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# Layers of Tradition: Culture Regions at Different Scales

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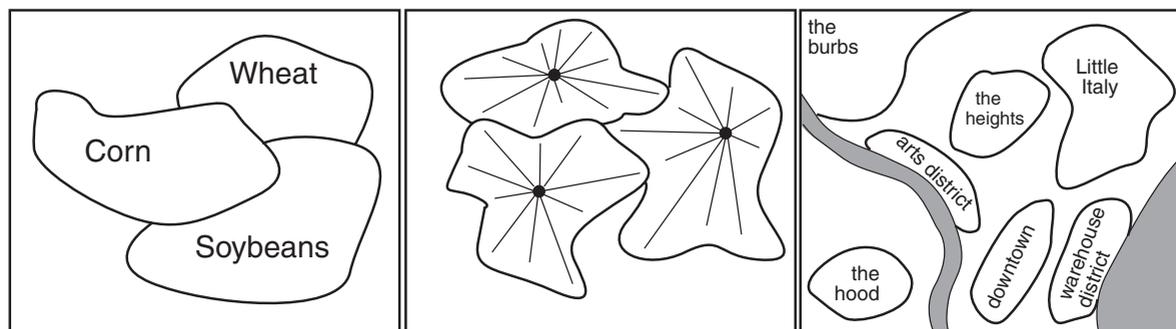
## ► INTRODUCTION

One of the most important aspects of humanity that differentiates people and shapes the way we live and the places we create is **culture**. *Culture* refers to a people's way of life, their behavior, and their shared understandings about themselves and the world. Culture serves as a guide for how we act and interpret the world around us. When studying how cultural characteristics of place come to be, geographers often focus on a **region**, or an area with common characteristics. Aspects of culture—the complexities of human lifestyles, including social arrangements, the use of land and resources, language, and spiritual and political beliefs—are often the best features we can use to define regions.

*Region* is a concept that is used to identify and organize areas of the world. It is a form of classification and is a basic building block of geographic analysis. A region is quite simply an area characterized by similarity or a cohesiveness that sets it apart from other regions. This similarity can take the form of a common characteristic such as geographic proximity (North America), a dominant crop (the Corn Belt), the prevailing livelihood (the Manufacturing Belt), a common history (Dixie), or a common set of trading partners (European Union). Some regions have clear-cut boundaries; others have indefinite boundaries.

All regions are mental constructs; nothing is absolute or sacred about them. One person's conception of "The South" will quite likely differ from the next person's, but that does not mean that the regional concept is not useful. Conceptualizing a region is a method for geographers to impose order on the messy complexities of the real world—to make sense out of geographic chaos. Just as it helps people understand history better by organizing time into blocks called *eras* (e.g., Middle Ages, Great Depression), so does it help people understand geography better by organizing space into regions. The degree of detail in definitions of regions correlates to the familiarity people have with those regions, so that locals and outsiders often focus on different characteristics. Like maps, regions exist for particular purposes. Also like maps, regions vary in scale from local to global.

There are three types of regions: formal, functional, and perceptual (Figure 2.1). A **formal region** has a common human characteristic such as language, religion, or level of economic development or a common physical attribute such as climate,



Formal regions based on dominant crop types.

Functional regions tied to a central node. These could be banks serving their branches, dairy farms providing milk to suppliers, etc.

Perceptual regions of a city.

**Figure 2.1** Three types of regions.

landform, or vegetation. The Dairy Belt shares a common agricultural specialization in milk, cheese, and butter production. Dixie consists of states that seceded from the Union in the Civil War. Latin America is held together by a common location in the Western Hemisphere and by a common Spanish or Portuguese colonial heritage. A single criterion can be used to define a formal region as in the case of the Dairy Belt, or multiple criteria can be used. In addition to secession from the Union in the Civil War, Dixie may also be defined as the block of states where African-Americans represent more than 20 percent of the population or places where the typical breakfast menu includes a side order of grits.

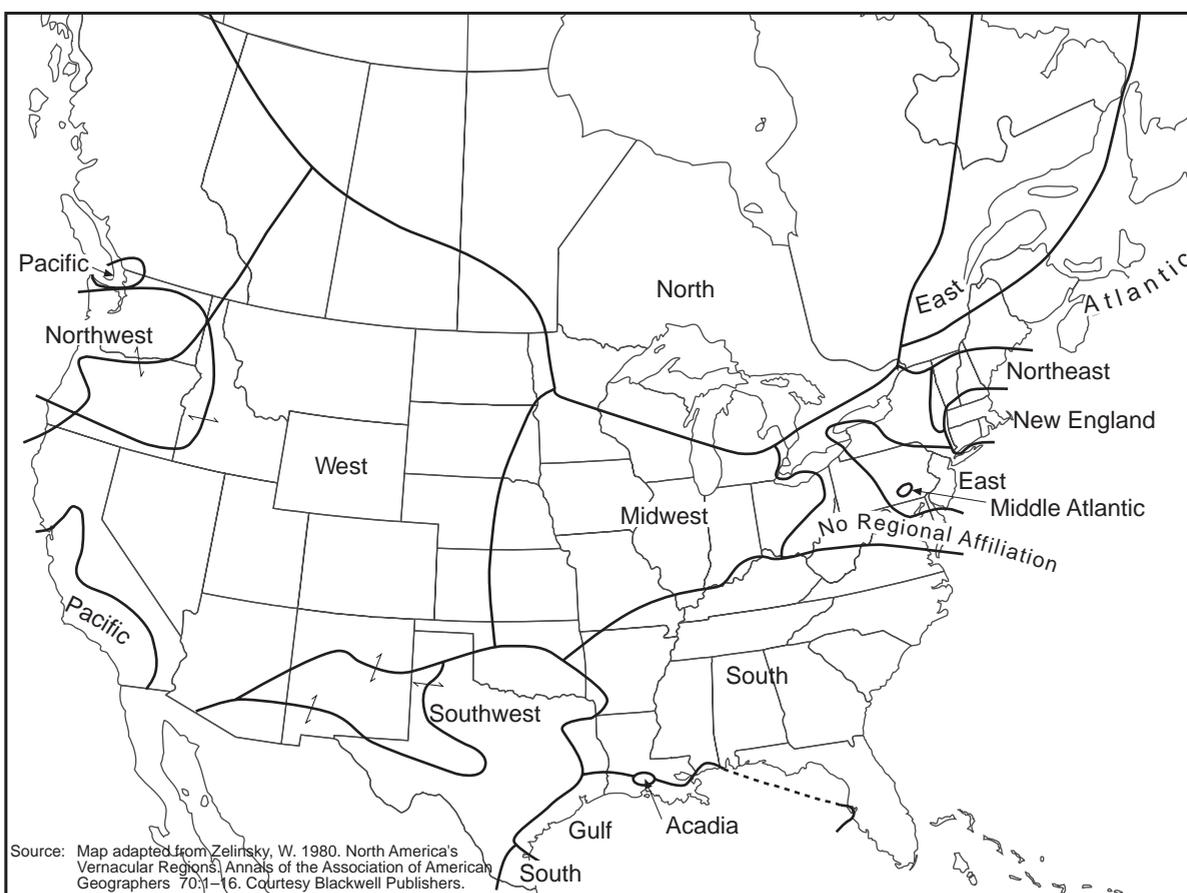
**Functional regions** are held together by a common set of linkages or spatial interactions. These linkages are organized around one or several nodes. Criteria for defining functional regions take the form of transportation flows, information exchanges, and movements of people. A metropolitan area is a functional region bound together by movements of people to and from work, school, stores, cinemas, and doctors' offices; information flows from newspapers, television, radio, telephone calls, and facsimile messages; and movements of goods and services. Although city and suburban residents sometimes view themselves as separate, they are, in fact, inexorably intertwined by a complicated web of economic, social, and political interactions into one functional region. The region *from which* people travel to a movie theater is a functional region, as is the region *to which* goods are shipped from a seaport.

