
Thomas F. Glick
Department of History
Boston University
Boston, Massachusetts

The revolution in American human geography during the 1960s resulted in the replacement of regional geography with the quantitatively oriented “spatial science” that came to a position of intellectual preeminence and political dominance in most major American geography departments by the end of the decade. This relatively easy ascent to power was made possible by the weak intellectual foundations, lack of vision and low prestige that characterized regional geography. The mediocrity of the field as perceived by other academics resulted in the extinction of Harvard’s geography program in 1948. The attempt to revive the study of geography there in 1949–50 (the subject of this essay) failed in large part because the leading human geographers who were called as expert witnesses by the Harvard Committee on Geography were unable to convince the committee’s members of the field’s intrinsic worth or even to provide a coherent description of the nature of the field. Lacking the “high tradition” its French counterpart had, American regional geography was unable to produce leaders with enough analytical power or conceptual depth to permit the field to defend itself and its scholarly mission in terms that were acceptable or meaningful to other academics. The lack of a high tradition can be readily explained by the idiosyncratic social and cultural origins of the academic field in the United States.

American academic geography was dominated from its inception until very recently by persons educated in the “land-grant colleges” (state universities) of the American middle west in alliance with the University of Chicago, a private institution in the same region. Because one of the most important functions of the land-grant colleges was to provide technical support for the agricultural economy of the Great Plains and north-central states, the academic ethos implanted in them was highly pragmatic and utilitarian, with an emphasis on practical knowledge and, insofar as academic training was concerned, field work. Conceptualization was undervalued.

There is, as yet, no critical or analytical intellectual history of American regional geography, possibly because those capable or desirous of writing one would not want to embarrass their elders. Moreover, the regionalists themselves have, even in their most introspective moods, proven unable to conceptualize the very bases of their own intellectual formation or to probe beyond familiar cliches that all regional geographers accept. A revealing example of this lack of vision appears in a roundtable discussion among American geographers reflecting on their training in geography. There was common agreement among the participants that field work had been the most valuable component of their graduate education in the 1930s. But when E. Cotton Mather (University of Minnesota) asked Leslie Hewes (University of Nebraska), “What did you do in the field? I am sort of curious. Did you hang around
with soil augurs and act like scientists or... did you ever make maps?" Hewes replied: 
"We did a bit of that. More commonly we went out to see what we could see. A few times we made maps; more often, I think not." This kind of crude inductivism is simply an admission (by Hewes) of the abandonment of conceptualization by midwestern regional geographers in favor of a folk model of field work and "seeing what we could see." formalized by Richard Hartshorne in his famous defense of regional geography The Nature of Geography, 1939, which Fred Schaefer was later to characterize as "exceptionalist" and "idiographic." The idiographic approach was not so much the result of a carefully thought-out method deliberately inoculated in students as it was the deliberate eschewal of generalization. Reaction to the failure of the large-scale theories of the enviromental determinists may have been the cause but it is more likely due to pragmatic and utilitarian values deeply engrained in the ambient culture.

The predominance of pragmatic midwesterners in American academic geographers was overwhelming. According to Rugg, about one-half of all geography dissertations written in the United States between 1839 and 1946 were produced at midwestern institutions and 44 percent of the positions filled in that period were in the Midwest. As a result, the Midwest produced a surplus of geographers who diffused a particular orientation and set of values to other universities beyond the confines of that region. Bushong's study of "academic genealogies" between 1907 and 1946 shows that one-quarter of all doctorates in geography were produced by only three mentors: Charles C. Colby (1884–1965) and Harlan H. Barrows (1877–1960) at the University of Chicago and Walter E. Ekblaw (1882–1949) at Clark University in Massachusetts. Fully 25 of 32 mentors of the fourth academic generation were "directly descended" from Barrows. Midwestern geography departments, particularly at Chicago and Wisconsin, were also typical inbred, hiring their own students as professors. Between 1923 and 1943, Rugg shows, the Association of American Geographers (AAG) was totally controlled by midwesterners.

