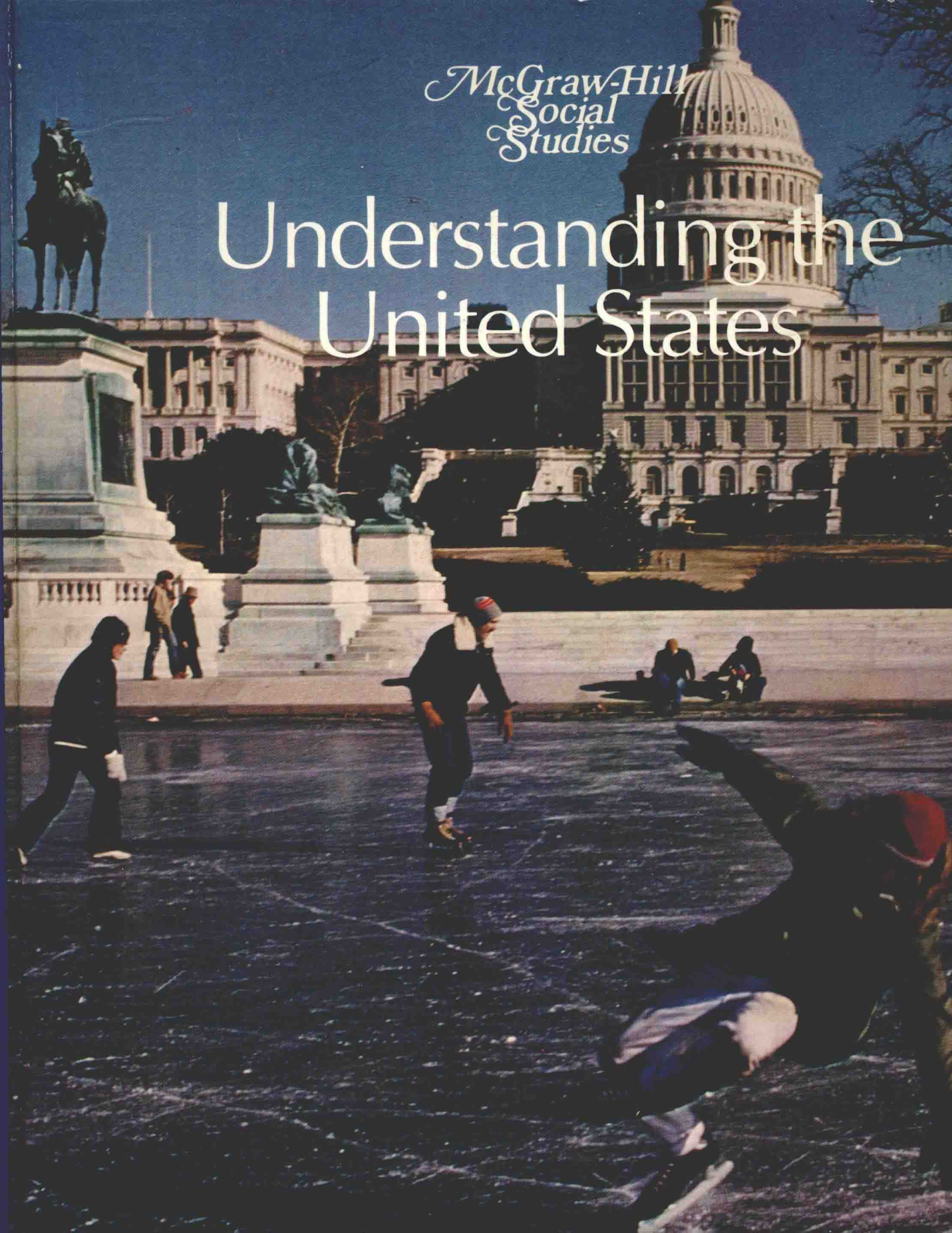


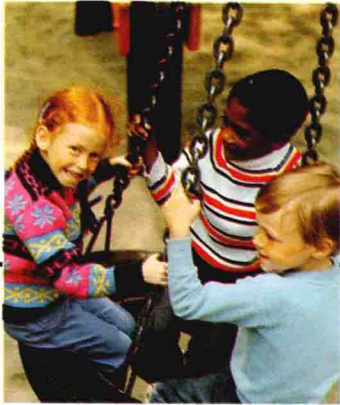
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# Understanding the United States