Sometimes the distinction between formal and functional region is fuzzy, as in the case of *megalopolis*, geographers' name for the coalescence of metropolitan areas into a continuous network of urban development. Megalopolis is a formal region in the sense that it represents a dense concentration of human activity and the dominance of urban over rural land uses. Megalopolis is also a functional region because it is linked by extensive movements of people, goods, and information. The fact that people living hundreds of miles apart in megalopolis are said to be "close neighbors" speaks to the importance of functional interactions over geographic proximity in defining closeness.

More elusive but equally important is the third type of region, the **perceptual region**. Perceptual regions are based on people's feelings or beliefs about areas and are subjective rather than objective in nature. Joel Garreau, an editor with *The*

*Washington Post*, developed the “Nine Nations of North America,” a regional geography of the United States based on how reporters perceived and described the places that they visited. He classified North America into such regions as “MexAmerica,” “The Bread Basket,” and “The Foundry,” regions that he believed captured geographic variation in culture better than the political units of states and provinces we commonly use. *Vernacular regions*, one type of perceptual region, are identified by local residents, not as outsiders perceive them. *Vernacular* refers to the traits of the common folk, such as vernacular speech, vernacular architecture, or vernacular dress. The way to discern vernacular regions is at the grassroots level: to ask people if they believe that they live in a region called “the South” or to ask them to outline on a map where “the South” starts and stops. Another way to define vernacular regions is to determine how local businesses use regional monikers such as Acadia, Delta, Dixie, Eastern, Northwestern, Midwestern, Pacific, and Western (Figure 2.2). These are **symbols** that people use to express their identity.

Perhaps the best way to think of a region is simply as a classification scheme that uses characteristics that *best represent* the place to define it. Geographers use **culture traits**, which can be anything from religion, land use, or language to the type of eating utensils, grave markers, or headwear to define a **culture region**. A



**Figure 2.2** Vernacular regions of North America as defined by names of businesses. Taken from advertisements in phone books, the logic is that the frequency with which people use certain themes in commercial names is a function of group perceptions of regional identity.

key component of a culture region is that the inhabitants are aware to some degree of a common cultural heritage and differences from other territorial groups. This consciousness of belonging to a group united in a common territory is **regional identity**, which is what geographers look for when studying vernacular regions. Vernacular regions stem from human emotions and feelings about place. Regions have *meaning* to their inhabitants and form part of residents' cultural identity.

Culture regions show that, just as the distinction between formal and functional regions can get fuzzy, so too can the distinction between formal and perceptual regions. A culture region is defined by some common human characteristic and thus is a formal region. Because people in a culture region also have an awareness of belonging, however, a culture region can also be a vernacular region (such as Dixie). Like regions themselves, the three types of regional definitions—formal, functional, and perceptual—often overlap. Use them as a conceptual tool only, recognizing that a region being of one type does not necessarily exclude it from belonging to another.

One way to study which characteristics best define a region would be to actually go there and engage in fieldwork involving detailed observation. Each culture region develops a distinctive **cultural landscape** as people modify their environment to their specific needs, technologies, and lifestyles. Terraced rice paddies, for instance, represent a distinctive feature of the cultural landscape in the humid, hilly terrain of Southeast Asia. Humid, hilly terrain in the southeastern United States looks very different, however, because the U.S. culture formed at a different time and with a different mix of population, capital, diets, technology, and trade relations.

