



Don't Know Much About Geography: Everything You Need to Know About the World but Never Learned

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Davis consistently does what your junior high teacher probably didn't; he makes geography amusing and riveting. From early concepts of whether the world was a disk floating in water (Thales) or pear-shaped (Columbus), Davis explains earthquakes, rain forests, Atlantis and whether there are canaries on the Canary Islands. In short, he covers the scientific, physical, and political history of the Earth and does his level best to raise our collective geographic IQ while entertaining us.

Don't Know Much About Geography: Everything You Need to Know About the World but Never Learned Details

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Barry says

Written by a historian, this book is chock full of facts, trivia, and tidbits about history, geography, and science. It's an interesting read, especially if you enjoy learning about a wide range of social studies. While it's interesting, there is one major flaw: a lack of maps. Sure, there are a few maps thrown in, but they are historical maps (like, the first maps that were made) and not useful to a modern reader. This book is indexed comprehensively like it is designed to be a reference book, but without maps it cannot be a usable reference book. There really is no excuse for the lack of maps (which I figure were not added either for budget concerns or because maps would have swollen the book to between 450 and 500 pages). My other complaint about this book lies in its billing as a humorous book, when in fact the humor is almost unnoticeable. Yes, there are attempts at humor, but they are mostly so overdone that they fall flat ("Who killed the Dead Sea?", "Help me, Rwanda", etc). While this book is interesting because of the wealth of information in it, it's certainly not a must-read.

Crabbygirl says

read with my son for our geography course, it was a thorough trek thru history seen through the eyes of a real estate broker (location, location, location). where it was history we had already covered, it was great. but when it was more recent, and we didn't have the base knowledge, it was hard to grasp because - let's face it - geography without a framework is a boring list of never-heard-of places.

the book was published in the early 90's and it's a product of it's time - pushing an environmental agenda and raising all sorts of warning bells. actually it was quite a downer in that aspect. all the worries for the environmental age have gone nowhere - acid rain, arctic ice melting, the hole in the ozone layer, carbon emissions...

Buddy Don says

This book was not well-designed to last very long. The writing is filled with references that might have been clever in 1992 but have become dated in 2017. Not only that, but the paperback version I'm reading literally fell apart as I read it. Brittle glue, I guess. It was enjoyable in many ways, but the attempt to be more interesting by constant reference to how geography affects current events got old, literally.

Elizabeth says

I admit it. I am a geography nerd. I grew up reading National Geographic. I hoped that this CD, which I listened to in the car from 6/5 to 6/21, would be full of fun and unusual facts. It was, frankly, a bit boring-

listing dates and events, just reminding you of the explorers and their accomplishments, and much worse, inserting the writer's politics on global warming and other subjects into the mix.

melydia says

This was just the book I was looking for. Geography is a science not just of place names and boundaries, but of politics and culture and environment and history. I learned tons about exploration and wars and colonization and weather and climate and more, all in bite-sized chunks that somehow managed to be very accessible without talking down to the reader. I never felt embarrassed by my lack of knowledge, and it opened my eyes to a number of subjects I never knew could be interesting. Definitely recommended as a solid introduction.

Manybooks says

Now I first read Kenneth C. Davis' Don't Know Much About Geography: Everything You Need to Know About the World but Never Learned when it originally appeared on the market in 1992 (it was a nice and most welcome break from my massive and literary mega-tomes heavy German PhD Comprehensive Exams reading list and I certainly at that time did in fact sorely need a perusal choice that was both informative and engaging, but also without too much academic dryness and monotony). And yes, considering what I was expecting and wanting from Don't Know Much About Geography: Everything You Need to Know About the World but Never Learned the book (and by extension of course also the author) indeed very much achieved and more than reached my expectations (a fast and fun read, and although I did at times think that Kenneth C. Davis' repeated mocking of the Bible, while not inappropriate and an issue to and for me personally and in and of itself, might have perhaps been just a trifle too off topic with regard to a book specifically about geography, generally, I did really and truly enjoy Don't Know Much About Geography: Everything You Need to Know About the World but Never Learned and the author's staunchly politically liberal, centrist and very much anti fundamentalist and right wing extremist tone of narrational voice, and in retrospect, especially that Davis was warning about man-made, pollution caused climate change and resulting global warming tendencies at a time where and when these were not even a topic that most meteorologists and climate scientists were as yet considering with in any manner sufficient urgency and concern).

