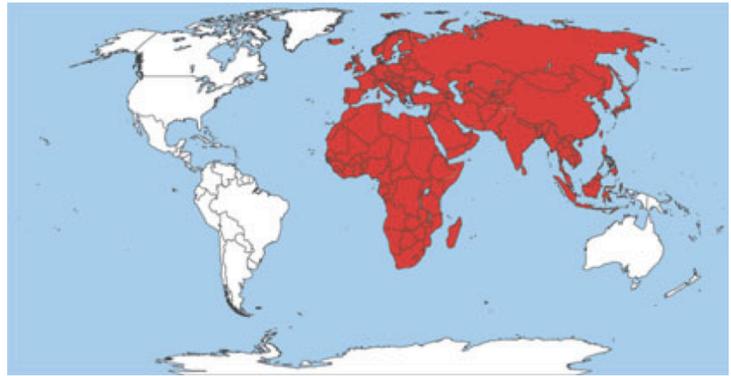


Big Geography: Some important geographical terms

To "think world history" in a way that makes room for all peoples requires that we see the spherical surface of the planet as the primary place where history happened. Students need, therefore, to have a basic knowledge of what has called **Big Geography**, that is, the largest-scale features of the earth's physical and natural environment. These are the patterns of topography, vegetation, climate, and weather that cut across particular nations or cultural groups and that give the world as a whole its distinctive "face." Attention to Big Geography prepares students to explore particular events, time periods, and regions in a way that encourages making connections between whatever subject matter they are learning and the world-scale context.

I. Afroeurasia

Afroeurasia is the landmass made up of Africa and Eurasia together. Afroeurasia was formed during the last 40 million years by the collision of the tectonic plates that contained Eurasia and those that contained Africa and Arabia. This geographical expression serves as a helpful tool in discussing large-scale historical developments that cut across the traditionally-defined continental divisions of Africa, Asia, and Europe. Even though Africa is separated from both Europe and Asia by the Mediterranean and Red seas (except at the Isthmus of Sinai where modern Egypt meets Israel), these bodies of water have historically been channels of human intercommunication, not barriers to it. Therefore, we may think of both the Mediterranean and the Red Sea as "lakes" inside Afroeurasia.



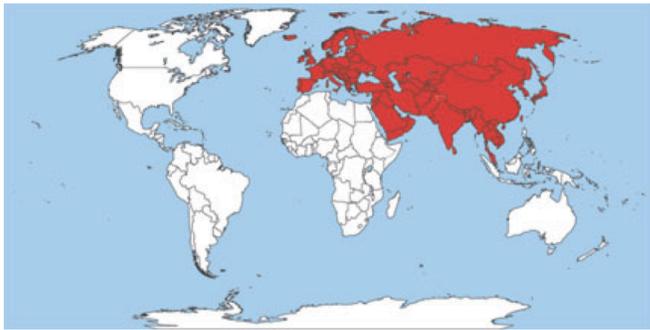
2. America, the Americas

The Americas are made up of the continents of North America and Latin America (Central and South America) including neighboring islands, notably the islands of the Caribbean Sea. Until the twentieth century, most geography books classified North and South America together as a single continent, labeling them the "New World" ("new" to Europeans beginning in the late fifteenth century CE) in contradistinction to the "Old World," that is, Afroeurasia. In the twentieth century, school children in the United States and most other countries (though not in some Latin American states) were taught to see

the "Western Hemisphere" as constituting two continents, joined only by the narrow Isthmus of Panama. On the other hand, humans in North and South America have never been entirely disconnected from one another. As far as we know, humans first migrated from North to South America 12,000 years or longer ago by advancing along either the Isthmus or its coastal waters. Also, it is not hard to perceive the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean Sea as two "internal seas" of a single American landmass, much the way we may think of the Mediterranean and Red seas as "inside" Afroeurasia. The Caribbean and the Gulf of Mexico are bounded on three sides by land and on the west by a long string of closely clustered islands

3. *Australasia*

The continent of Australia, plus New Guinea, New Zealand, Tasmania, and other islands that neighbor Australia make up Australasia. During the last Ice Age, when sea levels were lower, Australia, New Guinea, and Tasmania constituted a single landmass known as Sahul. Human settlement of Australasia began as many as 60,000 years ago, though Polynesian mariners did not reach New Zealand until about 1000 CE.



