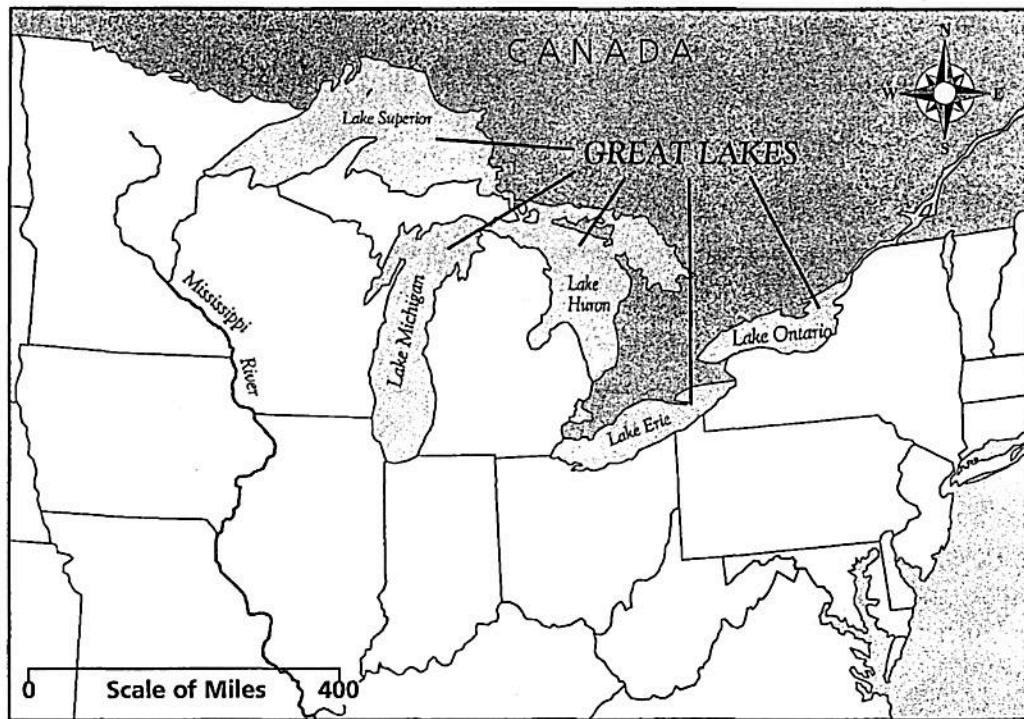


wide coastal plain extends along the Atlantic coast. The lowlands and the coastal plain, as well as the Central Valley in California, have very fertile soil.

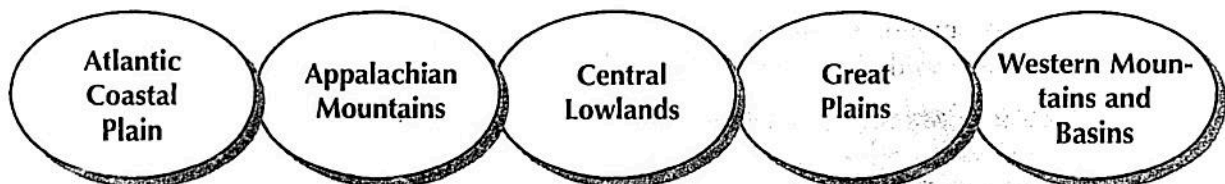
The United States also has the **Great Lakes** — some of the largest fresh water lakes in the world. In addition, the U.S. contains several major rivers systems. The largest is the Mississippi River system, with the Missouri and Ohio Rivers and other tributaries draining almost half the continental United States. Other major river systems are the Rio Grande, Colorado River, and Hudson River. Major mineral resources include iron ore, coal, and oil.



