

THE QUALITY OF GEOGRAPHY

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(Text of the banquet address by Mr. Sauer that highlighted the annual meeting of the California Council of Geography Teachers held on May 4, 1968, at California State College, Hayward. At this annual meeting, formal action was taken that led to the organization's change of name to the California Council of Geographic Education. Mr. Sauer, Emeritus Professor of Geography, University of California, Berkeley, was introduced by the C.C.G.T. President for 1967-68, Dr. William L. Thomas, Jr., who subsequently edited the text for publication.)

AS I LOOK over this vast concourse, the thing that impresses me most is the ruddiness of complexion of the participants. Thereby, I have the feeling that I am among my kind of geographers. This raises the question as to how you came to be geographers? When I was a young fellow, there were testimonial meetings, especially in wintertime, when people would gather together and testify as to how they came to undertake a Christian living. The same thing is of interest with regard to how you came to be geographers.

I start with the premise that you became geographers because you like geography. This is an important premise that does not apply to all people in all professions. The reasons are undoubtedly various, but they probably go back with most of you into quite early years. Perhaps the thing that you would find most common among yourselves is that you liked maps. I think this is important: all geographers who have been any good, in my judgment, have been people who have liked maps, or the conversion of maps into language.

THE MAP AS GEOGRAPHY'S SYMBOL

I think that there may be one person here—maybe only one—who remembers Miss Ellen Semple and her lectures. When Ellen Semple lectured, you could see the people trailing across the Appalachians and into the Bluegrass Region; you could follow them mile by mile. Or when she was dealing with the ancient Mediterranean, you could watch the ships turning the promontories on which the temples stood. You went with her! I think this is an important quality. With some it is a God-given gift; she had it. With others it is a learning that follows upon an inclination in that direction. The map is the common language.

There is an old saying, largely true, that "if it is geography, you can show it on a map." Maps speak an international language that, in large measure, is dissociated or quickly dissociated from particular training. The map, of course, is a wandering by the mind's eye; the feeling of wandering depends largely upon one's particular desire and yearning to wander.

Kids like maps! So far as I know, they genuinely *like* them. It may be that education gets in their way so that they no longer wonder about the world, taking pleasure in recognizing again on the map what they have known visually, adding to it some sort of insight into what they have not seen and may see or may not see. I think that the map is perhaps the best common ground by which we can identify the convergence of our interests.

I suspect that the map has been with us ever since there has been geography, and that is almost ever since man existed. I am thinking of the first human who scratched a line on the sand and, with a stammering speech, said: "Now you go this way and then you go that way and you get to that point and that's where the fat oysters are." Therein lies the beginning of geographic nomenclature. That place became known as "Fat Oyster Point," a proper name that had to be learned by the people who grew up in that community. I look on geographic thought as having that antiquity, supported by fundamental interests.

The map represents an assemblage of things that you think belong together. This "belonging together" business is one of the most rewarding and one of the most difficult things about trying to be a geographer.

I am reminded of a good parallel in psychology. Prominent some years ago was a form of psychology called *gestalt*, of which Professor Köhler was the principal exponent. Gestalt psychology has always been respected but not followed very much because it operates on the idea that the person or group is more than components, the parts. Not lending itself readily to analysis or experimentation, gestalt psychology is regarded as more of an intuition than a discipline. Well, I accept that same sort of thing for geography. One of the things that I have always hoped to do was to present life and nature as a whole in whatever area I had been studying. I know that this is not a matter that is satisfactorily subject to analysis; I have been trying for a kind of understanding that is other than an examination by analytic methods.

In addition to the inclusive map, from which one starts with information and extends his learning process, there is the topical map, which also is very old. A topical map is one on which there is no attempt to show the gestalt—the everythingness—but which establishes the distribution or ranges of some particular thing. This concern about the description and distribution of whatever you are working at and the concern as to the meaning of its range is the only thing that is recognized in the rest of the world as "the geographic method."

