

When "Pokémon: the First Movie" opened in late 1999, a Los Angeles radio station conducting a contest for free tickets found its switchboard overwhelmed with 70,000 phone calls a minute. Across town—and across the United States—Burger King was running a \$22 million promotion giving away 57 varieties of Pokémon trading cards with selected purchases. With the Pokémon sensation still in high gear, by the end of the year more than 50 million Pokémon cards had been sold, and the television series based on the little Japanese pocket monster was the most popular children's show in the country. The five top-selling video games were all Pokémon themed, and Pokémon.com was the most popular website for children under 12.

The year 1999 was also when the British sensation Harry Potter, the child wizard made famous in the J.K. Rowling trilogy, occupied first, second, and third place on the *New York Times* fiction bestseller list for months; and this ranking was for *all* fiction sold in the United States, not just children's fiction! And we must not forget the startling popularity that same year of Teletubbies, a British children's television show that has become a serious rival to Sesame Street, that quintessentially American show that has been on the air for over 20 years. In short, 1999 was a year when the flow of popular cultural products for children came from beyond U.S. shores. In fact, what Pokémon, Harry Potter, and Teletubbies underscore is that although the cultural influence of the United States is vast, this country does not have a permanent lock on global popular culture.

Culture has been and continues to be a central concept in geography, although our understanding of its meaning and its impact have changed considerably over the last two decades. In this chapter, we examine the many ways that geographers have explored the concept of culture and the insights they have gained from these explorations. We ask, what counts as culture? How do geographers study it? How do we come to grips with the fact that U.S. cultural practices are being exported to the far corners of the globe at the same time that our own cultural practices are being shaped by forces beyond our national borders?

In this chapter, we distinguish between a geographer's approach to culture and an anthropologist's approach. After providing background on some of the earliest approaches to cultural geography, we examine the many new ways that geographers have begun to address culture.

Main Points

- Though culture is a central, complex concept in geography, it may be thought of as a way of life involving a particular set of skills, values, and meanings.
- Geographers are particularly concerned about how place and space shape culture and, conversely, how culture shapes place and space. They recognize that culture is dynamic, and is contested and altered within larger social, political, and economic contexts.
- Like other fields of contemporary life, culture has been profoundly affected by globalization. However, globalization has not produced a homogenized culture so much as it has produced distinctive impacts and outcomes in different societies and geographical areas as global forces come to be modified by local cultures.
- Contemporary approaches in cultural geography seek to understand the role played by politics and the economy in establishing and perpetuating cultures, cultural landscapes, and global patterns of culture traits and culture complexes.
- Cultural geography has been broadened to include analysis of gender, class, sexuality, race, ethnicity, stage in the life cycle, and so on, in recognition that important differences can exist within as well as between cultures.
- Cultural ecology, an offshoot of cultural geography, focuses on the relationship between a cultural group and its natural environment.
- Political ecologists also focus on human-environment relations but stress that relations at all scales from the local to the global are intertwined with larger political and economic forces.

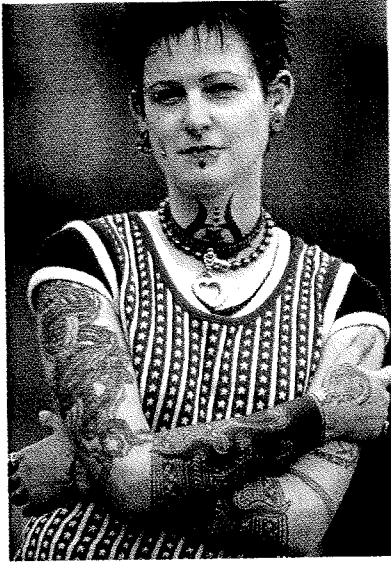


Figure 5.1 Youth culture The term *culture* has been used to describe a range of practices characterizing a group. Pictured is a youth-culture known as gothic. Hairstyle, dress, and body adornment, as well as a distinctive philosophy and music, characterize gothic culture. Yet culture is more than just the physical, distinguishing aspects of a group. It is also a way in which groups derive meaning and attempt to shape the world around them.

culture: a shared set of meanings that are lived through the material and symbolic practices of everyday life.

Culture as a Geographical Process

Geographers have long been involved in trying to understand the manifestations and impacts of culture on geography, and of geography on culture. While anthropologists are concerned with the way in which culture is created and maintained by human groups, geographers are interested not only in how place and space shape culture but also the reverse—how culture shapes place and space.

