

The great demarcation: the French Revolution and the invention of modern property

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Abstrak

The French Revolution remade the system of property-holding that had existed in France before 1789. This book engages with this historical process not from an economic or social perspective, but from the perspective of the laws and institutions of property. The revolutionary changes aimed at two fundamental goals: the removal of formal public power from the sphere of property and the excision of property from the realm of sovereignty. The revolutionaries accomplished these two aims by abolishing privately owned forms of power, such as feudalism, seigneurialism, and venal public office, and by dismantling the Crown domain, thus making the state purely sovereign. This brought about a Great Demarcation: a radical distinction between property and power from which flowed the critical distinctions between the political and the social, state and society, sovereignty and ownership, the public and private. This destroyed the conceptual basis of the Old Regime, laid the foundation of Frances new constitutional order, and crystallized modern ways of thinking about politics and societies. These monumental changes were consolidated by the Napoleonic Code. By tracing how the French Revolution sought to make the Great Demarcation a legal and institutional reality, this book shows how the revolutionary transformation of Old Regime property helped define key categories of political modernity.