

History of Human Rights

Fall 2020: HIST 33805 ~ MWF 1:30-2:20 ~ UNIV 217

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Eleanor Roosevelt holding the Spanish-language version of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Palais de Chaillot, Paris, December 1948.

The concept of – and struggle for – human rights is powerful, pervasive. Its origins, development, and strategies of implementation contested. Have human beings always had the "right to have rights"? How did the concept of "rights" arise? What does it mean, and how has it been used? This course explores human rights' geneology and uneven historical evolution from the European Enlightenment through the late twentieth century human rights revolution and experience of globalization. We will examine Atlantic Revolutionary era articulations of "rights of man" and "human rights," the interwar institutionalization of rights, the post-WWII shift from minority to individual human rights, the human rights revolution of the late 1970s, and the relationship between globalization and human rights using a variety of primary and secondary sources. Students will come away with a deeper understanding of a human rights narrative that belongs to the world, its politics and ideas, and our own humanity. This course fulfills a core requirement for the Human Rights minor.