However and the above having all been said, and while on my recent reread, I still very much and with all my heart tend to actively do agree with Kenneth C. Davis's political stance and the liberally centrist (most delightfully anti extremist and fundamentalist) tone and feel of Don't Know Much About Geography: Everything You Need to Know About the World but Never Learned, there are simply too many factual (often calendar date and time based) mistakes presented and featured for me to now consider more than a three star ranking at best. As honestly, Kenneth C. Davis getting the date wrong with regard to when North and South Vietnam reunited, as well as making some rather basic errors with regard to the timing of both the Apollo and Viking space missions and a few other such doozies, this really, this truly should not happen, and albeit it does in no way make me in any way despise Don't Know Much About Geography: Everything You Need to Know About the World but Never Learned, it definitely and indeed does take some of the shine off of my erstwhile wholehearted and total enjoyment and appreciation of and for this book.

Larry Wegman says

Interesting, although with almost more history than geography - and an (I think inappropriately) opinionated outlook on a lot of things - stating things as fact which are actually controversial.

Gordon Gravley says

I know a lot more, now. Davis' books are perfect for all of us who were daydreaming or fell asleep in class.

Scott Worden says

I enjoyed learning certain aspects of the book (weather patterns, deserts, planets, cyclones, etc.) That was also its downfall: not enough geography and more about other history and astronomy. I also found that the author didn't go into enough detail (e.g. the difference between an ocean and a sea) and just randomly put things together without much thought behind it.

W. Derek Atkins says

I read this book, and found much of the information interesting and fascinating. However, I found numerous factual errors, including the following:

1. Davis writes that Texas was annexed into the United States in 1836 - This actually occurred in December, 1845. (p. 116)
2. Davis writes that the Bikini Atoll in the Pacific was the site of the detonation of the first nuclear bomb in 1946 - The first nuclear bomb was actually detonated on July 16, 1945 in Almagordo, New Mexico. (p. 184)
3. In his list of the longest rivers in the world, Davis neglects to mention the Volga River in Russia. (p. 188)
4. Davis wrote, "In its post-1854 quest for modern power, Japan did not make the mistake of turning inwards as so many other countries have done." (p. 258) However, this statement ignores the fact that beginning in 1603, Japan did just that, and isolated herself from the outside world for two and a half centuries.
5. Davis writes that North and South Vietnam were reunited in 1976 - This actually happened in 1975, following the fall of Saigon. (p. 264)
6. Davis writes that on July 11, 1969, Apollo 11 landed on the moon, and Neil Armstrong became the first man to set foot on the moon - This event actually took place on July 20, 1969. (p. 324)
7. Davis writes that In August, 1975, Viking 1 landed on Mars, and Viking 2 landed on Mars in September, 1975 - The actual dates for these two landings were July 20, 1976 for Viking 1 and August 7, 1976 for Viking 2. (p. 325)

In addition, I found that Davis wrote with a fairly strong liberal bias throughout the entire book.

While I found the book quite readable and learned many fascinating facts, I was disappointed by the factual errors that I recognized in the book. If Davis was wrong about the facts I listed above, what other facts did he get wrong in this book?

Jeff says

Good book, similar to "America's Hidden History". The author claims he's going to make Geography less dry for readers, but I don't think he really accomplishes that by discussing such things as ancient Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greek, Persian, etc. societies. Certainly his tidbits are informational if you are already interested in Geography, but not enough to make the layman suddenly become a fan. I also thought his chapter on climate was too preachy. And I don't know if there's an updated edition, but the copy I read was copyrighted in approximately 1993. He mentions several times about how there's going to be an update to his figures in the late 90's, but it's annoying to know that we've passed that milestone and here I'm reading about outdated material.

Jvtv says

Puts me to sleep sometimes but I'm learning things. Some of those things are interesting.

