PSR1 for 10/6/88#FAILING GRADES ABOUT GEOGRAPHY

A recent Gallup survey showed that the United States is the only country in the world in which young people of college age know less geography than senior citizens (age 55 and older). That was one of the many dismal conclusions of an international Gallup survey conducted for the National Geographic Society.

When asked to identify specific places on a map of the world, every other country except Italy and Mexico ranked higher than America. Among the 18 to 24 year old group, the United States finished last.

The Gallup survey found that 24 million Americans cannot identify the United States on an outline map of the world, and that 44 million Americans cannot identify the Soviet Union or the Pacific Ocean. More than half of Americans have no idea of what the population of their own country is.

Although 69% of Americans think it is absolutely necessary to be able to read a map, and nine out of ten believe it is much more important to be able to read a map than to write a business letter or use a calculator or PC, 58 million Americans cannot tell direction on a map or calculate the approximate distance between two points.

The average American adult could identify from outline maps only about 4 of 12 European countries, less than 3 of 8 South American countries, less than 6 of 10 U.S. states, and less than 9 of 16 key places on a map of the world.

Knowledge of geography within the United States wasn't much better. Only 55% could identify New York State on a map of the United States. The other 45% mistook New York for one of 37 different states ranging from Maine to Florida, and from coast to coast.

Despite heavy U.S. involvement in Central America, only half of all U.S. adults know that the Sandinistas and Contras have been

fighting in Nicaragua. 117 million Americans don't know where Vietnam is.

One in three (32%) Americans cannot name any countries that are members of NATO. Sixteen percent think the Soviet Union is in NATO, and even one in ten (11%) college graduates make this error.

Half of Americans cannot name any Warsaw Pact nations. Eleven percent think the United States belongs to this Soviet-bloc alliance.

Only 57% could identify England on a map of Europe. Although 61% of Americans surveyed identified Brazil as a South American country, it was the (BF)only(end BF) South American country identified by even half of the respondents.

More than 10,000 respondents from the United States, Japan, France, West Germany, the United Kingdom, Sweden, Italy, Canada and Mexico participated in this Gallup survey during April and May. The responses of Americans were contrasted with those of respondents in the other surveyed countries and with responses from the adult U.S. population of 40 years ago.

It is obvious from the results of this survey that a consistent pattern of evidence shows that the 18 to 24 year old age group in the United States is in a state of ""crisis'' when it comes to basic geographic knowledge and skills.

There is nothing inherently difficult about learning geography. It is not nuclear physics or a subject that requires a high I.Q. or extensive prior learning. If people of any age are exposed to geographic information and apply themselves to learning it, there is no reason why they cannot become proficient in geography.

Geography is an extremely important subject. Political, economic, environmental, and social events all take place within a geographic context, and people cannot really understand the news unless they are oriented toward where the news is taking place. How can we make

informed decisions about our place in the world community if we don't know where we are?

The reason why Americans over 55 years old know more geography than their children and grandchildren is that older Americans learned essential facts of geography when they were in grade school and thus had a foundation of basic knowledge to which they could add in subsequent years. A couple of decades ago, however, the so-called progressive educators eliminated geography from the schools, replacing it with a vague mish-mash called ""social studies.''

The report card is now in. Social studies gets an F. It's time to put geography back in the schools.