



Reflections on Christopher Chase-Dunn as a Mentor and His Influence on Global Environmental Sociology

Andrew Jorgenson

Boston College

jorgenan@bc.edu

When I was finishing my undergraduate degree in sociology at the University of Utah, Jeffrey Kentor (Jeff) and Thomas Burns (Tom) took me under their wings. I had taken an environmental sociology course from Tom, and I was hired to teach the labs for Jeff's statistics course for sociology majors. I had a growing interest in both environmental sociology and political economy, and I was fascinated by the ways in which macrosociologists were doing cross-national research, including the two of them. They sat me down in front of a computer and taught me how to build cross-national datasets and how to analyze such macro-level data with various regression techniques. And they had me read a lot of stuff.

One day Jeff suggested I read *Global Formation: Structures of the World Economy*, a book authored by Christopher Chase-Dunn (Chris). I knew that Chris had been Jeff's advisor in graduate school at Johns Hopkins University (JHU). Jeff made it clear that I should order the book. Checking it out from the university's library wasn't a good idea. "Trust me" he said. So I ordered the book, and I'm glad I did. By the time I finished reading the first two chapters I knew that I wanted to be Chris' student. I read the book twice in a row, cover to cover. Since then I've read it multiple other times. My original copy is full of highlighted text and the pages are worn.

Jeff contacted Chris and told him about me. I don't know the exact details of their conversation. Neither of them will give me straight answers, even after all these years. At some



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point shortly after their conversation, I spoke with Chris, and I expressed my interest in being his student. He encouraged me to apply to the Sociology PhD program at UC Riverside (UCR). He had recently moved to UCR from JHU and started his new center, the Institute for Research on World-Systems (IROWS).

Before applying to UCR, my fiancée, Katrina, and I took a road trip to visit UCR and meet with Chris. It was summertime so campus was pretty quiet. We met in Watkins Hall, where the Sociology Department is located. Chris wanted to show us IROWS, which involved a short walk across part of campus. Right after getting outside Watkins Hall, Chris stopped and looked closely at something on the ground. There was some type of large insect, and it had caught his attention. He studied it for a few minutes, and then cracked a joke about it being an escapee from the Entomology Department. The rest of our short visit was just as fascinating and enjoyable. I was even more convinced that I wanted to be Chris' student. So I applied, and was accepted into the Sociology PhD program at UCR. Fortunately, Chris offered to fund me as his research assistant (RA) at IROWS. I moved to Riverside and started the graduate program in January of 2001.

There was a small kitchen between my office and Chris' office at IROWS. Many unplanned conversations took place in that kitchen over coffee. This is where much of my learning took place. We would discuss all sorts of ideas. Even though he was endlessly busy, Chris always took the time to talk and he never rushed our conversations. Side note: a rather large and completely harmless snake lived right outside the exit door in the kitchen at IROWS. My first encounter with it was late at night while leaving for home. While exiting the building I might have accidentally stepped on part of its tail. But the snake stuck around and we'd see it quite often and it was a common topic of conversation. It even found its way inside once or twice.

There were (and still are) many research projects taking place at IROWS. As Chris' RA I spent much of my time working with him on his NSF funded structural globalization project. He had already completed the trade portion of the project, which was published in the *American Sociological Review* in 2000. (If you haven't read this paper lately, give it another read. It is simply brilliant.) We were attempting to apply the same methodology to investment globalization that Chris had developed and used for the trade globalization study. The investment globalization study proved to be quite challenging. Along with his other graduate student RAs, especially Carolina Bank Munoz and Shoon Lio, we sought out and coded historical data on foreign investment spanning close to two centuries. Chris always formulated solutions for the challenges that arose, and we were able to finish the project as well as many others, including a quantitative study of hegemonic cycles and conceptual work on regions and interaction networks.

Besides working as Chris' RA at IROWS, he invited me to assist him with the *Journal of World-Systems Research*. The experience was invaluable and enjoyable. Early on, I made a lot of

mistakes, but Chris was incredibly patient. He encouraged me to guest edit a special issue on a topic of my choosing, even though I was just a graduate student. With my growing interest in global environmental sociology, I ended up guest coediting an issue with Edward Kick on “Globalization and the Environment” that was published in the journal in 2003. (Coincidentally, Edward and I ended up serving as co-editors of the journal from 2007 – 2011, which was the period of time in which Chris’ efforts for JWSR to become the official journal for the PEWS section of ASA proved to be successful!)