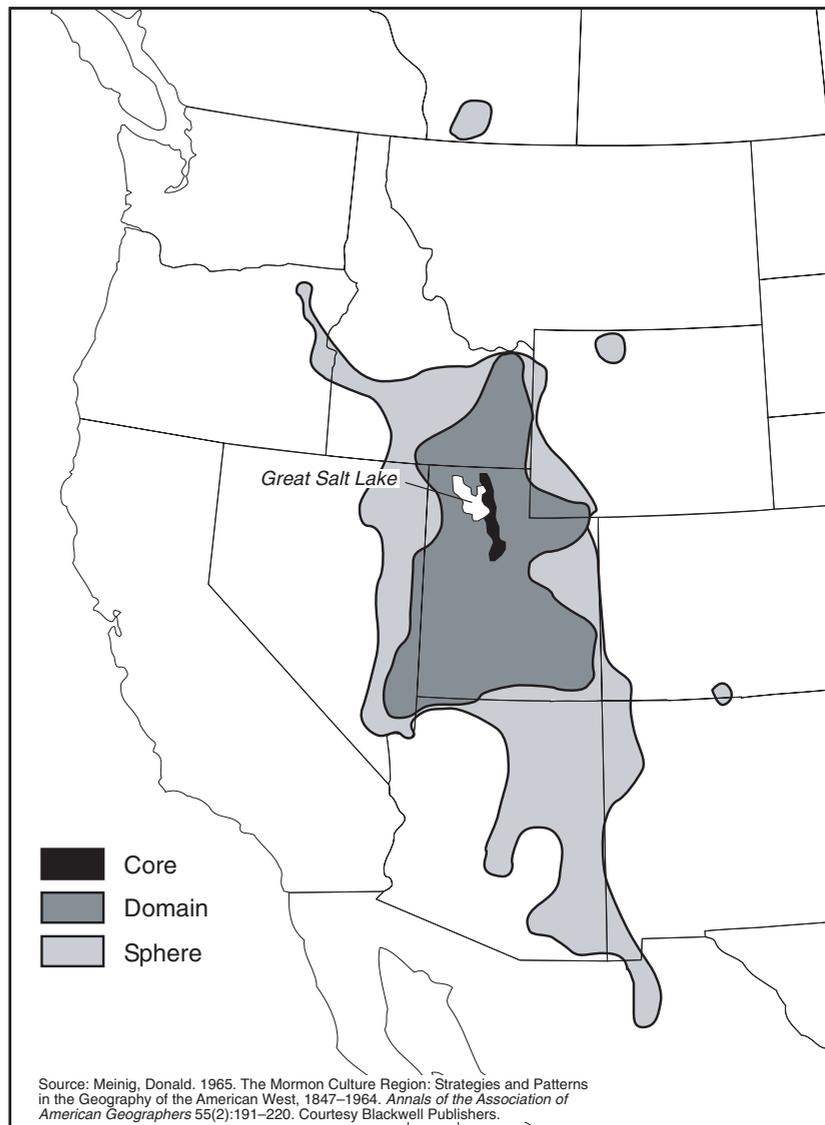
The value system of cultures affects the way people use the natural environment and, thus, the way the cultural landscape looks. Native Americans of the northeastern United States, for instance, modified their environment with paths and villages and through various field types to grow corn and other crops. Although often agriculturalists, they were still very dependent on hunting and gathering and therefore perceived the forest and its wildlife as the most valuable resource. Whether left intact or, more commonly, modified by fire, the pre-European eastern forests were in fact a cultural landscape used to sustain many people. The farm-oriented European successors on the landscape, however, perceived the soil as more valuable and an individually owned resource, and they cut down many forests and leveled terrain to till the land and plant crops. With the advent of industrialization, energy was seen as a prized resource. Streams were dammed for waterpower and coal mines were excavated. The wilderness was something to be overcome, and the natural environment had value only in being able to provide raw materials and energy for human consumption. Today, society has begun to question the unbridled use of the environment for human consumption. Contemporary values now respect unfettered wilderness as an end in itself, as a place that lifts and sustains the human spirit. As a result, some dams are being removed, mines are being reclaimed, and much of New England has been reforested.

Culture is evident everywhere throughout the landscape, not only in adaptations to the natural landscape but also in such things as names of places, types of architecture, and designs of cities. People express cultural beliefs through **symbols**, such as monuments, flags, slogans, or religious icons, as well as through symbolic meaning that is associated with artifacts such as landscaping, house types, and commercial signs. Symbols express people's identity, whether that identity be soccer mom, union worker, feminist, hippie, or gang member. Symbols can promote ideology, such as the western image of the cowboy as an expression of individualism. Geographers who study the cultural landscape have come to recognize that the concept of **regional**

**identity** as we have discussed it so far can be problematic. There is often no central, unifying cultural “belief,” no single “identity” in any given place but a multiplicity of belief systems and group allegiances. Much of the landscape we see and live in reflects the cultural beliefs of those with power, such as the classical Greek architecture of our government buildings that celebrates a European heritage and democratic ideals, skyscrapers that serve as corporate advertising, monuments to founding fathers and war heroes, and churches and other symbols of Christianity. These symbols can be used to construct a regional identity, but they are usually symbols from the majority and often do not represent minorities or disenfranchised groups. For example, the South still faces controversies about the Confederate Stars-and-Bars flag in public spaces and on official seals. The Stars-and-Bars to many is a symbol of southern pride and membership in Dixie but represents slavery, racism, and oppression to others. Rarely do we see expressions of disenfranchised groups—gay couples walking hand in hand, Rastafarian communal living, migrant worker union halls, Black Muslim organizations—used as expressions of regional identity.

Setting aside for a minute the complexities of multiple subcultures in any given place, culture regions are still a valuable tool to understand a place and its people. A problem remains, however, with drawing precise boundaries around them. How can you determine where a culture region starts and where it ends? The answer is that you can't with any degree of precision. For this reason, it is best to think not in terms of one fixed boundary between culture regions but of gradations between them. Geographer Donald Meinig first conceptualized these gradations when studying the Mormon culture region in the western United States. Based on Meinig's work, we can define three terms that express the decreasing influence of a culture with increasing distance from the center of the culture region. The first is the **core**, the centralized zone of concentration, or the “most pure” area that possesses all of the culture traits used to define the region (Figure 2.3). This represents the heart and soul of a culture region, its vital center and focus of circulation. The second is the **domain**, the area in which the particular culture is dominant but less intense. Finally, the **sphere** is the zone of outer influence where people with the culture traits in question can even be a minority within another culture region.

You'll want to keep two things in mind when thinking about cores, domains, and spheres. First, one culture's core can lie within another culture's sphere. For instance, the core of Tibetan Buddhist culture, the Tibetan plateau, is also part of the Chinese cultural sphere because China conquered Tibet in the eighteenth century and has occupied it since 1950. Second, the transitions between core, domain, and sphere can be gradual or abrupt. Barriers to movement have historically created abrupt transitions. Political barriers such as the Berlin Wall and the Great Wall of China sharply separated the capitalist West from the communist East and Chinese Confucians from Mongolian invaders. Physical barriers including the Alps sharply divided Roman civilization from Northern European “barbarians.” On the other hand, in Southeast Asia, a very gradual transition occurs over a thousand miles between the curry-based flavors of Indian cuisine to the soy-based flavors of Chinese cuisine with Thai cuisine halfway between featuring major influences of both. Thai cuisine is an example of **syncretism**, when new cultural traits emerge as a cultural hybrid of two distinct parent traits. Syncretism occurs in many aspects of culture, such as the fusion of African religion with Catholicism in Brazil and the change in food such as the Mexican taco or Chinese chow mein into the variety we are familiar with in the United States and Canada. Another example is Japanese-style capitalism, which fuses the free-market ideas of the capitalist West with the group-oriented social relations of the



**Figure 2.3** The Mormon Culture Region, showing the core, domain, and sphere of a culture region.

Confucian East. The result is a form of capitalism much different from that in North America in which corporations offer lifelong jobs to their employees and government decides which industries should be phased out.

Activity 1 of this chapter asks you to construct a cultural region, either the Middle East or the American Southwest, depending on your instructor's choice. Ask yourself, "What's it like there?" What do you think is the essence of the region? What are its signature traits? Which cities, states, or countries does it include? Deciding the criteria for regional definition will help you to better understand the region. In Activity 2, you will look for the linguistic, culinary, landscape, or other cultural traits that mark your local culture region. In Activity 3, postcards will serve as clues to the **regional identity** of your own culture region.

