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Who Needs Human Rights? : Cultural Studies and Public Institutions

The goal of this paper is to attempt to bring about an articulation between cultural studies and public law in order to understand better the changing and complex political context that continuously shapes contemporary ethical debates. More specifically, I attempt to forge a closer relation between cultural studies (especially the social movement bend of the field) and human rights (especially critical legal theory as well as the pragmatic practices of the field), seeing that both share a commitment to social justice work, at a time of enormous global uncertainties and egregious erosion of liberties. The paper focuses on the way in which we may reconceive human rights and international public law – including the assumptions, institutions, relations, and practices of the rights discourse, as it is imagined politically and legally – in order to remap the ethico-political commitments of cultural studies from *within* a “rights imaginary.” This will require a perspective that will enable us to embed the practice of cultural studies inside the legal space of, the institutions associated with, and social movements connected to, human rights.