Has there always been an inalienable “right to have rights” as part of the human condition, as Hannah Arendt famously argued? The contributions to this volume examine how human rights came to define the bounds of universal morality in the course of the political crises and conflicts of the twentieth century. Although human rights are often viewed as a self-evident outcome of this history, the essays collected here make clear that human rights are a relatively recent invention that emerged in contingent and contradictory ways. Focusing on specific instances of their assertion or violation during the past century, this volume analyzes the place of human rights in various arenas of global politics, providing an alternative framework for understanding the political and legal dilemmas that these conflicts presented. In doing so, this volume captures the state of the art in a field that historians have only recently begun to explore.

Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann is Research Director at the Center for Research in Contemporary History, Potsdam, Germany, and has been a visiting scholar at the University of California, Berkeley, and Stanford University. He is the author of the prizewinning *The Politics of Sociability: Freemasonry and German Civil Society 1840–1918* (2007). Currently, he is preparing a short history of human rights and a book on Berlin in the wake of the Second World War.
Human Rights in History

Edited by

Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann, Zentrum für Zeithistorische Forschung
Samuel Moyn, Columbia University

This series showcases new scholarship exploring the backgrounds of human rights today. With an open-ended chronology and international perspective, the series seeks works attentive to the surprises and contingencies in the historical origins and legacies of human rights ideals and interventions. Books in the series will focus not only on the intellectual antecedents and foundations of human rights, but also on the incorporation of the concept by movements, nation-states, international governance, and transnational law.
Human Rights in the Twentieth Century

Edited by
Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann
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