

American Odyssey

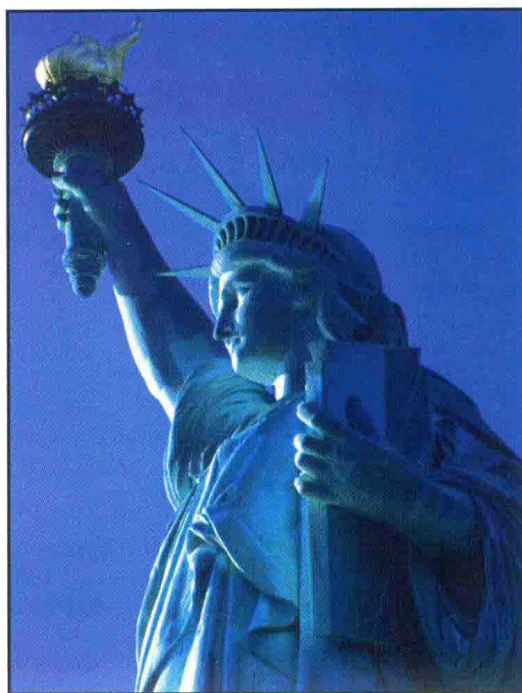
The United States in the 20th Century



American Odyssey



The United States in the Twentieth Century



Gary B. Nash

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA AT LOS ANGELES

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UNIT

1

A Nation of Nations

CHAPTER 1

A Geographic Perspective on History

CHAPTER 2

Encounters and Colonies

CHAPTER 3

The American Revolution

CHAPTER 4

A New Nation

CONTENTS

UNIT 1

A Nation of Nations, 40,000 B.C.–A.D. 1800

Chapter 1: A Geographic Perspective on History 4

- 1 The Five Themes of Geography 6
- 2 The Themes as Guides to History 11

Chapter 2: Encounters and Colonies 20

- 1 The Earliest Americans 22
- 2 Three Worlds Meet 30
- 3 Building Colonial America 36
- 4 Conflict and Growth in the Colonies 46

Chapter 3: The American Revolution 54

- 1 Toward Revolution 56
 - Declaration of Independence 61
- 2 War for Independence 66
- 3 Creating a New America 72

Chapter 4: A New Nation 78

- 1 From Federation to Constitution 80
- 2 Debate and Ratification 88
 - Constitution 91
- 3 Launching the New Government 112

UNIT 2

Rift and Reunion, 1800–1900

Chapter 5: The Expanding Nation 128

- 1 Territorial Expansion 130
- 2 The Economy Grows 140
- 3 A Changing People 150

Chapter 6: Civil War and Reconstruction 162

- 1 Slavery and Politics 164
- 2 The Civil War 172
- 3 Reconstruction 184

Chapter 7: New Frontiers 194

- 1 Moving West 196
- 2 Rise of Industrialism 204
- 3 Populism and Protest 212
- 4 Reaching for Empire 218



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UNIT 3

The Roots of a Modern Nation, 1880–1920

Chapter 8: Progressive Reforms 232

- 1 Facing a New Order 234
- 2 A Generation of Reformers 242
- 3 Progressive Agendas 250

Chapter 9: Progressivism Takes Hold 264

- 1 Theodore Roosevelt and the Modern Presidency 266
- 2 Woodrow Wilson and the New Freedom 274
- 3 Limits to Progressivism 281

Chapter 10: Expansionism and World War I 292

- 1 Becoming a World Power 294
- 2 Watching Europe's War 304
- 3 World War I: There and Here 314
- 4 Reshaping the World 321

UNIT 4

The New Era of the Twenties, 1920–1929

Chapter 11: Getting on With Business 336

- 1 Postwar Turmoil 338
- 2 The Republican Influence 346
- 3 Prosperity and American Business 353
- 4 The Changing Nature of Work 362

Chapter 12: A Prospering Society 374

- 1 Growth of the Middle Class 376
- 2 The Jazz Age 386
- 3 Cultural Conflicts 396

UNIT 5

Economic Crisis and the New Deal, 1929–1939

Chapter 13: The Great Depression 416

- 1 The Crash and Its Aftermath 418
- 2 The Dream on Hold 430
- 3 Life During the Depression 440

Chapter 14: The New Deal 450

- 1 FDR and the First New Deal 452
- 2 Criticism and Reformulation 464
- 3 The Impact of the New Deal 476