I have implied that geography is a broad subject, that it has always been broad, that it should remain broad, and that it has no lesser task than the one that it has always had. I have no sympathy with these people who say, "Well, let's not have anything to do with physical geography because it is not significant to the kind of human geography in which we are interested." I think that whenever a group who call themselves geographers try to reduce the field, to make it only the kind of field in which they are most interested, they are taking a step in the wrong direction.

We are now in a time when innovation is tremendously "in," when the only thing that is recommended for me to buy as being old is distilled liquor (and one beer, I believe). For the rest, innovation, the newness, is the thing that recommends it. In geography, we are having rather a time with innovators. I do not object to their playing their particular kind of a game, but I do object to these folks coming and saying, "*We* are the geographers." I do not object to a person who really likes statistics doing quantifying work; there are things that he probably can do that are worthwhile doing. I should even admit that a person is entitled to be a simulator and a model builder; if that is the game that interests him, that is all right. The one thing that I am worried about is when geographers offer themselves as decision makers. This seems to me to be going a bit far, that those who have a title in geography can then set themselves up as decision makers.

I think that if they take over in geography, my kind of geography is gone. If they take over in geography, I also think that public school geography is gone. Can you imagine getting grade school kids interested in regression analysis in order to study geography?

I think that ever since primitive man scratched the route to the oyster bed on the sand, the basic continuity of direction of geography has been set. We redefine geography in terms of our needs and our interests—but are these reformulations so very different? I do not object to one of the definitions: "Geography is the organization of space." But why be so esoteric about it? We all know, or ought to know, what the essential interests of geography are: the diversity of the earth, the patterns of resemblance and repetition, and (this is my personal addition which I find necessary) how things came to be.

By and large, geography has been historical. It has been historical in the physical sense, also. Professor William Morris Davis made the most gallant attempt ever to make physical geography non-historical, and he failed. No one may ever do as well as that again! When man is introduced into the geographic scene and into the geographic process, explanations can only be in terms of origins and changes. The Bible, as you

know, begins with *Genesis*, and the second book is *Exodus*. I think that is just about the way geography has its main problems presented to it. This is true, you know, of primitive geography (I am not apologizing for being interested in primitives). Primitive peoples have their creation myths and they have their migration myths, the equivalents of the Jewish *Genesis* and *Exodus*. There is a need in mankind to look back and see how he came to be and how he changed and how he went from one place to another. There is thus a greatly enduring reason why the historical approach has its basic place in geography.

THE CALIFORNIA EXPERIENCE

You are all well aware that I am not a California specialist, sometimes to my regret. But many of you are primarily interested in California, which is good. California geography, in my view, is a greatly under-cultivated field.

If I were to undertake its study, I would start with the first known human beings in California. This would take me to the Channel Islands off the coast of Santa Barbara, where an interesting story of human antiquity raises some very intriguing geographic questions. In establishing a reasonable view of where the natives lived and what they did, geographers have contributed very little. The notable study by the late Erhard Rostlund on Indian fishing in the streams of California is first-class geography, but there is not much along that line. There is, then, a field of Indian geography which is intellectually interesting and on which there is material available.

On the coming of the white man, I have done a little reading in the past few days. I want to share with you some discoveries of mine of new knowledge and new meaning.

For example, I think all Californians know the name of Cabrillo, since his voyage of discovery for Spain is taught in all the histories, but always his name is mispronounced. Cabrillo was not a Spaniard, but a Portuguese, which is rather interesting; his second in command was a Christian Levantine, which is also interesting; and the third was a Corsican. This expedition of two ships, one of which had no deck to it, started off from the known—which at that time was Cedros Island, halfway north along the coast of peninsular California. That far these people knew where they were; beyond was untrodden ground to civilized people. As they came north, their descriptions of the coast throughout are quite interesting. Although all the names they used have been forgotten with one exception, the whole route can be established quite well. The coast was pretty bleak until they approached the present-day Mexico-California border. Their interest picked up markedly when they sailed into the Bay of Ensenada, to use the current place-name. Ashore, they saw groves of trees and savannas of grass intermingled, and repeatedly herds of animals ranging from 100 to 150 in number. Even without their description of these animals, the mere designation of the savannas and the herds would establish prong-horn antelopes.

