Dear GORABS Members,

On behalf of the GORABS Board, we hope that you will enjoy this Summer 2020 edition of the GORABS Newsletter. The advent of the Coronavirus pandemic, of course, meant that the AAG Annual Meeting that was supposed to be held in Denver was canceled in lieu of a fully online meeting. This has been a difficult year for GORAS and for all of us. But, as you will see, we have begun some new initiatives that we believe will strengthen our group going into the future and reassert the importance of the study of religion in the discipline of geography.

Please keep an eye out for announcements about these initiatives on our new GORABS webpage, which can be found at: https://www.gorabsaag.org/. You can also find us on Facebook at: https://www.facebook.com/GeographyOfReligionAndBeliefSystemsGorabsAag/ and on Twitter at https://twitter.com/gorabsAAG.

-Vincent M. Artman, GORABS Chair, and Maxim G.M. Samson, GORABS Secretary & Vice-Chair

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GORABS News

Please note the following GORABS-related information:

1. **GORABS Statement of Solidarity against Racism and Police Brutality** (p. 4)
2. **David Sopher New Scholar Award & Wilbur Zelinsky Award Announcement** (p. 5)
3. **GORABS is recruiting members to serve on the board** (p. 5)
4. **Participate in our “Virtual Brownbag” series** (p. 5)
5. **Forthcoming book to include contributions from several GORABS members:**
   - *Religion, Sustainability and Place: Moral Geographies of the Anthropocene*, Edited by Steven E. Silvern and Edward H. Davis (p. 6)
6. **Call for contributors for upcoming book:** *COVID-19 and an Emerging World of Ad Hoc Geographies* (p. 7)

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GORABS Mission Statement

The central objective of GORABS Specialty Group is to encourage and advance the study of the geographical dimensions of religious phenomena and belief systems. This includes, but is not limited to, the study of spatio-religious aspects of human behavior, socioeconomic and political issues, material culture, gender role, and human-environment relations from a religio-geographical perspective.

GORABS intends to achieve its objectives by organizing scholarly paper presentations and discussion of sessions at the professional meetings, developing strategies to facilitate teaching the geography of religions, publicizing information about GORABS, establishing contact with scholars in other related disciplines, and by seeking funding for research pertaining to the geography of religions.
MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

Dear GORABS Members,

Typically, this space is reserved for a “pre-conference address,” wherein the Chair reflects on the past year and discusses what we can expect at the upcoming AAG conference. But, of course, this was not really possible this year.

Despite a few challenges, the 2019 AAG meeting in Washington, D.C. was quite successful. Although we only had a modest number of sponsored sessions, each of them was well-attended. Likewise, while one of the presenters for the Annual Lecture was unfortunately unable to attend, Dr. Peter Hopkins, one of the co-founders of the Annual Lecture series, gave a fascinating talk on Islamophobia, which also closed out our Ruby Anniversary year.

The 2019-20 year has presented unique challenges for GORABS and its members, not the least of which was the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic and the cancelation of the 2020 Denver Annual Meeting. Had the regular Annual Meeting proceeded we would have seen a modest increase in the number of sponsored sessions over last year, which I take to be an encouraging sign of GORABS’s continued relevance in the discipline. In the event, however, no GORABS-sponsored sessions were able to take place as part of the online AAG meeting that replaced the Denver event.

Perhaps not surprisingly, given the chaotic state of affairs, we did not receive many submissions for the David Sopher New Scholar Award, and none for the Wilbur Zelinsky Award. Our judges opted not to grant any award this year. I would like to take this space to extend my sincere thanks to the scrutineers who graciously volunteered their time and effort to review the submissions. If you or one of your students is interested in applying for either one of those awards, please do not hesitate to reach out.

We are already beginning to plan for the 2021 meeting under the assumption that it will happen online. I am very happy to announce that Dr. Ken Foote, who had agreed to present this year’s GORABS Annual Lecture, “Shadowed Ground, Sacred Place: Reflections on Memory, Memorials and the Spatiality of Public Commemorative Rituals,” has already agreed to give the Annual Lecture at the 2021 meeting instead. If you have any ideas for a session that you would like to organize, particularly around the topics of the COVID-19 pandemic or social justice, please let me or any of the other Board members know.

