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Localizing Human Rights in Response to Global Urban Crises and Right-Wing Populism

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

2017 Conference of the University of Dayton Human Rights Center

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Research Panel: Place-Based Rights: Connecting Global to Local

Presenter: Jackie Smith

Title: Localizing Human Rights in Response to Global Urban Crises and Right-Wing Populism

Abstract:

Human rights are under increased threat as the world faces economic insecurity, financial volatility, climate change, and the rise of right-wing populist movements. At a time global interdependence demands more intensive cooperation among national governments to address economic and environmental crises, nationalist tendencies are polarizing politics within and among countries.

Although news headlines have focused on the rise of exclusionary and racist movements, there is evidence of significant popular mobilization around more inclusive human rights claims. Because these movements challenge basic elements of the capitalist system, they get less traction in electoral contests and remain marginal to mainstream media and scholarly discourse.

This paper explores the emergence of translocal networks of human rights advocates articulating place-based human rights claims in communities around the world. Amid new threats to human rights from far-right advances such as Brexit and the election of Donald Trump, demands for “the right to the city” are rising as people seek to reconcile the tensions between global and local politics and between economic globalization and community survival.

I provide illustrations from this emergent right-to-the-city movement and consider its implications for our understanding of the evolution of global human rights.

About the presenter:

Jackie Smith is professor of sociology at the University of Pittsburgh and editor of *Journal of World-Systems Research*, an open-access scholarly journal. Her books include *Social Movements and World-System Transformation* (forthcoming, co-edited with Michael Goodhart, Patrick Manning, and John Markoff), *Social Movements in the World-System: The Politics of Crisis and Transformation* (with Dawn Wiest), and *Social Movements for Global Democracy*, among other co-edited and co-authored collections on social movements and global social change. Smith has served on the United States Social Forum’s National Planning Committee and is co-founder of the International Network of Scholar-Activists. She works with technology justice organization May First/People Link and helps coordinate Pittsburgh’s Human Rights City Alliance. Smith also serves on the national steering committee of the U.S. Human Rights City Alliance.