

IN MEMORIAM

James M. Blaut (1927–2000)

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James Morris (“Jim”) Blaut, Professor of Geography at the University of Illinois–Chicago, died 11 November 2000 at home, at age 73. The proximate cause was heart failure. He had also been battling pancreatic cancer for several years. In life, however, being faint, or having failure, of heart was emphatically *not* a condition one could attribute to Jim Blaut. His life was a testimony to passionate engagement in and commitments to both ideas and actions, whether in the field or the classroom, at conferences or cafes, through correspondence and publications, or just irrepressibly being-Jim Blaut-in-the-world. Although many geographers may not realize it, by his final decade James Blaut had become one of geography’s most widely read writers, recognized by scholars in a host of other disciplines, from anthropology and history to political science, psychology, sociology, and beyond. Works published in the 1990s, especially his widely acclaimed *The Colonizer’s Model of the World* (1993), had begun to reach a global audience far beyond the confines of academic geography.

At the time of his death, Blaut had begun the final volume of his trilogy critiquing Eurocentricism. As many of his many friends and colleagues noted, in these last years, a lifetime of agitation, investigation, interpretation, and analysis seemed to come into increasingly sharper focus. Also fittingly, Blaut’s new acuity contrasted sharply with the opacity that surrounds much of current critical scholarship. From beginning to end, Blaut’s intellectual compass was set by encounters with and syntheses of American pragmatism, historical materialism, and cultural geography. The combinations yielded an array of enthusiasms and contributions, sending him in



a number of seemingly disparate directions. For geographers alone, there must be at least five different Jim Blauts. Lacking officially accepted names for some of Blaut’s many facets, we have had to coin a few of our own: macrohistorical geographer of Eurocolonialism and Eurocentric thinking, geopolitical theoretician of nationalism, cognitive developmental geographer (in child development), ethnocultural ecologist (specializing in tropical ecosystems), and, least known—avid amateur zoogeographer. For Jim Blaut, much of this diversity—with the exception, perhaps of his devotion to bird-watching—was unified in his uncompromising campaigns for social justice and his conviction that geography and

geographers could make a radical difference.

Early Years

James Morris Blaut was born on 20 October 1927 in New York City into a milieu of immigrant intellectuals and political activists. His father, Samuel Blaut, had been a member of the Socialist Party, and he counted as kin the famous feminist anarchist Emma Goldman. Given this background, it was natural that he would attend the famous Little Red School House and Elisabeth Irwin High School in lower Manhattan, founded by progressive educator Elisabeth Irwin. Blaut often remarked that his Deweyian outlook was implanted in the experimental milieu that the LR-EI education provided, but was solidified at the University of Chicago, which he entered in 1944 at age sixteen. He was part of their noted program for advanced high-school students, joining future luminaries such as Richard Rorty and Carl Sagan. Deweyian educational models and methods continued to influence

the undergraduate program, coexisting in creative tension with Robert Hutchins and Mortimer Adler's Great Books crusade and curriculum.

Whether Blaut went to Chicago with formal interest in geography is unclear, but he certainly found it there. He spoke most warmly of working with Robert Platt, but also acknowledged Edward Ackerman's aid. Of other faculty in the late forties he had little to say. During his years in high school and college, he held various summer and part-time jobs on farms in Vermont and Rhode Island, with the U.S. Forest Service in South Dakota, with a railroad in Chicago (he rode freight trains all around the United States), with market research firms in New York, and in a zoological laboratory and a biological library of the University of Chicago. His farm experiences were apparently congenial, as agricultural geography was to become his first calling. Similarly, his lab and library jobs were in character.

Jim Blaut was a lifelong and passionate bird-watcher. There was seldom a schedule too tight, or a destination too direct, that couldn't be delayed or deflected by a chance to do some bird watching. He'd disappear for a half-day with the comment, "The birds need watching." Chris Spencer, a British developmental psychologist who collaborated with Blaut during the latter period of Blaut's research on children's spatial cognition, was a fellow bird-watcher:

Margaret and I had the pleasure . . . and frustration . . . of taking Jim a-birding in our Peak District countryside. One species which had always eluded him was the Dipper: a splendid, rather comic stream-living bird, which one can always guarantee to find fishing at certain spots we know well. Could we find it for Jim? Of course not: and his disappointment after several trips was palpable. . . . One day he came into the lab triumphant: he'd seen a dipper at last. Where'd he been: skiving off into the countryside when he should have been in research meetings? No: he'd been bird-watching from his in-town hotel bedroom, which overlooked a small brook running by. Happiness was total.