The weakness of academic geography in the East was pronounced. Clark University, in Worcester, with its "School of Geography," was an exception, but there was a strong class distinction between such elite institutions as Harvard and Yale and the more middle-class Clark, whose values were much closer to those of institutions in the Midwest. William Morris Davis, the great physiographer and author of the "cycle of erosion," held a chair of physical geography at Harvard and was the dominant force in the AAG in its early years. But Davis, although he gave superficial support to human geography, never practiced it himself. When he retired in 1912, his influence in the AAG quickly waned and hegemony passed to midwestern regionalists.

The predominance of pragmatic, anti-theoretical midwesterners meant that no high tradition ever emerged in American geography and, as a consequence, by the late 1940s, regionalism had lost its cachet and was ripe for overturn by more analytical practitioners. At the same time, lack of prestige made the field as a whole institutionally vulnerable. The crisis of geography at Harvard is one case of the history of the demise of American regional geography in the late 1940s.

Early in 1948, President James B. Conant of Harvard announced that "geography is not a university subject," thus initiating what the Harvard Crimson (the student newspaper) described as "an academic war over the field of geography." Both physical and human geography had been accommodated within the Geology Depart-
ment although separate courses and degrees were offered under the name of geography. The geography program had, nevertheless, been staffed mainly by temporary appointments, the political geographer Derwent Whittlesey holding the only permanent position. In 1948, the administration approved a proposal to name a new associate professor, but when the Geology Department recommended Edward Ackerman for the post, the administration announced that there was no longer a vacancy in geography to be filled. Later in the year the university terminated three temporary geography posts and Ackerman left for the University of Chicago.

The next step in determining geography's future at Harvard was taken in May, 1949 when the Committee on Educational Policy appointed a Subcommittee on Geography (known as "the Committee") with a mandate to consider the situation created by the administrative decision of January-February 1948 regarding instruction in geography. The Committee was to give broad consideration to the nature of geography as a field and to the desirability of developing geographical instruction at Harvard. If the latter seemed appropriate, the Committee was to bring in recommendations as to how it might be done. The Committee was composed of Alexander Gerschenkron (Economics), Lewis Don Leet (Geology), Arthur Maass (Government), Donald C. McKay (History, chairman), Frederick Merk (History), John M. Roberts (Anthropology), Karl Sax (Biology), and one geographer, assistant professor Edward L. Ullman (1912-1976). "For two years," he later recalled, "we met with me as the only geographer on a committee, highly skeptical, of peers from other disciplines."

At its first meeting, on May 24, 1949, the chairman proposed two broad areas of inquiry: first, "What is geography; is it a distinctive science or discipline? (The 'Conant' question.)" and second, the role of geography at Harvard. The fact that the Committee chose to deal directly with the thorny and elusive issue of geography's identity as an academic discipline and called witnesses from within the field to give their opinions on the matter makes the internal documents of the Committee, together with its final report, a unique source for the history of geography in the United States. Moreover, it illuminates an important phase in the career of one of the significant American geographers of the twentieth century, Edward Ullman, who throughout the proceedings provided a highly idiosyncratic counterpoint to a developing consensus, his dissent from which became increasingly marked. For Ullman did not believe that the way out of the crisis—both the general one, as characterized by Richard Hartshorne, or that at Harvard—would be solved through a redefinition of regionalism or areal differentiation, which was the common prescription. In insisting that the geography of the near future was going to be quite different from the models of the discipline under discussion, Ullman seems, in retrospect, to have been a prescient voice. Ullman's early conceptions of a human geography of spatial relations form what might be seen as the future spatial science prefigured.

