

Political Geography Specialty Group Newsletter

Winter 2011



What Vassar will look like in February.

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Mat, Tom, (and what Vassar will really look like in February).

PGSG President: Mat Coleman, Ohio State University
PGSG Secretary/Treasurer: Reece Jones, University of Hawai'i

President's Column

Let me start off my first presidential column by thanking Jason Dittmer for his hard work during his tenure as PGSG President. Jason not only kept our specialty group financially and administratively afloat but helped to consolidate it as an intellectual center of gravity for many of us. The great preconferences at Tacoma (2010) and Alexandria (2009) testify to this. Jason also, it should be stressed, pushed us forward into the digital age. (Don't ask me why I'm not tweeting this column!) Indeed, as part of my annual report to the AAG I reviewed the traffic stats from our blog (<http://pgsgaag.wordpress.com/>) and I am very happy to report that it has been a successful experiment. In 2009, when the blog was created, we had 1500 visits to the site. In 2010, 2400 individual visits were registered. This year (with no data for December 2011) we have tallied 4000 individual visitors. We're a ways off Perez Hilton's blog (10.2 M visits this year) but it's definitely a positive trend!

I'd also like to thank board members past and present, and our new Secretary-Treasurer Reece Jones (who visits the blog 100x daily to drive up our numbers). Seriously though, there is a lot of work that goes on at the PGSG behind-the-scenes, and these folks are all crucial to it. For example, the board undertook a lengthy discussion this autumn and voted to stop providing funding for non-geography, non-member faculty to attend the AAG. In place of this mostly ad hoc practice, we've designed and passed a new Political Geography Student Travel Award which consists of five \$200 awards annually for grad students going to either the AAG or the PGSG meetings (<http://www.politicalgeography.org/aagsessions.html>). We're likely to be doing more on the graduate funding front later in the year too, so stay tuned while we sort out our finances. My board and I feel that it is very important to help graduate students attend the PGSG and AAG given how crucial attendance is to meeting colleagues and ultimately to getting a job. We also feel strongly that the PGSG should be finding ways to fund more ground-breaking graduate student research.

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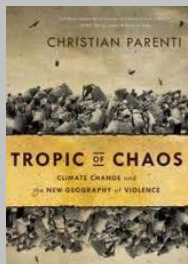


PGSG Newsletter

Christian Parenti PGSG Keynote Address

The era of climate war is upon us. Extreme weather brought on by global warming is unleashing cascades of unrest and violence across the globe, from Africa to Asia to the Americas. In *Tropic of Chaos*, award-winning journalist and sociologist Christian Parenti reports from the front lines of this gathering social and environmental catastrophe. Combining historical research and academically informed theory with on-the-ground reporting, Parenti shows how environmental crisis is already colliding with the twin legacies of cold war militarism and unbridled free market economics to cause fragile nations to disintegrate into failed states. He critiques the way the countries of the Global North have responded to this dangerous new world: rather than adapt by defusing tensions and embracing cleaner forms of energy, these governments are responding with greater repression, surveillance, and a program of border militarization and permanent counterinsurgency.

* Christian Parenti is a Puffin Foundation Writing Fellow, contributing editor at *The Nation* and a visiting professor at Brooklyn College, City University of New York. His most recent book is *Tropic of Chaos: Climate Change and the New Geography of Violence* (Nation Books, July 2011). As a journalist, he has reported extensively from Afghanistan, Iraq and various parts of Africa, Asia, and Latin America and his articles have appeared in *Fortune*, *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, *London Review of Books*, *Mother Jones* and *Playboy*. He has a PhD in sociology from the London School of Economics, has held research fellowships from OSI, RBF and the Ford Foundation; and has won numerous awards, including the 2009 Lange-Tailor Prize and "Best Magazine Writing 2008" from the Society for Professional Journalists. His three previous books are: *The Freedom: Shadows and Hallucinations in Occupied Iraq*; *The Soft Cage: Surveillance in America from Slavery to the War on Terror* and *Lockdown America: Police and Prisons in the Age of Crisis*.



