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THE AMERICAN LANGUAGE OF RIGHTS

Richard A. Primus examines three crucial periods in American history (the late eighteenth century, the Civil War and the 1950s and 1960s) in order to demonstrate how the conceptions of rights prevailing at each of these times grew out of reactions to contemporary social and political crises. His innovative approach sees rights language as grounded more in opposition to concrete social and political practices than in the universalistic paradigms presented by many political philosophers. This study demonstrates the potency of the language of rights throughout American history and looks for the first time at the impact of modern totalitarianism (in Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union) on American conceptions of rights. *The American Language of Rights* is a major contribution to contemporary political theory, of interest to scholars and students in politics and government, constitutional law, and American history.

RICHARD A. PRIMUS studied political theory at Harvard and Oxford and law at Yale.

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for Sarah
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“All of us, grave or light, get our thoughts entangled in metaphors, and act fatally on the strength of them.”
George Eliot, *Middlemarch*

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