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# The Emergence of Radical/Critical Geography within North America

**Linda Peake<sup>1</sup>**

Urban Studies Program,  
Department of Social Science  
York University, Canada  
[lpeake@yorku.ca](mailto:lpeake@yorku.ca)

**Eric Sheppard**

Department of Geography  
University of California, Los Angeles, USA  
[esheppard@geog.ucla.edu](mailto:esheppard@geog.ucla.edu)

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## Abstract

In this paper we aim to provide a historical account of the evolution of Anglophone radical/critical geography in North America. Our account is structured chronologically. First, we examine the spectral presence of radical / critical geography in North America prior to the mid-sixties. Second, we narrate the emergence of both radical and critical geography between 1964 / 1969 until the mid-1980s, when key decisions were taken that moved radical / critical geography into the mainstream of the discipline. Third, we examine events since the mid-1980s, as radical geography merged into critical geography, becoming in the process something of a canon in mainstream Anglophone human geography. We conclude that while radical / critical geography has succeeded in its aim of advancing critical geographic theory, it has been less successful in its aim of



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<sup>2</sup> Eric's first exposure was as an undergraduate at Bristol in 1971 when the newly hired lecturer Keith Bassett, freshly returned from Penn State, brought a stack of *Antipodes* to one of his lectures. Linda's radical awakening also came in the UK, in the late 1970s courtesy of her lecturers at Reading University. Sophie Bowlby took her

increasing access to the means of knowledge production to become a peoples' geography that is grounded in a desire for working towards social change.

Purporting to provide a historical account of the evolution of Anglophone radical/critical geography in North America is a hazardous proposition. First, the sheer quantity of radical/critical geography within this relatively confined area of the globe is enormous: spanning more than forty years (and arguably much longer), and innumerable individuals, organizations, activities and academic and non-academic writings. This cannot possibly be captured adequately in a single paper, nor can definitive definitions of these wide ranging fields in terms of their content or purposes. Second, and relatedly, many such accounts are possible, each marked by the situated knowledge of the narrators. Our perspective is that of two relative latecomers to what at that time was known as radical geography; neither of us participated in the early years.<sup>2</sup> In writing this paper, we have attempted to plumb the recollections of early participants we could identify, but inevitably what we write is not what they would have written. Our particular predilections about what is significant inevitably shape this account. This is not, then, the definitive story, but a provocation: one particular account that can only be enriched as others react to, correct, and differently narrate these events. Third, as critical scholars we must be alert to the occlusions made possible by the few already existing narratives of the emergence of radical geography in Anglophone North America—accounts that become canonical simply by dint of the lack of alternatives. In particular, we interrogate the conventional wisdom, today, that radical geography emerged out of Clark University with the publication of *Antipode* in 1969, and was primarily Marxist. This is the case, but there also was much more. Fourth, as geographers we must be alert to the geography of knowledge production. In interrogating conventional wisdom, therefore, we begin to disinter both the theoretical/ideological variegation, characterizing the field from its beginnings but unevenly though time, as well as outlining the complex spatialities connecting the US with Anglo-Canada and beyond.

Our account is structured chronologically. First, we examine the spectral presence of radical / critical geography in North America prior to the mid-sixties. Second, we narrate the emergence of both radical and critical geography between 1964 / 1969 until the mid-1980s, when key decisions were taken that moved radical / critical geography into the mainstream of the discipline. Third, we examine events since the mid-1980s, as radical geography merged into critical geography becoming in the process something of a canon in mainstream Anglophone human geography.

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## Hauntings: Radical Geographers avant la lettre

It might be expected that we begin in the tumultuous times of the mid and late 1960s, dating the birth of North American radical geography to 1969 (Castree 2000). The story has been widely told of a staid discipline, caught between a Hartshornian regionalist past and its aspirations to be recognized as a value-free spatial science, whose disengagement with the world was disrupted by the impact of the May 1968 student revolts in Europe and the anti-Vietnam war and civil rights movements in the United States (Peet 1977, 2000). But this would be to ignore the precursors of that time, those individual scholars already mapping out potential routes toward radical/critical geography. Four men are widely acknowledged as radical geographers whose political and academic contributions predated 1969, and since have been assessed and analyzed: the Russian anarcho-communist Pyotr Kropotkin (1842-1921) and French anarchist Élysée Reclus (1830-1905), and the German and American Sinologists, Karl Wittfogel (1896-1988) and Owen Lattimore (1900-89) (Clark and Martin 2004, Dunbar 1978, Galois 1976, Harvey 1983, Peet 1985).<sup>3</sup> Yet others' contributions have been overlooked. For example, Mary Arizona (Zonia) Baber (1862-1956), a founder of the Chicago Geographical Society, was committed to peace, antiracism, and conservation, and worked closely with Puerto Rican suffragist movements (Monk 2004). No doubt, Baber is just one of a number of radical geographers, otherwise gendered and racialised, whose contributions have been sidelined and then elided by the "1969 story", and await recovery in the name of tracing multiple histories, situated knowledges, counternarratives, silences, and lacunae.<sup>4</sup>

By the mid 1960s, a handful of radical geographers were percolating the field, also shaping what was to happen in 1969. Most importantly in moving radical geography beyond the academy, Bill Bunge, a communist when he wrote his paean to quantitative geography (Bunge 1966, Akatiff, personal communication), co-founded the Detroit Geographical Expedition and Institute (DGEI) with the African American community leader Gwendolyn Warren in 1968. The Expedition and Institute was committed to practicing the kind of radical pedagogy and activist research on issues of poverty and race widely espoused today by post-structural and feminist geographers; it operated at the University of Michigan, and then Michigan State, until the latter closed it at the end of 1970 (Heyman 2007, Horvath 1971). Clark Akatiff had entered UCLA's graduate program in 1960 as a Marxist, was hired as an Assistant Professor at Michigan State University in 1966 and participated in the Detroit Expedition (Akatiff 2007). Jim Blaut, life-long leftist, joined the faculty at Clark in 1967, having returned from five years in the

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<sup>3</sup> In 1952, former communist Wittfogel denounced Lattimore during the McCarthy hearings (Lattimore 1950).

