

Political Geography Specialty Group of the Association of American Geographers

NEWSLETTER

February 1 2010

Jason Dittmer
President

Mat Coleman
Secretary/Treasurer

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT



Jason Dittmer, Clashnessie, Summer 2009

Dear Political Geography Colleagues,

As I sit down to write this I have received an email announcing that the AAG preliminary program is available online, and that along with our own announcement of the PGSG pre-conference (see this newsletter) has

started my mind thinking about all the work that goes into assembling the enormous Frankenstein monster that is the AAG Annual Meeting. My role in this year's process has been infinitesimal, mainly limited to approving sessions for PGSG sponsorship. This process is useful in that it allows the AAG to attempt to minimize the overlaps between sessions likely to be of interest to political geographers, but it can be pretty tedious for he (or she) who is serving as the rubber stamp, particularly when you feel like some session organizers are collecting dozens of sponsorships in an effort to aggrandize their topic. My grumpiness rose in proportion to my inbox, and eventually I put my foot down.

What a mistake that was. The slighted organizer (whose name escapes me, but whomever you are please consider this letter

as a formal apology) was quite shocked that I did not consider his research area to be political geography, and politely pointed out that the research in this proposed session had been published in several journals obviously associated with the sub-discipline (and even bearing its name. Ahem.). Humbled, I assented and retreated to consider what had happened. Besides my own low blood sugar level, what contributed to the president of the Political Geography Specialty Group not recognizing his own sub-discipline when it was presented to him?

Since then I have followed this question down two lines of thought. First, what do we mean when we say political geography? We talk about 'it' like political geography is the same thing to all of us, but it clearly is not. For an example it is only necessary to look to the literature on feminist geographies to see how work that is obviously 'political' has not always been positioned as political geography, either by those writing it or by those who self-identify as political geographers. While this is slowly changing, there are plenty of other aporias at the intersections with other specialty groups and with other extra-disciplinary knowledges that deal in the political.

The second line of thought I have been following has to do with reading habits. The amount of literature published in 'political geography' outlets, when combined with political geography work published in more general journals as well as new books, far outstrips the ability of anyone to keep up with it. I don't even read one-tenth of the things that I pretend to have read to my colleagues (for the record, my 'knowing head nod' when you mention some new theorist should be understood in polite company as "please don't ask me anything

specific about this person"). I comfort myself with the idea that the sub-discipline has grown large enough to become unknowable in its totality – a situation reminiscent of Benedict Anderson's notion of the nation as an imagined community. The proliferation of outlets increases the possibility of publishing work that is 'niche' in character; this is a sign of the dynamism and maturity of political geography but also a sign that 'political geography' will increasingly mean many different things to many different people.

Following from these two lines of thought comes one call to action (as if you didn't have enough to do). Consider the journals you read, and the other specialty groups or disciplinary organizations of which you are a member. Who are your contacts in those disciplinary meeting grounds who are doing work that *might* be considered political geography? Talk to them, and invite them to participate in our discussions as full-fledged members of our community. Don't make my mistake and try to throw up walls; instead, invite them in and their contributions will enrich our discussions and debates. In an era of shrinking budgets and hiring freezes, this is no time to hide behind sub-disciplinary boundaries and defend some essentialized notion of political geography. Instead, we ought to celebrate its many meanings and consider some new ones.

Happy new year and I look forward to seeing as many of you as possible in Washington this spring!

Jason Dittmer
London, UK

LETTER FROM THE STUDENT BOARD MEMBER



Necati Anaz, Greece, Summer 2009

Dear PGSG student members,

Happy New Year to one and all, and welcome to my second address as your PGSG student representative! I hope this letter finds you all well.

As much as I would like to begin this address on a happy note, there is only one thing on my mind, and it is not a happy thing at all: the recent destruction wrought on the island of Haiti by the devastating earthquake of January 12th. It is heartbreaking to watch the ongoing tragedy on that small island; who among us has not spent hours and hours thinking of the tens of thousands of men, women, and children who died under the dark and airless rubble?

