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*From Selma to Moscow: How Human Rights Activists Transformed  
U.S. Foreign Policy* Sarah B. Snyder (review)

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order to participate in debates about how much inequality can be permitted, and how much if at all to focus on provision of basic needs or fulfilment of economic human rights, even if inequality is also growing. Reduction in inequality does not necessarily mean that poverty will be reduced.

Moyn argues that “the age of human rights . . . is also an age of the victory of the rich.”<sup>72</sup> Sadly, this is true. Many factors caused this victory, such as lowered taxation rates in some countries, partly in response to global competition. It is frustrating that Moyn’s fascinating history of intellectual approaches to inequality contains few, if any concrete recommendations, and is based upon questionable assumptions about its nature. Moyn might reply that it is not his business to suggest solutions, but his agenda is so obvious, and his criticisms of the human rights movement are so strong, that a discussion of possible remedies to the problems of severe inequality would have been welcome. Among these remedies, Moyn might have considered the relevance of civil and political rights.

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**Sarah B. Snyder, *From Selma to Moscow: How Human Rights Activists Transformed U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), ISBN, 978-0-231-16947-9, 320 pages.**

The history of human rights, perhaps surprisingly, emerged relatively recently as a field of scholarly inquiry.<sup>1</sup> Historians began publishing widely on the topic only in the past decade and, as historian Barbara Keys noted, scholars of US foreign relations have been “among the most avid” contributors to fill the void in this burgeoning field.<sup>2</sup> Sarah Snyder became one such pioneer in 2011 when she published her first book, *Human Rights Activism and the End of the Cold War: A Transnational History of the Helsinki Network*.<sup>3</sup> In that volume, Snyder examines how non-state actors used the passage of the Helsinki Act of 1975 to promote a human rights agenda as a central element in East-West diplomacy, which helped lead to the end of the Cold War.

In her latest book, *From Selma to Moscow: How Human Rights Activists Transformed U.S. Foreign Policy*, Snyder looks again to nonstate actors to examine how human rights emerged—this time as a central part of the US foreign policymaking apparatus. Eschewing claims from Samuel Moyn in *The Last Utopia* that human rights’ true rise can be traced to the 1970s, Snyder is part of a group of historians, which includes Steven L.B Jensen and Roland Burke, who are looking to the 1960s to locate the origins of

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72. MOYN, *supra* note 1, at.2.

1. Kenneth Cmiel, *The Recent History of Human Rights*, 109 AM. HISTORICAL REV. 117 (2004); Mark Philip Bradley, *American Vernaculars: The United States and the Global Human Rights Imagination*, 38 DIPLOMATIC HIST. 1 (2014).
2. Barbara Keys, *The Newest Idealism: Human Rights in US Foreign Policy*, LAWFARE (19 Apr. 2017), <https://www.lawfareblog.com/newest-idealism-human-rights-us-foreign-policy>.
3. SARAH B. SNYDER, *HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVISM AND THE END OF THE COLD WAR: A TRANSNATIONAL HISTORY OF THE HELSINKI NETWORK* (2011).

modern human rights.<sup>4</sup> While Jensen and Burke are more concerned with global events in their analyses of the earlier decade, the former examining the impact of decolonization and the latter looking to the terminal years of liberal post-colonialism, Snyder focuses on how US nonstate actors and low level diplomats played a pivotal role in bringing human rights to the forefront of US policymaking, and how their actions continues to have lasting relevance.

With this project, Snyder contests the prevailing emphasis on Jimmy Carter's presidential anointment that "our commitment to human rights must be absolute" to locate when human rights had finally arrived on the US foreign policy scene. Instead, Snyder shows how a diverse set of activists, missionaries, academics, and bureaucrats laid the groundwork for Carter's inaugural claims in the "long 1960s"—a period she defines as John F. Kennedy's inauguration in 1961 through the end of Gerald Ford's presidency in January 1977. By investigating various actors' personal connections, racial identity, and transnational ties in a diverse set of ideological and geographical case studies, she argues that the long 1960s set the stage for the "institutionalization of human rights in US foreign policy and the expansion of human rights activism" in subsequent decades.<sup>5</sup>

In reexamining the temporal origins of human rights in US foreign policy, Snyder also points to an important geographic shift that occurred, which re-centered human rights activism in the US from New York to Washington DC in the 1960s. As Snyder explains, this change is significant because it shows how activists

who cared about global rights stopped appealing to the United Nations and foreign governments to advocate for moral claims abroad. Instead, their frustration and disillusionment with a UN-centered approach led them to see the US as an important arbiter that could marshal its power in support of human rights to effect change.

