It is widely recognized that times of national emergency put legality to its greatest test. In such times we rely on sovereign power to rescue us, to hold the danger at bay. Yet that power can and often does threaten the values of legality itself. Sovereignty, Emergency, Legality examines law’s complex relationship to sovereign power and emergency conditions. It puts today’s responses to emergency in historical and institutional context, reminding readers of the continuities and discontinuities in the ways emergencies are framed and understood at different times and in different situations. And, in all this, it suggests the need to be less abstract in the way we discuss sovereignty, emergency, and legality. This book concentrates on officials and the choices they make in defining, anticipating, and responding to conditions of emergency as well as the impact of their choices on embodied subjects, whether citizen or stranger.

This book is a product of the University of Alabama School of Law symposia series on “Law, Knowledge & Imagination.” This series explores the ways law is known and imagined in a diverse array of disciplines, including political science, history, cultural studies, philosophy, and science. Books produced through the Alabama symposia will explore various conjunctions of law, knowledge, and imagination as they play out in debates about theory and policy and will speak to venerable questions as well as contemporary issues.

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Sovereignty, Emergency, Legality

Edited by

Austin Sarat
Amherst College
To Stephanie, Lauren, Emily, and Ben
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