

### Note from the Non-Resident Fellow

Dear CENFAD Community,

It has been a productive spring semester that began with my visit to Philadelphia. In early February I delivered my lecture at CENFAD and presented my research. I enjoyed the lively discussion that followed. I especially appreciated meeting with graduate students and learning about their projects. After my time at Temple, I remained in Philadelphia for a few more days and visited Swarthmore College's Peace Collection. This archive has been a wonderful resource for my work. I wanted to pick up on research I conducted there several years ago and begin gathering materials for a future project examining human rights activism for displaced persons in Central America in the 1970s and 1980s.

The majority of my work at Swarthmore was research for a book project that is now under contract with the University of Pennsylvania Press. The book, originally my dissertation, examines the influence of human rights activism on U.S. foreign policy during the Nicaragua Contra War of the 1980s. I argue that NGOs successfully used human rights advocacy to limit U.S. support for the counterrevolution and help convince Congress to cut off military funding for counterrevolutionary groups referred to as the Contras, effectively ending the war. The revisions and additional research have been my primary task as a CENFAD Non-Resident Visiting Fellow. The dissertation was narrowly focused on archival research of U.S.-based NGOs. For the book, I am strengthening my argument and enhancing the narrative through interviews with activists. The oral history of human rights

activism and the anti-Contra movement will be another original contribution of my book that I am excited to pursue. Second, I am examining Nicaraguan activism as part of a network with U.S. groups. I have already conducted substantial research in collections in Managua and in Nicaraguan sources in U.S. archives. This avenue of research will clarify the transnational nature of human rights activism regarding Nicaragua that other scholars are pursuing in different contexts.

Finally, I am finishing up a new article about the methods used by the Reagan administration to undermine the credibility of human rights organizations and refute evidence-based reporting of violations. Human rights watch groups investigated and testified before Congress about pervasive human rights abuse by the Contras. These investigations and resulting reports by organizations such as Amnesty International, Americas Watch, the Washington Office on Latin America, and the International Human Rights Law Group provided evidence of widespread Contra violations. Reagan and his administration countered these allegations by casting doubt on the veracity of the information and attacking the integrity of those organizations who advocated for human rights protections.

The White House and its allies worked to convince the American people that the Sandinistas presented the greater threat and that the questionable conduct, if any, by the Contras was not important because the Contras fought against communists and for democracy. Reagan was not the first U.S. president to use this justification for U.S. intervention in Latin America. However, NGOs faced additional concerns when Contra-backers accused human rights activists of aiding the Sandinistas and

and purposefully engaging in a disinformation campaign orchestrated by communists. These accusations tended to neutralize the effect of human rights reporting and endangered human rights activists throughout the world. NGOs responded by gradually altering their tactics to effect change in U.S. foreign policy.

Best Regards,  
Erik Moore