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AUTHOR Saueressig-Schreuder, Yda
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ABSTRACT

The importance of restructuring the discipline of geography and enhancing its role in the precollege curriculum as part of a global approach to education is emphasized in this paper. International education is seen as an essential part of high school and college education in an increasingly interdependent world. The oil crisis, the world economic recession, and the Iranian hostage crisis have made the U.S. public aware of the complex world situation and have increased the need to understand the complexities of global interdependence. A revitalization of regional geography or area studies with a global emphasis and a problems approach is suggested. In order to show how geography developed as a discipline and illustrate its placement in the curriculum of the United States and Europe, its history is traced from the eighteenth century to the present. Traditionally, geography has held a higher status in the curriculum in Europe than in the United States. By the time a global perspective was introduced into the United States curriculum, theoretical goegraphy prevailed at the university level, and geography was never introduced as a required and integral part of high school education as it was in Europe. (SM)

THE STUDY OF GEOGRAPHY IN AN INTERDEPENDENT WORLD

Yda Saueressig-Schreuder
Department of Geography
University of Delaware
Newark, Delaware 19711

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Introduction

High schools and colleges in the United States, as opposed to Europe and other parts of the world, have failed to instruct students in the most elementary fashion in the discipline of geography. In February 1980, the Education Testing Service conducted a survey of global understanding with a nationally representative random sample of more than 3000 undergraduate students at some 185 American two-year and four-year institutions and found the mean percentage score of four-year college freshmen to be 41.9; seniors, after four years of a college education scored only 8.5 percentage points higher with a mean of 50.5. Education majors, the future teachers in our schools scored lowest with 39.8 percent. The U.S. Department of Education estimates that less than 9 percent of all secondary school students in the U.S. are enrolled in geography courses and this figure is about 60 percent of what the enrollment figures showed for 1960-1961.[1]

No other group of academicians knows the state of geographical illiteracy better than geographers. Yet, we do not have cogent explanations as to why geography has such low status as a subject in pre-collegiate and collegiate education in the U.S. in contrast to its status in other highly technologically and industrially advanced societies. The educational decline in geography in the United States has occurred during a period when unparalleled advances in science and technology were made and when U.S. foreign trade and political involvement in other parts of the world increased tremendously (after World War II). Recent government reports have emphasized, in fact, that American efforts have fallen short in international education

and that the U.S. position in world affairs may be in jeopardy if we fail to redress these insufficiencies.[2]

It is the purpose of this paper to detail on the reasons behind the geographic illiteracy among U.S. students, to trace the history of geography as a discipline, and to make some recommendations for geography teaching in high schools and colleges in the future.

Geographic Illiteracy: The "Bays and Capes" stigma

Compared with other industrialized and developed countries, geography teaching has been greatly ignored in the United States. Both in Western Europe and the Soviet Union, compulsory curriculum in the equivalent of high school includes five years of geography besides physics, chemistry, and biology, which are taught for about the same length of time. In the United States, the discipline seems to suffer from the "Bays and Capes" stigma or from the notion that: "Geography is nothing more than the memorization of place-names." While modern geography goes far beyond rote learning of place names, students seem to continue to resist taking courses in geography due to a negative public image the discipline has had for some time.

It is easy enough to make excuses for not considering geography or the study of foreign places as serious or worthwhile endeavours. Unlike European nations, the United States is relatively far away from most parts of the world and with its wide variety of environments and resources, the country has for long been relatively self-sufficient compared to most other developed nations. Its history as a colonial power was insignificant adding to insular attitudes with respect to other societies.

The situation has changed dramatically since World War II, however. During the last decade alone, U.S. international trade has grown more

than two-fold and investments abroad have more than tripled. U.S. political involvement in foreign countries has increased accordingly, and we can no longer afford to stay aloof as far as our geographical knowledge about foreign places is concerned.[3] Like Europe in the nineteenth century, the United States today is in the midst of world affairs which requires knowledge about foreign places and international issues on the part of its citizens beyond the tourist brochure.

Geography - a European discipline

In Europe, the emergence of geography as a professional discipline resulted from empirical observations made during the time of discoveries and explorations in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[4] Although geography as a body of knowledge is of classical antiquity as Clarence Glacken points out so well in Traces of the Rhodian Shore (1976), conceptual developments about time and space, and about man's relationship to the natural environment and to foreign places, which resulted from the European voyages of discovery and colonization, formed the main contribution to geography as an academic discipline.[5] Darwin's theory of evolution (1859), for instance, gave the key to understanding the interrelationships of natural and human phenomena, which influenced both von Humboldt (1769-1859) and Ritter (1779-1859) who established geography as a field of study.

To trace the role of geography as an academic discipline in the context of society, we will ask the questions why men turned to geography, what they did when they became geographers, and how they pursued their discipline. In other words, what were the circumstances, the arguments, and the questions raised.