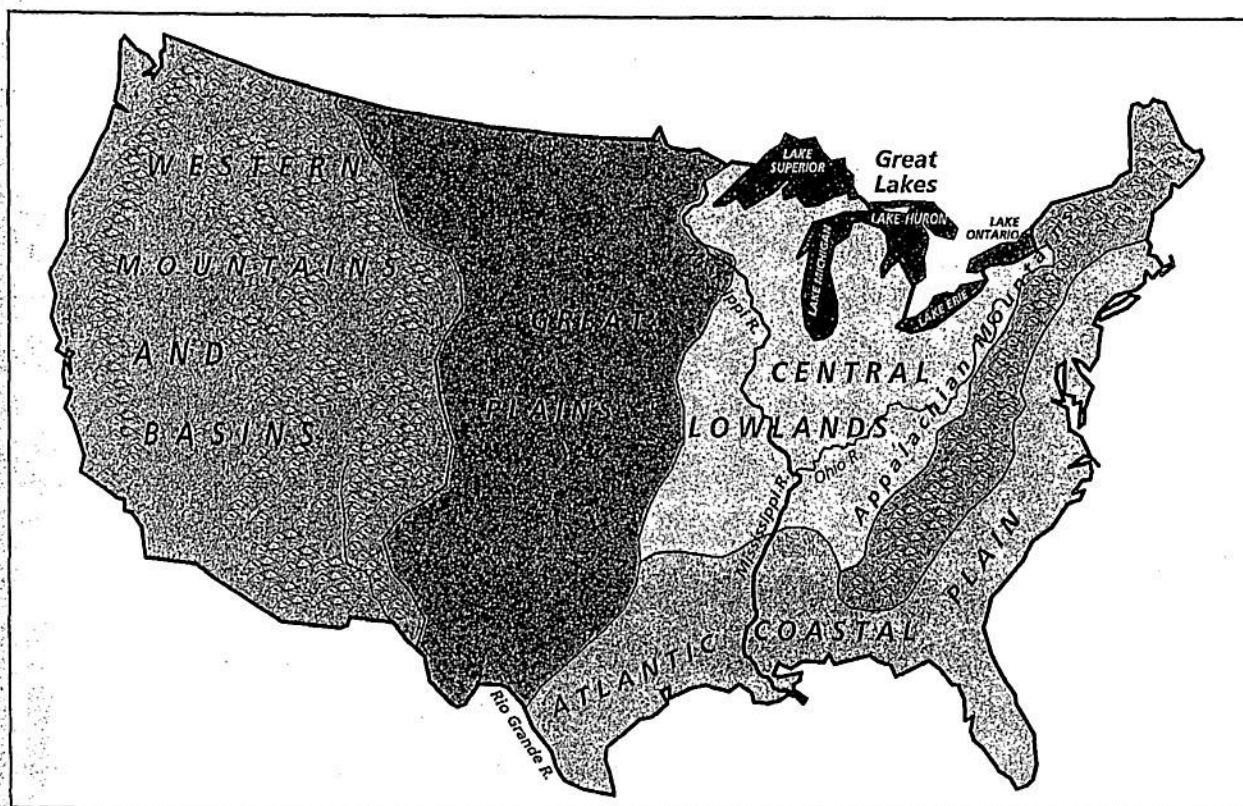
The United States benefits from plentiful rainfall in the East and Midwest, with generally moderate temperatures. The West is drier, and areas of the Southwest, including parts of Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, Nevada, Utah, and California, are desert.

THE PHYSICAL REGIONS OF THE UNITED STATES

A **region** is an area that shares certain features and has greater contact with places within the region than outside it. Because of its diverse **topography** (*surface features*) and climate, the continental United States can be thought of as one nation consisting of several geographic regions. Indeed, there are many ways to divide the United States into regions. One way is as follows:



The locations of these five regions are indicated on the following map:

