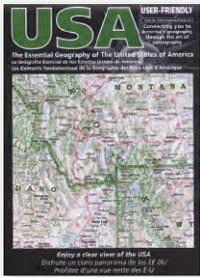


USA: THE ESSENTIAL GEOGRAPHY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA



Published by David Imus, Eugene, OR, Imus Geographics, 50" x 35.3", ISBN: 978-0-9818551-2-7, Folded; \$12.95.

Review by: Dan Cole,
Smithsonian Institution

Unlike most books that I have reviewed in the past, this map arrived pre-reviewed by eight individuals including such eminent cartographers as Stuart Allan and Tom Patterson. Imus describes *The Essential Geography* as “the first map created with the goal of so clearly representing the basic geography of the USA that it becomes understandable and interesting to everyone. Aiming to set a new standard in cartographic clarity, this map gives Americans a unique opportunity to see geographic associations, to grasp the essential character of our national landscape, and in the process become more geographically aware; making *The Essential Geography* map an invaluable resource for all Americans.” (Press Release, November 15, 2010)

Such broad self-promotional claims must be examined: taken individually, they would be impressive; collectively, they are somewhat astonishing. What is it that renders a map “understandable and interesting to everyone”? Imus does not explain, but implies that it has something to do with “clarity.” Have there been no clear maps of the US (or other places) before? Further, could not his aim to set a “new standard in cartographic clarity” be construed as something of an insult to some of the reviewers, mentioned above, and quoted on his map? The last sentence above assumes that Americans (who *are* typically geographically illiterate and unaware of GIS) have not previously seen, or even had an opportunity to see, geographic associations of our national landscape. A goal of making Americans geographically aware also raises the question: Is this map being marketed in support of a campaign to reestablish the teaching of Geography in our primary and secondary school systems, or will this map supply all such wants by itself? None of these questions are easy to answer.

Imus also makes some rather more specific claims that are easier to evaluate, such as, for instance, that the map “allows you to easily follow rivers, locate forested and mountainous areas, differentiate time zones, find the highest point in each state, or judge relative population density by the density of city names.” We also learn that

the map “depicts approximately 700 iconic American landmarks that have never been shown on a map of this kind, landmarks which help define the history and geography of the United States” (ibid.). I will look into these issues below.

This map is available as rolled paper or laminated sheets, or, like the reviewed copy, as a folded paper edition. The map is projected using the Albers Equal Area Conic projection, and the contiguous states plus the Hawaiian inset are at a scale of 1:4 million, while the Alaskan inset is set to 1:9 million. Overall, the map appears attractive, and fortunately does not stop its detail at the Canadian and Mexican borders. Viewed from a distance of 6 feet, one can easily see the green state boundaries, and get a feel for the topography based on shaded relief.

Upon closer inspection, the shaded relief is toned subtly and thus does not overpower any portion of the map. Cities and villages are easy to spot with lettering set to a visual hierarchy. Major cities have offset side notes indicating interesting historical sites, tourist attractions and major universities. One city that was short-changed on the last item is Honolulu, which is missing the University of Hawai’i.

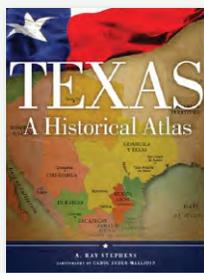
Likewise, interstates, US routes, and state highways are well-labeled and portrayed in red. Other linear features, such as political boundaries, rivers, time zone lines, and the Continental Divide are easy to locate, read and follow. All along the bottom collar is a clearly laid out tri-lingual legend (English-Spanish-French). Since space is tight, many abbreviations are used on the map and all are spelled out in a type block situated in the Gulf of Mexico. Off the left side of the map is a tri-lingual “Dear Map Reader” introduction. Below that section is what seems at first to be an unfortunate printing error; a portion of text printed upside down, containing excerpts of praise from six reviewers. I suspect that it is printed this way because the layout designer was thinking about the arrangement when the map is folded, but if it is also printed like this on the rolled paper or laminated versions, then such thinking is indefensible.