Anthropologists, geographers, and other scholars who study culture, such as historians, sociologists, and political scientists, agree that culture is a complex concept. Over time, our understanding of culture has been changed and enriched. A simple understanding of culture is that it is a particular way of life, such as a set of skilled activities, values, and meanings surrounding a particular type of economic practice. Scholars also describe culture in terms of classical standards and esthetic excellence in opera, ballet, or literature, for example.

By contrast, the term *culture* has also been used to describe the range of activities that characterize a particular group, such as working-class culture, corporate culture, or teenage culture. Although all of these understandings of culture are accurate, for our purposes they are only partial. Broadly speaking, **culture** is a shared set of meanings that are lived through the material and symbolic practices of everyday life (Figure 5.1). The “shared set of meanings” can include values, beliefs, practices, and ideas about religion, language, family, gender, sexuality, and other important identities. Culture is often subject to reevaluation and redefinition and ultimately altered from both within and outside a particular group.

Culture is a dynamic concept that revolves around complex social, political, economic, and even historical factors. This definition of culture is part of a longer, evolving tradition within geography and other disciplines such as anthropology and sociology. We will look more closely at the development of the cultural tradition in geography in the following section, in which we discuss the debates surrounding culture within the discipline.

For much of the twentieth century geographers, like anthropologists, have focused most of their attention on material culture as opposed to its less tangible symbolic or spiritual manifestations. Thus, while geographers have been interested in religion as an object of study, for a long time they have largely confined their work to examining its material basis. For example, they have explored the spatial extent of particular religious practices (the global distribution of Buddhism) and the expression of religiosity (the appearance of yard shrines in the U.S. Southwest, Figure 5.2). In the last 20 or so years, the near-exclusive focus on material cultural practices has changed—driven by the larger changes that are occurring in the world around us.

As with agriculture, politics, and urbanization, globalization has also had complex effects on culture. Terms such as *world music* and *international television* are

Figure 5.2 Yard shrine in the U.S. Southwest Yard shrines are a ubiquitous feature of Roman-Catholic Mexican-American communities in the U.S. Southwest. Their purpose is to show respect and devotion to the Virgin Mary as well as to appeal for favors. Yard shrines are a public display of religiosity outside of the formal bounds of church-based worship and a particular characteristic of a regional culture group.



a reflection of the sense that the world has become a very small place, indeed, and people everywhere are sharing aspects of the same culture through the widespread influence of television and other media such as radio. Yet, as pointed out in Chapter 2, while powerful homogenizing global forces are certainly at work, the world has not become so uniform that place no longer matters. With respect to culture, just the opposite is true. Place matters more than ever in the negotiation of global forces, as local forces confront globalization and translate it into unique place-specific forms. See "Geography Matters 5.1—The Culture of Hip-Hop," which illustrates the global nature of hip-hop music.

The place-based interactions occurring between culture and global political and economic forces are at the heart of cultural geography today. **Cultural geography** focuses on the way in which space, place, and landscape shape culture at the same time that culture shapes space, place, and landscape. As such, cultural geography demarcates two important and interrelated parts. Culture is the ongoing process of producing a shared set of meanings, while geography is the dynamic setting that groups operate in to shape those meanings and in the process to form an identity and act. Geography in this definition can be as small as the micro space of the body and as large as the macro space of the globe.

Building Cultural Complexes

Geographers have long been interested in the interactions among people and culture, and among space, place, and landscape. One of the most influential individuals in this regard was Carl Sauer, a geographer who taught at the University of California. Sauer was largely responsible for creating the "Berkeley school" of cultural geography (Figure 5.3). He was particularly interested in trying to understand the material expressions of culture by focusing on their manifestations in the landscape. This interest came to be embodied in the concept of the **cultural landscape**, a characteristic and tangible outcome of the complex interactions between a human group—with its own practices, preferences, values, and aspirations—and a natural environment. Sauer differentiated the cultural landscape from the natural landscape. He emphasized that the former was a "humanized" version of the latter, such that the activities of humans resulted in an identifiable and understandable alteration of the natural environment. Figure 5.4 (page 192) illustrates the idea through a listing of the differences between a natural and a cultural landscape.

