

# THE OXFORD EAGLE

*Online Edition*

**Today's Eagle**

**Opinions/ Editorials**

## Feb. 28 - Geography lessons – maybe we do need them

[Don Whitten](#)

*Editor*

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It's time for a test, a geography test. That's what I told 10 people at The Oxford EAGLE earlier this week after receiving an e-mail from Western Kentucky University professor David J. Keeling offering a guest column entitled "Geographical ignorance limits America's opportunities" where he wrote about how Americans are intertwined with the rest of the world but relatively ignorant when it comes to knowing where anyone else is.

According to Keeling, "If Americans remain woefully ignorant about the spatial dimensions of global climate change or the inherent geopolitical dangers in an increasingly networked world, then the country has little chance of taking a proactive leadership role in addressing global problems."

### Interaction

He proposes we all embark on a "No American Left Geographically Ignorant" campaign much akin to the president's No Child Left Behind Act.

Advertising

Links to the American Geographical Society, of which Keeling is a member, sent me on to other sites – many of which basically say that we Americans just don't know a whole lot about geography, home or abroad.

Letters to the Editor

Submit Classified Ad

Well, let's see, I decided.

Submit Announcements

### Simple test

Submit Calendar Item

After glancing at some of the reports, including a survey of 18- to 24-year-olds by the National Geographic Education Foundation, I put together a five-map, 25-question survey. One blank map was of the world (locate the general area of Iraq, England, Australia, etc.), one of the U.S. (locate several states and the city of Atlanta), one of Europe (point out Sweden, France, Germany, etc.), another was of Mississippi (locate five different cities and towns) and the other one was of Asia (where we looked for Iraq, Afghanistan, Israel, etc.)

Submit a Story Idea

Contact Information

Subscription Information

And off I went around the building picking a wide range of employees.

Meet the Staff

How did we do?

### Around Oxford

### Different responses

**City Government**

Not very well if you ask some of the folks who took the test. Many were frustrated with their answers or their problems in some areas.

**Chamber of Commerce**

A couple headed for maps around the building to see just how good or bad they did, while others just said bad things about me.

**County Government**

But my co-workers actually did better, with similar cases and questions, than the test group the National Geographic Education Foundation worked with.

**Important Numbers**

The very informal and unscientific survey, however, does point out that we're not as geographically inclined as we might ought to be. Or as we think we are.

**Community Calendar****Yoknapatawpha Arts Council**

Here's how EAGLE employees compared with the national test group of young adults:

**University of Mississippi**

- Only 48 percent of the test group could locate Mississippi on a map of the United States. We did, as you'd expect, better there, going a perfect 10-for-10.

**Oxford School District**

- When it came to locating the state of New York, the numbers were about the same – 60 percent for us and 50 percent for the test group. We hit the same 6-for-10 mark on Ohio, while only 43 percent of the test group could find that state on a blank map.

**Lafayette School District****Oxford-Lafayette School of Applied Technology**

- Given a map of Asia, only 12 percent of the test group could correctly label the country of Afghanistan. We were at 40 percent. Only 37 percent of those young adults could find Iraq; we pretty much matched that at 40 percent.

**WOXD 95.5 (FM)**

- Only a fourth of the test group could locate Israel, while we doubled that mark. Half of our folks could locate Egypt compared to just 30 percent of the national group.

**WQLJ 93.7 (FM)****WUMS 92.1 (FM)****Highs and lows**

What about our local group's highs and lows? We were perfect on locating Mississippi, Jackson and Oxford. We were 9-for-10 on Philadelphia (lots of folks go to the Neshoba County Fair or the casinos, maybe) Australia, Idaho (we like potatoes, I guess), France, Italy (nothing like a country shaped like a boot) and Russia. Our lowest marks (only 40 percent) went to Iraq and Afghanistan, while we were only marginally better (50 percent) on Sweden, Egypt and Israel.

(It was a little disconcerting that some of our folks put Atlanta in South Carolina, New York where Maine actually is, Japan in Europe and both Iraq and Afghanistan in Africa. But, hey, how much better do you think you'd do?)

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How about our overall results? In the world “test,” we got 64 percent of the countries correct. We were at 78 percent overall in the U.S. test, 76 percent in Europe, 86 percent in Mississippi and 52 percent in Asia.

That’s still likely to be a lot higher than the results you’d get from the nationwide test group, but I don’t know that it means our group has things figured out. We do, as many of you might point out, work at a newspaper and maybe should know a little more than the average Joe. But, by the same token, our group felt like it should have done better and that’s part of the point Keeling makes.

Now, as for that No American Left Geographically Ignorant campaign, it sounds like a pretty good idea, but I’d say its chances of moving forward very fast are less than chances of that test group finding Afghanistan.

That’s a shame, too, but the way it is.

One thing, though. I know folks here at the newspaper are paying just a tad more attention to maps these days. Maybe that’s something we all should try.