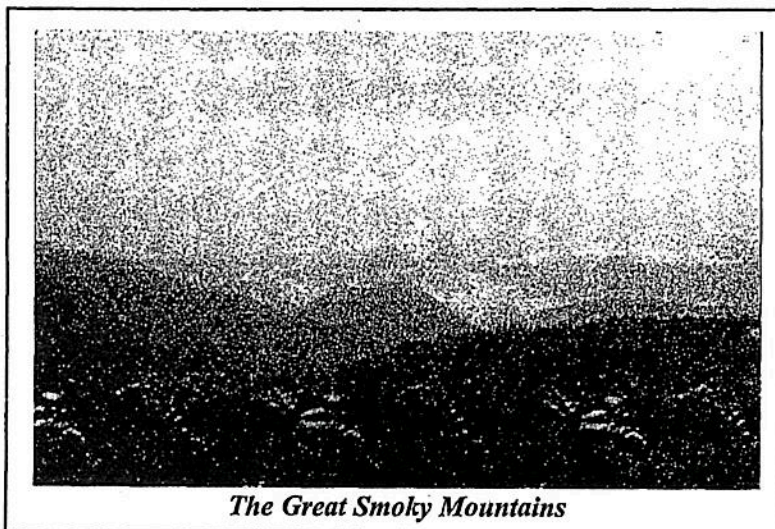


THE ATLANTIC COASTAL PLAIN

The Atlantic Coastal Plain is one of the world's largest coastal plains. It stretches southward from New England to Georgia. From Georgia it widens out to Texas while continuing southward. This was the region first settled by colonists from Europe in the 1600s. Much of the area was forest before settlers cleared the land and turned it into farmland. Today it is the region with the highest concentration of people in the United States. The Atlantic Coastal Plain rises up to a hilly area as it approaches the Appalachian Mountains.

THE APPALACHIAN MOUNTAINS

The Appalachian Mountains are located in the eastern part of the United States. They extend from Maine in the north to Alabama in the south, where they are cut off by the coastal plain. The Adirondack Mountains, the Allegheny Mountains, the Blue Ridge Mountains and the Great Smoky Mountains are all part of the Appalachians. The Appalachian Mountains were originally formed by the folding and wrinkling of the Earth's crust.



The Great Smoky Mountains

Thousands of years ago, the Appalachians were higher than they are today. Over time, their peaks eroded and became rounded. They were difficult for the first settlers to pass through because they presented an almost unbroken chain of mountains with few gaps.

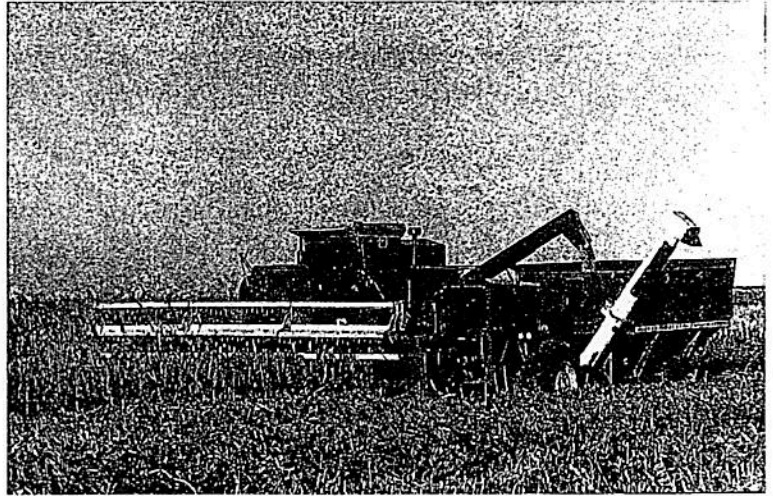
THE CENTRAL LOWLANDS

To the west of the Appalachians are the Central Lowlands. The northern part of this region was once scraped by glaciers (huge moving sheets of ice) and is a continuation of a sheet of ancient rocks extending down from Canada.

The Superior Uplands in Minnesota and northern Michigan and the Adirondack Mountains in northern New York are part of this northern system.

Farther south, where the elevation is lower, glaciers and winds deposited soil and silt, making the land well suited for farming. Windblown topsoil, known as loess, makes parts of the Central Lowlands among the most fertile regions of the United States. The eastern part

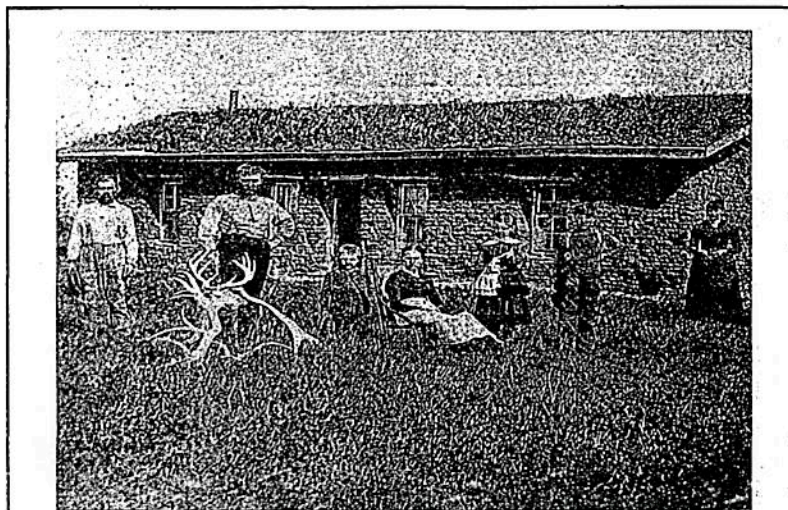
of the Central Lowlands consists of grasslands known as prairies. The Mississippi, Missouri, and Ohio Rivers drain this vast region.



