**Learning Human Rights and Political Theory: An Interactive Research Portfolio Approach**

**by Steven Miller**

**Introduction**
This portfolio assignment aims to embed human rights into a political science course on political theory. Within this course, students read political theorists, discuss human rights in general, watch documentary films, and complete a research portfolio project on a human rights issue (e.g., human trafficking, genocide). Leading into this research portfolio assignment, I offer several activities related to human rights. These activities are a human rights/constitutional amendment simulation, polling, crucial blogging, and a Wiki page photo/graph/image assignment. The purpose of the portfolio assignment and these activities is to promote student learning about political theorists, political theories, politics, and human rights. I want students to connect concrete human rights issues and their portfolio to the academic literature offered in class.

**Essential Questions**
Students produce a comprehensive research portfolio made up of thirteen content entries such as reports on independent research, responses to political theory/human rights questions, and reflections on Wiki pages and photograph/image assignments. The final entry in the portfolio is a paper in which students must answer essential questions such as: What are causes of the human rights atrocity/problem that you studied? How should we respond to this atrocity/problem? What is the relationship between political theory and human rights?

**Learning Outcomes**
As a result of satisfactory completion of this course, the student should be prepared to:

- Compare and contrast two major political theorists; and
- Analyze a fundamental political concept.

**Procedures**
The first five weeks are devoted to discussing various political theorists’ views on democracy, followed by a midterm exam. Next students spend three to four weeks examining the history of and background to different human rights issues. Finally, students return to reading political theorists and begin work on their research portfolio assignment. Students have five weeks to complete their portfolio assignment.

**Weeks 1-5 - Introduction of Political Theory and Democracy**
The purpose is to introduce students to political theory, with a focus on democracy. Examples of thinkers we read include Plato, Sophocles, Locke, Mill, Arendt, Amartya Sen, and Larry Diamond. By the end of
Assessment

Portfolio assignments are assessed based on a rubric that distinguishes between poor, satisfactory, good, very good, and excellent work. The rubric is divided into three categories: Content, clarity, and completion. An excellent portfolio will be insightful, thoughtful, and informative; connect political theorists to portfolio entries; demonstrate good writing style; and be persuasive in its argumentation.

Week 5, students will have submitted a paper and taken a midterm. While the thinkers we are studying contribute to an understanding of human rights, I do not emphasize human rights at this earlier stage.
Interactive Research Portfolio Assignment
For a Political Theory Course
Project Theme: Connecting Political Theory and Human Rights

Background
Studying the history of political theory, and contemporary political thought, enables one to learn about the meaning of fundamental political concepts, such as justice, freedom, power, democracy, equality, authority, obligations, peace, and security. In this portfolio assignment, students will try to connect political theory to a concrete human rights issue.

This assignment is designed to be interactive. The instructor will facilitate student engagement, debate, and collaboration with classmates and the instructor, both in regular and online modalities. We will use a film session followed by discussion, regular class discussions, a critical blog, a simulation, polling, and a Wiki page assignment.

Organizational Structure

Weeks 1-5 - Introduction of Political Theory and Democracy
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Weeks 6-8 - Introduce Research Portfolio Instructions, In-Class Lesson Plans, Human Rights Film
We will spend these class periods discussing the portfolio assignment, human rights in general, and current events. We will also schedule an extra session to watch one or two Human Rights films, and complete a simulation. During these weeks, students are to think about what topic they want to select. By the end of Week 8, students will have participated in an interactive activity related to their topic selection and have submitted their topic selection.

Weeks 9-15 – Work on the Research Portfolio, Continue with Study of Political Theory
Students will be working on their research portfolio entries. They will also be completing a Wiki page photograph/image assignment. While they are doing this work, we return to
portfolio assignment

studying political theorists in class who address topics such as equality, oppression, just war theory, and leadership.

