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In Memoriam: Janice E. J. Monk (1937–2024)

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My hope is for a geography that is enriched by and more responsive than it has historically been to diversity. To attain that future, we need ways in which conjunctions and divisions are created, sustained, and challenged, to bring our energies and talents to bear on fostering institutions and knowledge that are consciously inclusive.

—Jan Monk (2004 AAG Presidential Address, 18)

Janice (Jan) Monk was a pathbreaking feminist geographer specializing in gender and feminist geography, the history of women in geography,

geographic education, and the geographies of marginalized groups, including Aboriginal communities (Hansen and Monk 2013). She is remembered as an extraordinary scholar and mentor who built and sustained networks across the world, especially through her work with the American Association of Geographers (AAG) and the Geography and Gender Commission of the International Geographical Union (IGU). Jan served as president of the AAG (2001–2002) and was recognized for her accomplishments with the Lifetime Achievement Award (2000), the Enhancing Diversity Award (2007), selection as an AAG Fellow (2017), and the Stanley Brunn Award for Creativity in Geography (2019). When she passed away in July 2024, geographers across the world shared memories of Jan, her impact on geography, and her impact on their lives and careers (Fincher et al. 2024; Howitt et al. 2024; Queirós 2024; School of Geography, Development and Environment [SGDE] 2024; Baylina, Ramon, and Luna 2025; House-Peters 2025; Sanders et al. 2025).

Biography

Janice Jones Monk was born in Sydney, Australia, in 1937. She received a BA honors degree in geography from the University of Sydney in 1957. Her honors thesis examined Scottish investment in Australian livestock lands (Howitt et al. 2024). In 1961, she took a ship across the Pacific and a train across the United States to begin a master's program at the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign, close to cousins in Chicago. She earned her PhD in 1972 before becoming an assistant professor of geography at the University of Illinois, where she published on geographic education, the Caribbean, and from her dissertation. She was denied tenure in 1980

(Monk and Hanson 1982; Holcomb et al. 1987) and filed several appeals. She decided to move to Tucson, Arizona, in 1980, joining the University of Arizona's Southwest Institute for Research on Women (SIROW) as associate director with adjunct status in the then Department of Geography and Regional Development. She became executive director of SIROW from 1983 to 2004 and was promoted to a permanent position as associate research social scientist in 1984 and to full research social scientist in 1989. Jan retired from SIROW in 2004 and then became an emeritus research professor in the School of Geography, Development and Environment (SGDE) where she remained active in research, outreach, and mentoring for the next two decades.

In 2006, in collaboration with the journal *Gender, Place and Culture* (GPC), SGDE established the annual Janice Monk Lecture in Feminist Geography. The lecture has been given by many feminist geographers¹ at the University of Arizona and the AAG conference and subsequently published in GPC. Jan would attend each lecture, asking insightful questions.

In her biographical essay “Braided Streams” (Monk 2015a), Jan identified three themes in her professional life: social equity and inclusivity (including her research on Aboriginal communities); women, gender, and feminism (including work in the Southwest); and the study of geographical institutions and education, women geographers, and international collaboration (Monk 2015b).

Social Equity, Inclusion, and Indigenous Communities

Jan’s PhD dissertation focused on Aboriginal lives in rural New South Wales, Australia, conducting surveys across six towns, comparing the socioeconomic conditions for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal residents in the context of historical marginalization, government policy, and poverty (Monk 1972, 1974, 2015a; Monk et al. 2023; Howitt et al. 2024). Her interest was fostered when, as an undergraduate, she volunteered to help build homes in an Aboriginal community. This work was partly inspired by anthropologist Julian Steward at Illinois and by the work of fellow Australian geographer Fay Gale (e.g., Gale 1962). Jan rejected generalized stereotypes of acculturation and assimilation, finding diversity within Aboriginal groups and focusing on the legacies of

dispossession, spatial isolation, poverty, prejudice, and varying economic opportunities across people and communities (Monk et al. 2023).

Her interest in Indigenous experiences of racism and prejudice informed some of her work in Arizona, which included perspectives from Indigenous women (Norwood and Monk 1987). She was thrilled, in 2011, when a collaboration with Australian geographer Richie Howitt provided the opportunity to revisit this research on the communities she had studied in Aboriginal Australia from a feminist lens (Howitt, Crew et al. 2018; Howitt, Fincher et al. 2024). Funded by the Australian Research Council, and with the baseline of extensive notes and surveys she had saved from her dissertation research, the project explored the changes that had occurred since the 1960s, including recognition of land rights, policies against racial discrimination, and apologies for abuse of Aboriginal peoples (Monk et al. 2023). As part of this collaboration, her dissertation materials were shared with the communities of those she had surveyed, and an archive was created at the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies.

