



Foreign Policy Research Institute

FOOTNOTES

Vol. 7, No. 4

The Newsletter of the Marvin Wachman Fund for International Education

May 2002

TEACHING GEOGRAPHY AND GEOPOLITICS: A REPORT OF FPRI'S HISTORY INSTITUTE FOR TEACHERS

Trudy Kuehner, Rapporteur

The eighth annual FPRI History Institute was devoted to the teaching of geography and geopolitics. The weekend conference was dedicated to the memory of FPRI founder Robert Strausz-Hupe, who died in February 2002 at age 98 and who is said to have introduced the term geopolitics into the American vocabulary. The conference brought university faculty and authors together with 40 high school teachers from 17 states to discuss ways to teach how geography influences human settlement patterns, commerce, diplomacy, and culture. The papers will be published in Orbis in 2003; condensed versions will appear as FPRI bulletins and on our website (www.fpri.org).

WHY GEOGRAPHY MATTERS

Walter McDougall, Chairman of FPRI's History Academy and professor of international relations at the University of Pennsylvania, opened the conference by recalling his own sadness upon realizing his students' ignorance of geography. Students are often unable to locate states, continents, and even oceans. Geography is snubbed as rote learning, but we were all geographers as children when we explored our neighborhoods and, enthralled, asked not just "What? and "Where?" but "Why?" and "How?" questions. (See McDougall's "You Can't Argue with Geography," Footnotes, Sept. 2000, <http://www.fpri.org>.)

The origins of the self-conscious study of the human environment are unknown, but seafaring existed as early as 6000 BCE, implying shared knowledge of the coasts and waters. Eratosthenes is thought to have coined the term "geography" ("earth writing") in the second century BCE.

Nothing better illustrates the power of geography than the Age of Discovery. Explorers had to be able to navigate beyond the sight of land and to map and describe what they found. The commerce this permitted made the 15th-18th centuries the first age of globalization. As explorers brought home flora and fauna, botany was born. Philosophers such as Voltaire and Montaigne transcended the old, Eurocentric view of the world. The mother of the sciences, at the end of the 18th century geography also became a tool of statecraft (Napoleon founded the first chair in geography, at the Sorbonne).

America was geography-minded from the start, with the founding fathers' active support (including Jefferson's for the Lewis & Clark expedition). After the Civil War, for each one student studying history, eight were studying geography. The creationism/determinism debate tore the field apart, but only after it peaked in 1893, when Spencer Trotter of a Committee of 10 convened to consider national educational standards declared that "Geography is a part of everyday life." Works such as Albert Brigham's Commercial Geography (1911) brought to the public's attention world problems from Armenia to the Congo, establishing geography's role in educating citizens to their world obligations.

In 1905, Swede Rudolf Kjellen coined the term "geopolitics" for the field of inquiry developed by Capt. Alfred Mahan (The Influence of Sea Power upon History, 1890) and Halford Mackinder (The Geographic Pivot of History, 1904). Later practitioners included Robert Strausz-Hupé (Geopolitics The Struggle for Space and Power, 1942) and Henry Kissinger.

Meanwhile, geography's fortunes were subject to the vicissitudes of war and peace as well as the emergence of social studies, a new field under which it would often be subsumed. Today, it is easy for geography to be reduced to game show-type facts. Four-year colleges often require no history and offer no geography. McDougall identified and dispelled several myths that have grown up around geography: It is not boring; learning "mere facts" is not a waste of time; teachers who stress factual knowledge are not second-rate or old-fashioned; the idea that geography is only useful when serving some social or political agenda is wrong and pernicious. Equally, teaching it correctly will not "save the world." Rather, to quote C. S. Lewis, "I believe not because I see the light, but because by it I see everything else."

McDougall would restore an emphasis on topography and map reading ("the Earth, after all, does revolve around the sun: that was not just Galileo's point of view") so that when students are shown how perceptions of space and time have changed over millennia, centuries, and even decades, they will know what they are deconstructing.

DOES GEOPOLITICS MATTER?

FPRI President Harvey Sicherman answered his assigned question with "Yes, but we'd rather it didn't!" Geography can explain why people are who they are, but America has historically wanted to overcome these burdensome facts.

Americans also want to do international relations their own way: No narrow national interest for us, we'll pursue a global common interest. Geopolitics doesn't fit into our concept.

To Kjellen, geopolitics explained why nations had developed as they did and where they might go. Leaders could divine their nations' destinies. The American geopolitical school got off to a rousing start even before Alfred Mahan came to Theodore Roosevelt's attention. Mahan and his successors spoke of sea power, the heartland, and a balance of power: Many nations should participate but none dominate in world affairs. Kjellen's colleague Karl Haushofer, on the other hand, saw geography as a tool to securing supremacy. His theories gave Hitler cover for his pursuit of German lebensraum and the overthrow of Versailles.

