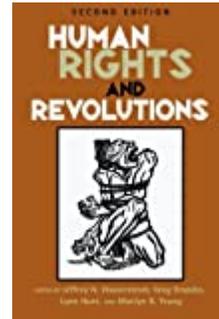




Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom, Greg Grandin, Lynn Hunt, Marilyn B. Young, eds. *Human Rights and Revolutions*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007. 225 pp. \$79.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7425-5513-6; \$28.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7425-5514-3.



Reviewed by Christian W. Erickson (Department of Political Science, Roosevelt University)

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Rights and Revolutions, Paradoxes and Promises

This edited volume explores the complex status of human rights in the midst of revolutions, revolutionary regimes and movements. The volume deliberately explores the complex nexus of revolution and rights to examine fundamental questions involving the conflict between universalistic, relativistic, and particularistic/interpretive conceptualizations of human rights. The authors detail how conceptions of rights are shaped by revolutionary moments, which are characterized by the most comprehensive extensions of rights, yet also provide the impetus to some of the most violent negations of rights.

Mark P. Bradley, in the first chapter “Introduction: Human Rights and Revolutions” situates the volume within three dominant approaches to the study of revolution: gradualism, skepticism, and polarized binaries. He finds all of these wanting for their respective limitations. Bradley views the contributions to this volume as enabling the reader to move beyond the contradictions inherent in each of these approaches to an investigation of both the universal and the particular.

This theme is taken up by Lynn Hunt in “The Para-

doxical Origins of Human Rights,” wherein she points out that at the moment when the French “Universal Declaration of the Rights of Men and Citizens” was being promulgated, the praxis of rights in the midst of this revolutionary moment was fraught with paradoxes. Jeffrey Wasserstrom echoes this in “The Chinese Revolution and Contemporary Paradoxes” which traces the complex relationship between the various promises of rights during both before, during, and after the Chinese revolution. In this piece Wasserstrom cautions against idealizing the pre-European contact, pointing out that Europeans did not need to instruct the dominant Hans in demonizing other ethno-linguistic groups. He also warns against simple explanations for fluctuating parameters of rights under the protean situation in the PRC.

The next section examines the roles of the English, American and Russian revolutions in the further development of human rights. In “Tradition, Human Rights, and the English Revolution” David Zaret argues that understanding the development of human rights during and after the English Revolution must be based on pre-revolutionary techniques of governance, such as the

manner in which the right of petition guided discussion rights, and provided a sense of citizenship to those individuals utilizing the petition. Michael Zuckert, in "Natural Rights in the American Revolution: The American Amalgam" explores how the American Revolution embraced two theories of rights: that of a Creator or "nature" being the origins of rights, and the belief that these rights are the endowment "of all men" (p. 67). This led to a situation in which the American commitment to republicanism was critically bound up in the basis of human rights in natural law possessed by all men, a formulation of rights both paradoxical and powerful. Yanni Kotsonis, "A European Experience: Human Rights and Citizenship in Revolutionary Russia," examines how the influence of the Enlightenment diffusing from the West influenced the debate over human rights in the Czarist and Soviet periods. The contradictions between "'man and citizen'" and "'rational' and 'human'" compounded lasting contradictions between expansive state power and hierarchical administration and the contrasting promises of liberation during the fragmentation of Czarist power and rise and consolidation of Soviet power (p. 93). The next section of the book examines Asian and African cases. Alexander Woodside, in "An Enlightenment for Outcasts: Some Vietnamese Stories," argues that Vietnamese conceptualizations of rights must be understood as a complex overlay of pre-colonial conceptions of rights and those imported by European Enlightenment streams of thought, including Marxism. Woodside highlights a positive aspect of the legacy of the revolutionary promise of rights, a sense of hope of improvement of rights—leading away from a "swampland" of rights never promised, let alone delivered (p. 109). Sumit Ganguly, in "India, Human Rights, and 'Asian Values'" continues on in this vein by examining the case of India. India, according to Ganguly, is unique in not asserting that there was a separate and distinct "Asian" approach to defining human rights, as argued in the mid to late 1990s by Singapore's Yew. Ganguly traces how the distinct aspects of India's democracy buttress a strong conceptualization of rights. In the final chapter of this section, "What Absence Is Made Of: Human Rights in Africa," Florence Bernault focuses primarily on tracing the legacy of colonization on accounting for the state form and lack of a strong civil society to provide the bulwarks to defend human rights. To Bernault, Africa is caught up in global trends defined by the increasing invocation of human rights combined with the difficulty of realizing, and defending those rights, which rests upon an increasingly active civil society, rather than the promised but never delivered revolutionary transformation of rights.