Women, Gender, and Feminist Geography

In 1982, Jan Monk and Susan Hanson challenged the discipline of geography in their seminal article in *The Professional Geographer*, “On Not Excluding Half of the Human in Human Geography,” in which they argued that much of human geography was biased against women and, as a corrective, promoted alternative perspectives that included a gender-sensitive feminist geography (Monk and Hanson 1982). They identified research that overlooked women or assumed stereotypes and essentialized women’s gender roles, ignored emerging feminist theory, or dismissed the significance of women’s activities. A parallel article with Wilbur Zelinsky in *Progress in Human Geography* (Zelinsky, Monk, and Hanson 1982) provided further review of studies on women and environment, women and work, the status of women and their quality of life, gender as related to housing and transportation, child care, health, education, and aging. Together they set out a research agenda that included calls to political, urban, environmental, and medical geographers to

take up questions of gender. Jan continued to argue for gender and feminist geography throughout her career with a focus on internationalizing this field (Monk and García Ramón 1987; Monk 1994, 1999, 2022; García-Ramon and Monk 2007).

Jan's interest in gender and feminism increased when she moved to the University of Arizona in 1980 to work at SIROW (Monk 2015a), an interdisciplinary research center that focuses on women in the U.S. Southwest including the experiences of Latino and Native Americans. Jan became particularly interested in women and landscape (Monk 1984a, 1984b), but she also wrote policy pieces on women and the Arizona economy (Monk, Fleischman, and Dinnerstein 1981; Monk and Schlegel 1986). One of Jan's best known publications, inspired by her role at SIROW, is a coedited book with Vera Norwood from the University of New Mexico. *The Desert Is No Lady: Southwestern Landscapes in Women's Writing and Art* (Norwood and Monk 1987) highlighted the life experiences and artistic and cultural works of diverse women writers and artists in the Southwest region. The book inspired a 1995 film that includes profiles and reflections of women poets and artists (<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt12147058/>). A follow-up volume edited with Lillian Schlissel and Vicki Ruiz—*Western Women: Their Land, Their Lives*—emerged from a conference at the University of Arizona and includes essays on the everyday lives and histories of these women and their perceptions of landscape (Schlissel, Ruiz, and Monk 1988).

Another important contribution to understanding the geographies of gender and feminist ideas is a book coedited with Cindi Katz (Katz and Monk 1993), *Full Circles: Geographies of Women over the Life Course*, which looks at women over different stages in their lives and their experiences of work, gender discrimination, aging, child care, and mobility.

Research on Women Geographers

Jan Monk is notable for her sustained efforts to address gender bias against women in geography, supporting women geographers around the world and documenting the untold histories and efforts of early women geographers (Monk and Allen 2024). Zelinsky had raised concerns about bias and lack of

representation of women in geography (Zelinsky 1973a, 1973b). He found that only 3 percent of AAG membership in 1970 and only 7 percent of college faculty and 3 percent of full professors were women. Given this low representation and status of women in geography, Jan and others were instrumental in establishing the AAG Committee on the Status of Women Geographers (CSWG). A more recent report found that among AAG members who volunteered their gender identity, 47 percent were female (AAG 2022). Jan celebrated the increasing proportion of women faculty, including in her own department at the University of Arizona, where in 2018, women constituted 45 percent (thirteen) of the full-time geography faculty, including a half-dozen full professors (when Jan joined Arizona in 1980 there were no female geography faculty). She always enjoyed the annual holiday get together of women geographers on campus and was gratified to see increasing numbers of women and geographers of color at the AAG annual meetings.

One of Jan's most important contributions to our understanding of women geographers lies in her deep and detailed research into the earlier history of women geographers, including those working outside major universities and beyond the academy. This was the topic of her AAG Presidential Address on “Women, Gender, and the Histories of American Geography.” According to Monk (2004), “It is the neglected early women geographers and their descendants who serve as my inspiration as I attempt to interpret the histories of our profession within a framework that recognizes it as a gendered social institution” (1). She highlighted the careers of women, such as Lucia Harrison, who taught in the teacher training institutions called “normal schools” and were members of the National Council for Geography Teachers, now the National Council for Geographic Education (NCGE).