GORABS has been increasingly visible online. Our social media accounts (on Facebook at https://www.facebook.com/GeographyOfReligionAndBeliefSystemsGorabsAag/ and on Twitter at https://twitter.com/gorabsAAG) are more active than ever. Furthermore, our official web page has transitioned from the old WordPress site to https://www.gorabsaag.org/, which we hope will better promote the activities of GORABS members, serve as a clearinghouse for calls for papers, and function as an archive of previous newsletters and other items of interest.

In a more serious vein, many of us have been affected by job loss, the rapid and often disorganized “pivot to online teaching,” school closures, stay-at-home orders, increased parenting duties, and many other hardships that have made the business of teaching and doing scholarship substantially more difficult, and the time with which to do it more fragmented. Furthermore, the murder of George Floyd on May 25 triggered unprecedented nationwide protests that continue to this day. These events also forced us as scholars, as geographers of religion, and as members of the AAG to recognize and reckon with the struggles faced every day by Black geographers and other geographers from marginalized communities. Discussion of the violence and oppression suffered by our friends, our colleagues, our students, our communities, and our families can no longer be ignored,
downplayed, or put off for another time. A full statement of GORABS’s position on racism and police brutality is published in this newsletter, and as Chair of GORABS I want to reaffirm this specialty group’s commitment to addressing systemic inequity.

It has been my pleasure to be involved with GORABS over the past few years, and I have found it to be a congenial and welcoming community of scholars. I want to thank all of the other members of the GORABS Board who have demonstrated their immense flexibility, creativity, and commitment over the course of the last year. Without their hard work, none of the exciting new initiatives that are upcoming would have even been possible. But we have a long way to go not only to grow our membership, but to do so in a way that both broadens and deepens our representation. To this end, I would like to encourage everyone, particularly scholars from historically marginalized communities, to consider not only becoming GORABS members, but also serving on the Board and assuming a leadership position in our specialty group.

It is my hope that the study of religion can assume its central place in the discipline of geography. That will mean continuing to strengthen GORABS as an organization and demonstrating its importance vis-à-vis the issues of the day and to the discipline as whole. As always, if you have any comments, suggestions, or proposals regarding these or any other matters, I urge you to reach out to me.

Be safe.

Vincent M. Artman
Geography of Religions and Belief Systems Statement of Solidarity

The Geography of Religions and Belief Systems Specialty Group (GORABS) expresses its unconditional condemnation of anti-Black racism, militarized policing, and all other forms of oppression. We affirm our support for the struggle of Black geographers and all activists and protesters in the community who fight against this oppression every day. Following the lead of the Black Geographies Specialty Group, the Queer and Trans Geographies Specialty Group, the Indigenous Peoples’ Specialty Group, and the Latinx Geographies Specialty Group, among others, we express solidarity with all marginalized peoples and call on the AAG and all geographers to resist by any means necessary structural racism and violence, police brutality, and white supremacy.

Recent events in the United States have once again brought into stark relief the profound, racialized inequities that pervade American society, which are too often overlooked, downplayed as someone else's problem, or simply ignored. The murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, David McAtee, and Ahmaud Aubrey are only the latest in a long history of violence perpetrated against people of color. It is not enough to say that responsibility for this brutality can be attributed to racist structures of state, to the dehumanizing economic system that has left millions in grinding poverty, or to the white supremacy that has characterized much of American history. All of these things are to blame. But responsibility, ultimately, is woven into the very fabric of our society and of our lives.

As fundamental parts of our lives and of our society, religion and other belief systems are thus inexorably tied to issues of racial injustice. While religion is frequently a potent symbol of hope and a unifier of people, it is just as often been employed as means to divide, to downgrade, and to 'other.' Whether in justifications for the violence of colonialism, the destruction of places of prayer for marginalized people, or discriminatory immigration policies, religions and belief systems are intimately bound up with systems of oppression. Only recently have we witnessed the appalling spectacle of chemical weapons being employed against peaceful protesters to allow the President to pose with a Bible in front of a hijacked church, putting into stark relief how geographies of religion are interlaced with geographies of violence. It is the task of geographers of religions and belief systems to confront this violence, both in our scholarship and our lives, and to commit ourselves to supporting our colleagues and those in our community who are most affected by it.