PGSG Preconference:

Vassar College; Feb 22-23 2012

The conference will start off with a keynote talk by Christian Parenti and discussion on Wednesday February 22nd; paper sessions will be scheduled for Thursday February 23rd.

Accommodation:

The PGSG will not be booking a block of rooms for the preconference because hotel rates in Poughkeepsie are very competitive. We recommend basic search engines like www.hotels.com and www.priceline.com for the best rates. More details about the exact location of the preconference on the Vassar campus will be forthcoming.

Travel:

Poughkeepsie is approximately 90 minutes north of Manhattan. Train enthusiasts are lucky because Poughkeepsie is very well served by rail. Visitors can use the affordable MTA Metro North Railway (Hudson Line from Grand Central). See <http://mta.info/mnr/> and <http://mta.info/mnr/html/mnrmap.htm> for a map. Poughkeepsie is also served by Amtrak from Penn Station. See <http://www.amtrak.com> for more details.

Deadlines and registration:

Please submit a paper title and a brief 200 word abstract, along with author contact details, to aag.pgsg@gmail.com by **January 14 2012**.

As with our past preconferences, there will be a nominal registration fee for faculty only.

PGSG Newsletter



Student Column

Greetings PGSG student members,

Thanks to all for the opportunity to serve as the PGSG grad student representative. I actually assumed this role toward the end of my graduate experience at Syracuse University. While I technically do not graduate until December, I began a one-year faculty position this fall. In this column, I share some experiences and insights gained from this period of transitioning from graduate student to faculty member.

Last academic year, the end of the doctoral tunnel slowly but surely went from a fuzzy, improbable mirage to an approaching, ever more focused reality. Throughout the year, I applied for a steady stream of faculty positions, post-docs, and adjunct gigs. A sense of unease grew as the spring semester marched on and it seemed quite possible that I would finally finish, only to be unable to pay my bills. I felt a huge sense of relief and excitement when I got a one-year “Scholar in Residence” position at Emerson College in Boston in the Institute for Liberal Arts and Interdisciplinary Studies, teaching three classes per semester. Then, I gulped as I realized that I really had to finish!

And, as I believe most PhDs can attest, the finish was somewhat brutal. In April, I estimated I had a breezy month or so of work left, which would leave me three months to rest, recover, and plan my classes. What actually happened was an all-out four-month sprint to the dissertation defense. This entailed many late nights, little sunlight, and tendonitis. I defended on August 25 and began teaching at Emerson on September 6, so there really was not much time in between to savor or celebrate the conclusion of my grad student days. It seems that such a grueling end is practically standard. Indeed, most PhDs to whom I recount the tale simply share a wry, knowing smile. What’s more, I think I was very lucky; many students begin a faculty position before they have defended. That means that they are adjusting to life as a faculty member and still have the pressures of dissertating hanging over their heads.

As the semester began and I dove into teaching three new classes, I was considerably more nervous than I had been before my dissertation defense. As is the case with most graduate students, while I had been a teaching assistant or instructor for numerous courses, I had never taught three at once. How, I worried, was I going to manage three? Also, during the final blitz to finish my dissertation, I had been honing skills to routinely tap into theory and almost cavalierly throw around academic jargon. My brain felt slightly out of touch with the skills necessary to explain introductory concepts to first-years.

Well, I have made it to December, and the semester is nearing its end. The intensity and stress of this first semester as a faculty member have often caused me to think of my grad student days wistfully. In moments of daydreaming, I think, “Ah, those days when all I had to do was produce a chapter in a month...or read 600 pages for the next day...” However, I must say that it is still fabulous to be on the other side of the PhD for several reasons, a few of which I will address here.