## ▶ CASE STUDY

## LAYERS OF TRADITION

**GOAL**

To introduce the concept of a **culture region** by evaluating **culture traits** and **cultural landscape** of the Middle East and/or the American Southwest (check with your instructor). You will define your own core of the region, identify the traits of your own culture region, and explore how symbolism is used to represent **regional identity**.

**LEARNING OUTCOMES**

After completing the chapter, you will be able to:

- Evaluate map layers using a geographic information system (GIS).
- Define the core of a culture region on the basis of three characteristics.
- Define the sphere of a culture region on the basis of the farthest extent of any cultural traits.
- Discuss the history and geography of the Middle East and/or American Southwest.
- Identify the cultural traits that make your subregion distinctive versus those that are shared with the entire North American culture region.
- Recognize symbolism as it is used to promote regional identity.
- Recognize that regional imagery often promotes one group's identity while excluding that of others.

**SPECIAL MATERIALS NEEDED**

- Computer with CD drive and Internet Explorer 5.0 and above. See *Read Me*.

**BACKGROUND**

The Middle East and the American Southwest are marked by distinctive **culture traits** and **cultural landscapes**. Both regions consist of a relatively uniform core, surrounded by an increasingly mixed **domain** and **sphere**. Residents of both regions perceive that they belong to their region, and use *vernacular* terms to refer to it. Although these regions are at different scales, geographers analyze them in a similar fashion.

Unless you have lived or traveled in these regions, your knowledge of them could be sketchy. You probably have a mental picture of each region, and you can probably name at least one city that definitely belongs to each one. On the other hand, you could have a number of misconceptions about each region, and you probably don't have an exact idea where each region ends and the neighboring region begins. The regional background section that follows will help you to put the maps in Activity 1 into historical and geographical context.

What most North Americans know about the "Middle East" consists of snippets and images from TV, newspapers, and movies. We don't hear much about it unless there is a crisis going on. For the first half of the twentieth century, the Middle East was perceived as a vast, stark, beautiful, waterless emptiness as featured in the movie epic *Lawrence of Arabia*. American perceptions were dominated by sun-baked men in white robes and headdresses, riding camels and living in tents. Female stereotypes were performing as belly dancers or shrouded in veils (Figure 2.4). The movie *Raiders of the Lost Ark* imprinted similar images onto a new generation of North Americans. Both movies, interestingly, set the Middle East not as a region in its own right but as a stage for European conflict.

In the second half of the twentieth century, romantic mental images of the region were replaced by images of war and conflict. First, in 1948 the Jewish state of Israel was inserted into a Muslim-dominated region. A string of wars in 1948, 1956, 1967, 1973, and 1982 followed. Peace came haltingly and only partially to the region: a land-for-peace deal with Egypt in 1979, partial autonomy for Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and parts of the West Bank in the late 1990s, and Israeli withdrawal from occupied southern Lebanon in 2000. As of 2003, however, peace talks between Israelis and Palestinians have broken down amid violence by both sides. Meanwhile, other conflicts added new images to the American mental map of the Middle East. An Arab embargo of oil exports to western supporters of Israel in 1974 quadrupled oil prices. Another oil price hike in 1979 coincided with the overthrow of the American-backed Shah of Iran by Muslim fundamentalists and the taking of hostages at the U.S. Embassy in Tehran. Then, the apparent unity of the Middle East



**Figure 2.4** Iranian women wearing their chadors, or veils, outside a mosque during Friday prayers in Tehran. The veils symbolize the sheltered status of women in many Middle Eastern countries.

► **CASE STUDY** (continued)

appeared to crack. A long war ensued between Iran and Iraq in the 1980s. In 1990, Iraq invaded Kuwait and threatened Saudi Arabia. The western powers led by the United States intervened during the Gulf War, ostensibly to protect their allies and uphold international law, and not coincidentally to ensure the continued flow of oil to the West.

The twenty-first century dawned with more troubled relations between much of the Middle East and the Western world. On September 11, 2001, radical fundamentalist Muslim terrorists hijacked commercial airliners and crashed them into the World Trade Center towers in New York City and the Pentagon in Arlington, VA, two of the most prominent symbols of U.S. military and economic power. There was no simple answer to President George W. Bush's question: "Why do they hate us?"—or even who "they" are. Some experts see this as a clash of civilizations, with Middle Easterners feeling that their independence and traditions are threatened by the globalization of western influence and culture (see Chapter 8). Others say the attacks were motivated by anger specifically against U.S. foreign policy in the region, which is widely seen as hypocritical and biased against Muslims. Anti-American resentment focuses on U.S. military bases in Muslim holy lands in Saudi Arabia, including in Mecca; favoring of Israelis over Palestinians; economic sanctions against Iraqi civilians; and U.S. support for repressive and corrupt regimes in oil-rich countries. It is safe to say that most Middle Easterners share some of these political complaints but were horrified by the September 11 attacks carried out by the al-Qaeda terrorist group, led by Osama bin Laden (Figure 2.5).

Following September 11, an international coalition led by the United States invaded Afghanistan to wipe out the al-Qaeda network and the fundamentalist Taliban regime that had allowed the terrorists to train there. In 2002, the United States renewed pressure on Iraqi President Saddam Hussein to reveal and eliminate any weapons of mass destruction, as per previous United Nations (UN) resolutions (see Chapter 13). When Iraq did not comply, the United States, the United Kingdom and several other countries—without UN backing—invaded Iraq in March, 2003 and deposed Saddam Hussein's totalitarian regime. Critics of American policy decried the lack of evidence linking Iraq with al-Qaeda and pushed for a diplomatic solution. Other critics pointed out that in the 1980s the United States had provided military and economic support to both Saddam Hussein in Iraq and fundamentalist Muslim guerillas in Afghanistan to help each fight enemies considered more dangerous to the United States at that time. By April 2003, when this book was finished, the whereabouts of Osama bin Laden and Saddam Hussein were still unknown, and the United States was involved in costly economic and political reconstructions of Afghanistan and Iraq.



**Figure 2.5** Osama Bin Laden.

Both sides in this conflict possess, and even promote, cultural stereotypes. Al-Qaeda paints the western system as a unified threat led by the United States. Westerners often see the Middle East as a hostile, war-torn area of radical fundamentalists and suicide bombers. At a more detailed scale, both pictures distort the great diversity in both the West and the Middle East. Al-Qaeda's attempts to promote a pan-Muslim Middle Eastern identity try to supercede regional diversity, but these attempts are challenged by basic geographic realities. Just as not all Americans are White, English-speaking Christians, not all Middle Easterners are Arab (Turks and Persians are just two other groups), not all are Muslim (Jews and Coptic Christians are numerous), not all practice the same form of Islam (Sunni and Shia are the two main sects), and many countries have moderate, pro-western governments (such as Turkey).