During the postwar period, when the Cold War was just beginning to congeal, Blaut also became active in progressive politics and actions. He joined Henry Wallace's Progressive Party and worked as an activist/organizer in Georgia for a summer. These formative experiences in high school and college, together with his summer activities, provided a foundation for his political activism later in life, especially during the 1960s Vietnam War and in the 1970s and 1980s campaigns for Puerto Rican independence. While his experiences in geography at Chicago formed the basis for some of his later work, most of Blaut's subsequent interests in geography were

developed in the contexts of later times and issues, both academic and extramural. Perhaps the greatest lesson that he learned from his Chicago training, besides deepening his pragmatist convictions, was that Platt's advocacy of microgeographic fieldwork could yield more than micro results.

Over the next five decades, Blaut involved himself in wide array of research topics at scales ranging from micro to macro. Long before it became a cliché of environmental groups, "thinking globally and acting locally" characterized Jim Blaut. His economic, ecological, ethnographic, and psychological work tended to focus on individuals, or small groups, in small places or limited spaces. On the other hand, his political and historical works are framed at more expansive scales, ultimately embracing global-scale macrohistorical treatments of cultural diffusion, capitalism, and Eurocentrism. His methodological and philosophical writings on space, process, mapping, ethnogeography, and geography's nature in general engage various scales, plotting geography's advance, whether in particulars or through generalities, but always grounded in a geographical materialism of his own making.

Finishing his studies at the University of Chicago in 1948 with a Bachelor of Philosophy in geography (in 1950 he received his B.S. in geography with a minor in economics in absentia), Blaut studied at the New School for Social Research during 1948–1949. Founded in 1919 by Columbia University antiwar dissenters such as Charles Beard, John Dewey, and Thorstein Veblen, by the late 1940s the New School had become a haven for European exile intellectuals and scholars. Despite the attractions of critical social science at its far edges, Blaut had become a convert to Platt's call for close inspection of Latin American agricultural landscapes, especially at the individual farm scale. Blaut felt that in order to do this creditably, he would need formal training in tropical agriculture. The logical place to turn, he believed, would be to one of the British colonial agricultural programs.

Tropical Exposures

Casting about for the best option, Blaut got advice from a number of people. One was Andrew Clark, then at Rutgers. Clark suggested that Blaut could get first-rate training in geography and serviceable knowledge of tropical agriculture at Louisiana State University (LSU), located as it was at the edges of both the colonial and tropical worlds. Blaut took this under advisement, but he was still seeking the real thing. He spent the academic year

1949–1950 taking postgraduate courses at the Imperial College of Tropical Agriculture in Trinidad. The knowledge gained, especially courses on tropical soils with F. Hardy, was to serve him well in his later studies of small-scale farming in Southeast Asia, of shifting cultivation in Latin America, and especially, in 1957, of soil erosion and conservation in the Blue Mountains of Jamaica. In the late 1940s the college was like the Empire itself—in full but waning maturity. Still, the time was ripe to learn lessons of tropical agronomy and to observe first-hand the political motion and social momenta pointing toward West Indian independence.

Although Eric Williams (*Capitalism and Slavery*, 1944) and C. L. R. James (*The Black Jacobins*, 1938), Trinidad's two greatest historians, did not formally join the independence struggle until the late 1950s, their implicit critiques of Eurocentric currents in both Marxian and orthodox analyses of capitalism's formation were rooted in their own West Indian experience. When Blaut first encountered their work is not retrievable, but his stinging critiques of Eurocentric historiography parallels and pays homage to their prescience. Certainly Blaut's first Caribbean exposure was to lead to a lifetime of engagement with the region, especially as demonstrated through his later support for the Puerto Rican independence movement, in which he remained active until his death.