After stating the general questions to be addressed by the Committee, chairman McKay then called upon Ullman "to clarify the thinking of the Committee on the first question"—what is geography? This Ullman answered by giving three standard definitions followed by four statements of what geography was not. Three standard definitions were: (1) geography as a study of areal differentiation; (2) as the science of distributions; and (3) as the study of the relationship between man and his environment. "Ullman says this [last] definition is no longer acceptable," the minutes note laconically. Geography is not (a) geology; (b) determinist–environmental; (c) a
study of place names and locations of state capitals; or (d) preparation of guide books nor the National Geographic Magazine. These exclusionary definitions, it should be noted, did not come out of thin air but must have represented positions which Ullman had found held commonly by his colleagues at Harvard, and therefore had practice in rebutting. Before departing Harvard for Washington in 1951, Ullman went to bid farewell to President Conant, who remarked that he had had a wonderful primary school geography teacher who taught him where the rivers and mountains were. "That is why you abolished geography," Ullman told him, "We don’t do rivers and mountains anymore." Responding to the question of whether geography was a distinctive discipline, Ullman said, "sufficiently distinctive and basic, and yet related to other disciplines that it should be taught in very large universities." From the second meeting on, substantive issues were discussed, both in comment on readings in geography assigned to Committee members and in cross-examination of expert witnesses, called to explain the nature of geography. In these discussions, which extended through the thirteenth regular meeting (March 24, 1950), there were two crucial issues. The first was that of the boundaries of the discipline and the problem of overlap which included the relationship of physical to human geography as well as the broader relations of geography to other disciplines. The second, in which Ullman’s position crystalized, was that of the future of the field, of the old school versus the new, and of the radically different perceptions of Ullman and committee witness Carl Sauer, founder of the Berkeley school of cultural geography.

In dealing with the problem of disciplinary boundaries and overlap, the members of the Committee were groping toward some functional definition, which all found elusive. At the same time, they were receiving testimony from geographers which tended to confirm the perception of the field as being without boundaries and hopelessly amorphous (although the Committee did not explicitly so state, because it finally reached a conclusion favorable to the continuance of geography). However, witness after witness responded to the Committee’s questions wholly within the context of what Alain Reynaud has identified as "the myth of the unity of geography." The myth, which dates to early years of academic geography in the late nineteenth century when geographers sought to justify the new fields as the mother science, hold that geography’s purview includes all facets of the earth’s surface and human occupancy of it. Typically invoked when the field is under attack, it is represented as axiomatic in a literature of self-justification and is rarely questioned, although non-geographers have repeatedly stressed their mystification over the all-inclusive nature of the field. In particular, physical and human geography are viewed as inseparable, even in the face of evidence that individual geographers have rarely been able to integrate the findings of perspectives of both in their research. Those who invoke the myth, nevertheless, view as scandalous any attempt to limit the scope of the field.

The Committee discussed three books by leading American geographers, all of which promoted the unity myth and all of which elicited puzzlement from reporters and discussants alike. These were: Glen Trewartha, Japan: A Physical, Cultural and Regional Geography; Isaiah Bowman, Geography in Relation to the Social Sciences; and Richard Hartshorne, The Nature of Geography. According to McKay, Trewartha dealt with "a wide range of topics where representatives of other disciplines would have done better." McKay was disturbed "over the amount of description which is not organized around any central conception," but drew from the volume a number of implications. First, the "geographer has a point of view (relation of land and culture) which could be fruitfully unifying"; (2) if the geographer was to be the instrument of unity, he had to abandon description for interpretation, and (3) he must "either invite collaboration of men in other fields or himself master at least one other field." Bowman’s book was found by Merk not to discuss "at least directly, the relationship of geography to the social sciences." What Merk found instead, was a statement of principles by a universal geographer, one of the old school who was educated "before the younger scholars began to emphasize regional and functional geography." Bowman’s implied definition of a geographer as any scholar who deals with geographic data, troubled Merk. "So far as regional synthesis goes," he quotes Bowman as saying, "geography is the one subject that provides it systematically." But what, Merk wonders, about anthropologists, soil scientists, sociologists or historians? "This inclusiveness of term" posed a problem for the Committee.