For roughly five decades, interest in culture within geography largely followed Sauer's important work. His approach to the cultural landscape was ecological, and his many published works reflect his interest in trying to understand the myriad ways that humans transformed the surface of Earth. In his own words:



Figure 5.3 Carl Sauer (1889–1975)
Born in the U.S. Midwest of German-immigrant parents, Carl Sauer spent his career as a geographer at the University of California, Berkeley. He rejected environmental determinism as a way of understanding human geography and emphasized the uniqueness of landscape through the impact of both cultural and physical processes.

cultural geography: how space, place, and landscape shape culture at the same time that culture shapes space, place, and landscape.

cultural landscape: a characteristic and tangible outcome of the complex interactions between a human group and a natural environment.

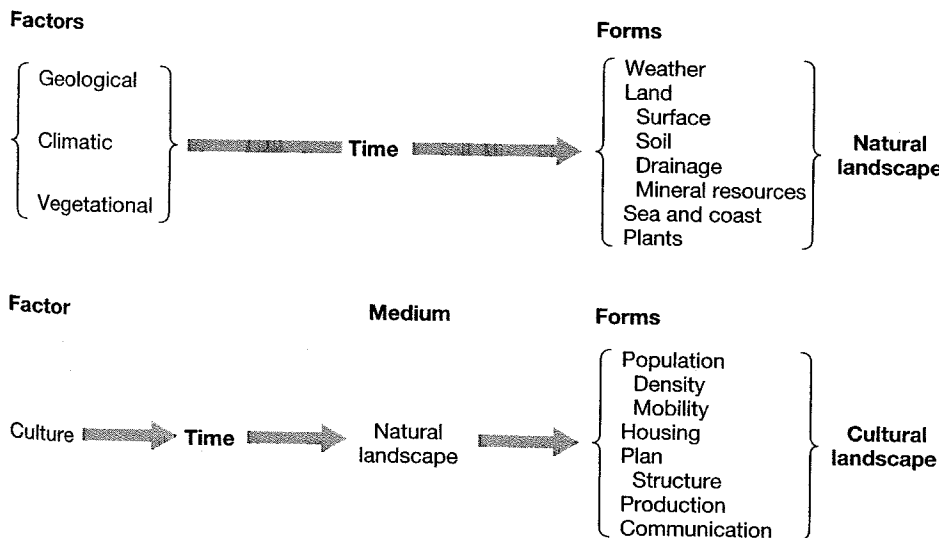


Figure 5.4 Sauer's cultural landscape This figure is a graphic representation of the ways in which the natural landscape and cultural landscapes are transformed. Physical features as well as climate factors shape the natural landscape. Cultural practices also have an important impact upon it. The results of cultural factors are cultural forms, such as population distributions and patterns and housing. Over time, people—through culture—reshape the natural landscape to meet their needs. (Source: Adapted from C. Sauer, "The Morphology of Landscape" in J. Leighly (ed.), *Land and Life: Selections from the Writings of Carl Ortwin Sauer*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1964, pp. 315–350.)

5.1 Geography Matters

The Culture of Hip-Hop

Hip-hop is the popular street culture of American big-city and especially inner-city youth. Characterized to some extent by graffiti art, and earlier on by break dancing, hip-hop is understood globally through rap music and a distinctive idiomatic vocabulary. Like most nations, hip-hop has its forefathers. These include boxer Muhammad Ali, Jamaican Rastafarian and reggae musician Bob Marley, Black Panther Huey Newton, and funksters James Brown and George Clinton. Also like most nations, the Hip-Hop Nation has its origins: in the Bronx, in New York City. But it also has much older roots in the West African storytelling culture known as *griot*. The Hip-Hop Nation has enlarged upon those origins, and now hip-hop is both appreciated and produced on six continents. Hip-hop is a nation that has truly globalized, not because its citizens have migrated far and wide, but because its culture has migrated via telecommunications. Hip-hop has become a nation that exists beyond geography in the music, the clothes, and the language of its citizens. Touré, writing in the *New York Times*, locates the Hip-Hop Nation this way:

We are a nation with no precise date of origin, no physical land, no single chief. But if you live in the Hip-Hop Nation, if you are not merely a fan of the music but a daily imbiber of the culture, if you sprinkle your conversation with phrases like off the meter (for something that's great) or got me open (for something that gives an explosive positive emotional release), if you know why Dutch Masters make better blunts than Phillies (they're thinner), if you know at a glance why Allen Iverson is hip-hop and Grant Hill is not, if you feel the murders of Tupac Shakur and the Notorious B.I.G. in the 1997-98 civil wars were assassinations (no other words fit), if you can say yes to all of these questions (and a yes to some doesn't count), then you know the Hip-Hop Nation is as real as America on a pre-Columbian atlas.¹

Although the hip-hop leadership is exclusively black and male, the Hip-Hop Nation crosses all color lines and includes women (Figures 5.1.1 and 5.1.2). Its citizens are black, brown, yellow, and white, male and female. Its

¹Touré, "In the End, Black Men Must Lead," *New York Times*, 22 August 1999, Arts and Leisure section, p. 1.

