

Intro

Human rights, as we understand them today, are the result of a long & complex historical evolution

These rights, considered universal, have roots in various cultures, religions & philosophies throughout history

Early Concepts: Ancient Civilisations

The Code of Hammurabi (c.1754 BCE) One of the earliest known legal codes, established laws governing various aspects of life in ancient Babylon. Introduced the idea of justice & the protection of individuals, at least within certain societal hierarchies

The Cyrus Cylinder (539 BCE) Often referred to as the first charter of human rights, issued by Cyrus the Great of Persia. Proclaimed freedom of worship & allowed displaced peoples to return to their homelands

Ancient Greece Concepts of democracy & citizenship in Athens, laid groundwork for later ideas. These rights were limited to small segment of population

Ancient Rome Roman law introduced concept of "natural law" which influenced later thinkers

The Influence of Religion & Philosophy

Judeo-Christian Tradition The idea of inherent human dignity, central to the teachings of Judaism and Christianity, contributed to the development of human rights. Concepts like the sanctity of life and the Golden Rule ("Do unto others as you would have them do unto you") have been influential

The Influence of Religion & Philosophy (cont)

Islamic Contributions Islamic teachings also emphasize the dignity of the individual and include early concepts of social justice, charity, and the rights of the poor. The Constitution of Medina, created by the Prophet Muhammad, laid out principles of religious freedom and mutual protection

Enlightenment Philosophers (17th-18th Centuries) **John Locke (1632-1704):** Locke's theories of natural rights, particularly the rights to life, liberty, and property, were foundational. He argued that these rights were inalienable and that governments should protect them.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778): Rousseau introduced the idea of the social contract, arguing that individuals have rights simply by virtue of being human.

Voltaire and Montesquieu: These thinkers further developed ideas about freedom of expression, the separation of powers, and individual liberties.

The Age of Revolutions: Codifying Human Rights

The American Revolution (1775-1783) **The Declaration of Independence (1776):** Written by Thomas Jefferson, this document asserted the right to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." It was a revolutionary statement of individual rights against oppressive government.

The French Revolution (1789-1799) **The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen (1789):** This document proclaimed that all men are born free and equal in rights. It established principles such as freedom of speech, the right to security, and the right to resist oppression.

The Abolition of Slavery The 19th century saw the abolitionist movement gain momentum, leading to the end of the transatlantic slave trade and slavery itself in many parts of the world. The British Slavery Abolition Act (1833) and the U.S. Emancipation Proclamation (1863) were critical milestones.

20th Century: Birth of Modern Human Rights

The Aftermath of World War I **The League of Nations:** Established in 1920, the League sought to prevent future conflicts and promote peace. Although it had limited success, it set the stage for later international cooperation on human rights.



20th Century: Birth of Modern Human Rights (cont)

The Horrors of World War II The atrocities committed during World War II, particularly the Holocaust, highlighted the need for a global human rights framework. The war's devastation led to a stronger resolve to protect human dignity.

The United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) **Formation of the United Nations (1945):** The UN was created to promote peace, security, and cooperation among nations. Human rights became a central part of its mission.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948): Drafted by a committee chaired by Eleanor Roosevelt, this document is a landmark in human rights history. It asserts that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights, covering a broad range of civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights.

20th Century: Birth of Modern Human Rights (cont)

Post-War Human Rights Conventions **The Geneva Conventions (1949):** These treaties established standards for humanitarian treatment in war, including the protection of civilians and prisoners of war.

The Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1948): This was the first human rights treaty adopted by the UN, aiming to prevent future genocides.

The Global Human Rights Movement

Decolonisation and the Right to Self-Determination Following World War II, many nations in Asia and Africa gained independence from colonial powers. The right to self-determination became a central theme in the fight for human rights during this period.

The Civil Rights Movement in the United States (1950s-1960s) The U.S. Civil Rights Movement sought to end racial segregation and discrimination, leading to landmark legislation like the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

The Global Human Rights Movement (cont)

Human Rights in the Cold War Era Both the U.S. and the Soviet Union used human rights rhetoric to criticize each other, while often violating these rights within their own spheres of influence. The Helsinki Accords (1975) were an important development, linking security and human rights issues in East-West relations.

The Fall of Apartheid in South Africa International pressure and internal resistance led to the end of apartheid in the early 1990s, with Nelson Mandela becoming the country's first black president in 1994.

The Rise of International Human Rights Organizations Organizations like Amnesty International (founded in 1961) and Human Rights Watch (founded in 1978) have played crucial roles in monitoring and advocating for human rights globally.

Human Rights in the 21st Century

Challenges & Progress The 21st century has seen significant advancements in recognizing the rights of women, LGBTQ+ individuals, and people with disabilities. However, challenges remain, including ongoing conflicts, authoritarianism, and human rights abuses.



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Page 2 of 3.

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Human Rights in the 21st Century (cont)

International Human Rights Law The International Criminal Court (ICC), established in 2002, prosecutes individuals for crimes of genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity, reflecting the growing importance of international law in human rights.

The Digital Age and Human Rights The internet and social media have become powerful tools for both promoting and violating human rights. Issues like privacy, freedom of expression, and digital surveillance are increasingly important in the modern human rights discourse.

Conclusion

The history of human rights is a testament to humanity's ongoing struggle for dignity, freedom, and justice

While significant progress has been made, the journey is far from complete

The challenges we face today require a renewed commitment to these universal principles, ensuring that human rights are protected and respected for all people, everywhere



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