This groundbreaking study understands the “long history” of human rights in Australia from the moment of their supposed invention in the 1940s to official incorporation into the Australian government bureaucracy in the 1980s. To do so, a wide cast of individuals, institutions and publics from across the political spectrum are surveyed who translated global ideas into local settings and changed meanings of a foreign discourse to suit local concerns and predilections. These individuals created new organisations to spread the message of human rights or found older institutions amenable to their newfound concerns, adopting rights language with a mixture of enthusiasm and opportunism. Governments, on the other hand, engaged with or ignored human rights as its shifting meanings, international currency and domestic reception ebbed and flowed. Finally, individuals understood and (re-)translated human rights ideas throughout this period: writing letters, books or poems and sympathising in new, global ways.

Human Rights in History

Edited by

Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann, University of California, Berkeley
Samuel Moyn, Yale University, Connecticut

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.

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Human Rights in Twentieth-Century Australia

Jon Piccini
Australian Catholic University
For Teena
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Acknowledgements

While perhaps a worn cliché, that it takes a village to make a book has certainly been true in my experience. This book began life in the dying days of my doctoral studies at the University of Queensland (UQ) in 2013, as I considered what became of the transnational 1960s social movements my thesis had explored when their passions ebbed in the late 1970s. My chance discovery of Samuel Moyn’s then recently published provocation *The Last Utopia* both provided a partial answer to this question and drove me in the direction of what was then becoming the burgeoning field of human rights historiography.

After several post-PhD years in the wilderness, it was back at UQ that I received a postdoctoral fellowship in 2016 and an Early Career Research Award in 2018, providing the necessary time and funding to turn this project from vague idea to (almost) finished product. All those employed at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences’ Research Office, and in particular Rachel Smith, were instrumental in ensuring my project was appropriately translated into the language of the Grant Writing Industrial Complex. Thanks must also go to Australian Catholic University, and in particular Michael Ondaatje and Maggie Nolan, for recognising this book and its author as worthy of support in the form of an ongoing lectureship in 2019, during which the rougher edges of the manuscript have been ironed out.

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