

## The 1998 Carl O. Sauer Distinguished Scholarship Award



It is indeed a pleasure and an honor to present CLAG's 1998 Carl O. Sauer Distinguished Scholarship Award to **Karl S. Zimmerer**.<sup>1</sup> Latin America has been the arena of his geographical investigations for nearly two decades. Its people and places (present and past), environments and development, and landscapes and livelihoods have inspired the diverse works of this Berkeley-trained geographer. Since 1995 he has served as Professor in the Department of Geography at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

According to my reconstructions he is the ninth geographer to receive this award. CLAG began honoring its members, and later associated colleagues, in 1977 in awarding Preston James for "Outstanding Contributions in Teaching, Research, and Service." Six other CLAG members were so honored between then and 1985. In 1986 this award was superceded and redirected into two separate categories: the Eminent Career Award, and the Distinguished Scholarship Award. The latter category's recipients were B. L. Turner II in '86, and Leví Marrero in '87. In 1989 CLAG's two major honors were renamed - the Preston E. James Eminent Latin Americanist Career Award, and the Carl O. Sauer Distinguished Scholarship Award. Criteria for the Sauer Award include an outstanding publication, or series of publications, in recent years. As I will recount in a moment, Karl Zimmerer's recent publication record certainly recommends him for this honor. The first Sauer award went to Peter Ward, distinguished urbanist and Mexicanist. In order, the other recipients have been Campbell Pennington 1990, Linda Newson 1991, Alfred Siemens 1992, Alan Gilbert 1993, William Doolittle 1994, George Lovell 1995, and Karl Butzer 1997.

As somewhat of an aside, I can't help calling attention to some patterns that may, or may not, be evident here. Whether mere coincidence or *complot*, first and foremost, it looks like we may have the beginnings of a *tocayo* dynasty here! Last year's CARL Sauer award went to *Karl Butzer*, eminent student of *Carl Troll*. Now this year's award to *Karl Zimmerer*! And, it even seems to be extending into [end p. 103] the realm of the companion award, with *Carl Johannessen* receiving the Preston James Award. I would also like to note that the majority of the Sauer awardees have been Mexicanists: Ward, Pennington, Siemens, Doolittle, and Butzer. For the rest, save perhaps for Newson, Mexico has been more than a transit zone or fly-over space. For Zimmerer, as I'll indicate, Mexico served, as for Sauer and so many of us, an introduction to Latin America and its geography. And in some minds, we are meeting on Mexican territory right now! But before this gets completely out-of-hand, and the contours of a full-blown Carlist/Mexicanist conspiracy emerges, I would like to turn this back to the subject at hand:

### ***Karl's recent contributions to Latin Americanist geography and how he came to produce them.***

Karl got his start in Latin Americanist field studies at Antioch College in Yellow Springs, Ohio in the 1970s under the influence of Robert Bieri, a marine biologist and inspired teacher. Karl, a native of New Jersey, made the most of Antioch's experimental approach to education, with its dual emphases on close faculty-student interaction and self-directed study. He also took advantage of Antioch's work-study internships that put him into research projects and field studies in Montana, the Smokey Mountains, at Wes Jackson's Land

Institute in Salinas, Kansas, and most formatively, leading a three-month "mobile field school" in the American Southwest where in situ instructors included noted ethnobotanists and ecologists such as Gary Nablian and Deborah Rabinowitz. Important elements informing his current approaches to human environmental geography were gained from these undergraduate experiences.

As for Latin America, an extended field trip that Karl and Medora Ebersole (a fellow Antioch student, filmmaker and now Karl's wife) - who I am pleased to note is also here tonight - took to Mexico with Bieri in one of his legendary "field-mobiles" (a van fitted with hammocks and all manner of natural historical instrumentation a la Alexander von Humboldt) opened their eyes and minds to tropical work and travel. Zimmerer was headed toward a career in biological ecology, (his 1980 B.S. degree is in biology and physics) but took Wes Jackson's advice to look into Carl Sauer's "Berkeley" approach to geography as well. A meeting with James J. Parsons, as for so many of us, proved pivotal. Latin Americanist geography, along the Sauer-Parsons line - with updated modifications of course - was to become his calling. At Berkeley he produced an excellent Master's thesis on peasant management of common bean variation in northern Peru. He followed this up with a CLAG award-winning dissertation on agrarian structure, crop ecology, and Quechua agricultural knowledge as related to the loss of biological diversity in the Southern Peruvian Andes. Both his thesis and dissertation were directed by Parsons. From there he has tilled these topics and related issues to great effect.