<sup>4</sup> Not least, Thelma Glass, a professor at Alabama State College, who helped establish the Women's Political Council in Montgomery Alabama, which organized the Montgomery bus strike led by Martin Luther King (see George, Monk and Gaston 2004).

Caribbean, including a stint in Puerto Rico where he joined its *Movimiento Pro Independencia* (Mathewson 2005, Santana 2005). In October 1967, Blaut and co-conspirator David Stea flew Jim's plane to Washington D. C., to observe the countercultural attempt to 'levitate the Pentagon': Akatiff was at the protest (Akatiff, 1974b).<sup>5</sup> When Ben Wisner arrived at Clark in 1968, radicalized by the anti-war movement and experiences in Tanzania, a small group of radical geographers was already active.<sup>6</sup> While not self-identified as radical, several sympathetic geographers helped create space in a hostile disciplinary and political environment, across both Canada and the United States, including Jim Lemon, Robert McNee, Richard Morrill, Phil Wagner, Julian Wolpert, and Wilbur Zelinsky.

Of course, what is striking about this list is its exclusivity. Neither women nor people of colour feature in accounts of this period of North American radical academic geography, yet the seeds of their participation were also sown during this time and they were to figure increasingly in developing both radical and critical geography, although this has been more the case for the former than the latter.<sup>7</sup> Their absence in these reflections speaks strongly to the ways in which the production of knowledge reflected the social demographics and political preoccupations of the overwhelmingly white, male and middle-class North American academy of that time.

### **Radical geography: 1969-86**

It was in 1969 that radical geography gained visibility as a 'center of calculation' (Latour 1987) within US geography, through two events. First, at the Association of American Geographers (AAG) meetings in Ann Arbor, Michigan, radical geographers for the first time defined themselves as a group (the meeting was relocated from Chicago, in response to opposition to meeting in the city where Richard Daley had repressed protests outside the Democratic National Convention—Ann Arbor being chosen because Michigan geographers were particularly vocal in this opposition. Eichenbaum, personal communication). Clark Akatiff (2007: 7) recalls: "three busloads from the [Detroit] Expedition brought the presence of the black streets to the halls of Academe. There were acts of showy militancy. Free Huey was scribed on the wall. Militant interventions were forced on staid academic panels about the 'Problem.'" For the 1970 meetings, symbolically in San Francisco, the Detroit Expedition was accorded a plenary

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<sup>5</sup> On October 21, 1967, the Youth International Party (Yippies) attracted over 100,000 people to an event billed as levitating the Pentagon (Akatiff 1974a; <http://www.americanheritage.com/articles/web/20051021-pentagon-vietnam-protest-washington-dc-lyndon-johnson-jerry-rubin-david-dellinger-allen-ginsberg-yippie-robert-mcnamara.shtml>, accessed March 14, 2011)

<sup>6</sup> One of their activities was to produce "a 'peasant farm' by slashing and burning and hand-tilling some land at Martyn Boyden's house. Blaut insisted we pay a huge rent in kind to the landlord (Boyden) to make it realistic." (Wisner, personal communication)

<sup>7</sup> The term 'people of colour' is commonly used in North America, albeit being a geographically contested one and much less in use elsewhere.

session led by Bunge, divided into an academic session and the peoples' geography, of mixed success: "it was like the original Acid Tests in the sense that we knew something was happening, but we didn't know what it was..." (Akatiff 2007: 10-11). By the 1971 Boston meeting, radical geographers had pushed the AAG business meeting to pass a "strongly worded resolution opposing the Indochina War..., along with others concerned with the status of women, graduate students, and Spanish-speaking minorities, and a resolution calling for the release of Angela Davis...[which] was only narrowly defeated" (Smith 1971: 155).

Second, *Antipode: A Journal of Radical Geography* was initiated at Clark in 1969, at the end of David Stea's graduate seminar (Mathewson and Stea 2003). It was a student-led initiative: "a reaction against the Vietnam War, racism and pollution...The key to *Antipode's* origin is the term 'radical.' We were groping for root causes of the problems, contradictions, inconsistencies, and hypocrisies with which we had grown up.... The 'specter that stalks Europe' that Marx made famous didn't come first to mind because of who we (mostly white and male and middle class) young Americans were" (Wisner 2006).

*Antipode's* emergence was the relational effect of multiple conditions of possibility, but it created visibility, and a place, for radical geography by dint of being a concrete and recognized academic object (a journal), drawing others into the orbit of Clark University where it was physically located. The early issues were eclectic, reflecting those who were aware of it and bound together by a shared no—rejection of the US societal status quo—and diverse yeses. Articles were included on imperialism, poverty, ghettos and African Americans, geography's whiteness, women, American Indian geography, the environment and nature, remote sensing, migration, and a map projection. The progenitors of radical thinking at Clark, until they left, were Blaut and Stea. They catalyzed the radical politics of Ben Wisner and the other students who started *Antipode*, but also of Peet, who had arrived as a new faculty member with a freshly minted Berkeley Ph.D. in 1967. Peet took over the editorship of *Antipode* in 1970 (with volume 2), and co-produced it until 1985 with generations of Clark students—a number of whom went on to influential academic careers. David Harvey coincidentally arrived in the US in 1969 from Bristol, where his experiences in Baltimore triggered his philosophical shift from logical positivism to social justice and then Marxism. Harvey (personal communication), recalls this period as a "collision between the more book-wise UK trained geographers (like me) and the street-wise down with the people orientation of some of the US animators.... I certainly learned the importance of being in the street from Bunge.... [T]here was a joint exploration of anarchism and Marxism."