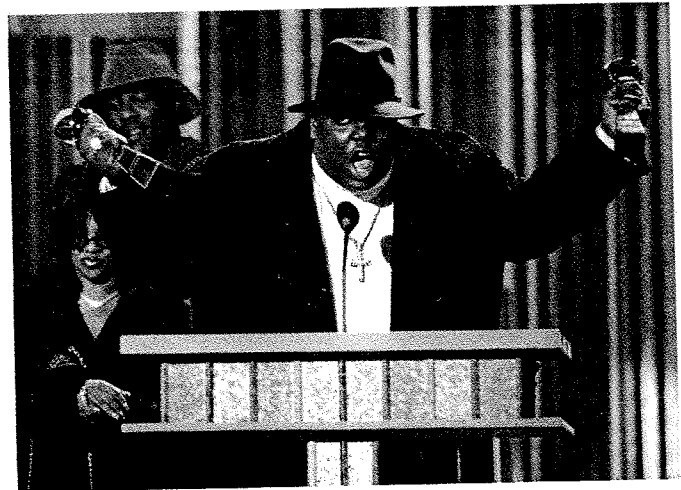


Figure 5.1.1 Notorious B.I.G. "Biggie" burst onto the hip-hop scene with his platinum 1994 album, "Ready to Die." In 1995 B.I.G. was named Rapper of the Year at the Billboard Awards. Born Christopher Wallace in New Jersey and raised in Brooklyn's Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood, the rapper was killed in March 1997. Speculation abounds as to why the murder occurred (as well as the murder of rapper Tupac Shakur). Some believe that B.I.G.'s death was the result of an East Coast-West Coast Rap rivalry and payback for Tupac Shakur's murder in Las Vegas months before. Others believe the murder was carried out by a gang upset by B.I.G.'s growing prominence on the West Coast. The murder was characterized in the mainstream press as a drive-by shooting. No suspects have been arrested, and the case remains unsolved to this day. Both murders point to gang culture as an important source of identity in hip-hop.

pioneers include white graffiti artists and Latinos who influenced break dancing as well as hip-hop DJ (disk jockey) and MC (rapper) styles. Music is the heart and soul of the Hip-Hop Nation, and although the nation is beyond geography, the rappers and their musical styles are not.

The geography of American hip-hop—where the most important music has come from—can be crudely divided into East Coast, West Coast, and South Coast, and an emerging region in and around Detroit where white rap-metal groups have become popular. The East Coast includes the five boroughs of New York, Long

The cultural landscape is fashioned from a natural landscape by a cultural group. Culture is the agent, the natural area is the medium, the cultural landscape is the result. Under the influence of a given culture, itself changing through time, the landscape undergoes development, passing through phases, and probably reaching ultimately the end of its cycle of development. With the introduction of a different—that is an alien—culture, a rejuvenation of the cultural landscape sets in, or a new landscape is superimposed on remnants of an older one.¹

¹C. Sauer, "The Morphology of Landscape," in J. Leighly (ed.), *Land and Life: Selections from the Writings of Carl Ortwin Sauer*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. 1964, pp. 315-350.

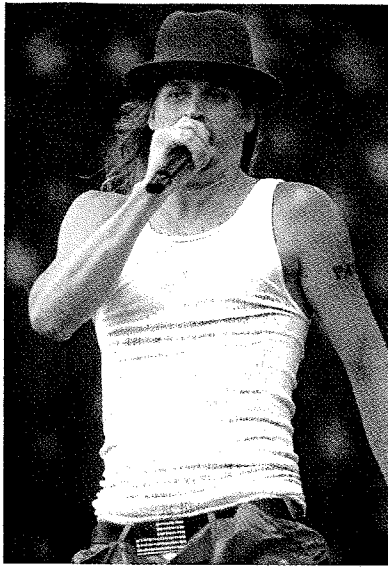


Figure 5.1.2 Kid Rock Since the mid-1980s rap has been integral to the lifestyle of white suburban youth. Performers like Kid Rock, who claims he was weaned on Big Daddy Kane and Lynyrd Skynyrd, characterize a musical sensibility that combines rap with heavy metal. Given that 70 percent of rap records are sold to a white audience, it is not surprising that this musical hybrid has emerged.