Farther north at San Diego, the Cabrillo expedition encountered unusually stalwart Indians. Nothing much happened in San Diego (sorry!), but then they went on to the Port of Smokes. Because this occurred in September or the beginning of October, fires were burning on the hills behind this Port of Smokes—San Pedro. Continuing to a point northwest (they were quite good in directions, not good on latitude), they came upon villagers living in houses, whereupon the story becomes quite interesting in human terms. From this point, which later is identified in the text as Mugu, they were then going through the Santa Barbara Channel for weeks, naming and counting the villages, 50 or more. They were impressed by the quality and the size of the canoes, made and used by the best native navigators anywhere south of Puget Sound. They were very freely served sardines, fresh and in great diversity. The houses interested them and are fairly well described.

They came to areas in the villages where there were poles. Spaniards are always kind of casual about the size of timber (for example, using the phrase *Palo colorado*, the “red pole,” as their name for the redwood). But these poles were not redwoods, being described as painted and having figures on them. This is the first evidence that these Santa Barbara Channel people were kinfolk of the people of the Pacific Northwest, a suggestion that has had a good deal of reinforcement since then.

The Cabrillo expedition had a marvelous time in the Santa Barbara Channel country. They provide some very appreciative descriptions of how nice this country was and how nice the people were, but in so fooling around, they consumed several weeks of precious time. About the first of November, when they decided to go on, they learned a significant lesson about California's climate. They were just beyond Point Concepción when they were hit by their first storm, which drove them back south to the town of the sardines. They started out again, and the next storm took them in the other direction, chasing them north until they entered a bay where the pine trees came down to the water's edge. This was Monterey, and from then on they were in continual trouble. They were experiencing a season in which the fall and winter storms had come early and unusually hard. When they were being driven along the coast south of Monterey they recorded how the waves broke unceasingly against a cliffshore and how the mountains were so close and so high and covered with snow (in November, which is possible) that they feared the mountains might fall down and crush the ships. From their description, they did not know where they were a good deal of the time, because of being battered back and forth by storms. The question whether they reached as far north as Cape Mendocino or not, is academic and no longer of interest, really, to the geographer.

Here is a remarkably good first account of the presence of white men on the coast of California, from which I have taken some of the highlights. After this introduction to the historical geography of California, for 60 years there is nothing more. It is an interesting matter that there is no more concern with California for a while. But finally the colonial period begins with the settlement of the whites that leads on to all that you know so well about California in the 19th century.

Then in 1923, C. O. Sauer came to California, and that was some California! I am sorry that I never studied it; I just experienced it. To use the current term, I have had only some "environmental perception." We came out for the first time on the Santa Fe Railroad, all the way from Kansas City. During this trip, the train stopped for every meal and we put on our coats before entering the Harvey dining room, an interesting cultural note. Then we got to Southern California, to Pasadena, the goal of the old folks who had a moderate income. What a wonderful place these towns were down there: Pasadena, Sierra Madre (still a bit on the youngish side), and Laguna Beach!

After I had been in California for not too long a time, I was invited to a very august place right in the middle of the best of Southern California to make a geographical address. In reassuring my audience about California, I said, "You have a wonderful state here. You have people who enjoy it, who appreciate it, people who have the means and the good sense to come out here and choose it as a place to live, and you won't need to worry about the future. This is so because California has climate but it does not have the resources that will sustain industrialization. You will enjoy your citrus fruits, your palm trees, your living, and you're not going to be overwhelmed by industrial and urban growth." I am afraid that shortly after this I quit predicting the future!

