

The conservative human rights revolution: European identity, transnational politics, and the origins of the European convention

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Abstrak

This study radically reinterprets the origins of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), arguing that conservatives conceived of the treaty not only as a means of containing communism and fascism in continental Europe, but also as a vehicle for pursuing a controversial domestic political agenda on either side of the Channel. A European Court of Human Rights was meant to constrain the ability of democratically elected governments to implement left-wing policies that British and French conservatives believed violated their basic liberties. Conservative human rights rhetoric evoked a romantic Christian vision of Europe. Rather than follow the model of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, conservatives such as Winston Churchill grounded their appeals for new human rights safeguards in the values of a bygone European civilization. All told, these efforts served as a basis for reconciliation between Germans and the West, the exclusion of communists from the European project, and the denial of equal protection to colonized peoples. The book highlights the role that culture, ethics, and memory played in the genesis of international law and organization from 1899 to 1959. It elucidates Churchills Europeanism and his critical contribution to the genesis of the ECHR, as well as that of a number of free-market conservatives and social Catholics in the movements for European unity. Revisiting the ethical foundations of European integration, it offers a new perspective on the crisis in which the European Union finds itself today.