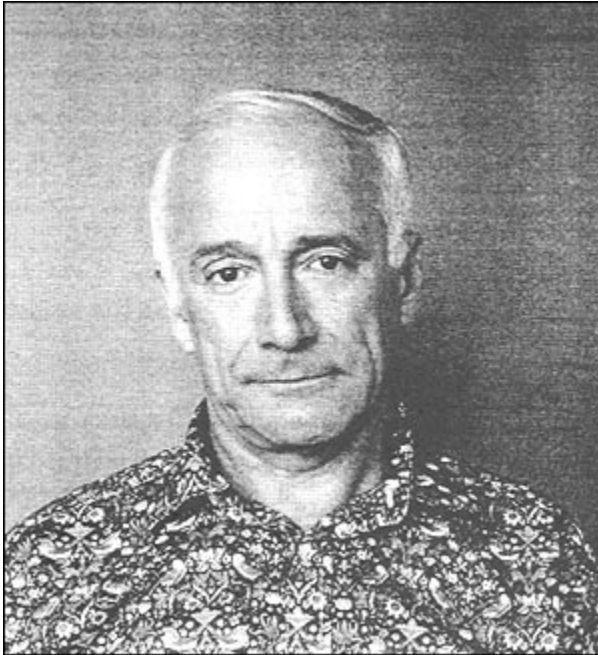


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David Preston

The 1999 Preston E. James Eminent Latin Americanist Career Award



It is with very great pleasure that the Conference of Latin Americanist Geographers honors David Preston with the Preston E. James Award for his eminent career as a Latin Americanist geographer. David's four decades of research, writing and teaching extend across a period of profound and important transformations in Andean America. As a companion of, and commentator on, these transformations, he has made many contributions to our understanding of rural change in the Andes and in Latin America more generally. At the same time, his work has furthered more general, theoretical interpretations of agrarian and rural change.

David's earliest work was in Ecuador. His Ph.D. at the London School of Economics and Political Science addressed the relationships between rural

settlement, land use, and ethnicity, a theme that was to recur throughout his career. By the mid-1960s, he extended his field research to Bolivia, where he participated in the continent-wide initiative on land tenure and land reform, coordinated by the Inter-American Committee on Agricultural Development (CIDA). Nominated by Tom Carroll, via Eric Hobsbawm via Perry Anderson ("never before or again [have I been] associated with so many so varied stars," comments David), he studied the impacts of Bolivia's land reform on freeholding communities in the altiplano of Orura. He then built on this research with work on the influence of small towns on agricultural communities in the Bolivian highlands.

By the mid-1970s, David was back in Ecuador studying the nature and effects of emigration in highland rural communities. This interest in migration and, more generally, the mobility of rural residents has characterized David's work ever since. At a time when many others were still writing about self-contained peasant communities and the continuities in Andean agriculture, this research was an early statement on the prevalence and profundity of processes of rural change in Ecuador. David and his colleagues raised issues that to this day continue to challenge rural studies in the Andes: how to understand the links between migration and agriculture without automatically invoking notions of agrarian and social crisis; how to understand the aspirations of Ecuadorians who have one foot in a rural economy and another in an urban one; and how to understand the relationship between agriculture and off-farm activities?

The early 1980s marked the beginning of another of the distinguishing features of David's career: the re-study of localities in which he had already worked. This has only been possible[**end p. 161**] because of his deep and constant commitment to field work. This long term engagement with the field has allowed him to chart histories of modern geographical change with ethnographic and empirical data collected at different points of time. This is surely a critical contribution. The themes that such re-studies have allowed David to address are captured in paper titles such as *Restructuring Rurality: Batallas in the 1990s* and *From Hacienda to Family Farm: Changes in Environment and Society in Pimampiro, Ecuador*. These long-term engagements with

particular places are pivotal to the ways in which David's work has helped us to understand rural Latin America.

It is presumably this sensitivity to longer term processes of change that has inspired his more recent research into the long-term relationships between rural livelihoods, agriculture, and environmental change in Bolivia and Honduras. This work brought together physical and human geographers from five countries in a collaboration coordinated by David. His field component of the project, in Tarija, has already generated papers that further enhance our understanding of the complex relationships between population, environment, and livelihood, challenging dominant notions of environmental crisis in this region.

Like a number of former recipients of this Award, David's work has taken him beyond Latin America. Between 1984 and 1987 he was a Senior Research Fellow at the Research School of Pacific Studies at the Australian National University, at the invitation of Harold Brookfield. While there he worked in Java, Luzon (the Philippines), and Papua New Guinea, again on issues of household livelihoods and agriculture. This work led to the paper *Too Busy to Farm*, which David considers "maybe the most important that I've written." Though specifically about Java, this paper also seemed to encapsulate many of the insights of his work in the Andes, emphasizing the need to understand peasant agriculture, land use, and environmental change within the broader livelihood and economic contexts in which peasants are embedded.

While many of the people whose livelihoods David studies spend much of their time on the move, his own livelihood has been remarkably stable. David's entire thirty-five year teaching career was based in the Department of Geography at Leeds University in England, where *inter alia* he also served stints as Dean of the Faculty of Social and Economic Studies and Director of the Centre for Development Studies. David is now a Senior Fellow of the Department of Geography. Ostensibly two-thirds retired, his research program (with increasing links to practice and policy) only seems to grow as he continues his work in Bolivia and elsewhere. There is much more that could be said about this eminent career: the textbooks on *Latin American Development* that many of us have used in the classroom; the generous interest in the work of young scholars; the long list of publications; and on and on. But it is above all for his sustained empirical contribution to our knowledge of rural and agrarian change, and the dynamics of peasant livelihoods in the Andes, that the Conference of Latin Americanist Geographers takes the greatest pleasure in bestowing on David Preston the Preston E. James Eminent Latin Americanist Career Award of 1999.

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Anthony Bebbington

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