Genocide and Humanitarian Intervention

Course Description:

This colloquium traces the history of genocide in the 20th century and the question of humanitarian intervention to stop it, a topic that has been especially controversial since the end of the Cold War. The pre-1990s discussion begins with the Armenian genocide during the First World War and includes the Holocaust and Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge in the 1970s. Coverage of genocide and humanitarian intervention since the 1990s includes the wars in Bosnia, Rwanda, Kosovo, and Darfur. The final sessions of the course will include discussion of the International Criminal Court and the separate criminal tribunals that have been tasked with investigating and punishing the perpetrators of genocide.

Course Readings:

Samantha Power, "A Problem from Hell": America and the Age of Genocide (2002).

Philip Gourevitch, We Wish To Inform You That Tomorrow We Will Be Killed with Our Families: Stories from Rwanda (1998).

For each class session, supplemental readings—mostly newspaper and magazine articles—will distributed in class or made available online. Each of these readings offers a present-day "hook" to the historical events covered in Samantha Power's book and since its publication, from Armenia to Sudan.

Course Requirements:

The course is a colloquium, which means that class attendance and participation are especially important, counting for as much as 70% of the final grade. A central component of the course is a close reading and discussion of the assigned texts. There will be a short (8-10 pages) final paper whose topic, length, and format will be announced during the first weeks of the course.
Course Schedule & Readings

Week One

Tuesday: Course Introduction and Overview

Thursday: Armenia; Making Genocide a Crime

Readings: Power, "A Problem from Hell", pp. 1-85

Articles from The New York Times since 2006 about Turkey, Armenia, and the question of whether the massacres of 1915 in fact constitute genocide; if so, whether the Turkish government ought to be pressured into acknowledging that fact.

Week Two

Tuesday: Genocide in Cambodia

Readings: Power, "A Problem from Hell", pp. 86-154

Articles from The Economist and The Guardian about the ongoing war-crimes trial in Cambodia of Khmer Rouge officials, against the backdrop of a general discussion regarding the costs and benefits of such tribunals.

Thursday: U.S. Ratification of the Genocide Convention; The Kurds of Iraq


Week Three

Tuesday: Genocide in Bosnia (I)

Thursday: Genocide in Bosnia (II)

Readings: Power "A Problem from Hell", pp. 391-441


Week Four

Tuesday: Rwanda (I)


Thursday: Rwanda (II)

Readings: Gourevitch, We Wish To Inform You . . ., pp. 1-171

Week Five

Tuesday: Rwanda (III)

Readings: Gourevitch, We Wish To Inform You . . ., pp. 173-356

Articles from The New York Times and The Economist about the prosecutions and pending cases at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda.

Thursday: Kosovo

Readings: Power, "A Problem from Hell", 443-473
Week Six

Tuesday: Punishing Genocide

Readings: Power, "A Problem from Hell", pp. 475-516

Articles about recent court cases involving the crime of genocide, including the trial of Slobodan Milosevic. The purpose is to bring Samantha Power's chapter about courtroom justice (published ten years ago) up to date.

Thursday: Darfur

Readings:


[other readings TBA]

Week Seven

Tuesday: Is "Genocide" a Good Idea?

Readings:


[other readings to be distributed]

Thursday: Review Session