Mathematicians, educators, policy makers, parents, and students submit a variety of reasons for the teaching of mathematics in our school system. The question becomes somewhat more nuanced at the college level. From basic quantitative literacy skills essential for a healthy civic life to a keen understanding of the power and limitations of mathematical tools, college courses in mathematics offer students a wide range of justifications. Mathematics courses developed to fulfill a general education requirement often fall into one of two categories: courses in quantitative literacy or courses in mathematical appreciation. In this presentation I explore the history of this duality of offerings and focus on the tension that underlies it. Finally I claim that our stance on this issue sends specific messages to students about the roles of mathematics in their lives and what mathematics might or should mean for them. (Received September 11, 2016)