

# Geographic Education in the United States: Past, Present and Future

David A. Lanegran

*Minnesota Alliance for Geographic Education and Macalester College*

The history of geographic education in the United States is a story of missed opportunities. Once taught in nearly every school and considered to be essential information, geography was replaced in the curriculum by Social Studies. Unfortunately a communications gap developed between the teachers of geography, most of whom taught several additional subjects, and the specialized, professional geographers teaching in post secondary institutions. This gap manifested itself in the lack of a concise definition of geography and a rationale for its inclusion in the school curriculum. This gap has been reduced somewhat in the past five years as a result of new cooperative efforts among the major organizations of geographers in the United States. Although this cooperative effort has not reached all of our goals there are obvious signs of progress. There has been a concerted effort on the part of the National Geographic Society to heighten the general public's awareness of the need for improved geographic education. The NGS has commissioned surveys that measured the levels of geographic literacy in the United State and other countries. This research showed that the young people in the United States knew much less about the world than did their peers in other countries.

As a response to this information, several educational organizations, private corporations, and geographers have joined forces to produce a wide range of activities that are intended to increase the quality of geographic education and to show students how important their geographic knowledge will be to them as they mature and lead independent lives.

This paper traces the history of geographic education over the past century and highlights the pattern of strategic decisions that led to the decline and re-emergence of the discipline as a component in the curriculum of schools in the United States.

Geography was taught in most schools during the 19th and early 20th centuries as a form of catechism of place names, locations, and significant facts. This information was alternately presented in a dry and dull format or spiced up with exciting views of natural wonders, large cities, stunning architecture, dangerous animals, and exotic people. Most writers focused on patterns of political power that reflected the imperialist views of the world or reported on products that moved in international trade patterns.<sup>1</sup>

For example the only mention of Korea we find in Goldsmith's *An Easy Grammar of Geography* published in Boston in 1807 is, "Corea is subject to China and is considered as a part of it" (Goldsmith 1807, 41). Later, in Mitchell's *First Lessons in Geography*, we are asked, "What peninsula is in the eastern part of Chinese Tartary?" (Mitchell 1860, 59). In 1904 we find a little more information in Redway's *Commercial Geography*, a book written for college students. He writes

Korea, formerly a vassal of China, became an independent state after the war between China and Japan, this step being forced by Russia. The country is a natural market for Japanese manufactures, and in turn supplies Japan with a considerable amount of food-stuffs. Chemulpo is the chief center of its commerce. (Redway 1904, 375-376)

For most 19th century Americans, geography consisted of memorization of a host of facts, some connected, others just curious. All the information reflected a Eurocentric view of the world. This situation began to change somewhat as the ideas of Johann Pestalozzi (1820-1870) entered the mainstream of American education. Basically Pestalozzi believed that direct observation and sense of perception were important to learning. Thus teachers were encouraged to base their geography classes on direct observation of home regions, map drawing and experimentation via globes. This was very different from the memorization of facts from an old and dusty book. Arnold Guyot brought the direct observation method to the United States. Guyot learned these methods in Prussia from Karl Ritter, one of the two founders of modern geography. Guyot's works greatly influenced the thinking of William Morris Davis, who argued that geography should seek explanations and attempt to predict effects. Davis was the dominant thinker in American geography at the turn

of the century (Libbee & Stoltman 1988).

As more young people began to attend schools at the end of the 19th century educators and others began to have debates on the content and teaching techniques most appropriate for public schools. Several key decisions were made in those years that affected the growth of geographic education. Although they happened a long time ago, their effects are still visible in the curriculum of public schools.

In 1894 the National Education Association's "Committee of Ten" said that physical geography followed by physiography were the most important contributions geography could make to the secondary curriculum. This decision followed the thinking of W. M. Davis, who defined geography essentially as physical geography. Over the following decade opinion shifted. In 1908, at its annual meeting in Baltimore, the Association of American Geographers held a discussion on high school geography. The professors concluded that high school geography should "deal largely with regions say, the United States and Western Europe." During the next year another committee of the National Education Association, the "Committee of Seven of the Science Section," issued a report which argued that geography should: (1) be required in some form in all secondary schools; (2) be pursued for not less than one year; (3) be presented during the first year of the high school course; (4) have five recitation periods per week; (5) be devoted one-fourth of the time to the large topics in physical geography, with the human side more prominent than at the present, and the remainder of the year given over to the study of North America and Europe. This shift in emphasis is understandable when one considers that the primary justification of public education was the belief that the children of immigrants should be taught to be citizens, and the schools were the best way to Americanize the diverse people moving to the United States (Libbee & Stoltman 1988).

