

KEY ISSUE 2

Where Are Folk and Popular Material Culture Distributed?

- Folk and Popular Clothing
- Folk and Popular Food Preferences
- Distribution of Folk and Popular Housing
- U.S. Housing

Learning Outcome 4.2.1

Compare reasons for distribution of clothing styles in folk and popular culture.

Material culture includes the three most important necessities of life—clothing, food, and shelter. As is the case with leisure, material elements of folk culture typically have unknown or multiple origins among groups living in relative isolation, and they diffuse slowly to other locations through the process of relocation diffusion.

Popular clothing, food, and shelter vary more in time than in place. They originate through the invention of a particular person or corporation, and they diffuse rapidly across Earth to locations with a variety of physical conditions. Access depends on an individual having a sufficiently high level of income to acquire the material possessions associated with popular culture.

Some regional differences in food, clothing, and shelter persist in popular culture, but differences are much less than in the past. Go to any recently built neighborhood on the outskirts of an American city from Portland, Maine, to Portland, Oregon: The houses look the same, the people wear jeans, and the same chains deliver pizza.

Folk and Popular Clothing

People living in folk cultures have traditionally worn clothing in part in response to distinctive agricultural practices and climatic conditions. In popular culture, clothing preferences generally reflect occupations rather than particular environments.

FOLK CLOTHING PREFERENCES

People wear distinctive folk clothing for a variety of environmental and cultural reasons. The folk custom in the Netherlands of wearing wooden shoes may appear quaint, but it still has practical uses in a wet climate (Figure 4-15).



▲ **FIGURE 4-15 DUTCH WOODEN SHOES** A man wearing wooden shoes bikes on a flooded street in Stellendam, Netherlands.

In arctic climates, fur-lined boots protect against the cold, and snowshoes permit walking on soft, deep snow without sinking in. People living in warm and humid climates may not need any footwear if heavy rainfall and time spent in water discourage such use. Cultural factors, such as religious beliefs, can also influence clothing preferences (Figure 4-16).

Increased travel and the diffusion of media have exposed North Americans and Europeans to other forms of dress, just as people in other parts of the world have come into contact with Western dress. The poncho from South America, the dashiki of the Yoruba people of Nigeria, and the Aleut parka have been adopted by people elsewhere in the world. The continued use of folk costumes in some parts of the globe may persist not because of distinctive environmental conditions or traditional cultural values but to preserve past memories or to attract tourists (Figure 4-17).

Wearing traditional clothing in countries dominated by popular culture can be controversial, and conversely so can wearing popular clothing in countries dominated by folk-style clothing. Especially difficult has been the co-existence of the loose-fitting combination body covering, head covering, and veil traditionally worn by women in Southwest Asia and North Africa with casual Western-style popular women's clothing, such as open-necked blouses, tight-fitting slacks, and revealing skirts.

The loose-fitting combination garment, known by a variety of names, including burqa and chador, is typically



▲ **FIGURE 4-16 TRADITIONAL CLOTHES, MUSLIMS AND JEWS** Devout Muslim women and Jewish men wear modest black clothes, including head coverings. (top) French women wear traditional Muslim burqa to protest the French government's ban on wearing the burqa in public. (bottom) Jewish boys in Israel.

▼ **FIGURE 4-17 POSING FOR TOURISTS, PERU** These women in Cuzco, Peru, dressed in traditional costumes, are posing for tourists as a way to make money.



worn by women following traditional folk customs in Southwest Asia and North Africa. Women in these countries are discouraged from adopting Western-style blouses, skirts, and slacks. Meanwhile, men in the region may prefer to wear Western-style suits, especially if they occupy positions of leadership in business or government.

On the other hand, European countries, including France and Belgium, prohibit women from wearing the burqa in public. Some leaders in these countries have argued that traditional clothing that completely hides the face and body represents unacceptable treatment of women as second-class citizens.

Pause and Reflect 4.2.1

Can you think of other restrictions on clothing styles in developed countries, perhaps in schools?

RAPID DIFFUSION OF POPULAR CLOTHING STYLES

Individual clothing habits reveal how popular culture can be distributed across the landscape with little regard for distinctive physical features. Instead, popular clothing habits reflect:

- **Occupation.** A lawyer or business executive, for example, tends to wear a dark suit, light shirt or blouse, and necktie or scarf, whereas a factory worker wears jeans and a work shirt. A lawyer in New York is more likely to dress like a lawyer in California than like a factory worker in New York.
- **Income.** Women's clothes, in particular, change in fashion from one year to the next. The color, shape, and design of dresses change to imitate pieces created by clothing designers. For social purposes, people with sufficient income may update their wardrobe frequently with the latest fashions.

Improved communications have permitted the rapid diffusion of clothing styles from one region of Earth to another. Original designs for women's dresses, created in Paris, Milan, London, or New York, are reproduced in large quantities at factories in Asia and sold for relatively low prices in North American and European chain stores. Speed is essential in manufacturing copies of designer dresses because fashion tastes change quickly.

In the past, years could elapse from the time an original dress was displayed to the time that inexpensive reproductions were available in the stores. Now the time lag is only a few weeks because of the diffusion of electronic communications. Buyers from the major retail chains can view fashions electronically and place orders. Sketches, patterns, and specifications can be sent instantly from European fashion centers to American corporate headquarters and then on to Asian factories.

