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America is disastrously failing to educate internationally literate citizens | Opinion

Yet we seem unconcerned that high school and college students can receive degrees without knowing the difference between World War I and World War II; and the location of China, India or Nigeria on a world map - much less know anything more about them.

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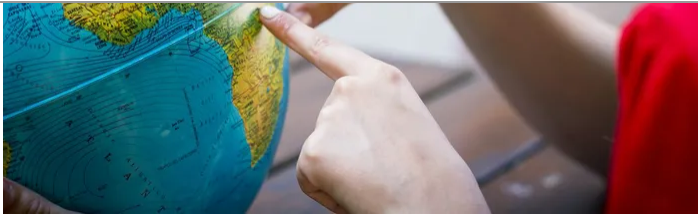
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Americans seem unconcerned that high school and college students can receive degrees withc ... [Read more](#)
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by Margee Ensign, For the Philadelphia Inquirer
Published Jan 16, 2018

None of us should be surprised by President Trump's recent vulgar and racist attack on Haiti and all of Africa. His racism has been visible for a long time, and he has repeatedly proved to be uninformed about international affairs. Meanwhile, the State Department, our governmental repository of experience and knowledge about the world beyond our borders, is hemorrhaging personnel.

While it is easy to point fingers at Trump, the problem for America runs far deeper. The United States has been the world's greatest superpower for many decades, but many of our citizens remain willfully ignorant of that world.

For decades, we have been testing high school and college students about their knowledge of the world. The questions are

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fashioned. Google Maps can tell us where Africa or the Gaza Strip is.

We are an exceptional country, so there is no perceived need to learn about others. Our isolationism is a function of geography—or so we are told. Were we in Europe, we would learn other people's languages, as Europeans do. We have the world's longest international border with Canada, but most Americans know almost nothing about Canada.

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It comes down — at least in part — to what we as Americans think is important and what we demand of our educational institutions. We would be appalled at any

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Democrat. It is about ensuring our citizens have the knowledge they need to participate in a democracy. Concerned about self-government, one of the first things the founders of our republic did was to create colleges, because they realized that democracy can't work if the citizens know nothing. As Jefferson wrote: "Experience hath shewn, that even under the best forms, those entrusted with power have, in time, and by slow operations, perverted it into tyranny; and it is believed that the most effectual means of preventing this would be to illuminate, as far as practicable, the minds of the people at large ..."

In education, we need to lead. Even in the face of opposition, we need to lead. If students or parents or even our president fail to see why learning about the world matters, we must have the courage to persevere and require that they have the

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years and served as an adviser to the governments of Uganda and Rwanda.

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