Despite this rationale, the general science courses took over most of the earth science content of geography. Regional, commercial, industrial and economic geography were advocated and taught with much greater frequency. Commercial geography is the "flax mentality" geography. These classes focused on where the goods needed by industrial society are grown or made. During these years, regional geography began to flourish, and several new books were published.

In 1911, the NEA commissioned a secondary curriculum review which had tremendous impact. That group recommended that several

disciplines be removed from the curriculum and the "social studies" be taught as a single discipline in their stead. It further recommended that all the social aspects of geography be transferred to social studies. Thus we see that the physical geography content was transferred to general science and the remainder of human geography given over to the new social studies. Social studies was thought to be a better way to make students ready for citizenship. A group of teachers began to refine social studies concepts and content during the 1920s. When they asked for help, the college and university geographers refused, saying that geography was not a social science and therefore they should not be involved in the process. Therefore, the nongeographers determined what should be in social science and left geography out. Those who set forth the guidelines for the social studies made errors, but the academic geographers did nothing to rescue the discipline (Libbee & Stoltman 1988).

During those years progressive education stressed the expanding world model of elementary education. Students first learned about people and places in their own country, gained knowledge about the dependency of humans on the physical environment, and learned about economic interdependence.

In the 1930s social studies replaced commercial geography courses and geography was infused into the social studies. No one spoke out for an independent course. Reports of the National Council for Social Studies recommended the following aspects of geography be included in the social studies: (1) time, place, and space relationships, especially with refer to aviation; (2) increased use of maps and teaching of map skills; (3) geographic factors and influence in economic, social and political life in the past and present and planning for the future (Libbee & Stoltman 1988).

It is argued that, as a result of the World Wars, people became interested in different parts of the earth and regional courses were developed during the late 1940s and early 1950s. These courses drew the ire and ridicule of the university level geographers who believed in the "quantitative revolution," and who thought regional geography courses to be "mere description".

The launching of Sputnik by the Soviets thirty years ago profoundly altered the nature of social studies. Discipline based courses were once again proposed. Large curriculum development projects were funded by the National Science Foundation (NSF), and teachers were encouraged to return to universities for further training. The institutes were funded either by programs of the

National Science Foundation or by something called the National Defense Education Act.

The Association of American Geographers, with money from NSF developed the "High School Geography Project" (HSGP). Some of the most famous geographers in the United States worked on the HSGP. Their plan was to create a new set of course materials, not a text. This strategy diverged from that advocated by other disciplines such as biology which created a new textbook that was widely adopted. The HSGP material broke with the traditions of school geography. The plan was to cover topics, not regions. The guiding principles were: (1) selected ways the discipline looked at the world; (2) questions geographers ask; and (3) methods geographers employ when seeking an answer.

Unfortunately, the HSGP did not meet its objectives. In 1977 less than 5 percent of a sample of U.S. high schools had HSGP materials. HSGP's lack of appeal can be explained by two major factors. First, AAG sold the copyright to MacMillan, a textbook publisher interested in selling textbooks and not all the paraphernalia that came with HSGP. Second, very few teachers were trained in geography, so the sales force of MacMillan had to convince historians and others to stop teaching history or government and take up a high school geography course. While university geographers involved in HSGP generally cite the lack of trained geography teachers as the chief barrier to the diffusion of the project, this seems to be a case where a product was developed for which there was not a market. In the United States during those years, geography was generally taught in the junior highs. In 1973 a survey showed fifty percent of all the nation's junior and senior highs (about 20,000 schools) had a geography course. Most of the courses were probably in junior highs; the survey did not specify, however. Unfortunately, the HSGP could not be easily adapted to the junior high classroom (Stoltman 1980). By 1980 geography texts for secondary schools were organized on the principle of hemispheres, and were essentially revisions of older books. The HSGP materials became collectors' items.

In 1982 nine percent of all secondary students had taken a geography course, down sixty percent from 1960-61. Why was geography unpopular? Consensus centers on two causes. First was the inability of university-based geographers to articulate a definition of geography. Second was the perception that geography was dull and useless information (Winston 1989).

