

# Sociologist expands US conversation on human rights

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Issues of race and gender are important aspects of American sociology; however, the U.S. is behind the curve in consideration of a subject that affects individuals internationally on a daily basis - the human rights of all people. The American Sociological Association added the sociology of human rights as a section only recently, while Canada has included the issue of human rights for more than 10 years. Now, David Brunnsma, associate professor of sociology in the University of Missouri College of Arts and Science and the interim director of the Black Studies Program, is working on a three-book series, *The Handbook of Sociology and Human Rights*, with co-editors Keri Iyall Smith and Brian Gran that he hopes will raise questions about human rights issues domestically and abroad.

"Human rights is grounded in two things: dignity and self-determination," Brunnsma said. "All human beings have inherent dignity that they want to express and that they express that dignity through a desire to be self-determinative. We want to know how recognizing this inherent dignity and self-determination might change the discipline of sociology and then find out what we can do to make necessary changes in the American social structure to ensure human rights for all. With this project, we want to discover how including human rights in the discussion of American sociology changes the questions that have been asked and how to create projects that involve the voices of the people that help us understand where we need to go."

Brunnsma is a prominent member of Sociologists Without Borders, an

international organization of sociologists committed to the principle that all people have equal rights to political freedoms, legal protections, socioeconomic security, self-determination and their personality. He is also a co-editor of the organization's journal, *Societies Without Borders: Human Rights and the Social Sciences*. He recently won their W.E.B. Dubois award for his work on the journal.

"After working with Sociologists Without Borders, I realized that part of the problem is that American sociology is very American-centered," Brunisma said. "We need to realize that we are a global village. Only in the international conversation can you start to create theories and practices that shape the world to be a better place. The U.S. has not been very interested in that discussion and neither has American sociology - this is problematic."

Brunisma's book series will include three separate publications, each with a different purpose. In the books, he hopes to include summaries from several prominent scholars in the field of sociology with insights on how human rights might change the questions American sociologists typically ask. The first book will be a large handbook, mainly for library use. Next, the handbook will be trimmed to a trade paperback version to be used for classrooms. The last installment of the series might include a dialogue with individuals from nonprofits and non-governmental organizations about [human rights](#) issues now and in the past, Brunisma said.

Brunisma's research has been published in *Social Forces*, [Sociological Quarterly](#), *Critical Sociology* and *Sociology Compass*. The first installment of his series is scheduled for release in 2011.

Provided by University of Missouri-Columbia

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