This begins with amplifying the voices of marginalized peoples in our scholarship, centering their histories in the classroom, promoting them in our departments and institutions, and decolonizing our course curricula. But our efforts cannot end there. These can only be first, partial, steps towards a fuller reckoning with the legacies of racism and oppression in the academy, in our communities, and in society at large. GORABS stands with all those seeking to achieve those ends.

Black lives matter.

Signed:

The Board of the Geography of Religions and Belief Systems Specialty Group
**THE DAVID E. SOPHER NEW SCHOLAR AWARD 2021**

**Description:** The purpose of the David E. Sopher New Scholar Award is to promote intellectual inquiry from new scholars into geographies of religions and belief systems through the presentation of papers at the AAG meeting. Papers will be judged on potential contribution to the field of Geography of Religions and Belief Systems, organization, and written composition.

**Eligibility:** Both graduate students and untenured faculty, who are not currently serving on the GORABS Board, can apply for the award.

**Award:** The amount for the 2021 award is a travel grant of $250. The recipient will also be given an official certificate at the AAG Awards Luncheon.

**Disbursement:** A check will be disbursed to the winner at the 2019 Geography of Religions and Belief Systems Annual Business Meeting at the AAG event.

**Requirements:** The paper and application form must be submitted in rich text or Microsoft Word format by March 21, 2021. The paper must subsequently be presented at the national AAG meeting, though it does not have to be in a GORABS-sponsored session. A panel drawn from the GORABS Board will judge the papers and determine a recipient. The winner will be announced in time to attend the Awards Luncheon with a GORABS representative. GORABS reserves the right to not make an award in a given year.

**THE WILBUR ZELINSKY AWARD 2021**

GORABS has recently inaugurated The Wilbur Zelinsky Award, which students can apply to upon submitting a session of papers to the AAG, having first taken out student membership in GORABS and received GORABS group sponsorship. This award was first presented in 2018. Applications are now open for The Wilbur Zelinsky Award 2020, whereby a certificate and $100 will be given to the best session of papers that qualifies in the above categories.

**GORABS IS RECRUITING**

If you are interested in serving on the Board of GORABS, particularly if you are from a historically underreported group, please consider joining our group and becoming part of the Board. Your participation will help to strengthen our group and shape its direction going forward.

**VIRTUAL BROWNBag SERIES**

With the “pivot to online” and the advent of Zoom, the Board has decided to inaugurate a new “Virtual Brownbag” series that will feature short lectures by geographers of religion, followed by discussion from attendees. We are particularly interested in featuring scholars from Latin America, Asia, or Africa who may not always be able to attend the AAG Annual Meeting, but who want to communicate their research to a wider audience. This should be an exciting new venture, and we hope that this series will help to keep us geographers of religion more connected over the course of the year.

Inquiries regarding the Sopher or Zelinsky Awards, about serving on the GORABS Board, or about participating in our “Virtual Brownbag” series may email any of the following officers:

Chair: Dr. Vincent Artman, Wayne State University, vincent.artman@wayne.edu
Secretary & Vice-Chair: Dr. Maxim Samson, DePaul University, msamson6@depaul.edu
Assistant Secretary: Dr. Nathan Burtch, George Mason University, nburtch@gmu.edu
New Book to Include Several GORABS Members

Religion, Sustainability and Place: Moral Geographies of the Anthropocene
Edited by Steven E. Silvern and Edward H. Davis
Palgrave Press (London) forthcoming in early 2021

This book explores how religious groups work to create sustainable relationships between people, places and environments. This interdisciplinary volume deepens our understanding of this relationship, revealing that the geographical imagination—our sense of place—is a key aspect of the sustainability ideas and practices of religious groups. The book begins with a broad examination of how place shapes faith-based ideas about sustainability with examples drawn from indigenous Hawaiians and the sacred texts of Judaism and Islam. Empirical case studies from North America, Europe, Central Asia and Africa follow, illustrating how a local, bounded, and sacred sense of place informs religious-based efforts to protect people and natural resources from threatening economic and political forces. Other contributors demonstrate that a cosmopolitan geographical imagination, viewing place as extending from the local to the global, shapes Christian, Jewish and interfaith groups’ struggles to promote just and sustainable food systems and battle the climate crisis.