I have been especially moved by these events because I know what it feels like to experience the sudden violence of the very Earth. On August 16, 1999, I was living in northwestern Turkey, and just like I did every night, I fell asleep on my couch. When I awoke on August 17th, however, I was no longer on my couch, and my world was no longer the same. In fact, I thought the world had ended. It sounds like a cliché from a

horror movie, but it is true; when the 7.6-magnitude quake struck my hometown, my world was turned upside down both literally and figuratively. It was dark and it was noisy, and through the din I keyed in on one horrible sound: the screams of my neighbor's five-year-old daughter. Everyday objects—my lamp, my television, my computer—became deadly missiles, hurtling at me with awful speed. When I managed to look out my window only to see the eight-story apartment building across the street come crashing to the ground with all its hundreds of occupants, for the first time in my life I truly knew fear. In the aftermath of that day, I truly knew privation and want, as I realized that the *unentbehrlich* trappings of everyday life—those conveniences I worked so hard for, and thought I so badly needed—were nothing when one cannot procure the most basic of human needs: shelter, a bandage, a piece of bread and a drink of cold water.

I am sharing this unforgettable memory for two reasons. The first is to remind all of us that watching human tragedy unfold on the nightly news is not the same as experiencing that tragedy firsthand. Of course, I do not wish for anyone to experience such tragedy to better feel what others feel, but I do wish to point out that we need to shrink the gap, both physically and sensationally, between those that suffer and those that hear of the suffering. The second is to make us rethink how much we take ordinariness—the very regularity of our life—for granted. As I learned ten years ago, this is as simple and as basic as a night's rest: when we lay down our heads in our well-apportioned apartment, we expect to wake up the next day in the same way that we went to bed the night before; for many of our fellow human beings, however, this is a rather grandiose and unrealistic expectation. My point here

is that we take ‘time’ and ‘place’ for granted. Oh sure, as academic geographers we give a lot of lip service to the uncertainty of these things, but in reality, I would say that the vast majority of us consider time and place—for ourselves and our friends and families—to be fixed, unchanging, durable, and manageable.

They are not. And we need to realize this, not academically, but viscerally.

One of the great maladies endemic to modernism is that it has obliged us to squeeze time and space in the name of productivity, efficiency, and creativity, and this squeezing is antithetical to the social patterns developed over millennia. People have been extirpated from their rural habitats and compressed in cities, all in the name of happiness—or at least its pursuit. Hence, we build crowded cities out of concrete blocks in order to imprison ourselves in tiny cubicles, and still we rush to build them with all speed, yet without thought or care. We ignore the voices that question if these concrete prisons are even safe, let alone suitable for a healthy, *happy* human being; we decry as naïve and subversive those who dare espouse the well-being of the mass of humanity over the concerns of *more*, and of money, and of this thing called ‘modernity’. Worst of all, our brothers and sisters in the underdeveloped world live in this squalor to pursue a dream dictated to them from abroad and above, tricked into believing that this is their only lot in life, their destiny; that there are no solutions, no alternatives.

Loudly, now, I want to say this: there *are* alternatives and solutions, and *no one* should be destined to live a life not of their choosing. And I want you all to say this with me. Geographers must blaze the trail and head for the combat zone to fight against inhuman urbanization, global inequality, poverty, and the insidious politics of destiny. Geographers — especially political geographers — must desert their own academic cubicles, their own intellectual prisons, and tell the stories of the less-advantaged of this Earth to those who as yet turn blind eyes and deaf ears to the plight of so many; tell it to the policy makers, the public, and our own wayward colleagues.

And where to begin? I say the academy itself, and the journals that are its organ. And how to do this? By getting our hands dirty and then telling the tale in language that will be read by others outside of our cohort. I would call on us all to bring a bit of the visceral—a bit of the wide world—to our academic writing, and foment intellectual and actual change through the discipline we all love so much. As the Turkish saying goes: “A single rose does not bring spring, but every spring begins with a single rose.”

I end this letter with the sincere hope that you will all have a wonderful and productive semester.

Peace!