In physical geography, it was the notion of process rather than time--at the end of the eighteenth century--which gave direction to the study of the earth. Processes of change resulted from the interaction of physical forces in spatial context, Hutton argued in 1785.[6] The earth's history had no clear beginning or end, and the notion of creation was gradually abandoned, opening the way for more profound scientific research with respect to knowledge of the earth itself.

Also, at the end of the eighteenth century, was the growing recognition of man's capacity to modify his environment. Technological advances resulted in significant alterations of the landscape, and resource extraction took place at a scale never seen before. Railroads were built and far away places were reached to serve the industrial and urban society of Europe, and a profound notion of Europe's dominance of the world emerged.

Von Humboldt and Ritter both lived and worked at the time when Cook's journeys of the Pacific became known to Europeans and when Darwin conducted his ecological and evolutionary studies. Both dedicated their professional lives to organizing and ordering knowledge about foreign places from either a natural-philosophical interest as in the case of Von Humboldt, or a historical-regional and teleological interest as in the case of Ritter. Both men did travel extensively. Von Humboldt spent several years in Latin America and Ritter went on frequent trips to other European countries. The works of these two men and other geographers contributed to the introduction of geography in elementary and high schools. The Education Act of 1870 made elementary education compulsory in Britain and similar developments took place in France, Germany, Belgium, and the Netherlands. National examinations and national standards were introduced and geography shared in this development from the very beginning. During the same period geographical

societies and geographical journals were established. These developments, in the brief span between 1870 and the end of the century, determined the future organization of geography as a discipline and established geography as a required subject matter to be taught in European elementary and high schools.[7]

Of all the countries where geography began to play a role, France probably made the greatest advance. Some have attributed this to the defeat of 1870-1871--when France became acutely aware of the necessity to establish colonies and overseas rather than continental commercial contacts.[8] Until then France had been relatively "self-contained" and geographical awareness had been poor. As Goethe once said:

> "Ce qui caracterise les francais, ce n'est pas leur politesse, leur esprit, leur grace, leur clarite, c'est leur ignorance en geographie." [9]

Apparently, the French took his statement seriously. Soon after the Franco-Prussian war, several journals and newspapers began to publish geographical articles dealing with the outside world. When France acquired Tunis in 1881, the Revue de Geographie claimed credit for having advocated colonialism. In 1876, the Marseilles Society of Geography and Colonial Studies had been founded and several local and regional geographical societies contributed to a growing interest in world geography.[10]

Acutely aware of the impact of Western civilization on foreign cultures, some nineteenth century geographers expressed social concern. Von Humboldt himself had been appalled by slavery and social conditions in Latin America and wrote about these matters in his travel logs. Elise Reclus a French anarchist, and Peter Kropotkin, a Russian socialist, were both geographers

by training, and both devoted their lives to social justice. Reclus (1830-1905) is the author of Nouvelle Geographie Universelle (1876-1894) and L'Homme et la Terre, a six volume work written in the period 1905-1908. Reclus travelled extensively, both in Europe and in North and South America, where he became aware of oppression and social inequality.[11] Kropotkin (1842-1921) had been an aide to the Tsar in his early years. During expeditions and journeys to Siberia and the Upper Amur, he became increasingly critical of the social order in Russia. He was arrested in 1874 but managed to escape to the United Kingdom in 1876 where the Royal Geographical Society gave him support for the rest of his life. In one of his most passionate statements Kropotkin declared what geography ought to be:

> It must teach us, from our earliest childhood, that we are brethren, whatever our nationality. In our time of wars, of national self-conceit, of national jealousies and hatreds ably nourished by people who pursue their own egotistic, personal or class interests, geography must be...a means of dissipating these prejudices and of creating other feelings more worthy of humanity. It must show that each nationality brings its own precious building-stone for the general development of the commonwealth...It is the task of the geographer to bring this truth, in its full light, into the midst of the lies accumulated by ignorance, presumption, and egotism.[12]

Early American geography was hardly colonial minded. Of far greater interest was the issue of man-environment relationships. The first professor of geography, at Princeton University in 1854, was Guyot (1807-1884). Of Swiss birth, he had studied at German universities, where he acquired an interest in the natural sciences. In The Earth and Man, von Humboldt's and Ritte: 's influence--with whom he had studied, clearly showed. George Perkins Marsh (1801-1882) is by many considered the first American

geographer as well as the fountain-head of the conservation movement. In his book Man and Nature, which appeared in 1864, he viewed geography as:

> "the science of the absolute and relative conditions of the earth's surface and of the ambient atmosphere (and) the investigation of the relations of action and reaction between man and the medium he inhabits." [13]

