

Teaching a New History: The History of North America.
Social Studies Colloquium, Missouri Department of Elementary and
Secondary Education



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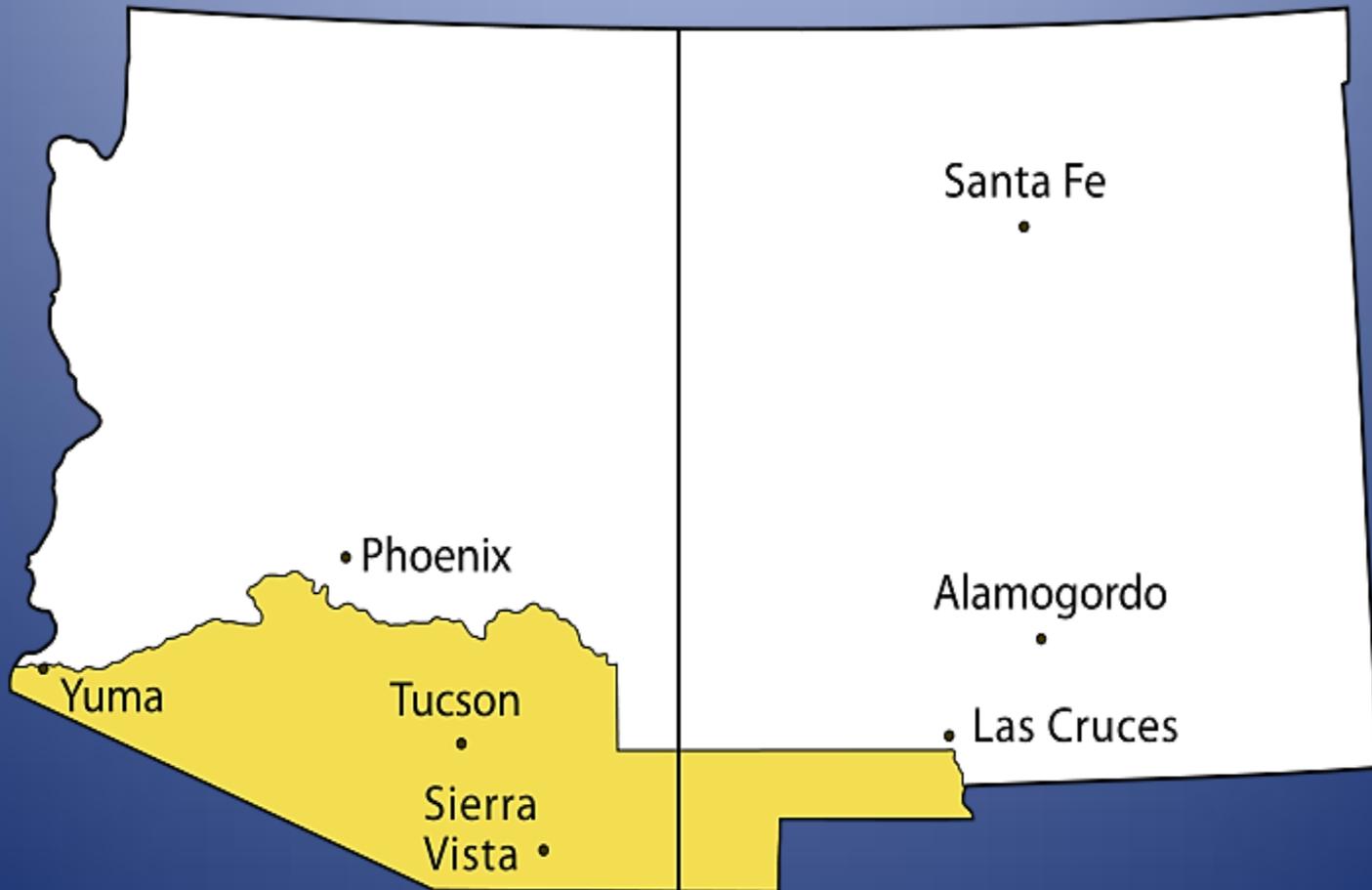
THE LAY OF THE LAND: MEXICO, CANADA, AND AMERICA

The Spanish, the French, the Dutch, and English shared an underlying cultural unity. This was true in Europe and it was true of the civilization that Europeans transplanted to North America. In respect to North American social development, one might argue that cultural factors—ones which distinguished New England from New France and from New Spain—basically canceled each other out, making geography all the more significant.

Tucson, Arizona



The Gadsden Purchase



Mission San Xavier del Bac, outside of Tucson, Arizona.



Father Eusebio Francisco Kino (1645-1711)

Source: Diorama at the Tumacácori Museum, NPS.





*Daniel Boone Escorting Settlers through the
Cumberland Gap (1851–52)*
George Caleb Bingham



There is no question that the very different geographies of Mexico, Canada, and the United States have a great deal of explanatory power.

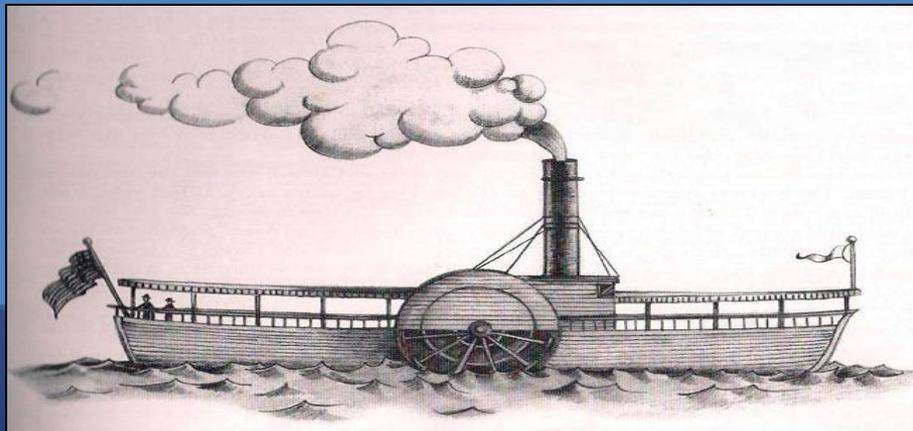
The fact that Mexico is so mountainous that if the country were flattened out its size would be larger than that of Asia is a key to understanding the history of Mexico's infrastructural and socioeconomic development.

Sierra Madre Oriental



Mexico's geography stands in contrast to its northern neighbors of Canada and the U.S. who possess large swaths of railroad and highway suitable terrain as well as long, navigable rivers, e.g., the St. Lawrence, the Ohio, the Columbia, and the Mississippi.

Image: wpgates.com



The Rio Grande, or in Mexico the “Río Bravo,” stretches 1,896 miles, but is not navigable. It forms the border between Texas and Mexico and empties into the Gulf of Mexico.

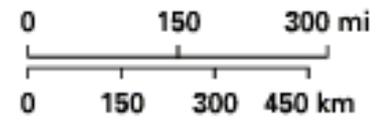


Like the Rio Grande, the Colorado River is also long, 1,450 miles, and it also originates in the U.S. But due to overdevelopment and drought, the Colorado River rarely reaches the Sea of Cortez in the Gulf of California. In 2014, the U.S. and Mexican governments agreed to return a portion of the river to the Gulf.



The mountains of Mexico: the Sierra Madre Oriental, the Sierra Madre del Sur, the Sierra Madre Occidental, run north to southeast; the Sierra Nevada—the volcano belt—transverses south central Mexico. These different ranges enclose the Central Plateau, walling off much of Mexico's plaza-centered pueblos from the coasts (not unlike the relationship of Spain's interior to its coastal areas).

Topography of Mexico



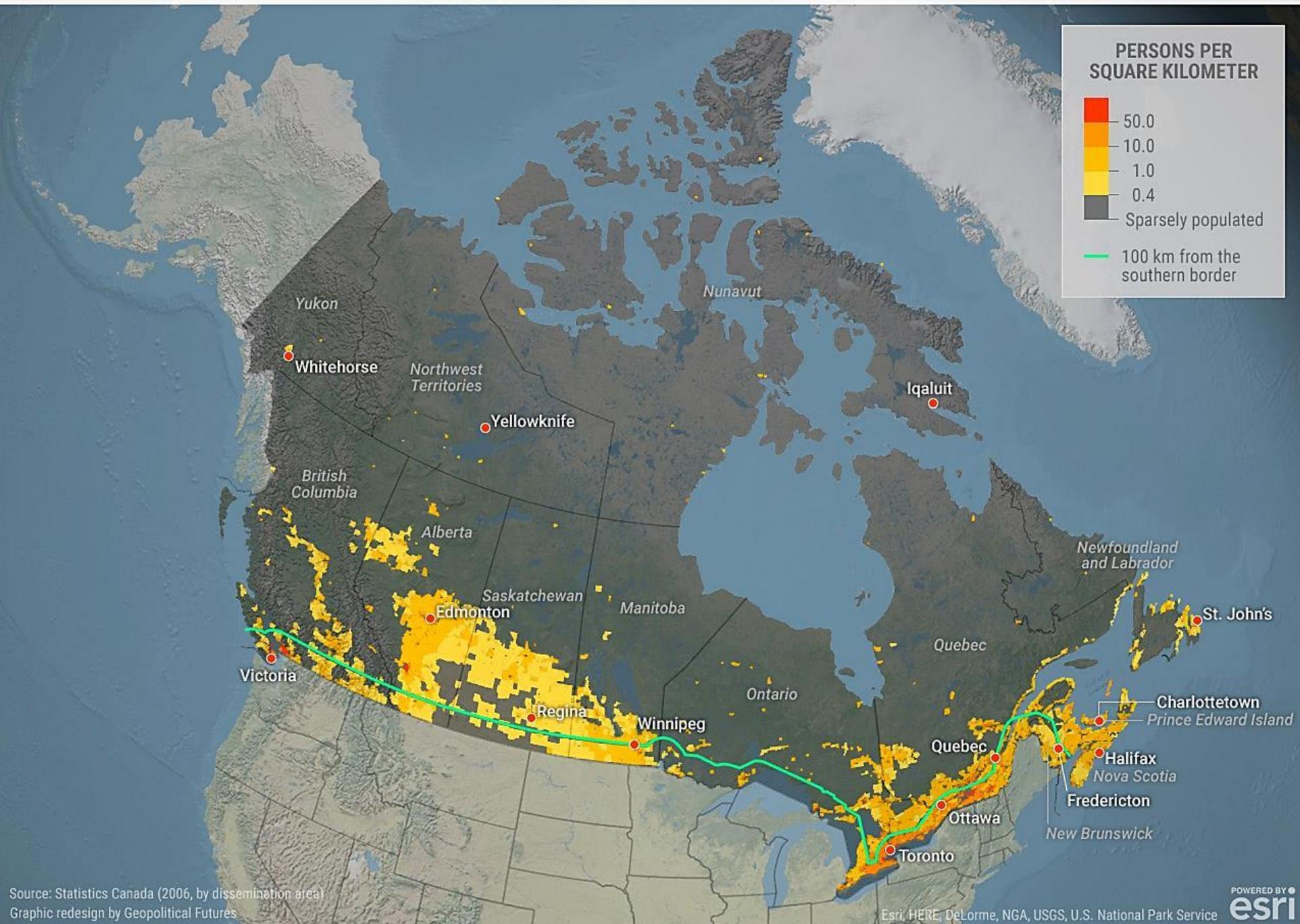
The Yucatán to the east and Baja California to the west, both large peninsulas, are, in effect, islands unto themselves, separated as they are from Mexico proper by the Gulfs of Campeche and California, respectively. These gulfs further divide this already topographically divided country. Mexican history, in short, is incomprehensible without reference to this broken geography.