Folk and Popular Food Preferences

Learning Outcome 4.2.2

Understand reasons for folk food preferences and taboos.

According to the nineteenth-century cultural geographer Vidal de la Blache, “Among the connections that tie [people] to a certain environment, one of the most tenacious is food supply; clothing and weapons are more subject to modification than the dietary regime, which experience has shown to be best suited to human needs in a given climate.”

Food preferences are inevitably affected by the availability of products, but people do not simply eat what is available in their particular environment. Food preferences are strongly influenced by cultural traditions. What is eaten establishes one’s social, religious, and ethnic memberships. The surest good way to identify a family’s ethnic origins is to look in its kitchen.

FOLK FOOD CUSTOMS AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Folk food habits are embedded especially strongly in the environment. Humans eat mostly plants and animals—living things that spring from the soil and water of a region. Inhabitants of a region must consider the soil, climate, terrain, vegetation, and other characteristics of the environment in deciding to produce particular foods.

FOOD AND PLACE: THE CONCEPT OF TERROIR. The contribution of a location’s distinctive physical features to the way food tastes is known by the French term **terroir**. The word comes from the same root as *terre* (the French word for “land” or “earth”), but *terroir* does not translate precisely into English; it has a similar meaning to the English expressions “grounded” and “sense of place.” *Terroir* is the sum of the effects on a particular food item of soil, climate, and other features of the local environment.

FOODS TO CRAVE OR AVOID. In folk cultures, certain foods are eaten because their natural properties are perceived to enhance qualities considered desirable by the society. Here are some examples:

- The Abipone people in Paraguay eat jaguars, stags, and bulls to make them strong, brave, and swift. The Abipone believe that consuming hens or tortoises will make them cowardly.
- The Ainu people in Japan avoid eating otters because they are believed to be forgetful animals, and consuming them could cause loss of memory.
- The Mbum Kpau women in Chad do not eat chicken or goat before becoming pregnant. Abstaining from

consumption of these animals is thought to help escape pain in childbirth and to prevent birth of a child with abnormalities. During pregnancy, the Mbum Kpau avoid meat from antelopes with twisted horns, which could cause them to bear offspring with deformities.

FOODS FROM A GARDEN: THE BOSTANS OF ISTANBUL.

Bostans, which are small gardens inside Istanbul, Turkey, have been supplying the city with fresh produce for hundreds of years (Figure 4-18). According to geographer Paul Kaldjian, Istanbul has around 1,000 bostans, run primarily by immigrants from Cide, a rural village in Turkey’s Kastamonu province. Bostan farmers are able to maximize yields from their small plots of land (typically 1 hectare) through what Kaldjian calls clever and efficient manipulation of space, season, and resources. In a bostan, 15 to 20 different types of vegetables are planted at different times of the year, and the choice is varied from year to year, in order to reduce the risk of damage from poor weather. Most of the work is done by older men, who prepare beds for planting, sow, irrigate, and operate motorized equipment, according to Kaldjian. Women weed, and both men and women harvest.

FOODS AND THE ENVIRONMENT. People adapt their food preferences to conditions in the environment. In Asia, rice is grown in milder, moister regions; wheat thrives in colder, drier regions. In Europe, traditional preferences for quick-frying foods in Italy resulted in part from fuel shortages. In Northern Europe, an abundant wood supply encouraged the slow stewing and roasting of foods over fires, which also provided home heat in the colder climate.

Soybeans, an excellent source of protein, are widely grown in Asia. In the raw state they are toxic and indigestible. Lengthy cooking renders them edible, but fuel is scarce in Asia. Asians have adapted to this environmental challenge by deriving from soybeans foods that do not require extensive cooking. These include bean sprouts (germinated seeds), soy sauce (fermented soybeans), and bean curd (steamed soybeans).

FOOD TABOOS

According to many folk customs, everything in nature carries a signature, or distinctive characteristic, based on its appearance and natural properties. Consequently, people may desire or avoid certain foods in response to perceived beneficial or harmful natural traits.

People refuse to eat particular plants or animals that are thought to embody negative forces in the environment. Such a restriction on behavior imposed by social custom is a **taboo**. Other social customs, such as sexual practices, carry prohibitions, but taboos are especially strong in the area of food. Some folk cultures may establish food taboos because of concern for the natural environment. These taboos may help to protect endangered animals or to conserve scarce natural resources. To preserve scarce animal species, only a



▲ FIGURE 4-18 ISTANBUL VEGETABLE GARDEN Geographer Paul Kaldjian sketched a typical bostan, a traditional vegetable garden in the center of Istanbul, Turkey. Bostans provide residents of the large city of Istanbul with a source of fresh vegetables.

few high-ranking people in some tropical regions are permitted to hunt, and the majority cultivate crops.