By the middle 1980s, the status of geography in American schools had reached a new low. Geography was not required for high school graduation in any state. Some states now require a course that includes geography in an interdisciplinary course such as a combination history and geography. Generally these courses are taught by people who have not studied geography in college. Therefore the courses are geographic in name only.

### Divergence of College and School Geography

Barbara Winston, writing in 1986 for an NCSS bulletin on the social studies, said, "The essence of what geographers are doing today bears little resemblance to the geography taught in most schools." Schools that still have geography expect their teachers to "cover the world", while university level geography is becoming increasingly specialized. In addition, most graduate students have been influenced by ideas in social theory and quantitative procedures that do not appear in the school curriculum (Winston 1986). The 1989 *Text Assessments in Geography*, written by Patrice St. Peter and published by Geographic Education National Implementation Project, reviews 21 textbooks for grades 7-12. Although texts vary considerably, they are still generally based on the regional approach. Some mix in earth science, others cultural history. The latest books incorporate the five fundamental themes of geography as defined in GENIP's *K-12 Guidelines* (St. Peter 1989).

### Challenge of Global Education

Traditional regional geography has faced major challenges from the rapid rise of global education. Global education has been defined as education for responsible citizen involvement and effective participation in global society. It cultivates in young people a perspective of the world which emphasizes the interconnectedness among many cultures, species and the planet. Global education has become popular because it is student-centered. It is defined in terms of what it can do for the student. Traditional disciplines are defined as bodies of knowledge. This is an important difference because school administrators are charged by the public to prepare the next generation to take up the task of managing society. They are not tasked with preserving bodies of knowledge.

Some regional geography has been branded as inadequate because it is "regional centric." That is, it starts with home and works outward. This was thought to be the best way to teach in the nineteenth century, but today some people argue that this approach promotes ethnocentric views of the world. Others argue that present regional geography texts obscure global, natural and social systems and the global character of human experiences. These perceived inadequacies of geography have made the addition of courses in global studies at the high school level a popular, although somewhat controversial, change.

### **The Place of Geography in the Social Science Curriculum**

Some geography teachers argue that geography has a special role in the social studies curriculum, and therefore they resist the demise of the discipline. There are three traditional foci in the social studies: knowledge, skills and affective learning. When geography is organized into these categories, the following patterns appear:

**KNOWLEDGE** - Knowledge of people and places; human dependencies on physical environment; economic interdependence and world trade; natural and social environments.

**SKILLS** - Map reading and manipulations; spatial data manipulation.

**AFFECTIVE LEARNING** - Content knowledge of other places can reduce ethnocentrism. It is argued that: (1) the "strange lands and exotic people" motif actually portrays the authors' home country and people as most fortunate, etc.; (2) it suggests discovery occurred with the arrival of the Europeans; (3) it implies that the world centers generally on Europe and North America in terms of map projections, numbers of pages of text, up-to-date information, etc.; (4) the material is not gender-balanced; sexist language has been removed, but women are still invisible or portrayed as having the same views and experiences as men.

Clearly geography has a contribution to make to the social studies curriculum, but our discipline must deal with the criticism of its contributions in the affective domain.

### **Turning the Tide: Geography in the Education Reform Movement**

During the past six years geography teachers and others have

made great strides toward the enhancement of geography across the nation. Indeed, the 1990s may prove to be a golden era for geographic education. More people are talking about geography than ever before. The popular media has become enamored with our discipline and students are rediscovering its fascination.

We took our first giant step forward in 1984 when a joint committee of members of the AAG and the National Council for Geographic Education (NCGE) drafted a brief statement describing the five fundamental themes of geography in terms that were understandable to the public and educational administrators (Committee on Geographic Education 1984). The first draft of this was written in Minnesota with a great deal of input from Minnesota teachers. The final version was produced by a committee drawn from across the nation and was aided by contributions from dozens of geographers and teachers who made comments and suggestions. It was not intended to give a formal definition of geography, but rather, to explain the nature of geography in a form that can be related to social studies teaching. That is, we wanted a document that would help teachers decide when they were teaching geography and when they were not. This document was needed because the nation's leading geographers have not articulated the nature of geography in a manner that can be understood by others. To date about 75,000 copies of the publication have been distributed. I hope it will be translated into Korean!