In Canada, geography is, if anything, even more important. Canada is the largest country in area in the world, after Russia. It faces three oceans: the Atlantic, the Arctic, and the Pacific, giving the country the longest coastline.



And yet for all of this territory, Canada's has a population of only 32 million, roughly 10% of the population of its southern neighbor, the U.S., and three-quarters of that relatively smaller population is huddled inside Canada's habitable zone, a narrow band which extends barely 100 miles north of, and along, the U.S.-Canadian border.

POPULATION DENSITY OF CANADA

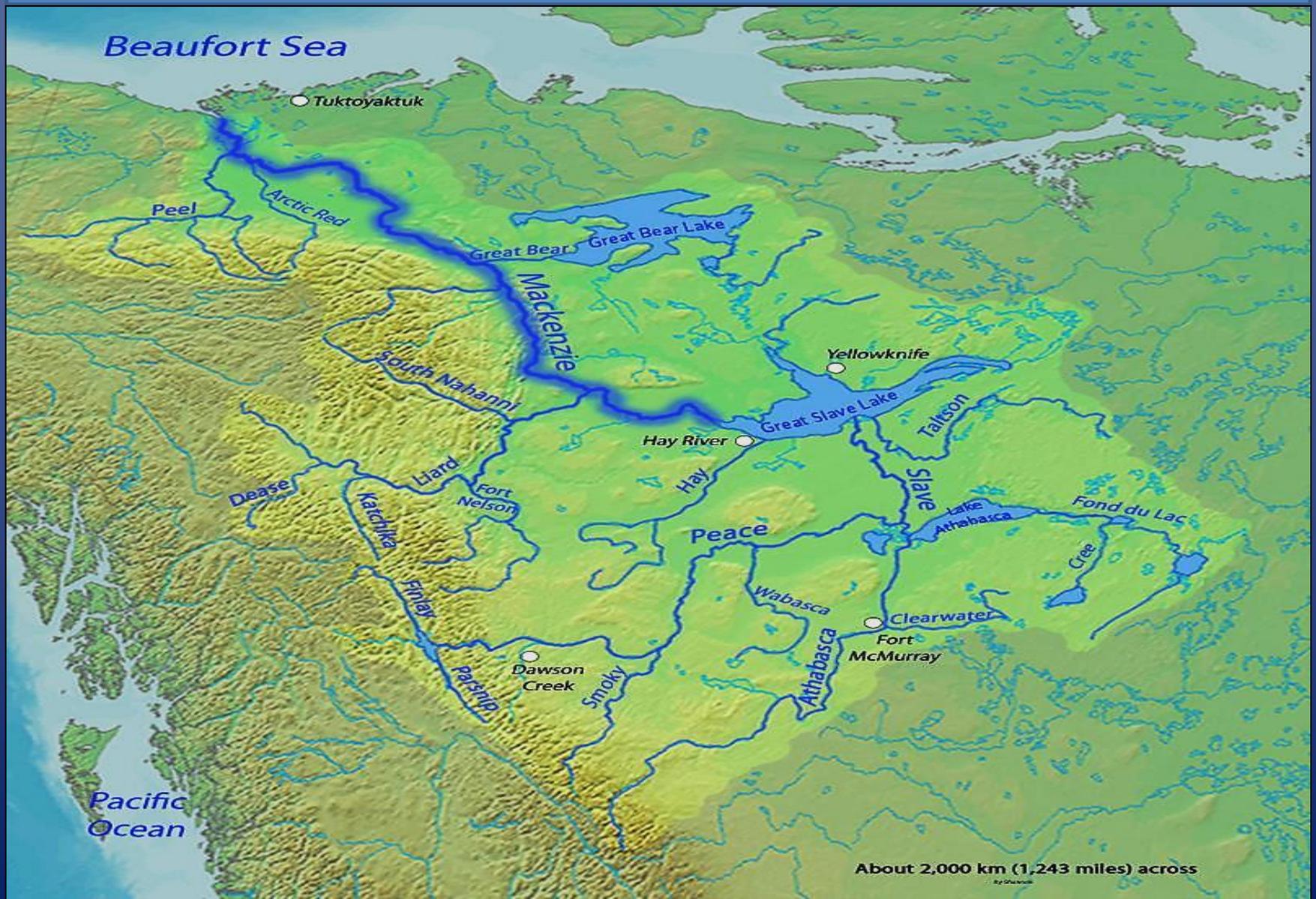


Source: Statistics Canada (2006, by dissemination area)
Graphic redesign by Geopolitical Futures

Beyond this zone is the great white and largely empty north. It is drained by the Mackenzie River, which flows north into the Beaufort Sea. The Mackenzie forms North America's largest river system, after the Mississippi.



Mackenzie Watershed



The Mackenzie watershed consists of boreal forest (taiga) and wetlands.

Image: Mackenzie River delta, near Inuvik, northwestern Northwest Territories.



To the west of the Mackenzie Mountains, is the source of the Yukon River. The Yukon originates at Atlin and Tagish Lakes in northern British Columbia, crosses the U.S.-Canadian border, drains central Alaska, and finally empties into the Bering Sea, south of Norton Sound.

Yukon River Watershed

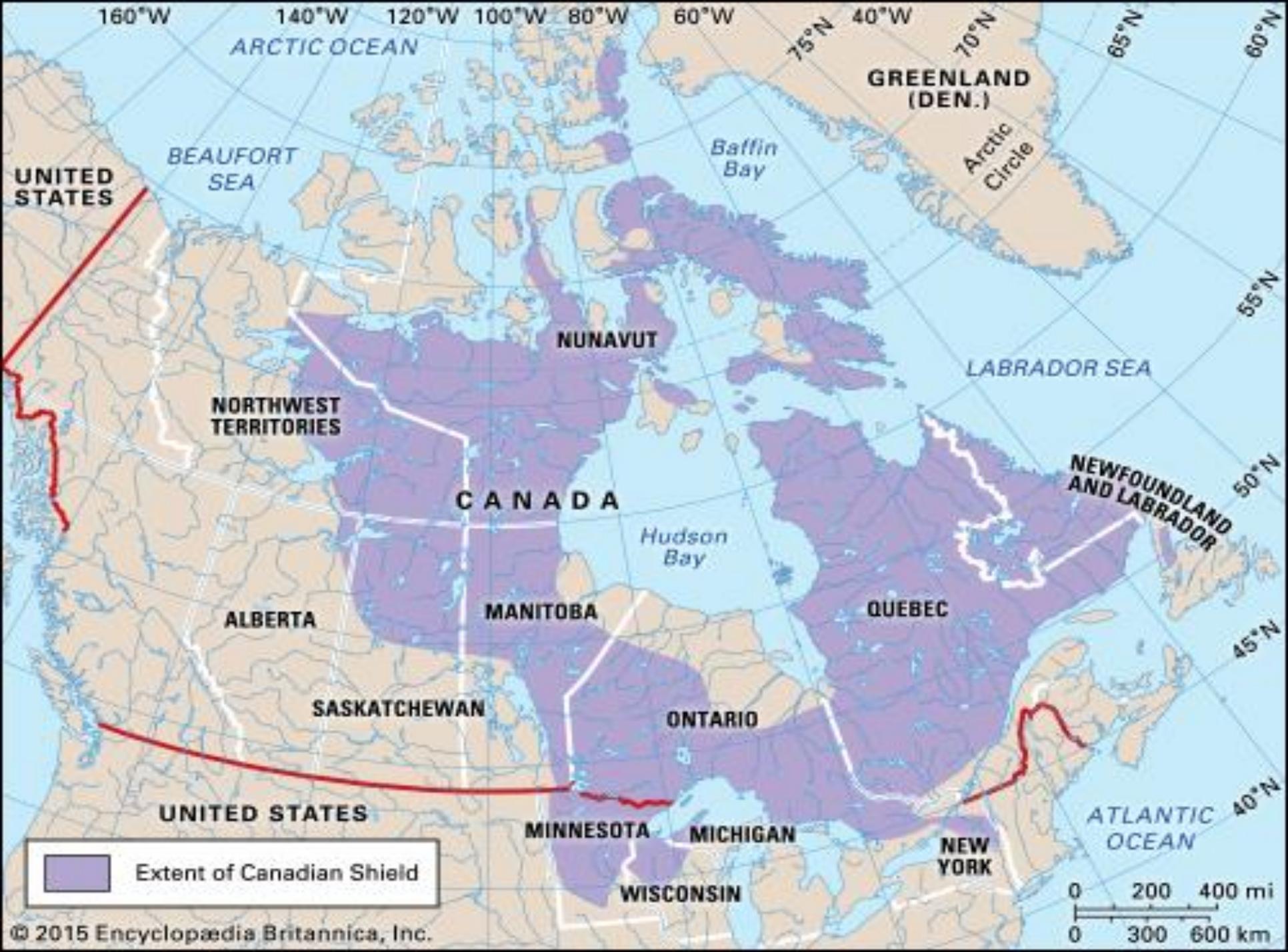


On the southern end of British Columbia, the Columbia River originates in the Canadian Rockies and heads south and enters the U.S. Pacific Northwest, and then turns and rolls westward, forming the border between the U.S. states of Washington and Oregon, before terminating at the Pacific Coast.

