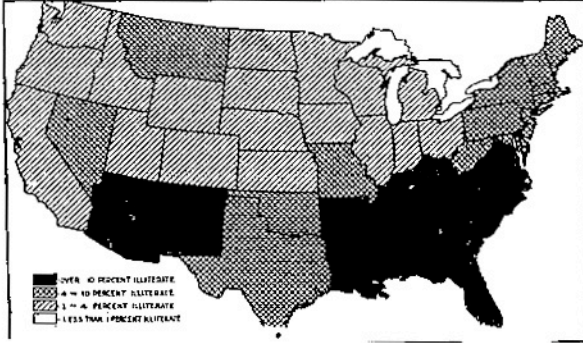


LITERATE AMERICA



ILLITERATE AMERICA

These two maps show the same thing, the percentage of illiteracy by states according to the census of 1910. Do they give your eye the same impression?

These Maps Tell Lies

An absolutely accurate and truthful map can be used in skillful hands to mislead the unwary. Only the crudest of propagandists will distort his facts; it is far better to take the facts as nature gives them and present them in such a way as to convey a false impression. A few examples will suffice to show how this may be done, but we hope the reader will not be tempted to "go and do likewise."

Suppose, for example, that a Bolshevik propagandist wanted to show as impressively as possible the extent to which his doctrines are spread abroad. He would take an ordinary map of the world on Mercator's projection and color the greater part of Russia and Siberia, preferably with Bolshevik red. To the frightened eye it would seem that the Soviet now ruled about half of the planet. Just what has the propagandist done that is amiss? He has told no lie, for it is quite true that most of Russia and Siberia is at least nominally Bolshevized.

But while such a map could be safely used by the trained geographer it would certainly require a word of comment if it were to tell the truth to the average layman. In the first place, Mercator's projection in representing the globe as a plane surface distorts areas in high latitudes and makes Greenland about as large as all South America. The chance that placed Bolshevism near the Arctic Circle was a godsend to the propagandist, who could have done nothing with a Mercator map if Bolshevism prevailed in India. But even if an equal area projection had been used in place of Mercator's, the vast unpeopled spaces of northern Siberia would show up more impressively than they deserve.

The third hidden trick in the Bolshevik map was the use of a vivid color against a blank or dull-tinted background. This is a common device on maps of nationality. Compare a German and a Polish map of central Europe. Even if they are based on the same statistics they will not look the same. Suppose the German map is in colors. All districts with a German majority will be colored a deep and solid red, all districts with more than ten

per cent of Germans will be a slightly lighter shade of red, all districts containing any Germans at all will be streaked as with flashes of red lightning. The area of Polish population will be tinted a shy, inconspicuous green or grey like the uniform of a modern soldier. Suppose that the Polish propagandist is restricted to black and white presentation. The resources of his German opponent will not be open to him, but he will do the best he can with shading.

Another good way to make a truthful map deceive is by shading in arbitrary intervals. Suppose that most of a country were level plain varying from two to three thousand feet above sea-level. If you colored green as "lowland" everything below three thousand feet your map would look like Florida; if you colored brown as "highland" everything above two thousand feet

your map would look like Nevada. Suppose, again, that a state had eleven per cent of illiteracy. If you favored the state you would shade very lightly such a group as "from five to fifteen per cent illiterate"; if you wished to make out a case against the local school system you would show in black "states with more than ten per cent illiterate."

It is not our intention to shake the reader's faith in the cartographic presentation of statistics. Usually the facts are themselves correct, and a study of the map itself will reveal the method which has been chosen to present them. No one will be deceived if he will ask himself a few questions, such as: (1) Is this an equal area map or must I make allowance for the projection? (2) Is this writer thinking in terms of areas or of people? (3) Is this writer dealing with absolute figures or percentages? (4) What system of shading or coloring is here used and with what purpose?