Westerners are not the only ones who trade in cultural stereotypes: Al-Qaeda also ignores the region's rich history and cultural identities. This history goes back to the dawn of civilization, when agriculture, domestication of animals, and the very first cities originated some 10,000 years ago. The setting was the "Fertile Crescent," a quarter-moon-shaped zone of the rain-catching hilly flanks of the Zagros and Taurus Mountains, plus the smaller mountains of Lebanon and Palestine, where barley and emmer wheat grew wild (Figure 2.6). Although not necessarily the first culture hearth where farming, herding, and permanent towns were "invented," archaeological evidence points to the Fertile Crescent—ideally situated at the crossroads of three conti-

## ▶ CASE STUDY (continued)



**Figure 2.6** The Fertile Crescent, an early culture hearth and likely source for the diffusion of agriculture.

nents and near several perennial rivers—as the major source region for the diffusion of agriculture worldwide.

Later, great empires ruled these lands and produced lasting works of art, architecture, science, philosophy, and, of course, religion. One of the first known maps is on a stone tablet from Babylon dated around 2500 B.C. In addition to the pyramids, Egypt developed the great library at Alexandria, which became the intellectual center of the western world in the second century A.D. Middle Eastern scholars not only kept the knowledge of the ancient Greeks and Romans alive during the European Dark Ages but also significantly advanced mathematics, which is why our numbers are referred to as *Arabic numerals*.

The Middle East “holy land” produced the Jewish and Christian faiths. Later, when Islam arose in the early seventh century A.D., it swept through the region in an extraordinarily short period of time. Within a century, Islam had spread to current-day Spain and Morocco in the west, to Pakistan in the east, south into Africa, and north to the Black Sea. Developed and spread by the Prophet Mohammed and codified in the holy book of the Koran, the practice of Islam is largely defined by the “Five Pillars.” The five pillars are (1) recognizing Allah (God) and Mohammed as his messenger; (2) praying five times a day toward Mecca, Mohammed’s birthplace; (3) giving alms to the poor and protecting the weak; (4) abstaining from food, drink, tobacco, and sex during daylight hours during the

entire month of Ramadan; and (5) making a pilgrimage to Mecca at least once during a lifetime. Mohammed recognized the validity of the other monotheistic “peoples of the book,” namely Jews and Christians, which helps explain how isolated Jewish and Christian communities survived in the Middle East over the next 1,400 years. (For your information, the *Country Facts* spreadsheet contains data on the leading religions for every country in the world.)

A unique combination of adaptations evolved in the Middle East that enabled human society to survive the arid conditions. Geographers refer to this culture complex as the **ecological trilogy** because it involved sophisticated interactions among three kinds of communities: village, tribe, and city. Each part of the trilogy represented a unique cultural landscape that adapted to the environment but also modified the environment. First, there were the sedentary villages that produced agricultural products (Figures 2.7 and 2.8). Villagers obtained water for farming in a variety of ways. Oases and foothills were farmed using rain or spring-fed water, and various types of irrigation were invented. The second element of the equation was the nomadic tribe, which added several essential factors. Tribes provided the protein in the Middle Eastern diet by nomadic herding of sheep, goats, and camels, which were used for meat, milk, and yogurt (Figure 2.9). Two primary variations are horizontal nomadism, in which herds are moved from one known pasture to the next, moving

► **CASE STUDY** (continued)



**Figure 2.7** Mud bricks, like those shown here, have been used for thousands of years in the Middle East.



**Figure 2.8** A small village with walled fields in the Al Bawn depression near Raydah, North Yemen.



**Figure 2.9** Bedouin shepherd herding sheep in the hills near Bethlehem in the occupied West Bank of Israel.

frequently so as not to deplete the pastures, and vertical nomadism, in which herds are moved to the highlands in summer and lowlands in winter. Nomads also provided long-distance transportation and military protection to the trilogy. Cities formed the third element of the trilogy.

Traditional Middle Eastern cities were centered on the mosque for religious and political leadership and the bazaar for trading, craftmaking, and services (Figure 2.10).

## ▶ CASE STUDY (continued)



**Figure 2.10** The minarets of a mosque tower above the stalls of a market in Istanbul, Turkey.

In spite of popular perceptions, significant parts of the Middle East are not desert. The true desert, which is characterized by a year-round deficit of moisture in the soil, is bordered by semidesert climate zones known as *steppe* that can sustain short grasses and scattered shrubs. The coasts of North Africa, Israel, and Turkey enjoy a Mediterranean climate similar to that of Italy and Southern California with dry summers and cool, moist winters. The mountains of the Fertile Crescent and Morocco's Atlas Mountains get significant amounts of snow.

The ecological trilogy is an important cultural feature of the Middle East, but the region also has a common colonial heritage. Like much of the developing world, the Middle East was colonized by European powers, including Russia, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, with only the Ottoman Empire (Turkey), Morocco, and Iran remaining independent. The country boundaries we see today were largely drawn by the European colonizers as they divided and redivided the region without any regard to the local people and land. In retrospect, the Arab-Israeli wars, the Iran-Iraq war, and the Gulf War were all fought over European-imposed boundaries! In the colonies, traditional regional ties were replaced with exports of raw materials to the colonial power. The technological benefits of industrialization were rarely transferred back, other than through sales of western goods. With the exception of a few landowners in several oil-rich countries, most

Middle Eastern people now face the same problems as those in other less-developed countries (see Chapter 7). It is within this historical context that today's conflicts and some countries' use of the oil trump card must be seen.

Although the history and cultural landscape of the American Southwest are markedly different from those of the Middle East, both regions are dominated by vast tracts of arid land. The Sonoran, Chihuahuan, Great Basin, and Mojave deserts converge in the Southwest and extend from southeastern California to southern New Mexico and west Texas. Many of the plants that grow in these deserts, such as creosote bush, saguaro cactus (Figure 2.11), Joshua trees, and yuccas, are typical symbols of the Southwest. Semiarid grasslands also cover much of the region, especially in mid-altitude areas such as southeastern Arizona, the fringes of the Great Plains in eastern New Mexico, and much of the canyon country around the "Four Corners" (where Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, and Utah meet). Yet the entire Southwest is not arid. Coastal Southern California, which may or may not be included in the Southwest, actually has a Mediterranean climate with hot, dry summers and cool, moist winters. The region is also punctuated by mountain ranges that receive abundant precipitation and are the source for such notable southwestern rivers as the Rio Grande, Colorado, Salt, Gila, San Juan, and Pecos. These rivers and the many dams and reservoirs that were constructed to store their water for year-round use were crucial to the early settlement of the region. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, water supply looms as an important issue facing the Southwest.