The Columbia River Basin.



If mountains define Mexico's topography, in Canada the significance of the great Laurentian Shield (in French the *Bouclier Canadien*) cannot be overstated.



This vast cap of Precambrian rock covers the eastern half of Canada (centered under the frigid waters of Hudson Bay), from the Great Lakes to the Arctic Ocean.



Samuel de Champlain described the shield as “a wilderness, being barren and uninhabited,” full of “rocks and mountains and not ten *arpents* of arable land.” It was “frightful” and “abandoned.” But Champlain found there an abundance of sorts—a “grand quantity of blueberries” in “such plenty that it is marvelous.”

Indeed, Canada is rich in many things—blueberries as well as timber, fish (the Grand Banks off of Newfoundland was once the richest cod fishery in the world), furs, and minerals. But, relative to the U.S., Canada could boast of relatively few farms because of the thin soils found on this eroded plain.

Precambrian bedrock of the Canadian Shield rising out of Reindeer Lake, on the border between northeastern Saskatchewan and northwestern Manitoba.



Canada's fertile prairie provinces—Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta—lie between the rocky shield to the east and the Rocky Mountains to the west.





Farmland, Saskatchewan

The French found arable land to the east and south of the country in the valley of the St. Lawrence River, between the cities of the Ville de Québec (founded in 1608 by Samuel de Champlain), which was situated between the Gulf of St. Lawrence and the continent's interior, and Montréal, established later in 1642 on a riparian island.



St. Lawrence / Great Lakes Watershed

Superior

Michigan

Huron

Erie

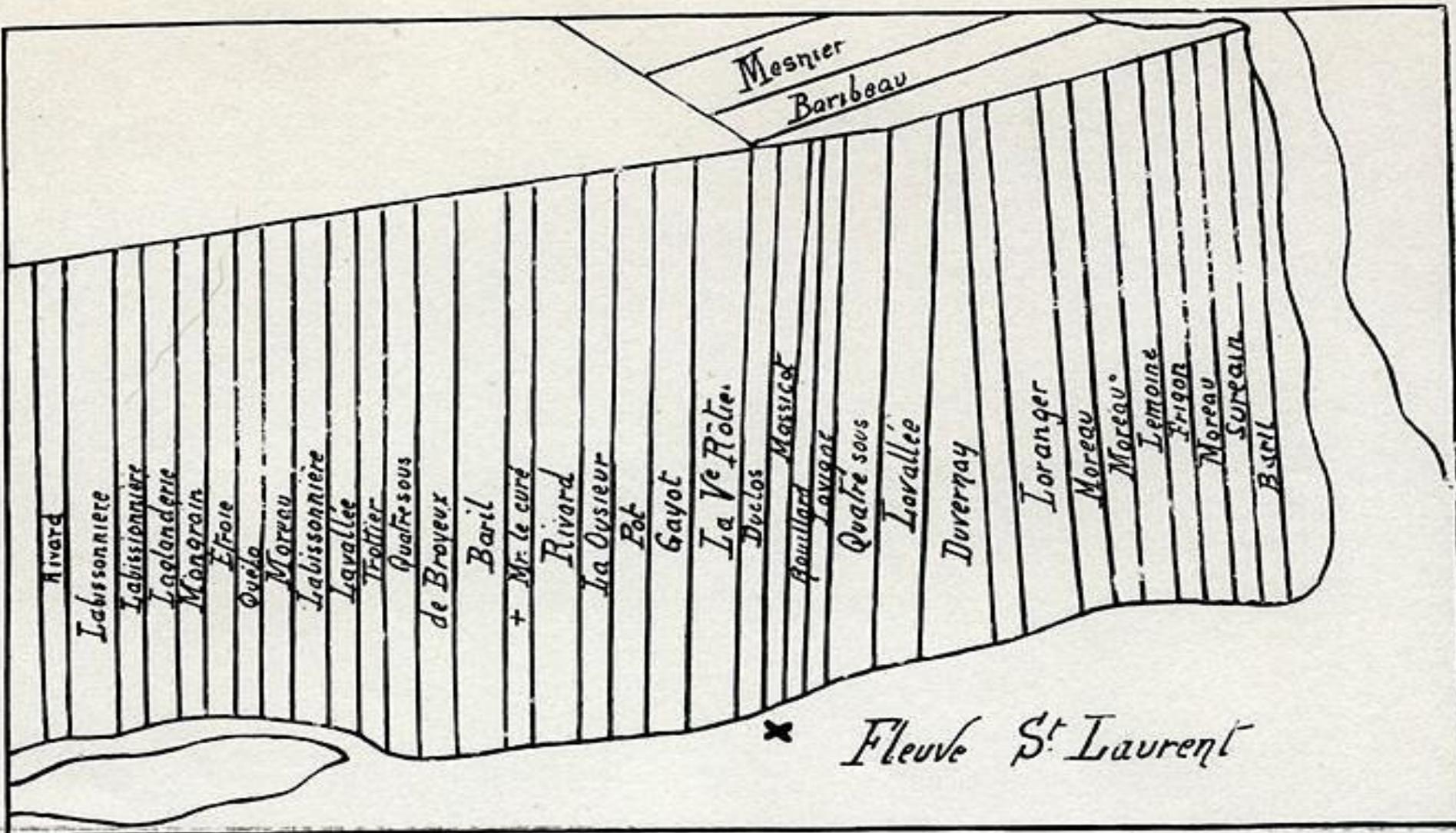
Ontario

Saint Lawrence River

Gulf of Saint Lawrence

The French seigneurs or lords sensibly divided their seigneuries or lands into long and narrow lots—a Norman practice. Each lot or strip of land, which was worked by a farm family, ran down to the river thereby increasing the number of points of riverfront access than would have been possible with square or rectilinear lots. Old World manorialism brought economy and efficiency to New World land use, at least in this particular corner of the continent.

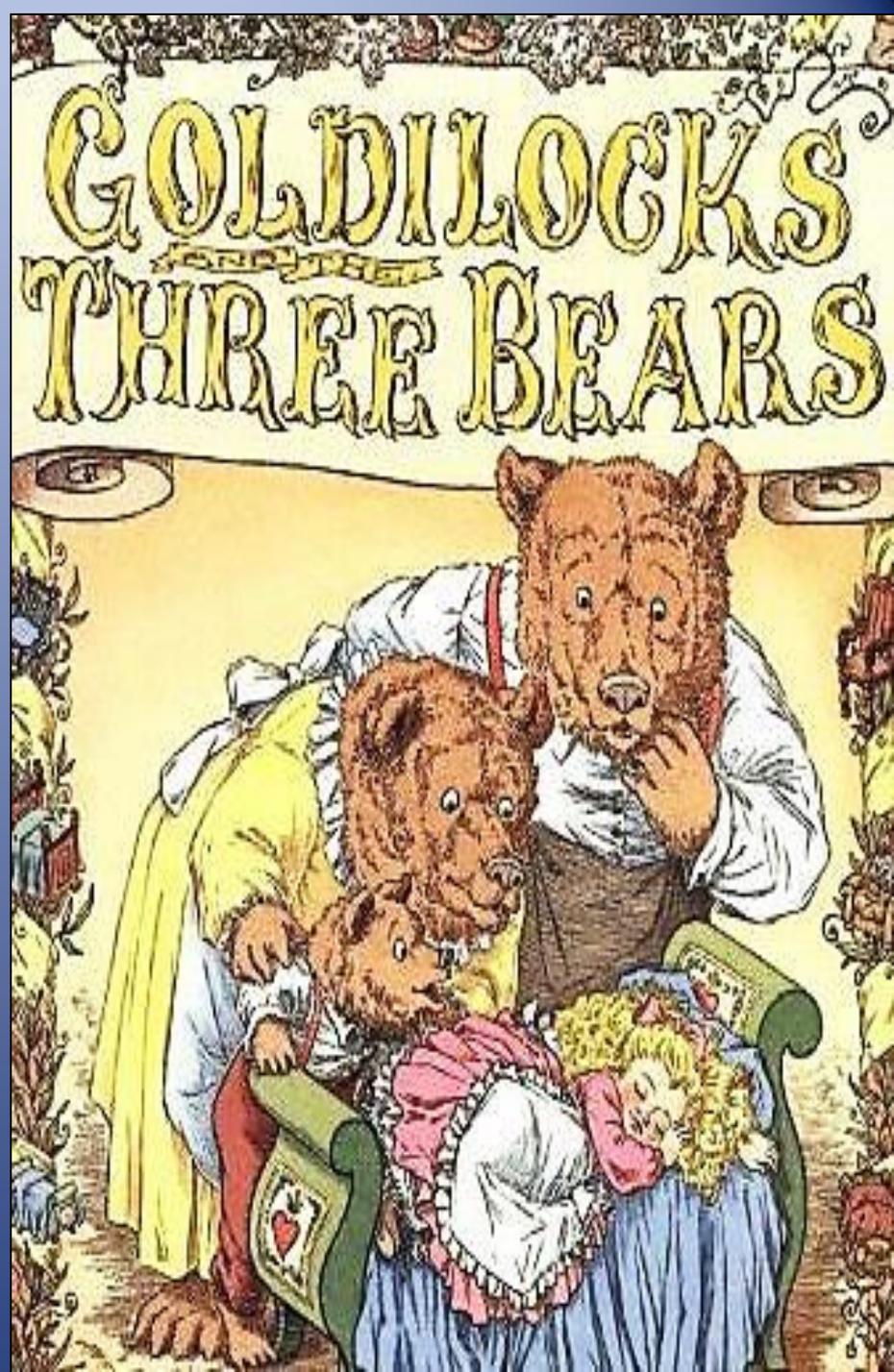
The long-lot system.