Gerschenkron followed with the assertion that, mutatis mutandis, the same held for Hartshorne’s book, which the economist characterized as “difficult and diffuse; the arguments, difficult to follow.” Hartshorne’s elaboration of the definition of geography as the study of the importance of “social diversities associated with place” was “so general as to be encyclopedic.” Moreover, Gerschenkron could not follow Hartshorne’s discussion of regional differentiation as the basis of the discipline. Far from setting out ideal types which Gerschenkron would have liked seen explicated as applications of the possible relationships in regional differentiation, Hartshorne was “not clear on which characteristic elements are to be pressed in defining a region.”

When Hartshorne appeared before the Committee personally, McKay questioned him on the relationship between geography and the other social sciences. “When the geographer deals with men, rather than physical facts, it appears that he always marries with another discipline. When the geographer gets into another discipline he is obviously doing a less adequate job than the man trained in the other discipline.” The problem at Harvard, according to McKay, was how to maximize the university’s opportunities “in regard to this marriage of discipline.” Hartshorne replied that the same could be said of historians but that the issue doesn’t come up because history is so well established. When Merk noted that physical geography would be kept on at Harvard and that the Committee’s interest was in establishing the bounds of human geography, Hartshorne replied emphatically, within the context of the unity myth: “Physical and human are all parts of one geography. Geography’s particular point of view in area—both physical facts and people in that area.”

At the next meeting, McKay made a telling remark to witness L. Dudley Stamp. Stamp had noted that most human geographers had a physical background, including some field work, in their graduate training. “But after graduation, they develop their own interests, some historical geography, some economic geography, etc. On the whole, the economic geographers have not done enough in economics.” “This last is very interesting,” replied McKay, “Our committee has come to a feeling that to be effective a geographer must be wedded to some other field.” Stamp rejoined that, nevertheless, there was a core which one could insist on, and this was “physical (terrain), a biological science, climatology;” beyond this core specialization was possible.
The same point, in much the same terms, had been made earlier by Isaiah Bowman in an exchange with Merk. There was no question, according to Merk, that physical geography would be continued at Harvard; this issue was whether a department of geography should be established to consist largely of human geographers. Earlier consultants had indicated a trend away from world geography towards functional and regional approaches. Did not this very process create overlaps with other disciplines and, if so, could not "geography be taken care of by people in other disciplines?"13 Bowman replied that he would not like to see a department of human geography "but rather a department of geography—both human and physical" and that the two should never be separated. However, when Bowman enumerated the personnel in the department he had established at Hopkins, the fact that only one of its members had a geography degree was not lost on the Committee. "The fact that you have brought to (Johns Hopkins University) men who are specialists in other fields and who were in other fields first is the most arresting fact we have heard," McKay opined.

It is clear that one result of the unity myth is that other social scientists find it difficult to believe that geography can encompass any and all other disciplines, and thus the consensus, as articulated by McKay, that geography cannot exist apart from other disciplines in not surprising. Once such a conclusion is reached, however, it is difficult to justify a free standing geography program with any conviction.