Completing his studies at the Imperial College, he entered LSU in the fall of 1950. The LSU Department of Geography and Anthropology offered strong emphases in physical geography, especially coastal and fluvial geomorphology, and in cultural/historical geography, focused primarily on the American South and Latin America. In 1950, the geography faculty consisted of Fred B. Kniffen (chair), Richard J. Russell, Robert C. West, and Benjamin A. Tator (Ph.D., LSU). A. C. Albrecht (Ph.D., Vienna), the sole anthropologist, was replaced in 1952 by William Haag, an archeologist with a Ph.D. in ethnozoology from the University of Michigan and a devotee of Leslie White's "culturology." Kniffen, Russell, and West all had doctorates from Berkeley and maintained close ties with Carl Sauer. Albrecht's undergraduate training in Anthropology had been at Berkeley. Blaut's practical interests in agronomy, along with his interest in tropical environments, found sympathetic reception from West and Kniffen. His predilection for cultural studies from a materialist perspective found validation in Kniffen and Haag's approaches. Though Blaut's progressivism probably set him somewhat apart from his mentors and cohorts, in later years both Blaut and Kniffen were fond of pointing out that Kniffen had briefly been a member of the anarchosyndicalist I.W.W. ("Wobblies") in the early 1920s when he was tramping around the Pacific Northwest and Alaska before entering

Berkeley. Nothing in conversations with either Blaut or Kniffen suggested that Blaut's political outlook stood in the way of a close relationship between them. During this period Louis Seig remembers Blaut's social, more than socialist, side:

When I first met Jim Blaut (over 50 years ago) he was a doctoral candidate in geography at LSU; I was a sophomore. We met on a social basis at first—we were dating roommates [his first wife Ruth Pulwers, an anthropology student, later an anthropologist and co-researcher on various projects]—in the Spring of 1951. I was having some problems in school and was searching for direction. Jim suggested I talk to Fred Kniffen. The rest, as they say, is history. I owe the beginnings of my career in geography to advice from Blaut . . . My earlier recollections of Jim at LSU include his love of folk music and his playing the five-string banjo. I remember joining groups drinking beer on the levee just off campus with Jim singing calypso songs he had learned in Trinidad. When he left Baton Rouge to do his dissertation fieldwork, he left the banjo with me for safekeeping until he returned.

Not surprisingly, after a year of coursework at LSU, Blaut was off to the tropics again in the fall of 1951. This time it was to the East Indies, or more precisely the Crown Colony of Singapore and its hinterlands. For the next two years, he held an appointment as Assistant Lecturer of Geography at the University of Malaya. The newly established university (formerly Raffles College), with campuses in both Singapore and Kuala Lumpur, served as the technical and intellectual center for that part of the British Empire. The Department of Geography had been established before WWII and played an important role in the university's various missions. Blaut joined an able group of geographers, including Paul Wheatley, fresh from University College, London with his M.A., working under Clifford Darby on the Domesday project.

Singapore must have invited comparisons to Port-of-Spain, though amplified by several orders of complexity, especially in its ethnocultural and economic articulations with adjacent regions. There were parallels between Wheatley and Blaut's trajectories, too. Both found dissertation topics at hand—Wheatley's historical and precolonial (Wheatley [1958] 1961); Blaut's agrocultural and colonial-contemporary (Blaut 1958). On matters of methodology and epistemology there was concordance, especially in their rejection of the then-dominant paradigmatic regimes. For Wheatley, it was Wooldridge's regionalism (largely derivative from Hartshorne—see Stoddart 1989) and Blaut took aim directly at Hartshorne's chorology, centered on areal differentiation. By this time Blaut was already beginning to formulate

his processual critique of static chorology and narrow functionalism. This was elaborated in his dissertation (1958) and in articles over the next several decades (1953, 1961, 1962, 1994). His dissertation research was initially designed to apply Robert Platt's microgeographic theory and methods to the study of a few smallholder farms in Singapore. Government and university officials, impressed by Blaut's work, provided sufficient funding and personnel to expand his intensive examination of Singapore's small farms to a 10 percent sample of the total, or some 400 farms. Several dozen students and various government officials were eventually enlisted in Blaut's microgeography corps between December 1951 and June 1953. That the provinces and peripheries rather than metropolitan cores are often the loci of creativity and innovation, as well as opportunity, was to become a truism for Blaut, no doubt validated through personal experience in outposts such as Trinidad and Singapore.