Breakdown of Class Lessons for Weeks 6-8 (which is when we start discussing human rights)

Class #1 - Begin Introducing Students to Human Rights. Ask students these questions:

- What is a human right?
- What is not a human right?
- What are the differences between human rights and legal/civil rights? Between human rights and animal rights?

Extra Class Session: We watch two documentary films. Examples of films that could be shown are as follows:

Journey to Freedom

“Our fight against human trafficking is one of the great human rights causes of our time…”

-President Barack Obama, September 25, 2012

The same week President Obama made this statement, a film called Journey to Freedom played in U.S. Embassies around the globe. It tells the true stories of two men—21st Century Cambodian Vannak Prum and 19th Century American Solomon Northup—who were sold into slavery more than 150 years apart. It also examines the communities of abolitionists from yesterday and today that fight to free men and women like Vannak and Solomon who are held against their will and forced to work for others.” (http://freedomcenter.org/journey-to-freedom)

My Neighbor My Killer

“Could you ever forgive the people who slaughtered your family? In 1994, hundreds of thousands of Rwandan Hutus were incited to wipe out the country’s Tutsi minority. From the crowded capital to the smallest village, local ‘patrols’ massacred lifelong friends and
family members, most often with machetes and improvised weapons. Announced in 2001, and ending this year, the government put in place the Gacaca Tribunals — open-air hearings with citizen-judges meant to try their neighbors and rebuild the nation. As part of this experiment in reconciliation, confessed genocide killers are sent home from prison, while traumatized survivors are asked to forgive them and resume living side-by-side. Filming for close to a decade in a tiny hamlet, award-winning filmmaker Anne Aghion has charted the impact of Gacaca on survivors and perpetrators alike. Through their fear and anger, accusations and defenses, blurry truths, inconsolable sadness, and hope for life renewed, she captures the emotional journey to coexistence.” (http://www.gacacafilms.com/about.html)

Discussion will follow screening of the films.

Class #2- Lecture and Discussion that Introduces the Topic of Human Rights

- Students are assigned to read the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).

- For the first half of class, the instructor will give a PowerPoint-guided lecture on the UDHR, using information from Mary Ann Glendon’s A World Made New: Eleanor Roosevelt and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Key topics in this lecture will be as follows:

- The role Eleanor Roosevelt played in creating the UDHR.
- The political and historical context in 1948, especially the Cold War tensions between the U.S. and U.S.S.R.
- The extent to which different countries and viewpoints were represented in the creation of the UDHR.
- Specific articles in the UDHR that caused controversies, such as the exclusion of a ban on the death penalty, the issue of freedom to change religion, and the guarantee of equal rights to marriage.

During the second half of class, the Instructor will ask students discussion questions, such as

- What is the difference between a right that is “recognized” vs. a right that is “conferred”?
- Are human rights universal?
  - Are human rights a Western idea imposed on non-Western cultures?
How do we resolve the conflict between state sovereignty and humanitarian intervention?

Classes #3, #4, and #5

Human Rights/Constitutional Amendment Simulation

A Hearing on the Proposed Human Rights Constitutional Amendments

Before the Subcommittee on the Constitution and Civil Justice
The U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C.

Committee Members
Rep. Trent Franks (R-AZ), Chairman
Rep. Cynthia Lummis (R-WY)
Rep. Nancy Pelosi (D-CA)
Rep. Lynn Jenkins (R-KS)
Rep. Nydia Valazquez (D-NY)
John Conyers, Jr. (D-MI)
Rep. Jeff Denham (R-CA)
Rep. John Lewis (D-GA)
Rep. Paul Ryan (R-WI)

Students review the following economic, social, and cultural rights in the UDHR that are not currently in the U.S. Constitution:

• “Everyone has the right to freedom of movement”

“Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution.”
• “Men and women of full age, without any limitation due to the race, nationality or religion, have the right to marry and to found a family. They are entitled to equal rights as to marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution.”

• “Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favorable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment.”

• “Everyone, without any discrimination, has the right to equal pay for equal work.”