In discussions over the boundaries of geography, Ullman was mainly silent. It took the intrusions of the California school of Carl Sauer to get him going.16 At the fifth meeting, Dmitri Shimkin, a protege of Sauer’s, gave testimony on geography as a "medium of integration" and the geographer as an intermediate link between natural and cultural phenomena. McKay insisted that the integrating function, stressed by all the witnesses, faithful to the unity myth, was what bothered the Committee most, because it seemed to imply that a human geographer had also to be a specialist in another discipline.17 Nevertheless, it was Shimkin who, in consultation with McKay, produced a suggested minimum course program for a department of geography. The department already offered six systematic courses (transportation, cities, two in political geography and two graduate research courses) and five regional courses (the Boston Region, Africa, Latin America and two graduate research courses). Shimkin recommended eleven new courses, particularly four new systematic courses: cartography, land forms and hydrography, climatology and bio-geography. Ullman led the charge against this proposal, asserting "I do not consider Shimkin’s eleven courses as a satisfactory minimum. They do not consider systematic geography in the social sciences...and this is what I am interested in." Shimkin, in sum, "reflects the California school. He does not represent all systematic human geography." When Maass asked what systematic courses he would add, Ullman replied, "Any ones—industrial location cities etc. It makes little difference. Each is a test bore."17 Specifying further, Ullman continued: "Transportation is my personal interest. It appears to me to be quite essential to geography as a study of spatial relations." He also wanted courses on industrial location, resources, and agriculture; he did not see the need for separate courses on climatology (which was covered in the introductory course) or bio-geography (because plant growth could be subsumed under climatology). "I should rather see population geography than bio-geography," he concluded.18

With the thirteenth and last regular meeting held on March 24, 1950, the committee then proceeded to finalize its report.19 Ullman’s preliminary draft, entitled “Geography and Harvard” (dated February 14, 1950) contained some interesting statements regarding “present and future developments” in the field. “There is evidence,” he began, “that the present generation is attempting to produce a more significant geography,” which he believed would take the following forms:

1. deeper penetration into systematic social aspects, such as technological developments, transportation, marketing or resources use;
2. more use of the problem method and less reliance on description (a phenomenon common to all the social sciences);
3. more applied geography (the result of geographers’ wartime experience);
4. Three related items concerned with theory:
   a. Development of geographical theories of spatial relations, based in part on new data. Contributions to this have already been made by geographers, sociologists, economists and astrophysicists.20
   b. the refinement of regional geography and the geographical theory of regions;
   c. the dynamics of spatial relations as measured primarily by movement—transportation, circulation. Lack of data made this difficult in the past, but it is now becoming feasible through the use of origin and destination surveys, and traffic flow maps.
5. Production of studies narrower in focus than earlier works of universalist aspiration, yet broader than the micro-studies of the previous period; and
6. a continuation of regional synthesis.21

These generalizations were not embodied in the final committee report and there Ullman had to make his point in a more specific way. The report laid heavy stress on the relationship between society and environment. The human geographer studies not only the physical environment, but the "way in which man has used, manipulated, and modified this environment, and of the way in which that environment has obliged man to conform to and modify his habits."22 Ullman’s dissent was unequivocal:

...I object to stressing the relation of man to his environment as a way of getting across the nature of geography. I should prefer an emphasis on spatial relations as the basis. It is through a study of spatial relations—or distributions—that you can get back to man’s relation to his environment....The emphasis on man and his environment has led in the past to the types of determinism of Semple, Ratzel, and others—to which we American geographers today object strenuously.23

But that was not the worst, in Ullman’s view. The Chairman included in its draft report long excerpts from a letter written to McKay by Carl Sauer, in lieu of a personal
appearance, the full text of which follows:

[1] I am appreciative of your invitation to meet with your committee on the future of geography at Harvard. I hope to be in the East early in February, but I am so fully committed as to time that I do not see how I could manage a trip to Cambridge. May I offer, therefore, some observations and comments?

[2] The field of geography is very poorly defined and this is both its weakness and opportunity. Attempts to define it by restrictions have not helped. Much of the best geography has, at times, been done by persons not classed as professional geographers, as has always been recognized by our major journals. There is not, and, probably should not be, any such thing as a model organization or generalized pattern of any department or institute of geography. As I think of the good centers that have existed, they have differed in their interests and have changed these interests from time to time. The best overall view I know of emergence and change of geographic problems is afforded by the programs of the International Geographic Congresses.