List of Contributors

Vincent M. Artman
Center for Peace & Conflict Studies
Wayne State University, USA

Madden Bremer
Geography and Sustainability Department
Salem State University, USA

Kendyl Crawley Crawford
Virginia Interfaith Power & Light, USA

Edward H. Davis
Department of Geography & Environmental Studies
Emory & Henry College, USA

Madeline Duntley
Department of Sociology
Bowling Green State University, USA

Judit Farkas
Department of European Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology
University of Pécs, Hungary

Alice Hague
The James Hutton Institute, UK

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Samuel DeWitt Proctor School of Theology
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R.D.K. Herman
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Peter Klepeis
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Nora McNamara
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Steven E. Silvern
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James L. Wescoat Jr.
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Stephen Young
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Call for Papers: COVID-19 and an Emerging World of Ad Hoc Geographies

Stanley D. Brunn, Ph.D. (Emeritus Professor)
Dept. of Geography, University of Kentucky, brunn@uky.edu

Background

Most of us are following the daily news about this pandemic and reflecting about what geographers and others in related space, place and environment disciplines and fields can/might contribute to our understanding. Geographic perspectives play a very useful and important role in our understanding about “what is happening where and why.” Papers are being sought for an interdisciplinary and international book on the causes and impacts of the coronavirus on populations, economies, politics, institutions and environments. The contributions will come from those in the humanities and social/policy science disciplines as well as emerging transdisciplinary fields including sustainability, gender, aging, health care and epidemiology, security, interfaith dialogue, art, music, theater, visualization (cartoons, websites, film, news reporting), economic and social well-being, law, borderland studies and even climate change.

The volume will include chapters about the virus in the Global North and South written by scholars from all continents and world regions. Some may have longstanding interests in health/environment issues; others may wish to use their systematic, regional and technical skills to explore a new subject at some personal/local or transborder/global scale. Chapters (4-6000 words) would be original and due in late 2020/early 2021 after the virus (we hope) has subsided. Some may wish to write about early stages, others when at its peak, and still others once it has run its course.

Below are listed the tentative sections and chapters:

1. Introduction
2. Origins (myths and realities): From Localization to Globalization
3. Media Coverage and Reporting (print, visual, internet; fake and real news)
4. Visualization (photos, tv coverage, cartoons, ghost-scapes, “closed” signage; govt warnings)
5. Mapping the Causes, Effects, Impacts – local and global, “ghost-scapes,” diffusion, boundaries (personal, community and political), diffusion, networks, impacts and impacted places and populations, restrictions, delivery of services, closures, responders, WHO networks, laboratories, manufacturers, etc.
6. Daily Living (children, elderly, the poor, unemployed, distraught, marginalized, vulnerable)
7. Health Care
   a. Medical Supplies and Demands (populations and areas)
   b. Vaccinations
   c. Social Distancing
   d. Immediate and Delayed Response: response health care/medical teams, etc.
   e. Priorities and Funding (populations and areas – who gets what?)
8. Impacts
   a. Daily Life and Living (shopping, working, transport, shopping, on children, households, health and welfare, streets, restaurants, leisure spaces
   b. Institutions- Winners and Losers (regions, places, economies): education, hospitality, airlines, stock markets, corporations, health, courts, public welfare
   c. Communities: education, faith, health, ethnic, leisure, arts and entertainment
   d. Cancelations of Elections, Events, Sports, Conferences, Religious Services, Holidays, etc.,
   e. Rescheduling: elections, megaevents, surgeries, construction projects
   f. Travel Restrictions (local and international) and Tourism
   g. Border Security (including refugees)
9. Alternate Worlds
   a. Teaching and Learning (close and distance-learning; creative alternatives)
   b. Parenting and Caregiving
   c. Traveling
   d. Shopping
   e. Human Behavior (activity spaces, alternative travels, emergency networking, etc.)
   f. Worlds of Silences (the visible (ghost-scapes), workplaces, malls, streets and the invisible)
10. Political, Organizational and Transboundary Responses
    a. Initial and Follow-up Worlds: denials and revelations
    b. Setting Priorities: preparedness and ill-preparedness
    c. Assistance, Leadership and Messaging: countries, WHO, CDC
    d. Sharing and Cooperating NGOs: professional and volunteer organizations aiding victims
Minutes of GORABS Remote Business Meeting, April 2020