UNIT 6

The United States Transformed, 1933–1945

Chapter 15: World War II	490
1 The Road to War	492
2 The War Begins	500
3 The United States at War	508
Chapter 16: The Home Front	522
1 Mobilizing the Home Front	524
2 The War and Social Change	534
3 The War and Civil Rights	542

UNIT 7

The Postwar World, 1945–1963

Chapter 17: The Uneasy Peace	560
1 The Cold War Begins	562
2 The Cold War Deepens	569
3 Cold War in the Atomic Age	576
4 A New Battleground	587
Chapter 18: The Postwar Era	596
1 Postwar Economy Booms	598
2 Suburban Lifestyles	606
3 Poverty and Plenty	618
Chapter 19: Cold War Politics	628
1 Retreat From the New Deal	630
2 The Cold War at Home	640
3 The Eisenhower Years	652

UNIT 8

Toward Equality and Social Reform, 1954–1976

Chapter 20: The Civil Rights Struggle	666
1 Challenging Segregation	668
2 Freedom Now	674
3 Government Response	680
4 Disappointed Hopes	690
Chapter 21: The Kennedy and Johnson Years	698
1 New Frontier and Great Society	700
2 The Supreme Court and Civil Liberties	713
Chapter 22: Voices of Protest	722
1 The Revival of Feminism	724
2 Hispanic Americans Organize	733
3 Land Claims of Native Americans	742
4 The Counterculture	748

UNIT 9

The Troubled Years, 1964–1980

Chapter 23: The Vietnam War	766
1 War in Southeast Asia	768
2 1968: A Year of Crises	776
3 The War at Home	786
4 Ending the War	796
Chapter 24: From Nixon to Carter	806
1 A New Majority	808
2 Nixon Foreign Policy	816
3 The Watergate Crisis	824
4 Ford and Carter	836

UNIT 10

New Challenges, 1980–Present

Chapter 25: The Reagan and Bush Years	854
1 The Reagan Revolution	856
2 The Collapse of Communism	865
3 The Bush Presidency	876
Chapter 26: A Changing Nation in a Changing World	890
1 The Clinton Agenda	892
2 The New Conservatism	902
3 Toward a New Century	916

APPENDIX

Atlas	932
Data Bank	944
United States Presidents	950
Glossary	958
Spanish Glossary	965
Index	974
Credits	998



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Features



TURNING POINTS

By examining pivotal decisions made by leaders and ordinary people, the cases provide insight into the decision-making process and highlight the significance of these historic events.

The Trial of Anne Hutchinson	42
Cherokee Expulsion	136
Woman Suffrage (Seneca Falls Convention)	258
The National Origins Act	404
Art and Politics at Rockefeller Center	472
Dropping the Bomb	516
The Hollywood Ten	648
The United Farm Workers and the Grape Boycott	738
The Attempted Impeachment of Nixon	832
Affirmative Action	912

LITERATURE

A variety of literature selections at the beginning of each unit communicate the thoughts, feelings, and life experiences of people, past and present.

Castaways	2
Roots	126
Sister Carrie	230
The Great Gatsby	334
The Grapes of Wrath	414
Dispatches From the Front	488
The Book of Daniel	558
Voices of Change	664
Born on the Fourth of July	764
"Double Face" From The Joy Luck Club	852

One Day in History

Reminiscent of a daily newspaper, these "front pages" recall the dramatic—and the ordinary—events of ten special days in history.

The Shot Heard Around the World, April 19, 1775	64
Surrender at Appomattox, April 9, 1865	182
Edison's New Lamp, January 1, 1880	240
Lindbergh Crosses the Atlantic, May 21, 1927	394
Stock Market Crash, October 29, 1929	428
Attack on Pearl Harbor, December 7, 1941	506
Soviet "Moon" Circles Earth—Sputnik, October 4, 1957	584
JFK Assassination, November 22, 1963	718
Moon Landing, July 20, 1969	802
Fall of Berlin Wall, November 9, 1989	874



Visual and verbal displays appearing once per unit capture the popular culture of the time.

The Colonial Period	110
An Age of Ingenuity	202
Ragtime	288
The Roaring Twenties	370
Hard Times	446
The Big Band Era	532
Rock 'n' Roll Arrives	616
The Beat of the Sixties	756
An Era of Consciousness	784
The Rap on the Eighties	886

Then and Now...

With photos and fun facts each feature examines in detail an artifact or phenomenon from each unit's time period and the influence of that item on what exists now.

