CIVIL RIGHTS IN AMERICA

The term “civil rights” has such a familiar presence in discussions about American politics and law that we tend to use it reflexively and intuitively, but rarely do we stop to think about what exactly we mean when we use the term and why certain uses strike us as right or wrong. In this book, Professor Christopher Schmidt tells the story of how Americans have fought over the meaning of civil rights from the Civil War through today. Through their struggles over what it means to live in a nation dedicated to protecting civil rights, each generation has given the label new life and new meaning. Civil Rights in America shows how the words we use to understand our world become objects of contestation and points of leverage for social, political, and legal action.

Christopher W. Schmidt is a professor at Chicago-Kent College of Law, where he serves as the Associate Dean for Faculty Development and co-director of the Institute on the Supreme Court of the United States; a research professor at the American Bar Foundation; and the editor of Law & Social Inquiry. Professor Schmidt received his Ph.D. in American Studies from Harvard University and his J.D. from Harvard Law School. He is the author of The Sit-Ins: Protest and Legal Change in the Civil Rights Era (2018).
This series is a platform for original scholarship on US civil rights and civil liberties. It produces books on the normative, historical, judicial, political, and sociological contexts for understanding contemporary legislative, jurisprudential, and presidential dilemmas. The aim is to provide experts, teachers, policymakers, students, social activists, and educated citizens with in-depth analyses of theories, existing and past conditions, and constructive ideas for legal advancements.

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Civil Rights in America

A HISTORY

CHRISTOPHER W. SCHMIDT
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For Erin
Only something which has no history can be defined.

— Friedrich Nietzsche

A word is not a crystal, transparent and unchanged, it is the skin of a living thought, and may vary greatly in color and content according to the circumstances and the time in which it is used.

— Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr.
Contents

Introduction

1 The Birth of Civil Rights – Reconstruction

2 The Transformation of Civil Rights – The Jim Crow Years

3 Civil Rights Reborn – The 1940s and 1950s

4 Beyond Civil Rights – The 1960s

5 Getting Right with the Civil Rights Movement

6 Civil Rights Everywhere

Conclusion

Acknowledgments

Notes

Index