

Competing Visions of Human Rights: Questions for U.S. Policy



THE
**CHOICES
PROGRAM**
BROWN UNIVERSITY

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Acknowledgments

Competing Visions of Human Rights: Questions for U.S. Policy was developed by the Choices Program with the assistance of faculty at the Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs, scholars at Brown University, and other experts in the field. We wish to thank the following researchers for their invaluable input to the written and video portions of this and previous editions:

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We wish to thank the Carnegie Corporation of New York for its generous support of these materials. The statements made and views expressed are solely the responsibility of the Choices Program.

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Introduction: What are Human Rights?

A political dissident is jailed in Myanmar without being given a fair trial. A massive oil leak in the Gulf of Mexico threatens the livelihood of fishermen on the Atlantic coast. A child is kidnapped, drugged, and forced to take up arms in the conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Young Muslim students are banned from wearing traditional headscarves in French public schools. A man in India without access to clean water dies of a treatable disease. A guard looks on as an inmate is assaulted in a Texas jail. A woman working at a business firm in New York is paid less than her male counterparts.

These scenarios raise two fundamental questions: What are the basic rights and freedoms that every human being deserves? How should we protect these rights and freedoms? By exploring historical and current debates about human rights, we can seek answers to these questions.

What are human rights?

Human rights are fundamental rights and freedoms that all people are entitled to simply by the fact that they are human. Human rights have been central to political struggles and social movements throughout history as individuals have organized, spoken out, and even risked their lives to demand that their rights be respected. Today, it is generally accepted around the world that governments have a responsibility to ensure and protect certain rights for their people. Human rights laws seek to protect the powerless from the powerful. They mainly focus on how governments treat their people, but also make governments responsible for protecting individuals from abuse by other individuals.

Yet while the general principle of human rights has been broadly accepted, human rights abuses persist, and questions about the subject are highly contested. These questions



UN Photo/Sylvain Liechti. Photo #571930.

Child soldiers (with their backs to the camera) who have given up their weapons turn themselves in to government authorities in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. December 2013. The use of child soldiers under the age of fifteen is a human rights violation that is prohibited by international law.

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Teacher Resource Book



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Promoting Human Rights through Social Movements

Objectives:

Students will: Consider the role of social movements in promoting human rights.

Assess creative forms of expression in movements for human rights.

Required Reading:

Students should have read Part II of the student text and completed “Study Guide—Part II” (TRB 18-19) or the “Advanced Study Guide—Part II” (TRB-20).

Videos:

Short, free videos that you may find useful for this lesson are available at <<https://video.choices.edu/curriculum/human-rights>>.

Handouts:

“Human Rights and Social Movements” (TRB-24) for each student

“Sources from Social Movements,” one set of sources per group (TRB 25-32)

In the Classroom:

1. Focus Question—Write the following question the board: “What is a social movement?” Ask students to recall the previous night’s reading, and remind the class that many social movements focus on a specific human rights issue. How can social movements promote human rights? What are some examples of social movements in the United States? In other countries? Encourage students to think of examples from the past as well as the present.

Tell students that individuals and organizations who lead social movements often use a variety of methods to promote their message, recruit members, and gain support for their cause. Ask students to consider how different social movements have communicated their views. For example, did they use public protests, music, artwork, or social

media? Scholars have argued that art—including things like music, murals, theater, and poetry—is often an important tool in social movements, because it can command attention and gain an emotional response. Why might emotional responses be important?

2. Source Analysis—Tell students that they will explore a variety of sources from past and current social movements for human rights. Divide students into four groups. Distribute “Human Rights and Social Movements” and a different set of sources to each group. Each student should have their own copy of the sources and questions, but should work with group members to analyze the sources and complete the questions. Tell students that everyone will be responsible for reporting on their group’s sources and responses to other members of the class.

3. Jigsaw Groups—After students have completed their source analysis, reassign students to new groups, ensuring that each new group has a representative from each of the former groups. Ask students to share a their sources with their new group and provide a brief description of the social movement that the sources represent.

4. Large Group Discussion—After about ten minutes, bring the class back together. Ask students to list the different human rights for which the people in these movements were (or are) advocating. What different forms of expression were used?

Ask the class to consider the following question: “Why do social movements use creative forms of expression—including art and social media—to express their views?” Have students brainstorm and share responses. Students should use their worksheet and sources to support their views.

How can social movements promote human rights? What are the benefits of using creative forms of expression in fighting for human rights?

Suggestion:

If time permits, you may want to do this activity over two class periods and have students spend time researching their assigned social movements.