Quebec City and the St. Lawrence River



America:
The Goldilocks
Country—Not too
hot; not too cold.
But just right.



The United States of America, or simply *America*, encompasses the rich mid-section of the continent, stretching from Cape Hatteras in North Carolina to Cape Mendocino in California.

Cape Hatteras



Cape Mendocino



America enjoys two long coasts—one facing the Atlantic, one facing the Pacific—each crenulated by numerous harbors and bays: the Cook Inlet, Puget Sound, San Francisco Bay, Massachusetts Bay, New York Harbor, and Chesapeake Bay.

The Golden Gate Bridge.



Verrazano-Narrows Bridge



The Great Lakes, a series of huge fresh water seas (Lakes Superior, Michigan, Huron, Erie, and Ontario), were shared by the U.S. and Canada, except for Canada's other great lakes: Great Bear Lake, Great Slave Lake as well as Lakes Athabasca, Reindeer, and Winnipeg; and the other U.S. great lakes: the Great Salt Lake in Utah as well as Lake Okeechobee in Florida.



Lake Okeechobee

The U.S. National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) has released satellite composite and cloud-free images of the U.S. at night, revealing a country clearly bisected, along the 100th meridian, into two distinct patterns of illumination—a proxy measure of the American adaptation to the continent's environment and climate patterns.





In 1878, John Wesley Powell, one of the government's foremost scientists at the time, warned Congress that the western half of the nation, outside of the Pacific Northwest, received less than 20 inches of rain a year. This amount was insufficient for traditional rainfed agriculture, which was practiced in Western Europe and in Eastern North America, where European civilization had been successfully transplanted.

REPORT

ON THE

LANDS OF THE ARID REGION

OF THE

UNITED STATES,

WITH A

MORE DETAILED ACCOUNT OF THE LANDS OF UTAH.

WITH MAPS.

BY

J. W. POWELL.

SECOND EDITION.

WASHINGTON:
GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE.
1879.

Powell's inconvenient truth was angrily ignored by growth-minded Western politicians who insisted that the Westward movement could proceed on a business-as-usual-basis, provided the federal government funded irrigation projects in the nation's arid lands, which covered twenty states.

In 1902, President Theodore Roosevelt created a federal bureaucracy in Washington, D.C., to reclaim the American West. These projects and policies helped alter the nation's settlement and agricultural patterns.





Missouri's Dragon (1945)





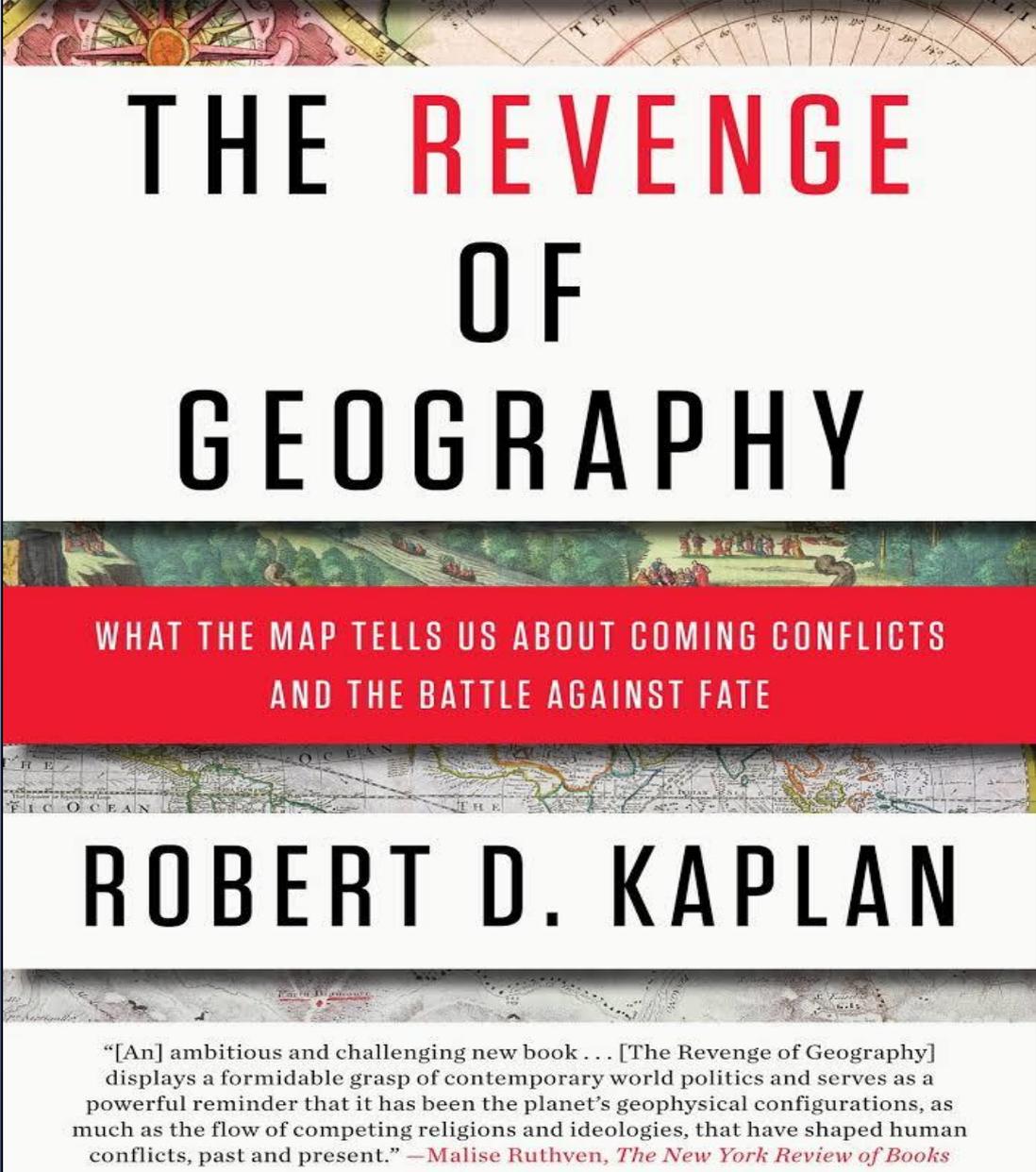
Lake of the Ozarks

What emerged in the American West was an
oasis civilization.



Robert D. Kaplan argues that Geography is key to understanding the past and predicting the future.

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER



THE REVENGE OF GEOGRAPHY

WHAT THE MAP TELLS US ABOUT COMING CONFLICTS
AND THE BATTLE AGAINST FATE

ROBERT D. KAPLAN

"[An] ambitious and challenging new book . . . [The Revenge of Geography] displays a formidable grasp of contemporary world politics and serves as a powerful reminder that it has been the planet's geophysical configurations, as much as the flow of competing religions and ideologies, that have shaped human conflicts, past and present." —Malise Ruthven, *The New York Review of Books*

The U.S.-Canadian Border, including Alaska, is 5,525 miles in length.



The U.S.-Mexican Border is
1,933 miles long.



America shares these borders and the surrounding geography with its two neighbors. The line dividing the U.S. grassland state of North Dakota and the Canadian grassland province of Manitoba, for instance, or the line that runs between the U.S. desert state of Arizona and the Mexican desert state of Sonora are not natural, they are cultural—the products of diplomacy, purchase, or war.

Although the geography along these borders is identical, one of the greatest divides in North American social development occurs along the border between El Paso and Ciudad Juárez.

