

# Anthropology 456: War and Human Rights Assignments

See also: [Syllabus](#)

## Weekly Reflection Papers

### Week One: Stop Making Sense

1. TAKE ME TO THE RIVER, WASH ME DOWN: Write a two page war and/or human rights autobiography. What has informed your understanding of war and/or the idea of human rights? It may be that like me, war touched your ancestors and in some cases brought them to this country. Perhaps your parents were affected by war or have strong feelings about human rights. Perhaps was shaped your environment growing up in some way. How has war touched you life? You may refer to movies, television, or music. What do you know about war and/or human rights? What do you want to know?

### Week Two: Franz Ferdinand

1. **THE KILLERS:** What do you think is anthropology's role or responsibility with regard to war and human rights? What is the role of the anthropologist, the fieldworker, or journalist? Does an anthropologist have a "humanitarian mandate" to get involved to help preserve the lives or the culture of the people they study? What do you think and why do you think this way? What academic or personal experiences have brought you to this point of view? Reflect on the readings or compare and contrast the articles.

2. **NORA JONES:** If you identify with the victim, the suffering, are you contaminated? Will you suffer witness trauma (delayed stress or post-traumatic stress syndrome)? Will your work stigmatize you? Will you be less objective as a scholar? There is a Zen saying, "A tenth of an inch of difference and heaven and earth are set apart." How do you go about transgressing the border without being burned by the fires of hell or burdened by the transience of heaven for the living? According to the poet Susan Griffin, war . . . has less to do with bombs, battles, and deaths than with the denial in a social structure that makes fragments of real events, "where one is never allowed to see the effects of what one does." How can anthropology contribute an analysis that integrates the effects of what one does when it is sometimes difficult to know the interrelationships in our changing world?

### Week Three: Kigali

1. **THE CRANBERRIES: SARAJEVO.** Please reflect on the readings regarding Rwanda or whatever aspects of the readings/films motivates you. What stands out? After finishing the readings, seeing the video, and if you attended the Dallaire lecture and/or met him, what thoughts have you had? What did you not know before or what do you know differently now? What is the role of the anthropologist and the discipline of anthropology with regard to Rwanda?

2. **METRIC: I FOUGHT THE WAR (AND THE WAR WON).** What impression of the anthropology of war and human rights did you form from the films you saw in your lower division anthropology classes? Did you see films like, "The Yanomamo," or "Dead Birds: The Dani of New Guinea," or others in your introduction to anthropology class? How do these films (or others) shape a students perspective about war and human rights from a cross-cultural perspective?

### Week 4: The Church of John Coltrane

1. **A LOVE SUPREME:** You are a cultural anthropologist in Srebrenica, Bosnia-Herzegovina studying the repatriation, or lack of it, of Bosnian Muslims to their homes. A forensic anthropologist asks you to assist in the identification of remains found in a mass grave. There is no identification on the bodies, but much of the clothing is handmade or patched. In order to assist in the identification, what do you do? What tools do you use? When you reach the point of finding kin or friends of the murdered men to help in your identification, how do you proceed? What are your concerns? What kind of reception to you expect? What kind of economic support do you expect?

2. **JACKSON BROWNE: DOCTOR MY EYES.** History, [Karl Popper] argued, has no eternal and unchanging laws. History is movement, transience. It devours everything .

. . Popper considered that the most appropriate criterion for categorizing societies was their degree of openness to other cultures, to their principles and values. An open society is one that accepts the Other and is ready to acknowledge the opinions and choices of the Other. . . That closed attitude toward the Other characterizes the three plagues of the contemporary world - nationalism, racism and religious fundamentalism. . . **ignorance is not a simple lack of knowledge, the refusal to know, issuing from cowardice, pride or laziness of mind. Popper did not accept the explanation that people did not know about the concentration camps, the Gulag, the Holocaust. They simply did not want to know. In Popper's philosophy, ignorance has an ethnical dimension, and knowing is a moral obligation for human beings.**

(From, The New York Times Magazine, "The Philosopher as Giant-Slayer" by Ryszard Kapuscinski. 1/1/1995: 24-25.) What do you think about this?

### Week Five: Wallace Stevens

**1. AFTER THE FINAL NO:** Is it possible to define human rights in international terms? Critique the United Nations' "The Universal Declaration of Human Rights" - <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/> and/or compare or critique the definition of human rights used by the American Anthropological Society and/or the Commission on Human Rights associated with the AAA. <http://www.aaanet.org/committees/cfhr/index.htm>  
The following site may be useful:  
<http://www.rightsworks.org/RightsWorks.html>

**2. WAYS OF LOOKING AT A BLACKBIRD:** What's on your mind, in your mind, in your vision after sorting through the readings? Critique/summarize selected readings.