Harvey visited Clark in 1970, and in 1972 published the first explicitly Marxist paper in *Antipode* (indeed, in Anglophone geography: Harvey 1972). As Wisner (2006) recalls: "the earliest days of *Antipode* were not informed by rigorous political economy. Only later, under Dick Peet's editorship and the frequent contributions of Jim Blaut and David Harvey, did we benefit from a systematic

exploration of capitalism, its logic, and imperialism – its highest stage.” As Peet has described it: “From 1972 onwards the emphasis...changed from an attempt to engage the discipline in socially significant research to an attempt to construct a radical philosophical and theoretical base...increasingly found in Marxian theory, which...many US geographers began reading in the early 1970s” (Peet 1977: 17).<sup>8</sup>

By the mid 1970s, reading Marx had become *de rigueur* for radical North American geographers, and *Antipode* was taking an increasingly Marxist tone—publishing a number of classic theoretical treatises in Marxist geography, although other kinds of approaches continued to be represented.<sup>9</sup> It was also a progressively masculine discourse, dominated by confident (Harvey), assertive (Peet), imposing (Blaut, Soja, Bunge) and difficult (Bunge) personalities. Yet radical geography also was active beyond Clark and Worcester, MA. Although the DGEI had been terminated, with Bunge fired by Wayne State, others sprang up. Geographical Expeditions were set up in Toronto (by Bunge), Vancouver and Sydney, Australia (by Ron Horvath, who prior to moving to Australia, Akatiff had persuaded to move to Michigan State from UC Santa Barbara in 1967), and these ideas were carried to London, England (by Bob Colenutt) and to Worcester (Peet 2006). In 1971 Larry Wolf and Wilbur Zelinsky founded a second critical geography group, the Socially and Ecologically Responsible Geographers (SERGE), publishing the mimeographed journal *Transition*, until 1986. A significant further development, with a strong Canadian footprint, was the founding of the Union of Socialist Geographers (USG).

The idea for a Union of Socialist Geographers emerged from a group of graduate students in Vancouver, catalyzed by the geographical expeditions and the critical support of Michael Eliot-Hurst, who had become chair of Geography at Simon Fraser University.<sup>10</sup> There were some 40 students working on the Vancouver GEI; Ron Horvath had been hired at Simon Fraser after termination of the DGEI. Simon Fraser’s geography graduate students included active exiles radicalized through political struggles in Ireland and South Africa, Britain and the US. Eliot-Hurst’s presence was vital, having himself been radicalized after experiencing state surveillance of teaching at California State University, Northridge in the 1960s: he “almost single-handedly oversaw the creation of a virtual graduate school in radical/Marxist geography at SFU in the early 1970s” (Breathnach, personal

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<sup>8</sup> Interestingly, many of the early generation of radical geography faculty, including Bill Bunge, Ron Horvath, Dick Peet, David Harvey, Ed Soja, Gunnar Olsson, Doreen Massey and Michael Eliot Hurst, were refugees from a spatial science whose empiricism and methodological individualism had not been able to match up to their progressive politics (Sheppard 1995).

<sup>9</sup> Wisner and O’Keefe (personal communication) lament inadequate attention to the environment notwithstanding the early influence of environmental activism over radical geography: the emergence of political ecology in the 1980s, catalyzed by Michael Watts, Piers Blaikie and Harold Brookfield, enrolled such issues into a Marxian framing.

<sup>10</sup> We are grateful to be able to draw, here, on the recollections of Clark Akatiff, Nathan Edelson, Alison Hayward, Alan Wallace, Audrey Kobayashi, Jim Overton, Damaris Rose, Sue Ruddick, Jack Eichenbaum, David Stea, Prionnsias Breathnach, Ben Wisner, Neil Smith and David Harvey.

communication).<sup>11</sup> The first meeting of the USG was held in Toronto on May 26-28 1974 (Akatiff, 2011), in parallel with the Canadian Association of Geographers (CAG) meeting and ‘under the roof’ of the Toronto Geographical Expedition (see photo).<sup>12</sup> Eliot-Hurst provided vans enabling a group of Simon Fraser students to travel across the country to attend.

The mandate of the USG was:

The purpose of our Union is to work for the radical restructuring of our societies in accord with the principles of social justice. As geographers and people, we will contribute to this process in two complementary ways:

1. Organizing and working for radical change in our communities
2. Developing geographic theory to contribute to revolutionary struggle.

(Akatiff 1974b: 1)

Tensions between theory and practice are evident in these USG goals, and initial debates occurred about whether to use Socialist, Marxist or Radical to delineate the Union. There were plans for a ‘regional hierarchy of communicants’ to distribute mailings, coordinated by Clark Akatiff, to publish in the *Association of American Geographers Newsletter*, *Transition*, and *Antipode*, and plans to meet independently of, but parallel to, national CAG and AAG meetings, as well as regional meetings. Thirty three people are listed as attending the first meeting (four being women; the racial and gender bias is visible in the photo below). In addition, two sessions were organized at the CAG meeting. In 1975 regional meetings were held alongside the AAG national meeting in Milwaukee, with a subsequent national meeting hosted by Blaut in Chicago. Thereafter, the USG held meetings alongside the CAG and the AAG in alternate years until 1981 (when it disbanded). Regional meetings of the USG were also held in the US Midwest and Québec in the late 1970s.