[3] There is a rather marked and significant contrast between European and American geography. Roughly, in European universities discovery of knowledge is basic; with us, communication and application. The war-time successes of the younger geographers, especially in Washington, have increased our satisfaction with applied geography. To my mind, our history is somewhat unfortunate. Geography moved into the universities originally from the normal schools, as a teacher training subject. It soon picked up service courses for the business schools. It added geo-politics when the world started to catch afire. It had further recognition during the war in making compilations for military use from available statistical and textual materials. At the moment it sees profitable outlets in ‘planning.’ Attention has been largely on the presentation of second hand data for immediate ends. The American geographer who writes no text book is the exception, as is the one who has made original identification and interpretation of data.

[4] Our selection of persons has not been concerned primarily with scholarly bent or aptitude. Our academic activities have done little to change us in such direction. We produce vigorous teachers and some capable organizers, but we are undeveloped as to scholarship. These comments are not directed against the substance of geography but against its practice among us.

[5] Traditionally, especially in Europe, the most important part of the training of a young geographer is in some job of field study. This habit of observation is continued and expanded in his mature years and stopped only by loss of physical ability. I know of very few significant workers who have not been eager and active field men. In fact, the most literate of our geographers have been those who have used their field observations as a means of formulating questions that have carried them into comparative studies in the libraries. The fading out of this quality among our younger countrymen is especially regrettable sensible. No geographer can really gain as much field experience as he should have, nor can he exhaust the documentation by other witnesses that have accumulated in the libraries. Yet we, in this country have lacked or have lost both the first hand discovery by observations in the field and the capacity to get back to actual source materials in the libraries.

[6] What we need most of all are people who have a sense of problems, who can discover and examine its constituent parts, who have the temperance for reflection. If they have the quality and opportunity to grow as scholars, they will individually make the decision as to where and on what their intellectual curiosity will center. There is no special field in physical geography, biogeography or human geography in which we are not in great need of real insight.

[7] On the whole, the good human geography has been done by students who have competence in some field of physical geography—geomorphology, climatology, biogeography. We (at Berkeley) have tried to keep ourselves as strong as possible on the natural science side (and that part of our work falls into natural science as to curriculum). On the human side, we operate as social scientists (we hope) who study cultural origins and processes historically-geographically. Such historical human ecology requires identification of the nature of the particular cultural complex, especially as to its material elements. This involves the study of the origins, diffusion, change and replacement of a given culture and its functional constituents. It also involves, of course, the study of how the group makes use of its physical environment and whether it keeps itself in balance therewith. And especially it involve sensiveness to modification in the environment as affected by human activity. The ultimate end, perhaps, is comparative knowledge of how different cultures have behaved in the use of their habitats and whether these actions aid or endanger their posterity. 24

The Committee report reproduced in full paragraphs 3, 5 and 6. Having dispensed with his environmental objections, Ullman followed by asserting "I am loath to include Sauer's letter in the report, as it stands. It represents very strongly his prejudices." When McKay rejoined that he thought it expressed well what had been heard from many witnesses (Bowman, for example), Ullman replied: "Neither Sauer nor Bowman is well informed on current trends in American geography. I suggest that
as a minimum we strike ‘It had...through ‘planning’[in paragraph 3]. Those sentences are sneering at geography.”Ullman’s opinions are, in general, admirable for their prescience, Sauer’s remarks constitute as accurate a short perception of the history and current status of the discipline as had been produced up to that time by any American geographer. The reference to a “profitable outlet in planning” seems absolutely true in retrospect, and also prescient given the future involvement of spatial scientists, Ullman included, in planning endeavors.