• “Everyone has the right to rest and leisure, including reasonable limitation of working hours and periodic holidays with pay.”

• “Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.”

• “Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.”

• “Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits.”

**Simulation Question:** Should the above-listed economic, social, and cultural rights that are in the UDHR, but not in the U.S. Constitution, be added to the U.S. Constitution through constitutional amendment?

Instructor divides students in the class into three groups: The Blue Team, The Silver Team, and Members of Congress

The Blue Team: Argues that some or all of the economic, social, and cultural rights listed above and in the UDHR should be added to the U.S. Constitution through amendment.

The Silver Team: Argues that none of the economic, social, and cultural rights in the UDHR should be in the U.S. Constitution.
Congressional Committee Members: The Members of the Subcommittee on the Constitution and Civil Justice

Instructions for First Simulation Class Meeting
A) The Blue Team
Elect a team leader. Develop your best arguments on behalf of amending the U.S. Constitution to add some or all of those economic, social, and cultural human rights. You should have a minimum of four arguments. The team leader writes down these arguments.

B) The Silver Team
Elect a team leader. Develop your three best arguments in opposition to amending the U.S. Constitution. You should have a minimum of four arguments. The team leader writes down these arguments.

C) Congressional Committee Members
Each student role plays a member of Congress. Students decide which Member of Congress each student will role play. Research your member of Congress so you know how he or she thinks. Develop a total of six good questions that you will ask the teams. Have the Chair write down these questions.

Instructions for the Second Simulation Class Meeting
Each group meets to organize (20 minutes)

Each team writes a summary of its arguments on the white board. Then each group orally presents its arguments (15 minutes each group, 30 minutes total)

Members of Congress ask questions (20 minutes)

Each team offers a rebuttal (5 minutes, 10 minutes total)

After the hearing, the Congressional Committee Members will deliberate (20 minutes)

Parliamentary Procedures
Teams are allowed to request additional time. The decision to grant that time rests with the Committee Chair. The Chair may also extend the time for questioning.

Instructions for the Third Simulation Class Meeting
The committee members will announce their votes on whether or not they support
moving the proposed Human Rights Amendment to the Congressional Floor Debate. Each committee member will give the reasons for his or her vote (5 minutes for each member, 45 minutes).

**Debriefing**
Discussion of what was learned through the simulation (10 minutes).

Students are to submit all of their written work to the Instructor at the conclusion of the simulation.

**Class #6 - Polling on Current Events, Topic Selection**
Poll Everywhere ([www.polleverywhere.com](http://www.polleverywhere.com)) is a web tool that may be used to facilitate discussion of current events. Select current events related to human rights, such as

- IKEA and the issue of using forced prison labor
- The Bangladesh Fires

Polling Instructions: Have students use their smart phones and laptops to answer questions that the Professor creates. Examples of questions could be

- After discussing human right issues in relation to IKEA, would you still shop at IKEA?
- Do the recent fires in Bangladesh factories make you think differently about the clothes you purchase?

**Students Select Portfolio Research Topic**
Review possible topics below

- Labor trafficking (select a country or a region of the world)
- Sex trafficking (select a country or a region of the world)
- Child soldiers in Syria
- Child soldiers in the Congo
- Child mine workers in India
- Organ trafficking
- In relation to topic of genocide, select one of the following:
  - Darfur
  - Rwanda
  - Bosnia
  - Iraq
portfolio assignment

- Cambodia
- Guatemala
- Armenia
- U.S. (against the Native Americans)

Critical Blog Activity (Due by the End of Week 8)
1) Go to the homepage of the Blackboard Learning Module System (LMS) Enhancement Shell for our political theory course. There you will see a link that says “Critical Blog Activity.” Click on that link.

2) Select a topic from the list above.

3) Post your topic selection on the blog. Explain why you select this topic.

4) Comment on two other blog posts submitted by classmates. Set forth what you think will be the primary challenge faced by the student who chooses this topic.

