

The background of the cover is a photograph of a desert canyon landscape, likely the Grand Canyon, viewed from an elevated position. The sky is filled with dramatic, white and grey clouds. A bright yellow sticky note is affixed to the top right corner of the cover, partially overlapping the title text.

The Perspective

*An Introduction to
Human Prehistory*

KENNETH L. FEDER

The Past in Perspective

AN INTRODUCTION TO HUMAN PREHISTORY

Kenneth L. Feder

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For Josh and Jacob

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Preface

“The past is a bucket of ashes,” said the poet Carl Sandburg. Surely he was wrong. The past is not cold, dead, and spent. It is alive in everything we are and will be. We live in a universe filled with its traces. The stars in the night sky shine with a light that began its journey millions of years ago. The fossilized remnants of creatures that once walked the earth lie entombed in the soil beneath our feet. Cooking hearths and food scraps, pyramids and pottery, stone tools and bone awls, cave paintings and ivory sculptures—all date to the ancient human past yet exist in the present. They are not ashes; they represent comprehensible evidence of species and cultures whose time is past, but that nonetheless deserve our attention.

The Past in Perspective: An Introduction to Human Prehistory focuses on this evidence of the past in an accessible chronicle of human physical and cultural evolution. The audience for this text is undergraduates who have had no previous coursework in archaeology; for many, it will be their only academic exposure to our prehistoric past. Rather than overwhelm beginning students with an all-inclusive, detailed survey of the human past, this text looks at the major themes of the human evolutionary story. It begins with the evolution of our earliest hominid ancestors, traces the evolution of the modern human species, and follows the various pathways our ancestors took in the development of food-producing societies and complex civilizations. My goal throughout was to instill in readers an appreciation for the long chronicle of humanity and the ongoing processes we use to construct and assess that story.

HOW THE TEXT IS ORGANIZED

Chapters 1–4 provide context and background for the discussion of human prehistory. Chapter 1 places the study of the human past in the context of science, using genealogy as a metaphor for the study of human prehistory. Chapter 2 focuses on how a scientific approach to the study of prehistory developed and the role biblical literalism played. Chapter 3 is a brief overview of key methodologies employed by archaeologists and paleoanthropologists. Chapter 4 presents a geological and biological context for the evolution of humanity; this summary of the geology and paleontology of the earth focuses on the evolution of the Miocene apes.

Following these introductory chapters with their contextual purpose, Chapters 5–15 present a chronological survey of the human past. Each

chapter follows a consistent format with these headings: **Chapter Overview, Prelude, Chronicle, Issues and Debates, Case Study Close-Up, Visiting the Past, Summary, and To Learn More.** My belief is that a consistent format provides a pedagogical advantage; the trajectory of human physical and cultural evolution becomes far more apparent and connected. What we know, what we don't know, and what are still topics of vigorous debate will be clear to the reader.

The **CHAPTER OVERVIEW** introduces the primary topic of the chapter in several brief paragraphs.



The **PRELUDE** represents a conscious attempt on my part to provide a pedagogical “hook” for each chapter. Personal anecdotes or fascinating historical incidents, for example, immediately engage students in the key issue or issues of the chapter, whether it is upright locomotion, the origins of artistic expression, or the power of ancient civilizations.



The **CHRONICLE** presents in narrative form a consensus view of that part of the human past that is the chapter's focus. It represents the heart of each chapter, providing our current understanding of the time period covered, the hominids discussed, and the cultural evolutionary developments reflected in the time period.



ISSUES AND DEBATES sections discuss the answers we have been able to provide for key questions about human physical and cultural evolution as well as the unresolved issues that remain and the ongoing debates. These sections provide differing—and sometimes competing—perspectives. Students are thus exposed to the sometimes messy process of science fraught with disagreements, shifting paradigms, and only hard-won consensus.



The **CASE STUDY CLOSE-UP** is a detailed examination of one or more sites considered diagnostic or emblematic of the time period or primary issue of the chapter.



VISITING THE PAST sections direct readers to key sites mentioned in the chapter that are open to the public, suggest museums where the materials from important sites discussed in the chapter are displayed, and point out computer software “virtual visits” that provide detailed discussions, photographs, videos, and animations related to the chapter topic.

Each chapter **SUMMARY** provides a brief recapitulation of the key issues in the chapter.

TO LEARN MORE presents a short list of books, magazine articles, and additional CD-ROM titles that focus on the central topics and issues of the chapter.

ADDITIONAL FEATURES

In addition to a consistent chapter format, I've included a number of additional features that I hope will make this text a more useful learning tool.

- A **timeline** opens every chapter and helps place the key events and sites mentioned in the body of the chapter within a global historical context. The timeline in Chapter 1 shows at a glance the chronological focus of each chapter in the text.
- To help students better orient themselves on the world stage, I've included abundant maps throughout the book. In addition, for Chapters 5–15, I've provided at the beginning of each chapter a **list of sites**, broken out by country, discussed therein.
- A list of **Key Terms** at the ends of chapters identifies important terms that appear in boldfaced type within the chapters; definitions can be found in the end-of-book glossary.
- The text's **visual appeal** enhances its readability. Detailed, colorful charts and drawings, as well as abundant photographs, underscore significant points in the text. Captions of the artwork add information rather than simply label the pictures.
- Full-color photographs that are cross-referenced to pertinent text discussions appear in a thematically organized **Color Portfolio**. The five thematic groupings offer close looks at the Ice Man, apes, the Paleolithic, the Neolithic, and civilization.
- The **Glossary, References**, and a comprehensive **Index** make information readily accessible.

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

The **Instructor's Manual** includes a test bank of multiple choice and short answer/essay questions, as well as chapter overviews, lists of key words, and suggested sources for videos, CD-ROMS, and Internet sites.

A **computerized Test Bank** is available free of charge to qualifying adopters. It is a powerful, easy-to-use test generation system that provides all test items on computer disk for IBM-compatible or Macintosh computers. You can select, add, or edit questions, randomize them, and print tests appropriate to your individual classes.

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