El Paso, Texas

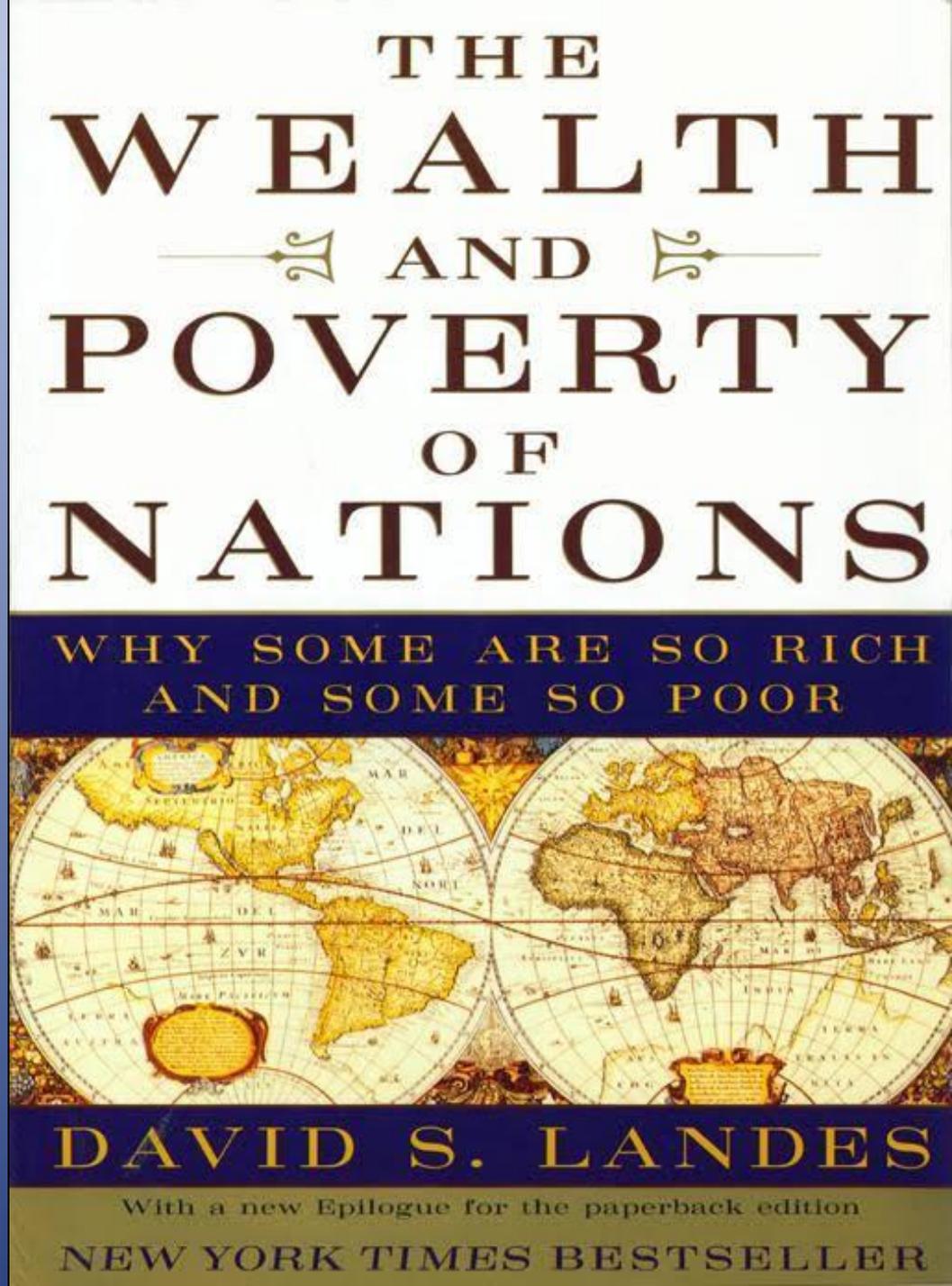


Juárez, Chihuahua



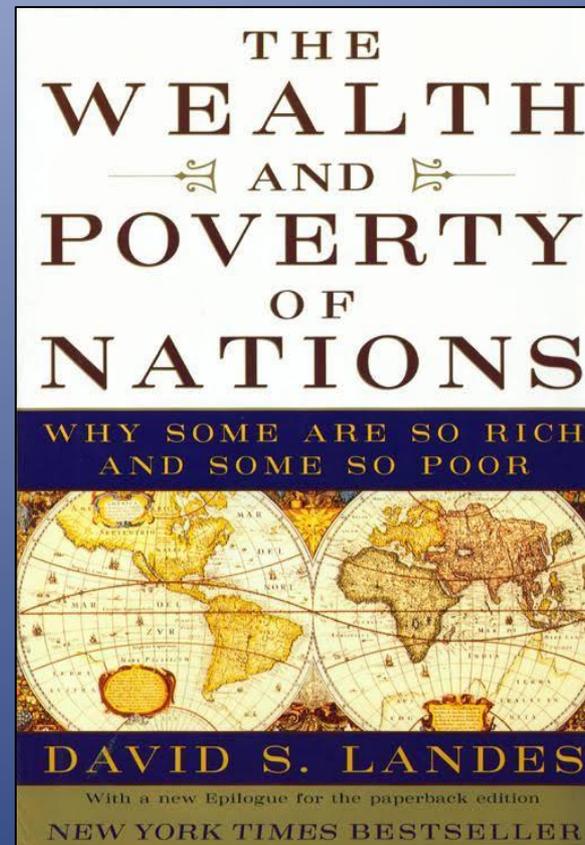
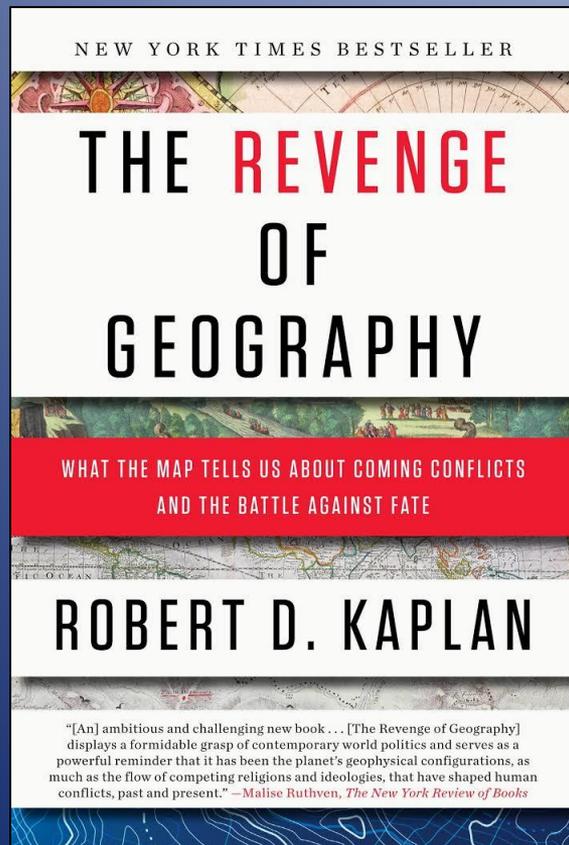
As important as geography is, it alone cannot explain North American history.

At the other extreme, there is David Landes who argues that it is culture that makes all the difference.



This is true not only in terms of the respective differences that exist on either side of the “Tortilla Curtain” between Mexico and America but also in the dynamic interplay of these two cultures with each other over time. Neither country exists in isolation of the other. And this is no less true of the U.S.-Canadian border, although the differences in social development there are not nearly as extreme.

Geography or Culture?



End of Part I.

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1. North American Prehistory and History, 12,500 B.C. to A.D. 1519

- 1.Unity.
- 2.Differentiation.
- 3.Asymmetry.



Source: Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission.



Source: arcticcircle.uconn.edu



Clovis Point.

Source:
www.ohiohistory.org.

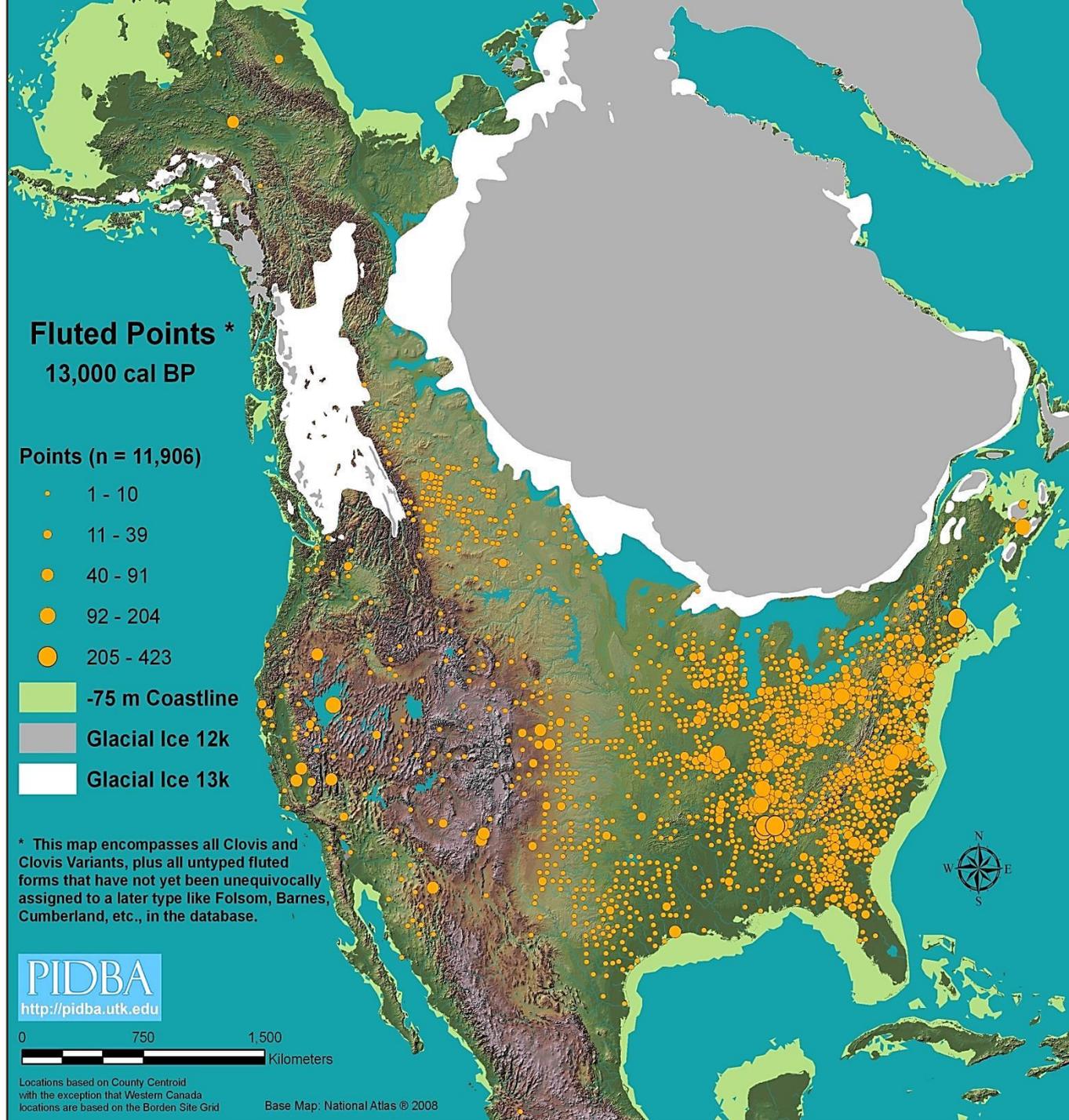
Mastodon State Park. Source: users.stlcc.edu.