In the past decade he has published some two dozen articles and book chapters on a range of questions and problems stemming from his initial field work in Peru, and more recently in Bolivia. His work has appeared not only in geography journals such as the *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, *Geographical Review*, *Journal of Historical Geography*, *Economic Geography*, *Journal of Biogeography*, but also in cognate journals such as *Human Ecology*, *Economic Botany*, *Journal of Ethnobiology*, *Gikos*, *Conservation Biology*, *Journal of Soil and Water Conservation*, as well as multidisciplinary fora such as *Bioscience* and *Nature*. He also has a new co-edited volume entitled *Nature's Geography: New Lessons for Conservation in Developing Countries* (1998). This collection features ideas and case studies that describe new findings on how environmental changes, ranging from conservation to degradation, entail processes that are distinctly "non-equilibria!" The book offers a geographical framework for assessing these non-equilibria changes through multiple scales (from local to global) and time frames. Five of the book's dozen case studies deal with Latin America.

Karl also has an impressive record of time spent in the field, and especially what he has been able to accomplish while there. His research efforts have taken him to Mexico, Costa Rica, and the Andean countries. More recently he has been invited to work with a range of agencies, institutions, and NGOs on environmental-development problems. This work has taken him to a number of Latin American nations, particularly Peru and Bolivia, but also Mexico and Chile. His Latin Americanist involvements outside of academic geography also include participation in [end p. 104] the Latin American studies centers at the universities where he studied and has taught - Berkeley, Chapel Hill, and now Madison - and active membership in the Latin American Studies Association (LASA).

In a scant ten years or so, Karl Zimmerer has become a respected authority on the geography of the Central Andes but also on the problems of erosion - involving both biogenetic and soil processes - and peasant subsistence in general. And, I could go on for a good while (as many of you are well aware ... ) enumerating his many awards already received at the University of Wisconsin and within professional organizations for his research and scholarship, but this would certainly erode the time available here to talk about the key reason he has received this award tonight.

In 1996 he published *Changing Fortunes: Biodiversity and Peasant Livelihood in the Peruvian Andes*. It is the first number in a new series on Critical Studies in Geography published by the University of California Press. By the end of this year, it will have been reviewed in a dozen or more journals. The response has been quite

positive, even laudatory. Among the most enthusiastic is Harold Brookfield's review in the *Annals* of the AAG (1998). I can't think of a more accomplished yet critical reviewer - and one with a truly global understanding of the material under review. As Brookfield notes: "Karl Zimmerer's flow of articles about changing agrobiodiversity and peasant livelihood in the [Peruvian Andes] has generated rising interest since it began to appear in 1991. Now he has brought this work together in a magisterial book based on extensive field research [and so on]." Elsewhere he writes: "Zimmerer has written an immensely comprehensive and satisfying book, rich in detail, well argued in interpretation, always with one eye open for regional contrasts outside his own valley." And finally, "Zimmerer's book will become, and remain, a classic in - his own term - environmental geography." That Brookfield, an erstwhile critic of the "Berkeley school" and the Sauerian approach to the study of peasant subsistence should find such merit in *Changing Fortunes* is sweet indeed. I can't think of a much better encomium. Nor can I think of a book in the past few years by a Latin Americanist geographer - nor a Latin Americanist for that matter - more deserving of our praise than *Changing Fortunes* and its author Karl Zimmerer.

***Kent Mathewson***

<sup>1</sup> The text reproduced here is a somewhat extended version of that presented at the 1998 CLAG Awards Banquet in Santa Fe, New Mexico. In this sense it is an attempt to include and convey the more informal side (and asides) that occasionally characterize CLAG's award presentations. **[end p. 105]**