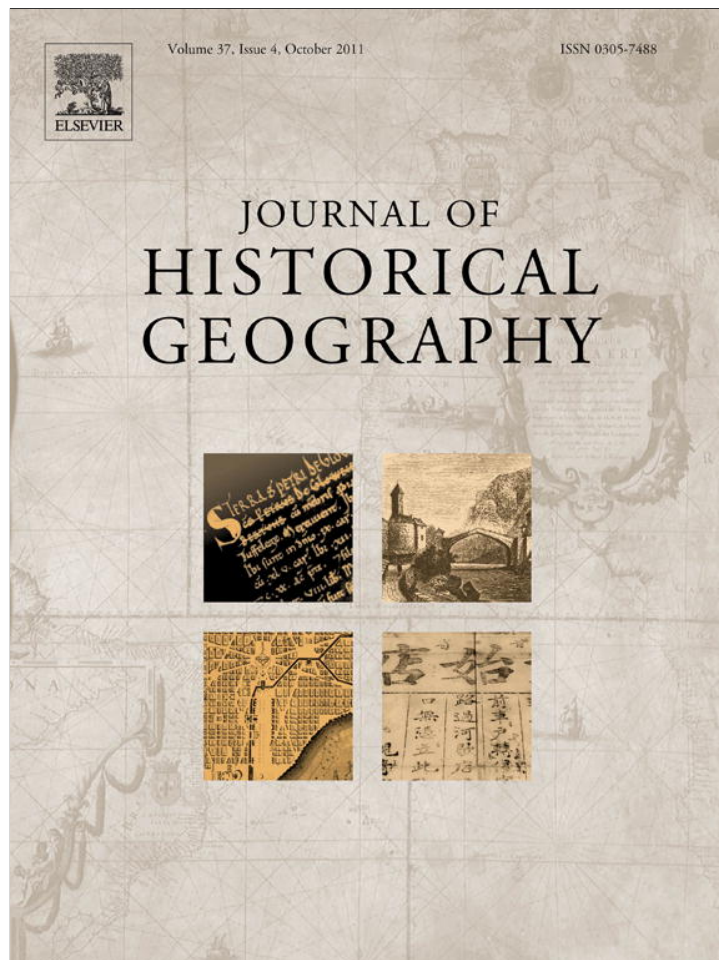


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Peter H. Herlihy, Kent Mathewson and Craig S. Revels (Eds), *Ethno- and Historical Geographic Studies in Latin America: Essays Honoring William V. Davidson*. Baton Rouge, Geoscience Publications, 2008, 346 pages, US\$25 paperback.

Homage is paid in academia in myriad ways. A venerable tradition is the *Festschrift* that honors the life and work of a distinguished individual through a collection of essays by former students or close colleagues. William V. Davidson fits the profile, though he continues like the best retirees to labor assiduously on the research front. *Festschriften*, however, can be uneven, lackluster, and disappointing assemblies that fall short of the high standards of the celebrated figure. Not so these essays which are uniformly excellent and are an exemplary contribution to what may be a dying genre.

'Geography,' Mark Bonta recalls Davidson counseling him, 'should be fun' (p. 194) – and, one hopes, professionally rewarding and fruitful. Editors Peter Herlihy, Kent Mathewson, and Craig Revels chart Davidson's stellar trajectory from boyhood thrills to 'geography questions' (p. 8) to 'traveling in a single-engine airplane throughout Middle and South America' (p. 9), and the pivotal decision to abandon law school and respond to 'the clarion call to action and redirection' (p. 10) by embarking on graduate studies in geography first at Memphis State University and then the University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee. Having completed his doctorate in 1972 Davidson taught for three years at Arkansas State University before taking up a position in geography and anthropology at Louisiana State University, his home from 1975 to 2002 where he established an eminent career as teacher, supervisor, and scholar of the ethnogeography of Latin America, especially Central America and in particular Honduras.

