

## THE NIETSCHMANN SYLLABUS: A VISION OF THE FIELD

BERNARD Q. NIETSCHMANN

***Editor's Note:** Few geographers have attained legend as did Barney Nietschmann. From the late 1970s to 1999 he taught and inspired a generation of field geographers at the University of California, Berkeley; before that, he was a distinctive force at the University of Michigan. He died of cancer in 2000, at the age of fifty-eight, but he left behind his students, his family, his writings, and more: indigenous and traditional peoples around many parts of the world who both learned from Mr. Barney and, as he said, taught him, whether in Central America, in the Torres Straits, in Mexico, or in his work as a political geographer among Fourth World peoples everywhere. For Barney the field was, matter-of-factly, where a geographer works, and always there was good work at hand. Although he would be loath to use the word "his," with its near echo of the colonial, the people he worked with were always implicitly his people; he was, when and however he could be, their defender and their champion. His books—Between Land and Water, Caribbean Edge, and the Maya Atlas, the last of which was produced collaboratively with the Maya who reside in what the supporters of nation-states would call southern Mexico, Guatemala, and Belize—are an inspiration to many. But they are also polemics of the first order. He believed in what geographers can do, and he believed in an obligation to do what you can.*

Nietschmann lacked faith in the acts of many a field-worker in the social or environmental sciences. Pioneering intellectual-property arguments, he came down strongly for the unique rights of indigenous peoples, even against the state. In the field or at home he savored deep relationships, and with those came a broad range of responsibilities. He found quite risible the practice of some of his colleagues, who directed group readings of a nearly sacred political writ, and his disapproval put him decisively at odds with many on the cultural left. The public disputes this led to in Berkeley and elsewhere were—predictably—difficult, unpleasant, and confrontational. The commitments of fieldwork, as many an author in this collection makes clear, do not halt with completion of a dissertation or article manuscript.

The materials that follow are all Barney's work, parts of his Field Methods or Field Research seminars at Berkeley. For the most part, what is reproduced below is from 1995, when the most complete set of papers was available. That said, handouts on "Mickey's Golden Rules for the Field," "A Moral Geography: Research Conduct and Conducting Research," and "The Beverly Hills Geographer" were often passed from hand to hand by the graduate students of many a department, including students who never had the chance to take a Nietschmann course. The reach of these broadsides for an ethical and efficacious field practice would in time span the Berkeley campus and later spread across much of academic geography. As Barney taught and practiced, the precepts evolved, increasing in number or building in forcefulness, but the underlying principles remained the same: Respect those with whom you work, honor knowledge, and be ethical. Along those lines, thanks are owed Francis Smith, Seth Macinko, Stan Stevens, Thom Eley, and, especially, Angelina Nietschmann, each of whom provided useful material.

—PAUL F. STARRS, EDITOR

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY  
DEPARTMENT OF GEOGRAPHY  
TUESDAYS, 1:30–4:30 P.M.

MR. NIETSCHMANN  
575 McCONE HALL  
FALL SEMESTER 1995

GEOGRAPHY 204  
GEOGRAPHIC RESEARCH METHODS AND THEORIES

One of the major tasks of a graduate school is to train students to be professional academics. A professional academic is supposed to have the training and experience to be able to do original research, to produce new knowledge, and to be able to communicate that new knowledge to other academics, students, and, sometimes, the public. A professional academic should be able to design and fund a research project, use a variety of research methods and skills during the project, and be able to communicate and disseminate the results to a wide range of people.

The Geography 204 seminar helps prepare beginning and advanced graduate students for field research. Field research means leaving the university, the library, and the laboratory to go somewhere—near or far—to obtain firsthand information from firsthand investigations. To do this requires experience with research methods, theories, and ethics, and considerable skills, equipment, and money. Seminar participants will examine and use a variety of research methods, skills, and equipment to survey, interview, photograph, and map; learn how to design and fund a research project; and learn how to present and publish research.

Seminar participants will do weekly readings and discussions, and there will be frequent assignments and presentations. Both beginning and advanced students are encouraged to take the seminar.

Textbooks:

- Leedy, P. D. 1993. *Practical Research: Planning and Design*. 5th ed. New York: Macmillan.
- Locke, L. F., W. W. Spirduso, and S. J. Silverman. 1987. *Proposals That Work*. Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage Publications.

SCHEDULE OF SEMINAR TOPICS BY WEEK

I. Introduction to Field Research

August

29 Geographic Field Research

II. Geographic Field Methods and Skills

September

5 Geographical Research Theories and Methods

12 Geographic Surveys

19 Geographic Research

26 Photography in the Field