Relatively well-known taboos against consumption of certain foods can be found in the Bible. The ancient Hebrews were prohibited from eating a wide variety of foods, including animals that do not chew their cud or that have cloven feet and fish lacking fins or scales (Figure 4-19). These taboos arose partially from concern for the environment by the Hebrews, who lived as pastoral nomads in lands bordering the eastern Mediterranean. The pig, for example, is prohibited in part because it is more suited to sedentary farming than pastoral nomadism

▼ FIGURE 4-19 KOSHER RESTAURANT, ROME



and in part because its meat spoils relatively quickly in hot climates, such as the Mediterranean. These biblical taboos were developed through oral tradition and by rabbis into the kosher laws observed today by some Jews.

Similarly, Muslims embrace the taboo against pork because pigs are unsuited for the dry lands of the Arabian Peninsula. Pigs would compete with humans for food and water, without offering compensating benefits, such as being able to pull a plow, carry loads, or provide milk and wool. Widespread raising of pigs would be an ecological disaster in Islam's hearth.

Hindu taboos against consuming cattle can also be partly explained by environmental reasons. Cows are the source of oxen (castrated male bovine), the traditional choice for pulling plows as well as carts. A large supply of oxen must be maintained in India because every field has to be plowed at approximately the same time—when the monsoon rains arrive. Religious sanctions have kept India's cattle population large as a form of insurance against the loss of oxen and increasing population.

But the taboo against consumption of meat among many people, including Muslims, Hindus, and Jews, cannot be explained primarily by environmental factors. Social values must influence the choice of diet because people in similar climates and with similar levels of income consume different foods. The biblical food taboos were established in part to set the Hebrew people apart from others. That Christians ignore the biblical food injunctions reflects their desire to distinguish themselves from Jews. Furthermore, as a universalizing religion, Christianity was less tied to taboos that originated in the Middle East (see Chapter 6).

Pause and Reflect 4.2.2

What foods do you avoid? Do you avoid foods because of taboos or for other reasons?

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POPULAR FOOD CULTURE

Learning Outcome 4.2.3

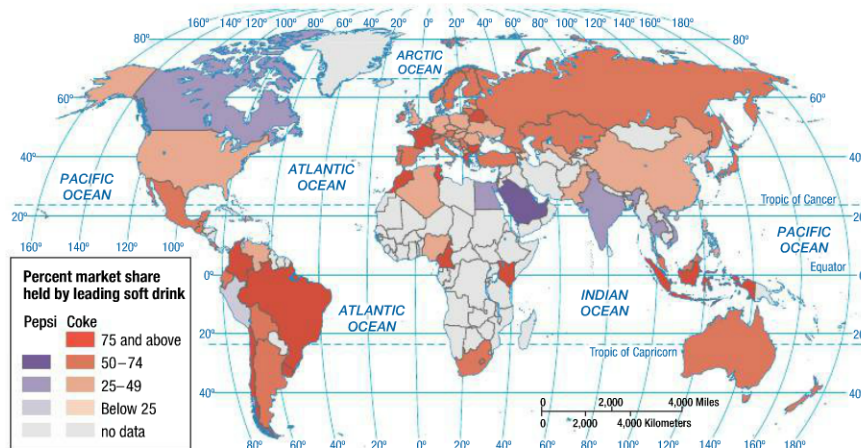
Describe regional variations in popular food preferences.

In the popular culture of twenty-first century America, food preferences seem far removed from folk traditions. Popular food preferences are influenced more by cultural values than by environmental features. Still, some regional variations can be observed, and environmental influences remain important in selected items.

DIFFERENCES AMONG COUNTRIES. Why do Coca-Cola and Pepsi have different sales patterns (Figure 4-20)? The two beverages are similar, and many people are unable to taste the difference. Yet consumers prefer Coke in some countries and Pepsi in others.

Coca-Cola accounts for more than one-half of the world's cola shares, and Pepsi for another one-fourth. Coca-Cola is the sales leader in most of the Western Hemisphere. The principal exception is Canada's French-speaking province of Québec, where Pepsi is preferred. Pepsi won over the Québécois with advertising that tied Pepsi to elements of uniquely French Canadian culture. The major indoor arena in Québec City is named the Colisée Pepsi (Pepsi Coliseum).

Cola preferences are influenced by politics in Russia. Under communism, government officials made a deal with Pepsi to allow that cola to be sold in the Soviet Union. With the breakup of the Soviet Union and the end of communism, Coke entered the Russian market. Russians quickly switched their preference to Coke because Pepsi was associated with the discredited Communist government.



▲ **FIGURE 4-20 COKE VERSUS PEPSI** Coca-Cola leads in sales in the United States, Latin America, Europe, and Russia. Pepsi leads in Canada and South and Southwest Asia.

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In Southwest Asia, religion influences cola preferences. At one time, the region's predominantly Muslim countries boycotted products that were sold in predominantly Jewish Israel. Because Coke but not Pepsi was sold in Israel, in most of Israel's neighbors Pepsi was preferred.

REGIONAL DIFFERENCES WITHIN THE UNITED STATES.

Some of the leading franchised fast-food restaurants display regional variations in popularity. Lexicalist (www.lexicalist.com) reads through millions of words on Twitter and other social media to see what kind of words are being used throughout the United States. Based on the frequency of referring to particular fast-food restaurants, Lexicalist concludes that Dunkin' Donuts is especially popular in the Northeast, Krispy Kreme in the Southeast, White Castle in the Midwest, and In-N-Out Burger in the Southwest (Figure 4-21).

