

SWAAG

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE SOUTHWESTERN DIVISION OF THE ASSOCIATION OF AMERICAN GEOGRAPHERS

June, 2006

Editor, Michael Yoder

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Letter from the Chair

It's often said that those who fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it. But to paraphrase the humorist/writer Sarah Vowell, I guess that means the lesson of the Napoleonic Wars is that we should remember never to invade Russia during the winter. Vowell and others have scoffed at such unnecessary utilitarian rationale for historical study emphasizing that history is fascinating and fulfilling on its own merits and immediate application of history's lessons ought not be the measure of its worth. Indeed, even those who profess to be fans of history and so-called history-makers are unfortunately reliving historical follies as they themselves govern our local, state and federal governments today. We are constantly revisiting old debates (without adding anything new) and basing social policy on ideas and trends of both the recent and the distant past.

Consider the debates that have recently been raised about the "problem" of illegal immigration to the United States. Haven't we heard these expressions of threats to our lives and lifestyles before? Do "we" as a nation (or as political parties, or as citizens, or even as academics) rely upon basic, often jingoistic, notions of who "we" are and who "they" are to help define the problems and the solutions? Are these base feelings repeated periodically because they provide "easier" (i.e. so-called "common sense") explanations for the things that people perceive as problems and "easier" solutions to our problems? I would argue that we do repeat

history despite how hard we've studied it, despite how much education we have, despite how vast our knowledge-base is because wisdom is usually not collectively exercised and does not often prevail.

Has it ever been said that those that do not study geography are doomed to repeat *it*? Probably not, I suppose, because geography, besides being greatly misunderstood as a disciplinary pursuit, rarely possesses the infamy that history does. But if either geographical processes or geographical "events" were regarded with the moralistic judgments that historical processes and events were, we might recognize that we repeat the spatial mistakes of the past with great frequency and regularity (unfortunately) and that many of those geographical lessons from the past are quite obvious to us today. Still collective wisdom does not prevail.

One of the hot geographical policy issues of this year has been illegal immigration: What do we do with the population of illegal migrants within our borders today? And how do we keep the illegal immigrants of the future out? At regular temporal intervals over the last century, the U.S. has visited and revisited the inconvenient reality about "those people": we need them for the cheap labor they are willing to provide, but we don't want to acknowledge their important roles and their invaluable contributions to our economy and culture. In fact, the geographical reality of this issue is that many (if not all) of our regional, national and international spatial processes (the economic system, agricultural commodity production processes, trade, operation of service industries, etc.) and our regional, national and international spatial patterns (of land use, of politics, of culture, of environmental and social problems, etc.) are reflections of the ethic that underpins the belief that Americans can have the benefits of cheap labor (inexpensive goods), but don't have to pay the costs of cheap labor (family services, health care, childcare, welfare, education, etc.). The ethic is that wealth is "our" right, but not necessarily the right of people who belong outside of our borders. We end up with the disamenities of this ethic (crime, violence, poverty, disease, corruption, etc.) within our borders and blame the disamenities on the people who "don't belong here."

All of these issues are connected by the ethic that drives them. The geographical byproduct of these issues is an ethical landscape: a space or set of spatial processes that is shaped by the beliefs, wisdom, and reflection of an ethic. The ethic behind the immigration problem produces agricultural landscapes that are industrial-scale systems dependent upon large amounts of energy input, operated in places where water is naturally limited but is in fact provided through large-scale, publicly funded irrigation projects, where natural fertility was either limited or has been outstripped through over-consumption of soils and therefore requires significant inputs of more energy and artificial fertilizers, where natural systems have been replaced and where we spend millions of dollars trying to artificially resurrect endangered ecosystems that somehow are to live in disharmony with an agricultural production system that depends upon a low-wage unskilled labor force that just can not be found in local communities at the right price. The ethic produces political, economic, and social landscapes that ironically distribute the people who feel the most threatened by the presence of illegal immigrants (and whose lifestyles and lawns are most dependent upon those same immigrants) to be in closest proximity to the source regions and pathways of the immigrants that come north to seek employment and opportunities for their families who either journey with them or wait for their return.

