



Utopian Legacies: A History of Conquest and Oppression in the Western World

John Mohawk

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Paradoxically, contemporary horrors like ethnic cleansing are deeply rooted in humanity's highest aspirations, which have given rise to countless similar upheavals and atrocities perpetrated over millennia. Although the ideals embodied in religion and philosophy are considered to be humanity's prime "civilising" force, religions that preach love have been used to justify bloody massacres, and utopian ideals have fomented intolerance and persecution of those who were perceived as obstacles to the realisation of an ideal society. John Mohawk, a distinguished Native American historian, examines this paradox and traces the role of utopian thinking as the rationale for religious wars, subjugation of indigenous peoples, genocide, enslavement, plunder, economic domination, and campaigns of world conquest from the time of the ancient Greeks. Mohawk examines the hidden dynamic within utopian thinking and the danger it poses when it is adopted by powerful groups who use it to serve their own interests. He points out that the danger lies not in the utopian ideal itself but in the parallel assumption that its followers are in possession of the only "truth" and are therefore justified in forcing their "better way of life" on other cultures or nations for the ultimate good of humanity. In a gripping historical narrative, Mohawk traces the impact of utopian thinking on the rise of Western culture in ancient Greece and Rome, the emergence of the Christian empire, and the holy wars of the Middle Ages. Showing how this mindset has shaped Western development, he makes it clear that the utopian legacy still influences contemporary social and political movements at home and abroad. Our greatest challenge is to find ways to defuse its harmful effects on cultures different from our own, while preserving our aspirations and personal ideals. Mohawk argues that only a pluralistic outlook can truly support peace and understanding among the peoples of the world.

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