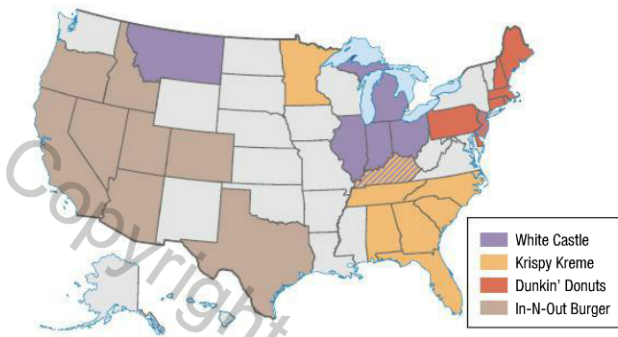
Americans may choose particular beverages or snacks in part on the basis of preference for what is produced, grown, or imported locally:

- Wine consumption is relatively high in California, where most of the U.S. production is concentrated, and beer consumption is relatively low there. Beer and spirits consumption are relatively high in the upper Midwest, where much of the grain is grown. Consumption of wine is low in that part of the country, where few grapes are grown.
- Southerners may prefer pork rinds because more hogs are raised there, and northerners may prefer popcorn and potato chips because more corn and potatoes are grown there.

Cultural backgrounds affect the amount and types of alcohol and snack foods consumed:

- Utah has a low rate of consumption of all types of alcohol because of a concentration there of members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, who abstain from all alcohol consumption. The adjacent state of Nevada has a high rate of consumption of all types of alcohol because of the heavy concentration of gambling and other resort activities there. Alcohol consumption relates partially to religious backgrounds and partially to income and advertising.
- Texans may prefer tortilla chips because of the large number of Hispanic Americans there. Westerners may prefer multigrain chips because of greater concern for the nutritional content of snack foods.

Geographers cannot explain most of the regional variations in food preferences. Variations



▲ FIGURE 4-21 FAST-FOOD RESTAURANT PREFERENCES Dunkin' Donuts is especially popular in the Northeast, Krispy Kreme in the Southeast, White Castle in the Midwest, and In-N-Out Burger in the Southwest.

within the United States are much less significant than differences between the United States and developing countries in Africa and Asia.

Pause and Reflect 4.2.3

Do your food preferences match the predominant ones in your region?

WINE PRODUCTION: ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS. The spatial distribution of wine production demonstrates that environmental factors can be of some influence in the distribution of popular food customs. The distinctive character of a wine derives from a vineyard's terroir—the unique combination of soil, climate, and other physical characteristics at the place where the grapes are grown:

- **Climate.** Vineyards are best cultivated in temperate climates of moderately cold, rainy winters and fairly long, hot summers. Hot, sunny weather is necessary in the summer for the fruit to mature properly, whereas winter is the preferred season for rain because plant diseases

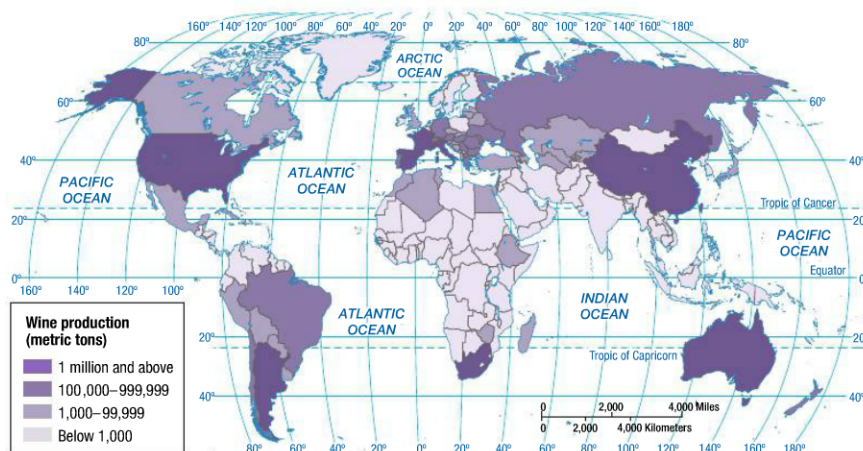
that cause the fruit to rot are more active in hot, humid weather.

- **Topography.** Vineyards are planted on hillsides, if possible, to maximize exposure to sunlight and to facilitate drainage. A site near a lake or river is also desirable because water can temper extremes of temperature.
- **Soil.** Grapes can be grown in a variety of soils, but the best wine tends to be produced from grapes grown in soil that is coarse and well drained—a soil that is not necessarily fertile for other crops.

WINE PRODUCTION: CULTURAL FACTORS. Although grapes can be grown in a wide variety of locations, the production of wine is based principally on cultural values, both historical and contemporary. The distribution of wine production shows that the diffusion of popular customs depends less on the distinctive environment of a location than on the presence of beliefs, institutions, and material traits conducive to accepting those customs (Figure 4-22). Wine is made today primarily in locations that have a tradition of excellence in making it and people who like to drink it and can afford to purchase it.