Other forgotten groups of women Jan highlighted are the women travelers and writers who worked at the American Geographical Society (Monk 2003) and in the U.S. federal government, such as Evelyn Pruitt (Monk 2017), a pioneering researcher in remote sensing at the Office of Naval Research (Monk 2004).

Jan wrote specifically about the women who received doctorates from Clark University in geography (thirty-nine from 1921–1969) and their

challenges in finding faculty employment (Monk 1998). Some of this research included in-depth interviews with women geographers, exploring achievements and barriers such as family responsibilities, field work, racism, and unadulterated sexism. Jan particularly admired Mary “Zonia” Baber for her lectures and activism for peace, antiracism, and conservation, as well as Black geographer Thelma Glass, for her outstanding role at Alabama State University (Monk 2004; Monk and di Friedberg 2011).

Jan’s other groundbreaking work includes interviews with U.S. women geographers who began their careers, as she did, in the 1970s (Monk 2006, 2010). She found that many had intended to be teachers and were fascinated by travel and landscapes. Faced with a lack of female role models and helpful mentoring in academia, they experienced tensions with and isolation by male faculty and students, and weak support for family responsibilities or dual careers. Even the beginnings of affirmative action did not bring opportunities to many of the women she interviewed. As she noted, “The lives of the women I have studied stimulate awareness of persistence, accomplishment and significant professional contributions while they may have faced political, cultural and economic difficulties” (Monk 2015a, 17). Her work with the CSWG encouraged the AAG to take gender bias more seriously, to consider more women for official roles within the association, and to support affirmative action.

Jan’s interest in women geographers also led to her involvement in the Society of Women Geographers (SWG), founded in 1925 by women explorers who wanted to bring together women who were interested in exploration and research (Eppinga 2009). Early members and award winners included Margaret Mead, Mary Leakey, and Amelia Earhart. Jan was president of the Society, hosted the triennial conference in Tucson in 2002, and received its Outstanding Achievement Award in 2008. For many years, Jan chaired the selection committee for the Society’s Evelyn L. Pruitt Fellowships for graduate students, reading dozens of proposals and recruiting applicants.

International Networking and Collaboration

Jan cared deeply about the international community of geographers and forged many friendships and

collaborations around the world. An edited book, *Bridging Worlds: Building Feminist Geographies, Essays in Honor of Jan Monk*, celebrated the thirtieth anniversary of the IGU Commission on Gender and Geography with more than forty scholars contributing essays relating to her scholarship (Datta, Momsen, and Oberhauser 2024). In the introduction the editors stated, “The metaphor of a bridge connecting feminist scholarship across different worlds best describes the supportive figure Jan Monk has been to feminist geographers of different generations and social locations.”

At the IGU Congress in 1988, in her hometown of Sydney, she was invited to give a plenary lecture titled, “Encompassing Gender: Progress and Challenges in Gender Research.” Eventually a proposal to IGU leadership resulted in the creation of a full Commission on Gender and Geography in 1996 (Monk 2008; Huang et al. 2017). Jan became the editor of the Commission’s newsletter, editing it for more than twenty years until 2014. In the newsletter, Jan included reports from many regions and suggested many geographers from the Global South join the IGU, paying for some to attend IGU Congresses. The Commission now has more than 870 geographers from fifty-seven countries as members and in 2022 received the IGU’s excellence award. In 2012, the IGU awarded Jan its highest award—the Lauréat d’Honneur. With Janet Momsen, in 1991, she became the founding coeditor of a Routledge book series—*International Studies of Women and Place*—that has published thirty-five books on gender, women, and feminism. Jan was a coauthor of several books in the series including *Full Circles* (Katz and Monk 1993) and *Women in the European Union* (García-Ramon and Monk 1996).

In the 2024 the chair of the IGU Gender Commission, Professor Joseli Maria Silva from Brazil, wrote the following about Jan:

Everybody recognizes her relevance in the academic world of global geography . . . I would like to highlight . . . the most remarkable, namely, her ability to build up relationships, and connect people and places. She managed to leave in each meeting an ancestral seed blooming into new knowledge, even in places very far from her hometown. Jan is a seed-woman. According to the Latin-American indigenous ancestral knowledge, a seed-woman does not separate the fight to defend their lives and their bodies [from] the fight for their territories. Her lessons will always be present in the actions of this commission that she

helped to create in 1992. (IGU Commission on Gender and Geography Newsletter #72, Nov. 2024)

Her international networks stretched across the world. She was a visiting scholar and invited lecturer, for example, in India, New Zealand, Taiwan, the United Kingdom, and Portugal, and she attended many IGU Congresses and conferences.