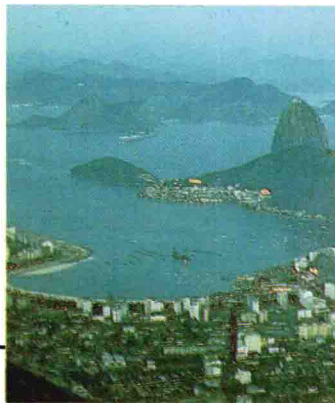
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# Understanding the United States

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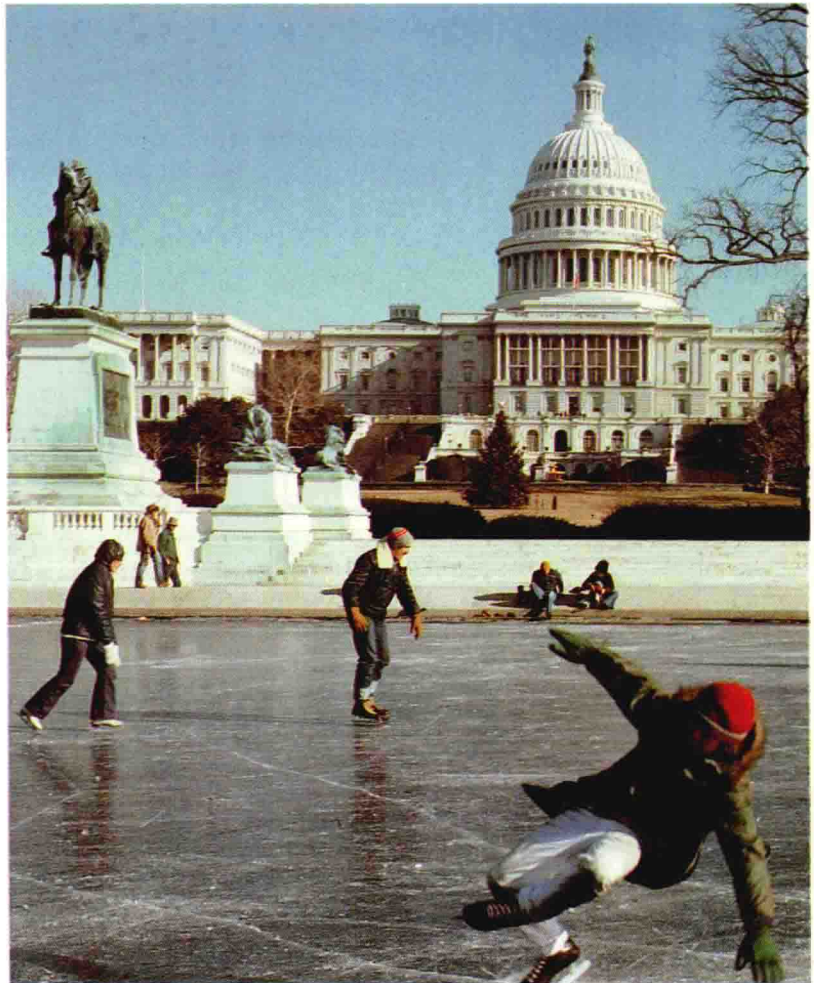
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A group of approximately ten diverse children are running and playing on a green asphalt playground. A large white outline of the United States is drawn on the ground, with the children running through its various states. In the background, there is a white building with a green roof and a small covered area with a car parked underneath. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting a sunny day.

## UNIT ONE

# The United States Today







# 1

## OUR NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

How are the regions of North America different from one another? What are the climates like? How are the rivers and lakes of North America important to people?



# The Continent of North America

You are one of the people living in North America. Your ancestors may have come here sometime in the last 400 years. During that time, many people from all parts of the world came to North America. Native Americans lived here even before that time. If you are a Native American, your people have lived in North America for thousands of years.

Have you heard the song that begins “Oh beautiful, for spacious skies”? Do you remember the rest of the words? This song is called “America, the Beautiful.” It tells about the beauty of North America. It tells how big the land is, how wide the skies are, how rich the crops are.

North America is a *continent*, or large land mass, on Earth. There are three large nations on the continent of North America. They are Canada, the United States, and Mexico.

Because North America is so large, it has many different *landforms*, or kinds of land. In some places, the land is as flat as a tabletop. In others, it is as jagged as the edge of a saw. Some land in North America is covered with thick forests. Some land is covered with drifting sand. How do we study a land with so many differences?

