

AAG Newsletter of the Association of American Geographers

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Race/Ethnicity and Place Conference Builds Bridges for Geography

The Race/Ethnicity and Place Conference co-sponsored by the AAG last month at the Howard University, dramatically demonstrated the value and necessity of reaching out beyond our discipline to engage other institutions and disciplines. The intellectual and creative energy generated by bringing the topics of geography, race, ethnicity and place together at the world's leading historically black university was remarkable, and catalyzed a strengthening of institutional, personal, and research ties between the Howard University community and geographers from across the U.S.

Co-sponsored by the AAG, Binghamton University, and Howard University, this meeting built upon an earlier successful mini-conference held at Binghamton in 2002, and an on-going program of research and educational coordination recently established between the AAG and Howard University. In addition to building two-way bridges for geography to research agendas in other disciplines and to programs at historically minority colleges and universities, the conference also focused attention on geography's own diversity needs and initiatives. Joe Darden, AAG Diversity Taskforce chairman attended and stressed the need for meaningful progress in this arena. John Frazier presented a cogent analysis of institutional challenges to racially integrating U.S. geography and successful efforts underway at Binghamton. AAG Executive Director Doug Richardson and Howard University Vice-Provost for Research Orlando Taylor described their joint efforts to date to bring geography

to Howard University, which graduates more Black PhDs than any other institution in the world, and underscored their commitment to continuing cooperation between the AAG and Howard University in the future.



Richardson

This dynamic conference also created an extraordinary opportunity to showcase modern geography's relevance to the educational, research, and policy needs of minorities in American society, and to discuss geography's traditional strengths and its integrative new technologies with scholars

from many disciplines at Howard University. Featured plenary speakers in addition to those above included Rickie Sanders (Temple University), AAG President Vicky Lawson (University of Washington), Howard University Provost Richard English, Ruth Wilson Gilmore (University of Southern California), Sam Aryeetey-Attoh (University of Toledo), Native American legal historian Rennard Strickland (University of Oregon), Darryl Cohen (U.S. Census Bureau), and Rodney Green of Howard University.

Sessions, posters, and paper presentations combined to integrate theory and applications across topics ranging from "Profiling Alienated Labor: Racism, Externalities and Re-Partitioned Geographies" and "Linguistic Tools for Race/Ethnicity and Place Research: the MLA Language Map," to "Geographies of Race and Poverty in the American Northwest" and "The Segregation of Chicago." The full program of speakers and wide-ranging research presented at the conference is available at www.aag.org/meetings/place.html.

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New relationships were also established between geographers and researchers from other disciplines around the common ground themes of the conference. Other disciplines represented by minority scholars at the conference included, among others, sociology, history, law, anthropology, political science, religious studies, landscape architecture, geosciences, economics, urban planning, health sciences, African American studies, global studies, woman and gender studies, public policy and administration, American studies, ethnicity studies, peace studies, and environmental science. An additional tangible outcome of this conference was the surprise announcement of a gift of \$450,000 in GIS software to Howard University on the last day of the meeting by ESRI's Todd Rogers. Rogers, a widely respected African-American leader in the field of large-scale GIS applications, noted that as he was participating in the conference he was struck by the disparity of the geography based resources available to Howard students, and those at the U-Penn's Wharton School, where he had been visiting the previous week, and as a consequence decided to arrange this donation so that the minority students and faculty at Howard might have access

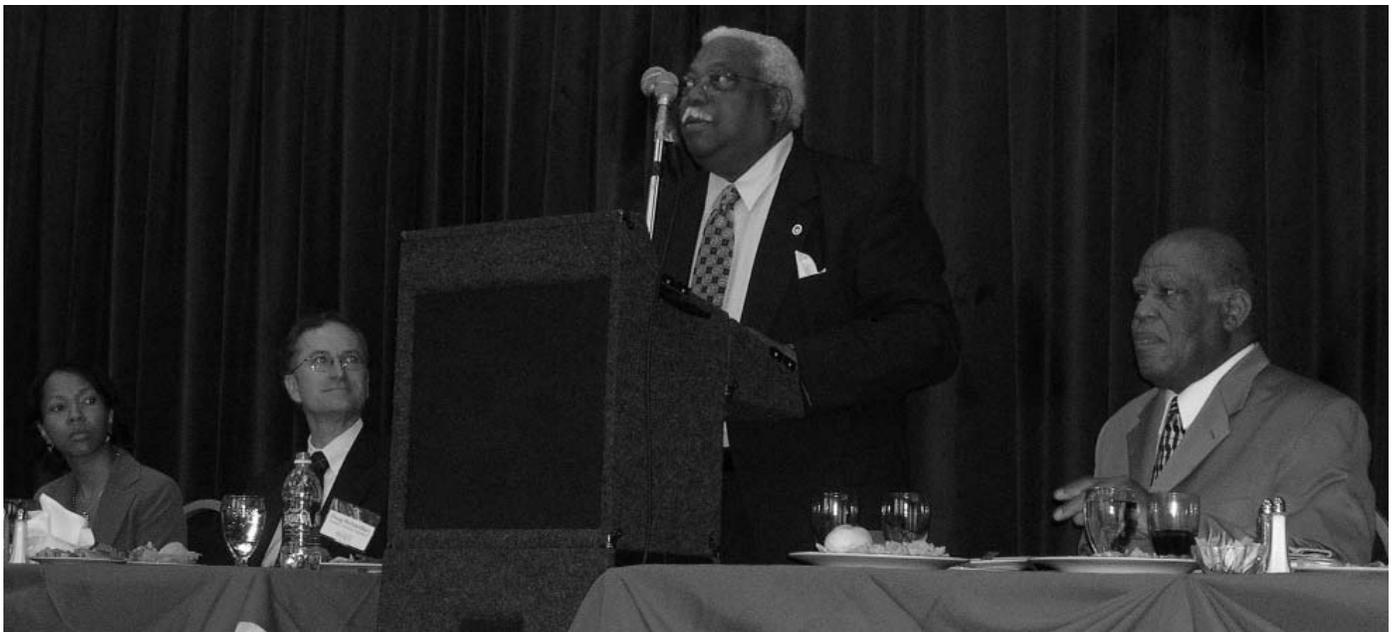
the same level of resources as their counterparts at Wharton.

Howard University's Vice-Provost of Research Orlando Taylor welcomed the grant as an important step in enabling Howard to expand geographic teaching and research capabilities across many disciplines at the University.

The AAG is continuing to build on this conference and on our previous work with Howard University, via joint research proposals, mentoring programs (which work both ways), and regular meetings to explore and develop ways in which geography can play an expanded role at Howard and other minority-serving institutions in the U.S. and around the world. These bridges are also being designed to help bring more minority students and faculty to our geography departments and to address the important diversity needs of U.S. geography at all levels and in all sectors of employment. Several geographers attending the Race/Ethnicity and Place Conference, among them Past AAG President Larry Brown, commented that this was the best conference they had ever attended. There was indeed a general consensus of something important happening at the meeting, a sense of auspicious beginnings. It will now be up to all of us—working

together—to ensure that these beginnings are carried through to real and meaningful endings.

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Howard University Provost and Chief Academic Officer Richard English addresses the Race/Ethnicity and Place Conference. Seated from left: Terrolyn Carter, Program Manager for Graduate Education at Howard University; Douglas Richardson, AAG Executive Director; and Orlando Taylor, Dean of the Graduate School and Associate Provost for Research at Howard University.