Ullman finally objected to the use of material drawn from Shimkin’s research on the Soviet arctic to illustrate the integrative functions of human geographers.23 The example, said Ullman, “has very limited application; it is based on a primitive environment.” Ullman was asked to submit “another example which equally emphasizes the relatedness of the social sciences and which does not deal with a primitive society.” “Yes,” Ullman responded, “but my whole objection is to the emphasis on the physical outlook and on primitive societies. In my opinion the report does not give examples from the major contributions of geography. What we are selling here is made hard to sell because it does not emphasize, as it should, major current problems.”24 The following text was added to the report: paragraph 7, written by Maass to take spatial considerations into account in a general way, and paragraph 8 submitted by Ullman as illustrative of the general point, and wholly drawn from his own research.25

7. The subject matter of geography becomes still clearer when it is understood that its emphasis is on place—specifically on a geographic “region.” With a constant concern with place, the geographer brings to the study of a civilization a distinctive point of view, one which looks at men and human institutions in terms of their distribution and relationships in space. This does not mean that the geographer should attempt the comprehensive study of a given civilization (the fact that some have done so is in part responsible for the low esteem in which certain critics hold the subject), but rather that the geographer’s approach should become part of the thinking of other social scientists concerned with regional problems. From an earlier concern with the delineation of simple “homogeneous regions,” the geographer in recent years has been developing techniques for the analysis of more complex regions, including their nodal centers and the dynamics of their varied and intricate systems of organization.

8. This last development can be illustrated by contemporary examples. (1) Geographers have succeeded in measuring and mapping the actual flow and route characteristics of the present American railway net, and have in this way corrected various erroneous impressions (for instance, analysis shows that the heaviest traffic in the country passes over the more difficult and grade-ridden Pittsburgh-New York route and not through the water-level Mohawk corridor). (2) In the field of urban development, geographers have made quantitative analyses of the connections of the city with its surrounding areas by defining and measuring these tributary areas in terms of the economic or social purpose which each serves, including studies of the traffic flow and of the origin and destination of goods moved in and out. Such studies enable us to understand the limiting factors in the growth of individual cities, and are useful to the planner. (3) Geographers have analyzed both the unifying and divisive characteristics of certain great rivers, in the light of such factors as technology, and the social habits of the population, thus providing interesting examples of the changing interaction of physical environment and social and economic factors.26

Ullman’s clarifications and hard examples notwithstanding, the Committee’s report was weak, because it was unable to resolve the problem of the proper boundaries of geography and hence could not articulate a strong case for its continuance. The Committee’s ambivalence on this score belies its favorable recommendation. The final report called for the continuance of the Department of Geography, staffed by human geographers, and offering degrees at the graduate level only. It is significant that in recommending a human geography program, it did not succumb to the admonition of many witnesses not to divorce physical from human geography. Many witnesses were unable to disengage the rhetoric of the unity myth from reality. In this context, Bowmann’s doublespeak testimony clearly impressed Chairman McKay, for Bowmann’s geographers were not geographers. No action was taken on the committee report owing to lack of available funding.

Instruction in geography ceased with the death of Derwent Whittlesey in 1956. The following year, the Committee, with Maass as chairman, was reestablished and was instrumental in bringing H. C. Darby to Harvard in spring and summer 1959. Its recommendation that geography be reinstated was also rejected on grounds of cost. The Committee, according to the Crimson, “emphasized...that the historical method of teaching geography should be instituted here.”27 Cost could be minimized, the newspaper suggested, were a geography chair to be established by the History Department which would have been a fitting implementation of McKay’s doctrine of “marriage.” With Darby’s return to England, geography was again eclipsed at Harvard.

Ullman, of course, went to the University of Washington, where he became a leading figure in the emergence of spatial science. But for at least a few years, perhaps permanently, his experience at Harvard left its mark. In the OSS during World War II he had felt that geographers had a poor reputation compared to their colleagues from other social science disciplines and, Ullman felt, he had to “prove himself.”28 The experience on the Geography Committee at Harvard “again influenced me to try to prove geography’s worth” and two of his subsequent research projects (those on economic base minimum requirements and on techniques for estimating recreation benefits) he singled out at “attempts to prove the worth of geography.”29 Indeed, his insistence on theoretical approaches can be interpreted, in part, as having been motivated by this search for respectability. As he wrote in a commentary on Hartshorne’s Nature of Geography, “The rather low reputation of geography among thoughtful people, whether correct or erroneous, encourages me all the more to try to look for something new.” But was spatial science all that new? Here Ullman had the last word, as usual. He wrote in 1953:
Opposition to determinism, of course, was just a canard, which had been used to justify the vogue of regionalism and areal differentiation. To reject regionalism in favor of spatial science meant, logically, a reevaluation of the determinism issue, although in point of fact few spatial scientists were as frank as Ullman. To pave the way for the new "paradigm," the old paradigms—all of them—had to be discredited.  