Conestoga Wagon	122
Levi's Riveted Waist Overalls	226
Coca-Cola	330
Old Movie Houses	410
The DC-3 Passenger Plane	484
Women's Baseball	554
The 1955 Corvette	660
The First McDonald's	760
The Stereo	848
The Nintendo Entertainment System	928



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Science, TECHNOLOGY, and Society

Through text, visuals, and a time line, this feature focuses on a technological advance and its short and long term impact on society.

Communication Media	86
The Steam Engine	158
The Radio	312
The Automobile	360
The Telephone	462
Medical Breakthroughs	550
Plastics	638
Television	710
Outer Space to the Kitchen	844
Personal Computers	862

Geography: Impact on History

The five geographic themes are explored through pivotal developments in United States history.

Native American Housing	28
The Rise of American Cities	148
The Panama Canal	302
Route 66	384
The Dust Bowl	438
A War Boomtown	540
Richmond, California: New American Landscape:	
Suburbia	604
Native American Urban Settlement	746
The Rise of the Sunbelt	814
America's Landfills	900

Social Studies Skill

Social Studies Skills provide learning and practice in the context of historical and geographical topics.

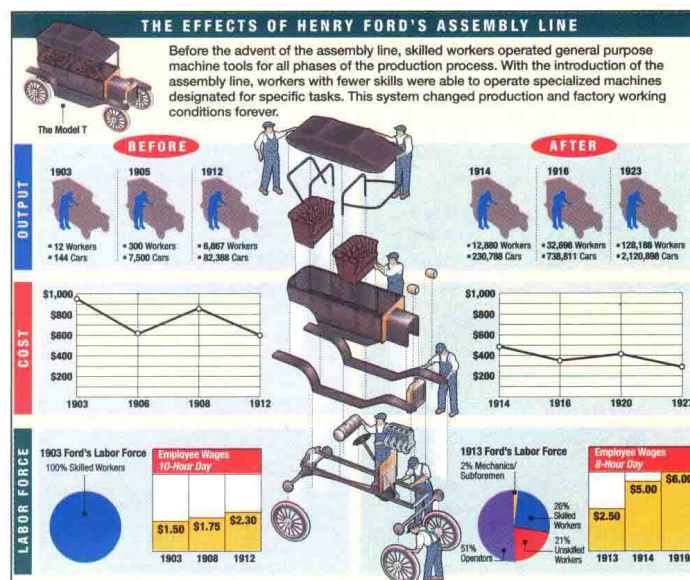
Reading a Map	10
Making Generalizations	51
Interpreting a Primary Source	71
Analyzing Information	119
Making Telescoping Time Lines	157
Combining Information From Maps	181
Reading Statistical Tables	211
Determining Cause and Effect	249
Making Comparisons	280
Using Reference Materials	320
Identifying Text Patterns	369

Synthesizing Information	393
Drawing Inferences From Maps	437
Interpreting Images	461
Recognizing Ideologies	499
Reading Economic Graphs	549
Analyzing Secondary Sources	586
Recognizing Bias	625
Distinguishing Fact From Opinion	657
Presenting Statistical Data	673
Identifying Assumptions	712
Conducting Interviews	732
Understanding Public Opinion Polls	795
Interpreting Political Cartoons	823
Predicting Consequences	864
Analyzing News Media	925

DIAGRAPHSICS

Through diagrams, maps, statistical information, and annotated visuals, complex concepts are clearly and accurately depicted.

Factors Influencing Vegetation	15
The Iroquois Longhouse	27
Supplying the Continental Army	69
The Three Branches of the United States Government	85
The First Modern Factories	142
The Cotton Gin	165
Horizontal and Vertical Integration	209
Forms of Municipal Government in the U.S.	251
The Anatomy of a Monopoly	270
Operating the Locks of the Panama Canal	296
The Effects of Henry Ford's Assembly Line	363





