

REFLECTIONS III: IMPACTS

GEOGRAPHY AND PUBLIC POLICY: REAPPRAISING THE EARLY 1970S DEBATES IN THE AGE OF IMPACT

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A wide range of debates on 'applied,' 'useful,' and 'relevant' geography were reanimated by Anglophone geographers in the late 1960s and early 1970s. But competing approaches ciphered the meaning and implications of this rapprochement variously. As titles go, few are as arresting or as recited as Harvey's 'What kind of Geography for What Kind of Public Policy?'. It was sparked by Terry Coppock's Presidential Address at the Annual IBG Conference held at the University of East Anglia (Norwich) in January 1974 and subsequently published in *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* in November 1974, entitled 'Geography and public policy: challenges, opportunities and implications'. Across the Atlantic, American geographers like Ackerman and Gilbert F White were already involved in state-led flood protection schemes, power generation, and regional economic development. The 1971 Association of American Geographers (AAG) meeting in Boston began the task of codifying and advancing such efforts. Subsequently, in 1972 Gilbert F White published a paper in *The Professional Geographer* with the similar title 'Geography and Public Policy' but embodying a different spirit, leading to a public rebuke by Glenn Trewartha in the same journal for its partisanship. White had spent a lifetime researching vulnerability to natural hazards and in time received US presidential decoration for his applied geographical research on hazards and flood insurance. The AAG subsequently introduced a Gilbert F White Public Service Honors

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award. White's focus was upon the public work that geographers ought to aspire to, and variants of applied geography informed by complex traditions of humanism, by theological concerns and by philosophies such as pragmatism. This intervention reflects upon these early 1970s debates and comments upon their legacies and considers their ongoing capacity to instruct current interest in the means and ends of scholarly in the age of impact.

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