Extra Challenges:

1. Have students creatively express their views on a human rights issue. For example, students might create a poem, drawing, or blog. Have students consider their intended audience and the goals that they aim to achieve by creating this source. For example, do they want to raise awareness about the issue, create a network of activists, influence policy makers, or organize protests or rallies?

2. Invite students to research a historical social movement and different forms of expression used to communicate the issues and goals of the movement. Are there social issues today that the movement would contest? Ask students to report back to the class.

Homework:

Students should read Part III of the reading and complete “Study Guide—Part III” (TRB 33-34) or the “Advanced Study Guide—Part III” (TRB-35).

Human Rights and Social Movements

Instructions: With your group, consider your assigned sources. Answer the questions below with your group members, but make sure that you have your own copy of the answers.

Questions

1.
 - a. What types of sources are these (for example, paintings, performance, etc.)?
 - b. When were these sources created?
 - c. What social movement are or were these sources a part of?
2. According to the sources, what specific human rights are the people in this movement being denied or striving for? Are these civil and political rights, social and cultural rights, economic rights, or a combination?
3. What emotions or attitudes do the creators of the sources express (such as anger, hope, pride, frustration, fear, defiance, etc.)? Give at least two specific examples.
4. To whom do you think the creative protest tactics are directed? For example, are they meant for the government? The local, national, or global community? A specific group of people? (There may be more than one answer to this question.)
5. Why do you think people in this movement chose to use this type of expression?

Sources from Social Movements

A. Songs from the Choir Project in Cairo, Egypt

January 25, 2011 marked the beginning of a revolution in Egypt. Over the course of eighteen days, millions of Egyptians protested for more democratic governance and basic human rights. Angered by corruption, poverty, and oppression in Egypt, they challenged one of the longest standing regimes in the region and demanded that President Hosni Mubarak step down from power. He had ruled Egypt for nearly thirty years. Among many issues, protesters opposed Mubarak's suppression of free speech. Journalists and bloggers were often detained for speaking out. Political assembly and opposition was met with militant police tactics.

On the third day of the uprising, the Egyptian government shut down the internet and social media channels for several days. This did not stop protesters from using other forms of communication, such as flyer distribution and creative tactics to continue organizing for change. The Choir Project is one example. It began in 2010 as the "Complaints Choir," with the intent to turn everyday concerns into music. This led to workshops for participants of all ages and backgrounds to compose and perform songs for the community that speak out about political and human rights issues.

"Sometimes we would find a venue willing to share the risk and host our performances.... Most of our viewers watched us online. Internet was the main channel...."

—Salam Yousry, artistic director of the Choir Project, 2011

Today, the Choir Project continues to perform internationally, share its music on social media, and conduct workshops for hundreds of participants. Its website offers a short documentary and a timeline of past and upcoming events <<http://www.choirproject.net/>>. The following songs, written collectively by the Choir Project beginning in 2010, are translated from Arabic.

"I Am Just Fine"

I am just fine. I am just fine.

Despite the soaring prices of electricity and gas, I am just fine.

Despite my friends who were killed or in prison, I am just fine.

Imprisoned and the walls keep me, I miss peace of mind.

Injustice is crippling me, damn injustice.

I wake up counting my friends who are not yet in prison, who still stand beside me,
and who are no longer there. I am just fine.

One day I was on the street, chanting among people.

Surely, all this time was not in vain.

I am wanted for prison. My passport is in my hand.

What is the solution? What can I do?

I am just fine.

Oh, how I wish there was peace.

Oh, how I wish there were no borders.

I am just fine.

Video: <https://youtu.be/fRYww9ZxVz0>

“Riddle Me This”

Riddle me this, riddle me that
 I’m afraid the joke
 might be swallowed by the sorrow
 I have a question
 If I don’t voice it, if I suppress it
 my head will explode
 What’s going on?
 What is the revolution?
 Who created it?
 Who protected it?
 Who stole it?
 Who controls its media?
 Who is trying us in military courts?

Who is describing us as thugs?
 Where is the tank?
 Who’s driving it?
 Who crushed us under his wheels?
 What’s going on?
 Who’s setting us back?
 Who’s starving us?
 Who’s destroying our joy?
 Who’s calling us traitors?
 Who is dividing us?
 Who is repressing us?

