

Figure 1.18
Guilin, China. The South China Karst region, bisected here by the Li River outside Guilin, is an UNESCO World Heritage Site. © Alexander B. Murphy.

city has a surrounding region within which workers commute, either to the downtown area or to subsidiary centers such as office parks and shopping malls. That entire urban area, defined by people moving toward and within it, is a functional region. Thus a functional region is a spatial system; its boundaries are defined by the limits of that system. Functional regions are not necessarily culturally homogeneous; instead, the people within the region function together politically, socially, or economically. The city of Chicago is a functional region, and the city itself is part of hundreds of functional regions—from the State of Illinois to the seventh federal reserve district.

Finally, regions may be primarily in the minds of people. **Perceptual regions** are intellectual constructs designed to help us understand the nature and distribution of phenomena in human geography. Geographers do not agree entirely on their properties, but we do concur that we all have impressions and images of various regions and cultures. These perceptions are based on our accumulated knowledge about such regions and cultures. Perceptual regions are not just curiosities. How people think about regions has influenced everything from daily activity patterns to large-scale international conflict. A perceptual region can include people, their cultural

traits, such as dress, food, and religion; places and their physical traits, such as mountains, plains, or coasts; and built environments, such as windmills, barns, skyscrapers, or beach houses.

But where is this Mid-Atlantic region? If Maryland and Delaware are part of it, then eastern Pennsylvania is, too. But where across Pennsylvania lies the boundary of this partly cultural, partly physical region, and on what basis can it be drawn? There is no single best answer (Fig. 1.19).

Major news events help us create our perceptual regions by defining certain countries or areas of countries as part of a region. Before September 11, 2001, we all had perceptions of the Middle East region. For most of us, that region included Iraq and Iran but stretched no farther east. As the hunt for Osama bin Laden began and the media focused attention on the harsh rule of the Taliban in Afghanistan, our regional perceptions of the Middle East changed; for many, the region stretched to encompass Afghanistan and Pakistan. Scholars who specialize in this part of the globe had long studied the relationship between parts of Southwest Asia and the traditional “Middle East,” but the connections between Afghanistan and Pakistan and the rest of the Middle East were almost invisible to the general population.



Figure 1.19
Mid-Atlantic Cultural Region. One delimitation of the Mid-Atlantic culture region. Adapted with permission from: H. Glassie, *Pattern in the Material Folk Culture of the Eastern United States*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1968, p. 39.

Perceptual Regions in the United States

Cultural geographer Wilbur Zelinsky tackled the complex task of defining and delimiting the perceptual regions of the United States and southern Canada. In an article titled “North America’s Vernacular Regions,” he identified 12 major perceptual regions on a series of maps (summarized in Fig. 1.20). When you examine the map, you will notice some of the regions overlap in certain places. For example, the more general term *the West* actually incorporates more specific regions, such as the Pacific Region and part of the Northwest.

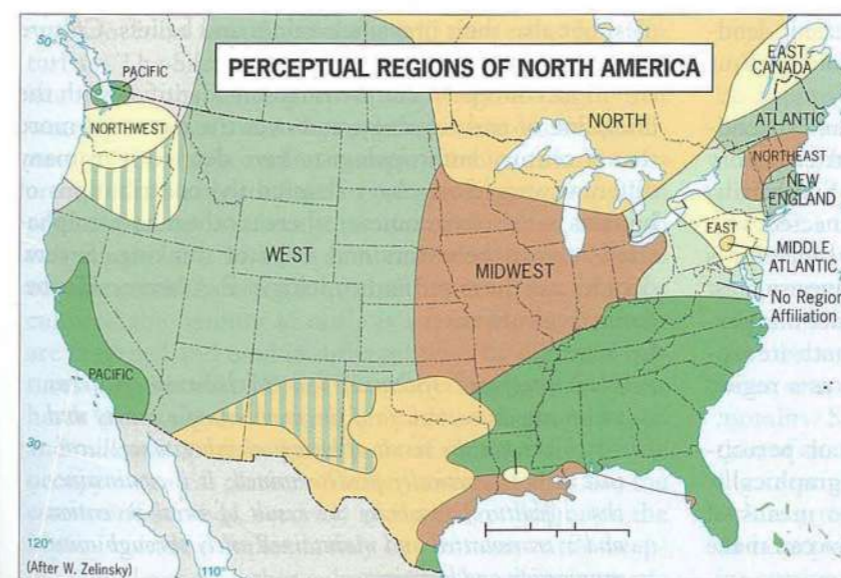


Figure 1.20
Perceptual Regions of North America. Adapted with permission from: W. Zelinsky, “North America’s Vernacular Regions,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 1980, p. 14.

The problem of defining and delimiting perceptual regions can be approached in several ways. One is to conduct interviews in which people residing within as well as outside a region are asked to respond to questions about their home and cultural environment. Zelinsky used a different technique; he analyzed the telephone directories of 276 metropolitan areas in the United States and Canada, noting the frequency with which businesses and other enterprises use regional or locational terms (such as “Southern Printing Company” or “Western Printing”) in their listings. The resulting maps show a close similarity between these perceptual regions and culture regions identified by geographers.

Among the perceptual regions shown in Figure 1.20, one, the South, is unlike any of the others. Even today, five generations after the Civil War, the Confederate flag still evokes strong sentiments from both those who revere the flag and those who revile it.

A “New South” has emerged over the past several decades, forged by Hispanic immigration, urbanization, movement of people from other parts of the United States to the South, and other processes. But the South, especially the rural South, continues to carry imprints of a culture with deep historical roots. Its legacy is preserved in language, religion, music, food preferences, and other traditions and customs.

If you drive southward from, say, Pittsburgh or Detroit, you will not pass a specific place where you enter this perceptual region. You will note features in the cultural landscape that you perceive to be associated with the South (such as Waffle House restaurants), and at some stage of the trip these features will begin to dominate the area to such a degree that you will say, “I am really in the South now.” This may result from a combination of features in the culture: the style of