The topography of the American Southwest could be even more diverse than its climate. The boundaries of the American Southwest can encompass hundreds of



**Figure 2.11** Saguaro and cholla cactus dot the slopes surrounding the thirteenth- to fifteenth-century cliff dwellings at Tonto National Monument, Arizona. The Salado (Salt) people, famous for beautiful polychrome pottery, farmed crops and supplemented their diets by hunting and gathering.

► **CASE STUDY** (continued)

thousands of square miles and extend into numerous physiographic or “landform” regions (Figure 2.12). Four of these regions lie within most people’s perception of the Southwest: the Basin and Range, Colorado Plateau, the Rocky Mountains, and Great Plains. The Basin and Range covers a considerable area of the western United States from eastern Washington through Nevada and then across much of southern and central Arizona and New Mexico and then extends into the “Big Bend” of west Texas. Large flat areas (basins) are interspersed with rather narrow, often steep but short mountain chains (ranges). Sometimes referred to as *sky islands* within a *desert sea*, the ranges frequently reach an elevation that is high enough to support different types of forest ecosystems such as those in the Rocky Mountains or Sierra Nevada. The second region, the Colorado Plateau, is an expanse of plateaus, mesas, and canyons that includes much of the “Four Corners” area where Arizona, Utah, Colorado, and New Mexico meet (Figure 2.13). The Grand Canyon is cut down into the Colorado Plateau. The southern and southwestern edge of the Colorado Plateau literally drops off into the lower-elevation Basin and Range; a several-hundred-mile-long escarpment (e.g., cliff) called the *Mogollon Rim* marks its edge in Arizona. Third, the Rocky Mountains extend into the American Southwest as far south as Santa Fe, New

Mexico. Finally, the Great Plains extend all the way into eastern New Mexico and west Texas. Note that many other physiographic regions may be considered part of the Southwest as well, such as the Pacific Coast Mountains, Mexico’s rugged Sierra Madre Occidental, or the Gulf Coastal Plain of Texas.

Although the landforms and vegetation define the boundaries of the American Southwest in one way, many geographers, historians, and others also define the region by its cultural characteristics. The population of the Southwest is a distinctive blend of Native Americans, Hispanics, and Anglo-Americans (Figure 2.14). Native Americans, both historically and in contemporary times, have exerted a powerful influence on the Southwest. Prehistoric civilizations such as the Anasazi, Sinagua, and Mogollon constructed cliff dwellings and road networks while others including the Hohokam established irrigation canals that subsequent groups of Native Americans and European settlers used. These early groups flourished, and although they no longer exist, contemporary agricultural tribes including the Pima, Tohono O’odham, Hopi, and Pueblo Indians are their likely descendants. Numerous other Native American tribes exist in large numbers across the American Southwest. More than 200,000 Navajo live on the largest reservation in the United States in northeast



**Figure 2.12** Physiographic regions of the Southwest.

## ▶ CASE STUDY (continued)



**Figure 2.13** Rainbow Bridge, the longest natural bridge in the world, towers above Lake Powell in southeastern Utah. Tourists to the Four Corners area can also visit Bryce, Zion, Arches, Grand Canyon, and Mesa Verde National Parks, plus Monument Valley and the Painted Desert.

Arizona, northwest New Mexico, and southeast Utah. The Apache, Utes, and Comanche, like the Navajo, were nomadic tribes that subsisted from hunting and gathering instead of agriculture. Separate Apache tribes currently exist in reservations across New Mexico and Arizona. The Utes have two substantial reservations in southwest Colorado. The Comanche, although originally inhabitants of the American Southwest, were forcibly relocated to reservation lands in Oklahoma. By raiding Spanish and Anglo settlements and forcefully defending their territory from European encroachment, the Utes, Comanche, and especially Apache were pivotal in limiting the spread of settlement of the Southwest.

The Hispanic element of the Southwest is evocative in the minds of many Americans. Symbols such as chile peppers (a crop Spaniards adopted from Native Americans), tortillas, adobe homes, and luminarias (traditional Christmas lights made of candles set in paper bags) are common characterizations of this region. The term *American Southwest* should be used carefully because most of the region was under Spanish control until 1821 and governed by Mexico until 1848 (Figure 2.15). The Southwest's Hispanic population, like that of the remainder of the United States, is not homogeneous and includes two diverse, although related, groups: Hispanos and Mexican-Americans. Hispanos were the first of the Hispanic groups to settle in the Southwest with the earliest villages appearing in the early 1600s in what is now central New Mexico. Most Hispanos were Spaniards with little Native American ancestry. Traditions and customs maintained by Hispanos were more similar to Spanish culture and not directly linked to Mexico. The center of Hispano influence in the Southwest is the upper Rio Grande Valley of New Mexico extending roughly from Santa Fe into south-central



**Figure 2.14** A mural on a wall in Douglas in southeastern Arizona honors the “Three Peoples” that settled in this region and contributed cultural traits to its distinctive culture.

Colorado. Other groups of settlers with Spanish ancestry settled in south Texas (Tejanos) and along the coast of southern California (Californios); yet these groups did not have as lasting of an influence on the local area as did the Hispanos in New Mexico, probably because the Hispanos in California and Texas were outnumbered by Anglos at a much earlier date.

After the initial Hispano settlement, Mexicans began arriving in the Southwest. Distinct from Hispanos, many



**Figure 2.15** One of the most important traits introduced by the Spanish to the Southwest was Catholicism. The Spanish built spectacular missions such as San Cayetano de Tumacácori, south of Tucson, Arizona, dating to 1691. Father Kino, the founder of the mission, established 27 others throughout the Southwest, all designed to convert the indigenous people into Christians and into tax-paying colonial subjects. Indians were enticed to the missions by food, clothing, supplies, and education.

► **CASE STUDY** (*continued*)

Mexicans were of mixed Spanish and indigenous descent with cultural characteristics that exhibited both Spanish and Aztec or other Mexican Indian roots. Many Mexicans fled political unrest and economic stagnation in Mexico and arrived in the Southwest from the late 1800s into the early 1900s to work in mining and agriculture.

Anglo and European settlers in the Southwest also began arriving in the mid- to late 1800s and accounted for rapid population growth in the twentieth century. Early Anglo groups such as Mormons and settlers from Texas came and established extensive farms and ranches across the American Southwest. Others emigrated directly from Europe and formed ethnic enclaves, mostly in mining communities such as Bisbee, Arizona, and Silver City, New Mexico. After World War II, the Anglo population of the region increased rapidly due to postwar economic development, the widespread use of air conditioning, and construction of the interstate highway system. The population of the Southwest has mushroomed over the past 50 years with areas such as metropolitan Phoenix expanding from less than 200,000 in 1950 to 3.1 million by 2000.