Video: <https://youtu.be/vSoXDL5cAfQ>

“They’re Talking About a Revolution”

They’re talking about a revolution
 About violence, gunfire, and blood
 They’re talking about a revolution
 About free-people that are now filling the squares
 They’re talking about a revolution
 There are gatherings, chants, and rants
 They’re talking about a revolution
 And fear is no longer there

What role should I now play?
 Anger... Hope... Fear... Anxiety...
 Passion... Glee... Guilt... Tears...
 Freedom Freedom Freedom Freedom
 They’re talking about a revolution
 Beautiful moments to be lived
 They’re talking about a revolution
 And souls given away, that didn’t go to waste

This leaves me a bit perplexed
 What role should I now play?
 And if I am far from home

They’re talking about a revolution
Video: https://youtu.be/v60Cp2B_Ugc

“People Want Justice Now”

People want justice now. People want truth now. People want their freedom, now.
 Walking out of our houses, not fearing death, join hands raise voices.
 This is time to speak up, not be silent.
 Our children’s blood is debt on our necks. We will never compromise.
 Our children’s bond we will collect to make guns out of it, and we will defend.
 Clap your hands together. Make the hundreds multiply into thousands.

Video: <https://youtu.be/yhIe19MauuI>

B. Artwork by Titus Kaphar from the Black Lives Matter Movement

On August 9, 2014, in Ferguson, Missouri, Michael Brown, an unarmed black teenager, was shot on his way to his grandmother's house by Darren Wilson, a white police officer. Thousands of people across the United States and in Ferguson protested. This was one of many incidents that spurred the Black Lives Matter movement, a continuation of the civil rights movement in the United States. The goals of the movement include an end to the criminalization and dehumanization of black people in the United States; investments in their education, health and safety; the demilitarization of law enforcement; a right to restored land, clean air, clean water and housing; economic justice and a redistribution of wealth; direct democratic influence; and reparations for past and continuing injustices.

Titus Kaphar was born in 1976 in Kalamazoo, Michigan. He earned a Master's of Fine Arts from Yale University's School of Art. In 2014, *Time Magazine* commissioned Kaphar to create artwork in response to the Ferguson events. He titled the painting *Yet Another Fight for Remembrance*. He created *Behind the Myth of Benevolence* the same year.



© Titus Kaphar, courtesy of Jack Shainman Gallery, NY.

Yet Another Fight for Remembrance. 2014.



© Titus Kaphar, courtesy of Jack Shainman Gallery, NY.

Behind the Myth of Benevolence. 2014. The man in the foreground of the painting is Thomas Jefferson.

C. Street Art for Indigenous Culture and Justice

Unceded Voices: Anticolonial Street Artists Convergence is a collaboration of primarily indigenous-identified women of color in Tiotia:ke (the original indigenous name for the region of Montreal, Canada). It was founded in 2014. The organization's public art takes various forms including painted murals, wheat paste collages, and street performance. The intent is to spark conversation and to remind people about the history and value of indigenous culture. The organization seeks justice for indigenous peoples related to environmental issues and violence against women.



