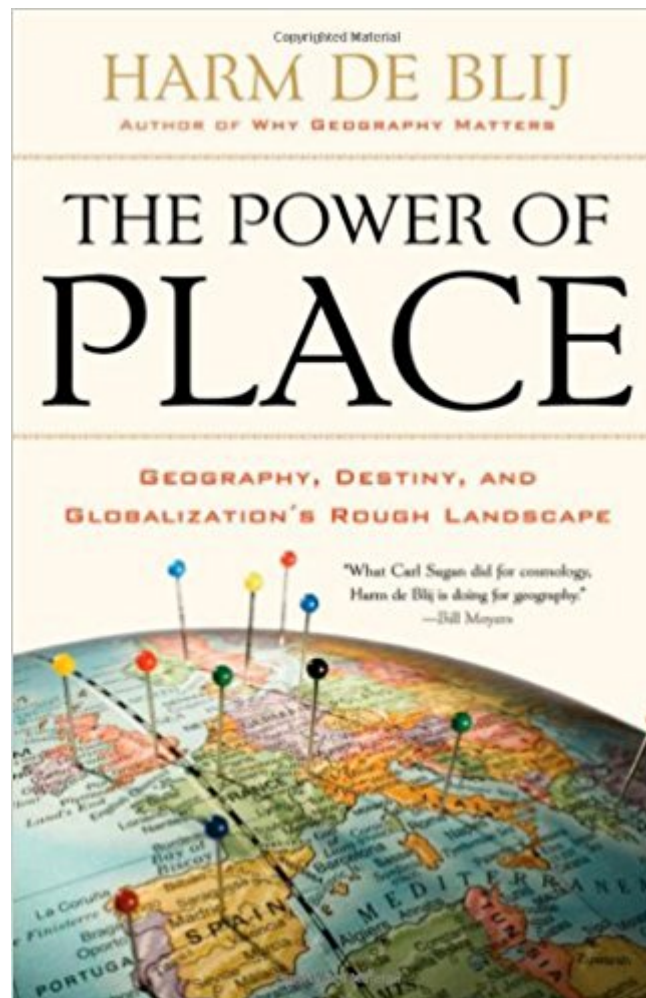




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# The Power Of Place: Geography, Destiny, And Globalization's Rough Landscape



## Synopsis

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.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

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, 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 --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

"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

Harm de Blij was our most prolific academic geography writers, and until his death earlier this year was one of the greatest advocates of this vital field of study. In this book, he responds to scholars who take the notion of globalization too far, implying that place does not matter in this age of rapid communication and transportation. He illustrates how the degree to which the "flat earth" concept applies depends greatly on one's socioeconomic position in a given place. In other words, some people are much more mobile and globally connected than their neighbors. In contributing to the debate on globalization, Professor de Blij has also illustrated the richness of geography, and the importance of its study.

A bit simplistic, but readable. Nice maps. Designed for readers who may not already be familiar with the material. The author's central thesis (hinted in the term "rough landscape" and contrasting with Thomas Friedman's "The World is Flat" approach) is that although globalization is bringing us together, and though it is equalizing socio-economic outcomes and opportunities for some peoples, it is doing so very unevenly, both between countries and between regions within countries. The author's overall position -- that geography influences but does not determine cultural and political relationships -- is less extreme than the environmental determinism of authors like Jared Diamond (indeed, deBlij is not determinist at all), and this allows him to privilege culture and power relationships more than he might. It is also to deBlij's advantage that he grew up in South Africa during the period of apartheid (he is currently based in the United States), as this allows him a unique perspective on his material. The book's opening thesis is that -- when defined in terms of their relationship to globalizing processes -- there are at least three kinds of people. "Globals" are essentially the elites of each country. Highly educated, and with relatively high amounts of social connections and personal economic leverage, they move across borders with relative ease, and land relatively well. "Mobals" are the next level down, usually moving from country to city, and performing the labor that helps fuel global economic processes, but not benefiting as directly.

"Locals" stay in place, relatively untouched and relatively poor. Easily grasped concepts like this are among the things that make the book valuable to general readers. At the same time, the author communicates a number of analytical biases that he asserts rather than argues. For example, he seems to assume that cross-border immigration is always a good thing, especially when countries (such as Japan or northwest Europe) are experiencing low birth rates. The author's main supporting argument is that immigrants will do the work that will fund government social security programs for the aging populace, so countries who erect barriers to immigration are doing so at their own peril. Counter-arguments are not really addressed, and the discussion never really gets more complex than that. That said, the author communicates unusually well, making this a relatively pleasant read. And the maps are well drawn and support the text well. However, readers should be aware -- as the author himself indicates -- that the book is deliberately forwarding particular perspectives even when it seems to be merely describing what is.

Harm de Blij is a professor of geography who has written widely used textbooks for many years. In this book, he summarizes much of the information you would find in one of those textbooks, but with an emphasis on demonstrating that the world is neither close to being "flat" (equal in opportunities and/or outcomes) nor likely to become flat any time in the foreseeable future. This is in direct contrast and response to the arguments of globalization advocates like Tom Friedman (who is a great writer, but a journalist, not a scholar). By deploying abundant details, de Blij shows that these inequalities are found in just about all spheres of human life, including health, physical security, education, overall standard of living, etc. And he shows that these inequalities are closely tied to geographic location ("the power of place") because the physical, cultural, and historical factors which affect outcomes are themselves tied to geography. In this regard, de Blij also forecasts where current trends may take us in the future, and his outlook is not encouraging when one considers the potential for cultural, religious, and military conflicts, along with the related likelihood of widening inequalities. For me, the one significant negative of the book is that, frankly, it became progressively more tedious and boring as I got closer to the end. This was because the book starts to sound repetitive and rambling after a while, throwing out more details than I really wanted to know, while increasingly lacking an integrative perspective which gives a clear sense of the forest rather than just describing the trees. Because of this, I found it difficult to finish the book, and so I'm tempted to give it 3 stars, but I'll stick with 4 stars because I recognize that other readers may be more interested in the details than I was. Overall, I do recommend this book to readers interested in a detailed description of why the world is not flat. However, again, beware that some readers may find

the level of detail somewhat tedious.

This book is fascinating. I have found more interesting geographical information than I ever knew before. It is a good book for teachers of geography and also economics.

Book is for school

Very readable and informative. It will be used in the AP Human Geography course I teach as a supplemental work.

Great book

It is easy to overlook that simple facts that where you were born and who your parents are have an incredible impact on your life. You will never overlook these realities after reading this book.

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