The social custom of wine production in much of France and Italy extends back at least to the Roman Empire. Wine consumption declined after the fall of Rome, and many vineyards were destroyed. Monasteries preserved the wine-making tradition in medieval Europe for both sustenance and ritual. Wine consumption has become extremely popular again in Europe in recent centuries, as well as in the Western Hemisphere, which was colonized by Europeans. Vineyards are now typically owned by private individuals and corporations rather than religious organizations.

Wine production is discouraged in regions of the world dominated by religions other than Christianity. Hindus and Muslims in particular avoid alcoholic beverages. Thus wine production is limited in the Middle East (other than Israel) and southern Asia primarily because of cultural values, especially religion.



▲ FIGURE 4-22 WINE PRODUCTION The distribution of wine production is influenced in part by the physical environment and in part by social customs. Most grapes used for wine are grown near the Mediterranean Sea or in areas of similar climate. Income, preferences, and other social customs also influence the distribution of wine consumption, as seen in the lower production levels of predominantly Muslim countries south of the Mediterranean.

Distribution of Folk and Popular Housing

Learning Outcome 4.2.4

Understand factors that influence patterns of folk housing.

French geographer Jean Brunhes, a major contributor to the cultural landscape tradition, viewed the house as being among the essential facts of human geography. It is a product of both cultural tradition and natural conditions. American cultural geographer Fred Kniffen considered the house to be a good reflection of cultural heritage, current fashion, functional needs, and the impact of environment.

ENVIRONMENTAL INFLUENCES ON FOLK HOUSING

A group's unique folk customs develop through centuries of relative isolation from customs practiced by other cultural groups. As a result, folk customs observed at a point in time vary widely from one place to another, even among nearby places.

The construction of a pitched roof is important in wet or snowy climates to facilitate runoff and to reduce the weight of accumulated snow. Windows may face south in temperate climates to take advantage of the Sun's heat and light. In hot climates, on the other hand, window openings may be smaller to protect the interior from the full heat of the Sun.

The type of building materials used to construct folk houses is influenced partly by the resources available in the environment. Stone, grass, sod, and skins may be used, but the two most common building materials in the world are wood and brick:

- **Wood.** If available, wood is generally preferred for house construction because it is easy to build with it. In the past, pioneers who settled in forested regions built log cabins for themselves. Today, people in developed countries buy lumber that has been cut by machine into the needed shapes. Cut lumber is used to erect a frame, and sheets or strips of wood are attached for the floors, ceilings, and roof.
- **Brick.** In hot, dry climates—such as the U.S. Southwest, Mexico, northern China, and parts of the Middle East—bricks are made by baking wet mud in the sun. Stone is used to build houses in parts of Europe and South America and as decoration on the outside of brick or wood houses in other countries.

Even in areas that share similar climates and available building materials, folk housing can vary because of minor differences in environmental features. For example, R. W. McColl compared house types in four villages situated in the dry lands of northern and western China (Figure 4-23). All use similar building materials, including adobe and

timber from the desert poplar tree, and they share a similar objective—protection from extreme temperatures, from very hot summer days to subfreezing winter nights. Despite their similarities, the houses in these four Chinese villages have individual designs, which McColl attributed to local cultural preferences:

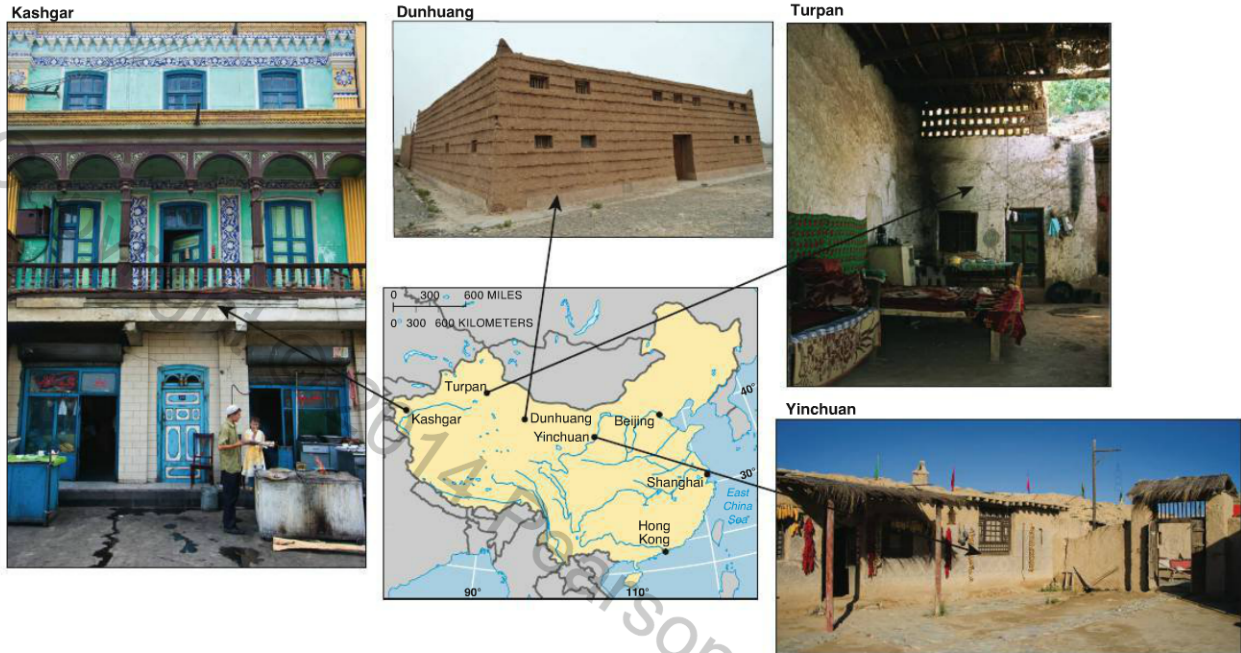
- **Kashgar.** Houses have second-floor open-air patios, where the residents can catch evening breezes. Poplar and fruit trees can be planted around the houses because the village has a river that is constantly flowing rather than seasonal, as is the case in much of China's dry lands. These deciduous trees provide shade in the summer and openings for sunlight in the winter.
- **Turpan.** Houses have small, open courtyards for social gatherings. Turpan is situated in a deep valley with relatively little open land because much of the space is allocated to drying raisins. Second-story patios, which would use even less land, are avoided because the village is subject to strong winds.
- **Yinchuan.** Houses are built around large, open-air courtyards, which contain tall trees to provide shade. Most residents are Muslims, who regard courtyards as private spaces to be screened from outsiders. The adobe bricks are square or cubic rather than rectangular, as is the case in the other villages, though R. W. McColl found no reason for this distinctive custom.
- **Dunhuang.** Houses are characterized by walled central courtyards, covered by an open-lattice grape arbor. The cover allows for the free movement of air but provides shade from the especially intense direct summer heat and light. Rather than the flat roofs characteristic of dry lands, houses in Dunhuang have sloped roofs, typical of wetter climates, so that rainfall can run off. The practice is apparently influenced by Dunhuang's relative proximity to the population centers of eastern China, where sloped roofs predominate.