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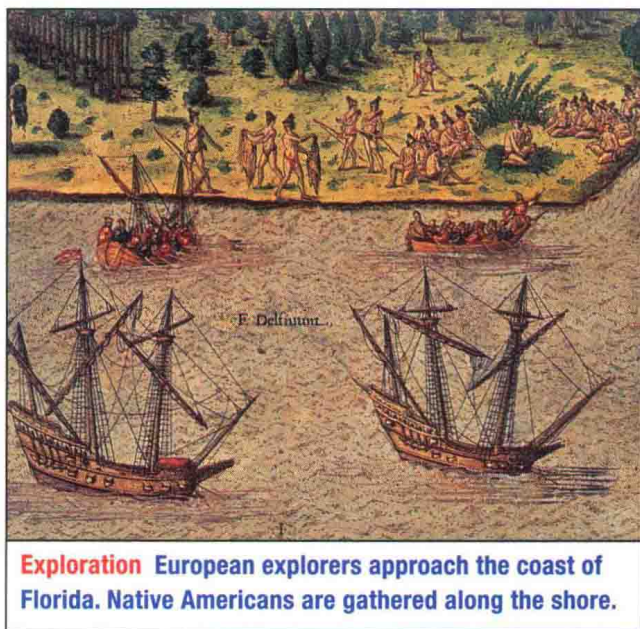
Castaways

BY ALVAR NÚÑEZ CABEZA DE VACA

Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca landed in present-day Florida in 1528, part of an expedition that was to explore and claim territory for Spain. After losing contact with their ships, the Spaniards found themselves stranded in a harsh land with no supplies, among often hostile local peoples. Cabeza de Vaca and 3 others reached Spanish territory (in present-day Mexico) after an 8-year odyssey; the 4 were the only survivors from a group of 300. This excerpt from Cabeza de Vaca's account of the expedition concerns an attack on the Spaniards as they were crossing one of many lakes in Florida.

In view of this [the Indians' aggression] the governor ordered the horsemen to dismount and attack them on foot. The auditor dismounted with them, and they attacked the Indians and they all fought together in the lake, and so we forced our way through. In this affray some of our men were wounded, and the good weapons they carried were

of no use; and there were men that day who swore they had seen two oak trees, each as thick as the lower part of a man's leg, shot clear through by the Indians' arrows. And this is not so much to be wondered at considering the strength and skill with which they shoot them, for I myself saw an arrow at the foot of



Exploration European explorers approach the coast of Florida. Native Americans are gathered along the shore.

a poplar tree that had penetrated into it two handbreadths. All the Indians that we saw, from Florida to here, use arrows; and they are so tall . . . they look like giants when seen from a distance. They are wonderfully handsome folk, very lean and extremely strong and agile. The bows they use are as thick as a man's arm and eleven or twelve hand-

breadths long, which they shoot at a distance of two hundred paces, so surely that they never miss anything. After we had made this crossing, a league farther on we came to another that was very like it, except for the fact that, as it was half a league wide, it was much worse; this one we crossed without hin-

drance and without attacks by Indians, for as they had used up all their supplies of arrows in the first encounter, they had nothing left with which they dared to confront us. On the following day, as we made another similar crossing, I found traces of people who had gone ahead of us and warned the governor of it, for he was in the rear guard; and so, although the Indians attacked us, they were unable to harm us because we were forewarned, and when we emerged on level ground they continued to follow us. We attacked them on two sides and killed two Indians, and they wounded me and two or three other Spaniards, and because they took shelter in the woods we were unable to do them any more harm or damage. We marched like this for eight days, and after the crossing I have described no more Indians attacked us until a league farther on, which is the place that, as I have said, we were going.

As we were going our way, Indians came out of the woods without our hearing them and attacked the rear guard, and among them was a hidalgo [a man of the lower nobility in Spain] named Avellaneda who turned around on hearing the cries of a lad who was a servant of his and went to his aid, and the Indians hit him with an arrow at the edge of his cuirass [breastplate], and the wound was so severe that almost all the arrow went into his neck and he died on the spot, and we carried him to Aute [community near present-day Tallahassee, Florida]. We arrived after nine days of journeying from Apalachee [village near present-day Tallahassee], and when we reached there we found all the people fled, and the houses burned, and a great quantity of maize and pumpkins and beans, all ready to be harvested. We rested there for two days, and after that the governor asked me to go

and find the sea, for the Indians said it was very close by: during this journey we thought we had discovered it because of a very large river that we found, which we named the Magdalena. In view of this, on the next day I set off to find it, along with the commissary and Captain Castillo and Andrés Dorantes and seven other mounted men and fifty on foot, and we marched until the hour of vespers, when we reached an inlet or arm of the sea where we found many oysters, which the men enjoyed greatly, and we gave great thanks to God for having brought us there.

