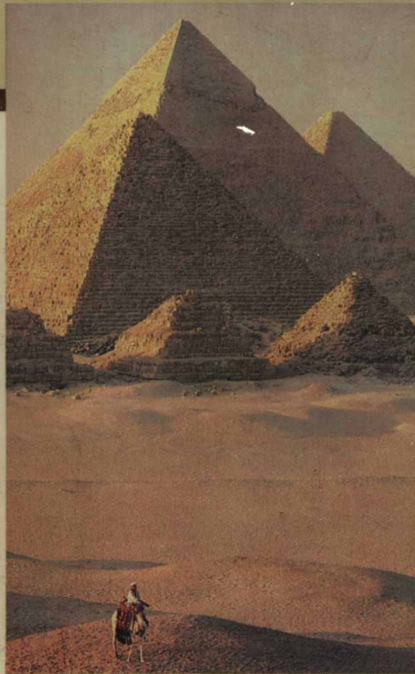
W. A. Douglas Jackson

THE SHAPING OF OUR WORLD



A HUMAN AND CULTURAL GEOGRAPHY

世界的形成：人文地理学
98.84
K901/J14

THE SHAPING OF OUR WORLD

A HUMAN AND CULTURAL GEOGRAPHY

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John Wiley & Sons
New York Chichester Brisbane
Toronto Singapore

Cover photos: **The Image Bank**
Japan: *Harvey Lloyd*
Egypt: *Gabriel Covian*
New York: *Harvey Lloyd*

For Kay
and
In memory
of
three beloved Afghan hounds,
Dodon, Rucidon, and Buzz

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Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Jackson, W. A. Douglas (William Arthur Douglas), 1923–
The shaping of our world.

Includes indexes.
1. Anthropo-geography. 2. Man—Influence on nature.
I. Title.

GF41.J325 1985 304.2 84-7518
ISBN 0-471-88031-0

Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Preface

The world we inhabit, as exhibited in patterns of human activity—settlement and occupance of area or place, movement, association, territorial organization, economic endeavors, and communication—is one largely of our own creation. No single scientific discipline or point of view can adequately or satisfactorily explain the diversity of these patterns. Geographers are ideally suited for the study of such patterns, but extensive borrowing from other disciplines has contributed significantly to the development of geographic insight.

The geographic perspective is spatial or territorial in the way in which it organizes its thoughts about human activity patterns, but anthropologists, economists, political scientists, sociologists, and other social scientists have much to tell about human behavior and motivation. Moreover, research into the nature and performance of humankind has moved in other directions where the talents of linguists and psychologists, for example, have been brought to bear; some of their findings have enriched the assumptions and conclusions of geographic research. But in this reaching out to other disciplines and fields of study, the geographer has not ignored the contributions of history and of historians, for how else could geography gain the perspective of time and change?

This book focuses on the world created by humankind, as expressed in the ways people have in effect dealt with the world. Human geography is the geography of humankind; cultural geography is the geography of human expression, inventiveness, and expectation. Only a fine line divides the two subfields and it is a division that need not concern us here. Both human and cultural geography find ultimate expression in the landscape, which while a part of the earth's physical whole has, nevertheless, been modified by human will and endeavor.

The Industrial Revolution, beginning about the mid-eighteenth century in England, has been a catalyst for the enormous transformation of the modern landscape of humankind. There have been massive movements of people, different settlement patterns have been created, new forms of energy have come into use—and these developments have in total greatly altered traditional values, uses of resources, and human associations. This revolution continues to play out its themes, in somewhat modified form, throughout the world today.

The patterns on the earth, however, are not solely the product of the Industrial Revolution. They represent a composite of forces and factors that reach deep into history. An understanding of the modern landscape requires that we do not reject the past. Rather, we must be aware of it, and attempt to identify its more important legacy. But we must not stop here. Within our modern world, however complex and confusing the patterns, however difficult the task of assessing relationships among phenomena, there are forces propelling the activities of humankind into new spatial forms as yet dimly seen, if seen at all. The incredible speed with which the communication (or electronics) revolution has descended on us is ushering in a geography that will see old patterns yielding to new as the landscape succumbs to further change. To say that humankind is always coming out of the past and moving into the future is to suggest simply that a degree of tension ac-

companies the compression of time people are forced to live with. And this tension is a feature of life in the United States no less than in South Africa, Poland, Vietnam, Saudi Arabia, El Salvador, or any other place on earth. A change in the pulse of life in the United States is felt all over today s world.