SACRED SPACES IN HOUSES

The distinctive form of folk houses may derive primarily from religious values and other customary beliefs rather than from environmental factors. Some compass directions may be more important than other directions.

Houses may have sacred walls or corners. In the south-central part of the island of Java, for example, the front door always faces south, the direction of the South Sea Goddess, who holds the key to Earth. The eastern wall of a house is considered sacred in Fiji, as is the northwestern wall in parts of China. Sacred walls or corners are also noted in parts of the Middle East, India, and Africa.

In Madagascar, the main door is on the west, considered the most important direction, and the northeastern corner is the most sacred. The northern wall is for honoring ancestors; in addition, important guests enter a room from the north and are seated against the northern wall. The bed is placed against the eastern wall of the house, with the head facing north.

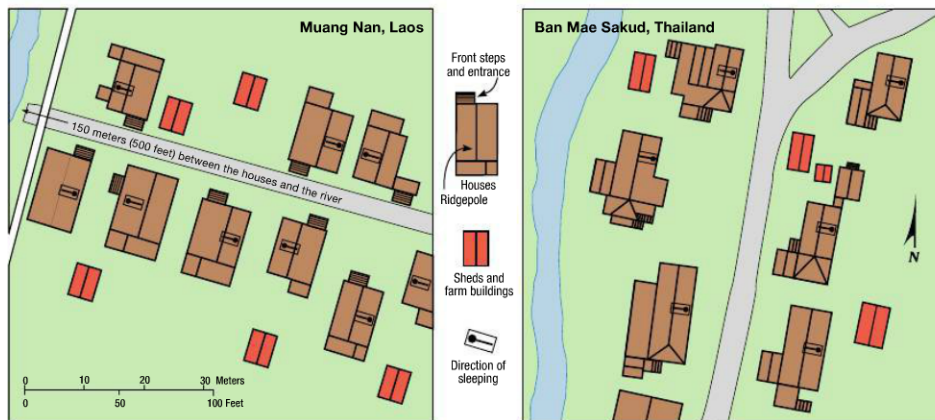


▲ FIGURE 4-23 HOUSE TYPES IN FOUR WESTERN CHINA COMMUNITIES House types in four communities of western China. Houses have second-floor open-air patios in Kashgar, small open courtyards in Turpan, large private courtyards in Yinchuan, and sloped roofs in Dunhuang.

The Lao people in northern Laos arrange beds perpendicular to the center ridgepole of the house (Figure 4-24, top). Because the head is considered high and noble and the feet low and vulgar, people sleep so that their heads will be opposite their neighbor's heads and their feet opposite their neighbor's feet. There is one principal exception to this arrangement: A child who builds a house next door to his or her parents sleeps with his or her head toward the parents' feet as a sign of obeying the customary hierarchy.

Although they speak similar Southeast Asian languages and adhere to Buddhism, the Lao do not orient their houses in the same manner as the Yuan and Shan peoples in nearby northern Thailand (Figure 4-24, bottom). The Yuan and Shan ignore the position of neighbors and all sleep with their heads toward the east, which Buddhists consider the most auspicious direction. Staircases must not face west, the least auspicious direction and the direction of death and evil spirits.

Pause and Reflect 4.2.4
What factors were considered in the arrangement of the bed in your bedroom?