Next morning I sent twenty men to explore the coast and find out what it was like; they returned on the following night saying that those inlets and bays were very large and entered so deeply into the land that they made it extremely difficult to find out what we wished to know, and that the coast was very far away. Once

we had learned this, and considering the fact that we were ill prepared and ill equipped to explore the coast, I returned to the governor. When we arrived we found him and many others sick, and the previous night the Indians had come upon them and placed them in great peril owing to the illness they had suffered; also, one of the horses had died. I reported to him what I had done, and the unfavorable lie of the land. That day we stayed there.

**WE ATTACKED
THEM ON TWO SIDES AND
KILLED TWO INDIANS,
AND THEY WOUNDED ME AND
TWO OR THREE OTHER
SPANIARDS . . .**

RESPONDING TO LITERATURE

1. What difficulties did Cabeza de Vaca encounter while trying to explore Florida?
2. Do you find Cabeza de Vaca to be a careful observer? Support your answer with examples from the selection.

A Geographic Perspective on History

LATE 1400s: EAGER EXPLORERS PORE OVER TRAVEL JOURNALS AND MAPS

“Just as we roof our houses or churches with lead, so this palace is roofed with fine gold. And the value of it is almost beyond computation.”

Thus did Marco Polo describe Japan, a country he had never visited. Polo, a trader from Venice, lived in China for about 20 years in the late 1200s. He saw many amazing events, and heard stories about a mysterious country now called Japan. After returning home, Polo was commanding a Venetian ship in a war against Genoa when he was captured and held prisoner. During his imprisonment, he recorded the story of his travels.

During the 1200s, people copied books by hand, so books were scarce. About 1440, however, Johannes Gutenberg invented the printing press. By the century's end, printing presses were common, and Europeans were exchanging ideas at an unprecedented rate. Polo's journal was now available to explorers, including the Genoese Christopher Columbus. In 1492 when Columbus set sail to find the riches of Japan and China, he took along Polo's book as a guide. ■

HISTORY JOURNAL

As you read this chapter, write a description of the ways that the geography of your locale has affected the events that have occurred there in the past and in the present.



FROM "LIVRE DES MERVEILLES" (DETAIL), MARCO POLO WITH ELEPHANTS AND CAMELS ARRIVING AT HORMUZ/BIBLIOTHEQUE NATIONALE, PARIS/THE BRIDGEMAN ART LIBRARY

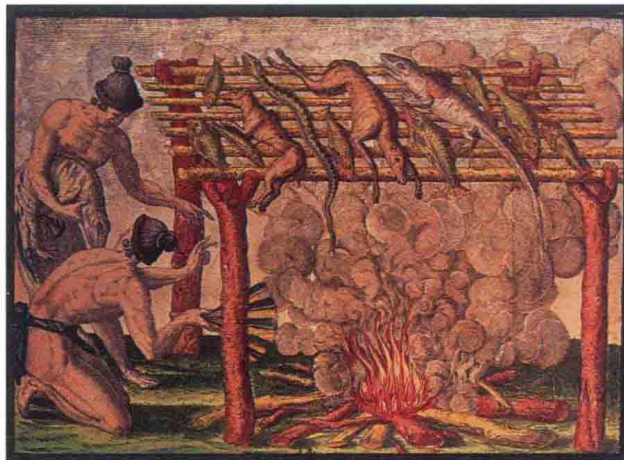
BY SHARING HIS DISCOVERIES ABOUT THE
GEOGRAPHY OF ASIA, MARCO POLO
INFLUENCED THE HISTORY OF THE WORLD.

The Five Themes of Geography

1542: EXPLORER PUBLISHES SENSATIONAL TRAVEL JOURNAL

IT WAS A GRIPPING STORY OF SURVIVAL THAT ÁLVAR NÚÑEZ CABEZA DE VACA HAD TO TELL. This Spanish noble had been a member of an expedition sent to claim new lands in America for the Spanish king. The explorers experienced terrible misfortunes, including shipwreck and disease. In presenting his journal to King Charles V, Cabeza de Vaca admitted that the expedition had failed to achieve its goals. He was convinced, however, that his journal was a worthwhile offering to the king.

The value of his report, Cabeza de Vaca wrote, was its information about the new lands, including descrip-



© SUPERSTOCK

A Land of Great Variety
Newcomers to the Americas saw animals and plants that they had never seen before.

tions of native peoples, the environment, the kinds of food people ate, and the location of places and the distances between them.

