

Needed, More Secondary School Geography

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On December 7, 1941, America discovered geography. Since that catastrophic day, nearly four years ago, a renewed interest has developed in geography. During the war which ended recently our newspapers and magazines offered daily spectacular lessons of a geographic nature. Almost every home in the United States has a special interest in a place or places heretofore wholly unknown. With the war ended and peace conferences common happenings, we are beginning to realize that a "just peace" and a stable "world order" are securely bound up with a thorough knowledge of geography. Unless the geographic aspect of all problems that face the framers of peace are weighed carefully, any formal peace agreements will be fruitless.

Together with a renewed interest in geography as a nation, there is now underway a widespread movement for the reintroduction of geography into the secondary schools of the country. Courses of study and work programs are being arranged to meet the special demands and capacities of teachers and prospective teachers in the field of geography.

The inclusion of geography in the secondary school curriculum, and taught by teachers specially trained in that area, are timely and of paramount importance. Our young men and women are leaving high school with little or no training in geography. Their knowledge of the world, not to mention their own country, is unpardonable. Data compiled from over five hundred students enrolled in the introductory geography course at Indiana State Teachers College during the past five years indicates that slightly over one-fourth, or twenty-seven per cent, of these young people had received any instruction in geography during their secondary school training. Informal questioning of those students who had taken geography in high school further revealed that the courses were largely limited to physical or economic-commercial geography. In most cases the teachers of these courses were wholly untrained in geography, and quite likely, professed little or no knowledge nor any interest in the subject. Filling out exercises in a workbook and constructing graphs showing the corn production of Iowa or potato yield of Idaho comprised most of the work in such geography classes. It is little wonder that geography has been "shelved" and disregarded as meriting a permanent place in the secondary school curriculum.

Further evidence of the need for more geography came to light through place tests which were given to the same students mentioned above. The class is given an outline map of the United States and is required to locate the states as the instructor reads the individual states. Data indicates that only four per cent of the students located correctly all of the states. Forty-four per cent incorrectly placed at least 10

states, while twenty-seven per cent failed to locate correctly over one-half of the states.

The accompanying table shows, in percentages, the frequency with which the various states were incorrectly placed by the students. Only one state, Florida, was correctly placed by all students. Its location and shape, together with its importance as a winter resort, are largely responsible for it being well known. Texas was correctly located by all but one per cent of the students with California and Indiana being incorrectly placed by two per cent. The fact that a college freshman, and in one case a senior, incorrectly located their home state is certainly lamentable.

The state most frequently missed was Vermont with a per cent of error of seventy-three. New Hampshire and Nebraska followed closely, each being incorrectly located by sixty-six per cent of the students. It should be pointed out, however, that thirty-five per cent of those who missed New Hampshire and Vermont interchanged the two states. New Mexico and Arizona were frequently interchanged as were Alabama, Georgia and Mississippi. The frequency with which Nebraska, Kansas, Colorado and Wyoming were incorrectly located was due in no small degree to the same factor.

Further examination of Table I shows that only seven of the states were correctly located by at least ninety per cent of the students, ten were correctly located by eighty per cent, nineteen by seventy per cent, thirty by sixty per cent and thirty-nine by fifty per cent of the students.

It is, of course, admitted that the same results may not be obtained in other parts of the United States. Certainly the section of the country in which the tests are given would determine the distribution of errors. For example, should the test be given in Vermont, certainly that state would have been correctly located with almost one hundred per cent accuracy.

It is also admitted that location is only one phase of geography. However, it is an important phase and one that can be developed without a great amount of expensive equipment. The first step in the study of a city or a region is its location.

Tests similar to the one just described were also given but dealing with places of prominence in the Pacific theatre of war. Thirty-five per cent of the students were unable to locate at least one-half of the stations correctly. Only two students among the one hundred and eight who took the location test of the Pacific region were able to locate the twenty places correctly. These figures indicate a definite lack of awareness to locational geography in relation to current events and the future security of the world.

There needs to be, however, considerable caution exercised when stressing more geography in secondary schools. The average person's impression of the subject is too often unbalanced. Evidence of this is to be found in current magazines, newspapers and the mass of polar projections and "Air Age" maps now being published. The publications too frequently leave the impression upon those unacquainted with true geography that new air routes, distances and times between one place

and another are the core of the subject matter. This is hardly what true geography has been or will be in the future.

Real geography is far more than a matter of names, and an understanding of flying time and directions. Geography concerns itself with all of those features, both physical and cultural, which affect man's adjustments to his natural surroundings. The continuous struggle of man to adjust his activities to climate, soil, and topography; to secure efficiently the natural resources of the land; to secure food, shelter and clothing; to find and hold markets and control trade routes; all are a part of geography and its significance in man's everyday life. The kind of surroundings leaves an indelible stamp upon the people who live in it.

Table I

The Frequency, in Percentage, with which the Various States
were Missed by Students

State	Percentage	State	Percentage
Alabama	38	Nebraska	66
Arizona	57	Nevada	30
Arkansas	47	New Hampshire	66
California	2	New Jersey	46
Colorado	62	New Mexico	39
Connecticut	41	New York	29
Delaware	55	North Carolina	39
Florida	0	North Dakota	31
Georgia	29	Ohio	9
Idaho	36	Oklahoma	41
Illinois	5	Oregon	23
Indiana	2	Pennsylvania	26
Iowa	38	Rhode Island	41
Kansas	45	South Carolina	35
Kentucky	9	South Dakota	29
Louisiana	41	Tennessee	19
Maine	16	Texas	1
Maryland	57	Utah	40
Massachusetts	54	Vermont	73
Michigan	22	Virginia	36
Minnesota	30	Washington	14
Mississippi	44	West Virginia	38
Missouri	41	Wisconsin	28
Montana	35	Wyoming	52