Blaut left Singapore on 7 July 1953. That fall, he resumed his residence in Baton Rouge, finishing his coursework and beginning his dissertation preparation. Before he could finish his dissertation, yet another detour intervened. This time, it wasn't the tropics calling, but the U.S. military. The Korean War had ended in stalemate the year before, but Blaut was drafted for two years of "peace-time" service in the U.S. Army. He wryly notes in his dissertation vita (1958, 402) that he served "between 1954 and 1956 . . . rising to the rank of Private First Class." Blaut's service was not without incident. During basic training at Camp Gordon, Georgia, Blaut and fellow trainees were subjected to extreme hazings that resulted in the court-martial of their lieutenant and the dismissal of the camp's commandant. As Gary Dunbar recalls it: "Len Kuntz [LSU geography graduate student] had come into a classroom at LSU waving a newspaper and said, 'Blaut has done it again!'" Apparently Blaut had been forced to bury a fellow trainee up to his neck and stuff a cross in his mouth. The hapless trainee had made a mistake that would have allegedly cost him his life in combat—thus the burial and benediction. At the trial, Private Rodney Steel of Lowndesboro, Alabama, testified that his punishment amounted to "terrorism." One can only speculate that Blaut helped interpret the events. Blaut's other military duties included working with the Army Map Service and a year as a physical geographer with the Environmental Protection Division of the Quartermaster Corps doing research on Middle American climates. With Kniffen's help, Blaut managed to cut short his tour of duty by two months, returning to LSU for the summer term of 1956 as an instructor in geography.

New England/Caribbean Interchanges

In the fall of 1956 he was appointed Instructor of Geography at Yale and was advanced to Assistant Professor after receiving his Ph.D. in 1958. With his intensive experience in Southeast Asia and additional work in the West Indies, Blaut was seen as an asset not only to the geography program, but also to Yale's budding area-studies programs. At Yale, Blaut's colleagues included Karl Pelzer in geography and Harold Conklin and Sidney Mintz in anthropology. Pelzer, the chair of the department, was an authority on tropical land use and pioneer settlement, particularly Southeast Asia. Conklin had pioneered the ethnoscientific study of shifting cultivation with his work in the Philippines. Mintz was already a recognized authority on Caribbean peasant economy and agriculture. In the relatively short time that he was at Yale (1956–1961), Blaut established his own credentials as an emerging figure in the field of human-environment relations and tropical agriculture. During the summer of 1957, Blaut and several other researchers investigated soil erosion and conservation in the Blue Mountains of Jamaica. This resulted in a widely acclaimed article on their findings (1959c). In 1960, he did field research in Costa Rica and was a visiting professor at Cornell in agricultural economics.

The next year, with geography in decline at Yale, Blaut looked south once again. After leaving Yale, he secured a position at the University of Puerto Rico (1961–1963) as the director of the Pan American Union's graduate studies in Caribbean social sciences. While in San Juan, he met and later married América ("Meca") Sorrentini, a developmental psychologist. This was followed by work as a UNESCO agricultural consultant to the Venezuelan government. In 1964 he moved to the College of the Virgin Islands where he assumed the position of Director of the Caribbean Research Institute (1964–1966). He returned to New England for the academic year 1966–1967, where he was a visiting professor at the University of Connecticut.

In the fall of 1967, Blaut moved to Worcester, Massachusetts to become a visiting professor at Clark University in the Graduate School of Geography. There, his physical presence (well over six feet in height), his resonant voice, and his lecturing style shortly established him as a charismatic teacher. Blaut was not just a part of Clark's "Insurgent Years"; to a large extent, he defined them. Jim Blaut and Richard ("Dick") Peet came to personify Clark's radical geography. Blaut became an advocate for minority students, worked alongside his wife Meca with the Worcester Puerto Rican community, and was part of the group that established *Antipode: A Journal*

of *Radical Geography* in 1969, at the conclusion of one of David Stea's graduate seminars. Shortly thereafter, the Union of Socialist Geographers was formed, and Blaut was an integral part of that, too.