The American Geographical Society, founded in 1851, was mostly interested in territorial or western expansion of the United States. As late as 1859, it was proposed that there should be expeditions into the "immense and little known region between St. Paul, Minnesota, and western British Columbia." During the 1860s and 1870s, important geographical work was done by government agencies. John Wesley Powell (1834-1902), later director of the Geological Survey began his explorations of the Colorado River in 1867.[14] Overall, few foreign expeditions were conducted and it was only with the establishment of the National Geographical Magazine in 1896 that foreign countries were highlighted and that geographical literature became popular reading. Unlike in Europe, geography in the United States has never had a very strong international or global orientation. In the nineteenth century, economic growth in the United States proceeded in almost total isolation from the rest of the world and early geographical works like those of Marsh and Powell reflect this. Early twentieth century geographical writing introduced environmental determinism, and it was only during the last few decades that a more global perspective was introduced in American geography.

Regional Geography

As knowledge of the world grew, the aim of some writers was to give an integrated picture of various regions in which all the interrelated phenomena, physical and human, were considered. This idea was advocated by Kant, who argued that just as chronology provides a framework into which facts can be ordered, space (or chorology) provides another ordering principle.[15]

The earliest advocate of regional geography, in England, was Hugh R. Mill, who argued that: "the key to the principles of geography was in the relation between the solid forms of the land and the things that are free to move about over the surface." [16] In France, Vidal de la Blache (1845-1918) greatly supported the concept of a region. The treatement of the pays blended both physical and human features and showed an uniqueness or individuality of each part of France. French geographers published many regional monographs all following a more or less predictable order of presentation: climate, soils, vegetation, agriculture, mineral resources, industrial development, transportation, settlement, and distribution of population. Each region was described separately and distinguished from other regions, by emphasizing differences rather than similarities. Sometimes regions were ordered in some kind of hierarchical fashion where small regions were combined into larger ones.[17]

While there was much to be gained by the regional ordering principles, the relationships between phenomena were not always clear. As Hettner (1859-1941) pointed out, causal connections were seldom place bound: "no phenomena of the earth's surface is to be thought of for itself, but

only in relation to other places."[18] This idea proved useful in giving geographers a more explicit world view. Spatial relations, transportation, and market conditions play important roles in the "Geographic Equation." A farmer knows quite well that soil and weather conditions are important factors in agricultural production, but market conditions probably explain the variation in his annual income and crop selection. Consequently, traditional regional geography proved too rigid in approach and many geographers turned to some systematic branch of the discipline such as geomorphology, climatology, urban geography, economic geography, cultural geography, etc. Today geography is mainly systematic or thematic. Although perhaps academically more satisfying, many feel that it was the appeal of regional geography that proved crucial in the growth of the discipline in the early part of the twentieth century and a reevaluation of the role of regional geography--in the world of today--might be a worthwhile exercise.[19] It is on the basis of the historical analysis presented here that I would like to make some recommendations for the teaching of geography in the future.

The Study of Geography in an Interdependent World

The historical analysis has illustrated that geography as a discipline emerged and developed in relationship to discoveries and explorations. In Europe, an early relationship with colonialism and an awareness of external or world market conditions formed important factors in the development of geography as an academic discipline. The teaching of geography in high schools seemed to serve the purpose of educating a population about

foreign places and international issues. In the United States, on the other hand, geography served primarily a natural scientific curiosity. Very little notion was given to global issues. By the time a global perspective was introduced, systematic or theoretical geography prevailed at the university level, appealing very little to the general public, and, geography was never introduced as a required and integral part of high school education as was the case in Europe.

Today, the study of international relations is seen as an essential part of high school and college education. Asked to rank important subjects for all high school students to take, sixty percent of adults sampled in a Gallup Poll in 1979, rated "interdependence of nations" or "foreign relations" behind only the most obvious basic skills. The oil crises, the world economic recession and unemployment problems, and the hostage crisis in Iran, all made the American public acutely aware of the complicated world situation. Distant affairs, all of a sudden, seemed to have a direct impact on Americans daily life and a desire to understand international issues led to a new awareness of the complexities of global interdependence. The Report of the President's Commission on Foreign Language and International Studies (November 1979), gave the cause high visibility and global education was introduced at all levels, from local school districts to State Departments of education.[20]

Restructuring geography as a discipline to serve these needs is an essential requirement. Priorities in geography teaching in the future ought to be in the area of world geography and in an expansion of courses that involve global issues. Food and Hunger, World Population, and the Middle East Conflict are all topics of great importance and can only be understood

if we realize both local geographical and world market conditions. To this end I propose the revitalization of regional geography or area studies with a global emphasis and a problems approach. Geography is unique among the social and physical sciences in its multi-disciplinary and integrative approach, and the regional context has always served geography to meet this end. Instead of the traditional ordering scheme, I would suggest, however, to introduce a "problem-orientation." In the geography of South-east Asia, the emphasis might be on population growth and food production. In the Middle East the prevalent theme could be the impact of oil revenues on recent development of the region, or the Israeli-Arab conflict. This way, current global issues would be approached and looked at in their proper setting.