The guidelines committee recommended an on-going group be charged with developing a plan to improve the quality of geographic education. The Geographic Education National Implementation Project (GENIP) was the result of that recommendation. GENIP is a steering committee made up of representatives from the AAG, the American Geographical Society, NCGE and The National Geographic Society (NGS). To date its major accomplishments have been publication of curricula guidelines for grades K-6 and 7-12. GENIP also published the textbook assessments and has other projects under discussion.

### **Activities of the major Segments of the Geographic Community: The National Geographic Society**

The greatest single development in the history of geographic education in the last half of the 20th century was the decision by the National Geographic Society to become an advocate for geog-



raphic education, to begin to train in-service teachers in geography and to develop new educational materials that are appropriate for geography classrooms. The President of The National Geographic Society, Gilbert Grosvenor, became alarmed at the state of geographic illiteracy in the United States and determined to do something about it. After the Joint Committee drafted the guidelines document, the leadership of the AAG approached NGS to ask for a cooperative effort to enhance geographic education. The first step was the formation of GENIP and the printing by NGS of some 4 million "GENIP Maps". These maps were designed as a way to help spread the word about the five fundamental themes. NGS did not stop there, however. Grosvenor had learned of exciting developments in Los Angeles begun by Kathy Riggs-Salter and her husband Kit Salter. This couple began an organization at UCLA which was called an alliance for geographic education. The group promoted geography by having things like geography days in schools and making public testimony before school administrations on the need for improved geographic education. The organization's work had an impact, and they attracted the attention of Grosvenor. The President of the NGS created the Geographic Education Project (GEP), first within the budget of his office and then as part of the Education Media Division. Today it is an independent division within the National Geographic Society.

The GEP of NGS set for itself five strategic goals: (1) grass-roots organization of teachers and geographers, (2) teacher education, (3) public awareness, (4) educational materials development, (5) targeted outreach to education decision-makers. To celebrate its one hundredth anniversary in 1988, the Society launched two additional projects. The Directors of the Society created the NGS Education Foundation, and *World Magazine*, a division of NGS, launched a national contest called the Geography Bee. This proved enormously popular and three years later some 30,000 schools were participating. The winner even appears on the Johnny Carson Show. The Foundation exists to help fund the various geographic education projects developed across the nation.

In order to understand the developments in geographic education in the United States, it is necessary to examine the activities of the NGS in each of its five priority areas.

## State Alliances for Geographic Education

The NGS will give financial and technical support to geographers and teachers who form themselves into a state network or Alliance for Geographic Education. The Alliances have the same goals as the NGS Geographic Education Program. The number of such alliances has grown from 7 in 1986 to 41 in 1991. The number of teachers affiliated with the alliances is estimated to be about 62,000. Many of these teachers are very active in promoting geographic education. Others are receiving newsletters and other forms of information and attending workshops. They are, however, confining their own activities to their classroom. The alliances are expected to raise money within their area which is then matched by the NGS. The alliances all have newsletters, do workshops for teachers promote geographic education within their states and have training institutes for teachers during the summer. The ability of the state alliances to raise funds varies considerably from state to state. Some states especially California, Colorado, Florida, Michigan, Mississippi, Texas, Missouri, and Tennessee, have been very successful. These alliances are all based at universities or colleges. Some are independent organizations and have an identity all of their own. Others are tightly connected to an individual or department. The NGS has committed itself to fund them for about six years. One additional benefit of the Alliance movement has been the growth of teacher memberships in the National Council for Geographic Education. The presence of the 41 Alliances has already had a big impact on the public awareness of the need for geographic education. These organizations are all working through the schools to excite teachers about the value of geography in everyone's education.

## Teacher Education

The Society developed a summer institute program. This institute is held in Washington DC at the Society's headquarters and is limited to teachers nominated by state alliances. In addition to the basic institute, the NGS holds a leadership development institute which is also for teachers working in the Alliances. In the past five years 376 teachers have graduated from the summer institutes. However, beginning in 1987 the state alliances also have been re-

quired to hold summer institutes. These programs vary in length and content according to the local situation. Approximately 2,755 teachers have attended these institutes. In 1990 there were 38 separate institutes around the country. These long term training sessions have been complemented by an unknown number of in-school workshops presented by the institute graduates. There have been, however, another set of workshops sponsored by the National Diffusion Network and conducted by teachers certified by NGS as qualified trainers using materials developed by NGS. These one-day workshops are primarily designed to increase teacher awareness of the latest developments in geography and to present the most useful approaches to teaching. In the past three years about 8,654 teachers have attended these workshops. The number of teachers impacted by the programs is quite impressive. Hopefully most of these teachers are now committed to teaching geography more effectively and are also working to enhance the amount of geography taught in their schools. These people will determine the future of geographic education. If they are effective, geography will increase its stature as a course in the curriculum. If they are not, then nothing done by the college based geographers can help.