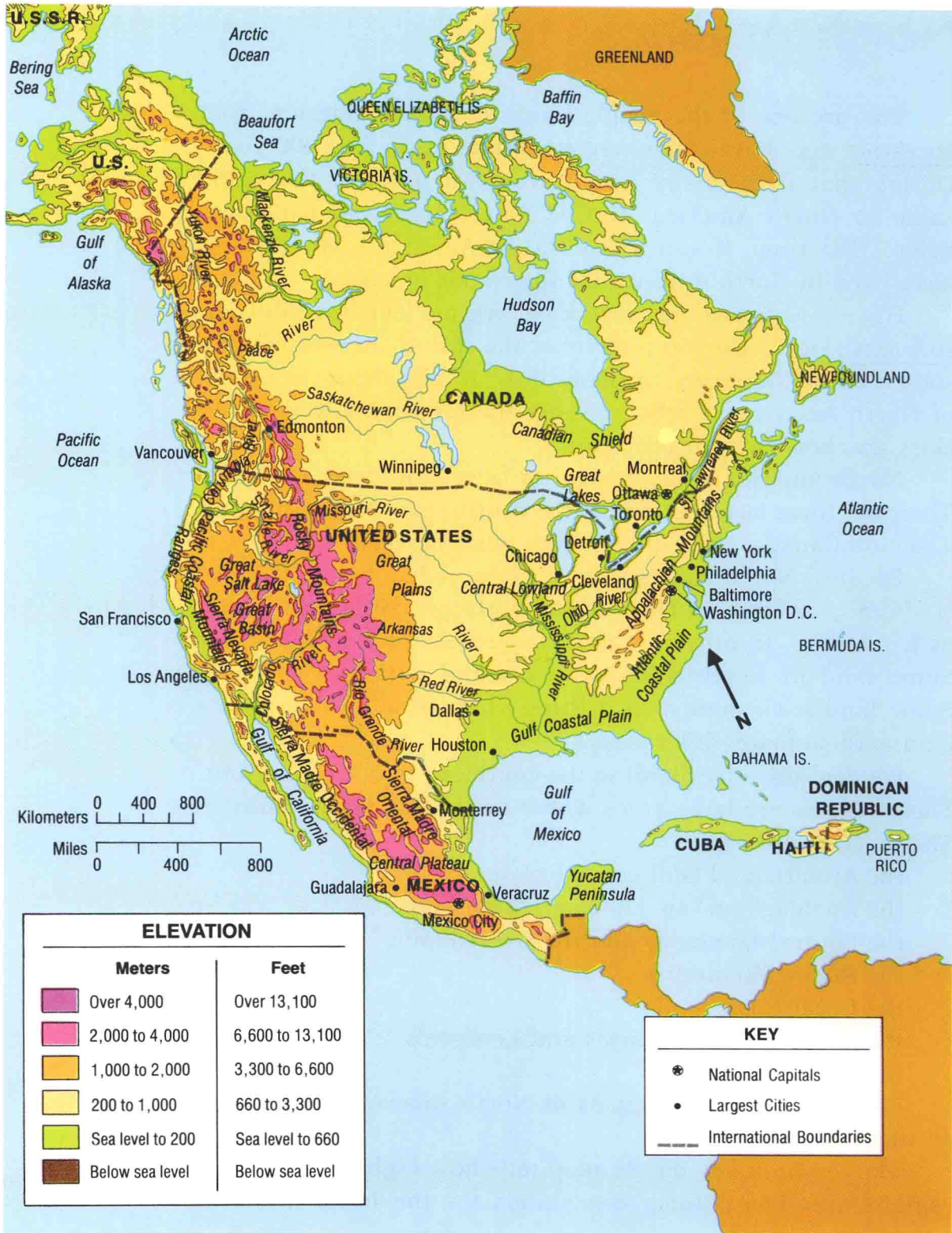
We can begin by dividing the continent into seven *regions*. These regions are large areas where the landforms are similar. The seven regions are:

- the Atlantic and Gulf coastal plain
- the Appalachian (ap' ə lā' chən) Mountains
- the Central Lowlands and the Great Plains
- the Rocky Mountains
- the Great Basin
- the Pacific Coastal Ranges and Lowlands
- the Canadian Shield

Find each of these regions of North America on the map on the following page.

