



## EDUCATION KIT

Mapping Manifest Destiny: Chicago and the American West  
A Newberry Library Exhibition Nov. 3, 2007—Feb. 16, 2008

### ***Mapping Manifest Destiny: Chicago and the American West*** **TEACHER EXHIBIT OVERVIEW**

#### **EXHIBIT INTRODUCTION**

*Mapping Manifest Destiny: Chicago and the American West* charts the historical role maps have played in imagining, understanding, promoting, and exploiting the Western frontier of North America. From colonial times through the turn of the twentieth century, maps encouraged Euro-Americans to see the West as a land of promise. Maps visualized the political idea that the United States was destined to expand across the continent to the Pacific Ocean.

Our exhibition is organized into four broadly inclusive themes of historical motivations for creating and using maps of the West. These four themes are: Maps for Empire, Mapping to Serve the New Nation, Mapping for Enlightenment, and Maps for Business. The galleries juxtapose birds eye views, atlases, and geography books with these maps to provide a broader sense of the visual culture of the frontier. Some examples have been celebrated for their artistry, cartographic innovation or link to famous people or events. Alongside these objects are utilitarian, mass-produced maps that were vital to their users but seldom studied or displayed.

The exhibition pays special attention to the place of Chicago in the development of the West. During this journey through time, the city emerges first as a dot on the map, then a bustling metropolis, and subsequently a major center for the production of American maps.

#### **MAPS FOR EMPIRE**

- Between the early sixteenth and the mid-nineteenth centuries, various European powers, including Spain, France, Britain, and Russia vied for control and territory on the North American continent.
- Maps helped establish borders and publicize territorial claims between the European powers as well as recruit settlers to the areas.
  - Many of the boundaries of the territorial claims east and west of the Mississippi River for France, Britain, and Spain were vague.
  - Each empire would produce maps that represented its national interest, resulting in many maps claiming the same parcel of land by multiple empires.
  - In 1848 the United States and Mexico signed the Treaty of Guadalupe to help settle the issue of disputed land after the Mexican War. American negotiators brought with them a map that maximized the representation of area under US control; Mexican negotiators had not brought any map to dispute the US claims, thereby allowing the US to successfully negotiate more territory than it otherwise would have.
- It wasn't until the seventeenth century that European nations began to view North America as an area with potential for land settlement and exploitation.
  - With the notable exception of Mexico, it is extremely rare to find European produced maps of North America prior to the seventeenth century.
  - The majority of indigenous maps of North America were drawn in dirt, painted on rock, or carved on trees, making them temporary in nature.
  - Most maps made by Native Americans were actually produced for use by Europeans.
- Of all the European nations that explored and eventually settled in North America, the French were the most eager to explore and map.



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- Since the majority of British colonies were along the eastern coast of North America, few British maps focus on the interior of the continent.

### MAPPING TO SERVE THE NEW NATION

- The US government did not sanction official cartographic programs until 1925, but ad hoc programs were ongoing throughout the nation's history.
- Maps that showed areas west of the nation's official boundaries often stressed the geographic similarities to emphasize the continuity of the continent and to hint at the two areas as parts of a whole.
- The concept of the West in cartography has evolved with time:
  - In colonial times, the West was the majority of land beyond the Appalachian Mountains.
  - In the Antebellum Period it meant the Old Northwest and the lower Mississippi Valley and all the river's western tributaries.
  - After the mid-nineteenth century, it included California, western Oregon, the High Plains, the Rocky Mountains, and the Great Basin.

### MAPPING FOR ENLIGHTENMENT

- A constantly expanding segment of commercial cartography was for products that were to be used in schools and in the home.
- Educational geographic materials often incorporated current geographic knowledge about the West into broader surveys of national or world geography. As a result some of the first themed maps were developed during this time.
  - One such thematic map in the exhibit discusses the locations and migratory patterns of Native American tribes, as perceived by European settlers.
  - Privately made maps were expected to promote a cause or product and success was integral to payment for services.
  - Many enterprising cartographers created guidebooks for emigrants, political pamphlets, or *broadsides* with maps integrated in the text to boost sales.

### MAPS FOR BUSINESS

- As industry in the West grew, so did the mapping of mineral deposits, transportation networks, and land surveys.
- Chicago quickly became the nation's busiest railroad hub, due to its location as a gateway between the east and west.
  - This led to Chicago cartographers becoming railroad map specialists.
  - By 1875 Chicago was the leading publisher of railroad cartography in the country.
  - By the end of the nineteenth century Chicago had eclipsed all other cities to become the national center for cartography and map publication.
  - Prior to this time, the majority of map publication occurred along the eastern seaboard due in large part to the number of US government sanctioned cartographic projects. The maps affiliated with these projects needed to be published near the nation's capital for efficient communication.
- After the completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869 railroad companies needed to promote the West in order to remain profitable.



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- Railroad companies often omitted facts that could impede their success, including the topography of areas that may have been difficult to farm, locations of other railroad company lines, etc.
- Maps proved to be crucial to the economic boom affiliated with the Gold Rush because they detailed specific mining areas, charted local topography, and identified key mining towns and mills.

### VOCABULARY WORDS:

*Absolute Location*—a unique or exact position on the Earth’s surface; for example, a classroom number or home addresses are examples of an actual location; the longitude and latitude reference system on maps and globes gives an absolute location.

*Broadside*—a sheet of paper printed on one or both sides, as for distribution or posting.

*Cartography*—the production of maps.

*Geography*—the study of the earth’s surface.

*Manifest Destiny*—a political philosophy common among American statesmen and business leaders in the nineteenth century that held that the United States was destined to, or deserved to, conquer the heart of North America from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific Ocean.

*Map*—a graphic representation that facilitates a spatial understanding of things, concepts, conditions, processes, or events in the human world.

*Relative Location*—the location of a point expressed in relationship to the location of other points or in relation to a geographic reference system, such as the USPLS.

*Topography*—the detailed description of the features of earth’s surface.

*Wayfinding*—signs, maps, and other graphic or audible methods used to convey location and directions to travelers.

### BIBLIOGRAPHY & ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

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Harley, J.B. and Woodward, David eds. *The History of Cartography*. Vols. 1 and 2 Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987.

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*Historic Maps in K-12 Classrooms* ([www.newberry.org/k12maps](http://www.newberry.org/k12maps)). Produced by the Newberry’s Hermon Dunlap Smith Center for the History of Cartography, this free web resource for teaching the geographical dimensions of history includes several maps and lesson plans that examine topics associated with westward expansion (these maps are not included in the *Mapping Manifest Destiny* exhibit)