At the invitation of Peet, in 1976 the Simon Fraser USG local edited one issue of *Antipode* (8#3), including articles on anarchism, environmentalism, Ireland and Latin America. This contrasted with the much more Marxist orientation of the other issues of that year. In the meantime, the USG began to publish its own regular journal, *The USG Newsletter*, again initiated from Vancouver. Volume 1 appeared as five issues, the last in summer 1976. It set out to provide a venue for reporting on USG meetings, seminars, bibliographies, course outlines, book commentaries, and event announcements. The second volume included an academic article, on Marx’ theory of circulation, and several others followed. The

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<sup>11</sup> Eliot-Hurst was one of the first North American geographers to declare his homosexuality.

<sup>12</sup> See *Antipode* (1975) 7 (1): 86, on the first annual meeting of the USG.

two issues of Volume 2 (1976-77) were edited by USG locals at Johns Hopkins (Baltimore) and McGill University (Montreal), successively. Québec became an active second Canadian local, its participants (including Damaris Rose and Sue Ruddick) catalyzed by street protests and the left-leaning Parti Québécois. John Bradbury (1942-88) was a vital figure in Montreal, heavily involved in local and international aspects of the USG. His radicalism was formed under the influence of Keith Buchanan and Terry McGee in New Zealand, and then at Simon Fraser before joining the McGill faculty.



Photo: Members of the first meeting of the Union of Socialist Geographers in Toronto, May 1974.

By the 1977 meeting in Regina (attended by Eric) the trappings of an academic organization were in place: an executive committee, membership structure, financial statements, connections with parallel organizations in other countries, instructions to authors, and stillborn plans for a textbook and monograph series. Volume 3 was edited successively in Vancouver, Toronto, Minnesota (on anarchism), and Montreal. At the January 1978 IBG meetings in Manchester, a



USG local was formed in the UK (members of the Vancouver collective also presented papers at the 1978 IBG meeting). By the 1978 USG meeting, alongside the AAG in New Orleans, USG locals also existed in Ireland, Denmark and Sydney, Australia (the latter instigated by Horvath). The editing of subsequent issues of the newsletter alternated between Simon Fraser, McGill and Sydney, before settling at Minnesota where the local collective edited, printed and distributed it (1979-81, including issues submitted from Queen's University, and the London (UK) and Montreal branches). Over time, academic articles became increasingly prominent, with a persistent diversity of theoretical and substantive approaches (including those of anarchist, gay and feminist geography). By 1981, the USG had 180 North American members, and midwest, east coast, west coast and Ontario and Quebec local collectives. *The USG Newsletter* had become a third radical geography journal, alongside *Antipode* and *Transition*.<sup>13</sup>

During the 1970s, forces of conservatism within the discipline and the academy posed continual barriers to the presence of a revolutionary radical geography in North America. Akatiff and Bunge were denied tenure, and in other cases the USG helped catalyze campaigns when others faced a similar threat (e.g., Dick Walker at Berkeley). Eliot-Hurst was replaced at Simon Fraser University, and the new chair set about dismantling radical geography. Horvath left, and when Eric interviewed at SFU in March 1976, the new regime plainly did not know how to react to a quantitative geographer enthusiastically supported by students because of his radical leanings. In 1977, on the Peace Bridge at Fort Erie, Canadian customs seized copies of *Antipode* from the possession of Dick Peet and Phil O'Keefe, on the grounds that they were not 'really geography' (USG Newsletter, 3#2, 1978-9: 5). By the late 1970s, however, radical geography was less preoccupied with breaking away from than breaking into the institutional structures of the discipline. This catalyzed extensive debate within the USG about whether to retain its independence—reinforced by declining subscriptions from an ever-expanding membership. There were also discussions about whether to formalize the relationship between the USG and *Antipode*.

Eric recalls a particularly intense debate, at a USG annual meeting in 1980, about whether to disband the USG, at a time when some USG members (including Eric) had taken the initiative to create a Socialist Geography Specialty Group (SGSG) within the AAG (which only required 100 AAG members' signatures). Eric recalls Neil Smith strategically in favor of shifting energy to the SGSG, with Jim Blaut energetically opposed. The crux of the argument was whether incorporation within the AAG would blunt radical geography's radicalism.<sup>14</sup> The

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<sup>13</sup> Copies of the *Newsletter* are now available at: <http://courses.washington.edu/scgsg/union-of-socialist-geographers-newsletters/>, accessed January 23, 2014

<sup>14</sup> Smith (personal recollection) recalls: "Jim's prognosis was surely correct, and an independent socialist group was obviously ideal, the USG had worked well but wasn't especially building, wasn't expanding quickly, and the political mood was dissipating. We wanted organization for the USG but were resistant in our post-60s

SGSG's officers came from the USG; its stated purpose was: "To examine geographical phenomena critically, questioning the implications of geographical research for the well-being of social classes. To investigate the issue of radical change toward a more collective society" (Socialist Geography Specialty Group 1980: 1). The SGSG grew from 105 to 177 members during the 1980s: the USG was dissolved in 1981. In 1986, SERGE was disbanded (its long-time leader and editor of *Transition*, Larry Wolf, retiring from the University of Cincinnati). Finally, in 1985 ongoing discussions about what the future of *Antipode* should look like, and whether it should go commercial, came to a head. Dick Peet took Eric aside and, much to the latter's surprise, asked whether he would be willing to become co-editor of *Antipode*, with Joe Doherty (St. Andrews University, Scotland), and negotiate a transition to commercial publication with Basil Blackwell. After difficult negotiations with Blackwell, who had the newly appointed editors over a barrel, the first commercial issue was published in 1986, with the stated intention "that *Antipode* will continue to be a forum for the publication of significant contributions to a radical (Marxist / socialist / feminist / anarchist) geography...we will seek to maintain traditional areas of strength in environmental questions, urban political economy and development issues. We intend to improve the journal's coverage of feminist approaches" (Sheppard 2006). A 'Debates and Reports' section, introduced to facilitate polemic and discussion alongside substantive articles, thrived.