AN APPRECIATION OF DIVERSITY

What a state this California was! And now we have a magazine called *Cry California*. Just this past week I was sent a copy of a new book by Raymond Dasmann, who was at Humboldt State College at Arcata for a good long time. He should have been brought into a geography faculty, but he did not have a Ph.D. in geography and, as you know, this is required now. Dasmann is now one of the members of the Conservation Foundation in Washington, and a very good observer; a wildlife man, among other things. His book is called *A Different Kind of Country*. It has California in it although it is not a book about California, but about what is happening to the United States at a dreadful rate. I refer to the loss of diversity, a thing that I have felt so very, very much in a particular way in respect to the farms.

When I left the Middle West, nobody would have thought that the then American farmer was on the way to extinction. By the American farmer I mean a person who grew a diversity of crops, who rotated his crop system, who had animals on the farm, who produced some of the food for himself, the pigs, the farm orchard, and that sort

of thing. This type of person is more nearly extinct in the American scene today than the Indian is. Nobody would have dreamed of that sort of thing a half century ago. The agricultural colleges, the experiment stations, were telling the farmer to keep on being a farmer of diversified crops, that the family farm was the good thing toward which American rural and small town life was looking.

I cannot describe this change for California as I can for the Middle West, which is my home country. Clover there was almost the sign of farming decency. Now, over the Mississippi Valley one must go a long way to find a field of red clover. I happen to be a farmer, in absentia, by inheritance. The farm used to be a farm; it is now just a piece of a larger operation in the middle of the best country in Illinois. It has yielded up to 210 bushels of corn an acre, which is something that no self-respecting piece of land can do by itself. This is just feeding it by the bottle. In that township I do not think there is a single living domestic animal; only a few birds and a very few bumblebees.

Now this is the sort of thing that has happened. The barn, over a large part of the United States, is as much of a relic as the hand pump in the yard. The farm houses are coming down. The land may even bring a somewhat better price if it does not have a house on it. The change between the world of my youth and the present rural world is fantastic!

There are other illustrations of this process in California, but here more strongly compounded with actual urban and industrial expansion. I am talking about the greatest granary of the world and the manner in which the American Midwest has become completely unrecognizable as to the way of life.