These two important historiographical contributions are illustrated through diverse emblematic case studies. Chapter one examines how human rights became an issue in US-Soviet relations. According to Snyder, pressure on the US foreign policy establishment arose from personal ties—particularly Soviet-Jewish connections—that led to the formation of NGOs, student groups, and mass demonstrations around the issue. This mobilization ended in Senator Henry Jackson's push to pass the Jackson-Vanik amendment, which limited trade with communist countries that restricted freedom of emigration and other human rights abuses. In Chapter Two, Snyder focuses on Africa, studying American activism against Southern Rhodesia's minority-ruled, racially discriminatory government. In this context, US citizens connected civil rights engagement at home to a global human rights imperative. Supported by Ambassador Arthur Goldberg at the UN and Donald Fraser in Congress, the relatively low importance of Cold War-related concerns in the country allowed for activists to push a human rights agenda in the foreign policy bureaucracy. Chapter Three returns to Europe to examine the Greek military coup of 1967. Here, the Cold War prism asserted its primacy over a strong human rights agenda. However, Andreas Papan-

4. STEVEN L.B. JENSEN, *THE MAKING OF INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS: THE 1960S, DECOLONIZATION, AND THE RECONSTRUCTION OF GLOBAL VALUES* (2016); Roland Burke, "How Time Flies": *Celebrating the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in the 1960s*, 39 *INT'L HIST. REV.* 394 (2016).

5. SNYDER, *supra* note 3, at 2.

dreou, the deposed leader of the country, had taught in the US and therefore held significant links to academics and activists. Thus, US citizens were motivated by personal connections to mobilize against the torturous regime, particularly connecting with strong Amnesty International support that sought to pressure the military junta in spite of US presidential intransigence. Chapter Four is centered on South Korea. Focusing more on personal connections with missionaries and diplomats, Snyder acknowledges the limits of this activism since South Korea was an anti-communist ally and hosted US military bases that dated back to the Korean War. However, the case study also illuminates how even with presidential reluctance on the issue, activism had an effect through congressional avenues in the form of human rights hearings and initiating the practice of State Department reports. Snyder's last country study examines Chile. In studying South America, she focuses on the high degree of grassroots activism and formation of American NGOs that emerged from personal and professional connections, the country's democratic history, and the killing of Americans—both in Chile and in Washington DC.

Snyder's last substantive chapter is focused on how Congress ultimately led the charge to integrate human rights into US foreign policy in the face of executive branch reluctance, most poignantly through the active stonewalling by National Security Adviser and then Secretary of State Henry Kissinger. Faced with increasing activism from constituents and representatives' own personal connections and moral convictions, Donald Fraser led a group of new internationalists to hold hearings on human rights in contexts around the world, to push State Department reporting to create records of abuses, and to pass legislation

to limit the imperial presidency, while simultaneously institutionalizing human rights considerations into foreign policy decision making. Ultimately, Snyder illustrates how these moves served to change the culture of human rights in the State Department.

Snyder employs an impressive array of sources from presidential libraries, the State Department, Congress, the UN, and individual NGOs that illuminated the rise of human rights from the vantage point of activists and low-level diplomats. Far from centering an executive topdown push to focus US diplomacy on human rights, Snyder makes a persuasive case that the groundwork for a late 1970s breakthrough was only possible because of these activists who identified their work within a human rights lexicon in the decade and a half that preceded Carter's oath of office. By emphasizing grassroots activism, Snyder explains how citizens became empowered by the universality of a human rights language to push a moral agenda from a source they believed could most effectively change foreign powers' repressive behavior—the US government.

Readers of the book might wonder, however, how a belief in the US to lead the global human rights charge changed in the period of the "long 1960s"—a period during which confidence in American power underwent a significant shift. Snyder's story begins with Kennedy's inauguration. His presidency imbued citizens with a global outlook and belief in the inherent good the US could do abroad. However problematic in implementation, the Peace Corps and Alliance for Progress are just two examples of Kennedy's inspirational belief in the moral force of American power. Thus, Americans appealing to this ideal and the ability of the United States to positively push a human rights agenda seems to fit comfortably within this notion

in the earliest part of Snyder's narrative. However, during the subsequent decade and a half, which included misadventures in Vietnam, belief in American moral authority and the power to do good abroad declined—leaving the question as to why a burgeoning human rights movement would have such faith in the bureaucracy to carry out a moral agenda internationally. As Snyder chronicles, part of congressional activism to pass legislation about human rights was due to the desire to reign in the imperial presidency; however, the text does not fully address how confidence in human rights activism changed as perceptions of American power shifted during the period of the long 1960s. Rather than engage in how these changes might have affected activists' targets, Snyder admits upfront that she does not find "guilt over the Vietnam War" as the foundation for human rights activism (1). Indeed, in her footnotes, she writes that she has not seen evidence of emotions over Vietnam—neither shame nor guilt—as motivating forces (174). While this might be true, grappling with changing notions and belief in the moral authority of American power as a result of the failures in Vietnam might have produced a more nuanced understanding of why and how Americans dealt with and continued to have faith in the US government to push human rights concerns abroad—particularly in the face of increasing evidence that it did not privilege these concerns in their own foreign policy decisions.

