

# Internationalizing Geography at the Dawn of the Twenty-first Century

We live in fast-changing times. Our globe is being reconfigured by a multitude of forces including ethnic conflict, struggles over resources, economic globalization, climate change, and health pandemics. In response to these global shifts, scholars and teachers from across the social sciences are rethinking international and area studies research. For example, Carnegie and the American Council on Education are running a new project to internationalize the disciplines (Solem, December 2004 *AAG Newsletter*). In the mid-nineties, the Social Science Research Council (SSRC) dissolved its area studies committees that had been in place during the Cold War decades. This move was followed in 2001 by a conference called "Rethinking Social Science Research on the Developing World in the 21st Century." The SSRC's goal was to assess some of the major global and intellectual shifts that are shaping international social science research going forwards. The conference brought together scholars to discuss the need for a new social science project that "...rethinks the geopolitical units of analysis that area studies-based frameworks tend to take for granted" (SSRC Conference Report, 2001:19).

New space is opening for critical research about our reconfiguring globe, and geography can be at the forefront of this shift. You might well ask "what does it mean to internationalize a discipline that has its roots in European histories of exploration, commerce, and imperial militarism?" Certainly geography has always been international in scope and focus, but the framing of that "international" owes much to its roots in the nineteenth century beginnings of social sciences. At the dawn of the new century we need a critically different internationalism than in previous decades.

In this column, I will talk about two challenges as we extend our research, teaching, and action in these fast-changing times. The first of these is to continually augment our questions, scales of analysis,

and explanatory frameworks to account for the complex transformations occurring in our world. The second is to humbly incorporate learning from the Global South into our thinking and action as we teach about social, cultural, economic, and political processes in other places. In other words, geographers can contribute by working across scales (rather than fixing the national scale) in ways that are both inclusive and humble.

Scholars at the SSRC conference drew two conclusions that both inform our work and that suggest a prominent role for geography. First, they suggested that while the depth and context-specificity of area studies knowledge is invaluable, it must be incorporated into analyses that are transnational (and trans-regional) in scope. Second, researchers noted a widespread problem across the social sciences of devaluing work undertaken outside of the U.S. and Europe.

Geographers are particularly well positioned to advance a reconfigured transnational research agenda. Geographers' conceptualizations of scale place us at the forefront of work that considers not only transnational but also subnational scales as crucially important. Geographers have also revealed the restlessly shifting politics of scale. For example, this scalar framework raises questions about the nation-state emphasis of dominant institutions of development such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organization (among many others). Literally, these powerful institutions only disburse money or design policy with agents and institutions of the state. Geographers have critically examined the ways in which this scalar focus enhances the power of national governments, while simultaneously excluding many actors, organizations, and communities from the mainstream devel-

opment agendas in various places around the globe. Geographical analyses of rescaling processes also show the geographical unevenness of globalization. For example, the poorest economies of the globe are being sidelined in WTO negotiations through the rise of new transnational alliances such as the Group of 20-plus. Our scale-sensitive research poses



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questions about the ways in which expanding European Union or Free Trade Areas of the Americas redefine control over flows of commodities and investments and shift regulatory power over corporations, migration flows, and development dollars. These examples represent just the tip of the iceberg of the myriad ways that geographical analysis can reframe crucial international questions of our times.

If we begin by learning from places and collaborators in the Global South, we will construct a more creative and socially just internationalized geography. Starting outside of Europe and North America can change our "angle of vision" on ideas and priorities for scholarship and teaching. For example, scholars from the Global South are posing questions about the connections between widespread poverty and environmental degradation and consumption in the Global North (rather than emphasizing population growth and immigration). In addition, indigenous movements around the globe are critiquing the stability and sovereignty of national identities and claims to territory from the perspective of indigenous histories and ancestral lands. We can expand our research and teaching agenda here at home if we take seriously the priorities of colleagues and residents in other places. Questions of poverty, economic globalization, climate change, and sustainability

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## Baseball at Denver's Coors Field



Denver's Coors Field

photo by Richard Grant for the Denver CVB

Annual Meeting attendees are invited to take part in an excursion to a Colorado Rockies baseball game at Coors Field. Frederick Chambers, author of "Atmosphere, Weather, and Baseball: How Much Farther Do Baseballs Really Fly at Denver's Coors Field?" (*The Professional Geographer*,

55:4) will accompany the excursion and be on hand to explain his research on the widely held assumption that batted baseballs travel 10 percent farther in Denver than in major-league ballparks at sea level.

For more information on this excursion visit [www.aag.org/annualmeetings](http://www.aag.org/annualmeetings). ■

## AAG Cartography Editor Sought

The AAG seeks applications and nominations for Cartography Editor. The editor will review and enhance the cartographic content and quality of submissions to both *The Professional Geographer* and the *Annals of the AAG* to ensure that all information is cartographically appropriate and clearly displayed.

She or he will be appointed for a four-year term. The Cartography Editor will work in coordination with the AAG Journals Manager and the *PG* and *Annals* editors, and is primarily responsible for all graphics used in both journals. This includes working on maps and figures to ensure that all information is clearly displayed and that figures and maps appear in proper electronic formats, etc.

The AAG will provide a modest stipend to be used for expenses and honorarium at the editor's discretion.

To apply, send a letter of application and a complete curriculum vitae to: Chair, AAG Publications Committee, AAG Meridian Place Office, 1710 Sixteenth Street NW, Washington, DC 20009-3198. Nominations and applications may also be submitted electronically to [annals@aag.org](mailto:annals@aag.org). ■

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are not only pressing in the Global South, but are deeply relevant here at home where poverty has disappeared from the national agenda and sustainability and environmental conservation are under siege.

Contemporary social science preoccupations with "globalization" do not signal the "death of geography" as some have asserted. I argue here that geographers can take a leadership role in critically rethinking international social science research in globalizing times. There are many ways to accomplish this. The AAG's participation in the Carnegie project presents us with one exciting opportunity. Another avenue

for international learning is to participate in, and organize more conferences overseas. We have the ready-made opportunity of the International Geographical Union, as well as other groups that meet outside the U.S. such as the Conference of Latin Americanist Geographers and the International Conference of Critical Geography. Indeed the AAG might consider holding our annual meeting in Mexico, following from our prior meeting in Toronto. We can also forge closer relationships with non-U.S. scholars by participating in the AAG's international reception at the national meeting. The AAG Diversity Task Force can also build strategies that are inclusive

of people from around the globe as well as diverse populations within the U.S. In the realm of secondary education, we can work with administrators and schools to participate in the International Baccalaureate Program as discussed by Stevelberg, in the December 2004 *AAG Newsletter*. The list of potential actions is long, but my message is simple: geographers should take a leadership role in rethinking international research. ■

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