



Any reasonable person knows it is impossible to keep a secret these days, especially if you intentionally broadcast the truth on your website ahead of time, as we did. Also, it is impossible to say something in one village and not have it spread to the next. We weren't keeping anything secret. At the community assemblies where we sought approval to work, including Tiltepec, we discussed our past experiences with mapping indigenous lands, our project objectives, the organizations involved, and our funding sources, as well as the benefits, uses, and publication of results. A few community members expressed concern about our funding, but most focused on community involvement in the research, verification and approval of results, project benefits, standardization of cartographic results, publication, crediting community participants, and technical training of the elected local investigators. Some communities voted not to work with us, and we respected their decisions.

What scholar would claim, as Bryan does, that “using many of the same techniques” implies a philosophical connection? Who would claim that the statement, “indigenous peoples’ demands for land tenancy and territorial autonomy challenge Mexico’s neoliberal economic policies – and democracy itself,” implies anti-indigenous sentiments?

What scholar would presume to imply, even through innuendo, as Bryan does, that a group photo in front of the Buffalo Soldier Monument during a visit to Fort Leavenworth reveals anything whatsoever about attitudes or values of those in the photo. This is an unfair and purely conjectural attack, which appears indicative of Bryan’s rhetorical technique.

What scholar would expound on the Association of American Geographers’ Statement of Ethics without once mentioning the American Geographical Society’s “Guidelines for Ethical Conduct of Foreign Field Research” that crystallize the principles that guided our research (available online, <http://www.amergeo.org/AGSethicalguidelines.pdf>).

How too can Bryan fail to cite geographer Scott Brady’s complimentary article in *Americas* based on close involvement in and direct observation of our project in Tiltepec? (Brady, 2009).

In these and other matters Bryan’s tactic is the slanted rhetoric of an activist, not a scholar.

Who has a right to control access to indigenous peoples? Bryan portrays indigenous peoples as naïve and vulnerable. He would be their gatekeeper, limiting access to their villages and councils to only the pure, meaning those who share his own political philosophy. Is this new priesthood any different from those of the past? In contrast, we view indigenous peoples as mature, intelligent, free-thinking people who benefit from diverse ideas and wide-ranging debates, just as other world citizens do.

Science and society have advanced for centuries with the recognition that knowledge is power. As scholars we maintain the overriding belief that knowledge is good and we see how it can be empowering, useful, and good for indigenous peoples. Yet, Bryan claims, in vague accusatory terms, that geographic knowledge somehow hurts indigenous people. Again, a reality check is in order. Where are the world’s conflicts today? Most, by far, are in poorly mapped, poorly understood regions that are often home to indigenous populations. Clearly, indigenous peoples can beneficially use maps to announce their presence, defend their communities, manage their lands, and protect their cultural heritages and environments. Yet, again Bryan recasts the activist’s case against maps and geographic understanding, attempting to scare readers with vague intimations that the dark powers of maps will be unleashed against indigenous people.

I have led PRM projects working with indigenous populations to map their lands and resources in the Mosquitia of Honduras and in the Darién of Panama (Herlihy & Knapp, 2003). We collaborated

with the military-run national geographic institutes of the host countries to publish standard map results. These cartographic results unquestionably have been beneficial in education, development, conservation, land rights, and resource management. Not one of the hundreds of communities involved has ever claimed the maps have caused them harm.

What harm has come from our work in Mexico? Clearly this specific geographic knowledge benefits the communities themselves. Does anyone, other than Bryan, really believe otherwise? The study communities in Huasteca have had their final PRM maps published for three years and not one has reported any harm or danger. To the contrary, most will testify to their usefulness in a variety of ways, sometimes unforeseen, such as helping one community reduce its taxes! Even in Tiltepec, where Gonzalez ignited villagers’ fears, community leaders consulted the PRM cartographic results in deliberations about a serious boundary error in the recently-completed government cadastral survey, an error brought to light by our research.

