

GEOGRAPHY 716-001
CB305 Tuesdays 3-545
3 credits
Spring 1999

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SEMINAR IN HUMANE GEOGRAPHIES

Description

The seminar is devoted to three overlapping themes related to humanitarians and humanitarian organizations. These are: individuals, organizations and associations, and landscapes. I define humane individuals as those who seek, as a major goal in their lives, to better the human condition and who have made a qualitative difference in the way people live and relate to one another, either in the past or present. In this context, I value the contributions of those from many different cultures, societies, and fields of study. Examples of caring individuals and organizations could come from medicine and health care, public service, religion, the visual and performing arts, and the academy. Individuals could be familiar names with international standing and those at the grassroots or local levels who pioneered successful and significant efforts. A few outside speakers will participate in class sessions.

Organization

The first part of the course will focus the personal geographies, histories and experiences of well-known persons. They and their contributions will also be studied in regards to their social and political changes in their society, who and what influenced them, their personal, professional, and intellectual linkages, how they worked within and outside existing institutions, and the obstacles they may have encountered in pursuit of their goals and dreams. The second part will examine the institutional histories of humanitarian organizations and networks at local, national, and international scales. These might be concerned with literacy programs, empowering women, expanding the human rights of minorities, disaster and emergency relief efforts, preventing cruelty to animals, opposing war and violence, and assisting refugees, the dispossessed and outcasts. These might include interfaith networks, environmental groups, and organizations of physicians, artists, scientists, environmentalists, women, farmers, and volunteers. The third segment looks at humanitarian landscapes, specifically who designed, planned, and constructed these built landscapes. We will consider as examples peacekeeping landscapes as well as those for refugees, relief operations, homeless and abused populations. Landscapes of a therapeutic variety and those honoring or commemorating individuals, groups, and events will also be considered.

Assignments

Class members will read biographies and autobiographies of noted humanitarians for the first assignment; they will also read reviews of these works. A paper is required about the individual and her/his contributions. For the second project, students will study a specific humanitarian organization and prepare a paper that discusses its history, role in society, membership patterns, and contributions to improve life and provide a better environment. The third project calls for examining a specific humanitarian landscape; this project can be undertaken with another class member or two. The paper will include some maps, diagrams, and photos. Lists of individuals, organizations, and landscapes will be provided.

Who Is Welcome?

I hope there will be students from the sciences, arts and humanities and with various theoretical and practical interests. The best composition would be a "mix" of students from different disciplines, backgrounds and world regions. An interest in the topic is the prime requisite.