewrite, it must be submitted 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 a 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. The Moses Center is located at 726 Broadway, 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 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 than 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.
2. **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-).