Is Bryan’s work good scholarship or good activism? Perhaps it is neither. He misuses the authority usually accorded to academic work to legitimize his intentionally constructed mythology, and he does so with ideological goals. Bryan presents a superficially persuasive but slanted and inaccurate narrative that portrays our project and all AGS Bowman Expeditions as scary, threatening military agents. He purposely supports the myth that military funding must be suspected and dangerous for projects dealing with indigenous peoples.

In concluding, Bryan admonishes us all that “Left unaddressed, the military’s influence on research agendas cannot help but militarize understandings of geography in the classroom and beyond.” He neglects to say however, what he means by “militarize,” or how that would be done.

How too could a scholarly appraisal of this issue ignore the seminal experience of the Department of Geography at the University of California, Berkeley? Led by Carl O. Sauer and James J. Parsons for 17 years, their “Caribbean Geography” program was funded by the Office of Naval Research (ONR), and it supported about forty students and faculty doing overseas field research (Parsons, 1996: 383). The Navy wanted to know about shorelines, shore processes, and coastal vegetation, but scholars selected their own research topics. The program was restricted more by Sauer’s directives than by governmental ones (Pruitt, 1979: 105). The ONR “military funding” did not taint or militarize understandings in geography, as Bryan suggests. Rather, it was foundational in the development of the “Berkeley School” of cultural historical geography (Herlihy et al., 2008: 397–398).

We believe the AGS Bowman Expeditions program, and the *México Indígena* project in particular, again show how military and other government funding can support valuable geographic scholarship. Our project results demonstrate that the little-known PROCEDE program represents a silent revolution in Mexico, undoing social property and changing communal ownership patterns that, in some cases, date back to pre-Columbian times. In contrast to viewing indigenous peoples “as a potential security threat,” as Bryan claims, our results raise concerns about the future of indigenous lands in Mexico. We see changes causing new boundary disputes, the breakdown of community institutions, the increased socioeconomic differentiation, the loss of forest and water resources, and the opening of new threats to the cultural survival of vulnerable indigenous societies. Contrary to the gatekeepers’ myth, the fine-scale PRM maps we produced with the eleven study communities actually empowered their Assemblies with tools needed to deal with these concerns; and our publications and presentations help explain these concerns to others (Herlihy et al., 2008; Kelly et al., 2010; Smith et al., 2009).

We remain dedicated to the indigenous communities where we have worked and we plan to check back with them to see how they are doing and how their maps are being used.

## References

- Brady, S. (2009). Participatory mapping empowers patrimony. *Américas*, 61(2), 38–43.
- Herlihy, P. H., Dobson, J. E., Aguilar Robledo, M., Smith, D. A., Kelly, J. H., & Ramos Viera, A. (2008). A digital geography of indigenous Mexico: prototype for the American Geographical Society's Bowman Expeditions. *Geographical Review*, 98(3), 395–415.
- Herlihy, P. H., & Knapp, G. (2003). Maps of, by, and for the peoples of Latin America. *Human Organization*, 62(4), 303–314.
- Kelly, J. H., Herlihy, P. H., Smith, D. A., Ramos Viera, A., Hilburn, A. M., & Hernández Cendejas, G. A. (2010). Indigenous territoriality at the end of the social property era in Mexico. *Journal of Latin American Geography*, 9(3).
- Parsons, J. J. (1996). Carl Sauer's vision of an institute for Latin American studies. *Geographical Review*, 86(3), 377–384.
- Pruitt, E. L. (1979). The Office of Naval Research and geography. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 69(1), 103–108.
- Smith, D. A., Herlihy, P. H., Kelly, J. H., & Ramos Viera, A. (2009). The certification and privatization of indigenous lands in Mexico. *Journal of Latin American Geography*, 8(2), 175–208.
- Union de Organizaciones de la Sierra Juárez, Oaxaca (UNOSJO). (2009). *Geopiratería en la Sierra Juárez, Oaxaca*. Available at El Enemigo Común at. <http://elenemigocomun.net/2057/x/es> Accessed 23.05.10.

Peter H. Herlihy

Department of Geography, University of Kansas,  
Lawrence, KS 66045, USA

E-mail address: [herlihy@ku.edu](mailto:herlihy@ku.edu)