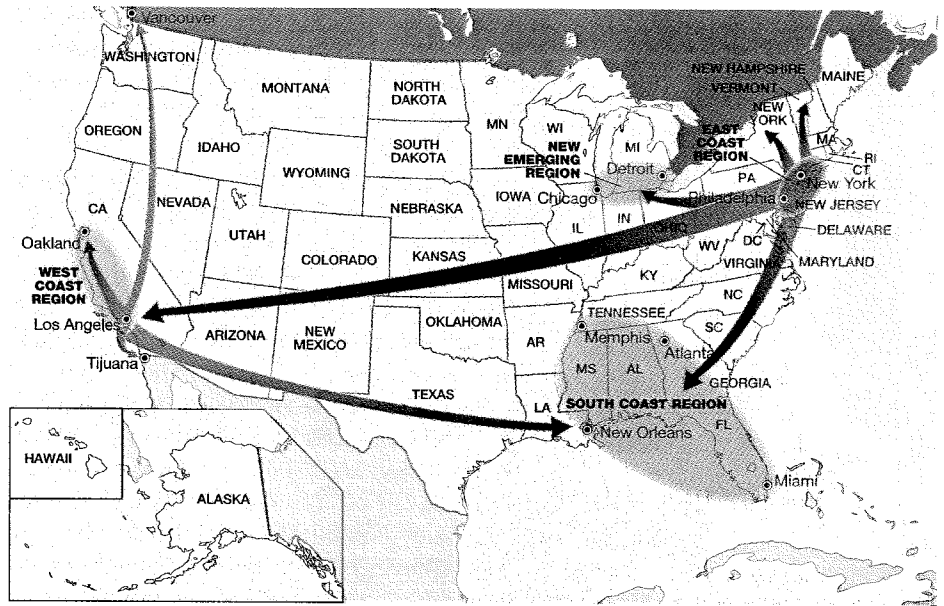


Figure 5.1.3 The cultural hearths and diffusion of American rap This map portrays the centers of rap music in America today, showing how rap, which began in African American inner-city neighborhoods in New York City in the late 1970s, moved westward and then southward. Most recently a hybrid form of rap-metal has emerged in the U.S. Midwest urban center of Detroit. The Detroit metropolitan area contains large numbers of African Americans and working-class whites who lost their jobs in the restructuring of the automobile industry in the 1970s and early 1980s. What the rap-metal genre confirms is that although hip-hop culture has its roots in the African American experience, it also derives much of its power from issues of poverty and class.

Island, Westchester County, New Jersey, and Philadelphia. The West Coast includes Los Angeles, Compton, Long Beach, Vallejo, and Oakland. The South Coast region is made up of Atlanta, New Orleans, Miami, and Memphis (Figure 5.1.3).

But just as hip-hop has broken out of its regional boundaries, it has transcended national boundaries as well. Hip-hop graffiti art can be found in urban areas as distant as Australia and South Africa. Rap music is as popular in the Philippines as it is in Paris. And individual DJs have had significant influences well beyond their old neighborhoods. For example, Afrika Bambaataa, a former gang member, organized the Universal Zulu Nation over 25 years ago. Bambaataa, or “Bam,” incorporated former gang members into a community-building group that has

become a household name in hip-hop circles all around the world. One website claims that there are now over 10,000 members of the Zulu Nation worldwide, and chapters in every major city in the world.

Hip-hop, as a youth-oriented cultural product commercialized by multinational corporations but originally homegrown, is to the latter part of the twentieth century what rock was to the middle of the century. Its influence is enormous, and its practices are likely to persist well into the twenty-first century.

Source: Davey D’s Hip-Hop Corner at <http://www.daveyd.com/index.html>; D. Toop, *Rap Attack 2: African Rap to Global Hip Hop*, New York: Serpent’s Tail Press, 1991; N. George, *Hip hop America*, New York: Viking Penguin Group, 1998.

