

I don't give two fucks about geography.

Whatever geography *is*.

Which has never been plain to me. Like everything else in my life I fell into it. Because I needed a lab science and the introductory geography course *was* one. I'd started college thinking I'd become a medieval historian, because I liked T. H. White's *The Once and Future King*; and the armor court at the Cleveland Museum of Art; and stained glass windows. But when I'd completed the requirements for a history degree with a couple of years left to go, I entered an honors program in English, where I wrote a thesis around my favorite detective stories. En route I accumulated enough geography credits to major in that too. I applied to graduate programs in all three areas. I ended up in geography because Clark University offered me far and away the most lavish support. Well, it paid for everything. *Everything*.

I *never* figured out what geography *was* but I soon discovered I could do whatever I wanted, so I stayed. I wrote about dime novels and the paper routes I'd had in Cleveland and the highlands of Chiapas.

I *loved* the highlands of Chiapas, well, San Cristobal and Mitontic and Zinacantan. And I loved Oaxaca, not like my brother, Pete, who soon settled there, but in my own way. I went there for the first time in 1946, in my mother's arms I like to say, though I'm sitting on my father's lap in the passport photo. We were on our way to Pinotepa Nacional where he was going to write the great American novel. We didn't stay there long, settling instead in Cuernavaca, but we returned to Oaxaca in 1963. And 1965. And 1966. And 1967, and so on, until 1976; after which I didn't go back until 2012 when Joe Bryan and I went up into the Sierra Juarez to talk to folks in Gelatao, Ixtlan, Tiltepec, Yagila, and Yagavila.

Let me say that I can't stand Kant, Hegel, or Heidegger – I can't *read* them – and though undoubtedly "abiding" carries its share of Heideggerian freight, I guess Joel gets *his* sense of *abiding* from Qadri Ismail anyway, so I'm puzzled about whether I want to use "abide" to describe my relationship to Oaxaca or San Cristobal, or for that matter Cleveland, Worcester, or Raleigh. The word rings false to me in that sense. I tend to use "abide" to mean "bear patiently," usually preceded by "can't", as in, "I can't abide these kinds of sessions," with that weird emphasis on "abide" that you give it when you use it that way.

I guess I could use it *this* way to say, "I can't abide the preface and fifth, and sixth chapters of Joel's book," though ordinarily I'd use "stand" instead of "abide" – "I can't stand them," I'd say – since they're about geography, a subject I neither understand nor care for, from philosophical perspectives that mean nothing to me. Jeremy Crampton thinks about this as me refusing to do the "intellectual heavy-lifting" he thinks I'm obligated to, but somehow I've never let *that* bother me either.

This is to say nothing about Joel's text. It's to say something about *my* relationship to it. I approached it warily, like a mouse a baited trap. But even approached this guardedly, I kept surprising myself by breaking out in laughter. The book's very funny, especially the notes, though perhaps I might better put this by saying that the text is very straight-*forward* while the notes are very straight-*faced*. I love the way Joel writes, saying of Dobson and Herlihy's receipt of \$2.5 million from the Department of Defense that, "These are not insignificant figures for our discipline," or "Each of the panelists was asked to speak for 10 minutes, but Herlihy spoke for more than 34. A trivial point, perhaps ...," or "Measured by the standard metric, *JLAG* is not an influential journal," or "Herlihy's earlier work in indigenous mapping has proven, to put it lightly, deeply controversial," or:

With all due respect to Professor Murphy (whose professional credentials are beyond question), I cannot help but wonder if it was a good idea for the AAG to appoint someone who was involved in the Bowman expeditions – even at "arm's length" – as chair of a committee created in response to a controversy caused by these very expeditions.

There's something delicious, to my ear, in all the "with due respect"s, the "I cannot help but wonder"s, the "not insignificant"s, the "to put it lightly"s, the "perhaps"es ... in a text that's a virulent polemic.

The contrast ... it's funny.