Because of the component of fast change, this book begins with a reminder that humans have not only created the environment in which they live, their milieu, but they have also attempted to be at home in it, to experience it. Although humankind is apart from nature, it remains very much a part of nature. From earliest times, people have sought to understand the relationship between nature and culture, the milieu in which they live. Culture, the product of a rapidly developing mental capacity and the remembrance of past experience, has shaped our patterns of thought, expression, and activity so much that culture components, such as language and religion, in turn shape behavior and other cultural processes.

Humankind divides the earth and its resources, though it is not a very just or equitable distribution. Inequity is the basis of much political activity whether conducted by national or international associations or by jurisdictions that have immediate effect on daily lives. Associations that are more specifically social in objective, though not exclusively so, reflect also how we feel about each other and the extent to which we include or exclude. Our group standards often exclude our sharing with the less privileged.

Cities have been the focus of much human energy since earliest times. A new type of city emerged with the Industrial Revolution, and changing forms of energy, transportation, and the Electronics Revolution may fashion still newer city types. The impact of humankind's identification and usage of the earth's resources have also led to profound variations spatially in the realm of agriculture and food production. But the modern burdens placed on resources raise pertinent questions of how humankind will fare in the future. Populations are steadily growing and multiplied needs and wants place additional pressures on familiar patterns and places. What the balance will be no one can foretell, although on the basis of what is known, it is certain that the future will hold more of today's stresses. Nor can we say how population growth will guard the earth's environment from further jeopardy and the human habitat from shantytown. We can attempt only to provide an assessment of the shape of our world and how it came to be this way.

It is to these themes that this book is directed. It does not attempt to introduce students to every term or concept used by human and cultural geographers. Rather, it seeks a synthesis, and one that is the product of historic forces, as a means of helping students comprehend the larger world they inhabit.

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Acknowledgments

To these colleagues throughout the land and abroad who made critical suggestions as the manuscript of this book progressed, I am deeply grateful. None was more generous in support than Kit Salter, to whom I owe a special debt. His sensitivity to the goals of the book were always evident in the reviews that he prepared.

Joyce Barnum, of the Reference Division, Suzallo Library, University of Washington, was everything that a reference librarian should be: painstaking, thorough, and always patient. John and Helen Sherman provided invaluable cartographic assistance, especially in the development of the maps. Sally Kostal, formerly of Goodyear Publishing Company, knew how to be supportive when, at times, words of encouragement were sorely needed.

I must also speak of friends and associates. They were near during the formative stages of the book and at a critical period of illness, and they offered, as well, much-needed and creative distraction at other times: Noel McGary, Douglas Fleming, Michael Talbott, Alfred Schweppe, Nané Brennen, and Kay Baillargeon.

The following must be thanked for their contributions in reviewing the manuscript: Martyn J. Bowden, Clark University; Gary Fuller, University of Hawaii; Peter J. Hugill, Texas A & M University; Warren Hultquist, California State University—Sacramento; Karl Raitz, University of Kentucky; Michael M. Swann, University of Nebraska; and Joseph Velikonja, University of Washington. Naturally, the responsibility for errors of commission and omission are mine.

Many persons have contributed to the final appearance of the book. I am especially indebted to Maura Grant for her ability to provide many of the photos that have illuminated the spirit and thrust of the text. At John Wiley and Sons, Miriam Navarro, senior production supervisor, gave dedicated attention to bringing text, maps and photos together, and for her I have nothing but admiration. Finally, Katie Vignery, my editor, has been a source of inspiration and encouragement; and it is to her that I express my thanks.

Finally, the opportunity to complete the manuscript as a scholar-in-residence at the Rockefeller Study and Conference Center (Villa Serbelloni) at Bellagio, Lake Como, Italy, in August–September 1983, is one that will always be cherished.

W. A. Douglas Jackson

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Introduction

The whole speculative impulse and systematic zeal of traditional philosophy from Aristotle to Hegel was directed at first toward an exhaustive treatment of the relationship between man and nature. Later, it moved toward the relationship between man and man, and still later to the relationship between man and history. But philosophy ignored the "human environments," the reality that for centuries represented the concrete world in which we made our anguished efforts to live, cohabit, and survive.

