

Geographies of Fear and Hope

Our post-9/11 world is one of heightened concerns about risk and safety, with numerous media reports about war and violence and with new "color-coded" terror alerts regularly issued to the nation. In other words, we live in a world of growing fearfulness. This expansion of fear seems to arise from many arenas: threats of natural disasters, global climate change, and health pandemics now occur alongside geopolitical fearmongering and growing apprehensions about inequality, social injustice, and political instability.

At the Denver AAG Annual Meeting in April 2005, two plenary sessions on "Geographies of Fear and Hope" will bring together scholars to discuss what geographers have to say about fear and hope in our contemporary world. I argue that there is a crucial research and teaching agenda in this project. We need to consider what produces fear; but more than this, we need to think about what fear sets in motion and how fear is being put to work in our society. I believe that geographic research can and must be central in moving us beyond fear and in building constructive and hopeful interventions in our world.

The speakers in our plenary sessions will address the power of both fearfulness and hopefulness. They will talk about how our questions, our priorities, and our resource allocations might shift if we started from positions of hope rather than positions of dread and anxiety.

I begin with the theme of fear and hope in this column to highlight what draws us together through the range and diversity of geographic inquiry. How does our work address these powerful emotions? There are many ways in which ongoing geographic research already investigates the myriad threats we face in the realm of environmental disasters, climate change, and unsustainable ecological practices. Geographers are now working on crucial questions related to food security, the sustainability of cities, the potential for species conservation, and the fears associ-

ated with physical hazards. They are engaged with topics such as flood and drought dynamics, greenhouse gas emissions, and global warming as well as the impacts of hurricanes, earthquakes, and tornadoes. The Denver plenaries will build on this work and pose hopeful questions concerning these complex nature-society relationships.

The plenary speakers will also encourage us to think about how we can analyze the political "work" that fearfulness is doing in the context of national and international conflicts and struggles over security and democracy. Spatial analyses and critiques of the politics of fear can offer alternative, hopeful visions of social and political organization. Some of this work is already underway in development geography as scholars are researching social networks that organize for farmer's rights, for indigenous territory and identities, and for peace and human rights. From this research we are learning more about participatory and inclusive approaches to political work and to understanding poverty. Our research and teaching can do more to interrogate the complex roots of threats emerging from distant places. Geographers in critical geopolitics, the new work on globalization, and cultural fields are situating these threats in relation to colonial histories, contemporary struggles over resources, and related projects of cultural transformation. Our work on fear and hope can also be conducted in the United States by examining the ways in which fear is materialized in landscapes and in concrete practices of regulation such that the values of the most powerful members of society construct "fearful others" and then monitor, regulate, and control their movement through space.

Geospatial analyses and technologies are central to these forms of regulation, as they are currently employed by new "security" organizations and bureaucracies. Instruments of monitoring and surveillance are present in arenas as diverse as immigration, health, and national security. But these same analyses can also be powerful tools for responding to issues of environmental and social justice, and in helping us to understand deforestation, urban sprawl, and pollution. We can analyze and teach about fear and hope by interrogating the complex and contradictory effects of these technologies and practices and the ways in which they play out unevenly across places and

for social groups marked by difference.

I don't raise these themes of fear and hope because I am pessimistic about our world, but rather, because I am optimistic about geography. Geographers can and must be at the forefront of these types of analyses. We should be yet more involved and visible in a range of pressing societal debates concerning rising inequality and poverty, global health pandemics, famine, war, and conflict. Framing analyses of the processes producing fear should not lead us to paralysis and retreat but rather it should mobilize us as we build hopeful understandings of our complex world.

Come to Denver to engage with these ideas at our two plenary sessions on "Geographies of Fear and Hope"! The first session focuses our attention on politics, economies, and peace and the second is on environments, societies, and sustainability. While we are still in the final planning stages, we have extended invitations to distinguished visitors Steve Schneider, Patricia Nelson Limerick, and



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Prizes in fiction and non-fiction. He is a regular contributor to *Harper's*, *The Paris Review*, and *Esquire*.

Former Senator Timothy Wirth's early political career includes service as a White House fellow for President Johnson, a deputy assistant secretary of education in the Nixon administration, a representative from Colorado's 2nd Congressional District, and in 1986, a senator. In the Senate, he focused on environmental issues, especially global climate change and population stabilization. More recently, during the Clinton administration, he served as the Department of State's first undersecretary for global affairs, coordinating U.S. foreign

policy in the areas of refugees, population, environment, science, human rights, and narcotics.

Wirth left the State Department, and has continued work on behalf of the world's underserved populations as President of the United Nations Foundation, established to support the U.N. by Ted Turner, since 1998. In this role he has led the formulation of the foundation's mission and program priorities, which include the environment, women and population,



Wirth

children's health, and peace, security, and human rights. Wirth is a graduate of Harvard and holds a Ph.D. from Stanford University.

The 2005 AAG Annual Meeting, to be held at the Adam's Mark Hotel in Denver, also will feature plenary sessions on the theme of "Geographies of Hope and Fear," panels of distinguished researchers, over 2,000 papers and presentations, and numerous special events such as the AAG International Reception and the Geography Exposition. To learn more, or to register for the meeting, visit www.aag.org. The deadline for abstract submissions is October 21, 2004. ■

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complete on the full system before we can go live with it, which we expect to do this month (October).

Please let us know your thoughts as we implement these new services, and in the meantime keep on developing those specialty group sessions for the annual meeting in Denver. The deadline for submission of abstracts for specialty group-organized sessions is October 21, 2004. As a former chair of two AAG Specialty Groups, I know how much advance planning and work goes

into organizing quality sessions for your specialty groups. Hopefully, after we implement the new services and procedures listed above, you will be able to spend more time on substantive matters in your SG, and less time on bureaucracy.

We have a great meeting taking shape for Denver, and your participation will make it even better. Regarding the ongoing controversy about the role of specialty groups in the AAG, perhaps moderation is the best course. Specialty

groups play a vital role in the AAG and in the discipline. But we now have fifty-four specialty groups. Some overlap with others, and a few are splinter groups with little rationale based on subject matter. Consolidation rather than division or duplication may be a better course for some specialty groups in the future. Let's have strong and active specialty groups, but let's not have 100 of them. ■

Doug Richardson
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Vine Deloria to complement presentations by geographers including Jennifer Wolch, Matt Sparke, Brian Klinkenberg, Sarah Radcliffe, and Jennifer Hyndman.

Our speakers will articulate the complex geographical dimensions of fear, but

more importantly, they will also enunciate the geographies of hope. Now, even more than in the past, it is important for us as geographers to build analyses of hope and hopeful geographies across all sub-fields of the discipline. I look forward to

continuing this conversation with you at the Denver meetings in April of 2005. ■

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Please Note:

The Deadline for Submitting Paper Abstracts or Organizing Paper Sessions is October 21, 2004 and

The Deadline for Poster Submissions is October 28, 2004

To Submit Abstracts or Register online, visit www.aag.org

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