



# The Power of Place: Geography, Destiny, and Globalization's Rough Landscape

By Harm de Blij

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The world is not as mobile or as interconnected as we like to think. As Harm de Blij argues in *The Power of Place*, in crucial ways--from the uneven distribution of natural resources to the unequal availability of opportunity--geography continues to hold billions of people in its grip. We are all born into natural and cultural environments that shape what we become, individually and collectively. From our "mother tongue" to our father's faith, from medical risks to natural hazards, *where* we start our journey has much to do with our destiny. Hundreds of millions of farmers in the river basins of Asia and Africa, and tens of millions of shepherds in isolated mountain valleys from the Andes to Kashmir, all live their lives much as their distant ancestors did, remote from the forces of globalization. Incorporating a series of persuasive maps, De Blij describes the tremendously varied environments across the planet and shows how migrations between them are comparatively rare. De Blij also looks at the ways we are redefining place so as to make its power even more potent than it has been, with troubling implications.

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### **Bibliography**

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### Editorial Review

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De Blij is the author of a variety of influential works on geography, including a best-selling college textbook on the subject, as well as a celebrated exploration of wine (*Wine: A Geographic Appreciation*, 1983). With this selection, de Blij adds a geographer's voice to the growing chorus of those objecting to Thomas Friedman's flat earth. Globalization may indeed level the global playing field for the "fortunate minority in control of, in the path of, or with access to the mainstreams of modernization," concedes de Blij, but the great majority of the earth's six billion people face obstacles that are steeper than ever. Not the first book to decry the dramatic contrasts between the "globals," the locals, and the "mobals" (migrants), this selection is nevertheless unique in cataloging the myriad ways in which such contrasts are informed by geographic factors, including language, natural resources, urbanization, and environmental risks. De Blij is as engaging as ever, and his fear for our collective future is evident on every page. --Brendan Driscoll

#### Review

"This meticulous analysis of the impact of everything from religious fundamentalism to the streamlining of world languages on these three groups will serve as an indispensable primer for serious policy makers."  
--*Publishers Weekly*

"Impressively, author Harm De Blij has attained what purveyors of mass market and trendy neo-geographic gospels have not: a comprehensive and optimistic geographic fact-book in narrative form synthesis of political, social and economic issues with the profound impact of spatial science. A compact and exhaustive book like *The Power of Place* should be set upon the desks of every legislator, policy wonk and concerned citizen. In an afternoon of reading purposeful prose and parsing such fine maps, readers will likely find an entirely new world to live in and an understanding that X never marks the spot; XY does, and often a bit of Z." --*Chicago Sun-Times*

"*The Power of Place* is a tour-de-force, a fascinating and deeply knowledgeable account of the crucial ways in which 'place', the Earth's physical geography, shapes global society. The world, we learn, is not flat but is indeed a rugged terrain, in which climate, topography, natural hazards, pathogens and much more, shape economy, politics, language, culture, and power. *The Power of Place* is a treat for the specialist and a thrilling eye-opener for the general reader." --Jeffrey D. Sachs, Director of the Earth Institute at Columbia University

"What Carl Sagan did for cosmology, Harm de Blij is doing for geography. See, hear or read him and you will sign on for a continuing course in a subject that he has brought alive like no one else in our time. *The Power of Place* is one of those books I hope the next President will read between the election in November 2008 and the inauguration in January. There couldn't be a better way to learn that the world isn't so flat, either." --Bill Moyers, host of *Bill Moyers Journal*, PBS

"*The Power of Place* offers a thoughtful, balanced, and meandering tour of the diversity of human geography... Mr. de Blij's vast reach and steady even-handedness make *The Power of Place* an enjoyable, intellectual stroll. If the author has one overarching theme, it is to remind his readers that much of the world is still suffering with poverty and disease. That fact is always worth remembering." *The New York Sun*

"Informative and provocative book. De Blij's analysis of each of these issues is made all the richer by his inspired use of maps. A brisk counteractant to the empty sloganeering that often accompanies all sides of the globalization debate--provocative, substantive and smart." --ShelfAwareness.com

"For those who want to be on top of world events, yet feel overwhelmed by the amount of information that floods into their homes and offices through the media, *The Power of Place* is an excellent start." --*Nature*

"A fascinating book that will resonate with all readers... Indispensable reading... Essential."--*CHOICE*

## About the Author

**Harm de Blij** is the John A. Hannah Professor of Geography at Michigan State University. The author of 30 books, including *Why Geography Matters*, he is an honorary life member of the National Geographic Society and was previously the Geography Editor on ABC's "Good Morning America."

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