5) Submit a follow-up post to your original blog post. Respond to any comments you have received. If you want to stay with your topic, then email your topic to the instructor through Blackboard. If you want to change your topic, submit another blog post and go through each of these five steps again.

Weeks 9-15
Week 9 - Start the Portfolio
The portfolio involves writing entries that are kept together in a small notebook or folder. Each entry should be at least 250 words and have a heading with proper source citation. There are three kinds of entries students are to complete: Independent Research Entries, Responses to Questions, Reflections on Wiki Pages.

Independent Research Entries (Complete At Least Five Entries)
These entries are to be reflection statements on any of the following:

- Journal articles
- Newspaper articles
- Books
- Films or video (documentary or Hollywood)
- Images
- Websites
- Guest speaker
For each of these “Independent Research” entries, write a summary and reflection on your source.

Library Research Guide
Iris Carroll, the Modesto Junior College Librarian, created an excellent research guide. It contains related to human rights, human trafficking and genocide. To help with independent research entries, please feel encouraged to use those resources. The link is http://libguides.mjc.edu/polsc130.

Responses to Questions (Complete At Least Five Entries)
These entries are to answer my study questions listed below:

• A Socratic maxim is, “It’s better to suffer wrong than to do wrong.” Gorgias. What does this maxim mean? Is this maxim relevant to politics? Does this maxim relate in any way to your human rights issue?

• Socrates states, “the true champion of justice, if he intends to survive even for a short time, must necessarily confine himself to private life and leave politics alone.” Apology

Is this good advice for someone trying to stop the human rights violation/atrocity you are researching? Explain.

• What is John Locke’s law of nature? What is his social contract? Do the law of nature and social contract relate to human rights issues? Explain.

• What is the status of freedom of speech in the country or region you are researching? What would John Stuart Mill think of the free speech situation? How does the issue of freedom of speech relate to the human rights issue/atrocity you are researching?

• What does Hannah Arendt say about civil disobedience specifically, and political participation, in general. Has civil disobedience or political participation been used to stop human rights violations? What would Arendt think of the active campaigns to stop violation of labor rights? Explain.

What is liberation technology? What are examples where liberation technology has promoted freedom? What impedes the ability of liberation technology to achieve its
• Larry Diamond argue? Explain.

• Many of us thought that lack of standards for human rights the world over was one of the greatest causes of friction among nations, and that recognition of human rights might become one of the cornerstones on which peace could eventually be based.” – Eleanor Roosevelt

Would political theorists we read agree with Eleanor Roosevelt? Explain.

• Paulo Freire focuses on humanization and dehumanization. What does he say about these terms? How are victims of the human rights violations/atrocities you are researching, and people who cause these human rights violations, dehumanized?

• Find a smartphone app used to combat human trafficking or genocide. Describe what this app does. What would some of the political theorists say about use of apps for these purposes?

• Find a website that is used to combat human rights in general, or human trafficking or genocide specifically. Explain whether, and if so how, this website helps.

• Jean Bethke Elshtain sets forth a contemporary just war theory that places special emphasis on how military force can sometimes be an instrument of justice. Is it ever just to use military force to intervene to stop the human rights violation/atrocity you are researching? Explain.

Week 10
Participate in the Wiki Page Photograph/Image Assignment (Complete One Entry)
1) Go to the homepage of the Blackboard Learning Module System (LMS) Enhancement Shell for our political theory course. There you will see a link that says “Wiki Page Assignment.” Click on that link.

2) Please post comments on any of the two Wiki pages that are already posted. (At least 75 words for each comment.) In your comments, discuss what you think about the photos. In your comments, you may include answers to these questions: What is the message that the photo(s) reveals? How do you feel about the photo(s)? Also, create your own Wiki page. Your Wiki page is to contain one or two photos that have to do with human rights.
Write a portfolio entry that reflects upon this assignment.