### **Critical geography: 1964 – 1986**

Nineteen eighty-six marked not only the commercialization of *Antipode* but also the demise of *Transition*; it was the turning point when radical geography in Anglophone North America became reframed as 'critical'. As radical geography entered into the mainstream it merged with a nascent but, we argue, *already existing* critical geography. The late-1960s to mid-1970s saw a flourishing of different voices in *Antipode*, *Transition*, and the USG newsletters; socialist, feminist, anti-racist, anarchist and environmentalist approaches to studying social problems and advocating social change were all evident. This reflected the multivalent, intersecting protest and social movements unleashed by a 1960s politics of radicalism, anti-racism, sexual liberation and emancipation, in which various protagonists were involved in multiple ways, and the complex linkages between these and academic trajectories. That these voices were progressively less heard with a hardening of orthodoxy, as a Marxist critique of capitalism came to dominate *Antipode*, is hardly surprising. That they existed within or alongside radical geography and in other times and places apart from it, is indicative not only of the transversal and unpredictable intellectual and spatial paths of the evolution of Anglophone North American critical geography, but also of the impossibility of attempts to explore its evolution through a core (Clark, SFU) versus periphery

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way to heavy organization, and this made the USG a bit haphazard." At the time, Eric sided with Neil; on reflection, he wonders what also was lost.

(everywhere else) model of knowledge dissemination. This period was especially important for the establishment of the emerging fields of geographies of race and racism, feminist (Marxist, liberal and other variants) geography, and (although slightly less so) for geographies of sexualities.

In the 1960s the United States was in crisis; anti-war fervour and the civil rights demands of African-Americans had dominated the decade. The discipline of geography was also in crisis, and not only because of its focus on intellectual framings that had their roots in the mathematical abstractions of mechanical social engineering rather than the material realities of social transformation (Peet, 2000). There was another crisis that encapsulated North American geography, albeit one that was not recognized as such. It was that of an 'absent presence', of a normalization of whiteness that went unquestioned; geography was a segregated and institutionally racist discipline. A national survey of geography departments in 1970 found that a total of only 12 African American faculty were employed in the US (just one at the level of full professor) only two of whom were employed at predominantly white universities. A full five years before the advent of radical (Marxist) geography, in 1964, the first attempts to address this segregation were made by Saul Cohen, a professor at Boston University (who in 1965 was to become Director of the Graduate Program at Clark).<sup>15</sup> Invited to become the Executive Officer of the AAG in 1964, he toured a number of southern (traditionally African American) colleges in an exercise aimed at identifying talented students who could join geography training programs, arriving coincidentally at Albany State in Georgia on the day of the riots (Darden *et. al.* 2006). A proposal was developed as a result of his findings to establish within the AAG a Commission on Geography and Afro-America (COMGA) to support the recruitment of African American geographers and research into issues facing African Americans (Deskins and Siebert, 1975).

Five universities that offered graduate programs in geography - Clark, Chicago, Michigan, Syracuse and Wisconsin - were selected to take part in the COMGA project of recruiting undergraduates to enroll in summer institutes. In 1968, Don Deskins at the University of Michigan became COMGA's first director (Darden *et. al.* 2006). Small but significant gains were made. Two surveys were conducted in 1968 on the low levels of participation by African Americans in geography. Two more surveys were conducted in 1970 and 1974 and the *Southeastern Geographer* and *Economic Geography* each dedicated a special issue to geographic research on African Americans, in 1971 and 1972 respectively (Dwyer 1997). A small number of African American geographers began to document experiences of the social problems and issues of political participation they faced, as well as the (under)development of black residential areas. They also

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<sup>15</sup> The extent to which Cohen's activities in attempting to change the racial composition of the discipline were influenced in any way by his association with his Clark colleagues is unclear.

investigated and reported upon their marginalized position in the discipline (Deskins 1969, Deskins and Speil 1971, Donaldson 1969, Horvath, Deskins and Larimore, 1969, Rose 1970, Wilson and Jenkins 1972). However, this level of activity was not sustainable and by the late 1970s COMGA was defunct, with the small gains of the early 1970s being eroded in the 1980s.<sup>16</sup>

During the early 1970s radical geographers' interest in poverty had been inflected with concerns of race as much as those of class. Bill Bunge's DGEI had been formed (in 1968) in conjunction with African American community leaders to highlight the racism and poverty under which daily urban life was lived by African Americans. He and other radical geographers were publishing in *Antipode* on the conditions of life in urban ghettos in the United States and in the developing world (Blaut 1974, Bunge 1971, 1976, Elgie 1974, Harvey 1972, Smith 1974), as were a few African American scholars (Donaldson 1971, Darden 1975).<sup>17</sup> By the mid 1970s, however, Marxist concerns largely turned away from race and racism, an unfortunate turn of events that led somewhat to studies in the global urban north reducing their understanding to an effect of class, and in the global south to their elision with underdevelopment and imperialism. Race and racism, theoretical objects of study so central to the inception of radical geography, disappeared from the agenda. Interestingly, they were just starting to appear in a new trajectory being carved out by North American humanistic geographers interested in the everyday lives of racialized communities (Ley 1974), an approach that was eventually to lead to the new cultural geography.

