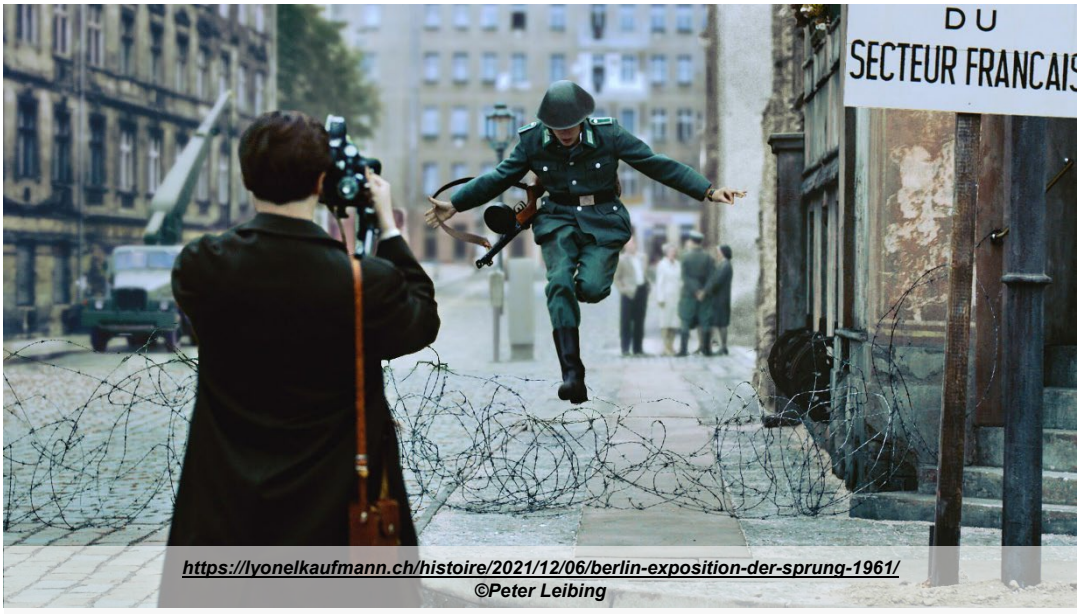

https://lyonelkaufmann.ch/histoire/2021/12/06/berlin-exposition-der-sprung-1961/
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Intellectual history of human rights

INSTITUT D'ÉTUDES POLITIQUES DE SAINT-GERMAIN-EN-LAYE

Dr. Thierry Leterre | Fall 25 | Semester 1 2025-26

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Please note that the "message" function of e-campus has limited interaction features. Email is a safe wary to contact me.

The history of human rights is a complex entanglement of political aspirations, juridical constraints, and ethical demands. Rooted in a rich past and in an even richer present, human rights are nonetheless challenged in many ways. The purpose of the course is to shed light on the diversity of contemporary understandings of human rights by revisiting different sources pertaining to the development of human rights ideas. This will be achieved through the study of classical texts such as the Magna Carta, the Declaration of the rights of man and citizen, or the universal declaration of human rights. More original sources such as the “Declaration of independence” of the low countries, the Seneca Falls “declaration of sentiments”, or the current constitution of Ivory Coast will be also reviewed to show how diverse and rich human rights are. The methodology for this course will be the one of “intellectual” or “conceptual” history of politics, a seminal methodology for exploring political ideas.

Objectives:

Students will:

1. Master the methodology of “intellectual history”.
2. Identify key moments in the history of human rights contributing to the multiple understandings and practices of human rights in the contemporary world.
3. Comprehend human rights as political tools in political struggles for domination, fight against oppression as well as defining ethical standards for life in society.

Assessment.

Final grade is based on:

- Attendance and participation.
- A song
- A Research paper.

ATTENDANCE & PARTICIPATION

- Attendance is automatically recorded by the Zoom platform. If you share a connection with fellow students, this is fine, but do send me a message to let me know so that I can properly report attendance.
- Participation starts with having your camera on during sessions. If you experience bandwidth problems making this difficult, please let me know. At any rate you must have a thumbnail picture of you on your profile.
- There will be group work on a regular basis, so be prepared to interact with fellow students during the sessions.

SONG

Each student will have to present a song related to human rights.

- The song will be played at the beginning and the end of the class.
- Then the student who chose the song will explain how it pertains to the theme of human rights (5mn).
- The explanation must be submitted in written form on e-campus (pdf, max 50MB). See Appendix at the very latest the week after it was presented.

RESEARCH ESSAY.

A research essay is an advanced academic work. It reflects the mastery of your topic, your ability to use references appropriately, and to develop the topic you have chosen through the lens of a research question that you have to carefully devise.

Your research is a *research in political science*. As we use the methodology of an intellectual history of human rights, the greatest problem is to avoid describing chronologically events and facts. On the contrary, you must identify issues and assert your claims. Historical moments serve your reflection, and not the other way around (we are not historians).

- Choose one of the following topics:
    1. Human Rights and Magna Carta.
    2. Is there an inflation of “rights” in the modern discourse of/on human rights?