Areal features, such as national parks, national wildlife refuges, and wilderness areas are also easy to locate and delineate. One set of areal features, Indian Reservations, referred to by the author using the politically correct toponym, “Native American Reservations,” are not treated consistently. While one would not expect a map at this scale to include the hundreds of federally recognized tribal locations, it would seem logical that those which are presented would be all treated alike. One may assume that small reservations, dot-sized at this scale, will be presented as such; but some larger

reservations, the Umatilla in Oregon and the Isabella in Michigan, to name two, appear as dots when they could easily have been portrayed as polygons. Further, some of the larger reservations are not depicted at all, like the Omaha and Winnebago Reservations in Nebraska. Lastly, whereas large reservations are almost all delineated using gray-toned linework, one reservation, that of the Navajo Nation, has been singled out and bounded by black linework. In addition, while a number of reservations are currently officially identified with the word “Nation” in their title (for example, Yakama, Jicarilla Apache, and Tohono O’odham), only the Navajo has earned the word Nation on this map. No explanation is given for this special treatment.

The index on the reverse side of the map is divided into eight categories: Land and Water, Native American Reservations, Intercontinental Airports, Landmarks, Universities, State High Points, Regions, and Populated Places. Each of these titles is noted using the tri-lingual format. All categories, except for the State High Points, are meticulously laid out in alphabetical order, and they include parks, cities and so on in nearby areas of Canada and Mexico. The High Points are arranged from highest to lowest in elevation. Finally, the right hand panels include a tri-lingual User Guide for map readers using this map for the first time.

Overall, *The Essential Geography* is an excellent map, and while the claims for it made in the press release may be debatable, I believe that this map can be used as an important tool in classrooms and elsewhere. Nonetheless, it should be used in conjunction with other maps (such as Federal Lands, Indian Lands, Airports and so on) when a fuller picture is desired. In spite of the criticism noted above, I recommend this map and hope that future editions will make any corrections in layout, missing items, and inconsistencies.



TEXAS: A HISTORICAL ATLAS

By A. Ray Stephens and Carol Zuber-Mallison.

Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2010.

448 pages, 175 color maps, 81 color and black and white photographs, 45 charts.

\$39.95, hardcover.

ISBN: 978-0206138732

Review by: Tom Nance, National Ice Center

Texas: A Historical Atlas is a compilation of 86 essays supported by 175 vivid and easily understood maps. There are also many photographs, portraits, sketches, representations of forts and battle layouts, and county-

specific facts. The atlas describes Texas’ geography, history, and current affairs from the time of the first inhabitants to the present. As Dr. Stephens observes, “The relationship of history and geography can not be separated. One must be aware of the natural features in order to understand and appreciate the activities of inhabitants.”¹

This book is divided into three parts: “Natural Texas,” “The Texans,” and “Modern Texas.” The very brief first section (about 7% of the book), “Natural Texas,” is an introduction to the geography, weather, water, and plant life of the state. Half of the atlas is taken up with the second section, “The Texans.” It is divided into six subsections, each discussing one of the major ethnic groups (indigenous, European/American, and Mexican) or pre-twentieth-century historical events and periods that shaped the place known as Texas. This was, for me, the most interesting and engaging part of the atlas. The final section, “Modern Texas, 1900–2009,” has two subsections: “Modern Texas, 1900–1945” and “Contemporary Texas, 1945–2009.”

As I mentioned, the large middle section, “The Texans,” really captured my imagination. The tales of exploration kept me entertained, covering resistance to tyranny, disorganization and defeat, desperate victories against overwhelming odds, the founding of a nation, becoming part of another nation, and fighting for rights that, one eventually comes to realize, maybe weren’t so right. I personally enjoyed piecing together the evolution of Texas over time, and was astonished at aspects I had never before considered. For example, I had never recognized how large a role water played in shaping Texas—in more ways than just political boundaries. Most settlements began near bays, river crossings, or springs. Forts were built to protect those settlements and other key terrain, such as passes and trade routes between settlements. The wagons that blazed those trails between settlements usually followed the path of least resistance, and the road network used today closely resembles the major roads of early Texas.

The main narrative is also sprinkled with informative sidebars. I especially enjoyed the one dealing with “The Variable Vara” (p. 76) describing the use of the Spanish customary length unit in land surveying, and how it is that seven different types of vara came to be used. This book linked events together in such a way that I came to realize just how disorganized the Texas Revolution really was.

The “Modern Texas” section is also substantial, but is far less readable. This section of the book is primarily composed of facts and figures broken down in charts and tables and mapped by county. As a compendium of statistics it is no doubt useful, but after the engaging and dramatic presentation of the previous material, it is a bit tedious.