



*When I was a kid growing up in Tyler, Texas, I used to wallpaper my room with National Geographic maps and stuff my bookcase with the magazines. I never thought that I would someday have a chance to lead such a national icon.*

— Bill Allen

## TOPICS:

### Managing Mad Geniuses

The story of a particular region or people is often only evident from ground level. National Geographic trusts the photographer and the writer to dive into the location and allow the story to unfold. Considering the vast range of personalities, temperaments, and talents, this requires the editor to be part coach and part sage. Allen discusses his experiences managing some of the greatest talents in photojournalism.

### Closing the 20th Century

Allen reviews some of the biggest stories he published during his time at the helm of NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC from 1995 through 2004 and the resulting dialogue with the public, including controversial cover stories, "Why Are We So Fat?" and "21st Century Slaves," which generated more reader letters than any story in NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC history.

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Since the first issue was published in 1888, NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC magazine has had only nine full-time editors. Bill Allen assumed the post in 1995, following 25 years of creative service in various editorial capacities at the National Geographic Society, including photographer, writer, and illustrations editor. He served as the eighth Editor in Chief for ten years before retiring in 2004. Before joining the Geographic in 1969 as a summer intern, Allen served as a lieutenant in the U.S. Army, working as an information officer along Korea's demilitarized zone. It was there, while running several military newspapers, that Allen developed a love of publishing and photography. Once he left the service in the late '60s, he pursued a career in freelance photography and developed a friendship with National Geographic staff photographer George F. Mobley. Mobley's experiences prompted Allen to follow his childhood dream and chart his own career path at the National Geographic Society.

In his role as Editor in Chief, Allen was the de facto CEO of one of the most trusted and widely distributed magazines in the world. Along with the responsibilities of steering a large, content-rich iconic publication comes the thrill of the creative process involved in its monthly rebirth. In Allen's presentation "Managing Mad Geniuses," he shares the secrets of staying at the forefront of the many fields the magazine covers, from archaeology to zoology. At National Geographic, a great deal of time is spent carefully matching subject with talent. Unlike many other magazines, the NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC writer and photographer remain involved in the project through every phase of production from concept and preliminary story meetings, through the expedition, to the final stages of editing and publishing.

Drawing on his experience at the helm of NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC, Allen talks about the larger challenge that engaged him as Editor in Chief: how to keep the magazine relevant as a brand while covering current affairs, broadening environmental awareness, chronicling adventure, and offering an escape for the generations who have learned much of what they know about the world from the pages of NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC.

Allen, now a National Geographic Trustee Emeritus, serves on the boards of the National Space Biomedical Research Institute, Institute of Nautical Archaeology, and the Teton Science School. He is also a member of the Council on Foreign Relations and the Cosmos Club in Washington, D.C.

He lives with his wife Carol in Alexandria, Virginia.