If geopolitics was studied at all during the 1960s it was only for its historic value. The U.S. was eager to flee from it. To understand U.S. foreign policy in the 1990s, one must appreciate this flight from geopolitics toward globalization.

Globalization is first and foremost an economic phenomenon. In the 1990s, the outflow of capital to emerging Asian markets led to growth rates of 8-20 percent per annum. The next century was to be the Pacific Century, but no sooner had it begun than the Asian economic crisis of 1997 proved it hollow. "While capital may graze, when it gets skittish, it knows the way back to the barn." Capital fled Asia, returning to the transparency and protection of the West. Geography, then, has an economy, which served a sharp check on globalization and the idea that borders were moot.

Much as economic globalization was to overcome borders, so too a new doctrine would replace traditional war: what Tony Blair termed "humanitarian war," waged as a multinational effort. But after the disaster of Somalia in October 1992 and Bosnia and Kosovo's being brought home by CNN, the U.S. humanitarian intervention doctrine became "Let catastrophe happen until the public demands action." Not only were these interventions too late, but there were many episodes that elicited no intervention, such as Rwanda (which was too remote to generate CNN coverage).

Moreover, the weapon of choice that was to overcome geography, airpower, proved not as capable as it had been thought of providing a nice, clean war. In Kosovo as in Iraq, groundwork still saved the day.

And so we have the revival of geopolitics. President Bush's early "distinctly American internationalism" has become distinctly geopolitical since September 11: He defined terrorism and "those who harbor them" as the enemy, making clear that attacks originate not in some international ether but in a state.

The debate over "nation building" -- anomalous as it is to use a term that evokes Garibaldi and Bismarck today -- has gained urgency. Given that there are no "Afghanis," for instance, this might more aptly be called "state building." What ties bind a nation?

Finally, the exercise of global power will be through, not the UN, but regional coalitions, just as before 1914 the world was accustomed to adjusting nation states' differences being settled among themselves. The world still works on rules, and geopolitics cannot be transcended.

GEOPOLITICS OF EUROPE

FPRI senior fellow David Gress, visiting professor of international relations at Boston University, explained that while some argue that Europe is not a continent at all, since it is not geographically independent, it is effectively delimited by land if not by sea: the Urals were until recently a formidable frontier.

Key features in Europe's development include its East-West population flow; population stability; temperate climate and conditions; a long coastline relative to area because of the numerous indentations; and fragmentation of the land mass, so that states were confined within small places.

The prologue transformation among the great transformations that led to modern Europe was Ancient Greece, which was almost a microcosm of Europe in its diversity and fragmented city-states. Europe/Asia identities had already formed: the Greeks knew themselves to be European and spoke of "Asiatics."

Second, unlike other and earlier empires (Asia, India, MesoAmerica), the Roman Empire formed as a sea-, not river basin-centered empire. The Romans were good assimilators as they expanded, creating the first Mediterranean world.

Third, the East/West split between the Roman Catholic church and eastern Orthodoxy, and later between Christianity and Islam, would long influence alliances.

Fourth, beginning in the ninth century, imperialist Germany essentially became Europe. The Habsburgs almost succeeded in collecting all of Europe in one bloodline: "one king, one continent, and one faith." But the Reformation and ensuing hundred years of bloody conflict would in 1648 yield the modern, Westphalian system of independent states.

Finally, the twentieth century saw a purging of nations as ethnically mixed nations attempted to align their borders and peoples. The ethnic cleansing of the century pushed Europe back toward the national borders of two hundred years ago and created the anomalous Cold War European borders.

The session concluded with discussion of Europe today: its integration; and the definition of "Europe," given the proposed enlargement of the EU to include Turkey, Slovakia and Slovenia and the fact that cities like Quebec and Lima are as culturally European as any.

GEOPOLITICS OF CHINA

Arthur Waldron, Lauder Professor of International Relations at the University of Pennsylvania and Director of Asian Studies at the American Enterprise Institute, discussed "China" not as a country or nation-state, or a Beijing-defined concept, but as a world. It is more a Europe than a France: its population is as diverse as Europe's. The only similarity among its languages is a shared script. Cantonese and Northern Mandarin are more different from each other than are, say, Italian and French.

With China's large diaspora after extensive emigration from the late 19th century through 1965, there are many Chinese in Chinatowns the world over who have never set foot in China. Today there is an entire "virtual Chinese world," thanks to satellite TV and the dynamism of Chinese outside the PRC.

By 221 BCE the middle kingdom Chinese states were unified around a common culture, developing more like the Greek than the Roman civilization. By the time the hu, or horse nomads, from the northwest first discovered the agrarian Chinese, the Chinese culture had already defined itself. But the need to fend off these predatory nomads introduced the military strand of Chinese culture that exists through today.

