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Commentary
**Sociology and Human Rights:
Building Professional Association Capital for
Improving the Human Condition**

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Human rights inquiry looms as a critical social science priority in the twenty-first century. For the discipline of sociology, the recent call for a more ‘public sociology’ has reinvigorated the more traditional applied, clinical, translational, and humanist applications. All of these efforts exist within the context of sociological practice and an emerging theoretical/conceptual nexus that focuses on the importance of social and cultural capital, social networks, and patterns of individualization (Beck 1992; Portes 1998). This evolving theoretical/conceptual concern implies and requires that sociologists investigate real people, their interaction patterns and the formation of collective entities that promote and support improvement of the human condition. One important measure of the human condition involves the protection of human rights and the advancement of practical strategies that ensure and maintain these rights.

This ‘practical strategies approach’ is a direct invitation to sociologists throughout the world to become involved in human rights research. The 2010 annual meeting of the Association of Applied and Clinical Sociology (AACS) included an invitation to colleagues from Sociologists Without Borders/Sociologos Sin Fronteras (SSF) to participate with a special session organized around human rights issues. SSF is a transnational organization of sociologists dedicated to all people, their socioeconomic security, self-determination, cultural preservation and personal rights to pursue freedom and legal protection. At the 2010 AACS meeting, the common concerns of the membership of both organizations became immediately apparent. This special issue of *Societies Without Borders: Human Rights and Social Science* reflects the success of this ‘meeting

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within a meeting' and provides a model for building what I call 'Professional Association Capital' (PAC) for future human rights inquiry.

The call for a public sociology carries a directive for sociological involvement with people; a style which educates, organizes, and informs the public. The critical relationship between sociologists and the public is 'equal-status', promoting a participatory action research model (Picou 2009). The articles in the present volume all reflect this critical methodological innovation, that is, a translational model, for human rights inquiry.

The AACS initiated this 'meeting within a meeting' model in 2009 when the Social Science Research Council Katrina Research Group joined them in San Antonio, Texas. From this gathering, a large number of applied, public and humanist research projects were initiated and continue to the present. From these last two AACS meetings, it is apparent that our professional sociological organizations and ASA sections have the potential to develop PAC, i.e., resources, networks and groups of 'boots on the ground' sociologists dedicated to enhancing the human rights of all people and, in particular, special groups such as survivors of Hurricane Katrina.

In brief, my vision would include AACS, SSF, the Association for Humanist Sociology (AHS), the ASA Section on Sociological Practice and Public Sociology and the ASA Section Human Rights. All of these professional collectivities have members who are directly concerned with human rights and improving the human condition. Collectively, these groups of professional sociologists bring a variety of topics of inquiry, a broad spectrum of methodological approaches and many innovative field experiences for understanding and promoting positive social change. I encourage the officers and boards of these professional organizations to reach out and build linkages between these and other organizations, facilitate 'meetings within meetings,' and pool the intellectual and interventionist resources that are unique to each group. The results of building PAC can only be positive as teams of researchers are more likely to produce innovative inquiry and be funded for their projects by foundations and government agencies. Such a positive outcome is apparent from the articles that appear in this special issue. This action would enhance the potential for collaborative advances in the study of the Sociology of

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Human Rights. These advances would be important and I enthusiastically invite you to join this movement.

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