

## Interview with Erik Moore

By Michael Fischer

**Q:** What pushed you to study what you do study?

**A:** I used to be an attorney. I practiced law for six years. What I like to learn about is how law and legal culture has influenced history and relations between countries and societies. That pushed me into researching law in US foreign relations. I landed on the topic of human rights because human rights is a point of contact where groups within countries or countries themselves differ on how they see right. I find it fascinating how different legal cultures around the world come into contact. Contestation, negotiation within human rights is one of those focal points that, and its within countries as well, I find really fascinating. My specific research topic is a situation where human rights had real specific consequences as far as foreign policy.

**Q:** Do you notice major differences with respect to human rights across presidential administrations or political parties? What is the source of differing domestic opinions on human rights?

**A:** The typical line from the United States government is that human rights are political rights, civil rights. That is built into the American legal and political system. The right to vote, free speech, and freedom from torture. Within that, there is also a view toward social and economic rights. Actually now, with this election cycle, we are hearing more about that. We heard much less about social and economic rights during the Cold War because that looked like Communism. If you got close to Communism, you were a Communist, as far as politics went. I deal with Latin America and human rights. There it is much more broad. Civil rights, economic rights, cultural rights, the right to

sovereignty, self-determination. These are seen as human rights before you got to the right to vote.

**Q:** For readers or those who cannot make it to the talk today, do you have one or two points for them to hear?

**A:** Grassroots activism really had an influence over policy. The organizations that I study had a compelling argument, a compelling story, based in human rights. They believed it, it was not just lip service. It was something that galvanized a lot of people. Grassroots activism really has an effect.

**Q:** Where does your work and research fit into the historiography?

**A:** Nicaragua has been largely neglected when it comes to human rights historiography. There are several reasons for that, but I am putting them front and center in the human rights debate. There are now a few studies, which Mark Bradley calls the second generation of human rights study. It has been the study of international lawyers, officials, diplomats, etc. until now. The current work is more focused on grassroots activists. They are people on the ground in the United States, their ideas on human rights, and how they are mobilizing them. It is relatively new. Mark Bradley, Sarah Sneider has done some work on it, but it is less top-down in methodological approach.

**Q:** What are some of the major challenges that you have either already encountered or are currently encountering in your research?

**A:** I would like to go back to Nicaragua for more Nicaraguan sources. Just the way the research went, I would like to revisit Nicaraguan resources. Some of the archives are not as organized, and I do not know that now is the best time to go with the current unrest against Daniel Ortega. Now, I am trying to find individual activists to talk to. I have identified them, and now I am trying to get into contact with them.

**Q:** What are some of the more exciting aspects of your research project?

**A:** Tracking down and interviewing individuals. Traveling to different archives is fun as well. Finding letters or reading transcripts of hearings before Congress, they are not the dry, black and white issues that you may think. Just finding the personalities, like Barry Goldwater, who wrote a letter, a scathing letter to the White House, you could feel how mad he was coming off the paper. Sometimes you can just sense the tension, and I find that fascinating.