### Public Awareness

There are many discrete activities that relate to this goal. Whenever a geographer speaks in public he or she does something to impact the public awareness of geography. However, the most important NGS activities are Geography Awareness Week, the Gallup Polls and the Geography Bee. Geography Awareness Week is an effort to create a focus for geography. Each year the Congress of the United States declares one week to be National Geography Awareness Week. When it was first announced in 1987, it generated considerable media coverage. In more recent years, the media impact of the week has become less important. Now the Society places great emphasis on in-school activities during the week. To that end a teacher packet is created that contains a colorful poster and a set of lesson plans intended to be used in schools during the week. In 1987, 5,000 teacher activities packets were produced and distributed. In 1990, 150,000 packets were distributed. These packets contained lessons on Eastern Europe and the unification of Germany. Clearly the impact of GAW on school based activities has increased tremendously over the past few years.

The Gallup Organization, Inc., was hired to conduct an international scientific study of the level of geographic knowledge in the United States and other countries. The survey assessed the extent of basic geographic literacy of adults 18 and over in the United States and other "comparison countries" (Japan, France, West Germany, the United Kingdom, Sweden, Italy, Canada and Mexico). In all countries, in-depth personal interviews were conducted among a nationally representative sample of adults. About 10,000 responded to the survey. This report was greeted with great fanfare. It was announced at a special session of the National Press Club in Washington D.C. and reported in newspapers and electronic media across the United States.

The survey's findings were interesting. For example 90% of Americans believe it is important to know something about geography; 70% believe it is absolutely necessary to be able to read a map; 90% think that a country's geographic location has some influence on the life and economic conditions of the residents. Despite these beliefs in the importance of geography, the people interviewed exhibited a serious lack in both geographic knowledge and skills. The youngest cohort interviewed, those between 18-24, knew less than the older groups. For example 56% did not know the size of the population of the USA. Thirty three percent could not name one member of NATO, and 16% thought the USSR belonged to NATO. Half of the population could not name any country in the Warsaw Pact, and 11% thought the USA belonged to the Warsaw Pact. These and other responses led the Gallup researchers to conclude that despite improved educational methods, technological advancements in global communications and increased relevance of global events, there is considerable evidence that American's geographic literacy is declining.

When compared to their peers in other countries, the residents of the USA do not do well. Moreover, the United States seems to be heading in the wrong direction all by itself. The U.S. is the only country in which the test scores of the youngest respondents did not surpass those of the oldest group tested.

The Geography Bee has also helped heighten public interest in geographic education. It is expected that 20,000 schools will participate in the Bee during 1992. The contest usually attracts media coverage in the contestants' hometowns. Naturally, each school involved in the Bee does something special with geography. This is the Bee's great contribution. Approximately 5 million students par-

ticipated in the 1991 Bee.

### **Education Materials Development**

The Geographic Education Project does not produce text material. Instead, several special publications have been released that focus teachers' attention on the need for geography. The *Update* magazine carries news and lesson plans. These materials are much less revolutionary than the electronic learning devices NGS is working on in other divisions of the organization.

### **Outreach to Education Decision-Makers**

This effort is similar to the public awareness effort but the NGS staff target their efforts on the groups within our culture that have some control over the education system. In 1988 the society worked with state governors, in 1989 with state legislators and in 1990 with state school board members. The purpose of communicating with these leaders is to convince them that they have the responsibility to improve the levels of geographic education in their jurisdictions. This is necessary, because unlike the situation in Korea, there is not a national organization that controls education.

It is important to note that NGS has steadfastly refused to engage in any attempt to define geography, or to publish text books. Still, their activities have had a huge impact on the way geography is taught. The NGS bases all its work on the five fundamental themes as presented by the Joint Committee, and not a definition more closely linked to social theory. Thus, although the number of teachers affected by NGS programs continues to expand, Barbara Winston's assertion about the difference between school geography and the material discussed in graduate seminars may still hold true. Clearly there is a need for something akin to the HSGP that would allow for geography as defined by professional geographers to be carried into the secondary curriculum. This task is not on the NGS agenda.

