

AAG Newsletter of the Association of American Geographers

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The Tapestry of Geography

Somerset Maugham once characterized life as a tapestry, woven of many disparate historical and experiential threads, into a complex but unique and beautiful whole. This metaphor can perhaps be useful as we contemplate geography's complexity and richness at this moment of the AAG's Centennial.

This month, geographers from all around the world and all corners of the

discipline will converge in Philadelphia for an historic gathering, a celebration of the AAG's first hundred years, and an assessment of geography's next century. It likely will also be the largest congregation of geographers convened hitherto on the planet. In more than three thousand



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presentations, hundreds of special events, wide-ranging initiatives, diverse committees, and innumerable new publications awaiting us on the tables of every publisher in the exhibit hall, we will encounter directly the complexity and dynamism of our discipline at this point in its history. Coalescing in Philadelphia during the next few weeks will be that rich tapestry which has become modern geography, a tapestry that derives its pattern and weave in no small part from the multi-textured threads of AAG's past one hundred years.

What we will see is a discipline that has somehow managed, against all odds, to continue to bridge the humanities, the social sciences, and the natural sciences, with each informing and strengthening the others. We will see a discipline where our historic approaches and our new tools now place us at the heart of current research trends in integrative science and

multidisciplinary studies in the humanities; a discipline where new technologies fuse with venerable geographic traditions to create an intellectual vitality that is matched by few other disciplines today, and where physical geography and cultural geography coincide to enrich our understanding of the world in ways that neither could alone. We will see a tapestry of the whole created from and lending meaning to parts.

There are many new starts in geography, and these also will be evident in the creative mix of Philly. Not all will flourish, but some will surprise our conventional wisdom or challenge our received ideological precepts. Many of

today's most vibrant threads in geography's tapestry, ranging from critical theory to now crucial technologies, have been the object of concerted sanction and suppression in the past by those who would stop the looms of geography. As bright young scholars and innovators step forward with new ideas or approaches, I suggest we give them a bit of space and sunlight. We may find that innovators will be more important than gate-keepers in the AAG's dynamic second century.

The Philadelphia meeting will be an extraordinary opportunity for us all to gather together, and to seek out, foster, and enjoy the collaboration and creativity that can sustain us into well into the next century. I look forward to seeing all of you there! ■

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