



Neil Englehart

Monday, September 15th, 2008
201A (Sky Bank Room) BTSU
12:30 pm

Petty Despots: Rethinking Human Rights Discourse After the Cold War

How have human rights abuses changed over time?

How are we to understand these abuses in the context of state failure?

How can we adapt human rights discourse to meet these new challenges?

Human rights discourse is built on the assumption that states are the primary abusers of rights, yet human rights law assumes that states are also the primary guarantor of rights. Thus, during the Cold War, human rights discourse and activism was premised on the assumption that states could protect rights if they chose; if abuses occurred, it was because the government lacked the will to intervene or acted out of malice. However, today most human rights abuses occur in places where states are too weak, incompetent and ineffective to protect citizens. The problem in these cases is petty despots: warlords, rogue police or military officers, landlords and strongmen. These local power holders operate free from effective government control, and under the radar of the international community, and are therefore able to commit abuses with impunity.

Neil A. Englehart is an Associate Professor of Political Science at BGSU. His teaching and research focus on Asian politics and human rights. He is the author of *Culture and Power in Traditional Siamese Government* and co-editor of *Human Rights in the Age of Globalization*, and has been widely published, especially in *Journal of Peace Research*, *International Political Science Review* and *Human Rights Quarterly*. Currently a fellow at ICS, he is at work on the book-length study *Petty Despots: State Failure and Human Rights*, which is based in part on field work in Afghanistan, Burma, and India.

Special Thanks to the Office of the Dean of Arts and Sciences and to the Office of the Vice Provost for Research for their support of this work. All events are free and open to the public. For more information, call (419) 372-0585