◀ FIGURE 4-24 SACRED HOUSING SPACE (top) Houses of Lao people in northern Laos. The fronts of Lao houses, such as those in the village of Muang Nan, Laos, face one another across a path, and the backs face each other at the rear. Their ridgepoles (the centerline of the roof) are set perpendicular to the path but parallel to a stream, if one is nearby. Inside adjacent houses, people sleep in the orientation shown, so neighbors are head-to-head or feet-to-feet. (bottom) Houses of Yuan and Shan peoples in northern Thailand. In the village of Ban Mae Sakud, Thailand, the houses are not set in a straight line because of a belief that evil spirits move in straight lines. Ridgepoles parallel the path, and the heads of all sleeping persons point eastward.

U.S. Housing

Learning Outcome 4.2.5

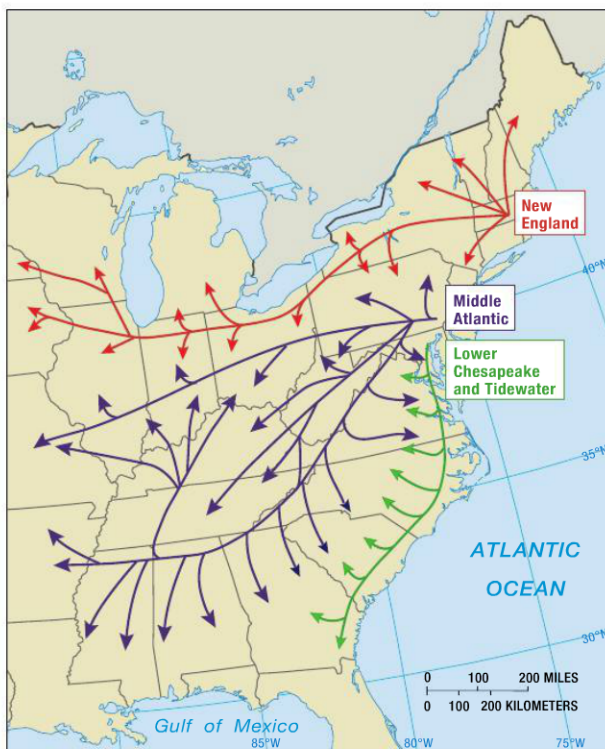
Understand variations in time and space of housing in the United States.

Older houses in the United States display local folk-culture traditions. Housing built in the United States since the 1940s demonstrates how popular customs vary more in time than in place. In contrast with folk housing characteristic of the early 1800s, newer housing in the United States has been built to reflect rapidly changing fashion concerning the most suitable house form.

U.S. FOLK HOUSING

When families migrated westward in the 1700s and 1800s, they cut trees to clear fields for planting and used the wood to build houses, barns, and fences. The style of pioneer homes reflected whatever upscale style was prevailing at the place on the East Coast from which they migrated.

HEARTHS OF HOUSE TYPES. Geographer Fred Kniffen identified three major hearths, or nodes, of folk house forms in the United States (Figure 4-25):



▲ FIGURE 4-25 HEARTHS OF U.S. FOLK HOUSING U.S. house types in the United States originated in three main source areas and diffused westward along different paths. These paths coincided with predominant routes taken by migrants from the East Coast toward the interior of the country.

- **Middle Atlantic.** The principal house type was known as the “I”-house, typically two full stories in height, one room deep and at least two rooms wide. Middle Atlantic migrants carried their house type westward across the Ohio Valley and southwestward along the Appalachian trails.
- **Lower Chesapeake/Tidewater.** The style typically comprised one story, with a steep roof and chimneys at either end. Migrants spread these houses from the Chesapeake Bay/Tidewater, Virginia, area along the Southeast Coast. In wet areas, houses in the coastal southeast were often raised on piers or on brick foundations.
- **New England.** The distinctive style was box shaped with a central hall. The New England house types can be found throughout the Great Lakes region as far west as Wisconsin because this area was settled primarily by migrants from New England.

Folk housing can still be seen in the United States in older housing that survives from the nineteenth century. As discussed in the following Contemporary Geographic Tools feature, geographers use field studies to document the distribution and diffusion of house types.

U.S. POPULAR HOUSING

Houses built in the United States since the mid-twentieth century display popular culture influences. The degree of regional distinctiveness in housing style has diminished because rapid communication and transportation systems provide people throughout the country with knowledge of alternative styles. Furthermore, most people do not build the houses in which they live. Instead, houses are usually mass-produced by construction companies.

Houses show the influence of shapes, materials, detailing, and other features of architectural style in vogue at any one point in time. In the years immediately after World War II, which ended in 1945, most U.S. houses were built in a modern style. Since the 1960s, styles that architects call neo-eclectic have predominated (Figure 4-26).

Pause and Reflect 4.2.5

Can you describe your house through reference to one of the past or present styles?

CHECK-IN: KEY ISSUE 2

Where Are Folk and Popular Material Culture Distributed?