Just as geographic studies of race and racism operated both inside as well as outside radical geography, so did feminist approaches (Kobayashi 2003). Engaging in social and political movements for civil rights and against war was not only the prerogative of radical geographers. For women entering the discipline it was not only these experiences but also their engagement in the Peace Corps and second wave feminism that marked a changing context (Monk 2004). This was the period when the institutional framing was put in place that would allow feminist approaches to prosper, notwithstanding that in the late 1960s and early 1970s women made up an incredibly small percentage of faculty members. In 1973, for example, women accounted for only 3.4% of the faculty in US and Canadian graduate Geography departments, with just one female full professor (Monk 2006). Notwithstanding the small number of women in the discipline, the Committee on the Status of Women in Geography (CSWG) of the AAG was formed as early as 1971, albeit more by accident than design (Monk 2004). In 1979, the Geographic Perspectives on Women (GPOW) was launched, the AAG specialty group on research on women and gender, and the AAG adopted a bylaw on affirmative

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<sup>16</sup> Although short-lived, COMGA paved the way for the establishment of the AAG's standing committee on Affirmative Action and Minority Status, now known as the Enhancing Diversity Committee (Patricia Solis, personal communication).

<sup>17</sup> There was evidence of some collaboration between members of these two groups, particularly by Bunge and Horvath.

action. A similar picture was played out in Canada a few years later, not least because a number of Canadian feminist scholars who were to play important roles in radical / critical geography had been outside Canada (mostly in the UK and USA) pursuing Ph.D.s in the 1970s, not returning until the early 1980s, when the Canadian Women and Geography Study Group (CWAG) of the CAG was formed (in 1982).<sup>18</sup>

The eclecticism that has come to characterise North American feminist geography was already evident in the early 1970s, via three trajectories: studies simply describing and mapping the differential geographies of men and women, registering their disparate access to services, employment and facilities (Caris 1978, Mazey and Lee 1983); studies of the status and position of women within the discipline (Zelinsky 1973, Rubin 1979); and studies that initially explored gender roles but quickly moved on to feminist approaches exploring the politics and economics of gender relations (Burnett 1973, Breughel 1973; Mackenzie and Rose 1983). The latter field was especially influenced by Marxist and socialist feminist analyses (although not dominated by them, as was the case in the UK) and was indicative of the strong transnational linkages that existed between a number of feminist geographers in Canada, the USA and the UK. As Damaris Rose (personal communication) states “the thinking of some of us was shaped interactively rather than sequentially by influences on both sides of the Atlantic.” Indeed the establishment of the Women and Geography Study Group of the Institute of British Geographers in 1980 was predominantly due to the presence in the UK of a Canadian socialist feminist, Suzanne Mackenzie. Suzanne’s ] charismatic presence, and warmth, wit and expansive nature, influenced a whole generation of women geographers to embrace feminism.

A third significant dimension of critical geography was also to emerge in this period, although without any institutional recognition. It was in the USG newsletters and *Antipode*, but also other journals (Winters 1979) that studies of gay geographies first emerged in the late 1970s, along with informal meetings of gay and lesbian geographers at the annual conferences of the AAG (Ketteringham 1979). These tentative forays mark the origins of the sexuality and space studies that from the mid-1990s onwards have been an integral element of critical geography.

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<sup>18</sup> The Canadian Women and Geography Study Group is one of the more influential study groups in the CAG, its founders including Fran Klodawsky, Audrey Kobayashi, Suzanne Mackenzie, Damaris Rose, Sue Ruddick and Pamela White. Its members have played leading roles in the CAG, including past presidents Alison Gill and Audrey Kobayashi (also AAG past president). It also sponsors one of the CAG’s annual lectures: The Suzanne Mackenzie Memorial Lecture. Unfortunately, CWAG, like GPOW, still has no written history of the organization.

### **Critical geography: mid 1980s onwards, ever onwards or back to the future?**

While the progress of radical geography through the late 1960s and 1970s into the mid 1980s was an assertive one, that of critical geography was less assured, more hesitant. And while radical and critical voices were growing they had yet to gain widespread acceptance from the mainstream, which was still a decade or so away. Nonetheless, it was evident that this intensely political period in geography was providing a new intellectual leadership. Many of its earliest practitioners were progressing through the academic ranks, to become not only full professors but also internationally renowned scholars, developing new fields of study, occupying prestigious chairs and becoming presidents of geographical associations, editors of journals, and medal winners. It was in this period, in 1983, for example, that the critical geography journal *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* was launched, to become extremely popular with a wide range of scholars. Unquestionably, this groundwork set the stage for a remarkable increase in the number of younger scholars who from the 1990s onwards were to identify as being on the 'Left'.

The early 1980s had been a period of internal critique for radical geographers - to maintain a commitment to revolutionary ideals or to join in the mainstream and accept a more fluid conception of praxis. For feminist geographers and geographers of sexuality studies it was a period of consolidation, for anti-racist geographers one of retrenchment. In short, it was a mercurial time for radical / critical geography, only to become increasingly turbulent as postmodernism and poststructuralism started to make their impact felt on the discipline in the mid to late 1980s. The widespread adoption of these philosophical approaches across the social sciences and humanities (and beyond) has been identified in geography as the so-called critical / cultural turn. It was to lead to a convergence of interests in the recognition that race, gender and sexuality, as class, were social and cultural constructions, charged through with power lines, social meanings and identities, meritorious of their own theoretical framings and united through a shared relational epistemology (Peake 2009). Since the critical / cultural turn, with its prioritisation of the cultural (often at the expense of the political-economic) and the rise of identity politics (often to the occlusion of class politics), North American radical / critical geography has diversified into a prolific twisting and geographically expanding skein of ways of knowing, sharing a progressive politics and activist bent (in theory, if not necessarily in practice). Indeed, by the late 1990s radical / critical geography was to become the new canon, the new mainstream, accompanied by a proliferation of practitioners and publications.