Snyder's book also centers US activism and the lobbying of congressional representatives to make an important historiographical intervention that shifts emphasis away from Carter and towards

low-level actors' contributions to the origins of human rights policymaking. At times, however, this focus comes at the cost of sidelining the contributions of exiles and activists from the countries suffering under repressive rule. As a historian of US foreign relations, her spotlight on actors like Ambassador Philip Habib, writer Rose Styron, and activist Joseph Eldridge makes sense. However, one wonders if and how emphasis on US protagonists might strip away the motivation and agency from exiles and activists from the countries that brought their plight to the attention of their American compatriots. Many of Snyder's actors were indeed inspired by personal connections to the countries they advocated on behalf of, but it was not always due entirely to American intrinsic goodness or empathy with their friends and connections; rather, it was often due to strategic and concerted work on behalf of exiles and actors from the effected countries. For example, in the Soviet Union, Jews sought to marshal American Jews to their side as early as 1964, when, as historian Gal Beckerman has chronicled, groups in the Soviet Union sought to strategically send open petitions to American Jewry and cultivate connections that could lobby on their behalf.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, historian Patrick Kelly recounts in his work how refugees and victims from Chile, along with the Pro-Peace Committee (the first domestic organization to fight for human rights there) consciously brought their plight to transnational organizations like Amnesty International and the World Council of Churches to push for aid and protection from the human rights crisis under Pinochet.<sup>7</sup> Thus, human rights became important in the United States not only

6. GAL BECKERMAN, *WHEN THEY COME FOR US, WE'LL BE GONE: THE EPIC STRUGGLE TO SAVE SOVIET JEWRY* 27 (2010).

7. PATRICK WILLIAM KELLY, *SOVEREIGN EMERGENCIES: LATIN AMERICA AND THE MAKING OF GLOBAL HUMAN RIGHTS POLITICS* 66–67 (2018).

because of US empathy, but also because of the strategic efforts of non-Americans around the world.

Overall, *From Selma to Moscow* successfully and importantly argues for a shift in the narrative origins debate about global human rights, making a valuable contribution to argue for how human rights as a concept and distinct moral language percolated among missionaries, academics, former Peace Corps volunteers, and low-level diplomats in an earlier period. It was these actors, as Snyder points out, that led to the eventual institutionalization of human rights measures in the US government. In addition to rethinking how human rights reached the highest level of government, Snyder reveals how even Kissinger's own staff and aides had begun to rethink and dissent on his obstinate anti-human rights view. Through these diverse case studies, Snyder reexamines how activists' tireless efforts ultimately brought human rights to the fore of US policymaking—effectively illustrating how motivated and organized citizens can move the bureaucratic needle and create lasting institutional change. This lesson, Snyder rightfully asserts, remains as important for the period she studies as it does in today's current political climate.

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**Azadeh Chalabi, *National Human Rights Action Planning* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2018), ISBN 9780192555595, 251 pages.**

As discussed so very well in this timely and original book by Azadeh Chalabi, the rapid development of human rights law and norms has been “spectacular” since the middle of the last century. The founding of the United Nations both brought about and was premised on a paradigm of human rights. This was a new framework designed to advance a global governance that not only melded the fractures caused by the world wars, but advanced a cooperative multilateralism that worked toward a humanity rooted in the dignity and prosperity of all peoples. Human rights instrument followed human rights instrument in an effort to advance these ideas. Lackluster translation of these lofty ideals into practical realities, however, meant that the generalized set of rights founded by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, and even those that founded civil, political and socioeconomic rights in the 1960s, were slowly followed by instruments dedicated to addressing gaps in specific areas of rights. Even these, such as the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, while contributing to vast improvements in tackling discriminations specifically affecting women and children, continue to lack a robust implementation required to achieve the vision originally set out by the human rights ideals of the United Nations system.<sup>1</sup>

The dissonance between the ideals of the instruments and their implementation, and indeed between what different states

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1. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, *adopted* 18 Dec. 1979, G.A. Res. 34/180, U.N. GAOR, 34th Sess., U.N. Doc. A/34/46 (1980),