The book sprinkles excerpts from people in history. My favorite is by Neil Amrstrong the man on the moon:

"We were still thousands of miles away, but close enough, so that the Moon almost filled our circular window. It was eclipsing the Sun, from our position, and the corona of the Sun was visible around the limb of the Moon as a gigantic lens-shaped or saucer-shaped light, stretching out to several lunar diameters. It was magnificent, but the Moon was even more so. We were in its shadow, so there was no part of it illuminated by the Sun. It was illuminated only by earthshine. It made the Moon appear blue-gray, and the entire scene looked decidedly three-dimensional... The sky is black, you know. It's a very dark sky. But it still seemed more like daylight than darkness as we looked out the window. It's a peculiar thing, but the surface looked very warm and inviting. It was the sort of situation in which you felt like going out there in nothing but a swimming suit to get a little sun. From the cockpit, the surface seemed to be tan. It's hard to account for that, because later when I held this material in my hand, it wasn't tan at all. It was black, gray and so on. It's some kind of lighting effect, but out the window the surface looks much more like light desert sand than black sand..." (p.324)

Kelly ... says

I love history and geography and was hopeful that this book would add to my knowledge and encourage my passion. Unfortunately I found the book too simplistic. If you do not have a basic knowledge of the world it might be for you, but I found myself distracted by its errors and longing for more depth.

Nathan Albright says

Don't know much about geography? You're not alone. Neither does the author. Or, to be more precise, sometimes the author confuses writing about geography in such a way as to educate, inform, and amuse audiences who often consider geography to be boring with writing thinly veiled propaganda that engages in

double-standards in terms of what the author seeks to promote and what he seeks to attack. This is the sort of book that is written for the people who know little about biblical historical geography and like it less, given the author's hostility towards the Bible and to the high regard that many people still have for it. It is written by people who are left of center politically, in that the author whines about how environmentalists are often considered to be extremists and about the threats to intrusive regulations from Republican administrations, promoting bogus scientific theories like the Gaia hypothesis and holding to scare tactics about global warming and the like, showing that bad science is acceptable if it promotes wealth redistribution to poorer countries and serves progressive political agendas. In addition, this book writes in such a way as to guarantee its obsolescence, especially in that it writes about geography from a current affairs perspective rather than seeking to write about that which is timeless and true and of evergreen relevance.

In terms of its contents, the author divides geography into several sections and discusses various topics of importance by seeking to answer humorous questions. After a short introduction that discusses a harrowing experience as a child being confused that the Nile was shown as flowing up, the first chapter discusses matters of conceiving the world and on mapping it, areas of fundamental importance in geography. The next chapter talks about the naming of places under the guise of pondering why the badlands are called bad, looking at mountains and making most of the book's blunders in exploring physical geography while seeking to mock the Bible. The third chapter explores the geography of the oceans and seas. The fourth chapter, in looking at elephants in the alps, addresses matters of political geography and the effect of human geography, even the unsavory personal lives of some explorers, like polar pedophile Robert Peary, whose book about exploring the North pole included child pornography under the guise of "ethnographic studies (217)." After this the author spends an entire chapter talking about environmental geography and progressive social causes and the view that the earth is some sort of living organism, and another chapter talking about space, in which he shows his knowledge of astronomy to be particularly slight, not including any of the recent planets and their discoveries, while making the odd claim that Pluto may be part of another solar system (314). After this the author includes explanations of the names of states and their nicknames and a listing of the nations of the world and their status vis-a-vis the United Nations that appears as if it would have been accurate in 1992, at best.

The subtitle of this book is "Everything you need to know about the world but never learned," but it is clear that the author has a skewed form of knowledge. In writing a book in such a fashion as to attempt to enlist contemporary conditions for political causes, the author leaves himself open to criticism in being biased in several ways. For one, this is not geography written with an eye towards education, but rather indoctrination into some sort of leftist viewpoint that views the wealth given to certain countries not as a gift from God to be carefully stewarded, which would be the biblical perspective, but rather that it should be given to poorer countries despite their corruption and their gross inability to handle the resources they have already been given. Nearly everything about this book that is viewed as relevant is relevant only to serve some sort of bogus political aims, not because it is actually worthwhile or necessary knowledge. In fact, someone who read this book would not be wiser than most people in terms of their actual geographical knowledge, but because their so-called knowledge would correspond to the prejudices and political worldview of a certain unsavory class of people, they would feel themselves to be a lot smarter than they were, like many of the people who post the leftist drivel that is so common on contemporary social media. There is a worse thing than being ignorant, and that is being ignorant and thinking oneself to be wise, which is a mistake this author makes to a large degree.

Sigrid Fry-Revere says

Clearly not everything, but very fun to listen to in the car.