The same ethical landscape features barriers, borders and boundaries of many kinds, some physical (like the "Great Wall of Mexico" proposal to extend the existing wall eastward as much as 700 miles along the U.S.-Mexico border, along the California-Mexico border, along the Arizona-Mexico border, perhaps even barricade the New Mexico-Mexico border, and, most

ridiculous of all, even a call to build a wall right down the middle of the Rio Grande between Texas and Mexico – What would Ronald Reagan say today?) and some perceptual, social, or cultural (racism, classism, English-only laws, etc.). We have plenty of recent experience with the idea of building moats and walls to keep people out (it does work a little better keeping people in, ask the East German and East Berlin border guards, for example). Ancient examples include China's Great Wall, Hadrian's Wall, Offa's Dyke, Danevirke, and Götavirke. Since the Second World War, we've seen several others built: the Berlin Wall, Turkey's 187-mile separation barrier on Cyprus, the Korean Wall, the Moroccan Western Sahara wall, and the British Northern Ireland barriers. Even more recent examples include the concrete walls and trenches that are expected by the Israeli government to help keep the peace, control movements, and reduce terrorism between Israel and Gaza/Palestine. A border fence was intended by the Spanish government to keep North African immigrants from Morocco out of Spain's North African exclaves Ceuta and Melilla (and therefore out of Spain itself). India is building separation barriers between India and Bangladesh and Indian-controlled and Pakistani-controlled Kashmir. Saudi Arabia is walling off Yemen. And a 60-mile wall between Malaysia and Thailand is expected to help stop the flow of smuggled narcotics, cigarettes and other taxable goods from Thailand into Malaysia. We (like many of the other nations) are trying to harden the definitions of our ethical spaces and limit and control access to "our castles" where our best interests are protected by moats and walls and the rest can fend for themselves.

Or can they? How would the landscape be different if the ethic were different? What would be the effect of a borderless world? The dissolution of barriers that has been occurring in Europe might begin to give some hints of what could be in the Americas, but the comparison to a completely new ethic would be weak as the Europeans are also trying to figure out how to exploit the poor from Africa, the Middle East and Asia without having to live with them and share the wealth.

There is certainly more that unites us than divides us. We face the unpredictable changes of global climate shifts together. We face the implications of new strains of viruses and diseases that feed off the elimination of biological and ecological diversity and the reliance on synthetic health rather than natural resistance and resilience. We share in the implications of the global shifts of people as well as dependencies on increasingly scarce global supplies of resources. These are all spatial processes tied to the same ethics that produce the immigration "problem."

Geographers might lend an important perspective to these debates and others by raising questions about alternatives. Whether employing philosophies that modify but do not fundamentally shift the ethical perspectives (like Neo-Marxism, socialist, or other development-oriented perspectives) or those that fundamentally question the premises of the systems (like feminism, anarchism, political ecology, social ecology, deep ecology, bioregionalism, or even Buddhist economics) we can investigate the implications of such shifts in thinking on the spatial patterns of our lives. We could be offering alternative futures that respond to models of the future worlds produced by scholars in our brother and sister disciplines: from climatology, ecology, hydrology and biology to demographics, sociology, economics and political science and many others. Geographers, in my humble opinion, are missing the opportunity to guide our thinking about local, regional, national and global spaces and spatial organization because we stick to more passive evaluations in our research, mistaking an unstated ethic in the research for research that is value-free.

Perhaps we are doomed to repeat historical and geographical mistakes as long as we force ourselves to remain constrained by our past ethics. Aldo Leopold is famous for having called for

major shifts in our relationships. More than sixty years later, perhaps the need for a new “Land Ethic” requires a shift in scale to a new “Global Ethic” because the driving philosophies are much more deeply ingrained and widespread.

John Tiefenbacher
President, SWAAG
Texas State University-San Marcos

Call For Papers, 2006 Meeting in Norman, Oklahoma

Dear SWAAG Members and Friends: I am writing to invite you to the annual meeting of the Southwestern Division of the Association of American Geographers (SWAAG). The meeting will be held at the University of Oklahoma Center for Continuing Education in Norman, October 26-28.

Please check out our new website at <http://geography.ou.edu/swaag>. Registration is now open! The early bird registration of only \$90/non-students and \$45/students is open until August 25. Registration will entitle you to all sessions and social events including a welcoming reception, keynote lunch, and barbecue. We will also feature workshops on professional development sponsored by the AAG Edge Project and Geography Faculty Development Alliance; sessions sponsored by the National Council for Geographic Education; the annual SWAAG Student Paper and Poster Competition; field trips (details to be announced in a few weeks), and many other activities. The AAG Council will be holding its annual fall meeting in conjunction with the SWAAG meeting.

Let me also invite you to submit abstracts for papers and posters and to suggest special sessions and other activities. Please feel free to e-mail me any suggestions for the meeting at any time. The deadline for abstracts will be September 15, 2006.

We at Oklahoma look forward to seeing you at SWAAG in October!!!!
Take care, Fred Shelley

SWAAG's New Regional Councilor

The votes are in, and Craig Colten of Louisiana State University is our new Regional Councilor to the AAG. Congratulations to Craig, who will undoubtedly do an outstanding job of keeping us apprised of the happenings of the AAG.