Pleistocene Megafauna. Source: swvirtualmuseum.nau.edu.

The Paleo-Indian Data Base of the Americas



From Paleoindian Unity to Indian Social Differentiation and Evolution.

Source: swvirtualmuseum.nau.edu.



The V-Shaped Geography of Social Development*

Upper, Middle, and Lower North America

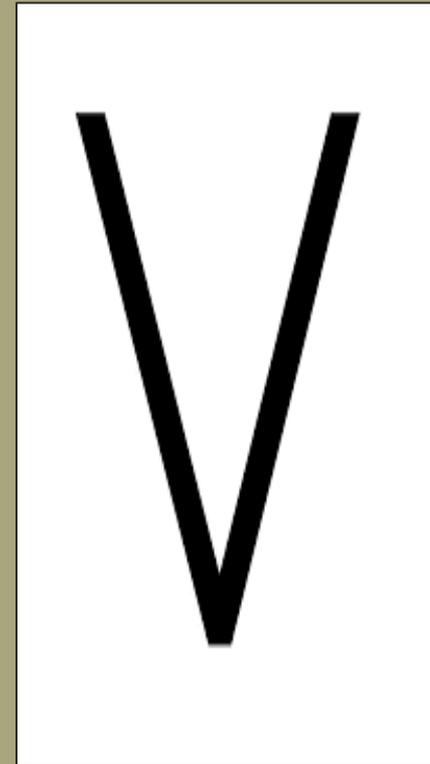
- 1) Lithic Stage (10,000-5,000 B.C.).
- 2) Archaic Stage (5,000 B.C to A.D. 1800s).

Middle and Lower North America

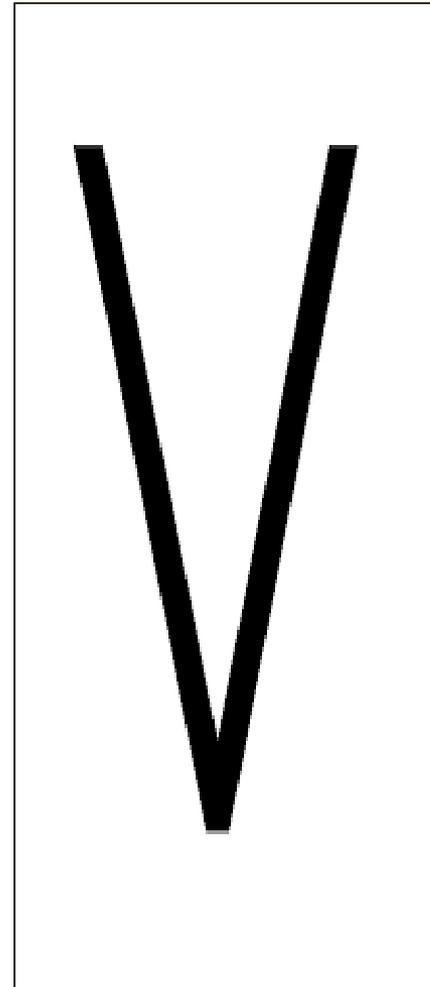
- 3) Formative Stage (1500 B.C.- A.D. 1300s)

Lower North America

- 4) Classic Stage (A.D. 1 – 1000)
- 5) Postclassic Stage (1000 -1521)



* The stages are based on the scheme of Gordon R. Willey and Philip Phillips.



1) The Lithic Stage (end of the Last Ice Age to 5,000 B.C.).

Chief characteristics:

- 1) Populations small and thinly scattered
- 2) Stone tools and weapons
- 3) Hunting and gathering of wild food

Notable achievement of this period: humans colonize the entire continent.



Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump





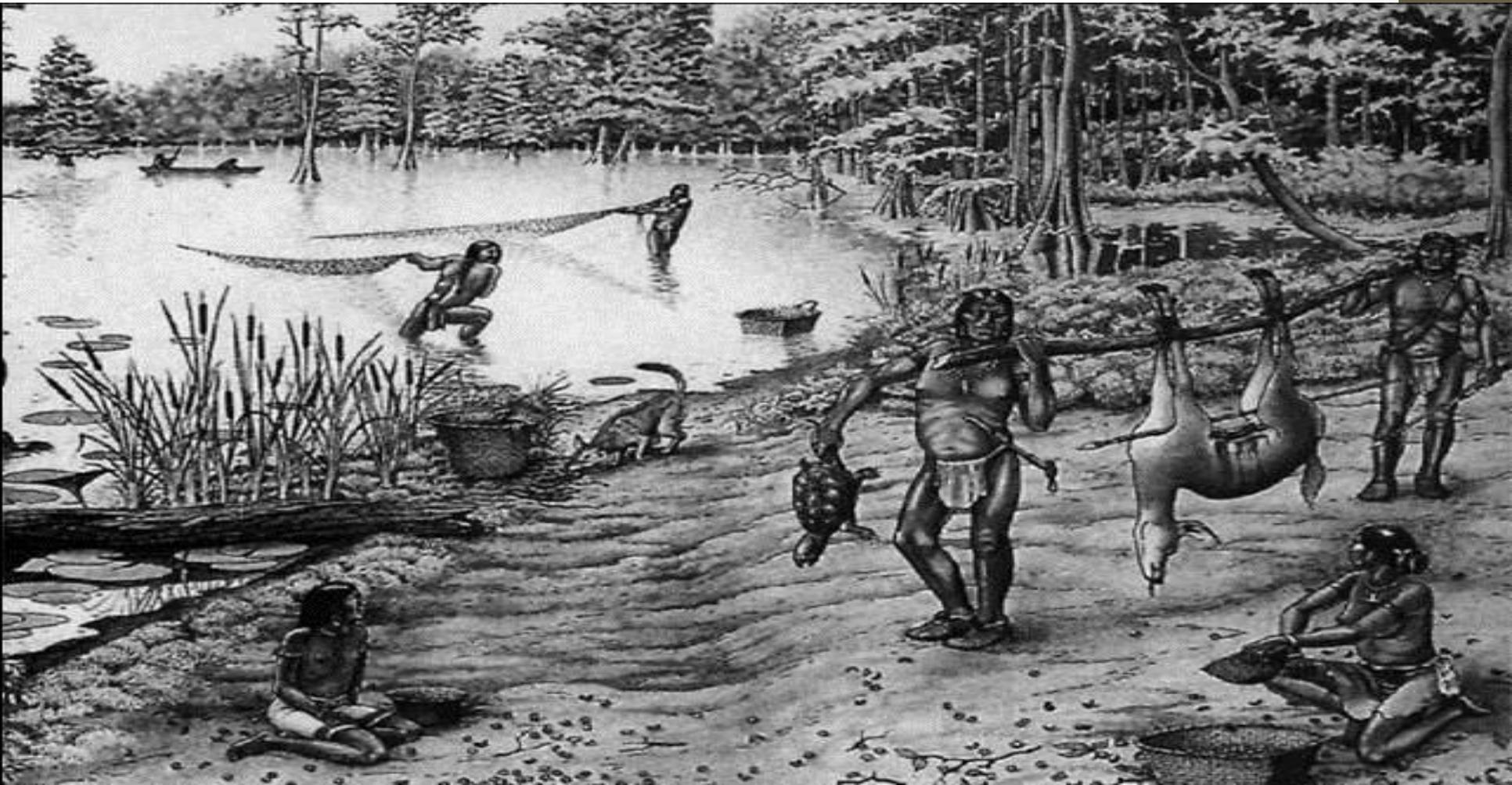
“Buffalo Drive” (1947) by William Robinson Leigh.
Photo: Buffalo Bill Center of the West



2) The Archaic Stage (5,000 B.C to A.D. 1800s).

Marked by sophisticated hunting and gathering techniques, supplemented by horticulture. Archaic Indians harvested the seasons. For many Eastern Woodland, Californian, and British Columbian Indians, the Archaic stage represented a cultural climax.

A Picture of Social and Ecological Harmony Archaic Foragers in the Ancient Woodlands of Mississippi



3) The Formative Stage (1500 B.C.- A.D. 1300s)

Cahokia. Source: *National Geographic Magazine*.