- ✓ **Regional variations in folk food, clothing, and shelter derive from the physical environment, as well as from religion and other cultural values.**
- ✓ **Popular preferences in food, clothing, and shelter vary more in time than in place. However, some regional variations in preferences persist.**

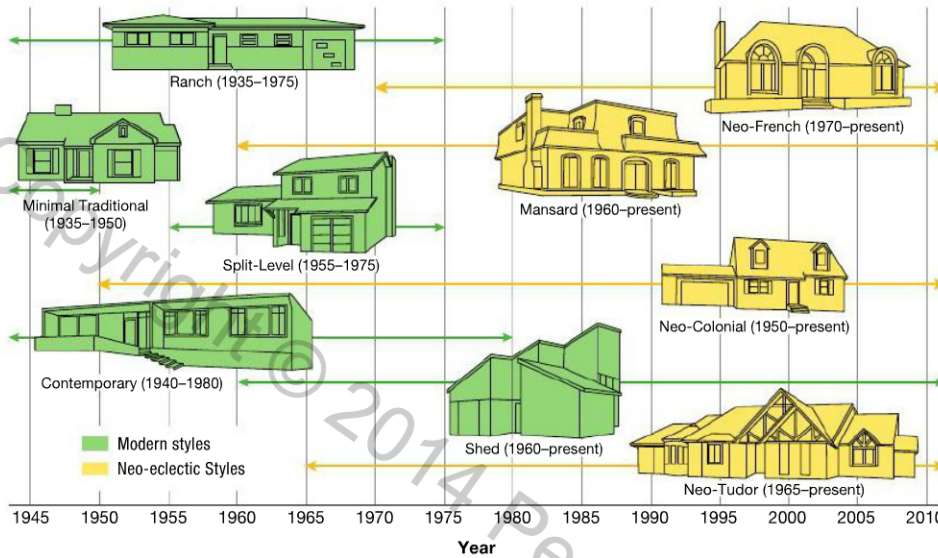


FIGURE 4-26 U.S. HOUSE TYPES, 1945 TO PRESENT The dominant type of house construction in the United States was minimal traditional during the late 1940s and early 1950s, followed by ranch houses during the late 1950s and 1960s. The split-level was a popular variant of the ranch between the 1950s and 1970s, and the contemporary style was popular for architect-designed houses during the same period. The shed style was widely built in the late 1960s. Neo-eclectic styles, beginning with the mansard, were in vogue during the late 1960s. The neo-Tudor was popular in the 1970s and the neo-French in the 1980s. The neo-colonial style has been widely built since the 1950s but has never dominated popular architecture.

CONTEMPORARY GEOGRAPHIC TOOLS

Documenting House Types through Fieldwork

Fieldwork has been regarded as an important geographic method since the development of geography as a modern science two centuries ago. Given their concern with regularities in space, geographers need to get out of their classrooms and laboratories to observe the visible elements of other places with their own eyes.

Especially well suited to field studies have been visible everyday elements of folk and popular culture, such as house styles. Field material can be collected by delineating one or more areas on a map and visiting the sites. Armed with a chart or a spreadsheet, a geographer counts the number of times that something appears in the area, such as a particular type of house.

According to fieldwork by geographers John Jakle, Robert Bastian, and Douglas Meyer, regional differences in the predominant type of house persist to some extent in the United States (Figure 4-27). Differences in housing among U.S. communities derive largely from differences in the time period in which the houses were built.

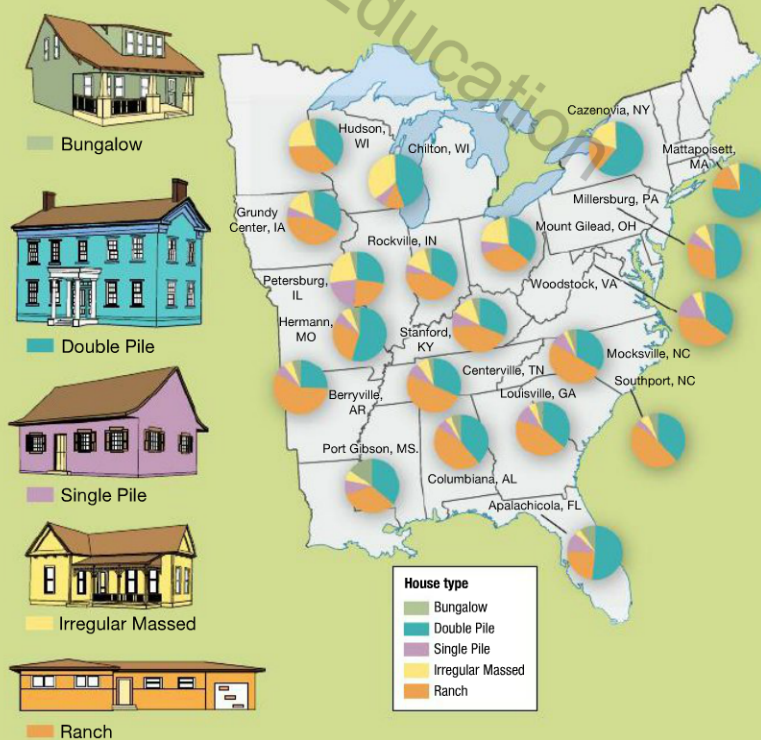


FIGURE 4-27 REGIONAL DIFFERENCES IN HOUSE TYPES Jakle, Bastian, and Meyer allocated the single-family housing in 20 small towns in the eastern United States into five groups: bungalow, double pile, irregularly massed, ranch, and single pile. Ranch houses were more common in the southeastern towns; double-pile houses predominated in northeastern areas.