The next section "Human Rights Revolution" does not have a brief introduction explaining generally the concept of a revolution in rights that the following chapters express, which is one of the problems with using this book for undergraduate classes—unless the instructor is prepared to fill in the absence with a lecture or other overview piece on the revolution in the conceptualization of rights to include more contemporary debates and cases represented in these chapters. James N. Green in "(Homo)sexuality, Human Rights, and Revolution in Latin America" provides an overview of the tensions and resistances inherent in the relationship between revolutionary states, movements, and left political parties and movements (revolutionary or not) and the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered (LGBT) movements throughout Latin America. Green points to this resistance as creating highly autonomous LGBT movements that are just now gaining enough traction in post-authoritarian polities to press for extensions of rights. This echoes what is now a unifying theme in the chapters of this volume, that civil societies, rather than revolutionary movements or states, offer the best hope of protecting human rights and offering definitions of human rights that can force the state to codify these rights into law.

Kristin Ross examines the blossoming of concern within France over human rights in the chapter "Ethics and the Rearmament of Imperialism: The French Case." For Ross, rearmament of imperialism occurs when what she terms the "New Philosophers" in France in the mid-late 1970s (among them Bernard-Henri Lévvy and André Glucksmann) become concerned in a patronizing way about humanitarian crises in the developing world that have been produced by the failure of left-authoritarian Marxist states, producing gulag states. This evolves into what Ross calls an "anti-third worldism" which blinded these theorists to the potential for left-authoritarian and other development models to lead to progress in some areas of human rights—be they political, economic, or social (p. 164). Through their blindness, these "New Philosophers" contributed to a new imperialist approach to former colonies while their patronizing tone did nothing to improve the status of human rights in these states.

In the final chapter of this section, Timothy McDaniel's "The Strange Career of Political Islam" the relationship between Islam and revolutionary attempts to transform rights is traced in detail. Again echoing earlier pieces, McDaniel traces out a relationship that is fraught with complexity yet is in need of urgent investigation—

especially given the influence of the Iranian revolution and other revolutionary or messianic movements with their own unique theologically derived conceptions of rights. In his conclusion, McDaniel argues that political Islam will continue to offer the promise of transformation and protection of rights, but will founder on the hypocrisy that has thus far characterized states ruled by a politicized form of Islam, revolutionary or otherwise.

The final section of this volume contains only one chapter, Greg Grandin's "Human Rights and Empire's Embrace: A Latin American Counterpoint." This is unfortunate, because the volume could have been improved by a final chapter that offered a more comprehensive perspective that outlined future directions for researching the vein of inquiry mapped out well by this volume. For Grandin, a key dynamic that intersects with the factors that produced the contemporary status of rights is the legacy of American imperialism and hegemony, principally the promises encoded in the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which has by the

early 21st century left nothing save for a legacy of hope that motivates civil society: the decentralized social, political and economic movements that offer a way to navigate between "imperialism and barbarism" that have characterized the status of human rights in Latin America and throughout the world (p. 210).

This volume would be ideal for advanced undergraduate courses or survey graduate courses investigating human rights and/or revolutions or revolutionary violence (including classes examining state terrorism and violent political movements and "terrorism"). This volume should not be the primary or sole text for courses because the different sections of this edited volume are in need of separate brief introductory chapters to locate the material covered in contemporary human rights debates. This book is a necessary addition to a research collection, because it provides a comprehensive framework and well chosen set of cases to illustrate the state of the art of the major debates in the human rights field.

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