Glaciers created rich farmland in the Central Lowlands.

THE GREAT PLAINS

West of the Mississippi, the grasslands become much drier and more hilly. This region is called the Great Plains. Before the settlers arrived, these plains were covered with sod and thick grasses.



Early settlers often used the thick sod of the plains as roofing material for their houses.

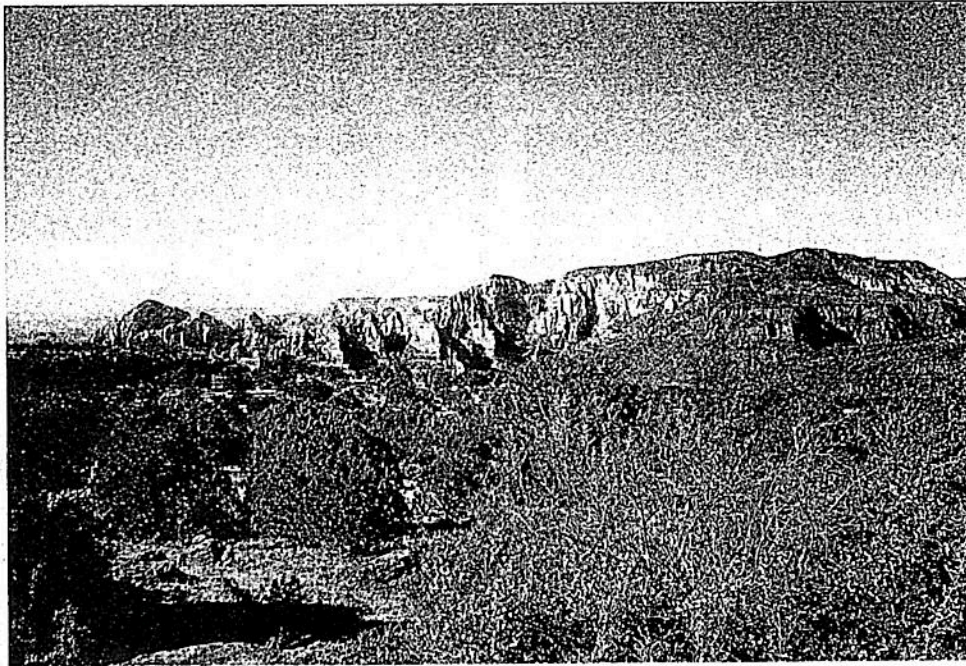
Today, the Central Lowlands and the Great Plains provide some of the world's best farmland — producing vast amounts of corn, wheat and soybeans, and large amounts of cattle, hogs, and other livestock.

If you were flying over this area in a plane, its many farms would look like a giant checkerboard quilt spread out below and stretching as far as your eye could see.

THE WESTERN MOUNTAINS AND BASINS

To the west of the Great Plains the land rises sharply, forming the Rocky Mountains. These mountains extend from western Canada as far south as New Mexico. Still further west are the Cascade and Sierra Nevada Ranges, and the Pacific Coastal Ranges. Some of these mountains were formed by volcanoes, but most of them, like the Appalachian Mountains in the east, were formed by the shifting and folding of the Earth's crust. These western areas generally receive little rainfall.

The Great Basin, separating the Rocky Mountains and the Sierra Nevada Range, is dry and desert-like. California's Central Valley, located between the Sierra Nevada and the Coastal Range, has excellent soils, almost continuous sunshine, and a long growing season. Although the Central Valley gets little rainfall in summer, irrigation has been made it into very productive farmland.



Many mountains in the West were formed by the shifting and folding of the Earth's crust.

To help familiarize you with the important role that geography has played in the unfolding of our nation's history, you will find special sections throughout this book entitled: *The Impact of Geography on American History*. In addition, the *Test Helper* section in Chapter 5 is further devoted to exploring the impact of geography on our nation's history.