Tomás Maldonado,
Design, Nature, and Revolution, 1972

"Space" is the basic organizing concept of the geographer (Whittlesey, 1954, p. 28). But, this word can be "a treacherous philosophical word" because of problems of interpretation and definition (Blaut, 1961, p. 1). Given this difficulty, then, geographers must distinguish their field of study from the endeavors of other social and natural scientists by the kinds of questions they ask about the world around. These may best be described as questions pertaining to relationships and associations between phenomena that are distributed over the surface of the earth. Understood in this manner, geography can rightfully be called a spatial science.

This focus on relationships and associations has underlain geographic inquiry from earliest times. Such questions, moreover, may be studied for the past as well as for the present. This broad time perspective brings geographic study close to history. Historians, however, are primarily concerned with the record of human activity over a given period of time. Geographers, on the other hand, study human-activity patterns in a spatial context whatever the period of time. Above all, they recognize that because activity patterns are not set for all time, relationships and associations are always in a state of flux, "a coming out of the past and a going into the future."

THEMES IN GEOGRAPHY

As we know from the texts of early Greek observers, the basis of geography was the quite ordinary human curiosity about the earth and the people known to live on it. We need not concern ourselves here with a precise dating of the origins of this interest or of geography as a recognizable field of study. The Greek scholars of the sixth century B.C. and later, especially the group of philosopher-naturalists, certainly laid the foundations of a rational, as opposed to a mythologic or religious, inquiry into the order they believed underlay the structure of the universe. But, it had to wait until the work of Eratosthenes (c. 276–196 B.C.) before the term geographer came into use.

Since that early period, geography as an identifiable body of knowledge and interpretation has been subjected to the shifting currents of philosophical thought and marked by significant regional cultural orientation. Much of what was once contained within the broad rubric of geography (meaning in the classical sense earth description) has broken away to constitute more specialized fields of study, especially in the natural sciences. Among these breakaway fields are astronomy, meteorology, and geology.

As for the narrowing focus of geographic study, it, too, has been subjected to changing emphases, both as knowledge of the earth and its inhabitants has grown and as perceptions of humankind's place have changed. From the middle of the nineteenth to the early part of the twentieth century, especially in Western Europe and the United States, the nature of the relationship between humans and the earth's physical environment was a dominant theme in geographic writing. Whether this relationship was expressed in terms of environmental control or influence or in terms of the restraints imposed on the capacity of humans to see or to take advantage of opportunities or possibilities inherent in the environment, the *human-environment theme* was and has remained, although somewhat modified today, an integral part of geographic thought and writing.

Overlapping the period in which human-environment relationships drew scholarly attention was another period when the study of regions was important (Whittlesey, 1954). An interest in observable differences among peoples and places has been part of the geographic field since the Greeks made a point of drawing attention to them. However, the study of regions and their differences assumed a major place in Western geography in the early decades of the twentieth century.

This interest in regional or areal differentiation (Hartshorne, 1959), however, created, for a subsequent generation of geographers, significant philosophic and methodological difficulties. The emphasis on differences led to the conclusion that every region or landscape was unique. This, in turn, prompted the criticism (after World War II) that regional geography afforded some excellent portraits of segments of the earth's surface, but it did not lead to any underlying body of theory to advance knowledge of the processes involved in shaping patterns on the earth's surface. On the other hand, geographers, engaged in dividing the earth's surface into regions, found that the criteria they chose for identifying regions were not necessarily accepted by all colleagues because of highly subjective methodologies. However, geographers continued to hold an interest in regions and the differences that places exhibited in their physical and cultural content (Fleming, 1973).

What the foregoing discussion suggests is that, since World War II, there has been a tendency to break with older traditions in geography and to advance a perspective on the field that demands definition and investigation along stricter lines. To emphasize their search for a new focus of study, many of the postwar generation of geographers termed their field the "new geography." What intrigued this new generation was the notion that there are principles that govern human spatial behavior and that these principles are generally applicable over the earth's surface (Abler et al., 1971). According to these objectives, the field of geography has been clearly identified as a social and behavioral science.

Even though they may recognize that some features of the earth's surface are due to unique causes—that is, an association of phenomena unlike any other association—geographers of the behavioral school have emphasized the generality of human experience, whatever the cultural heritage, wherever the location on the earth. Essential to this emphasis, then, has been the need to define human activities in spatial terms and to recognize a causal relationship between spatial structure and spatial process. "People generate spatial processes in order to satisfy their needs and desires and these processes create spatial structures which in turn influence and modify geographical processes" (Abler et al., 1971, p. 60).