The economy of the Southwest is now quite diversified. Economic activities commonly associated with the region such as ranching, irrigated farming, and mining are dwarfed by a burgeoning service sector related to retail trade and tourism. Industrial development in this region has always been somewhat limited, yet the number of high-tech firms (such as Motorola, Intel, and Sumitomo) has surged. In addition to the strong economy, migrants are lured by the sunny skies, mild winters, and perceptions that the “Sun Belt” has a “laid-back” lifestyle. The Mexican-American population of the “Sun Belt” has been steadily increasing through immigration from Mexico and higher rates of fertility among existing Mexican-American residents.

This background information about the Middle East and the American Southwest allows you to define the regions’ boundaries. Where does the Middle East begin and end? What makes the American Southwest different from the regions to the north, south, east, or west? Can the Middle East be defined based on physical characteristics including deserts or oil, or cultural characteristics such as Arabic language, Islam, goat milk, and camels? Is the American Southwest best defined by sunshine, Hispanics, cactus, or coyotes? These are some of the points you need to consider in Activity 1 of this chapter. You will use GIS to overlay different data layers to define your conception of the region.

The concept of a culture region with defining traits can be applied at different scales. In Activity 2, you will look within the North American culture region and downsize to the smaller subregion in which you live. Certainly, growing up in the American Midwest is not the same experience as growing up in the Northeast, the South, the Rockies, or Québec. We will ask you to identify some of the traits in the popular culture, the traditional culture, and the landscape that distinguish your culture region from others.

Finally, the Middle East and American Southwest are not the only regions in which media images dominate people’s perceptions. In Activity 3, we ask you to look at tourist postcards of the culture region where you live. Postcards are created to “sell” your region to outsiders. They feature an ideal or symbolic landscape that may not much resemble where you live. Who benefits from projecting these images of your region to the outside world, and who is left out? You may never have thought about it before, but the cultural identity of your region is up for grabs in your local souvenir shop and gas station.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Instructor: \_\_\_\_\_

## Layers of Tradition: Culture Regions at Different Scales

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### ► ACTIVITY 1: MAPPING CULTURE REGIONS

In this exercise, you will use a GIS to look at a series of maps that portray different definitions of the Middle East and/or the American Southwest (check with your instructor). By discriminating between the maps and by overlaying them in combinations, you will define your own composite culture region.

- A. Insert the CD into your computer. A window will automatically appear (if this doesn't work, see the *readme.txt* file or the instruction sheet that came with the CD).
- B. If *Human Geography in Action* has already been installed on your computer, click on *Run from HD*. If not, click either *Install* (for faster performance on your home computer) or *Run from CD* (on school lab computers).
- C. Click on the large *Human Geography in Action* logo to start.
- D. Click on *Chapter Menu*.
- E. Click on *Chapter 2—Layers of Tradition*.
- F. Click on *Activity 1: Mapping Culture Regions (American Southwest)* or *(Middle East)*, according to your instructor's directions.
- G. Read the activity description and then click *Continue*.
- H. A blank map of the general vicinity of the region will appear on your screen. Think about what the region means to you. What makes Middle Eastern culture different from, say, European, African, Russian, Chinese, or South Asian culture, or southwestern culture different from that of the South or Pacific Northwest? What is different about its culture, landscape, and people? Now, click and hold your mouse button on the map to trace a boundary (go slowly!) around what you consider to be the culture region. Click on *Reset Drawing* to erase and start over. Don't worry about whether your region is "correct"; it won't be graded. The purpose is simply to think about your preconceptions before you look at some regional data. When you have drawn your regional boundary, click on *Save My Initial View*.
- I. Computer mapping packages and geographic information systems are able to store many different layers. We have a number of different maps, each representing a separate definition of the region. The names of the map layers are visible in the right margin. The bottom layer, titled *My Initial View*, is what you just drew. Click any layer, and the first map will appear overlaid on the base map. This map layer text is now also highlighted, indicating it is turned on. To turn the layer off, simply click on it

again. Click on *Cities* or *Place Names* to identify cities and either states or countries.

1.1. Turn on each layer one at a time and look closely at each map. Write the name of each layer and the map title in the spaces that follow.

Name	Title
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	
6	
7	
8	
9	
10	
11	
12	
13	
14	
15	
16	
17	
18	

1.2. Think about what the region means to you and consider whether each map corresponds to your image of the region. In your opinion, which three maps best define the Middle East or American Southwest?

1. \_\_\_\_\_ 2. \_\_\_\_\_ 3. \_\_\_\_\_

1.3. Justify the inclusion of *each* of your three layers. Why, in other words, do you believe each of these three variables represents the way of life of the culture region?

- J. Turn on your three chosen layers at the same time. Regions that overlap are progressively shaded. The darkest shading therefore will be where all three definitions overlap. (Note that the red outline around each data layer appears only when you first turn on a layer.)

Think of the area of maximum overlap as the core of the Middle East or American Southwest. Print this view of your three-layer map by clicking on the *Print* button.

1.4. How closely do the boundaries of your three variables agree? What does this say about the presence of a domain (the zone of transition between culture regions) for the American Southwest or the Middle East?

1.5. What other variable that was not on our list could be used to define the Middle East or American Southwest as a culture region?

1.6. With your three layers still showing, click on *My Initial View*. How does your initial perception of the region differ from your composite view? What have you learned about the culture region?

- K. When you have finished, close the *Activity 1* browser window, and click the *exit* button at the top right of the chapter contents page. If you are on a campus network, log off your machine. Don't forget your CD.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Instructor: \_\_\_\_\_

## Layers of Tradition: Culture Regions at Different Scales

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### ► ACTIVITY 2: CULTURE TRAITS OF YOUR CULTURE SUBREGION

Most people would agree that life in Kansas is different from life in Alabama, California, Montana, New York, Alaska, Québec, or Nova Scotia. Of course, we recognize that all of these North American places culturally have more in common with each other than with Ecuador, Kenya, Malaysia, or Japan. Had Dorothy woken up in Philadelphia instead of Oz, however, she might still have said, “Toto, we’re not in Kansas anymore.”

In Activity 2, we ask you to think about the region where you live and what sets it apart from neighboring regions. In answering the following questions, there may be many right answers, but that doesn’t mean there are no wrong answers. Try to keep your focus at the regional geographic scale. Your answers should apply to the whole region, not just your town or neighborhood, and not to the United States or Canada as a whole.

2.1. Find the location of your college in Figure 2.2. Write its **vernacular region** here:

- Common vernacular name \_\_\_\_\_

2.2. Now, on the following map, draw your best approximation of the boundaries of your culture region. This will not be graded by your instructor. Its purpose is for you to have the whole of this region in mind when answering the next set of questions.