**The Final Paper (Due Week 14)**

Possible topics include as follows:

- What are the causes of the human rights atrocity or problem that you studied? And/Or how should we respond?

- Or a topic of your choice (check with Instructor if you choose this option).

When I say “we,” you may define the “we.” So the “we” can mean citizens, activists, transnational advocacy groups, the U.S. government, the United Nations, and/or Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs).

This paper should be at least 1,000 words at the 13th entry in your portfolio. In this paper, discuss at least four political theories from class.

**Week 15. Submit the Portfolio, Debrief**

**Due Dates For Assignments**

Friday, February 22 - Human Rights Extra Session Film Day (10am to noon) (8 Extra Credit points)
Wednesday, February 27 and March 4- Simulation (10 points)
Wednesday, March 6 - In-class polling exercise (10 points)
Monday, March 11 - Select paper topic through critical blogging (10 points)
Monday, March 25 – Wiki Page photograph/image assignments (10 points)
Monday, April 15 The portfolio entries and final paper (70 points)
Monday, April 15 Debrief (10 points)
Format for Portfolio Entries

Below is the format to use for your Independent Research Portfolio Entries

Name

Portfolio Entry # ___

Title of Entry

Citation Information of Source

Then write an entry of at least 250 words. This entry should briefly summarize your source as well as offer reflection about information in the source. You are also welcome to discuss how the information in this article connects to political theorists we have read in class.

You are required to complete at least six of these “Independent Research” Entries.

You may include the article you select. That is optional. However, if you are writing about a photograph or image, please include that image with your entry.

Below is the format to use for your Responses to Questions Portfolio Entries

Name

Portfolio Entry # ___

Title of Entry

Write out the review question you are answering

Then write an entry of at least 250 words. This entry should be an answer to the question.

You are required to complete at least five of these “Responses to Questions” Entries.
Below is the format to use for your Wiki Page Portfolio Entry

Name

Portfolio Entry # ___

Title of Entry

Copy and Paste the Wiki page photographs or images here, or attached them to your entry.

Then write an entry of at least 250 words. This entry should discuss the Wiki page and your thoughts about the photographs and images. You may also discuss what you thought about the Wiki assignment.
### Grading Rubric for Research Portfolio

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<th>CATEGORY</th>
<th>Excellent/Very Good (A/B+)</th>
<th>Good/Satisfactory (B/C)</th>
<th>Poor (D/F)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Content</td>
<td>• The Independent research entries and responses to questions are informative and insightful.</td>
<td>• Good points are included but the answers could be more developed.</td>
<td>• The arguments presented are weak, incoherent, and wrong.</td>
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<td>• The Wiki page reflection entry is thoughtful.</td>
<td>• Some of the arguments are unclear, incomplete, or incorrect.</td>
<td>• The final paper discusses two or fewer theorists.</td>
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<td>• The arguments in the final paper are persuasive and make sense.</td>
<td>• The final paper discusses three political theorists.</td>
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<td>• The final paper effectively used information from the portfolio entries</td>
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<td>• The final paper discusses four political theorists.</td>
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<td>Clarity</td>
<td>• The writing style is clear</td>
<td>• There are a few spelling errors and/or typos.</td>
<td>• Spelling mistakes.</td>
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<td>• The paper is very well proofread with virtually no typos or spelling mistakes.</td>
<td>• The arguments can be understood well.</td>
<td>• A number of typos.</td>
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<td>• The format given for portfolio entries is followed correctly</td>
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<td>• Poor sentence construction.</td>
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<td>Completion</td>
<td>• Completed all parts – all of the portfolio entries and the final paper.</td>
<td>• Completed almost all of the assigned parts.</td>
<td>• Didn’t come very close to meeting the requirements of 13 entries.</td>
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<td>• The word length of the entries and final paper are met</td>
<td>• The word length of the portfolio entries and the final paper are met</td>
<td>• The word length of the portfolio entries and the final paper are not met.</td>
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