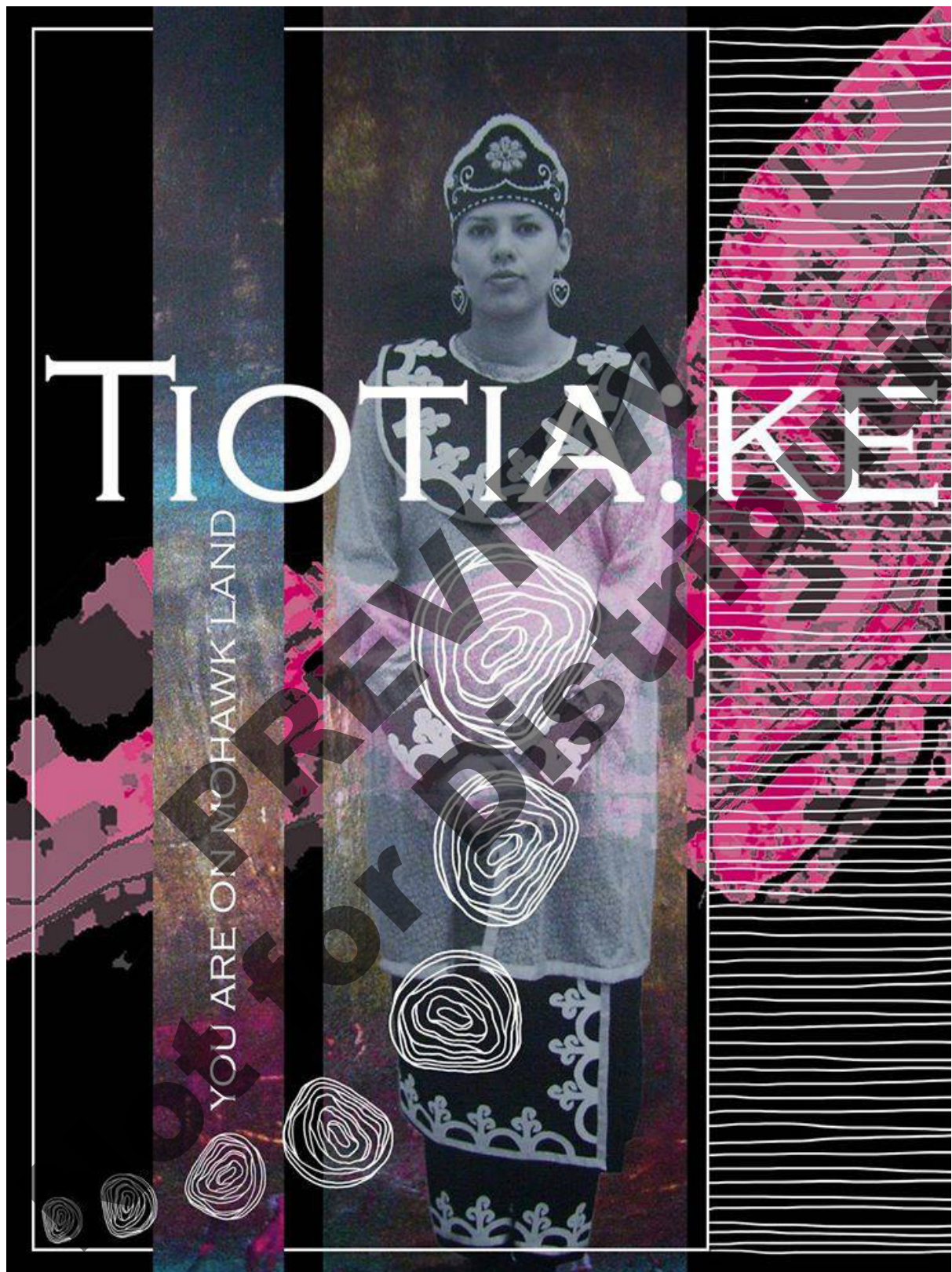
© Unceded Voices courtesy of Camille Larivée.

No Pipelines by Swarm, Unceded Voices, 2014. This mural resists the construction of pipelines that transport crude oil and threaten indigenous lands and resources.



© Unceded Voices courtesy of Camille Larivée.

Justice for all Indigenous Women by Jessica Sabogal, Unceded Voices, 2014. This mural addresses ongoing violence against indigenous women, such as the disappearances of more than one thousand indigenous women in Canada since 2000.



© Unceded Voices courtesy of Camille Larivée.

You are on Mohawk Land by Lindsay Katsitsakatste Delaronde, a Mohawk artist from Kahnawake, and Lianne Charlie (Tage Cho Hudan), 2015. This poster reminds the urban population of Montreal about the history of the region.

D. *Arpilleras* of Women in Chile, 1973-1980s

Arpilleras (pronounced “ar-pee-air-ahs”) are applique pictures or tapestries. This art developed into an important form of resistance in Chile during the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet. Over the course of Pinochet’s repressive regime, the government killed or “disappeared” more than three thousand people and arrested and tortured tens of thousands more. Women used *arpilleras* to tell their stories and to supplement their income. Local groups smuggled the *arpilleras* out of the country to buyers overseas. Some were bought by human rights organizations who displayed the *arpilleras* as a way of raising international awareness of the situation in Chile. In other cases, female prisoners in Chile made *arpilleras* in order to pass secret information. For many years, *arpilleras* were dismissed as insignificant “women’s work” by those in power, allowing them to become a powerful tool against the military dictatorship. For more information and examples of *arpilleras*, go to http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/quilts/exhibit/chilean_arpilleras.html.



© CAIN (cain.ulst.ac.uk/quilts/exhibit/chilean_arpilleras.html).

The Spanish words on this *arpillera* read *¿dónde están?* (“where are they?”) above each of the three figures at the bottom, and *justicia* (justice) next to the white dove.



During Pinochet's dictatorship, the government forced thousands to leave the country. The banner reads *Por el derecho a vivir en la patria ¡¡No al exilio!!* ("For the right to live in our homeland. No to exile!!").



This *arpillera* says *La Cueva Sola*. *La Cueva* is a traditional Chilean dance that is danced in pairs. In this case, the women are dancing *sola*, or alone. The women are wearing pictures of their missing loved ones on their hearts.