Spain, and especially Barcelona, held a special place in Jan's heart. Jan met Professor Maria Dolores García-Ramon of the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (UAB) through the IGU. They first published together in 1987 (Monk and García Ramón 1987; see also Monk and García-Ramon 2013) and Jan visited Barcelona more than fifteen times, including celebrating her eightieth birthday there in 2017. Jan gave many lectures at UAB, attending seminars and publishing many articles in Catalan and Spanish journals. A series of Spanish geographers came to visit her in Tucson, spending time in Jan's small guest house close to the University of Arizona. In 2013, Jan was honored by the UAB with an honorary doctorate (*Doctora honoris causa*), where García-Ramon highlighted Jan's international efforts on inclusivity "in the sense of actively defending the need to incorporate the work of geographers who work and write outside the Anglo-American academic space and to listen to their voices" and her support for Spanish and Catalan geography (UAB 2013, *Doctora honoris causa*). Jan published her reflections on the occasion by focusing on the "braided streams" of her career (Monk 2015b).

Living within fifty miles of the U.S.–Mexico border and through connections developed through her role in SIROW, Jan became involved in several collaborative projects that focused on women's health and the significance of gender in health care on the border (Monk, Manning, and Denman 2003; Manning et al. 2006). The "Transborder Consortium for Research and Action on Gender and Health at the Mexico-U.S. Border" emerged in 1993 when Jan and Norma Ojeda de la Pena worked to develop a new gender program for the Colegio de la Frontera Norte in Tijuana. Joined by Catalina Denman of the Colegio de Sonora, Jan received funding from the Ford Foundation and MacArthur Foundation for consortium projects on women's reproductive health, with links to lay health educators (*promotoras*) and community agencies (Monk et al. 2009). In the book *Compartiendo historias de fronteras: Cuerpos*,

géneros, generaciones, y salud (Denman, Monk, and Ojeda de la Pena 2007), they described participatory action research on topics such as reproductive health and migration of farmworkers in Baja California and the United States, women's perception of cancer screening, involving men in discussions of gender and health, and the risks of uterine cancer in Arizona and Sonora. This border collaboration between the University of Arizona and the Colegio de Sonora continues.

Geographic Education and Mentoring

Jan's substantive contributions to geographic education and mentoring were honored, when, in 2025, the AAG's edited book *Thriving in an Academic Career* was dedicated to Jan Monk:

Professional life in the ivory tower is often stereotyped as occurring outside the "real world," but, in reality, faculty practice cannot be separated from the dynamics of race, gender, class, sexuality, and other social characteristics that, while unrelated to academic ability, are too often associated with unequal career advancement and opportunity. Perhaps no one in our discipline understood this better than Jan Monk ... Jan dedicated much of her career to the needs of graduate students and early career researchers of all backgrounds.

... Jan was one of the original leaders of the Geography Faculty Development Alliance (GFDA) workshops and contributed numerous research articles for the Enhancing Departments and Graduate Education (EDGE) project, both initiatives of the American Association of Geographers (AAG) supported with funding from the U.S. National Science Foundation. For helping countless new faculty thrive, we dedicate this book to Jan. (Solem et al. 2025, vii–viii)

Although passionate about geographic education, especially relating to gender, Jan did not teach regular geography classes herself after she left her faculty position at the University of Illinois. Although her position at Arizona was focused on research, she was a valued member of graduate committees and gave many guest lectures there and around the world.

Some of her earliest publications were focused on education, including testing, lab skills in physical geography, geographic curricula, and course evaluations. She then turned toward reducing gender bias in geography teaching. Jan was particularly keen to see more attention to the lives of women in geography curricula at all levels and argued for changes in

language (e.g., people and environment rather than man and environment) and for more complex discussions of gender roles and differences. In 1980, she and Arlene Rengert wrote a report for the AAG on overcoming masculine bias in human geography teaching and a resource guide on teaching about women and spatial change (Rengert and Monk 1980, 1982). Jan suggested that geography could draw on women's studies for more gender-inclusive curricula arguing to "include in basic geography courses material that examines how gender shapes response to place, how the visible features of regions reflect values about male and female roles, and how the geographical organization of society affects women and men differently" (Monk 1983, 271).

Jan worked on the Finding a Way initiative for the NCGE, led by Ricky Sanders and funded by the National Science Foundation, to assist high school teachers in integrating more materials and approaches that are inclusive of women and race and ethnicity in their teaching (Monk 1997, 2000, 2004; Sanders et al. 2025).

