The Shifting Geopolitical World


9/11 will forever be branded into the American consciousness. A just-released book of essays edited by Stanley Brunn, a UK professor of geography, discusses the changes in the geopolitical makeup of the world brought about by the destruction of the World Trade Center twin towers on September 11, 2001.

“When such a catastrophic world-changing event like this happens, academicians and writers tend to think, ‘Let’s just leave this to the historians or the political scientists or the politicians to sort out.’ But the international geography community has something to say about interpreting what happened and why—the geopolitical impact—and this collection of essays helps us understand some of the ramifications.”

In assessing the impact of short-term events such as 9/11, Brunn believes it’s important to quickly seize the opportunity to study them.

“The first time I did an impact study was right after the Three Mile Island disaster in 1979. I was teaching at Michigan State at the time, and within one month of the event a couple of doctoral students and I sent a survey to people who lived and around Three Mile Island. We asked them the impact of that event on their lives, on the economy, on the environment.”

A few days after 9/11, Brunn contacted David Newman, the editor of the journal Geopolitics, and Newman immediately agreed to publish this book as a special issue. “I wanted the collection to represent different disciplines, both men and women scholars, younger and more experienced academicians,” Brunn explains in discussing the people he contacted and invited to submit an essay.

In the book the authors discuss, from a variety of perspectives, America and emerging world orders, terrorism, environmental security, civil society, and the visual and print media. Brunn wrote the book’s introduction.

Among the essay titles are “Calling 911: Geopolitics, Security and America’s New War,” “The Naming of ‘Terrorism’ and Evil ‘Outlaws’: Geopolitical Place-Making after 11 September,” and “Tabloid Realism and the Revival of American Security Culture.”

Four of the essays were written or co-written by UK geography doctoral recipients or graduates. Those writers are Margo Kleinfeld, a current geography doctoral student; Carl Dahlman, who is on the faculty of the University of South Carolina; Chris Jasparo, a member of the faculty of the Military College of Hanover; and Jon Taylor, who is on the faculty at California State University.

What would Brunn like readers to take away from this book?

“Everybody knows we live in an interdependent world, which means we need to know a lot more than we do about other cultures. We really don’t know much about Islamic culture, for example, and how it plays out in foreign policy. It’s embarrassing that we have so few people trained in other cultures and languages.

“I think if you are going to try to prevent something like 9/11 from happening again, you’re going to have to take a look at the root causes of terrorism and people mixing faith with foreign policy.”

Brunn also believes that the United States squandered a wealth of worldwide empathy and sympathy after 9/11.

“One of my greatest disappointments from the impact of this event is that our own political administration has not used this as an opportunity for understanding and for healing,” Brunn says.

“This book is an important contribution to the geopolitics literature and, in particular, the understanding of some of the wider implications of the events of September 11,” says Newman. “Professor Brunn has brought together a group of scholars whose take on this event is not the normal analysis offered to us by the politicians and governments. We are offered an insight into the way 9/11 has affected communities around the world.”

—Jeff Worley