### Week Six: Shoah

**1. NOEMI BAN:** There is a story often retold that may be true or may be an instructive myth. Tell me what it means to you; tell me what you think/feel. One miserable night, some Jewish men in Dachau put God on trial for the Holocaust, the genocide, the awful war. They found HIM guilty. They convicted God of murder for letting it happen. And then they said their evening prayers . . .

**2. ELIE WIESELI.** It is 2010 and you are a blue-helmet peace-keeper with the United Nations forces. You are asked where you want to be stationed. What does the world look like to you? Where are the conflicts? What kind of work do you want to do?

### Week Seven: Bushido

**1. TAI CHI:** You are a professor of anthropology teaching a class on war and human rights at a time when the country is involved in an increasingly controversial war. You are invited to attend an event in your campus' red square to both honor the 2,000 soldiers killed in that war and to bring attention to the war in a way that some may consider a protest or activism. It overlaps with class time. Do you invite the students to attend? Do you just release those who want to go from class and provide an alternative for the others? What are the issues you consider and what determination do you make? What's going through your mind?

**2. QIGONG:** What are the most pressing human rights issues in the world today? Gender issues: female genital surgery? education? sex trafficking? equality? Ecological issues: dumping of outlawed chemicals in other countries? pollution of the poorest areas of the earth? depleted uranium in areas where there has been war? land mines? Globalization and greater disparity between those who have and those who don't? To what issue would you lend your voice? What issues have you been introduced to that are not worth your breath?

### Week Eight: Baraka

**1. CHI:** In Part 5 of Hinton, "Critical Reflections: Anthropology and Study of Genocide," Nagengast, Scheper-Hughes, and Bowen discuss the current state of anthropology and our future directions. Please summarize this last section of Hinton. Of the three articles, which do you find most insightful and why? Why have anthropologists ignored violence to the extent we have? How can we, as anthropologists (or as a political science student!) contribute to the understanding of this troubling aspect of what it means to be human?

**2. PRANA:** In chapter 14 of the Power's text, "Conclusion," she writes about knowledge, influence, accountability, and the future, ending with a quote about reason

and unreasonability. Please summarize the Power text and her perspective about this kind of research and work.

### **Week Nine: Van Morrison: When Will I Ever Learn?**

**1. INTO THE MYSTIC.** There is a Zen saying, "A tenth of an inch of difference and heaven and earth are set apart." How do you go about transgressing the border without being burned by the fires of hell or burdened by the transience of heaven for the living?

**2. TENDER HEARTS FROM A BUDDHIST MONK:** What would you do if you discovered a poisoned tree (tree of poison) on your property? On first discovering a poisoned tree some people see only its danger. Their response is to cut it down before anyone else eats of the poisoned fruit. Does this resemble our culture's naming or avoidance of naming/discussing violence, war and killing? Consider who has the power to name, and the way that naming or failure to name shapes our lives. Does avoidance of a subject give it power in ways that may damage us or limit our thinking? Our initial response may be to avoid the topic - consider that it only happens to others, that we are not affected. War/violence is what happens to them, not to us or, conversely, that war/violence is a potential act or condition of other people. They are the terrorists, the war mongers, we are not. They have committed evil acts, we have not. Why are some of us in our culture more open to discussion of the cultural construction of war and analysis of cultural constructions in response to either those definitions of war/violence or the experiential effects of war? Who do some of us not meet discussion or even the experience of war/violence with aversion or denial? Knowing the poisoned tree is somehow a part of us, a part of past experiences, a potential future cause of suffering, and here to stay, we may say, "let's have compassion for the tree, for ourselves. So we build a fence around the tree so that others may not be poisoned. We show a profound shift of relationship from judgment and fear to compassion. The compassion for ourselves extends to others, known and unknown. There is another possibility that may be more analytic and whole. Sometimes a person may say "Oh, a poisoned fruit!" and pick it, pick at it, use the poison as a medicine. Maybe, through respect and understanding, this person sees in a way opposite to most people and finds the "evil" in the poison just there - Sometimes a person is willing to learn, witness, and not look away. Does it make a difference? If you identify with the victim, the suffering, are you contaminated? Will you suffer witness trauma (delayed stress or post-traumatic stress syndrome)? Will your work stigmatize you? Will you be less objective as a scholar?