



Geography has traditionally been about description and exploration. The ancient Greeks gave us the word *geography*, which literally means to *write about or to describe the earth*. They were keenly interested in explaining how humans fit into their world and, ultimately, the universe. Through their efforts to describe our relationship to our world, they gave us some the most important foundations of modern geography and cartography; these foundations and traditions are the important pillars of the discipline of geography even today. Later, during the centuries of European exploration that found the “New World” (new to them, at least) and led to the mapping of the far reaches of the globe, geography became an important trade, one that relied on a set of cartographic tools to help the early explorers find their way. These explorers built on the traditions of ancient civilizations that also set out to explore the world around them. During this period, geography was not so much a science as it was a vocation, albeit an important one, for without geographers and cartographers, explorers would surely have been lost. This role of geography is still an important one, and new-age geographers and cartographers continue to help us explore those areas of the earth still largely unknown.

Today geography has also become an important academic discipline, which is the subject of this text. The unique perspective of academic geography is its focus on spatial processes. Geographers ask questions about spatial variation, location and connections between places. Whether the geographer is studying a squatter settlement in Mumbai or icing processes in Northern Canada, both will focus on these spatial relationships. This unique perspective in the human and natural sciences has enabled geographers to address some of the world’s most important problems. In addition to their scientific contributions, a geographical understanding has been useful in developing solutions to a range of the world’s problems including desertification and climate change, homelessness and slum development, to name but a few.

Academic geography is special in that it is both a physical and social science, one that helps bridge the gap that can separate humans from their natural environment. This is the way that we will treat the study of geography within these pages. We will begin with an examination of the roots of geography and look at the tools that geographers use to both describe and explore the world we live in. From there we will examine the physical science side of geography, examining areas such as the physical makeup of the earth, its climate, its water resources and its living components. Finally, the text will deal the major components of human geography, including culture, economics, population, urbanization and environmental issues. What will hopefully become clear through this examination is that for a complete understanding of many of the issues that affect us, we must have a clear understanding of both the physical and social aspects of each issue.

Moreover, our examination of these topics in geography will highlight the interdependence of our world. In the modern era of globalization, geography and the integrating view it provides of a complex world is more important than ever. As we continue to struggle with the immense global issues that both divide and connect us at the same

time, geography's role is not to be underestimated. We hope that this text will provide the reader with the knowledge and tools to make sense of an increasingly complex world.

OBJECTIVES AND AUDIENCE

This textbook was written as an introduction to academic geography for the college or university levels. We teach a one-semester introductory course in the Québec college system, where geography is taught primarily in the Social Sciences program as an optional discipline. The textbook is, therefore, specifically written for arts and social science students who have a limited background in geography and are beginning their geography studies at the post-secondary level. It would be an appropriate textbook for similar students in other post-secondary contexts.

Given this context, the textbook is a departure from most introductions to human geography. First, we considered it important to impart to students that geographers have a unique disciplinary perspective, a specific way of seeing the world and its processes. We have, therefore, attempted to include the major contributions of geographers in each chapter. Second, since this textbook provides an overview of “geography” we decided to make the focus of each chapter “global”. Therefore, we engage with each subdiscipline at the world scale while using some local and regional examples. Third, we have included two chapters that are often left out of introductory textbooks in human geography. Since it is increasingly important to have a good sense of the physical world when addressing environmental issues, we include a chapter on physical geography. As we see cartography and GIS as some of the primary tools of the discipline, we have also included a chapter on mapping. Finally, we have been highly selective regarding the human geography subdisciplines that are included in this text. Some, such as cultural and economic geography, are the backbone of the human geography. Urban, population and environmental geography were chosen because they address global issues that are relevant highly to a contemporary geographical education.

FEATURES OF THE TEXT

Each chapter of the text provides an introduction and a summary to help the reader better grasp the content of each chapter. In addition, supplements are provided to ensure complete comprehension for the reader. These include chapter questions, questions for critical thinking and key terms. These aids are intended to be used by the reader upon completion of each chapter and will help ensure that the information is assimilated.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We thank our colleagues, past and present, who have all contributed to the evolution of the content and approach developed in our Introduction to Geography course at John Abbott College, including Jessica Burpee, Patricia Green-Milberg, Simon Kevan, Lewis McLeod and Jacques Critchley. We also thank our students for teaching us how to teach them geography. We are also grateful for our family and friends who have supported us through the writing of our first textbook.