Meca Sorrentini (de Blaut) held a master's degree in developmental psychology from the University of Puerto Rico. In early 1967, she and Jim began to experiment with kindergarteners in one of Worcester's primary schools to see if it was possible to teach map-reading at early age by first teaching the children to read aerial photographs. The project was a failure: they could not teach kindergarteners to read aerial photographs because, untaught, *they already knew*. Such a finding contradicted the conventional wisdom of the day. Thus was born another line of Blaut's research, one on which he continued working, on and off, for the remainder of his life. Together with George McCleary and Stea, he applied for and was awarded a grant from the U.S. Office of Education to continue this research. The resulting interdisciplinary research effort, which involved undergraduates as well as graduate students, was called the Place Perception Project (PPP). Between 1968 and 1971, the PPP produced a report series that Jim labeled the "greenbacks" because of the color of their covers. The results of the PPP research provided material for a series of Blaut's publications that continued to appear in print long after he had left Clark. And, as Simon Batterbury recalls, memory of Jim Blaut, too, loomed large in Worcester:

At Clark University, Jim remains something of a legend. With Dick Peet and Ben Wisner, he participated in *Antipode's* modest beginnings, and contributed several seminal and oft-reprinted contributions to that journal in its pioneering years. "Jim Blaut's plane," now a Clark myth, actually existed—it was a light aircraft purchased for research work on spatial cognition. While countercultural movements attempted to "raise the Pentagon" in 1967 to exorcise its demons, Jim Blaut was there, flying a group of Clark geographers overhead. The plane was even used for graduate fieldtrips to Puerto Rico, where it ended its days after suffering mechanical failure.

At Clark, Jim began to establish the pattern of both work and play in his basement. There he hosted his famous "antiparties" on weekends. A congenial colleague and loyal friend, Jim found his true nexus of support among Clark's graduate and undergraduate students. He inspired many followers, and even a few disciples. While he guided a number of master's theses, he chaired relatively few doctoral committees. Those whose dissertations he did supervise, along with several students who received Clark Ph.D.s under other chairs, continued to consider Jim their mentor long after leaving Clark. They include Roger Hart, Ben Wisner, Kirsten Johnson,

and Cindi Katz. These former students were among the many geographers who offered eulogies at the Blaut memorial session during the 2001 AAG Annual Meeting in New York.

In 1971, as the spirit of the halcyon 1960s begin to flag, Clark's "Insurgent Years" showed signs of fraying, too. In the eyes of the more conservative members of Clark's faculty and administration, his radical ideas and activities began to appear more disruptive than creative, challenging the conventional norms of university education. Blaut and some others from the radical core decamped for various new venues. Sad to leave Clark—especially the students—Blaut became interim chair of the new Department of Geography at the University of Puerto Rico. Within a year Blaut moved again, this time as a tenured full professor at what was then "Chicago Circle," later the University of Illinois at Chicago, or UIC.

Chicago Redux

Putting down roots for what became the long haul, Jim, Meca, and their daughter Gini acquired a large two-story brownstone on the edge of Chicago's Puerto Rican community. On the first floor, Meca established her office, the focal point of the Luis Belvis Center, devoted to Puerto Rican political-cultural advocacy. Jim, in turn, "went underground." He set up shop in their sprawling basement, filling it with his expansive library and documents from years of work and travel across several continents. It was here he launched his multiple book project on nationalism, colonialism, and Eurocentrism, a series cut short by his death. He also revisited the foundations of traditional cultural geography. During this period he published two key articles on diffusionism (1977, 1987a) reaffirming his links to his LSU training. In Chicago beyond his basement, Jim reconnected with the Puerto Rican independence movement, providing advice and scholarly support. During the 1980s, he published two books (1987, 1988) with impacts mostly in Europe and Latin America. The first was on the theory of nationalism, and the other on the question of Puerto Rican nationalism. These works (or portions of them) have been translated and published in a number of different languages. They served as nodes of debate, both academic and otherwise, on the cusp of nationalism's dramatic revival in the post-1989 world. Although UIC geography lacked a doctoral program, Jim rapidly established a following among minority undergraduates and master's students and once again became their advocate. To spur his creative work, he worked out an arrangement teaching fall-semester overloads. This left spring semester completely

free for research and writing. Among other things, this allowed Blaut to extend his sterling record of AAG meeting attendance, always making several presentations both individually and in panels, especially in the radical geography sessions. Blaut-in-motion at professional meetings was something to behold, whether brilliantly hammering out and nailing down points of an argument, rushing to a session already in session, or greeting old friends. Gary Dunbar remembers the 1965 AAG meeting in Columbus, Ohio, where their mentor, Fred Kniffen was giving the honorary presidential address:

Characteristically, Jim arrived late, just before Kniffen's address was to be delivered. The excuse he used for his tardiness was that he flew his own small plane to Columbus from San Juan and there was some sort of mishap en route. One of the first people Jim encountered was his old buddy Phil Wagner, and the two of them leaped on each other and couldn't stop hugging and dancing, much to the dismay of one of the onlookers—a former colleague of Wagner's—who thought that their conduct lacked dignity.