Necati Anaz
Norman, Oklahoma

PGSG PRECONFERENCE

This year's 2 day **PGSG preconference will be held at Virginia Tech's Old Town Alexandria campus**, located across the Potomac river from Washington DC, on **Sunday April 11 and Monday April 12 2010**. Please submit a paper title, author contact details and a brief abstract to Jason Dittmer and/or Mat Coleman at aag.pgsg@gmail.com no later than **March 1 2010**. Thanks to Gerard Toal, Gerry Kearns and co for generously agreeing to host the preconference. A list of accommodations is available at <http://www.planningacademy.ncr.vt.edu/location.html>. However, the most competitive accommodations are most likely to be found at www.priceline.com and www.hotels.com. The Virginia Tech-Alexandria Center is a 10 minute walk from the King Street metro stop.

GEOPOL 2010

This year's PGSG preconference is organized in concert with a very special one day **“GEOPOL 2010” conference at Virginia Tech** (see web site for details: www.criticalgeopolitics.com). GEOPOL 2010 will take place at the Alexandria Lyceum Hall, 201 South Washington Street, Alexandria, Virginia (<http://oha.alexandriava.gov/lyceum/>) on **Tuesday April 13 2010**.

Geopolitics at Virginia Tech presents:

GEOPOL 2010

Tuesday 13 April 2010

At the Alexandria Lyceum Hall,
201 South Washington Street, Alexandria, Virginia.
Conference web site: www.criticalgeopolitics.com
Lyceum location: <http://oha.alexandriava.gov/lyceum/>

The term 'geopolitics' has long had a contested meaning. For some a tradition on geographic causation in international affairs, for others the struggle for living space and resources between nations, and for yet others shorthand for Great Power competition, there are also a variety of critical Enlightenment-based perspectives (materialist, post-structuralist, feminist, libertarian) on its discourse and practice. Most recently, rising concern about global climate change and germs have re-invigorated a concern with 'geography' and the 'natural environment' into international affairs. Some figures like Jeffrey Sachs and Robert Kaplan conceptualize this as the determinism or 'revenge' of geography; others see a return of the dubious arguments of Victorian-era Geography. What does geopolitics mean in the twenty-first century? What does its past teach us about the present? What are some of the ways in which the notion is being re-imagined?

The AAG conference convenes in Washington DC 14-18 April 2010.

Travel to the conference by political geographers from around the world provides a unique opportunity for a conversation between them, political scientists and think-tank policy specialists in the Washington area. We have three aims for the conference:

1. to bring together a diversity of speakers and stimulate conversations across disciplinary, theoretical, and political lines
2. to reflect upon the history and practice of geographical reasoning in public affairs
3. to consider and review the geopolitical challenges of the present-day

I. What is Geopolitics in the 21st Century? 9:30 – 10:45

Chair: Gerard Toal, Virginia Tech.
Simon Dalby, Carleton University
Jakub Grygiel, SAIS, Johns Hopkins
Charles Kupchan, Georgetown University
Jennifer Hyndman, York University

II. Geopolitics and Empire, 11:00 am – 12:45 pm

Chair: Joel Peters, Virginia Tech
Dan Deudney, Johns Hopkins
Gerry Kearns, Virginia Tech
Chris Preble, Cato Institute
Patrick Jackson, American University

III. Lunch Time talk: War Cultures, 1:00-2:00 pm

Chair: Giselle Datz, Virginia Tech
Derek Gregory, University of British Columbia
(Boxed lunch will be provided)

IV. Geopolitics and Terror, 2:15- 3:45 pm

Chair: Wolfgang Natter, Virginia Tech
Peter Mandaville, George Mason
Gerard Toal, Virginia Tech
Rachel Pain, Durham University
Nadia Abu-Zahra, University of Ottawa

V. Geopolitics and Cosmopolitics, 4:00- 6:00 pm

Discussion of David Harvey's *Cosmopolitanism and the Geographies of Freedom*

Chair: Karen Till, Virginia Tech
David Harvey, City University New York
Dan Deudney, Johns Hopkins
Michael Lind, New America Foundation
Timothy Luke, Virginia Tech

2010 POLITICAL GEOGRAPHY SPECIALTY GROUP DISSERTATION ENHANCEMENT AWARD

The PGSG Dissertation Enhancement Award of \$800.00 is to be granted annually to a PGSG student member. Interested students should prepare a mini-dissertation proposal for submission to the Dissertation Awards Committee. Guidelines for the DEA are as follows:

1. The competition is open to all Ph.D. students who are members of the PGSG.
2. The DEA proposal should be 8-10 pages in length total (single or double spaced) and include sections covering the research question(s), theoretical issues, conceptual framework, methodology, relevance to political geography, and a budget describing how the \$800.00 would be used.