In Europe, geographers interested in human interactions with the landscape produced slightly different approaches. For example, in Great Britain, the approach to understanding the human imprint on the landscape was given the term *historical geography*, while in France it was conceptualized as *genre de vie*. **Historical geography**, very simply defined, is the geography of the past. Its most famous practitioner was H. C. Darby, who attempted to understand “cross sections” or sequences of evolution, especially of rural landscapes (Figure 5.5, page 194). *Genre de vie*, a key concept in Vidal de la Blache’s approach to cultural geography in France, referred to a functionally organized way of life that was seen to be characteristic of a particular culture group (Figure 5.6, page 194). *Genre de vie* centered

historical geography: the geography of the past.

genre de vie: a functionally organized way of life that is seen to be characteristic of a particular culture group.



Figure 5.5 H. C. Darby (1909–1992)

H. C. Darby argued that historical geography is an essential foundation for the study of all human geography. His own studies of past geographies were undertaken through cross-sectional analyses of archival materials published in a series of Domesday Geographies of England. (Source: *All Possible Worlds: A History of Geographical Ideas*, 2nd Ed., Preston E., James/Geoffrey W. James, p. 211.)

cultural trait: a single aspect of the complex of routine practices that constitute a particular cultural group.

Figure 5.6 Paul Vidal de la Blache (1845–1919) Vidal de la Blache was a founder of the *Annales de Geographie*, an influential academic journal that fostered the idea of human geography as the study of people-environment relationships. His most long-lasting conceptual contribution was *genre de vie*, which is the lifestyle of a particular region reflecting the economic, social, ideological, and psychological identities imprinted on the landscape. (Source: *All Possible Worlds: A History of Geographical Ideas*, 2nd Ed., Preston E., James/Geoffrey W. James, p. 194.)



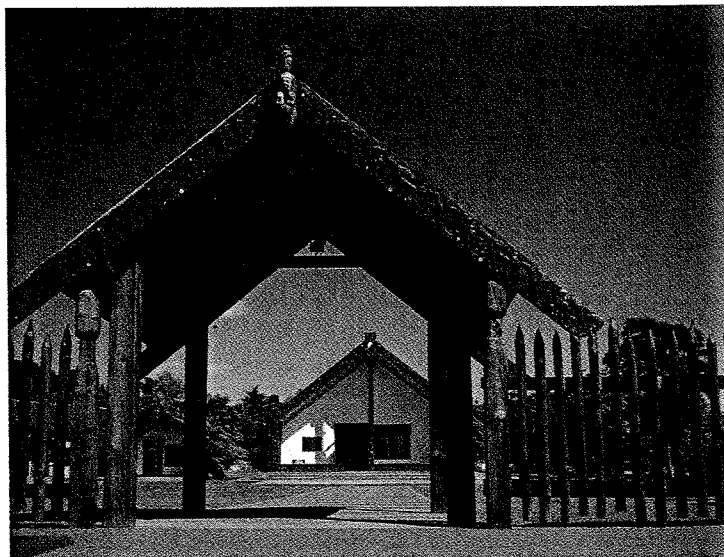
on the livelihood practices of a group, which were seen to shape physical, social, and psychological bonds. Although emphasizing some landscape components over others or giving a larger or smaller role to the physical environment, all of these approaches placed the cultural landscape at the heart of their study of human-environment interactions.

H. C. Darby most successfully implemented his historical approach to cultural geography and landscape by developing a geography of the Domesday Book. William the Conqueror ordered the Domesday compiled in 1085, so that he could have a list of his spoils of war. The book provides a rich catalog of the ownership of every tract of land in England and of the conditions and contents of the lands at that time. For geographers like Darby, such data are invaluable for reconstructing past landscapes.

Vidal de la Blache, on the other hand, emphasized the need to study small, homogeneous areas in order to uncover the close relationships that exist between people and their immediate surroundings. He constructed complex descriptions of preindustrial France that demonstrated how the various *genres de vie* emerged from the possibilities and constraints posed by local physical environments. Subsequently, he wrote about the changes in French regions brought on by industrialization, observing that regional homogeneity was no longer the unifying element. Instead, the increased mobility of people and goods had produced new, more complex geographies wherein previously isolated *genres de vie* were being integrated into a competitive industrial economic framework. Anticipating the widespread impacts of globalization, de la Blache also recognized how people in places struggled to mediate the big changes that were transforming their lives.