First, I have really enjoyed the immersion in teaching required by three classes. Yes, preparing for them has meant a lot of late nights. However, the late nights have been worth it when class discussions hum, when students make connections, and when good questions are raised. It turns out that the multi-tasking that was required of me in grad school to balance my own coursework, scholarship, and teaching just one class was actually fantastic preparation for managing three classes at once. Of course, it is a steep learning curve. I have made innumerable rookie mistakes (For example, I now realize the grading hell created for oneself by giving essay exams in all three classes at the same point in the semester!), but I am learning from every mistake. And I have yet to figure out where my own writing and new research projects fit into the puzzle, but I think that will come as I settle in a bit more.

Second, teaching has also pulled me out of the somewhat isolated intellectual bubble into which I had floated during the intense pre-finish period. Figuring out how to explain introductory concepts to undergrads is actually keeping my own scholarly musings and plans grounded. Through students’ interests and queries, I am reminded of how I became interested in my own work and why I went into academia.

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NEW Graduate Student Travel Awards

Description: The Political Geography Specialty Group (PGSG) student travel awards will be given to support graduate student travel to present a paper on a political geography topic at the PGSG pre-conference and/or the AAG annual meeting. This competition is open to all MA/MS/PhD students and up to five (5) awards of \$200.00 will be given each year.

Guidelines are as follows:

1. The competition is open to all MA/MS/PhD students who are currently enrolled in a Geography degree program and are registered to attend the PGSG pre-conference and/or the AAG annual meeting.
2. Students should submit electronic copies of the following documents to the PGSG student travel award committee by **December 15, 2011**: a) their paper title and abstract; b) confirmation of conference registration; c) a brief cover letter stating where they are enrolled, what degree they are pursuing, whether they are a member of the PGSG, and the details for any other travel funds they have been awarded.
3. Entries must be on a topic in political geography. The PGSG student travel award committee will prioritize applications based on these criteria: a) PGSG student members will be given preference; b) students with no funding or less funding will be given preference; c) students participating in the PGSG pre-conference will be given preference; d) the potential contribution of the student's presented research to the field of political geography will be considered.
4. Award winners will be notified no later than January 15, 2012.
5. All monetary prizes are awarded at the discretion of the Student Travel Award Committee. If fewer than five acceptable entries are made the committee can decide to give less than five awards in any given year.
6. Any questions pertaining to eligibility will be resolved by the Student Travel Award Committee.

Student Travel Award Committee:

Amy Mills, University of South Carolina,
amills@mailbox.sc.edu

Katrinka Somdahl-Sands, Rowan University
somedahl-sands@rowan.edu

Matthew Mitchelson, Kennesaw State
University, mitchelson@dartmouth.edu

Matthew Derrick, Humboldt State University
mderrick@uoregon.edu

PGSG Non-student 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
- **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
- **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 2010 will be made at the Spring 2011 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.

Email nominations by **February 15, 2012** to PGSG President Mat Coleman:
coleman.373@osu.edu

Lists of previous winners:
<http://www.politicalgeography.org/pastawards.html>

Graduate Student Paper Awards

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.
2. The entries must be research papers and not complete theses or dissertations. Papers must not be longer than 15 pages double spaced 12 point font, 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. 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 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).

8. The results of the Student Paper Award competitions will be announced to the winners just prior to the annual AAG meeting. 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 and payment will take place shortly thereafter. The awardees' names and paper titles will be forwarded to the AAG for publication in the AAG Newsletter.

Graduate Student Paper 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,
somedahlka@gmail.com.

Digital copies of papers must be submitted electronically to all three members of the PGSG's Student Paper Award Committee by **Wednesday, February 01 2012.**

Lists of previous winners:

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

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 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 2011--2012 academic year.
6. To enable full consideration of all submissions, entrants should send electronic copies of their DEA proposals to each member of the Dissertation Enhancement Award Committee listed below by **Wednesday, 01 February, 2012.**
7. The results of the DEA competition will be announced to the winner prior to the annual AAG meeting 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 and payment will take place shortly thereafter. The winner's name and dissertation title will be forwarded to the AAG for publication in the AAG Newsletter.