3. A proposal submitted for the PGSG DEA award may NOT be submitted to any other AAG Specialty Group for a dissertation enhancement award.
4. If a student has already incurred expenses listed in the budget by the time of the award announcement, the student may use the DEA to cover those expenses.
5. The DEA proposal should be crafted from the student's dissertation proposal which has been or will be submitted to the Ph.D. committee within the 2010--2011 academic year.
6. To enable full consideration of all submissions, entrants should send copies of their DEA proposals to each member of the Dissertation Enhancement Awards Committee listed below. Electronic submissions are welcome. Final acceptance date for submissions is **Monday, March 15, 2010**.
7. The results of the DEA competition will be announced to the winner **Monday, March 29, 2010** prior to the annual AAG meeting in Washington, DC and the winner will be invited to attend the annual AAG Awards Luncheon at the expense of the PGSG. The award will be formally announced at the PGSG business meeting in Washington, DC, and the \$800.00 award will be distributed to the winner at that time. The winner's name and dissertation title will be forwarded to the AAG for publication in the AAG Newsletter.
8. Questions concerning the competition may be directed to the members of the Dissertation Enhancement Awards Committee.

Dissertation Enhancement Award Committee:

Robert H. Watrel, Department of Geography, South Dakota State University, 246 Scobey Hall, Box 504, Brookings, SD 57007; robert.watrel@sdstate.edu

Shannon O'Lear, Department of Geography 1475 Jayhawk Blvd, 213 Lindley Hall University of Kansas, Lawrence, KS 66045; olear@ku.edu

Gabriel Popescu, Department of Political Science, Indiana University South Bend, P.O. Box 7111, South Bend, IN 466634; gpopescu@iusb.edu

POLITICAL GEOGRAPHY GRADUATE STUDENT PAPER COMPETITIONS

Description: The student paper competitions are open to all students who have written and presented a research paper on a topic in political geography. Guidelines are as follows:

1. The competition is open to all students, however a student may not receive a Student Paper Competition award more than once during her/his tenure as a student. See also 8a below.

2. The entries must be research papers and not complete theses or dissertations. Papers must not be longer than 15 pages plus bibliography.
3. Entries must be on a topic in political geography.
4. Paper entries must have been presented at a professional meeting during the period beginning with the first day of the previous AAG Annual Meeting and concluding with the last day of the next AAG Annual Meeting.
5. Hard or digital copies of papers must be submitted to all three members of the PGSG's Student Paper Award Committee by the deadline announced in the PGSG newsletter.
6. Submissions will normally be divided into Masters and Ph.D. student divisions.
7. Submissions will be judged on their written clarity, methodological and theoretical soundness, and their contributions to research in political geography.
8. All monetary prizes are awarded at the discretion of the Student Paper Award Committee. Awards will normally include:
 - A. A regional student-paper award: for a paper presented at a Regional AAG meeting; award will be \$100 for the top paper(MA or Ph.D. level, only one award); a student may not win both student paper awards;
 - B. Doctoral Student Award (\$100 + reimbursement of next year's AAG Annual Meeting student registration fee),
 - C. Master's Student Award (\$100 + reimbursement of next year's AAG Annual Meeting student registration fee),
 - D. up to three Honorable Mention awards (reimbursement of next year's AAG Annual Meeting student registration fee).
9. The results of the Student Paper Award competitions will be announced to the winner just prior to the annual AAG meeting in Las Vegas and the awardees (including any Honorable Mention awardees) will be invited to attend the annual AAG Awards Luncheon at the expense of the PGSG. The awards will be formally announced at the PGSG business meeting in Las Vegas. Payment will take place shortly thereafter. The awardees' names and paper titles will be forwarded to the AAG for publication in the AAG Newsletter.
10. Any questions pertaining to eligibility will be resolved by the Student Paper Award Committee.