The remarkable strides made by contemporary geography to develop a methodology that would permit precise measurement of geographic phenomena have been accomplished by intense interest in a number of subthemes. The 1950s and 1960s saw studies of economic regionalization (an interest shared with European and, especially, Soviet bloc countries) and of central place. Almost parallel in time was the growth of interest in innovation diffusion as a spatial process, a topic that had already received much attention in Sweden.

In the 1960s, the civil rights movement drew attention to the contribution of blacks to American life and to the fact that, a century after emancipation, blacks in the United States continued to face a multitude of social barriers that, upon inspection, revealed themselves in the spatial structure of society. In Great Britain, concern with questions of inequality and inequity produced a trend in geographic thinking that was inspired by, and drew heavily on, Marxist notions of conflict and exploitation. A similar concern in the United States spawned a group of geographers who found expression in a "radical" publication, called *Antipode*.

The larger awareness that grew out of the civil rights movement and the war in Vietnam was accompanied by a concern for humankind's general impact on the environment. This shift in interest among some geographers was stimulated by what was coming to be called the environmental crisis. Geographers in the United States had to a large degree thrown out their interest in the physical environment with the "new geography" of the postwar period. Now, they found that the natural and biologic sciences had moved quickly to tackle the problems that suddenly seemed to command atten-

tion. These were dominated by the growth of population; the expansion of cities, industries, and the automobile; the apparent depletion of natural resources; and the deterioration of the environment in general.

The behavioralist emphasis in modern geography, which now can be seen in perspective, was part of a movement within the social sciences generally. This brought a reassertion of interest in the human condition and to a fuller geographic treatment of it. Some geographers had never been fully convinced of the validity of some of the claims made for the "new geography"; others had rejected behavioralism because they found that it denied a realm of human knowledge to which they were especially committed, namely the intuitive. Basic to this school of geography, which called itself humanistic, was the recognition that geographers are not merely detached observers of phenomena "out there," but that they are very much part of the process of observation and analysis. Whether they admitted it or not, the geographers' perceptions of the world colored their analysis.

Humanistic studies, in general, have found expression in a broad range of topics: concern for humanity as a whole and for those who have been excluded from full participation in society; concern for society and the values that shape human behavior and the landscape; and, ultimately, concern for the individual in society and his or her fuller personal development through the expansion of awareness of the world and his or her agency for the creation of a more humane world. Above all, humanistic studies have reaffirmed an interest in landscape studies.

THE SEARCH FOR COMPREHENSION AND UNDERSTANDING

There is a widespread desire on the part of students in a world that is subject to forces that cause major changes in every field of human endeavor to come to grips with them. They want to understand, first of all, what has gone into producing the world and the patterns of relationships and associations that they have been taught to identify. Second, they want to understand the nature of the forces that are subjecting these patterns to change and modification. Above all, they want to know if they really are powerless to have any positive input into the course of events that shape and reshape their world. They are concerned, in the final analysis, as to how they can remain human when they seem powerless to have any impact on events and institutions that seem to demean their humanity as well as how they can find meaning in the world through a structuring of the mass of information with which they are bombarded daily.

Zelinsky has written that "genuine progress in human welfare, ultimate success in the prolonged struggle to become fully human, and most immediately evading disaster of a truly major magnitude for man and most of his fellow passengers on Spaceship Earth, may well hinge upon the promptest sort of corrective action" (Zelinsky, 1970, p. 498).

Geography and its subfields of human and cultural geography may not be the single discipline that will shed light on all the problems facing mankind and offer solutions, but "it is hard to imagine any workable therapy that excludes it" (Zelinsky, 1970, p. 498).

But, geography and the study of geography require something of the student in return. Young students of the field need, above all, to become aware of themselves in society. They need also to be aware of the values by which their society lives. Buttimer has stressed, with considerable feeling and conviction, that "to possess a system of values means that one wants and is convinced that the world ought to have a certain structure" (Buttimer, 1974, p. 38). Values influence our choice of alternatives and patterns of activity. Values, Buttimer emphasizes, make our actions intentional and im-

pose responsibility. Such a notion has concerned thinkers from Plato onward, but no one has put it more aptly, nor more poetically, than William Wordsworth:

> Happy is he who lives to understand, not human nature
> only, but explores all nature,—to the end that he may
> find the law that governs each.
> (*The Excursion*, Book 4, 1814)

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