

Editorial:
**The State of African Geography
in the North American Academy**

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INTRODUCTION¹

This is the first of two articles we intend to publish during our editorial tenure on the state of African geography within the academy. More specifically, this article seeks to examine the production of new geographers in the United States (U.S.) and Canada who have regional expertise in Africa, whereas the second essay will analyze the size, number and productivity of geography departments at universities in Sub-Saharan Africa.

While area studies is a long standing tradition in geography (Pattison 1990), the organization of geographical expertise along regional lines died over 50 years ago as a result of critiques of geography's then chorological focus (e.g., Sauer 1956; Berry and Marble 1968). As a consequence, most contemporary geographers distinguish themselves via thematic specializations such as, for example, economic geography, urban geography, or biogeography. Nonetheless, many geographers continue to have a secondary specialization in a region of the world. As such, we have medical geographers with regional interests in Latin America or development geographers with interests in Africa. Given the continuing popularity of regional courses in geography departments at most U.S. and Canadian universities, now taught from the perspective of regions in a global context (Gilbert 1988; Pudup 1988; Terlouw 2001), it is geographers with secondary expertise in a particular region who often teach such courses. Despite the ongoing popularity of regional courses (and the need to staff them), some commentators are concerned that the North American academy is producing fewer and fewer scholars with regional expertise, including geographers with an area studies background (e.g., Robinson 2003; Robinson and Long 2005).

Moreover, rising geographic illiteracy in the U.S. led to the development of the National Geography Standards (NGS) in 1994 in order to increase public awareness on the role of geography in everyday life