

**B.L. Turner II: Testimonial for Preston E. James Eminent Latin Americanist Career Award
Presented at the Conference of Latin American Geographers' May 2015 meeting**

Billie Lee Turner II deserves the Preston E. James Eminent Latin Americanist Career Award for his body of work and training and because his work--diverse, innovative, and extensive--reflects James's own. Billie has continued to develop his research and training agenda since he earned his Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin at Madison in 1974. His career as a Latin Americanist geographer began with his studies of pre-Columbian agriculture in the Mayan lowlands and transitioned to agricultural change, land use and land cover change, sustainability and vulnerability, and more recently to landscape architecture. Billie is currently the Gilbert F. White Professor of Environment and Society at Arizona State University's School of Geographical Sciences and Urban Planning [since 2008]. Prior to that, he served on the Clark University faculty for many years [since 1980], including as Director of the Graduate School of Geography [1983-88, 1997-98, and 2004-2008] and the George Perkins Marsh Institute [1991-1997]. CLAG awarded Billie Turner the Carl O. Sauer Distinguished Scholarship Award in 1986, and since that time he has garnered many other honors and awards. In 1995, he was elected to the National Academy of Sciences; in 1998, to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences; and in 2002, to the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

Billie's work in Mesoamerica, and his cultural ecological training at Madison, left Billie with an abiding concern to understand the drivers of farmer decision making. An early reflection of this was the book *Comparative Farming Systems*, co-edited with grad school colleague Stephen Brush. The book, supported by a remarkably early career Guggenheim Fellowship (just 13 years after his BA), said much about Billie: It engaged with a broad swath of theory and reflected a commitment to intellectual community, growing out of debates at Madison and feeding directly into debates with doctoral students at Clark. Yet at the same time as Billie was fiercely interested in the micro-foundations of resource use, the environment at Clark also pulled him into macro-debates regarding resource governance and planetary transformation, leading (inter alia) to the agenda setting *Earth as Transformed by Human Action* (1990), which became a critical text in the emerging Global Change community. In some sense, these two books and the projects of which they were a part underlie much of his subsequent career. The subsequent breadth of Billie's scholarship over the years is remarkable. He pioneered interdisciplinary work through his own diverse pursuits and his ability to work with scholars from other fields long before interdisciplinarity became the norm.

As mentioned, Billie has used his regional grounding in Mesoamerica to engage in important ways with global conversations both within the discipline of geography (shaping the evolution of human-environment geography) and within a larger land change science community

informing national and international policy. He contributed to the formation of the Global Land Project of the International Geosphere-Biosphere Programme and International Human Dimensions Programme. Today, he continues to serve on the Scientific Steering Committee of DIVERSITAS and he recently served on a panel of the NRC's Committee on America's Climate Choices. He also has served on, and continues to serve on, numerous other panels, committees and boards of the Association of American Geographers, the National Research Council of the National Academy of Sciences, the Social Science Research Council, and the International Council of Science. In these capacities, he has brought the discipline of geography into a larger interdisciplinary scientific conversation and elevated the profile and policy-relevance both of Latin Americanist geography and human-environment geography.

Importantly, Billie has trained a new generation of Latin Americanists—mentoring them toward a diverse range of successful careers. As described by his first student, Bill Doolittle, Billie was “the best advisor ever”--“supportive, demanding, personable, and professional.” Being required to “sing for one’s supper” was not uncommon at Billie’s dinner parties, and an ability to take some well-meaning humor was a must for his students. His comments were, and are, always prompt, his praise effusive, and his criticisms pointed. The success of Billie’s students is a testimony to his ability to hone the best in them, and to always point them towards advancement. Billie’s long list of graduate advisees is a remarkable legacy and is indicative of just how much time and care he has dedicated to students. While he would often dispense his advice with a directness that is all of Billie’s own, he has always been the most remarkably respectful advisor, allowing his students to follow their own paths and become their own persons. His generosity as an advisor, which extends beyond graduation and first jobs, has inspired an equally remarkable loyalty and motivation among his former students.

The long list of former students eager to contribute to this testimony reflects this loyalty. We contacted former students who had completed dissertation work in Latin America, and the following individuals contributed to this testimonial: Bill Doolittle, Tom Whitmore, Tony Bebbington, Brad Jokisch, Eric Keys, Rinku Roy Chowdhury, Laura Schneider, Claudia Radel, Jackie Vadjunec, Ximena Rueda, Birgit Schmook, Kirsten Barrett, Jacob Brenner, Susannah McCandless, Elia Machado, Marco Millones, and Karina Bennesaiah.