Jan coauthored several AAG handbooks such as *Aspiring Academics—A Resource Book for Graduate Students and Early Career Faculty* (Solem, Foote, and Monk 2009) and *Practicing Geography* (Solem, Foote, and Monk 2013) that provide guidance for faculty and students, as well as advice on professional development for those seeking nonacademic careers, with case studies of careers and lives of different geographers.

She helped GFDA organize workshops to bring together and mentor early career geographers as they navigate their careers. The Enhancing Departments and Graduate Education (EDGE) project focused on understanding the challenges facing graduate students, especially in the context of their diverse gender, age, marital and family status, ethnicity, and domestic or international origin identities. Solem and Foote describe her qualities as a mentor to be a caring friend who listens carefully, asks helpful questions, creates community, and offers appropriate feedback. Her understanding of the challenges facing early career scholars was partly based on her own experience, and from interviews with people in ten geography departments (Schlempfer and Monk 2011; Monk et al. 2000) where she found wide variations in mentoring, training in teaching and proposal writing, and support for women, international students,

and people of color, as well as barriers to advancement among junior faculty.

According to Solem and Foote (2024):

Jan's legacy as a mentor to early career geographers will continue long into the future. She has been instrumental in establishing professional development innovations that have helped an entire generation of early career geographers succeed in their careers The international collaborations she supported to advance feminist geography, and the geographies of gender have enriched our discipline through better mentoring worldwide ... Jan has been fearless not only in questioning how academic culture perpetuates unhealthy and unwelcoming climates but also by taking actions that have helped to create a diverse and inclusive global community of support for early career researchers. (119)

In recognizing Jan's legacy in mentoring and education, the Association of Pacific Coast Geographers (APCG) established the "Jan Monk Early Career Faculty Research Award" in 2023.

Conclusion

In the aftermath of Jan's passing in July 2024 there was an outpouring of remembrances on social media, professional gatherings, and newsletters, as well as several essays and dedications from colleagues and students around the world. The University of Arizona held a memorial event in October 2024 where friends and colleagues remembered her and the impact of her research and mentoring. Special sessions were also organized in her honor at the 2024 APCG and the 2025 AAG.

Remembrances from Jan's colleagues and students include the following:

Jan's support for my career and her dedication to helping other women geographers was unmatched. I am grateful for her scholarly contributions and the time she spent encouraging me and so many others. Eve Gruntfest (University of Colorado–Colorado Springs)

Beyond her professional accomplishments, Jan was a caring and kind individual. I will never forget her warmth and generosity. Kavita Pandit (Georgia State University)

Jan gave frank and direct advice that I still think about almost twenty years later. She was one of a kind, a pioneer, and a thoughtful scholar and mentor. Heidi Hausermann (University of Michigan)

The world of geography has lost a great one. Jan Monk was incredibly supportive, and I'm so glad to have had the opportunity to chat with her when I was a grad student. Korine Kolivras (Virginia Tech)

An outstanding person in our work at the border and such a wise mentor to many. (Catalina Denman, El Colegio de Sonora)

I would not have become a geographer without her support. Legend. Marissa Isaak (Central New Mexico Community College)

She leaves an incredibly important legacy that is an acute reminder of the importance of feminist activist inspired service, of remembering and helping others, and of noticing the whole person and not just the academic. Linda Peake (York University)

In addition to her legacy of research, pedagogy, outreach, mentoring, and networking she left generous financial gifts to the AAG, the University of Arizona, the Institute of Australian Geographers, and the Women's Foundation for the State of Arizona. Her contributions are also sustained through the annual Jan Monk lectures at the University of Arizona and with the journal *Gender, Place and Culture* at the AAG conference, and through awards established by the APCG, the IGU Commission on Gender and Geography, and the AAG Feminist Geographies Specialty Group. These lasting gifts ensure that Jan's legacy continues as she lived—through wise and generous contributions to geography and geographers across the world.

Acknowledgments

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Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Note

1. Lecturers have included Ruth Fincher (2006), Cindi Katz (2007), Geraldine Pratt (2008), Susan Hanson

(2009), J. K. Gibson Graham (2010), Banu Gökariksel (2011), Richa Nagar (2012), Melissa Wright (2013), Alice Hovorka (2014), Caitlin Cahill (2015), Sharlene Mollett (2016), Rebecca Torres (2017), Jennifer Hyndman (2018), Julie Young (2019), Rachel Pain (2020), Camilla Hawthorne (2021), Jack Gieseking (2022), Caroline Faria (2023), Sarah Hunt (2024), and Madeleine Cahuas (2025).

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