

# **David Hornbeck: Retrospect and Prospect**

**Retiring from Geography, CSUN, 1972 - 2009**

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This is a look back over the career of David Hornbeck and a quick look into his future. I'll sketch the highlights of Dave as a debatably human being, as a mentor, and then as a prolific researcher.

( PPT 2) David has had a rich personal and professional life, beginning on a crazy stormy night in a shack in Oklahoma, where he was born at home in August 1940. His Cherokee grandmother caught something special about him, saying that “this is a blessed child”! She might have chosen a different adjective if she knew him the way we do!

(PPT 3) His family hopped a freight train shortly afterwards to get in on the opportunities for farmworkers in California, settling in the Salinas Valley area not far from Monterey. Kind of *The Grapes of Wrath* without a jalopy.

This is where Dave grew up, picking crops in the summers and then going to school, where some of his teachers picked up on this bright little kid and worked him harder, which, of course, he bitterly resented. (PPT 4) Educated quite enough as far as he could see, he struck out on his own right out of high school. He went up to San Francisco and started playing drums with bands working the North Beach area.

(PPT 5) By then, he was a full-on smart aleck, horsing around behind the other band

members' backs, never missing a beat, much to the amusement of the audiences. In those audiences were several up-and-coming young comedians, who befriended Dave and encouraged him to try making a living as a comedian. These included Mort Sahl, Lenny Bruce, Bill Cosby, and the Smothers Brothers. He fell in with that crowd and did some stand-up and all the other things that young comedians did to amuse themselves between gigs. At some point, he could see this line of work came with great rewards but at great costs. Which led him to join the Air Force and within one day, he was in Texas, in boot camp.

(PPT 6) Like the recruiters say, "sign up and see the world." And see the world he did! He became a military policeman and was stationed in North Africa, in such places as Casablanca and Tangiers, Tunis, and he was there during the Agadir Earthquake in 1960. He and other military personnel were sent there to search for bodies in collapsed buildings and then he drove ambulances to get the injured out for 3 days straight. (PP 7) Beyond the straits of Gibraltar lay Spain, and Dave traveled there to see the sights, check out the art, and inadvertently document the feeling of a fascist landscape.

(PPT 8) Dave re-upped, when he found out that he could not get a job in a civilian police force because he was under the 5' 11" height requirement. On leaving the military, after 7 years 6 months and 22 days, he decided he should get a college degree, maybe in accounting or economics or some such practical field. (PPT 9) He went to CSU Fresno and fell in love with geography during a course in the historical geography of the US and Canada taught by Dr. Chester Cole. At last, he had found a field with a broad scope, where he could bring together his curiosity about history, the landscape, and economics, too! Something both intellectually interesting and practical! Now focussed, he blasted through his B.A. by 1968 and his M.A. one year later, in 1969. He then went to the University of Nebraska to work with

one of the *éminences grises* of historical geography, Dr. Leslie Hughes. Dave finished his dissertation in 1972 and took up an assistant professorship here at San Fernando Valley State College that fall. SFVSC at that time was the second largest geography department in the world, with 39 tenured and probationary faculty! Only Moscow State University was larger!

(PPT 10) This is when I met him. He was the Geography Council faculty advisor, and Geography had a lot of majors and Dave and the Council organized parties, something like one a month back then! The deal was you could go to the party and you could bring a friend along, whether or not they were Geography majors. Well, you can imagine how these parties built the Geography major! Then, he started the Geography t-shirt tradition by lending the Council \$600 to start making them: The club had something like \$3,000 in its coffers when he stepped down in 1979.

(PPT 11) Dave wanted to inspire students with his own love of learning and he particularly sought out “diamonds in the rough,” students often from a pretty rough working class background somewhat similar to his own, those first-generation students who wanted nothing more than to get a degree in something practical and saw the university as kind of a trade school. He also found a few dreamy-eyed kids who knew they were supposed to go to the university, struggled to find something of intellectual or personal interest in the huge GE menu, and really couldn’t imagine how they would be able to support themselves after getting out of school.

He really connected with his students, and they nominated him for a CSUN Distinguished Teaching Award, which he won in 1976.

He became a living legend for his field trips, which were grueling but fascinating schleps in sketchy State vehicles, with country music blaring, 60 mph land use surveys, and nights of Motel 6 rooms crammed with 8 people, including Dave! (PPT 12) But these field trips had such renown that pretty soon professional societies, such as CUKANZAS, AAG were having Dave organize field expeditions for them, too!