In describing these discoveries to the king, Cabeza de Vaca was writing about **geography**, the study of people, places, and environments. Geography looks at space on the earth and how specific spaces are alike or different. It is a rich subject filled with intriguing, even astonishing information. To help organize such a huge body of information, today's geographers cluster their subject matter around five themes: location, place, movement, human/environment interaction, and region.

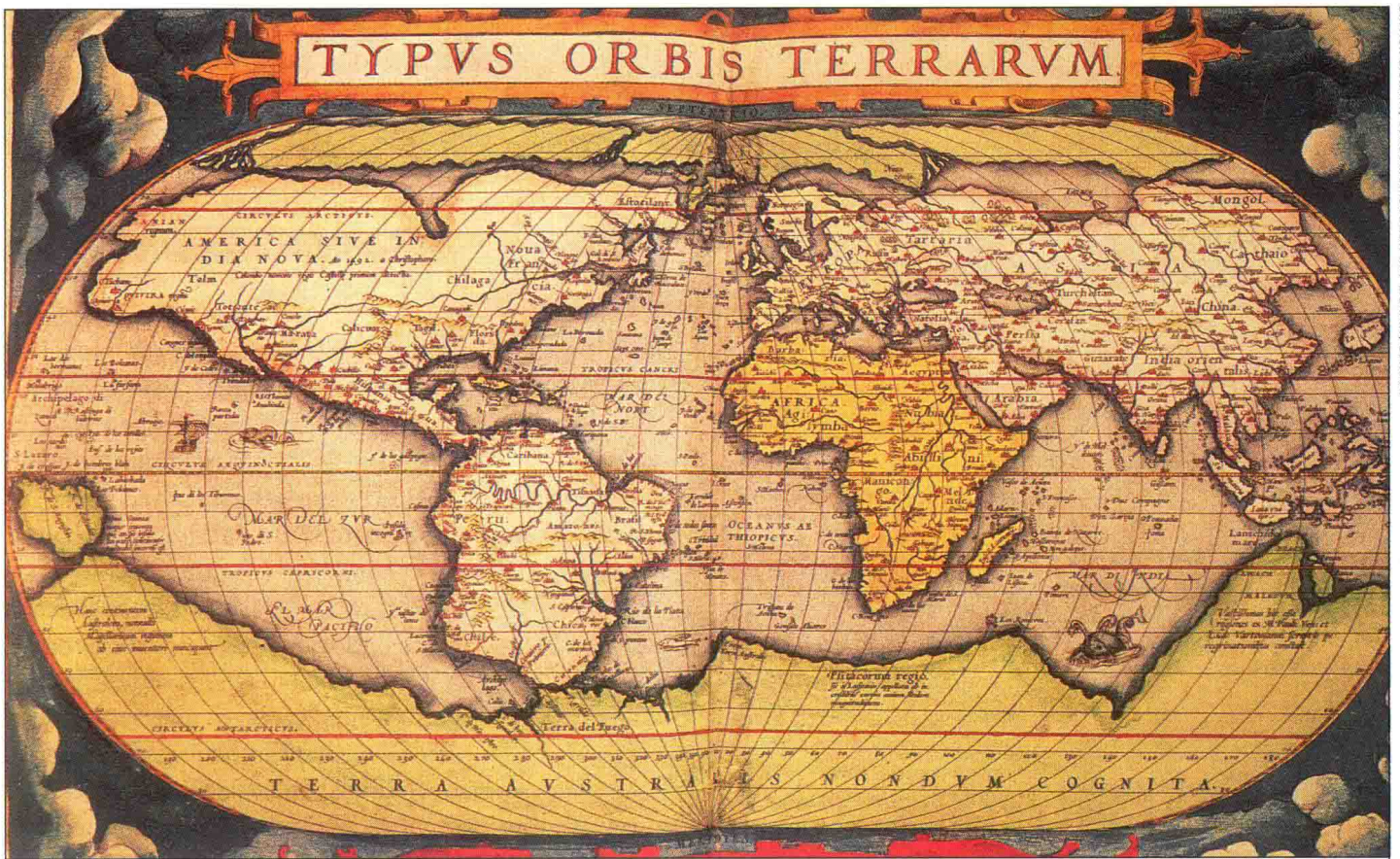
AS YOU READ

Vocabulary

- geography
- location
- place
- movement
- human/environment interaction
- region

Think About . . .

- what geography is and what it reveals about people, places, and environments.
- how the five themes of geography help organize geographical information.



