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## Working to keep Lady Justice blind

By Jane Palmer  
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

Americans have a popular image of Lady Justice holding a balance scale and wearing a blindfold to avoid discrimination.

Omahan Samuel Walker sees a criminal justice system that has made a lot of progress on discrimination in the last 40 to 60 years but still needs to improve.

He is a widely quoted researcher and author on the topics of civil liberties, criminal justice and police misconduct and he is professor emeritus of criminal justice at the University of Nebraska at Omaha.

The Western Society of Criminology honored Walker in February with its W.E.B. Dubois Award for contributions to the field of criminology in the area of race and ethnicity. He gave the keynote speech for the society's annual meeting in Vancouver last month and spoke on discrimination.

"We have had this terrible legacy of slavery since this country was founded," Walker said in an interview. "In terms of identifying the problems of discrimination and developing policies that will reduce it, we've really made significant progress since the early 1970s."

He mentioned better policies to reduce discrimination in the use of the death penalty and the use of deadly force by police officers as two examples. He credited research in the criminology field for contributing to those positive changes.

"We need to continue to do what we've been doing and dig deeper into how the justice system works and come up with effective solutions," he said. And the nation needs to protect its achievements, he said.

"The national economic crisis is threatening some gains," he said. "Cutting the number of police officers and probation parole officers takes time and energy away from their basic jobs. The whole immigration controversy has really heightened racial and ethnic tensions. We have things like the law in Arizona and Fremont (Neb.) which are steps backward, I think."

Walker traces his interest in criminal justice to the summer of 1964. He was a student at the University of Michigan and was volunteering on a voter registration campaign for African-Americans in Mississippi. That summer a fellow activist, Andrew Goodman, and two companions were murdered with the help of the police in Mississippi. FBI agents were sent in to the state to work on the case.

Walker's childhood home was in Cleveland Heights, Ohio, where he delivered the Cleveland Plain Dealer newspaper and was editor of his high school newspaper.

"I'm still a print guy," he said. He reads the newspaper in print form and has written 13 books on his research. Some of his books are so widely read that he has updated them over the years and they now encompass a total of 30 editions. He also writes online at samuelwalker.net.

As an emeritus professor and 68-year-old, he describes himself as retired from getting paid, busier than ever and traveling often to present speeches on his research. He continues to report to his office on the UNO campus at 8 a.m. as he did before he became an emeritus professor.

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## GET TO KNOW . . .



**Samuel Walker**

**Age:** 68.

**Who:** Professor emeritus of criminal justice at the University of Nebraska at Omaha.

**Family:** Mother Elizabeth Walker in Cleveland Heights, Ohio, and partner of 30 years Mary Ann Lamanna.

**Hometown:** Born in Indianapolis and reared in Cleveland Heights. He has lived in Omaha since 1973.

**Education:** Bachelor's degree, University of Michigan; master's degree in history, University of Nebraska at Omaha; and doctorate in American history, Ohio State University.

**Career:** UNO criminal justice faculty from 1974 to 2005, named a professor in 1984.

**Award:** The Western Society of Criminology recently honored him with the W.E.B. Dubois Award for his research on race and ethnicity.