Notwithstanding these achievements, the 1980s and 1990s cannot be characterised as a glowing affirmation of the relentless rise of radical / critical geography. By the late 1980s, in many respects the institutional picture remained virtually as dismal as in the preceding two decades; it was proving very difficult to diversify the academic profession in North America. Although there had been an increase in the number of women gaining faculty positions, they were still

significantly underrepresented. In 1988-89 in Canada women held only 8.1% (up from 3.4% in 1973) of faculty positions and there was still only one female full professor (Mackenzie 1989).<sup>19</sup> A 1987 survey of geography departments in North America also found just over 5% (n=73) of academic geographers were people of colour (African-Americans, Hispanics, Native Americans and Asians) (Shrestha and Davis 1988),<sup>20</sup> and a more recent survey of black geographers in the United States put the figure of practitioners at just over 60 (Darden and Terra 2003). Although women have made increasing forays into the discipline, people of colour still find geography institutionally racist, a space that has not only proven difficult to enter but also one that a number who found a way in have subsequently decided to leave.

The 1990s witnessed a number of significant developments in radical / critical geography that helped it gain ground in the mainstream. *Antipode* not only remained viable but increased its number of issues. There were significant debates taking place about the future direction of Marxist geography between those like Harvey, whose focus remained primarily on class, and others such as Gibson-Graham (1996) whose Marxist analyses were also informed by feminist and queer theory. The turning point for feminist geography to enter the mainstream came in 1994, when Susan Hanson gave her presidential address at the AAG on feminist geography and *Gender, Place and Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography* was established. In 1996 a Sexuality and Space Specialty Group was finally founded within the AAG, and in 1998 a workshop on race and racism was held at the University of Kentucky that attempted to form a Concerned Group on Race and Geography aimed at persuading Geography departments with graduate programmes to recruit people of colour. This was largely unsuccessful but the workshop did lead to two journal special issues on race and space (*Social and Cultural Geography* 2000 1 (2) and *Professional Geographer* 2002 54 (1)). It also reinvigorated efforts to establish a new generation of scholars and studies on the social construction of race and critical race theory, including the founding of an AAG Diversity Task Force within the AAG in 2003, largely through the efforts of Joe Darden, and, a series of conferences on race, racism, inequality and spatial justice. The first of these, organized by John Frazier, was held at SUNY Binghamton in 2002, followed by biennial meetings at Howard University (Washington, DC), Texas State University, the University of Miami, Binghamton again, San Juan, Puerto Rico, and Fort Worth, Texas (2014). Despite growing popularity, these conferences have featured little in the consciousness of white critical / radical geographers, indicative of the still deep fault lines working against the incorporation of race and racism into their lexicon.

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<sup>19</sup> This figure is for universities with doctoral programmes. When those universities with masters programmes are added the figure rises to 10.6% (Mackenzie 1989).

<sup>20</sup> Given the relatively low response rate to this survey, just over 40 percent, it is likely that this figure is inflated. Non-responses were geographically concentrated in predominantly white areas of the US where most probably no people of colour were employed.

The increasing influence of critical geography has been signaled by the emergence of various new organisations, or at least new names. In 1997 the first international group to officially adopt the title of critical as opposed to radical was the International Critical Geography Group (ICGG). Shortly after (2002) the AAG's Socialist Geography Specialty Group changed its name to the Socialist and Critical Geography Specialty Group. Critical geography was unquestionably flourishing, but for many it was also losing sight of its alternative nature and political purpose, and thereby its viability. The neoliberalization of the North American academy (and beyond) haunted radical / critical geography throughout the 1990s, replacing engagement and activism with professionalization and catalyzing what Castree (2000) dubbed academicisation, i.e., a reluctance to engage in activism as it endangered progress up the academic ladder. In response, new radical / critical spaces began to emerge beyond the academic mainstream. The ICGG, formed out of the Critical Geography Forum (an international listserv), stated its mission as:

the theory and practice necessary for combating social exploitation and oppression. We have formed this international association to provide an alternative to the increasingly institutionalised and corporate culture of universities. We believe that a 'critical' practice of our discipline can be a political tool for the remaking of local and global geographies into a more equal world ([http://econgeog.misc.hit-u.ac.jp/icgg/Statement\\_ICGG.html](http://econgeog.misc.hit-u.ac.jp/icgg/Statement_ICGG.html), accessed March 12, 2011).

The ICGG has held six international conferences thus far, the first being in Vancouver, followed by Korea (2000), Hungary (2002), Mexico City (2005), Mumbai (2007) and Frankfurt (2011). In 1999 there was another attempt, led by Don Mitchell of Syracuse University, to engage in democratic knowledge production. Named the People's Geography Project, its major goal was "to popularize and make even more relevant and useful to ordinary people the important, critical ways of understanding the complex geographies of everyday life that geographers have and continue to develop." (<http://www.peoplesgeographyproject.org/>, accessed March 12, 2011). The short lived nature of this exercise may well speak to its lack of a popular base (unlike Bunge's, also short lived but grass-roots, in your face, DGEI).

