Painting by Jan Van Meer, 1669

“Ein Geograph in seinem Arbeitzimmer”

(“A Geographer in his Workroom”)

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- About the readings . . .
- The grading formula . . .
- Term project . . .
- Attendance and participation . . .

Why “A History of Geography”? 

- A truly comprehensive history of geography would be “mission impossible.”
- Courses like this tend to reflect the instructor’s training and points of view.
- Therefore, content and organization rather depends on who’s teaching the course.
Old Chinese map

Old map of Tibet

Polynesian “Stick Chart”

Polynesian “Stick Chart”
Polynesians in multi-hulled canoe, 1781

Model of ancient Polynesian vessel

Fig 1. Stars from Polynesia to Pitcairn (from a sketch by the author)

Fig. 21. Mammalian swell patterns (based mainly on Whipple, 1993). Only swells from east and southeast shown.
The goals of this course are to familiarize you with:

- Important individuals and episodes that characterize American geography and its antecedents;
- The principal philosophies that have highlighted the history of western geography; and
- Some of the major “story lines” in the history of western geography.

“"It is through geography alone that the links can be seen that connect physical, historical and political conditions; and it is thus that geography claims the position of a science distinct from the rest; and of singular practical importance . . . Scientific geography may be defined as the study of local correlations.”

-- from The Keltie Report of 1886 (p.71)

Sir John Scott Keltie (1840-1927) was a highly active member of the Royal Geographical Society, serving as its Inspector of Geographical Education and later as Secretary of the Society. The 150-page Report served as a powerful justification for university-level geography.

Geography’s Main Storylines

- The relationship between geography and technological change
- the relationship between people and environment
- relations to other disciplines
- the nature of geographic knowledge and education
- the “ideographic vs. nomothetic” argument
- art vs. science
- pure vs. applied research
- What is/should be geography’s purpose, and who should determine geography’s agenda?
- field work vs. lab work
- inclusiveness (or lack thereof).

Vasily V. Dokuchaev
(1846-1903)

- Russian geographer and father of pedology – the study of soils in their natural settings.
- A pioneer in the mapping of soils and in the development of soil classification and vocabulary.

Geography as an academic discipline . . .

- Though an ancient subject, geography as a stand-alone academic discipline is a relatively recent thing. It was merely an “umbrella concept” for much of its history.
- As late as 1880 there were fewer than 20 university geography teachers in the entire world (Holt-Jensen, 1999).
- Two reasons: In an era of increased specialization, geography was seen by many learned people as too cosmographic to be a separate subject; and much of its content was perceived as falling within the realms of history and geology.
- The first geography departments in Britain and the U.S. date from 1900 and 1903 respectively.
- Geography’s ascendancy at the university level occurred largely because it became a compulsory grade-school subject, requiring university-trained professionals to teach it.
The Four Traditions of Geography
according to Wm. D. Pattison, NCGE, 11/29/63

- Spatial (mapping, GIS, RS-API, quantitative techniques, models, movement)
- Area studies (regional geography at all scales)
- Man-Land (human geography in all its forms, perception, hazards)
- Earth Science (physical geography)