

## Note from the Non-Resident Fellow

Erik Moore

Dear CENFAD Community:

My name is Erik Moore, and I am CENFAD's Non-Resident Fellow for the 2018-2019 academic year. I earned my PhD in U.S. history from the University of Oklahoma in 2018 and my JD from the University of Missouri – Kansas City School of Law in 2004. In addition to serving as a Non-Resident Fellow at CENFAD, I am a postdoctoral associate at the OU Humanities Forum.

My research focuses on law in U.S. foreign relations to explain how domestic conceptions of law interacted with that of other nations to influence international affairs. As a practicing attorney and as a historian, I interpret law as an expression of American culture, social values, and politics. Law and foreign relations embody the fluid, and often contradictory, popular, and governmental discourses that underpinned the nation's social hierarchies, individual rights, and the role of the state in society. As such, the study of foreign relations in the context of law examines the negotiation that took place as different worldviews came into contact.

My current project examines the contested legal conception of human rights as a point of transnational interaction. The research shows that non-governmental organizations (NGOs) advocating for peace in Nicaragua successfully used human rights discourse against President Ronald Reagan to limit U.S. support for the counterrevolution and help end the Contra War. Through a combination of grassroots activism, Congressional lobbying, and investigations and reporting, these organizations worked to reframe the Contra War as an issue of human rights and not Cold War anti-communism. In doing so, NGOs convinced enough members of Congress to cut off military funding to the Contras in 1988, which pushed the guerrillas into a ceasefire and peace agreement with the Nicaraguan government.

This research changes the narrative of the Contra War and human rights in the 1980s. My work refutes arguments that NGOs had minimal influence over policy in Washington. Scholars have understood the conflict in the context of Cold War geopolitics, that Reagan wanted to aggressively confront communism in Nicaragua but regularly ran into trouble with Congress because of errors in judgment or policy, such as the Iran-Contra Affair. My research intervenes to show that NGOs were necessary to hold the popular president accountable when Congress was unable or unwilling. The research is also the first to investigate Nicaragua as the subject of a human rights debate during the Reagan administration. While historians research human rights in U.S. relations with other countries in Latin America, Nicaragua has been left out. It did not fit the model of state-sponsored terror, like that in Chile and Argentina, against which activists organized or testified in Congress. The Contra War was also outside the 1970s, a pivotal decade for human rights in American politics and culture and the subject of the majority of research. Furthermore, my work is part of a new direction in scholarship examining interpretations of human rights at the grassroots and cultural level in the United States rather than focusing on government officials or international lawyers.

My article "Rights or Wishes? Conflicting Views Over Human Rights and America's Involvement in the Nicaraguan Contra War," appearing in the December 2018 issue of *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, discusses how different interpretations of human rights influenced how Americans viewed the Nicaraguan Revolution and Sandinista government. Human rights also provided a language of opposition to Reagan's policies. I am completing a second article that focuses on how the anti-Contra movement led NGOs to expand their scope and seek change to the underlying principles of Cold War ideology in American politics.

Best Regards,  
Erik Moore