The annual business meeting of the Geography of Religions and Belief Systems (GORABS) specialty group of the Association of American Geographers (AAG) was held virtually on Friday April 10, 2020, 2:00-3:00 PM (ET)

Present: Vincent Artman (VA), Chair; Max Samson (MS), Secretary & Vice-Chair; Nathan Burtch (NB), Assistant Secretary; David Rutherford (DR), Treasurer; David Butler (DB), Immediate Past Chair; Ed Davis (ED), Ordinary Board Member, Steven Silvern (SS), Ordinary Board Member; Samuel Nielson (SN), Graduate Student Ordinary Board Member

Minutes recorded by Max Samson.

I. Information pertaining to AAG 2020

• Introduction by VA: It is good to meet remotely. Had been talk of having online GORABS sessions at AAG but in the end we opted not to proceed with them this year. Would be a good idea to send out a short GORABS newsletter to keep people updated however. ED suggests that it may be good to make a link between COVID-19 and work relevant to GORABS, given the ways in which many religious organizations are responding. DB mentions that Stanley Brunn is even submitting an atlas on these issues, so he may want to contribute something. ED notes that there are debates about the religious right and a refusal to let the pandemic affect their rights to practice. Contributors will include VA, NB, ED, MS, SS).

• VA requests that a couple of people read the one Sopher application in the next few weeks. DB and ED volunteer to do so by May 1, 2020.
• Ken Foote is happy to provide the Annual Guest Lecture for next year in Seattle.
• VA will send some information to pass on to our webmaster regarding the canceled AAG.

II. Online presence

• VA notes that the Facebook group attracts hits so there is some interest.
• NB queries whether the Assistant Secretary position should take responsibility for web duties as far as possible. VA says it is a possibility but does not want to provide too many obligations, especially at this stage, but it is certainly a good idea we can consider more for the next meeting.
• DB queries current status of website (gorabsaag.org). Good progress has been made here, although we should add more in terms of publications as well as contact details. DB suggests adding who has won the Sopher and Zelinsky awards in the past. NB suggests adding executive board members’ contact details and social media information.
• DR has records of previous award winners for the website and will provide a list.

III. Looking to 2021

• Book on religion, place and sustainability by ED and SS is continuing to take shape and will have a section at the AAG in Seattle in 2021. Expected publication date is February 2021 but there has been some slowdown in publishing in general due to the pandemic.
• Annual report has already been compiled and sent to the necessary people.
• Next meeting can be tentatively scheduled for late June or early July 2020.
• Elections of board members will be postponed.
• ED suggests that it might be worth trying to encourage people who don’t or can’t normally attend in-person AAG meetings to engage in these remote meetings, especially if they live far from the USA. NB suggests we could encourage people with relevant research and interests to take part. VA will reach out to board members who have not participated frequently in an effort to get them involved.
• ED suggests that newsletter might be a good place to start an early CFP for papers and sessions, whether COVID-19 related or otherwise.
• DB wonders whether we could ask former speakers if they would be willing for recordings of their lectures to be added, possibly in a secure way, on the website. VA suggests uploading them to YouTube. NB adds that we may be able to ask future speakers in sessions if they would be willing to be recorded so that we can continue to build a repository (although DR notes that we will need permission in advance from the AAG as it has rules about this). SN suggests that a podcast would be another possibility.
• VA suggests ‘notes from the field’ in which scholars discuss their current fieldwork for 10-15 minutes, although we may have to explore the ethical issues.

IV. Any Other Business

There being no further business, the 2020 Annual GORABS Business Meeting closed at 3:00 p.m.