The Ming dynasty, founded in 1368, was the proto-Chinese nation-state. It would be the last time China was ruled by ethnic Chinese. When the Manchus from northeast Asia conquered China in 1644, the size of the polity was doubled and the ethnic Chinese alienated from their Manchu rulers.

The last dynasty, the Qing, fell with the Revolution of 1911-12. The China it left was larger than ethnic China. Unlike the case of Turkey in 1923, where Atatürk sought to create a smaller, culturally homogenous Turkey from the former Ottoman empire, this large China would have special security needs. Its land and sea borders gave it fear of a two-frontier war and an interest in maintaining good relations with its neighbors -- including the communist state to the north.

Today, as the Chinese government faces a mounting internal debt crisis, it increasingly seeks to direct Chinese frustrations outward, against Japan and others. Seeking to attain deference from its neighbors through might, it has engaged in a huge arms build-up, including placing ballistic missiles around Taiwan. Formerly friendly India has been alienated, and the continuing Japanese-Chinese-Indian rivalry is of disastrous potential. (For excellent background on China, see *China: A Macrohistory*, by Ray Haung, 1989.)

NARRATING THE PAST: HISTORICAL ATLASES

FPRI Senior Fellow Jeremy Black, Professor of History at University of Exeter (UK), presented a number of maps from historical atlases that illustrated the many problems involved in mapping both the past and present. As scaled-down, two-dimensional representations of a three-dimensional world, maps inherently distort direction and/or space. And they are subject to issues of choice: what to show and what to leave out. Even where to start is a choice. The North Pole doesn't have to be at the top of the world map: Jerusalem was in the Middle Ages (as any point could well be). And of course what to put in the center will differ: the U.S. is (unsurprisingly) center in the Time map.

One way to engage students in the complexities of the world is to have them map the present: They can be asked to "draw the map" for a selected topic and write about the problems they encountered. They can map their neighborhoods and compare the very different maps they will likely produce.

In the early development of atlases of world facts and maps, the first important atlas was the Le Sage "Genealogical, Chronological, Historical and Geographic Atlas" (Paris, 1803-4). Much of the content is depicted in timecharts,

tables, and compendia of dates. The maps, alas, give a misleading simultaneity to events: an event of 1745 appears to have occurred with one of 1066.

Until the 20th century, maps focused almost exclusively on the state as the central unit, giving more weight to state lines than topography. The Christian Kruse "Atlas und Tabellen zur Übersicht der Geschichte aller europäischen Länder und State" shows the hallmark fascination with borders, producing sequential maps on the same base map of Europe and the Near East to show the evolving state boundaries from the end of the sixth century CE.

English atlases often presented earlier empires in a way that made Britain's empire seem a natural extension. School maps were based on the teleological assumption that the nation should have evolved the way it did. A 19th-century German map might subliminally suggest that the German states were weak when divided and needed to be united.

Sir Adolphus Ward's "Cambridge Modern History Atlas" (1912) highlighted British triumphs in the Mysore and Marathas Wars (1792-1804) -- but omitted British defeats in India. Ramsay Muir's map of "British Settlement of Australasia" map (1911) gives no sense of the Maori wars, eliding any non-Western history (an error amended in Malcolm McKinnon's "New Zealand Historical Atlas," 1997).

With Charles O. Paullin's "Atlas of the Historical Geography of the United States" (1932), we begin to see mature, self-aware atlases that include discussions of nonpolitical information. University of Toronto has produced atlases that use new ways of conveying such things as homesteading, agriculture, and "distribution of greens and commons." But as much data as one can "map," one can never map such things as intensity of religious or political fervor. (For background, see *Black's Maps and History*, Yale University Press, 1997.)

CULTURAL GEOGRAPHY OF COLONIAL AMERICA

Alan Taylor, Professor of History at UC-Davis, outlined the immigration patterns key to understanding America's Revolutionary War. The British colonial population of 2.5 million eclipsed the native population (about 800,000 in 1776) and the enclaves of French (75,000) and Spanish (25,000) colonists. Their numbers and prosperity gave the colonial leaders confidence that they could and should achieve independence. But the ethnic, racial, and regional diversity of the new nation also gave them pause. How would they forge a common identity?

The Founding Fathers benefited from the demographic disaster unleashed when the diseases colonists had brought over decimated the native population, opening up habitational niches for them. Before embarking on the Revolution, they could look at the 3 percent annual population increase and be confident of doubling their population within twenty years.

The English population was actually a minority in the multiethnic colonies. In the 17th century England provided the most immigrants, but in the 18th century, as English economic conditions improved, their immigration was overtaken by Scots, Irish, Germans, and Africans.

