

GEOGRAPHICAL RECORD

BERNARD Q. NIETSCHMANN, 1941–2000
MR. BARNEY, GEOGRAPHER AND HUMANIST*

WILLIAM M. DENEVAN

There were many different Barney Nietschmanns, and likely no one knew them all. I remember him best from the late 1960s at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, when he was twenty-five years old or so, a shining light and very much his own person. I still have the first, and only, page of a final examination he took from me in 1967. It says, “I’ll take a raincheck on this, payable in a couple of months. There are more important things going on in the streets.” He was referring to the antiwar demonstrations. Then he wrote, “I hope that handing in this Bluebook early doesn’t psych out your class.” And I have a photograph of Barney during a strike by teaching assistants that all but shut down the university in 1970. In it he is picketing in front of Science Hall, home of the Department of Geography. Professors Glenn Trewartha and Richard Hartshorne, famous and formidable geographers, attempted to enter the building, and Barney said “No”—which took guts, of which Barney had plenty.

Barney was one of the early leaders of geographical cultural ecology in the United States. In cultural geography seminars in Madison during the rush of the quantitative revolution we were looking for a more rigorous and systematic approach to the study of traditional livelihoods. Geography graduate students in those seminars included Barney, Roland Bergman, Barbara Williams, and Bonham Richardson, plus William Davidson and Mario Hiraoka, who were visiting from the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee, and several anthropology, archaeology, and history graduate students who were to become important scholars.

Our approach was interdisciplinary, and the anthropologists present drew us to their developing field of cultural ecology. We read Julian Steward, Andrew Vayda, and Roy Rappaport in anthropology and looked for parallel but distinctive approaches in geography, guided partly by Philip Wagner and Marvin Mikesell, with their emphasis on ecological processes. We found inspiration in the early work of James Blaut on both Southeast Asia and tropical America, with insights into micro-geography, agricultural intensification, environmental perception, behavioral explanation, and critiques of carrying capacity and agricultural potential. Blaut talked about cultural ecology as early as 1959, if not before. Harold Brookfield was particularly influential for his New Guinea research in the 1960s, with its calls for localized

* Revision of a statement for the 2000 Robert McC. Netting Award, Cultural Ecology Specialty Group, Association of American Geographers.

✪ DR. DENEVAN is a professor emeritus of geography at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, Madison, Wisconsin, 53706–1491.