Dave made a point of connecting education with career, theory with practicality. He ran the CSUN Geography jobs program for 23 years, placing hundreds of Geography majors into careers, without so much as a single course of released time in all those years. He wrote an article for the *Journal of Geography* about it, and that was their most popular reprint for several years. This linkage lured a lot of students into Dave's orbit, as did his habit of buttonholing promising graduate students and cajoling them into his seminars, me among them. For instance, I wanted to do a thesis in biogeography and he asked me to take his seminar in Migration Theory. I told him I wasn't even dimly interested in human geography, and he said "the topic of the seminar is unimportant: I just want to get the brightest students in the Department together in one room. Can you imagine how great that would be?" Well, flattery hooked me into what was to be the best graduate seminar I ever took anywhere, bar none, and made my work take a social turn.

Dave fostered steep intellectual growth in his students with a high workload and a mixture of *ad hominem* humiliation ... and then guidance for our shattered egos about how to do better, to become sharp analytical readers and integrative thinkers. The process kicked us out of our slacker laziness into the hard work, by sheer terror, and the unexpected pleasure of getting an awful lot more out of our readings and projects than we ever imagined. It was like a

shamanic initiation. Many of us went on for Ph.D.s, as did a few other students in physical geography and cartography who didn't have Dave actually chair their theses but counted themselves among "his" students anyhow. All of us remain in at least sporadic contact, half jokingly calling ourselves the "Hornbeck School of Thought" or HUG "Hornbeck University of Geography."

Dave did not neglect the less accomplished students, either. He recently shared a theory about "C" students that I found really provocative. He said we tend to overlook these kids at the center of the bell curve and focus our efforts on the "A" listers. He said that he has remained in contact with many of the "C" students who did an internship through his program and has observed something interesting. Many of these kids are much brighter than their GPAs suggest but are either too overworked or too immature to do well while they are students. But they are still taking it all in and, then, they "grow into their educations" a few years later. It all comes together in the context of their careers, which then take off. He commented that it's the "C" students who seem to go on into six figure salaries and highly placed jobs, not the "A" students who go on to graduate school! This comment has made me more sympathetic to and respectful of the bulk of my own students.

(PPT 13) I sent out a call to the many of his students a couple of months ago, asking them for reminiscences and other contributions about David, a kind of informal festschrift, which I've put online. About twenty of his students and a couple of his scholarly collaborators responded, some sending along photographs. Many of these have developed extremely successful careers. Jon Voorhees, for instance, is now a senior vice president at Bank of America: Perhaps he's one of the lucky folks who made off with all our 401Ks!

I did a basic literature content analysis of these contributions, and there is quite a coherent collective image of David. Forty-six percent of the comments were about the quality of his mentoring, particularly how he demanded their highest level of intellectual work and got it, often totally surprising his students with what they learned about themselves and their abilities in the process. Another 15 percent specifically mentioned the camaraderie and fun of the interactions among the Hornbeck group and how the relationships forged in graduate school, internships, field trips, or Dave's company, Area Location Systems, persist to the present day, often channeling jobs from one person to another. Another 22 percent discuss their own career trajectories, how instrumental David was in getting them interested in geography and initiating their careers, and how grateful they feel towards him. Another 10 percent, from peers and clients, comment on his scholarly reputation.

(PPT 14) I have never seen another professor who has inspired this kind of loyalty and fondness among his former students, nor have I ever seen another group of students who have stayed in such persistent contact, people from each generation comfortably fitting into the group along with their predecessors and successors, kind of like “Trekkies.” It really is a “school,” characterized by well-trained people who are not afraid to venture into any topic that catches their interest using the intellectual habits Dave inculcated in them and who can seamlessly blend theory and application. Unlike some other professors known for their circle of students, Dave's place in the “school” is quite egalitarian: He is just another of this very bright bunch of people, dishing and expecting constructive criticism and just plain fun.

I just noticed another very salient quality in his grad students. See if you can pick it out of these photos (PPT 13, PPT 14, PPT 15, PPT 13, PPT 14). There is only one outlier to tell me I need to work on the residuals a bit: Martin Kenzer. How is Martin different from all the

rest of us? Don't let the hair distract you! (PPT 15) Gosh, even Ginny fits the model of the classic Hornbeck School of Thought member. Maybe because Martin wasn't available for marriage?

