

## CLAG Carl O. Sauer Distinguished Scholar Award for 2004: Joseph L. Scarpaci

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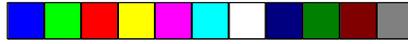
“This gringo is different.” As I combed through the dossier sent to me by the CLAG Honors Committee to prepare my remarks about Joe Scarpaci, these four words jumped off the page. They are written, most revealingly, not by a Latin Americanist geographer but by a Latin American geographer, someone who now teaches at the Universidad Católica in Chile. He states that he first met Joe when he — the writer that is — was an undergraduate student in the early 1980s, studying geography in a Chile then ruled by that most infamous of geographers, Augusto Pinochet. Our man in Santiago continues:

During those days of military dictatorship Chile was very isolated from the outside world. For a group of final-year students in Geography, myself included, the presence of Joe [among us] was extraordinarily interesting, [affording us] the opportunity to exchange concepts and views about the development of our field in other parts of the world. Joe’s answers to simple questions like “What is it like to be a geographer in the United States?”; “What are the kinds of jobs that geographers do elsewhere?”; or “What are the main trends of Geography in the world [at large]?”—these and other issues were a significant stimulus for us, [enabling] us to see professional challenges beyond our short-sighted view. After Joe’s departure, we were surprised to receive letters from him, sending us additional information about different aspects of Geography. Our conclusion at that time was: “This gringo is different. He is really involved with people.”

A few years passed before a “new opportunity” presented itself for the two to meet. “Again,” we are told, “Joe helped open our eyes not only in a professional perspective but also in a political perspective, pushing us to discuss issues that were not allowed in those days.”

Of all the accolades heaped on Joe by the many students as well as colleagues who took time and consideration to write on his behalf for the Carl O. Sauer Distinguished





Scholarship Award, these observations to me are the most prescient and pertinent, and certainly the most precious.

Joe's career trajectory spans two overlapping periods and research interests, though it is punctuated throughout by an eclectic curiosity that sees him try his hand, most innovatively, at all sorts of scholarly and artistic endeavors. Stage One evolves naturally from his 1985 doctoral thesis on "Accessibility to Medical Care in Chile," winner of the Association of American Geographers Jacques M. May Dissertation Prize, and runs to the mid 1990s, focusing on issues related to health care delivery and the interface between medicine and social science. Stage Two, which emerges in the early 1990s and runs to the present, sees Joe develop an interest more explicitly in urban and social geography, with a focus on issues related to heritage and globalization, and a spatial shift from Chile to the Caribbean, Cuba most specifically. His passion for Latin America and all things Latin American — including a rare brand of rum or a well-crafted cigar — has led Joe to log up, to date, some seven years residency in the region over the past three decades. During that time Joe has written, co-authored, or edited five books on Latin America, along with two dozen book chapters and over thirty articles in scholarly journals, not to mention scores of reviews and encyclopedia entries. Anyone who has tried to work in Cuba in any professional capacity knows how challenging that can be. Joe's sojourns there resulted not only in the award-winning *Havana: Two Faces of the Antillean Metropolis* (2002 [1997] with Roberto Segre, and Mario Cogula. 2002 [1997] (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of New Carolina Press), which in 1998 received the *Choice* Outstanding Book Award and in 2001 the *Lingua Franca* Academic Excellence Award, but also in an arrangement to publish a revised and updated Spanish edition with the Casa de las Américas. The publishing house of the Cuban Ministry of Culture, the Casa de las Américas is one of the most respected institutions in all Latin America, admired even by the staunchest critics of the Castro regime — among them Joe himself.

His scholarly credentials, therefore, bear the hallmark of quality and substance, but Joe is also blessed with a creative mind and a penchant for political activism. These traits see him push the formal boundaries of academe by writing and directing plays, film scripts, and video projects or participating in radio broadcasts, whether as a presenter himself or as the person whose expertise is sought in an interview.

It was to Guatemala that Joe Scarpaci traveled in 1975 to learn Spanish and have his first field-experience of Latin American geography. In a fitting twist of fate, it was to Guatemala he returned, three decades later, to be honored by CLAG as the 2004 recipient of the Carl O. Sauer Distinguished Scholar Award.