But that's what *Geopiracy* is, from the get-go, a polemic. That is, the book's a *blow*, in what Joel prefers to think about as a *polemos*. This is to say, the book's a blow in a war, a fight, a battle, a dispute, a strife, a quarrel ... *within the profession*. I hope this narrowing of focus was a tactical move, because otherwise I don't get it. I see what happened in Oaxaca as a battle ... *in the world*. The way I read it, the US Army suborned an American geographer to sneak into a foreign country about whose property relations it was ill-informed to get more information. *My* feeling is that at the very least anyone who pays US taxes should be concerned about it; certainly they legitimately *could* be. Mexicans could certainly be pissed off too. So could others. Geography, that is, the *profession* of geography, is involved in this largely by happenstance. Though I admit "geography" *was* advantageously situated.

Joe Bryan and I have spent the last few years tracing the genealogy of this event, and our story differs from Joel's. I guess I could say that it's ... *less disciplinary*. Our story, more focused on indigenous peoples and the military, *does* concern itself with geography, that is, with the *profession*, but largely because the descent of the American Geographical Society from the preeminent position it held during the First World War to the squalid condition it was in during the inauguration of the Bowman Expeditions – three rooms on a linoleum-tiled corridor on the second floor of a building on Court Street in Brooklyn – made it easy picking for the Foreign Military Studies Office.

In the book, *Weaponizing Maps*, that Joe and I are publishing about this, we spend a chapter on the AGS. We paint it as a New York social club that managed to parley its access to wealth and power into an institution with deep and important connections to the US state department and military – especially under Isaiah Bowman – that after the Second World War allowed its prestige and influence to dwindle to less than that of even ... *JLAG*. Under the presidency of Jerry Dobson, a retired Oak Ridge employee who got a job teaching geography at the University of Kansas, the AGS attracted the attention of Geoff Demarest, a lieutenant colonel with the Foreign Military Studies Office at nearby Fort Leavenworth. He had a deep interest in private property and he had money to toss around. Dobson and Demarest talked Peter Herlihy, likewise at Kansas, into converting his previously-Fulbright-funded year in San Luis Potosí, and Mexican-government-funded mapping projects, into the inaugural Bowman Expedition, México Indígena, an FMSO-funded, AGS-fronted mapping project originally focused exclusively on the Huasteca Potosina. Its involvement in Oaxaca emerged from a series of coincidences that resulted in Gustavo Ramírez inviting Herlihy to pitch his project to the Union of Organizations of the Sierra Juárez of Oaxaca, where, in the end, Herlihy was able only to map Yagila and Tiltepec, both of which subsequently published declarations condemning Dobson, Herlihy, and the American Geographical Society.

Does this have *anything* to do with geography? Maybe. In an *institutional* sense. But it's got more to do with the academy and social status, with influence and prestige. The FMSO was also involved in the creation of the Human Terrain System, a program the Army cooked up for integrating social scientists into battlefield command structures. Anthropologists in particular were recruited, though the program welcomed sociologists, political scientists, linguists, and others. Anthropologists who raised the alarm found *willing* ears among their colleagues, and the American Anthropological Association *condemned* the Human Terrain System as an “unacceptable application of anthropological expertise” that conflicted with its Code of Ethics. Why hasn't the AAG condemned the Bowman Expeditions? Because the AAG is dominated, as it always has been, by politically conservative, largely Midwestern university departments who think science needs to steer clear of politics, usually as a way of supporting politically conservative positions. Does this reflect an empiricist bent? I doubt it. I'm not sure many would have much of an idea what that would mean. I think it reflects their position in the “dominated fraction of the dominant class,” a relationship, for geographers, as true *within* the university as outside it.

As for the silence of the AGS, if it admits it's no longer anything more than a conduit and administrator of Army money, it will lose every remaining shred of academic respectability, and, along with it, its sole utility to the Army, which is precisely to cloak in respectability the intelligence that it gathers through its Bowman Expeditions. I mean, to be straightforward about it, the Army's turned the AGS into an intelligence agency,

perhaps not a *secret* intelligence agency – it’s “all” open source after all – but an intelligence agency nonetheless.

Does this need to be condemned? At the very least. I think it needs to be condemned vehemently. I think it needs to be *stopped*, stopped now. But not because I’m a geographer. Because I *hate* the Army and I *love* Oaxaca.