Deadline: 01 February, 2012

Dissertation Enhancement Award Committee:

Robert H. Watrel, South Dakota State University, robert.watrel@sdstate.edu

Shannon O'Lear, University of Kansas
olear@ku.edu,

Gabriel Popescu, Indiana University
South Bend gpopescu@iusb.edu

Lists of previous winners:

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

PGSG Newsletter

President's column (cont. from p. 1)

Of course, we are also strongly committed to maintaining our suite of awards and recognitions for faculty, and those opportunities will remain a key part of the PGSG support apparatus.

But despite all our work frankly too much of what we do at the PGSG is rubberstamp-type stuff, like vetting PGSG sponsorship for literally dozens and dozens and dozens of sessions at the annual meeting – which is a personal fav of mine that I usually reserve for Friday evening after the cocktail hour. Indeed, there's a lot more that we could be doing. And what this really means is that there's a lot more that the (currently) 800 member-strong PGSG body could be doing, like using the specialty group to explore issues and develop policies important to our sub-discipline (and discipline), whether related to research, teaching, employment, etc. So my hope for the next two years is that the Occupy Wall Street movement will spread to the next biggest center of global power that Hardt and Negri inadvertently forgot to mention in their opus *Empire*: the PGSG. Occupy the PGSG! And I promise that I won't call the police and have you arrested ...

Jokes aside, there are a number of serious pedagogical, professional, and research-based questions that we deal with in our everyday lives as political geographers, and there's no reason why the PGSG can't be a forum for finding like-minded individuals to talk with about these issues. Moreover, the PGSG should be a forum for developing policies for consideration by the AAG. At last year's business meeting, for example, Jason noted that some PGSG members are concerned about the cost of AAG membership and conference attendance, especially given the economic environment and the general decrease in faculty and especially graduate student resources at the departmental level. Perhaps the PGSG should be drawing up plans for a graduated membership and conference attendance rate, like some of our sister organizations? Send us your ideas, get involved, attend the business meetings, and let's take this specialty group to the next level.

Let me wrap up my column by noting that the preliminary schedule for this year's AAG meeting in New York is now available on-line at <http://www.aag.org/cs/annualmeeting/program>. May the jockeying for last minute flights and accommodations begin! But more importantly, please note that the deadline for submitting titles and abstracts for the PGSG annual preconference is coming up fast: **January 14 2012**. This year the preconference will be held on February 22 and 23 at Vassar College in Poughkeepsie, NY, about 70 miles north of Manhattan. A very hearty thanks is in order for Joseph Nevins, who is doing the organizational work on the ground for the preconference. We are also very excited that Christian Parenti will be giving

the keynote at this year's preconference. He will be speaking on the topic of "Climate Change and the Geography of Violence", based on his recent book *Tropic of Chaos*. It promises to be a very exciting couple of days in "the reed covered lodge by the little-water place", which Wikipedia tells me is the meaning of Poughkeepsie (U-puku-ipi-sing) as a Wappinger-derived place name. More details on the preconference are available on the PGSG website. Please get involved and help make this year's preconference every bit as exciting and provocative as our past preconferences. I look forward to seeing you all in Poughkeepsie and New York City.

Mat Coleman
Columbus, OH

STUDENT COLUMN (CONT. FROM P. 3)

Consequently, despite the sleep deprivation, I feel intellectually re-energized.

Third, I was – simply put – ready to be a faculty member. Though painful at times, grad school actually prepared me well for the role. That is, the destination (for me, being a faculty member) was only possible because of the long journey (readings, papers, discussions, teaching, presentations, and particularly the process of preparing and defending my dissertation) it took to get here. Through it all, I gained a sense of confidence in my own abilities, fresh ideas to bring to my new institution, and a willingness to express these ideas.

So, for grads still in the thick of it, keep that end in sight and try to enjoy the journey. While it would be misleading to say that finishing grad school brings some magical release from stresses and late nights, it does bring an intriguing new set of challenges and responsibilities. You will be ready for it.

Nancy Hiemstra
Boston, Massachusetts