This accounts for Ullman's vituperative opposition to Sauer and all his works.

In a recent study of contemporary Anglo-American geography, R.J. Johnston suggests that the succession of concepts in human geography, and in the social sciences generally, is explicable in terms of a "rolling program," whereby dominant concepts and explanatory modes succeed one another according to generational turnover, broadly influenced by trends in the ambient society (the post–World War II planning phase, in the case of spatial science).  

Subdisciplinary specialties arise through a process whereby individuals who previously worked alone come together into clusters; the clusters then lose their isolation and through a variety of institutional means start to intercommunicate and to influence the field concretely.  

The pattern is very clear in the history of spatial science, whose early years were characterized by work in a number of disarticulated clusters (at the universities of Washington, Iowa, Wisconsin, etc.). The subsequent institutional or intellectual preeminence of such groups can not be predicted at early states of development.

His experience at Harvard was an important episode in Ullman's career before he joined the incipient spatial science cluster in Seattle. In the 1940s his most important intellectual contacts appear to have been not with geographers, but with "social physicists." Although he presented his new mode of analysis as a self-evident truth, he could have had few indication that it represented the wave of the future, at a time when the Berkeley school of cultural geography had reached its zenith and regional geography basked in the reassuring glow of Hartshorne's self-justificatory treatise of 1939. In retrospect, Ullman's intuitions seem exact, and that is doubtless because of the fit of his ideas to the temper of the times, as well as the needs of the field.

NOTES


4. "Report of the Subcommittee on Geography of the Committee on Educational Policy," April 3, 1950, p. 1. This report, together with all the subsequently cited internal documents of the Subcommittee, was made available to me by Arthur Maass.


8. The Committee then launched into an interesting side discussion on how to define a discipline. The geologist Kirtley Mather, who attended only the first meeting, felt that a discipline was characterized by certain underlying principles and then asked whether there were any such principles distinctive to geography. Gerschenkron and Maass, more pragmatic, wanted to know what topics were in fact covered by the various social science departments.


12. Ibid., pp. 3–4.


16. Ullman did not attend the sixth meeting, when Bowman praised Sauer as the best geographer in the country and his approach as Bowman's own; Sixth meeting, pp. 2, 4.


19. The procedures for producing the report are outlined in the minutes of the seventh meeting (November 25, 1949), p. 5. Gerschenkron, Merk, and Maass were to prepare a draft on the nature of geography and Ullman and Leet, a report on current geography activities at Harvard, together with geography offerings at other selected universities.

20. The astrophysicist was, of course, J. Q. Stewart. See, Geography as Spatial Interaction, p. 19n. 13. During this period Ullman was reading the work of Stewart, G. K. Zipf, S. C. Dodd, and Joseph A. Cavanaugh, all of whom were interested in the gravity and other models of human spatial interaction.


22. Subcommittee report, April 3, 1950 (see note 4 above), p. 2. I cite the final report, although Ullman's comments were made on earlier drafts.

23. "Minutes of the Twelfth Regular Meeting," March 17, 1950, p. 1. Leet rejoined that Ullman interpreted the work environment as physical, whereas the chairman, who prepared the final report, had intended both physical and man-made.
31. Ibid., p. 220.
32. Ibid., p. 4.
33. Ibid., p. 184 (letter to S. B. Jones, April 23, 1953).