Despite a lifetime career marked by unconventional or, better, unselfconscious—conference comportment (particularly sartorial, with his invariable flannel shirt/blue jeans/work boot ensemble), Blaut went on to receive various awards for distinguished service and scholarship, including the AAG's Distinguished Scholarship Award in 1997. He also gave invited lectures at universities in more than two dozen countries on six continents. Similarly, he received research funding from agencies and foundations in a number of different nations.

Starting in the early 1990s, Blaut, Stea, and their colleagues in Mexico and the U.K. were awarded two National Science Foundation multiyear grants to continue the work they had begun at Clark on the development of spatial cognition and map-like modeling. Blaut expanded his “natural mapping” notion into a theory of “universal mapping.” He proposed that all people, at all stages of individual development, in all cultures, throughout history and prehistory, engaged in map-like modeling. Keying on Noam Chomsky's “language acquisition device” (LAD), Blaut proposed a parallel “map acquisition device” (MAD). Chomsky replied with a laudatory letter, soon posted on Blaut's refrigerator door. While this research continued and articles appeared, the promised books did not materialize. Some colleagues began to ask, “What's going on in Jim's basement?”

They were soon to find out. *Fourteen Ninety-Two* appeared, appropriately enough, in 1992, followed quickly by *The Colonizer's Model of the World* (1993), the first volume of his Guilford Press trilogy. The second volume, *Eight Eurocentric Historians* (2000) continued making

waves and fanning the flames as the first volume had. In essence, Blaut takes to task (and un.masks), from right to left, the major cast of historians and social scientists upholding the doctrine of Euro-uniqueness and, by implication, superiority. Marxists, Malthusians, and middle groundlings all get dunked and debunked. Jim had only begun working on the third volume in his “Decolonizing the Past” trilogy when he was stricken. His death came as a shock to all who knew him, leaving a substantial vacuum in the lives of many of us. In the weeks that followed, there was an upwelling of tributes and minimemorials on the Internet, particularly from nongeographers who barely knew him personally, if at all, but had been greatly moved by his scholarship and by his example. Andre Gunder Frank, for one, had some remarks to make on a particularly memorable meeting with Blaut:

At our first face-to-face meeting for dinner in a Chicago restaurant [after decades of mutual respect and intellectual exchange], Jim told me about his projects, including volume 3 of *Diffusionism* and a book on Marx devoid of Eurocentrism, which Jim meant to take out. There would be nothing left, I said. Oh Yes, Jim retorted, exploitation would still be there. But that is not especially or distinguishably Marxist, I claimed. Well, I will show how it is and that we can still rescue Marxism from its Eurocentrism and thereby refurbish it for future use. I can only hope that Jim made some progress on such a manuscript and that we can still rescue it for our use. If not, alas, we will never know.

Blaut's imposing physical stature alone usually made him stand out in a crowd. His firm convictions and outspoken advocacies always made him a memorable presence in whatever company or contexts he found himself. Michael Heiman was among us “short(er) people” who linked Jim's struggle for academic reform to his efforts to lay an intellectual foundation for a more equitable world:

My impression was, and remains, of an intellectual and physical giant . . . Of course he was a gentle giant, demanding yet unwavering in his support and love for those of us struggling to escape the institutional binds of academia.

Anne Reid, a social psychologist born in Britain who has dedicated her life to helping marginalized Mexican communities, captures this quality well:

He was in every sense “larger-than-life” and stood out as a vital and funny force in the generally conventional world of academe.

David Harvey echoed these sentiments:

For more than forty years, Jim Blaut has intrigued us, taught us, irritated us, inspired us and challenged us to be real and authentic geographers. He has shown by his example what

commitment to scholarship and to the values of open enquiry and dedication to work and to people can do in a sometimes stultifying academic setting.