A World Map From 1570 This map shows many misunderstandings about the size and shape of North America, South America, Australia, and Antarctica. Which parts of this map look like maps of today?

Location

Finding Places Anywhere on Earth

The theme of **location** focuses on a specific place and considers the question of its position on the earth's surface. People may talk about the location of a place just out of curiosity, or they may actually want to travel to a place.

Absolute Location

In 25 B.C. a young man named Strabo had the chance to visit Alexandria, then the Roman capital of Egypt and a cosmopolitan meeting place for travelers. In a library built by Egyptian royalty, Strabo found an enormous collection of scholarly writings. He pored over those works, especially those related to geography and mapmaking, and evaluated what he read. He eventually published his conclusions in an 18-volume book on world geography. Two of Strabo's central conclusions were that the earth had the shape of a sphere, and that the best map of the earth would employ a grid of intersecting lines, a plan that is still in use today.

One set of grid lines consists of the lines of latitude, which circle the earth parallel to each other and to the Equator, an imaginary line around the center of the

earth. The Equator is measured at 0° , and the poles are measured at 90° N (north) or S (south). The other set of lines comprises longitude lines, which run from pole to pole and measure distance east or west of a starting line called the Prime Meridian. During most of the history of mapmaking, individual mapmakers chose where to locate the Prime Meridian—usually placing it where they lived. Finally, in 1884, the United States held the First International Meridian Conference. The delegates decided to locate the Prime Meridian at an observatory in Greenwich, England. The other meridians are measured east or west of the Prime Meridian up to 180° . This grid system enables people to give the exact, or absolute, location for any place on the earth.

Relative Location

In everyday life people usually think of a place's location in relation to other known places, a concept called relative location. Even before there was a written language, people showed each other relative location by using simple maps such as those drawn in sand or made with sticks and stones. They also spoke of relative location, saying, for example, that Europe is north of Africa. Today following oral or written directions that are based on relative location continues to be a common way for people to get to their destinations.

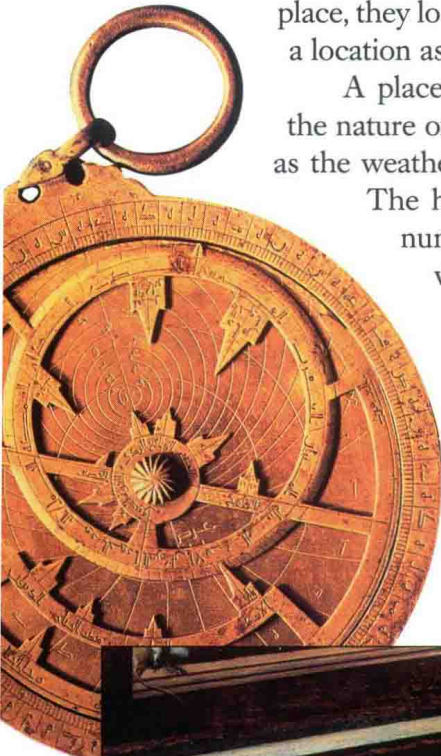
Place

Describing a Location

Every **place**, or specific location, on the earth has a set of characteristics that distinguish it from other places. When geographers focus on place, they look at the physical features of a location as well as its human features.

A place's physical features include the nature of the land and water as well as the weather, soil, plants, and animals.

The human features include the number and kinds of people who live in a place, the activities that occur there, and the cultures, languages, and religions represented. The combination of all these different characteristics gives each place its own distinctive flavor.



In 1596 explorer William Barents and his crew experienced the extremes of a place in the Arctic when their ship was frozen in the ice at 76° N latitude. Gerrit de Veer, one of the crew, recorded their experiences in a detailed account accompanied by illustrations.

Movement

Monitoring a Continuing Flow

From the beginning of human history, people have moved from one location to another, sometimes migrating great distances. They may have moved out of necessity, because of catastrophic natural events such as droughts or because of conflicts with other people. They may also have moved out of curiosity or from a desire to seek a better life. Such movements may be temporary, such as the travels of explorers or traders, or permanent, when people move to a new location and settle there. Geographers are also interested in the transfer of goods from place to place and the spread of information and ideas. All these activities are examples of the theme of **movement**.



Moving Into the Unknown Determining location at sea or in a new land presented explorers with a challenge. They used an astrolabe like the one shown (upper left) to determine latitude. Which geography themes does this painting illustrate?