Geographers have also been interested in understanding specific aspects of culture ranging from single attributes to complex systems. One simple aspect of culture of interest to geographers is the idea of special traits, which include such things as distinctive styles of dress, dietary habits, or styles of architecture. A **cultural trait** is a single aspect of the complex of routine practices that constitute a particular cultural group (Figure 5.7). For example, dietary law for Muslims prohibits the consumption of pork. This avoidance may be said to be a cultural trait of Muslim people. Additionally, in their religious iconography, Muslims

Figure 5.7 Maori architecture The indigenous peoples of the islands of New Zealand, the Maoris, have a distinctive and symbolic architecture. Different aspects of design are meant to convey different meanings about reverence for a higher power and people's place in the universe. The meaning systems of culture groups can be conveyed not only through ritual practices but through architecture.



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have prohibitions against displaying human faces. This, too, is considered a cultural trait. While understanding the geographical dynamics of cultural traits such as pork avoidance has been of importance to geographers, an interest has also existed in learning how traits come together to form larger frameworks for living in the world. Ultimately, cultural traits are not necessarily unique to one group, and understanding them is only one aspect of the complexity of culture. For instance, there are certainly other cultural groups (such as Hindus) that avoid pork in their diet.

Many cultures also recognize the passage from childhood into adulthood with a celebration or ceremony. Called **rites of passage**, these are ceremonial acts, customs, practices, or procedures that recognize key transitions in human life—birth, menstruation, and other markers of adulthood such as sexual awakening and marriage (Figure 5.8).

In Roman Catholicism, the passage of 12-year-old boys and girls into adulthood is celebrated with a religious ceremony known as confirmation. In this ceremony, the confirmed chooses a new name to mark this important spiritual transition. Similarly, Jews also mark the passage of adolescent boys and girls into adulthood with separate religious ceremonies: a bar mitzvah for boys and a bat mitzvah for girls. Although the marking of the passage into adulthood is a trait that is celebrated by both groups, neither exhibits the trait in exactly the same way. In fact, this and other traits always occur in combination with others. The combination of traits characteristic of a particular group is known as a **cultural complex**. The avoidance of pork, the celebration of bar and bat mitzvahs, and other dietary, religious, and social practices constitute the cultural complex of Judaism, although it is important to note that even within the cultural complex of Judaism, variation exists among regions and sects.

Another concept key to traditional approaches in cultural geography is the cultural region. Although a **cultural region** may be quite extensive or very narrowly described and even discontinuous in its extension, it is the area within which a particular cultural system prevails. A cultural region is an area where certain cultural practices, beliefs, or values are more or less practiced by the majority of the inhabitants.

For example, the state of Utah is considered to be a Mormon cultural region because, as Table 5.1 as well as Figure 5.9 (page 196) show, the population of the

rites of passage: the ceremonial acts, customs, practices, or procedures that recognize key transitions in human life such as birth, menstruation, and other markers of adulthood such as marriage.

cultural complex: combination of traits characteristic of a particular group.

cultural region: the areas within which a particular cultural system prevails.

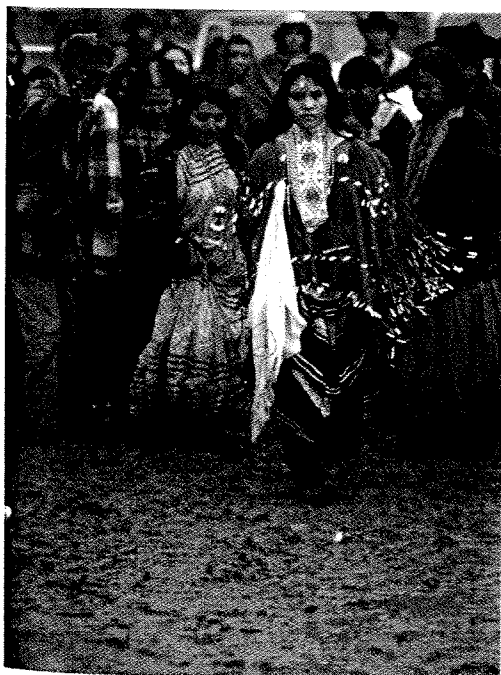


Figure 5.8 A coming-of-age ceremony, Apache reservation The Apache Indians recognize the passage of female children into adulthood during adolescence. A ceremony initiates a young girl into womanhood, signaling to other members of the community that an important transition has occurred. The photograph shows a young Apache girl about to begin four rotations in recognition of the four stages of her life: infancy, adolescence, adulthood, and old age. Eventually she will be blessed with a shower of pollen, candy, coins, and corn signifying a future of happiness and plenty. Such rites of passage are not uncommon among many of the world's cultures. Some non-Western cultures, for example, send adolescent boys away from the village to experience an ordeal—ritual scarring or circumcision, for example—or to meditate in extended isolation on the new roles they must assume as adults. After an extended absence from the social group, these youths return transformed and ready to lay down their previous childish occupations.