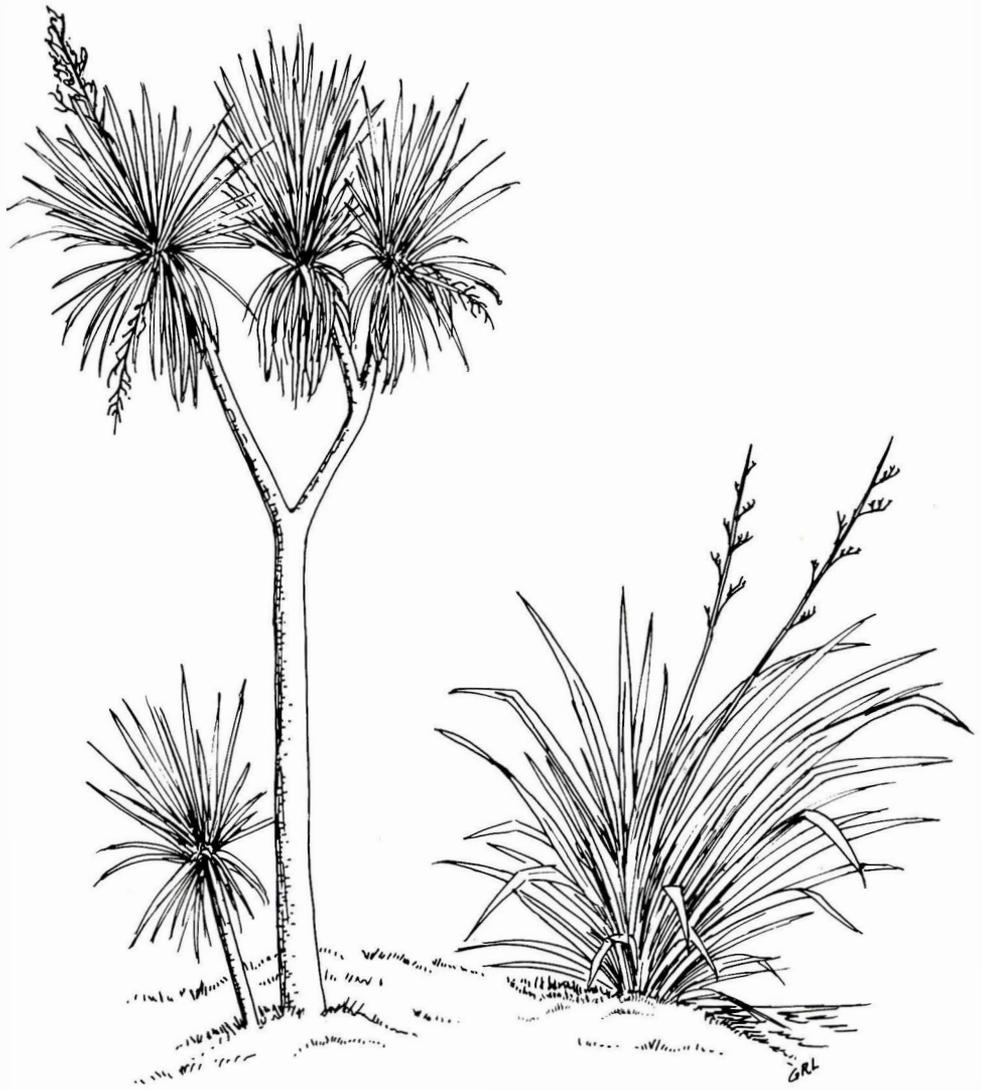
The thing that scares me is how fast things can come in this country. In the early 1930s one rarely saw soybeans; if so, one was likely to stop and ask what they were. The American farmer had grown corn by the Indian method for more than 300 years, "laying by the corn." This was the final cultivation by which the earth was heaped up or "hilled" around the corn. The American farmer did all of his cultivation in the Middle West by the Indian method of mounding the earth around almost whatever he grew; corn, potatoes, and everything that he planted. It was not necessary to do it, but a tradition that lasted and lasted, although people no longer knew how it started. This hilling cultivation of the Midwestern American farm was knocked out, beginning in the 1930s. The cornfields of today are an entirely different sort of thing from the cornfields on which America lived for hundreds of years.

Not liking a lot of change, certainly not too much change, I come back to an old creed and delight, as a geographer, of enjoying the uses of diversity, which I think is one of the most attractive features of human living. For diversity we currently have substituted the word "development." As you may have gathered, I am very, very cool on development. Our old friend, Lewis Mumford, who I think is one of the most interesting people in this country, recently wrote a book on *The City in History*. Long before that he had introduced the term "megalopolis." Concerned about the life of cities (before there were riots or anything like that), Mumford thought that large cities represented a great and possibly insoluble problem, an impasse for civilization. Then along comes a geographer, Jean Gottman, who writes a book called *Megalopolis*—in which all is sweetness and light.

I should like to call to your attention the fact that geographers do not worry enough. I worry a lot, but I cannot get enough people to worry along with me. I am terribly worried about megalopolis. I am very worried about underdeveloped countries, mainly because I am afraid of how they are being developed.

This is a finite world. It is a terrible truth, but what a truth it is! We are running along as though everything was infinitely expandable and we are not concerned about the expansion. I believe that more geographers should become recorders of where we are. A very, very serious question is whether we are going to have a world that is kept tolerable by the restraint of its civilized people who realize the importance of diversity in making the world attractive.

In closing, I have just one question to ask. It was asked of me by a youngster, and I think it is the biggest question of all: "Do you wish you were a teen-ager now?"



Cordyline australis (left) and *Phormium tenax* (right)