In his characteristically 'irreverent musings' on the role of the doctoral thesis in Latin Americanist geography, Daniel W. Gade reveals that 'less than a tenth of geography dissertations pass through an editorial process of a publisher and come out as a monograph' (p. 40). Davidson's treatise on the 'Historical geography of the Bay Islands, Honduras' was among that 'less than a tenth,' and served his own PhD students as a model just as he did a mentor. Gade attributes the essence of good mentorship to the ability to communicate 'one big thing: if you have the gift of curiosity' then 'follow that sense of discovery where it takes you' (p. 46). The contents of the *Festschrift* do precisely that – deservedly honoring Bill Davidson but showcasing a quirky array of talent along the way.

Peter Herlihy and Frederick Wiseman inaugurate the section titled 'Central American sites and situations' with an investigation of 'the dooryard orchard-garden,' an enduring practice among indigenous Mayas in Belize and Yucatan, where in pursuing a policy of heavy-handed resettlement (*congregación*) in the sixteenth century 'the Spaniards set fire to the fruit trees around [Maya] houses to force them to vacate their communities' (p. 76). Derek Smith comes next, offering (following Davidson himself) a study in the 'geography of survival' (p. 85) dealing with the Mayangna or Sumu of Nicaragua. Joby Bass and Laura Hobson Herlihy explore issues of identity. In Belize Bass finds that 'being Garífuna is linked with a specific local ecological

setting' whereas 'being Creole, apparently, is not tied up with any ecological setting as much as it is with being Belizean' (p. 122). Miskitu peoples in Honduras, Hobson Herlihy asserts, 'do not consider themselves to be a mixture of Blacks and Indians, but a mixture of all past and present-day Atlantic Coast residents, including the British' (p. 131). Kendra McSweeney applauds Davidson's mentorship by following the sage advice of one of *his* respected mentors, Jim Parsons, who found that 'it pays to keep going back to an area, a people' (p. 144). One episode in McSweeney's 'return fieldwork' involved a six-week sojourn in Tawahka territory in eastern Honduras, where her encounters with local people were enriched by her showing them photographs taken in 1933 by Smithsonian researcher Allen Payne. Scott Brady is another Davidson protégée whose 'going back' (p. 161) to Guajiquiro in western Honduras, a highland Lenca township where 'during a decade of observation' Brady notes a marked advance in ordinary people's 'consciousness of forest preservation' (p. 164).

With Honduras remaining the common thread, Benjamin Tillman (pp. 177–206) examines church locations in plazas throughout the country; Mark Bonta reflects on what makes the 'República Libre de Olancho' (p. 202) such a 'Wild East' (p. 198); Taylor Mack relays the failed attempts of Luis Diez Navarro to have the fortified port of Omoa 'control trade and stamp out all contraband' (p. 207) in the mid-eighteenth century; and Craig Revels subjects key toponyms to critical scrutiny to conjure up the mahogany trade that 'dramatically transformed the economic, cultural, and physical landscape' between 1750 and 1850.

In 'Farther afield: Latin America at large,' five pieces take us, for the most part, beyond Honduras and Central America, though Davidson-related themes and connections still abound. Kent Mathewson affords us a fascinating peek of 'montubio' culture in the Guayas basin of Ecuador, imparting 'the aura of either (or both) Afro and Amerind descent combined with Euro-ethnicity' (p. 241). Mário Hiraoka and Stephen Thompson look at cattle ranching in the Amazon floodplain. Two Bills (Woods and Denevan) fête their namesake by reporting on Amazonian dark earth soils – a valuable synthesis of work published mainly between 1874 and 1977. And a third Bill (Doolittle) urges us, in relation to settlement processes operating in eastern Sonora in Mexico, to accept 'an author's words on their own merits' rather than 'read the text through a filter of our own making' (p. 299) – something to which Davidson was never prone. Miles Richardson concludes with by a far-flung inspection of 'dark Christs and brown Virgins' in Honduras.

Historical geographers of every stripe will find something here to arouse their curiosity or perhaps even satisfy it. If not, that pleasure is guaranteed should they choose instead to search out a published work by the man so richly and commendably honored.

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