(PPT 16) At this point I would like to comment on David's record as a scholar. He is an historical geographer, whose work links geographers, historians, archæologists, and Borderlands scholars. He has made very significant contributions to the understanding of the historical geography of California, particularly during the Spanish, Mexican, and early American eras. His interest is in how the missions and, later, the ranchos functioned as economic institutions and their position within the larger global economy that was rapidly developing in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as colonialism began to shade into independence and neocolonialism. His work has been an important reminder of the palimpsest of Spanish and Mexican institutions and places underlying the contemporary California landscape. He has also punctured the romantic myth of an unchanging landscape of happy mission Indians, padres, and rancheros. Hispanic California was dynamic, experiencing substantial and often deeply wrenching change over time as the problems and opportunities facing different kinds of Californios shifted and morphed.

This work has yielded two books (the 1983 *California Patterns* atlas used for 25 years as a leading textbook in its single edition! and the 1991 *California Landscapes*). It has also resulted in 89 academic publications, along with 35 technical papers for various State agencies and the National Geographic Society. He also has given 103 papers to geographical, historical, and archæology conferences, and more than 200 *different* invited presentations to local community and business groups and schools up and down the State. He holds two copyrights for geocoding software programs he designed in 1984-85 and has a

patent pending for spatial database design. He has won \$672,000 in research grants and contracts from such sources as MapInfo, California State Lands Division, the California State departments of Justice and of Personnel, and the cities of Thousand Oaks, Westlake Village, and Oxnard. A quick tour of Google Scholar or Web of Science yields dozens of citations to his works. This expertise is the basis of David's recurrent utilization as an expert witness in the State legislature and in litigation.

Letters I have received from historical geographer Richard Nostrand, archæologist Robert Hoover, and attorney Patrick Maloney, comment on David's impact on geography, history, and archæology and on the impact that David's research is having on the adjudication of water exchange issues in the Salton Sea area, which could impact residents of Southern California for literally decades. Robert Hoover comments that David's work has really helped the archæology community contextualize their findings in the old missions, and he has contributed an article to the festschrift laying out how ceramics found at the various missions document the missions' rapid economic change and integration into global trading patterns. The traditional Puebla ceramics are displaced by industrially produced British ceramics, consistent with David's arguments. David has, thus, brought the disciplines of archæology, history, and geography into close and fruitful conversation about the dynamic Hispanic eras in California.

David's interests in geography moved well beyond the historical geography of the mission and rancho eras, however. In the 1980s, as an outgrowth of his jobs in geography fairs and internships, David began to explore how such geographic techniques as cartography and spatial location theory could benefit business, as a way of helping make CSUN Geography students more competitive. Some of this activity was motivated by former students coming



back with concrete business problems from banks and utilities. David began to work on educating banks and utilities about what GIS could do for them, in such contexts as market area analysis, business location analysis, network optimization, and merger and acquisition analysis. I was intermittently involved in this activity starting around 1980 and watched David pretty much single-handedly build a market for GIS and geographical field work in banking and utilities, build actual GISystems for them on our motley collection of personal computers in his living room, and place geography-trained students in their research departments and, later, GIS divisions. I remember “handmade” GISystems, comprising varying mixes of spreadsheets, relational database management systems, reporting systems, and AutoCAD and the eventual establishment of MapInfo as the predominant business GIS and ESRI as the predominant government and environmental GIS. David was really the first geographer out there doing GIS for banks, and banks became the first major business sector to adopt GIS (though GIS had been becoming popular in government in the 1970s, such as during my stint at Jet Propulsion Lab in 1977 where I first encountered them).

Cal State Northridge is fortunate to have had a scholar of David's stature on staff for nearly four decades. His scholarly stature, like his typical graduate student, is quite a bit taller than he is! In the daily grind of academic life, it can sometimes be hard to see the amount and quality of a colleague's scholarly output and what that does for the reputation of a department. You are losing a really good one!

So, now that David is leaving CSUN, what will he be up to? I somehow don't think kicking back is his style, though he has adopted golf as an attempt at this “relaxation” concept. Actually, it's more like a religious conversion experience to hear him going on about “birdies” and “irons” and “sand traps” and other such mysteries. He has a load of historical geography

consulting projects going on, working with Imperial County water districts on water exchange problems and on contract with a few owners of relict ranchos in Central California to reconstruct the history of their parcels. He has also developed quite an interest in photography, as you can see at this web page. At long last, Ginny and I can get him out “in the field” that we enjoy hiking in and, instead of getting bored at our biogeography and geology discoveries, he is out there happily taking floral portraits and completely geeking out on the art and science of digital photography. He is also keen to mentor his three grandchildren, of whom two are present today, Vianna and Ashton, and Robin in the Netherlands where his son, David, now lives.