Colonialists increasingly speak of five distinct regions: New England, Chesapeake, West Indies, and the later, "infilled" Mid-Atlantic and South. The West Indies were economically crucial. Barbados, as a sugar producer, was the gem of the colonies. Its land was so valuable for sugar, it could not be wasted on wood, crops, or cattle. This was the economic engine that drove the development of the other colonies, with whom they traded.

The demographics of immigration varied colony to colony, with more indentured servants in New England, the Chesapeake attracting the middle class, and the West Indies young single men of limited means to whom the West Indies offered hope and land. For it was agriculture, not mining as in Spanish America or manufacture, that forged the English colonies.

With some 500,000 African slaves in 1776, Thomas Jefferson could speak of the wolf the nation had by the ears. Continuing slavery had much to do with concerns about white safety should slaves become free. The division between the free and the enslaved, slaveowners and non-slaveowners that marked the country's founding was in place.

THE CHANGING MAP OF THE AMERICAS

Anthony DePalma of the New York Times, author of *Here: A Biography of the New North American Continent* (2001), observed that if the Spanish conquistadors were disappointed to find America, after hearing from the Taino Indians of Cuba about a great land the explorers hoped might be India or China, it was misdirected regret, given the wonders of the new continent. The explorers' misunderstandings of the new land would be reflected in maps for decades to come, with distances, relationships, and the make-up of the interior wildly off. North America was sometimes simply called "America Septentrional," from the Latin term for the seven stars of the Great Bear (Big Dipper) constellation used to find the North Star. A continent had become a mere signpost.

Unlike the conquistadors, we know North America's boundaries, but we know the concept in a way the Spanish would call *saber*, to observe, not *conocer*, to know. As a term of geography, North America means Canada, the United States, Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean. But are Jamaicans "North Americans"? Is Tegucigalpa (Honduras) a North American capital?

Mexico traditionally defined itself as Latin American, looking south. But with NAFTA it reoriented its compass. Since 1994, 90 percent of Mexico's exports have come across the Rio Grande to the U.S., and Mexico's economy is increasingly integrated with America's. Upon his election to the Mexican presidency in April 2000, Vicente Fox made it clear that North America would be of increasing importance. "The U.S.

and Canada need Mexican labor, and Mexicans need opportunities," he reminded. Fox suggested that there were shared North American values.

Canada, which had hoped that Mexico and Canada combined would make an effective counterweight to the U.S. on the continent, wondered if it had given up too much. With its growing economy, Mexico may overtake Canada to become the number-one U.S. trade partner by 2010. Since 9/11, shared interests have come to include not just economic development and a continental energy policy but also border-security concerns. (Even before 9/11, Ahmed Rassem entered Washington state from British Columbia for his thwarted millennial attack on the Los Angeles Airport.). While there have been no border closings, the slowdown has had a huge economic cost. In 2000, 489 million people and 127 million passenger vehicles passed through the U.S. borders.

Mexico and Canada each have recently been or are facing ethnic separatism issues (the 1994 Chiapas uprising in Mexico, the French separatists in Quebec and the Inuit Indian's independence struggle. North America is likely, then, to bear out Carlos Fuentes's description of it as the testing ground of the 21st century.

FINAL NOTES

William Anthony Hay, executive director of FPRI's Center for America and the West; Paul Dickler, history teacher at Neshaminy High School and senior fellow of FPRI's Marvin Wachman Fund for International Education, and James Kurth, professor of political science at Swarthmore College and chair of FPRI's Study Group on America and the West, led the wrap-up session.

Prof. Kurth noted that there are many instances where reliance on maps that showed a deceptive homogeneity or wrong scale but gave the illusion of precision had had disastrous results. These included Lord Salisbury's 19th century admission that "We looked at the wrong size map," Germany's World War I implementation of its Schlieffen Plan to invade France first and then Russia, and Japan's assessment that it could attack Pearl Harbor without risking reprisal. Maps have also been manipulated to exploit Cold War Americans' fear of a large USSR, or alternatively Soviets' fear of encirclement. Good maps that go beyond the geopolitical to show economic variables and domestic policies are hard to find.

Mr. Dickler explained how he uses any hook he can, even Jeopardy!-style geography questions, to pique student interest in the world. Mapmaking assignments can include where the students and their grandparents came from. One participant has students map different regional features on transparencies. Overlaid, the whole picture emerges.

FPRI's History Academy is chaired by Pulitzer Prize-winning historian Walter A. McDougall. Previous weekends have covered Teaching World Religions; Teaching the Vietnam War; Multiculturalism in World History; The Cold War Revisited; 200 Years of American Foreign Policy; Teaching History -- How and Why; and America and the Idea of the West.