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The Social Practice of Human Rights: Charting the Frontiers of Research and Advocacy

2015 Conference of the University of Dayton Human Rights Center

Oct. 2-3, 2015, Dayton, Ohio

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Research Panel: Framing Human Rights

Presenter: John H. Davis Jr., Denison University

Title: Human Rights: East vs. West

Abstract: Current events make it clear that human rights continue to be a pressing issue in most parts of the world. This is both a sign of work that remains to be done as various actors strive to realize the values espoused in international human rights documents and an indicator of the degree to which human rights has become an increasingly universalized discourse as more and more people in the world organize, mobilize, and engage their societies and governments seeking greater protection of their human rights. In this paper I utilize ethnographic research on the human rights of minorities in Japan as a counterpoint for examining discourses of minority rights in the United States.

In the case of Japan, one can clearly see a growing tendency to frame minority issues as human rights concerns and entities ranging from the government to grassroots organizations have employed the idea of human rights in efforts to facilitate social change. In the United States, however, minority issues garner a significant amount of national attention, but they are rarely framed as human rights concerns.

Through a comparative analysis of minority rights in Japan and United States, this paper will identify some of the causes of these differential degrees of engagement with human rights as well as the consequences in terms of the well-being of minority communities.

Keywords: human rights, minorities, japan

Biography: Dr. John H. Davis Jr. is an assistant professor of sociology and anthropology at Denison University. He has conducted more than ten years of research on minority communities and human rights in Japan.