This book fundamentally reinterprets the history of international human rights in the post-1945 era by documenting how pivotal the Global South was for their breakthrough. In stark contrast to other contemporary human rights historians who have focused almost exclusively on the 1940s and the 1970s – heavily privileging Western agency – Steven L. B. Jensen convincingly argues that it was in the 1960s that universal human rights had their breakthrough.

This is a groundbreaking work that places race and religion at the center of these developments and focuses on a core group of states that led the human rights breakthrough, namely Jamaica, Liberia, Ghana and the Philippines. They transformed the norms upon which the international community today is built. Their efforts in the 1960s postcolonial moment laid the foundation – in profound and surprising ways – for the so-called human rights revolution in the 1970s when Western activists and states began to embrace human rights.

Steven L. B. Jensen is a researcher at the Danish Institute for Human Rights. His current research, funded by the Danish Research Council (2015–2017), focuses on the history of economic and social rights after 1945. He has previously published on genocide, HIV/AIDS, global health and development, and 1960s politics and has held positions with the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the United Nations. He is the winner of the 2015 Ester Boserup Thesis Prize and the 2015 Rene Cassin Thesis Prize (Special Mention).
Human Rights in History

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The 1960s, Decolonization and the Reconstruction of Global Values

STEVEN L. B. JENSEN
The Danish Institute for Human Rights
Contents

Acknowledgments ix

Negotiating universality – an introduction 1

1 “Power carries its own conviction”: the early rise and fall of human rights, 1945–1960 18


3 From Jamaica with law: the rekindling of international human rights, 1962–1967 69


5 “The hymn of hate”: the failed convention on elimination of all forms of religious intolerance, 1962–1967 138

6 “So bitter a year for human rights”: 1968 and the UN International Year for Human Rights 174

7 “To cope with the flux of the future”: human rights and the Helsinki Final Act, 1962–1975 209

8 The presence of the disappeared, 1968–1993 237

Conclusion 275

Archives and references 283

Index 301
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