Minutes from SWAAG Business Meeting, 2005

SWAAG Business Meeting Fayetteville, Arkansas November 11, 2005 Minutes

- I. Meeting was called to order at 4:45 pm by Don Lyons, SWAAG Chair
- II. Approval of the minutes from the 2004 SWAAG business meeting at Nacogdoches, Texas (Doolittle moved) Approved unanimously
- III. Information from the AAG
 - A. Regional Councilor's Report given by Paul Matthews

Dr. Matthews reminded the members that his term as councilor was ending and that an election for new councilor was needed by the end of the spring of 2006.
 - B. AAG President's Report to SWAAG given by Richard Marsten
 1. Dr. Marsten thanked Dr. Matthews for his service on the Regional Council.
 2. Dr. Marsten discussed an issue that had emerged during the previous year regarding the cost sharing for visits of the AAG president to regional meetings. He conveyed that funding by regional organizations is helpful, yet completely voluntary and that response by regions has varied greatly (i.e. some have fully supported the cost of travel and lodging and others have paid for no part of the travel to regional meetings).
- IV. Officers' Reports
 - A. Treasurer's Report given by Michael Yoder (see handout provided in newsletter)
 - B. Report from Local Arrangements Chair given by Fiona Davidson

Attendance at this year's meeting was fairly strong: 119 registered for the meeting and there were 60 abstracts submitted.
 - C. Report from Editor of *The Southwestern Geographer* given by John Tiefenbacher

Tiefenbacher expressed his gratitude to all who served as editorial board members and reviewers of manuscripts and to all who submitted work for consideration. After 9 years as editor, Tiefenbacher has stepped down. The new editors are Jennifer Speights-Binet and Jeff Lash of the University of Houston-Clear Lake.
 - D. Introduction of New Editors of *The Southwestern Geographer*

All manuscript submissions should be mailed directly to the new editors at *The*

Southwestern Geographer, Geography Program, University of Houston-Clear Lake, 2700 Bay Area Blvd., Box 246, Houston, TX 77058. Please visit the following address for authors' guidelines: <http://www.geog.okstate.edu/swaag/SWgeographer.htm>

E. Results of election for SWAAG Treasurer

The new SWAAG Treasurer is **Sarah Bednarz** of Texas A&M University. The officers for the 2006-2007 term are: **John Tiefenbacher**, Chair; **Michael Yoder**, Secretary, and **Sarah Bednarz**, Treasurer.

F. Call for Nominations for Regional Councilor

The floor was opened for nominations. There was a call for the creation of an executive committee to identify nominees for a mailed-out slate of candidates for an upcoming election. The election will be held in May and June of 2006.

V. Old Business

A. Update on Future Meeting Sites

Only 2006's meeting site had been determined: University of Oklahoma in Norman, OK. Possible sites for future meetings include: 2007 – College Station or Bryan, Texas hosted by Texas A&M; 2008 – Little Rock, Arkansas hosted by the University of Central Arkansas; 2009 – Tahlequah, Oklahoma hosted by Northeastern State University. Tabled for officers to sort out.

B. Update on the Birthday Brick for the AAG's 100th Anniversary

Juana Ibanez of the University of New Orleans is prepared to receive donations in support of the brick purchase.

VI. New Business

A. *In Memoriam*: Sean T. Webster, Northeastern State University, 2005

B. Paying expenses of the AAG President

Motion (by **Estaville**) to 1) welcome, thank and celebrate the AAG's presence at SWAAG meetings; 2) to actively engage the AAG president while on the campus of the SWAAG-hosting institution; 3) to find creative ways to defer the expenses of the AAG president's visit; and 4) to be flexible. Motion passed without dissent.

C. Invitation and Call for Papers for the 3rd Annual Race, Ethnicity, and Place Conference to be held at Texas State University-San Marcos from November 1 to November 4, 2006. Please contact **Lawrence Estaville** for more information.

D. Invitation and Call for Papers for the 2006 SWAAG Meeting to be held at the University of Oklahoma in Norman, Oklahoma. Please contact **Fred Shelley** for more information.

V. Meeting Adjourned at 6:15 pm

Minutes submitted by John Tiefenbacher, SWAAG Secretary

Treasurer's Report, Fall 2005

SWAAG TREASURER'S REPORT

11/08/05

Prepared by Michael Yoder, SWAAG Treasurer

Beginning cash balance 11/15/04 **\$4,309.24**

Deposits 11/04-10/05

11/17/04	2004 SWAAG Subvention	\$343.20
6/22/05	2003 OK State Univ. reimbursements	\$1,110.00
6/22/05	2004 SFASU reimbursement	\$1,056.00

Total Deposits 11/04-10/05 **\$2,509.20**

Payments 11/04-10/05

11/04/04	SWG Invoice	\$1,554.04
5/31/05	SWG Invoice	\$1,791.20
4/18/05	Student Awards, 2004	\$475.00

Total Payments 11/04-10/05 **\$3,820.24**

Final Balance 11/08/05 **\$2,998.20**