TABLE 5.1 Salt Lake City, Utah: What's Hot/What's Not

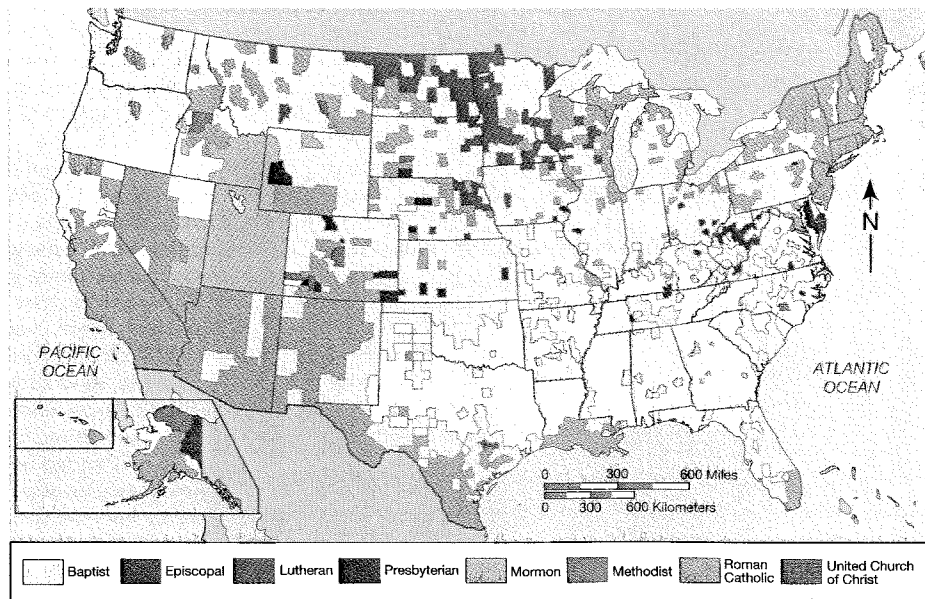
Certain dietary preferences and prohibitions, as well as an orientation to family, emerge in the results of a product analysis of Salt Lake City, where large numbers of Mormons reside. In addition to theme parks and national television shows, local politics are also distinctly family oriented. Salt Lake City and Utah constitute a distinct cultural region where certain religious beliefs and family values are practiced by a majority of the inhabitants.

What's Hot	What's Not
Theme parks	Fashion
The Bible	Gourmet cooking
RVs	Walking
<i>Family Handyman</i>	<i>New Yorker</i>
GMC Safaris	BMW 6/7s
Mitsubishi minivans	Jaguar XJ6s
Chevy Geos	Mercedes-Benz 560s
Conservatives	Liberals
Pro-lifers	Gay rights

Source: Michael J. Weiss, *Latitudes and Attitudes*. Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1994, p. 180.

state is dominated by people who practice the Mormon religion and presumably adhere to its beliefs and values. Figure 5.9 also illustrates the overall religious geography of the United States. The map shows that the southern part of the United States has a large Baptist population, whereas the west and southwest, particularly California, Nevada, Arizona, and New Mexico, are dominated by Roman Catholics. As with the large concentration of Roman Catholics in the northeastern and Middle Atlantic states, these concentrations reflect the immigration of people from Catholic countries. In the case of the western/southwestern United States, these are largely populations of fairly recent immigrants from Mexico and other parts of Central America. With respect to the eastern seaboard, the dominance of Roman Catholicism reflects older immigration from Catholic Europe as well as more recent immigration from the Caribbean Basin. In the upper central part of the United States, the scattered concentrations of Lutherans reflect previous immigration from the Scandinavian countries.

Figure 5.9 U.S. Christian population distribution by county This map shows the distribution of Christians in the United States. The map illustrates the concept of cultural regions based on religion. It is important to remember, however, that at such a scale, it would be erroneous to assume too much homogeneity within these regions. In each state or region there will be substantial variations in belief systems and practices at the local level. (Sources: Reprinted with permission from Prentice Hall, J. M. Rubenstein, *The Cultural Landscape: An Introduction to Human Geography*, 5th ed., © 1996, p. 203. Adapted from Douglas W. Johnson, Paul R. Picard, and Bernard Quinn, *Churches and Church Membership in the United States*. Bethesda, MD: Glenmary Research Center.)



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