

P.B.N. 10/26 -31/98

# Turned on teachers help students tune in to geography

If you hear your youngster just home from school talking about some local issues related to transportation, land use, natural resources, air quality, water pollution, zoning, population growth or economic development, you can bet that she has been turned on by her geography teacher.

And if your child comes home and discusses the war in the Sudan, riots in Indonesia, women and the Taliban in Afghanistan, depletion of the rainforest in Brazil, global warming, refugees in Rwanda or floods in China, you know that some geography teacher got to him and caught his interest.

And that's the difference with geography in today's classroom. Teachers are getting turned on because they are doing geography themselves and are relaying this excitement to the children. So how did all of this come about?

First of all, today's world is vastly different from that of previous generations. The major movements in the early part of this century related primarily to immigration, and this country experienced the largest numbers of new arrivals in its history during the first two decades, and these new people stayed to become Americans.

World War I provided experiences in Europe, but then the boys came home. The coming of the auto provided more mobility and the airplane caused us to claim that "the world is getting smaller." World War II opened the larger world to the young American who, again, came home.

All of these experiences provided a bigger view of the world, but there was little interest in learning about these

exotic places we briefly visited. Technology, government policy and rising affluence have made this generation different. We could watch a war in Vietnam on television, see the Astronauts land on the moon and explore the ocean depths. But it is the computer that allows any youngster to chat with a counterpart in Israel, Argentina, India or almost any place on earth.

Our governmental policy of helping less fortunate people in the world is best reflected in our Peace Corps which has sent thousands of our young people to most countries of the world. Our one-third of a million troops stationed all over the world generates interest in other places also. And it is our affluence which allows us to visit and learn in other places, whether as a tourist, member of an Elder Hostel or exchange student.

Truly, today the world is smaller and more and more Americans want to know and experience it. And for school children there is no better way than to study geography whose focus is the world as well as one's neighborhood.

A recognition of this world view is the recent \$684,000 National Science Foundation Award to the Association of American Geographers to produce a disk and activities related to world geography for high schools. And the \$900,000 award to four geography organizations by the National Aeronautic and Space Administration for a Mission Geography project to develop geography skills for remote sensing and map/image interpretation to be used in grades K--2 is another example.

Perhaps most important, NASA will now provide support for geography as well as math, science and technology.

The National Geographic Society has played a major role in all of this. The distribution this fall of a free, laminated wall map of the political world and a satellite image of the world

to all 113,000 schools in the nation, including the 325 in Rhode Island, is just one of their efforts. More important is their funding of training for teachers throughout the country, including Rhode Island, which now counts 16,700 teachers in the nation, including 100 in the state.

Advanced placement for geography in high schools will take place in four years; high school enrollment in geography has gone from 15 to 26 percent in the last four years; and the Geographic's \$80 million Endowment Fund to improve geography education in all schools over the last 10 years will continue to provide support to all states, Rhode Island included. To make Americans aware and to better understand the world and its people is necessary, not only in matters of foreign policy but also to know and appreciate the differences among people that make this such an interesting world, and what does this better than the study of geography?

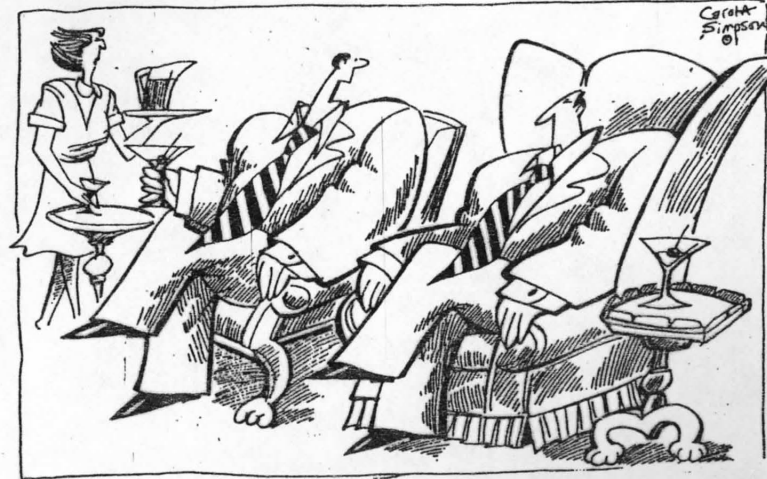
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