Most recently, the 2000s saw the launch of two new journals. *ACME: An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies* began in 2002. The journal's purpose, like that of *Antipode*, is to provide a "...forum for the publication of critical and radical work about space in the social sciences.... Analyses that are critical and radical are understood to be part of the praxis of social and political change aimed at challenging, dismantling, and transforming prevalent relations, systems, and structures of capitalist exploitation, oppression, imperialism, neo-liberalism, national aggression, and environmental destruction." (<http://www.acme-journal.org/index.html>, accessed March 12, 2011). *ACME* differs from *Antipode* and other radical journals in two significant ways. First, it is disseminated for free



(although supported by Canadian SSHRC funding, which made possible its hosting at UBC, Kelowna) with a circulation far beyond that of most commercially published journals. Secondly, it publishes in languages other than English, thereby challenging the Anglo-American hegemony of critical / radical geography.<sup>21</sup> The newest introduction, in 2008, is *Human Geography: A New Journal of Radical Geography*. Its underlying rationale is the “need to retain control of the value produced by academic labor” ([www.hugeog.com](http://www.hugeog.com), accessed March 12, 2011). In many ways, including its founding editor (Peet) and geographical location (Clark), *Human Geography* harks back to the early days of *Antipode*. Presumably in reaction to the trajectories of a commercialized *Antipode*, *Human Geography* is opposed to the removal of publishing from the hands of academics into those of publishers owned by a few multinational media conglomerates, and seeks to address “the wide range of urgent social and political issues...hardly mentioned in the existing journals” ([www.hugeog.com](http://www.hugeog.com), accessed March 12, 2011). *Human Geography* is run on a shoe-string budget as a non-profit organization, publishes a hard copy journal, is explicitly Marxist in tone, and publishes in Spanish as well as English. These examples of ongoing experiments in critical and radical academic geographic publishing speak to the ongoing struggles to carve out space for radical / critical geography in the contemporary increasingly neo-liberalised academic world.

## Conclusion

Little is known of the precursors to the last four decades of radical / critical Anglophone geography in the United States and Canada – who, and where, were the players, the networks, the catalysts. What we know is patchy at best, and documented overwhelmingly in favour of white males. What we also know is that the stakes of not engaging with the multifarious historical geographies of radical geography are too high; these unearthed genealogies of radical / critical geography demand interrogation. That so many accounts start not in 1964 but in 1969 speaks to the as yet largely uninterrogated whiteness that pervades the field, a field that has as yet not addressed the trampling underfoot of anti-racist efforts in establishing the grounds on which radical / critical geographies have arisen. Although there has been interest in excavating the advent of the DGEI and *Antipode*, huge gaps remain in our understanding of these now historical moments, and most especially those of the USG. Founded respectively at the University of Michigan, Clark University, Massachusetts, and Simon Fraser University, Vancouver, these three operations formed discernable nodes of radical geography whose spatialities spread out tentacle like, transcending not only the US – Canada border but extending to Europe and Australasia. The last four decades have seen

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<sup>21</sup> Debates about this linguistic hegemony have been a defining aspect of radical / critical geography since the early 1990s, influencing practices in a number of critical journals of geography. When Linda was managing editor of *Gender, Place and Culture* the journal began publishing abstracts in Spanish, and now also in Cantonese, making at least this journal more visible to the non-Anglo speaking academic worlds.

the coarse thickening of these now transnational networks and of many others, as (some) academic appointments are increasingly opened to (some) non-nationals, as attendees at (some) national conferences are increasingly multinational, and as technological developments aid the development of multinational teams of researchers. The spatialities of US and Canadian radical /critical geography increasingly criss-cross the globe, albeit unevenly and still heavily biased towards Anglophone circuits.

The seemingly inexorable march forward of journals and organisations in the 21<sup>st</sup> century would appear to indicate that radical / critical geography in the US and Canada is alive and well; it has succeeded in its aim of advancing critical geographic theory. As we argue, it is now canonical in mainstream Anglophone human geography. But has radical / critical geography succeeded in its aim of increasing access to the means of knowledge production, through both pedagogy and research, to become a peoples' geography that is grounded in a desire to work towards change through praxis?<sup>23</sup> On this question we think the jury is out. We have not had the space in this paper to investigate the extent to which pedagogy has taken on a radical / critical vein. We do know that many individuals are politically engaged and some discipline-wide interventions have been extremely successful, such as that of people's mapping, which through GIS and other technologies has been of use to various groups and in aiding understanding of major disasters. We both believe that much has been achieved, but also that superficial agreements to differ have taken the place of vigorous debate; that methodological progress overall has been stultifying; that engagement with epistemology has been often at the expense of praxis; and that diversification and pluralism are leading to a lack of a common purpose (see Barnes and Sheppard 2009 on economic geography; Peake forthcoming on feminist geography). While we do not think the terms 'critical' and 'radical' have become so widespread and scatological as to be meaningless, chaotic concepts, we do not think their uneven progress can be left unquestioned.

There is also too much at stake in not continuing to question and to break down Anglo-American hegemony in critical / radical geography. The work that has been done in democratising relations of knowledge production, risks being diminished if we continue to reproduce ourselves in our own image. If critical / radical geography is about where we can see geography from, how far we can see,

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<sup>23</sup> David Harvey defined a peoples' geography as follows: "The geography we make must be a peoples' geography, not based on pious universalisms, ideals and good intents, but a more mundane enterprise that reflects earthly interests, and claims, that confronts ideologies and prejudice as they really are, that faithfully mirrors the complex weave of competition, struggle, and cooperation within the shifting social and physical landscapes of the twentieth [and twenty-first] century. The world must be depicted, analyzed, and understood [as] the material manifestation of human hopes and fears mediated by powerful and conflicting processes of social reproduction. Such a peoples' geography must have a popular base, be threaded into the fabric of daily life with deep taproots into the well-springs of popular consciousness. But it must also open channels of communication, undermine parochialist worldviews, and confront or subvert the power of the dominant classes or the state. It must penetrate the barriers to common understandings by identifying the material base to common interests" (Harvey 1984: 7).

and where we can learn geography from (Harvey 2000: 254), then North American geographers may have the furthest distance to travel.

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