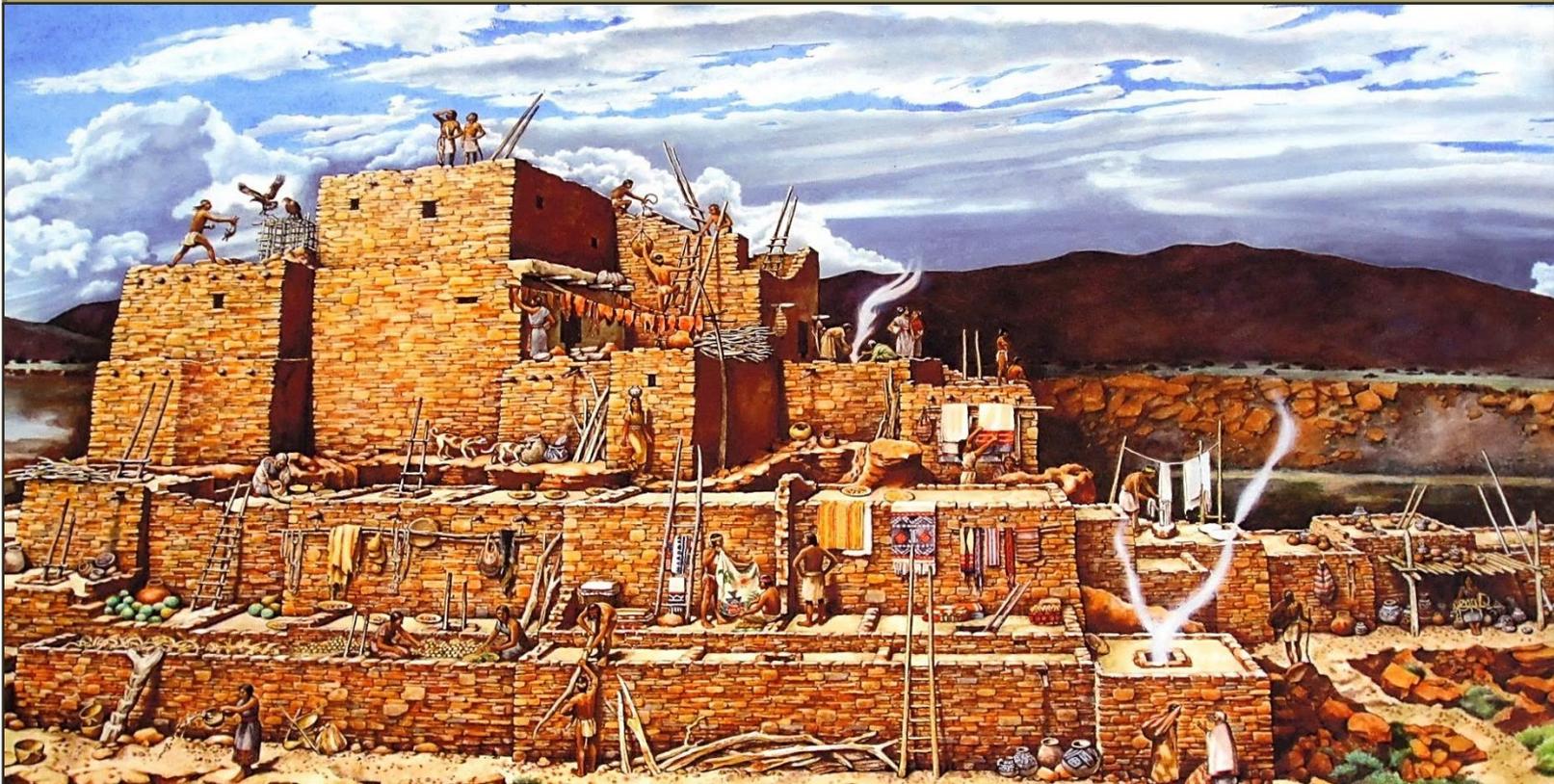


Source: Cahokia Mounds Museum.

Chief characteristics of the Formative Stage:

- 1) Shift from food gathering to food production
- 2) Advent of villages and towns
- 3) Abundance of ceramics and weaving

Below: Artist's rendering of Wupatki Pueblo in Northern Arizona. Source: swvirtualmuseum.nau.edu.



4. The Classic Stage (A.D. 1 – 1000).

Teotihuacán in the State of Mexico. Source: teotihuacan.com.mx.



Chief Characteristics of the Classic Stage:

- 1) The stage marks the beginning of urban life in native America.
- 2) Cities were built around ceremonial centers featuring temples, pyramids, and palaces.
- 3) The centers were of great size and elaboration.
- 4) Like their steep pyramids, classic society was stratified and hierarchical.
- 5) Urban zones contained not only rulers, priests, and their entourages but various craftsmen and handlers of produce.

Lower North America's classic civilizations ranked with the early civilizations of Egypt, Mesopotamia, and China in terms of sophistication and refinement. However, the New World was behind the Old by several millennia. This time lag would place the Americas at a crucial disadvantage when the Old and New worlds finally collided in the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

5) The Postclassic Stage (1000 -1521), evident in western Mexico, Oaxaca, and the Guatemalan highlands.

Chief Characteristics:

1) Urbanism

2) Militarism and large-scale warfare

3) Secularization or waning of religious authority—the prominence of the god of war.

Below: Aztecs at war. Source: <http://www.mexicolore.co.uk>



Capital of the Aztec Empire: Tenochtitlán, looking east, in the Valley of Mexico.





An illustration from the *Codex Magliabecchi* depicting an Aztec priest performing human sacrifice—victims were warriors captured in battle.
Source: *Encyclopedia Britannica*.

The sharp differences in the levels of social development (SD) between Europe and North America and between Upper and Lower North America would profoundly influence the European conquests of, and the history of their empires in, these two regions.

What is social development?

SD may be measured by four things:

- 1) a society's extraction of energy—from plants, animals, or fossil fuels.
- 2) its urbanism, measured by size of population.
- 3) its processing of information—writing, printing.
- 4) its capacity to project military force.

In short, SD is a society's ability to get things done.

It takes greater—*much greater*—SD to build a pyramid than it does a teepee.



Thus, in modern times, the social development of Canada and the U.S.—or Upper North American—is higher than was Mexico's or that of Lower North America. In pre-Columbian times, however, the precise opposite was true.

The transplantation of Western civilization to the Americas is largely explained by Europe's greater level of social development or capacity.

A thousand years after the fall of Rome in the fifth century, Europe had finally recovered the lost ground and the Middle Ages gave way to the Early Modern period.

Europe could now project power far from its shores; the rest of the world could not. This global asymmetry is the key to explaining the Rise of the West.

Major technologies:
Gunpowder, the Printing Press, and the Compass.

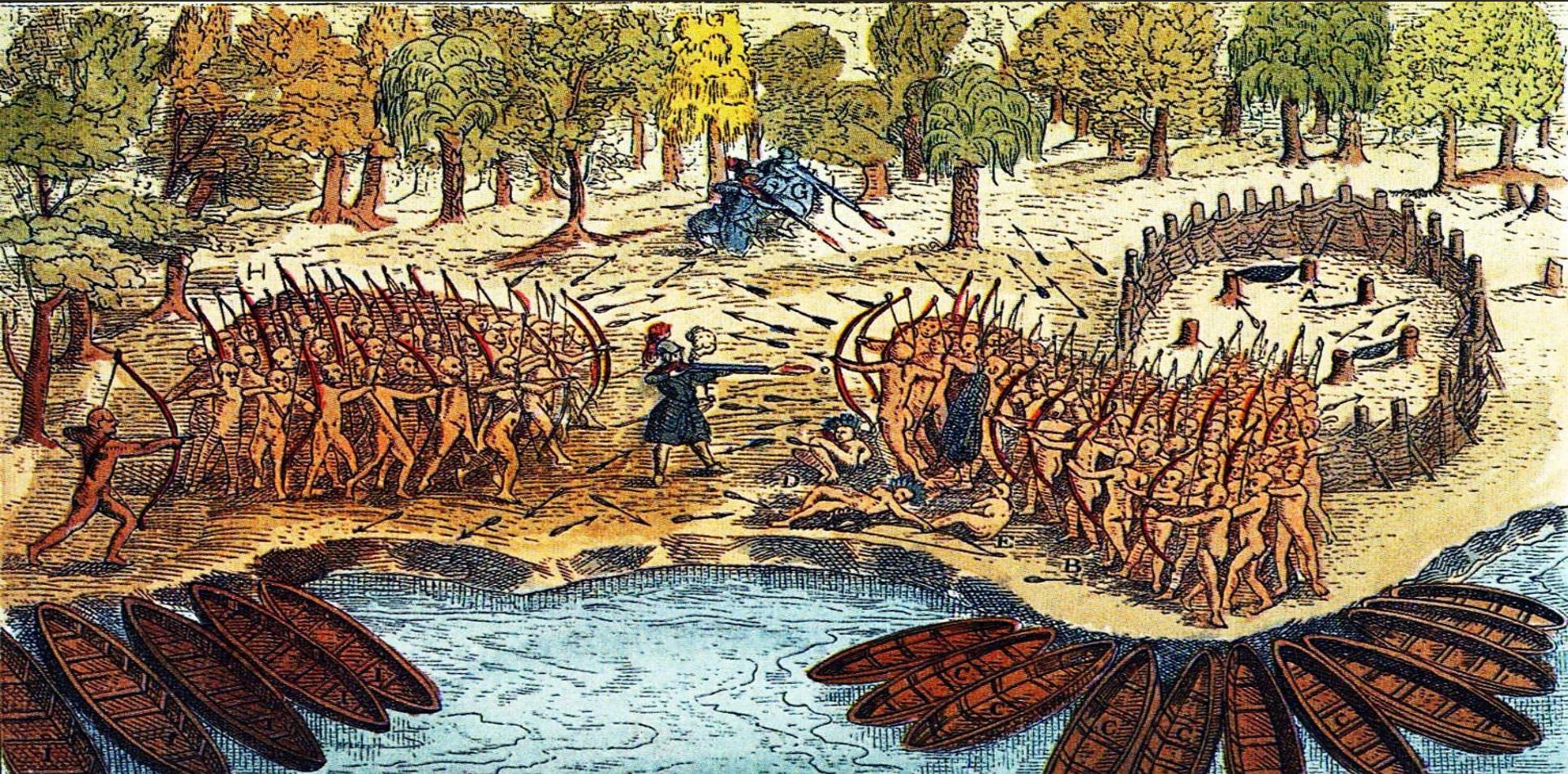
In 1521, the Spanish swiftly conquered the densely populated Post-Classic cultures of Lower North America, which were more advanced than the Archaic cultures of Upper North America.

The Storming of the Teocalli (1848) by Emmanuel Leutze.



The English, French, and Dutch began the slow subjugation of the Archaic peoples of Upper North America, which began in the early 1600s and grinded on inexorably for nearly three centuries.

Samuel de Champlain's drawing of the battle between the Iroquois and Algonquian tribes near Lake Champlain in 1609.