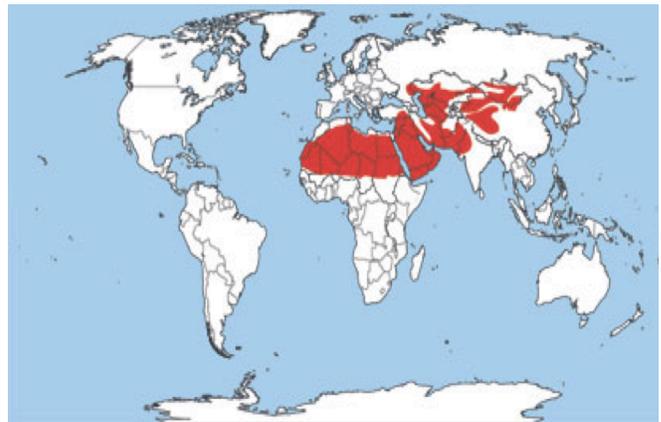
4. *Eurasia*

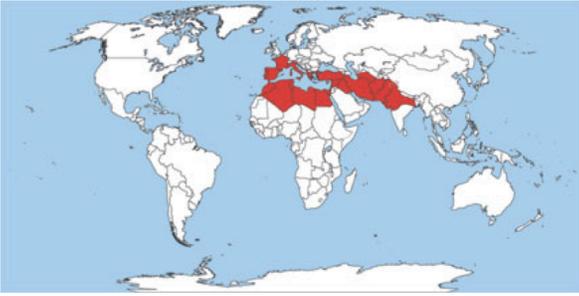
Eurasia is the landmass made up of Asia and Europe. Today, this term is widely used in history and geography education. The idea that Europe and Asia are separate continents goes back many centuries, but scholars who accept the definition of a continent as "a large landmass surrounded, or nearly surrounded, by water" know that the definition applies to neither Europe nor Asia because these two landmasses are conjoined. Moreover, the Ural Mountains, which eighteenth-century European geographers designated as the proper boundary between the European and Asian continents, have never been a serious obstacle to the flow of migrants, armies, trade

goods, or ideas. On this site, we define Europe as a subcontinent of Eurasia (or of Afroeurasia), parallel to South Asia or to the Indochinese peninsula.

5. *Great Arid Zone*

A climatic map of Afroeurasia shows that a good part of the landmass is a belt of dry or semi-dry country that extends all the way from the Atlantic coast of Africa in a generally northeasterly direction to the northern interior of China. This enormous tract comprises a chain of interconnected deserts, mountains, and semi-arid steppes. A steppe may be defined as flat or rolling grassland, equivalent to what Americans call "prairie" and Argentineans call "pampas." The main climatic characteristic of the Great Arid Zone is low annual rainfall, which may range from an average of less than 5 inches in the bleakest of deserts to 20 inches or so in better watered steppes. For several millennia, the Great Arid Zone has been home to pastoral nomadic peoples. Where water has been available from rivers, springs, or wells, it has also been home to farming societies and even large cities.





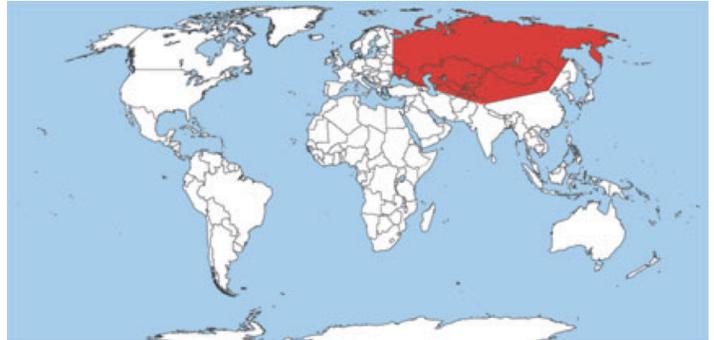
5. *Indo-Mediterranea*

The region of lands and seas extending from the Atlantic coasts of Europe and North Africa to North India is known as Indo-Mediterranea. This expression includes the Mediterranean basin as a whole and extends eastward across Southwest Asia to northern India as far as the Bay of Bengal. In the long term of human history

from at least the third millennium BCE to modern times, this region has been characterized by a proliferation of clusters of dense population (notably in river valleys) and by intense commercial and cultural interchange.

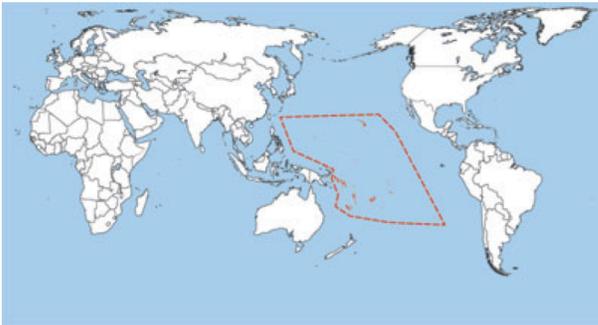
6. *Inner Eurasia*

The huge interior landmass of Eurasia, whose dominant features are flat, semi-arid regions of steppe and forest, is known as Inner Eurasia. David Christian defines Inner Eurasia as the territories ruled by the Soviet Union before its collapse, together with Mongolia and parts of western China. Poland and Hungary on the west and Manchuria (northeastern China) on the east may be thought of as Inner Eurasia's borderlands. The northern margins are boreal forest and Arctic tundra. The southern boundaries are the Himalayas and other mountain chains.



7. *Oceania*

The basin of the Pacific Ocean and its approximately 25,000 islands make up Oceania. Human settlement of this enormous region, sometimes called the Island Pacific, began in western islands near New Guinea about 1600 BCE. Polynesian mariners reached both Hawaii to the northeast and Easter Island to the far southeast around 500 CE. The majority of the islands lie in the tropical belt south of the Equator. The first peoples of Oceania spoke mostly Polynesian languages. Some geographers (we will) include both the large island of New Guinea and the continent of Australia as part of Oceania.



8. *Southwest Asia*

Southwest Asia is the designation of the region, often referred to as the Middle East, which extends from the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea to Afghanistan, including Turkey and the Arabian Peninsula, but not including Egypt or any other part of Africa. World History for Us All uses the term "Middle East" only in the context of history since the start of the twentieth century. For earlier periods, "Middle East" has caused students of history considerable confusion because it is used sometimes as a synonym for Southwest Asia, sometimes to encompass Southwest Asia plus Egypt, and sometimes to embrace the entire region from Afghanistan to Morocco.



Taken from *World History for All of Us*