Kropotkin's statement about "what geography ought to be," could serve as an ideological guideline. If we recognize the world to be a community of independent states and if our concerns are to improve relationships between nations, then geography clearly has a task. Understanding East-West and North-South relationships requires familiarity with cultural, historical, economic-environmental, and geo-political conditions. As Kropotkin stated: "Geography must show that each nationality brings its own precious building-stone for the development of the commonwealth...It is the task of the geographer to bring this truth, in its full light, into the midst of the lies accumulated by ignorance, presumption, and egotism."

FOOTNOTES

1. A Survey of Global Understanding (Princeton, New Jersey, Educational Testing Service, 1980); A. David Hill, "A Survey of Global Understanding of American College Students: A Report to Geographers," The Professional Geographer, 33, no. 2, May 1981, pp. 237-45.

2. Strength Through Wisdom: A Critique of U.S. Capability (Jimmy Carter's Government Commission on Foreign Language and International Studies, 1979); Geography and International Knowledge (Association of American Geographers; Committee on Geography and International Studies, 1982).

3. John W. Studebaker, former U.S. Commissioner of Education, recommended in the war years that more emphasis should be given to world geography: "Dr. Studebaker Calls for Geography," NCGE Perspective (Newsletter of the National Council for Geographic Education), 9, no. 5, June 1981. The address was delivered at a National Conference of College and University Presidents, Baltimore, Maryland, 3-4 March, 1942.

4. Dr. R. Stoddart, "Geography - a European Science," Geography, no. 297, vol. 67, part 4, October 1982, pp. 289-96.

5. T. W. Freeman, A Hundred Years of Geography (Aldine, Chicago, 1961). Clarence J. Glacken, Traces on the Rhodian Shore: Nature and Culture in Western Thought from Ancient Times to the End of the Eighteenth Century (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1976).

6. James Hutton, "Theory of the Earth," Transactions of the Royal Society of Edinburgh, 1, 1788, pp. 209-304.

7. D. R. Stoddart, "That Victorian science: Huxley's Physiography and its impact on geography," Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, 66, 1975, pp. 99-104; and, by the same author, "Geography, education and research," Geographical Journal, 147, 1981, pp. 287-97. The origins of geographical societies are closely linked to commerce and colonialism. Financial support and membership came primarily from the business community. In 1865 there were 16 geographical societies, in 1885 there were 94 (80 in Europe), and most were imperialistic in orientation, openly advocating colonial expansion. Geographical societies were seen as essential to European achievements overseas.

T. W. Freeman, A Hundred Years of Geography, p. 59, p. 70.

8. D. V. McKay, "Colonialism in the French Geographical Movement, 1871-1881." Geographical Review, 33, 1943, pp. 214-32.

9. C. Faure, "Le Progres de l'enseignement de la Geographie en France," Bulletin de la Societe Neuchateloise de Geographie, 6, 1891, pp. 96-125.

10. T. W. Freeman, A Hundred Years of Geography, pp. 46-47, pp. 51-52.

11. D. R. Stoddart, "Kropotkin, Reclus, and 'relevant' geography," Area, 7, 1975, pp. 188-90; G. S. Dunbar, Elisee Reclus: Historian of nature (Hamden, Archon Books, 1978).

12. P. Kropotkin, "What Geography ought to be," Nineteenth Century, 18, 1885, p. 942. Quote derived from Stoddart, "Geography - a European science," op.cit., p. 295.

13. D. Lowenthal, George Perkins Marsh, Versatile Vermonter (New York, 1958), p. 270.

14. J. W. Powell, Report on the lands of the arid region of the United States (1878).

15. J. A. May, Kant's Concept of Geography and its relation to recent geographical thought (University of Toronto Department of Geography Research Publications, Toronto, 1970).

16. Hugh R. Mill, An Autobiography (London, 1951), p. 98.
"A Fragment of the Geography of England: Southwest Sussex." Geographical Journal, 15, 1900, pp. 205-27, pp. 353-78.

17. J. F. Unstead, "A System of Regional Geography," Geography, 18, 1933, pp. 175-87.

18. Quoted in R. Hartshorne: "The Nature of Geography," Annals Association of American Geographers, 29, 1939, p. 140.

19. R. W. Steel, "Regional Geography in Practice," Geography, 294, 67, Part I, January 1982, pp. 2-7.

20. Instrumental in support of global education are such organizations as: Global Perspective in Education, Inc., New York, N.Y., and the Center for Teaching International Relations, University of Denver, Denver, Colorado.