The *elevation* key on the map tells how high some of these regions are. The color green stands for the lowlands. This

# NORTH AMERICA





land is usually found along seacoasts. The highest land is colored in purple. Look at the key. How many meters high is this land? Now look at your map and find the areas in purple. What regions of North America have the highest land?

The other key on your map gives the *symbols*, or small drawings, that stand for national capitals, largest cities, and *international boundaries*. Find the symbol for national capitals. Then, find the national capital of the United States.

International boundaries are the lines on a map which divide one nation from another. They show where one nation ends and another begins. Find the symbol for international boundaries on your key. Now look at the map. With your finger, trace the international boundary between Canada and the United States. Then find and trace the international boundary between the United States and Mexico.

Notice that the land regions of North America do not stop at international boundaries. Landforms do not change suddenly as you go from one country into another. For example, the Great Plains extend from Canada through the United States and into Mexico. The coastal plains lie along the seacoasts of both the United States and Mexico.

In the next few lessons, you will learn about the land and resources of the seven main regions of North America.

---

Choose the best answer:

1. North America is (a) a landform, (b) a nation, (c) a continent, (d) a region of the United States.
2. An international boundary separates (a) one land region from another, (b) Mexico from the United States, (c) the Great Plains from the Rocky Mountains.
3. An elevation key is useful because it tells you (a) how high land regions are on a map, (b) where nations are located, (c) how far one place is from another.

TO DO

- 
4. Look at the map on page 12. Try to find the general area where you live. What large city is nearest to the place where you live?
  5. In which region of North America do you live?
- 

ON YOUR OWN



# East and Central Regions

Along the east coast of North America is a narrow plain. This plain begins far up the coast and becomes wider as you travel south. On the map on page 12, trace with your finger the coastal plain. Notice that the coastal plain extends all along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts of the United States.

The coastal plain is low and flat. In some places, there are large areas where the land is covered with shallow water. These areas are called *swamps* or *wetlands*. The swamps are thick with plants, and there are many wild animals.

Much of the coastal plain is fertile land. In the north, farmers grow vegetables and raise dairy cattle. In the south, they grow crops such as oranges and rice.

Some of the largest cities in North America are found on the coastal plain. Many of the cities on the plain are near important or famous waterways.

West of the coastal plain are the Appalachian Mountains. These mountains begin in Canada. They reach all the way to Georgia and Alabama. The Appalachians are old mountains. This means that they were formed millions of years ago. Since

Swamps are important areas for wildlife.





Compare this picture of the Appalachians with the picture of the Rockies on page 17.

then, they have been worn down by the wind and the weather. Today, most of these mountains have rounded tops. The valleys between them do not have steep sides.

In parts of the Appalachians, the land is not good for farming. People have farmed thin strips of land in the valleys where it is flat. But farmers here barely grow enough for themselves to eat. Much coal, however, is found in these mountains. Coal is black and rocklike. It is used for fuel and is very valuable today.

Stretching across the center of North America are the Central Lowlands and the Great Plains. This is one of the largest areas of flatland in the world. It stretches from northern Canada to the Gulf of Mexico.

The plains east of the Missouri River are called the Central Lowlands. Here is some of the most fertile land in the world. On these plains, the farmers grow corn, soybeans, and wheat. More of these crops are grown here than all the people of North America can eat. The Central Lowlands are also rich in oil and natural gas.

Many of the large cities in the United States are located in the Central Lowlands. Cities are often built on level land because transportation there by road or railway is fairly easy. Find Chicago, Detroit, and Cleveland on the map.





The combines are harvesting wheat on the Great Plains.

To the west of the Missouri River is the Great Plains. Less rain falls here than on the Central Lowlands. Much of the land is covered with grass. Great herds of cattle and sheep graze on these plains. They provide most of the meat, wool, and leather used by the people of North America. Great amounts of wheat are also grown on the Great Plains.

## TO DO

1. Imagine that you are in Philadelphia and are traveling west to the city of Winnipeg. Number the following regions in the order in which you would cross them: (a) the Great Plains, (b) the Appalachian Mountains, (c) the coastal plains, (d) the Central Lowlands.
2. Match the following regions with the goods they produce:

a. Northern Coastal Plain	1. herds of cattle and sheep
b. Central Lowlands	2. coal
c. Appalachian Mountains	3. vegetables and dairy cattle
d. Great Plains	4. corn and soybean crops

## ON YOUR OWN

3. Look at the coastal plain on the map. Name the cities you see. Why do you think many cities on the coastal plain were built near waterways?