Neil Smith remembers Blaut from both first- and second-hand encounters:

I had an undergraduate teacher once . . . who argued that geography was in general a rather timid and boring discipline and that no good would come of it. The discipline needed a few good arguments, he said. Blaut was among the very few people he would name who, he thought, infused life into the discipline by arguing against accepted wisdom. Today the discipline is teeming with life and arguments from many sources. But Blaut for more than four decades had been a consistent, iconoclastic source of life in geography, often a dissenter (even against some of his own innovations) but always a committed and original contributor.

Kirsten Johnson, who was born and raised in Mexico and who studied with Blaut at Clark, has written about Blaut's unique ability to link the theoretical with the practical ("There's nothing so practical as a good theory," as Blaut was fond of quoting the Gestalt psychologist Kurt Lewin):

Upon learning that I was from Mexico . . . Jim suggested that I could go to the Tabasco lowlands, study intensive riverine agriculture and thereby strike a body blow against environmental determinism. He hauled out a stack of rather fuzzy black and white photos he had taken from a plane flying over the area and pointed out the farm layouts. He then explained the link between contemporary peasant practices and the debates over the potential of the pre-Columbian tropical lowlands to support high population densities, urbanism, and civilization as we know it. Pretty heady stuff. I was hooked. Although I never made it to the mosquito-ridden backwaters of Tabasco, I did embark on what has become a life-long engagement with peasant agriculture and development. Jim's ability to connect theoretical debate and on-the-ground practice is what captured my imagination. Jim's belief in the potential of the humid tropics was also a firm belief in the potential of the peoples who live there. Thus his battle against environmental determinism was also a battle against the euro/ethnocentrism that is so pervasive in both academics and development practice . . .

Ben Wisner, who had done research in Africa before coming to Clark and was later to gain fame for his work on food and basic needs, remembered Blaut's form of "multi-tasking"—the way, for example, in which he combined bird-watching with critical historiography and anti-imperialist theorizing during the Miami AAG meeting:

I recall discussing African history—not Jim's strength since he had read more deeply in Asian and Latin American history—in the Everglades one evening after our rental car had died and we stood waiting for rescue, swatting mosquitoes while we deconstructed the colonial notion of Africa as the "white man's grave." Jim gave me a pair of binoculars when I went off to Mozambique in 1978, with advice to watch birds. I've tried, but I'll never match his keenness. We were both at the first international geography conference to be held in postapartheid South Africa. Jim made his academic and political contributions, and then he was off in rented car to commune with birds North along the coast from Durban . . .

What struck most of his colleagues, along with Blaut's humanity, was his humanitarianism, as Eric Sheppard, in nominating Jim for the AAG Distinguished Scholarship Award, remarked:

Beyond the scholarly nature of his contributions, Dr. Blaut's research consistently has been informed by a deep concern for the well-being of the less well off and marginalized in places ranging from Central American rural communities to inner-city American neighborhoods of color.

In his ideological stance, Blaut was consistent. The lessons of both his early field experience and his later activism were carried into the classroom, as Batterbury noted shortly after Jim's death:

As an uncompromising and articulate supporter of the academic left, involved in both debate and activism, he was committed to using geography to achieve greater social justice, and entered debate with real passion. Always in touch with the pulse of critical scholarship, his postings to numerous listservs and conference networks only fell silent in recent months. He will be sorely missed.

Indeed, Jim Blaut is greatly missed by many, but *he* did not miss many opportunities to fight for what he thought was right. In this regard, his example will probably be his greatest legacy. One of his last campaigns was not waged for one of the many causes with which he was often associated; rather, it was for the survival of geography on his home campus. Retiring geographers in the UIC joint anthropology-geography department were not being replaced by geographers, and Jim was correctly concerned that this would mean the effective end of yet another Chicago-area geography program. He energetically sought to organize a cadre of prominent geographers to meet with UIC's new dean, Stanley Fish, the noted deconstructionist scholar and high profile administrator, to make the case for geography's continued existence. He had at least one meeting with Fish, but the cadre never really materialized before he died. Jim himself said that he didn't

expect to retire alive, that he would go on teaching, researching, and fighting for geography at UIC as long as he could. That he did: with more than fifty years' momentum behind him, and with his heart in many places, causes, and minds the world over, he left geography a better place for most than when he began.

Selected Bibliography

The bibliography here is partial; many items have been omitted due to space limitations. Most notably missing are Blaut's field and research reports to funding agencies, commentaries, comments, encyclopedia entries, articles reprinted in edited volumes and/or translated into a half-dozen different languages, and book reviews.

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