Chris provided me unconditional support for pursuing MA and PhD projects on the political economy of global environmental change, and his unconditional support has continued throughout my career. For example, during my first individual presentation at an ASA conference in graduate school, another very senior scholar was rather hostile and dismissive towards the preliminary research I was presenting, and he interrupted me multiple times. Chris defended me and my work and did it in a way that was firm yet collegial. Months later when I learned that a paper out of my MA research had been accepted for publication in one of our discipline’s flagship journals, Chris had me over for a group dinner, and he toasted my achievement.

Chris’ influence on my research is without question. Just a casual glance of any of my published work is all that is needed to see this. My research on international inequality and environmental degradation, ecologically unequal exchange, and foreign investment and the environment all rest on the shoulders of his foundational scholarship concerning the stratified interstate system and his path breaking theoretical and empirical work on investment dependence and trade dependence. My longitudinal research that focuses on how the environmental impacts of various political-economic and demographic factors change through time, and how such changing relationships differ for nations in various structural and spatial contexts is inspired by his propositions about constants, cycles and trends in the modern world-system that he outlines in chapter 2 of *Global Formation*. My recent collaborative research, which focuses on facility-level carbon emissions for all of the world’s fossil fuel power plants, is influenced by Chris’ fundamental assertions about nestedness, particularly the relevance of what occurs at smaller scales and how smaller-scale occurrences are shaped by broader conditions of power and inequality in the core-periphery hierarchy.

At the ASA meetings in 2015, I had the privilege of speaking on a panel to celebrate Chris’ contributions to world-systems perspectives and other areas of theory and research. I intended to make one simple point: his influence on the field of global environmental sociology is substantial and hugely significant, and is growing as the area itself continues to evolve. This is obvious to anyone familiar with the field. I read statements written by many of the world’s most well-known global environmental social scientists that underscored this point (e.g., Brett Clark,

Thomas Dietz, Alf Hornborg), and I outlined how Chris' work has influenced everything I've done throughout my career. Chris responded by politely telling the audience that he didn't believe me (us). Well, the evidence is abundantly clear, and we collectively stand by our message!

I'd like to conclude by sharing two short stories that illustrate Chris' sense of humor and adventure, both of which I admire greatly and are part of what make him such a wonderful mentor and scholar.

1. My wife and I were eating dinner with Chris and his family at their home on a springtime evening in 2003. At the time they had a small adorable dog named Maddie that was quite a character. While this dog was about the size of a large pigeon, it would try and stick up to coyotes, other much larger dogs, and it would get very close to their horses. Maddie thought she was in charge and was constantly getting into mischief. On this springtime evening, we were all sitting out on their back patio enjoying good food, wine and excellent conversation. Maddie trotted by with a sense of urgency. Chris glanced in her direction and then glanced in my direction and stated "how would you like to live your entire life as a joke?" I laughed so hard I fell off the bench I was sitting on.

2. During my first year as an assistant professor at Washington State University (2004-2005), I was encouraged by my department chair to invite Chris to come up to Pullman and give a talk in our seminar series. Chris kindly agreed. His talk was excellent. It turned out that he had spent time during his childhood on a relative's farm just outside of Washtucna (about 70 miles from Pullman), a bustling metropolis with a population of slightly over 200. Chris was keen on the idea of visiting this farm. We drove around the area on a few different state highways and many farm roads. After a while he found it. The farm hadn't been in operation for quite some time, and the buildings were dilapidated. We walked around the property and explored the old farm house. Some excellent pictures of Chris and the farm were taken. Then we decided it was time to head back to Pullman since we were having dinner with my dear colleague Gene Rosa, who was cooking for us at his home.

About halfway back to Pullman, I looked down and noticed a tick on my leg. I pulled over and removed it from my body and car before it could burrow into my skin. When we arrived at my house in Pullman, we were greeted outside by Katrina, who noticed multiple ticks and fleas on the back of my shirt. Then she noticed a few ticks and fleas on Chris as well. The next thing I know, Chris is undressing on our front lawn and he suggested I do the same. He asked Katrina if she could grab the garden hose. In a matter of seconds we had stripped down to our undergarments, checked each other and ourselves for ticks and fleas, and then Katrina had the pleasure of hosing us down, on the front lawn, and with the neighbors across the street watching.

We had a great laugh, put on some dry clothes, and went off and had a lovely time at Gene's that evening.

About the Author

Andrew Jorgenson is Professor and Chair of the Sociology Department and Professor of Environmental Studies at Boston College. His primary area of research is the political economy and human ecology of global environmental change.

Disclosure Statement

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