Regions: A Crucial Concept

- One of the most important concepts in geography is the idea of regions.
- There are actually many kinds of regions.
  - Regions can be based on uniformity (or, since no place is absolutely like another, relative uniformity). These are called uniform regions (or formal regions).
  - Regions can also be based on connections or networks. These are called functional regions.
  - Regions can be based on people’s perceptions — and these are called perceptual or vernacular regions.

Regions: Uniform Regions

- Uniform regions are based on particular or unique characteristics.
- For example, we could say, on the basis of maps of Presidential voting, that in 2000 some states were “Republican” and some were “Democratic.”
- But even in heavily “Republican” states there were lots of people who voted Democratic — so these are not absolutely uniform, but relatively uniform regions.

Source: [http://www.nationalatlas.gov/electionsprint.html](http://www.nationalatlas.gov/electionsprint.html)
Regions: Functional Regions

- Functional regions are based on some kind of function — social, economic, political, etc.
- For example, this map of proposed high-speed rail corridors shows the economic connections between different cities.
- Note the cities that are, and the cities that aren’t connected — for example, San Diego is not connected to Phoenix, Seattle is not connected to Boise, etc.  
  

Regions: Vernacular Regions

- Vernacular (or perceptual) regions exist because people believe in them or perceive them.
- In class we looked at a map of the “State of Jefferson,” a region of Northern California & Southern Oregon that actually tried to establish itself as a new US State about 60 years ago.
- This is “A Literary Map of the American South.” Notice the areas that are, aren’t included here (Virginia, but not Maryland, Missouri, but not Illinois, and notice that this particular map does not include Florida or Texas in the “The South”!)
  
Source: [http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/map_item.pl](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/map_item.pl)

The Problem of Boundaries

- Cultural and economic boundaries are difficult to draw. Unlike political boundaries, you have to look at many different factors, most of which aren’t sharply defined.
- Statistical data is usually collected using political units – states, cities, counties – that rarely coincide with the boundaries of regions.
- Geographers use a process of “scientific generalizing,” combining physical, historical, economic, and cultural factors to come up with reasonable regions. And no two experts are likely to come up with same regions!
Examples: Regions Based on Physical Characteristics

- Landform regions of the US
- Major watersheds of the US

Sources: http://vathena.arc.nasa.gov/curric/land/landform/landform.html; http://nationalatlas.gov/articles/water/a_hydrologic.html

Examples: Regions Based on Cultural Characteristics

- Culture regions of the US
- Census regions of the US

Changing Regions

- Regions are constantly changing. They change both because of changes in the physical environment, and because of cultural environment changes.
- The regions we see today are the result of changes that have taken place – and which are continuing to take place today.
- Example: Breaking up California
  - Your book includes an amusing (?) 1990 article from the Los Angeles Times on breaking up California into four regions:
    - Oregon: “this region does not belong to California and never has.”
    - Ecofornia: “a boutique state.”
    - Lettuce: “The valley has always shared more with Nebraska than coastal California.”
    - Los Angeles: “Los Angeles has become a separate world.”
  - In fact, in 1992, Assemblyman Stan Statham proposed that the State of California be divided into three new States. In 1993 the Assembly actually voted to put the proposal on the ballot, but the bill died in the State Senate. There have been at least 26 other attempts, the earliest in 1852.
- Other Proposed State Break-Ups
  - The State of Jefferson (Northern California & Southern Oregon; proposed 1852, 1859, 1941)
  - The State of Superior (the Upper Peninsula of Michigan)
  - Western Massachusetts (four or five of Massachusetts western counties)
  - Columbia (parts of Oregon, Washington, Idaho, and Montana)
  - Republic of Winston (Winston County, Alabama, 1861)
  - State of Franklin (Western North Carolina, 1784-1789; eventually became part of Tennessee)
  - State of Scott (Scott County, Tennessee, 1862)

13 Regions of the US (as defined in your textbook)

- The Atlantic Northeast
- Megalopolis
- The Appalachians & Ozarks
- The Inland South
- The Heartland Region
- The Great Plains & Prairies
- The Rocky Mountains
- The Intermontane West
- The California Region
- The Hawaiian Islands
- The North Pacific Coast
- The Boreal Forest
- The Arctic