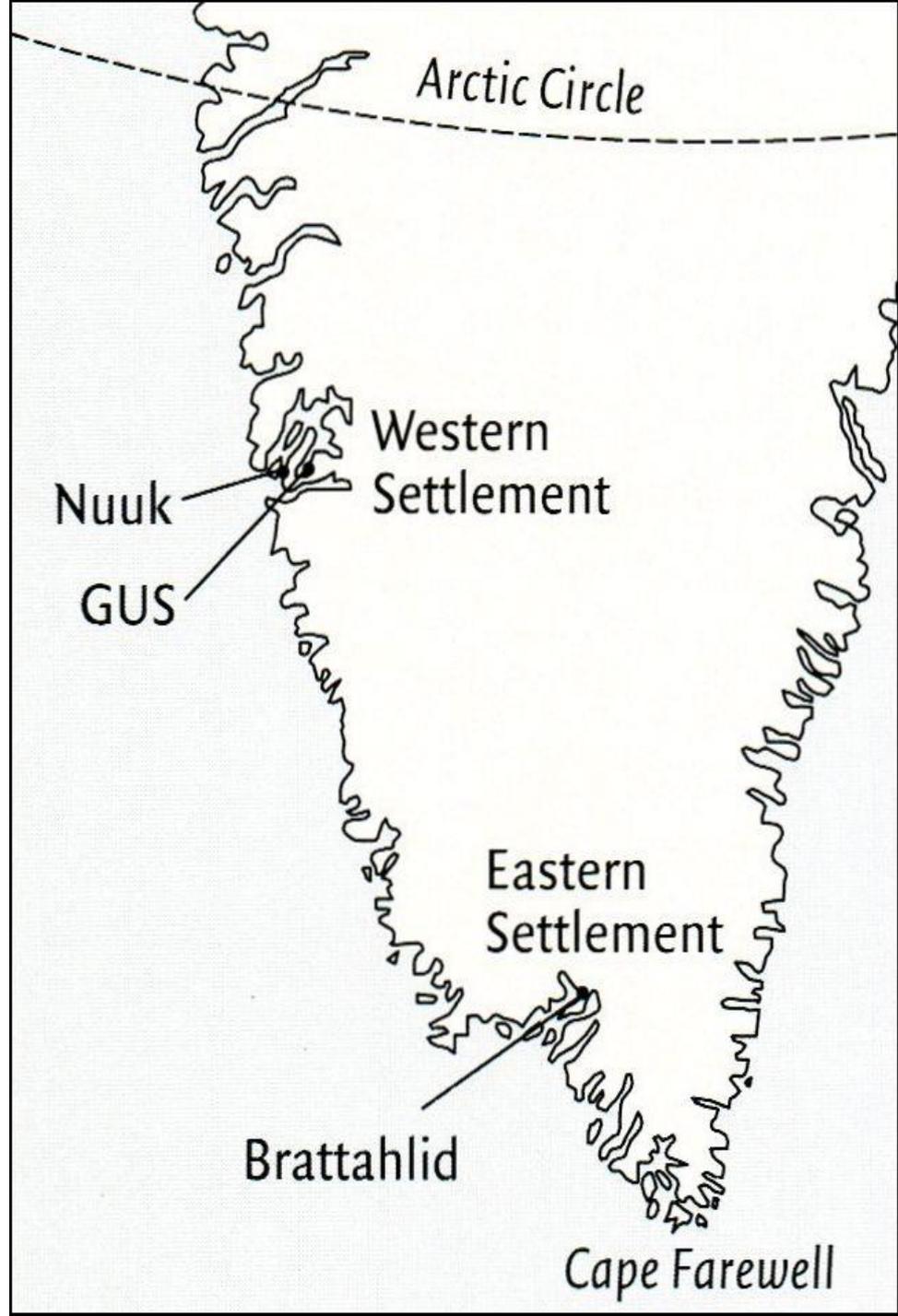


The Apache Chief Geronimo and his Chiricahua warriors surrendered in 1886. They were the original “department of homeland security.”



The First
Transatlantic
Connection:
The Vikings in
Greenland,
c. A.D. 1000-1500.

Image: Viking Archaeology.



The ruins of Hvalsey Church in the Eastern Settlement, Greenland.

Photo: Wikipedia.



Leiv Eriksson oppdager Amerika ("Leif Erikson discovers America") by Christian Krogh (1893). Image: Wikipedia.



L'Anse aux Meadows National Historic Site, Newfoundland, Canada.

Source: Wikipedia.



The Thule (Inuit) migration routes from the Bering Strait east. The Thule appear to have pushed out the more peaceful Dorset and later the Norse peoples in Greenland who were in their path.

Source of map: <http://people.wku.edu>.



Inuit bone and ivory hunting tools.

Source: <http://people.wku.edu>.

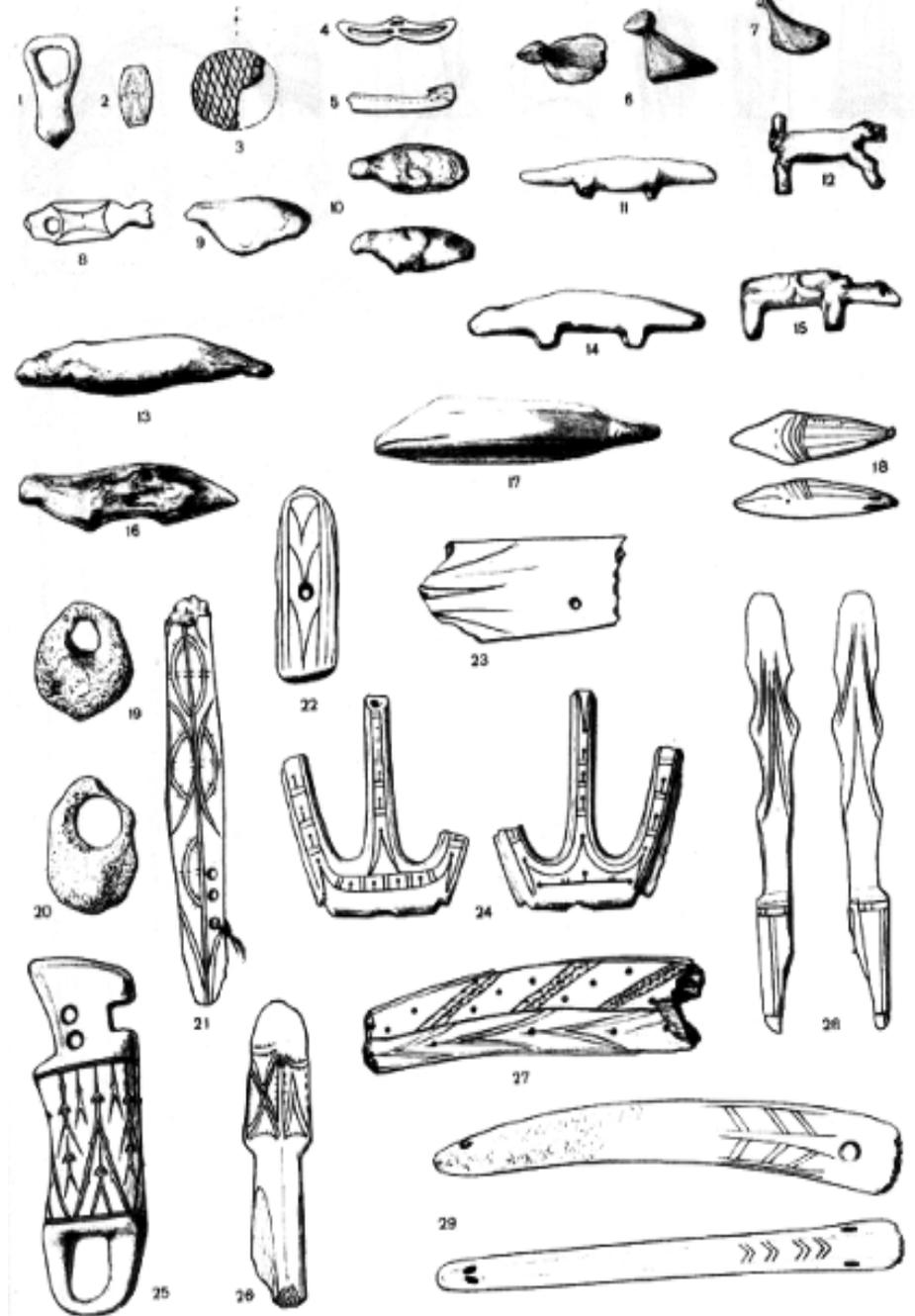


PLATE 29

In what was a *struggle of the coldest*, the Archaic Thule appear to have been better adapted than were the Norse peoples to the conditions of Upper North America. By the end of the fifteenth century, after five centuries, the Norse disappear from Greenland, not much before the Spanish conquer the Aztecs in Mexico.



Scandinavia, that is, the unitary personal union of Denmark-Norway (1524-1814), eventually recolonized the “Land of Great Length” in 1721 and today Greenland, or, as it is known in native Inuit, *Kalaallit Nunaat*, is an autonomous constitutional monarchy, under the reign, but not the rule, of Denmark’s Queen Margrethe II (left).

Queen Elizabeth is the Sovereign of the parliamentary democracy and constitutional monarchy of Canada.



Much of North America is therefore ruled, technically at least, by a European monarch.



End of Part II

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National Mythology of North America

1. Mexico
2. Canada
3. America

Lewis and Clark at Three Forks (1912) by Edgar S. Paxson



Cortés and Malinche
(1926) by José Clemente
Orozco.



The Death of General Wolfe (1770) by Benjamin West



End of Part III



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Periodization of the North American History

1. North American Prehistory (12,500 B.C. to A.D. 1519).
2. Integration with Europe (1519-1763).
3. Independence from Europe (1763-1914).
4. The Canadian Exception (1867-1982).
5. Reintegration with Europe (1914-1992).
6. The Mexican Exception (1910-1992).
7. Transatlantic Project (1950 to Brexit, Trump).
8. The Fate of North America (1992-Present).

End of Part IV

