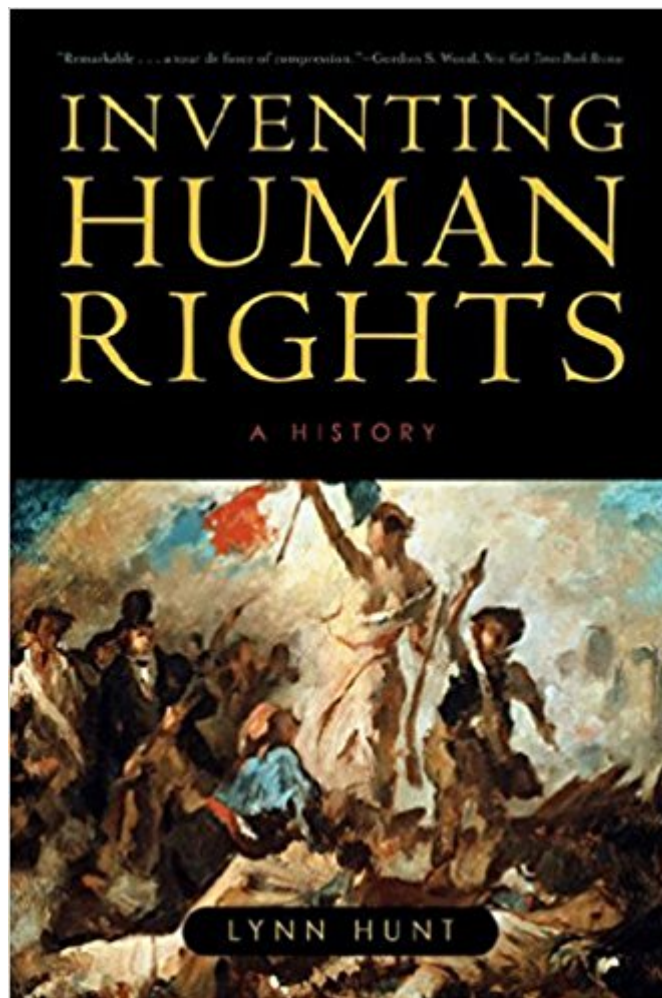


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# Inventing Human Rights: A History



## Synopsis

“A tour de force.”—Gordon S. Wood, New York Times Book Review How were human rights invented, and how does their tumultuous history influence their perception and our ability to protect them today? From Professor Lynn Hunt comes this extraordinary cultural and intellectual history, which traces the roots of human rights to the rejection of torture as a means for finding the truth. She demonstrates how ideas of human relationships portrayed in novels and art helped spread these new ideals and how human rights continue to be contested today.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This comprehensive work traces the development of human rights from its conceptual roots in the Enlightenment to its full expression in the United Nation's 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Hunt begins with a wonderfully detailed lexicographical survey of 18th century uses of rights language ("rights of man," "natural rights," "rights of humanity") to show the many currents that led to the first modern declaration of human rights, the Bill of Rights. She then triangulates the upswing in rights language with both the appearance of the novel of letters (such as Rousseau's *Julie* and Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* and *Clarissa*) and the rise of portraiture in the mid- to late-18th century. These particular art forms, she argues, fostered a sense of individuality in their audience and empathy for their subjects, most frequently "regular folks" rather than nobles, royalty, or saints. She then takes the reader through 250 years of rights legislation, covering the French Revolution's

Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, various anti-torture measures and 20th century campaigns against human rights violations, among others. Despite the obvious academic grounding of this sweeping work, it is aimed at a wider audience and will appeal to most readers interested either in the history of human rights or in European or American history. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

“Elegant... intriguing, if not audacious... Hunt is an astute historian.” - Joanna Bourke, Harper’s  
“Fast-paced, provocative, and ultimately optimistic. Declarations, she writes, are not empty words but transformative; they make us want to become the people they claim we are.” - The New Yorker  
“A provocative and engaging history of the political impact of human rights.” - Gary J. Bass, New Republic  
“This is a wonderful story of the emergence and development of the powerful idea of human rights, written by one of the leading historians of our time.” - Amartya Sen  
“Rich, elegant, and persuasive.” - London Review of Books  
“As Americans begin to hold their leaders accountable for the mistakes made in the war against terror, this book ought to serve as a guide to thinking about one of the most serious mistakes of all, the belief that America can win that war by revoking the Declaration that brought the nation into being.” - Alan Wolfe, Commonweal

first of all the book is very well structured with the content. Despite unstable and spreading issues, Lynn Hunt gathers and assimilated issues extraordinarily from third chapter. So first two chapter might embarrass and confuse you a bit, but a gradual and patient read ahead will make everything Crystal clear. Her analysis of evolution of human rights from rights of Man and torture is well compiled, addictive and brilliantly arranged for general understanding. Her writing of torture and change in prison and legal system makes me call her 'Simple Foucault'. Final chapter is equally persuasive wot her proper and unbiased analysis of the gestation of current Universal Declaration.