Graduate Student Paper Award Committee:

Darren Purcell, Chair, University of Oklahoma, dpurcell@ou.edu

Helga Leitner, University of Minnesota, helga.leitner-1@umn.edu

Katrinka Somdahl-Sands, Rowan University, somdahlka@gmail.com

POLITICAL GEOGRAPHY UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT PAPER COMPETITION

Description: The undergraduate student paper award will go to the best paper on a political geography topic written by an undergraduate student, regardless of membership in the AAG or participation at the Annual Meetings. Papers submitted for awards to other AAG-affiliated organizations are not eligible. This competition is open to all undergraduate students who have written a research paper or senior thesis on a topic in political geography. Guidelines are as follows:

1. The competition is open to all undergraduate students, or those who have completed an undergraduate degree since the last award has been made.
2. The entries must be research papers or theses, and not reviews. Papers must be longer than 10 double-spaced pages plus bibliography, but less than 15 pages plus bibliography. Margins must be 1" on all sides and 12 point font must be used.
3. Entries must be on a topic in political geography.
4. Each university may only submit one undergraduate paper or thesis for consideration.
5. Hard copies of papers must be received by all three members of the PGSG's Undergraduate Student Paper Award Committee by 15 June to be included in that year's competition. They must each be endorsed with the signature of the applicant's department chair. This signature will indicate that the submission is the department's chosen applicant (see #4 above).
6. Submissions will be judged on their written clarity, methodological and theoretical soundness, and their contributions to research in political geography.
7. All monetary prizes are awarded at the discretion of the Undergraduate Student Paper Award Committee.
 - A. Up to three Honorable Mention awards will be given (award of \$50 each).
 - B. The winner of the Award will receive \$100 cash and registration to the next year's AAG conference (the registration fee component is contingent on continued study of geography).
 - C. If no acceptable entries are made the committee can decide to not give the award in any given year.

8. The results of the Student Paper Award competitions will be announced in the fall PGSG newsletter. The awards will be formally announced at the PGSG business meeting and the cash awards and registration reimbursement will be distributed to the awardees at that time. The awardees' names and paper titles will be forwarded to the AAG for publication in the AAG Newsletter.

9. Any questions pertaining to eligibility will be resolved by the Undergraduate Student Paper Award Committee.

POLITICAL GEOGRAPHY NON-STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS

Awards are as follows:

- Julian Minghi Outstanding Research Award. This award will be given to the author(s) of a journal article, book chapter, or book published during the previous calendar year that makes an innovative, original contribution to the conceptual and/or methodological embrace of political geography.
- Stanley D. Brunn Young Scholar Award. This award will be given to an individual who has received her/his Ph.D. within the past ten years, in honor of contributions that have generated new interest in the subfield and/or opened up new areas of inquiry for political geographic research.
- Richard Morrill Public Outreach Award. This award will be given to an individual who has used her or his political geographic expertise to affect change (in public thought or public policy) beyond the academy.

General Information:

1. All awards will be based on nominations made to the President of the PGSG, with award decisions to be made by the PGSG Board.
2. For all awards, the field of political geography will be defined according to the breadth of topics covered in the Political Geography chapter of the "Geography in America at the Dawn of the 21st Century" volume.
3. For each award category, a maximum of one award will be conferred each year, with the announcement to be made at the PGSG Business Meeting taking place the next Spring (e.g., the announcement for the Outstanding Research Award for 2009 will be made at the Spring 2010 Business Meeting). For each award category, if there are no nominees whom the Board views as deserving of merit, no award will be made.
4. Each award recipient will receive a \$50 check to honor her or his achievement.

5. Decisions regarding who receives awards will be made by the PGSG Board. The PGSG Board reserves the right to determine whether a nominee (or a nominated publication) falls within the scope of political geography.
6. Nominations by Board members are permitted.
7. Awardees need not be PGSG or AAG members, although awardees will be strongly encouraged to join both groups if they are not already members.

For more details on PGSG events and competitions
(plus the PGSG blog) visit

<http://www.politicalgeography.org/aagsessions.html>

“BOUNDARY, *n.*

In political geography, an imaginary line between two nations, separating the imaginary rights of one from the imaginary rights of the other.”

Ambrose Gwinnett Bierce, *The Devil's Dictionary* (1911)