- Grade will consider:
    1. Quality of research.
    2. Respect of guidelines.
    3. Quality of presentation.
    4. Quality of style.
    5. Quality of language.
    6. Demonstration of mastery of learning objectives.
    7. Ability to present a short (10 titles) bibliography (Chicago style) with comments.

Assessment rubrics:

Formal indications respected	2
Quality of English (language & style)	2
Outline is clear and well developed	2
Detailed argumentation is clear and well developed	2
Research question is well-posed	3
Examples are substantial and explained	2
Citations are appropriate and well chosen	2
Learning objectives are reached	3
Bibliography	2
Total	20

RESEARCH ESSAY GUIDELINES

Your essay must include **a cover page** which will display your name, the title of your essay, the table of content, and word count.

Your cover page will also be illustrated, and proper credits must be given (if you are designing the illustration, credit yourself, if you are using a picture, credit the source, if you are using an AI software, credit the software).

- 2,000 words (10% margin, word count must be included in the paper), not counting bibliography but including footnotes.
- Language: English (US. spelling & dialect preferred, please indicate if you use another dialect and spelling). Academic style (no contractions).
- Footnotes only, no endnotes.
- Bibliography.
    - Please use the Chicago Manual of style 17th edition, note[1].
    - A minimum of 10 titles is required, of which at least 5 must not be on the syllabus. These 5 titles (or more) are to be put in bold.
    - 5 titles must be commented: explain in 50 words (approx.) what the interest of the title is and how you used it.
- An illustration for your paper (with credits) must be provided on the cover page.
- You must use class material.
- Introduction, titles for parts, and conclusions must be present and clearly identified.
- A research question and a claim must be clearly identified in the introduction.
- Your outline must be indicated and explained in the introduction.
- A conclusion must be present and is not limited to the summary of your content.

Submission:

- Pdf format, less than 50MB on e-campus only.
- Late submissions are downgraded based on the following scale:
    - Date of submission December 10, 2025. Time of submission is 11:59 PM local time (Paris).
    - A grace period is granted for nine (9) days. During this period, a penalty of 0.5% on the first day (starting at 12:00AM) then 1 point per day after that.
- If you are claiming extenuating circumstances for late submissions, please let me know *before the submission due date*.

Plagiarism and academic violations

Students should be aware that academic integrity is a cornerstone of higher education. Cheating, plagiarism, and any form of academic dishonesty are not tolerated and will be grounds for downgrading and / or disciplinary review following Sciences Po regulations.

Plagiarism and cheating include the use of Artificial Intelligence to write research papers. While AI can provide valuable tools for drafting ideas or identifying references, it cannot be substituted for your own work and writing.

Please be aware that all your work will be reviewed for plagiarism and unauthorized use of AI.

[1] If you do not use a paying reference software (endnote, refworks etc.), you should consider Zotero, which has a free version including limited storage space. Please see: www.zotero.org and: Center for History and New Media, "Zotero Quick Start Guide."

OUTLINE

1. Presentation of the semester
    a. Review of the syllabus.
    b. Photo elicitation.
    c. What is the intellectual history of politics?
    d. A classic view of the history of human rights: Maurice Cranston.

2. Fundamental questions & Origins
    a. Human rights, rights of man, universal rights, humanitarianism?
    b. Natural law and human rights.
    c. Three dimensions: a history of Parliamentarism, of Revolution, and of modern legal standards.
    d. Magna Carta or 18th century Revolutions?
    e. French or American Revolutions?
    f. Universal or Western ideologies?
    g. Ritter, the first historian of human rights?

3. Human rights and the dawn of modern politics
    a. From medieval quarrels to modernity: Magna Carta
    b. The Act of Abjuration.
    c. The 1689 Bill of Rights.

4. The era of Revolutions
    a. 1776.
    b. 1789.
    c. 1791.
    d. 1793.
    e. 1795.
    f. 1918.

5. The place of women in a masculine history
    a. Mary Wollstonecraft's Vindication of the Rights of Woman.
    b. Olympe de Gouges' Declaration of the rights of women and female citizens.
    c. Seneca Falls.
    d. From vindicating rights to fighting discrimination.

6. The social history of human rights
    a. France, 1848: the right to employment.
    b. US. 1944: Roosevelt's Second Bill or Rights.
    c. Generations of human rights?

7. Juridicization
    a. Marbury v. Madison.
    b. Universal jurisdiction.
    c. Regional legal instruments.
    d. The ICC.

8. From Universality to Humanitarianism
    a. The United Nations Declaration.

b. The Biafra Crisis.
c. From Human Rights to Humane Rights.

9. Critique of Human Rights
    a. The critique of individualism.
    b. The critique of universalism.
    c. The critique of entitlement.
    d. The critique of juridicization.

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APPENDIX : SONG SUBMISSION FORM

Student Information

- Name:
- Contact Information (Email):

2. Song Details

- Title of the Song:
- Artist:
- Authors (lyrics, music):
- Lyrics (if applicable):

3. Explanation: how this song relates to human rights