This is a book that finishes much stronger than it starts. The author is trying to track the development of the idea of Human rights in the western civilization and although there is a obviously a need to begin somewhere, the point where the author starts seems a little arbitrary. For this reason I believe that the first and part of the second chapters of the book are the weakest parts. After this, however the book seems to find its stride by tracking the development of the concept of human rights over time with a focus on the Declaration of Independence , The Declaration of the

Rights of Man and the U.N. Declaration of Human Rights. She makes the important point that once the conversation on who should be included in what rights is started the group of those included will inevitably expand. All in all it is a decent introduction to the topic

Excelent work! I couldn't leave it untill I finished it! It was very helpful for my research project with the University of Costa Rica. Patricia Rodríguez Håklemeyer, Full Professor, School of Political Science, UCR.

The Enlightenment was a period of history when the influence and power of the Christian churches diminished, and can be blamed for the genocide and wars of the 19th and 20th century. This interesting book sheds light on this period of history. Consider the following

quote: “Bentham objected to the idea that natural law was innate in the person and discoverable by reason. He therefore basically rejected the entire natural law tradition and with it natural rights. The principle of utility served as the best measure of right and wrong. (location 1405) What is utility and what is right and wrong? The principle of utility is that governments should strive to produce the greatest happiness of the greatest number of people. Utility is the ability of a good to make a person happy. Utility can clearly be measured on an ordinal scale. In a Robinson Crusoe economy, if Man Friday spends his time hunting instead of fishing, the utility of meat is greater than the utility of fish for Friday. If Crusoe exchanges meat for fish with Friday, it means the utility of the fish is greater for Crusoe. But are there units of utility? If Friday is starving and steals a little meat from Crusoe, can you say Friday’s utility increased 5 units and Crusoe’s utility decrease only 1 unit? Whether utilities are measured on a cardinal or ordinal scale sheds light on the questions of morality, right and wrong, and justice. If utilities are measured on an ordinal scale, utilities are clearly maximized if Crusoe and Friday cooperate with one another. If utilities are measured on a cardinal scale, it is not so clear. The hypothetical island may need a beast of burden, and slavery may be a just or moral arrangement. This raises the question of what the difference is between cooperation and slavery? In other words, what is coercion and force as opposed to free interactions between human beings. The doctrine of original sin sheds light on this question, and the author brings it up in her discussion of the change in laws about judicial torture and public punishment: “This tendency toward evil in mankind resulted from original sin, the Christian doctrine that all people have been innately predisposed to sin ever since Adam and Eve fell from God’s grace in the Garden of Eden. (location 1009) In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve were like

God because they possessed sanctifying grace. They were not subject to death or sickness, but they had bodies so they could communicate with one another. If they farmed the land, it was because they enjoyed the activity. They enjoyed eating, but did not suffer from hunger. Their communications were free because Adam could not affect Eve's consciousness without her consent, and vice a versa. According Paradise Lost by John Milton, Eve committed the sin of disobedience and Adam the sin of being excessively fond of Eve, and they found themselves in the world we live in. In this world, we define cooperation/freedom and slavery/force in terms of utilities measured on an ordinal scale. According to Thomas Aquinas, morality is based on the principle that humans are responsible for their actions. Moral laws are secondary principles. What determines right and wrong is the tiny voice inside our mind that we call conscience. Sinning doesn't mean violating a moral law, it means not following your conscience. Sinning and morality relate to family life, and justice relates to the actions of governments. If the Robinson Crusoe economy is a model for family life, slavery is immoral. If it is a model for government, slavery is unjust. The doctrine of original sin also sheds light on the question of property rights. There clearly was no property before the fall. God gave the Garden of Eden to both Adam and Eve. It follows that there was no property rights after the fall. Adam and Eve created property rights in their state of sin.

very interesting from the historical point of view

I like the content of book a lot but want to let others be aware that the kindle version I got is missing all the figures. I sent an inquiry to and was told that some kindle version they received may not be exactly the same as the print version.

Perfect Condition

Awesome book! Must read for modern history lovers.

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