### **Activities of the Association of American Geographers**

The AAG has played an active part in the renaissance of geographic education, but its activities have been more focused. Leaving

to the NGS the tasks of public awareness, teacher training and outreach to opinion leaders, the Association has focused on projects that develop new curriculum and promote geographic education in the classroom. The first major project was an effort to develop a guidebook for teachers who were teaching classes taken by pre-service teachers. Because in the United States most social studies teachers only take one geography course in their preparation to be teachers, it is essential for that course to pass on to them a clear understanding of geographic skills and knowledge. With the help of a grant from the Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education, college faculty across the country experimented with new approaches to the introductory course. After three years of work, the results were published in 1990. It is too early to assess the impact of this project.

In an effort to promote better geographic instruction, the AAG collaborated with American Express Company (AMEX) in a national geography contest. This contest differs from the Bee because entrants must carry out a research activity and their research is evaluated by professional geographers. Many teachers have their classes work on the AMEX Contest as a part of their curriculum. Therefore, the research concepts and procedures used by geographers are being introduced into the secondary schools.

### **Activities of the National Council for Geographic Education**

This 75 year old organization has always been focused on ways to improve geographic education. It now stands at a point when it must respond to ever-increasing opportunities and challenges. Its leadership has determined to focus the organization's resources in five areas: (1) strengthening pre-service teacher education; (2) strengthening in-service teacher education; (3) placing geography in the curriculum; (4) producing high-quality teaching materials; and (5) providing public recognition for outstanding teachers of geography. The organization has prepared a set of recommended standards for pre-service teacher training, and it provides in-service training at its annual conventions. It has yet to organize an effort to install geography in the curriculum. As a publisher of a journal and books, it has long produced materials for teachers. In addition to these traditional activities, a group is exploring how GIS and satellite imagery can be introduced into the secondary school geography class. The recognition of teaching is accomplished by giving disting-

uished teacher awards at the annual meeting. As increasing numbers of teachers become active in the alliances, they will move on to the NCGE. We can expect the organization to expand its activities accordingly. For example, the 1991 NCGE Convention held in St. Paul, Minnesota was organized by Minnesota teachers and teachers gave 60% of all the presentations. That convention also set an attendance record because so many teachers attended it.

### **Outcome Based Education: The Coming Revolution**

Important as the activities of the three major geographic education organization are, what may become the dominant force affecting geographic literacy in the United States during the next two decades is a movement called outcome-based education. This approach to schooling argues that instead of defining a curriculum in terms of the number of courses taken or the number of hours a student has sat in a seat, the curriculum should be set up around a set of learner outcomes. Students' proficiency on the outcomes is measured, and the student either goes on to another set of outcomes or uses a different learning method to master the outcomes. Each student is supposed to have three chances to master the outcomes before going into the special help category. The learner outcomes can be taught in a variety of ways, and ideas of one discipline may be taught in another discipline's class. Thus, some geography outcomes could be taught in history or geology. Likewise some economics outcomes could be taught in a geography class. This movement raises many questions about teacher preparation and the organization of the school day. Furthermore, modern techniques of learning assessment will have to be utilized to make certain the required learning has taken place.

If geographers are successful in getting geography included in the required learner outcomes, then the future of geography will be secure. In Minnesota we have been working hard to achieve that objective. For example, in 1989 after a series of public hearings and requests for input from interested parties, the State Board of Education adopted a set of goal statements which are to become the frame for the learner outcomes and models for local school districts. Of special interest to geographers are the following goal statements:

— to know the impact of human life on nature and the impact of natural phenomena on human life;

— to know the importance of geographic location in the functioning of contemporary society;

— to understand how citizens of the United States are geographically and socially connected to people and places in other parts of the world.

These three goals for Minnesota are paraphrases of three of the five fundamental themes of geography.

Much work remains to be done. We must determine what the necessary outcomes of a geographic education are. Do we need to redefine geography yet another time? Unfortunately, our students will not wait. They want to know as soon as possible what geography can contribute to their education. We can not shirk from this task. The public agrees that geography is important, and various organizations are prepared to help train teachers. Geographers now must determine what are the appropriate outcomes of a geographic education. We must also be ready to agree that in many cases these outcomes can be achieved by teachers in classes other than geography. However, our goal is not more and more geography teachers. Our goal is a population that is geographically literate.

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