2.3. To start you thinking about the cultural geography of your region, identify:

- Common or unique characteristic of the natural landscape  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Unofficial capital city \_\_\_\_\_
- Famous tourist site for visitors who want to experience the essence of your region \_\_\_\_\_
- Movie or TV show set in and symbolic of your region  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Novel about your region \_\_\_\_\_

2.4. For each of the following culture traits, identify a notable example associated with your region. For each trait, make your best guess about whether it is unique (found exclusively in your region), prevalent (not unique to your region but more prevalent or widespread in your region than elsewhere), or the same (as most of the United States and Canada).

- |  |          |             |        |
|--|----------|-------------|--------|
| • Food _____   | Unique__ | Prevalent__ | Same__ |
| • Clothing _____   | Unique__ | Prevalent__ | Same__ |
| • Crops _____  | Unique__ | Prevalent__ | Same__ |
| • Livestock _____  | Unique__ | Prevalent__ | Same__ |
| • Music _____  | Unique__ | Prevalent__ | Same__ |
| • Sport or game _____  | Unique__ | Prevalent__ | Same__ |
| • Architectural style _____  | Unique__ | Prevalent__ | Same__ |
| • Building material _____  | Unique__ | Prevalent__ | Same__ |
| • Mode of transportation _____   | Unique__ | Prevalent__ | Same__ |
| • Prominent religion _____   | Unique__ | Prevalent__ | Same__ |
| • Local expression _____   | Unique__ | Prevalent__ | Same__ |
| • Accent (spell phonetically an example of the pronunciation)<br>_____ | Unique__ | Prevalent__ | Same__ |

2.5. Which of the cultural traits in your list in Question 2.4 was the least distinctive to your region? Why do you think that your region has lost its distinctiveness in this aspect of culture?

2.6. Are there any prominent cultural traits in your region that originated outside of Canada and the United States? If so, what is it, where did it come from, and when do you think it was brought to your area?

2.7. Is the “nonnative” cultural trait in Question 2.6 an example of syncretism, and if so, how has it been modified and fused with a North American cultural element?

2.8. Do you think regional culture traits are disappearing in the United States and Canada as the global economy becomes more pronounced? Why or why not?



Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Instructor: \_\_\_\_\_

## Layers of Tradition: Culture Regions at Different Scales

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### ► ACTIVITY 3: REGIONAL IMAGERY

In Activities 1 and 2 you tried to distinguish the key characteristics of a culture region based on maps and personal experience. Activity 3 uses another method to measure characteristics of a region by looking at major themes that define the region on postcards. Themes on postcards project recognizable symbols or scenes that people from around the nation or world can identify as representing that region.

- A. Go to some local stores that sell postcards and identify the symbols, cultural characteristics, or features of the cultural landscape that best represent the region in which you live. Keep a tally of the number of times each theme appears. You should sample at least 20 to 30 postcards. The more you use, the easier your task will be.

3.1. Fill in the following table of the dominant themes that appear on the postcards and the number of times you saw cards in this group. The number of themes you should identify will vary for each region. Use an extra sheet of paper if you identify more than eight themes. Think about which themes struck you as repeatedly appearing, and try to be thorough in creating the groups.

<u>Theme (fill in as many as necessary)</u>	<u>Number of Appearances</u>
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	
6.	
7.	
8.	

- B. Buy five postcards that you believe are most representative of the themes you identified (these should cost you very little). You will hand in these five postcards with the assignment, and your instructor will return them to you.

3.2. What were the dominant themes in the postcards that you selected?

Card 1:

Card 2:

Card 3:

Card 4:

Card 5:

3.3. What is surprising to find or not find in this list of dominant themes?

3.4. Postcards are representations of a region designed for a specific purpose. What is the intent of these postcards? What message are they conveying about the region?

3.5. You read in the Introduction that culture regions have different subcultures, each with its own identity. Did you see examples of any “minority” cultures represented in your postcard themes, and if so, were those portrayals realistic? What groups, if any, were not represented?

3.6. Whose regional identity do you think these cards represent? In other words, whose belief system determines what imagery appears for your region?

## ► DEFINITIONS OF KEY TERMS

**Core** The zone of greatest concentration or homogeneity of the culture traits that characterize a region.

**Cultural Landscape** Modifications to the environment by humans, including the built environment and agricultural systems, that reflect aspects of their culture.

**Culture** The shared understandings that guide behavior and values and condition a group's perception of the world. Culture is learned from one generation to the next and evolves over time.

**Culture Region** A region defined by similar culture traits and cultural landscape features.

**Culture Trait** A defining characteristic of the culture that is shared by most, if not all, members.

**Domain** The area outside of the core of a culture region in which the culture is still dominant but less intense.

**Ecological Trilog**y The traditional symbiotic relationship among villages, cities, and nomadic tribes in the Middle East, in which villages grow irrigated crops, cities provide the central mosque and bazaar, and tribes herd livestock and provide transportation and protection.

**Formal Region** An area of near uniformity (homogeneity) in one or several characteristics.

**Functional Region** A region created by the interactions between a central node and surrounding locations.

**Perceptual Region** An area defined by subjective perceptions that reflect the feelings and images about key place characteristics. When these perceptions come from the local, ordinary folk, a perceptual region can be called a **vernacular region**.

**Region** An area characterized by similarity or by cohesiveness that sets it apart from other areas.

**Regional Identity** An awareness of being a part of a group of people living in a culture region.

**Sphere** The zone of outer influence for a culture region.

**Symbol** A material object that represents some greater meaning or refers to something else.

**Syncretism** The fusion of two distinctive cultural traits into a unique new hybrid trait.

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## ► WEB RESOURCES

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- Harvard University, Center for Middle Eastern Studies: [fas-www.harvard.edu/~mideast/](http://fas-www.harvard.edu/~mideast/).
- Indian Pueblos Cultural Center: [www.indianpueblo.org/](http://www.indianpueblo.org/).
- Lebanon Atlas: [www.lebanonatlas.com](http://www.lebanonatlas.com).
- National Hispanic Cultural Center: [www.hcfoundation.org/](http://www.hcfoundation.org/).
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- Planet Arabia: [english.planetarabia.com/index.cfm](http://english.planetarabia.com/index.cfm).
- University of Arizona, Center for Middle Eastern Studies: [www.cmes.arizona.edu/](http://www.cmes.arizona.edu/).

## ► ITEMS TO HAND IN

- Activity 1: • Questions 1.1–1.6, including your overlay map for Question 1.4
- Activity 2: • Questions 2.1–2.8
- Activity 3: • Questions 3.1–3.6, including the five postcards of dominant regional themes

