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in the Humanities & Social Sciences

OSSEE Historical and Cultural Atlas Resource. New Media Center, University of Oregon.

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Tired of dragging battered wall maps to your classroom? Looking for something more exciting than transparencies and an overhead projector? Enticed by the prospect of using multi-media in your lectures? If so, this collection might be for you. Designed by the New Media Center and the departments of history and geography at the University of Oregon, the OSSEE Historical and Cultural Atlas Resource is useful for virtually any course ranging from Ancient Civilization to nineteenth-century America. A work-in-progress, the collection promises only to improve over time. And, indeed, some improvements are necessary. While the visual quality of the maps is consistently high, their historical accuracy ranges widely. <p> As of now, the collection's holdings are much stronger in European, North African, and Middle Eastern history. Arranged into sections on atlases and cultural images, the site offers interactive maps and images (in two sizes) on topics including economics, territorial expansion, religion, and slavery. Materials are posted in either a JPEG or Microsoft Shockwave format. Convenient links enable one to download the Shockwave software. The site also features links to several map collections and internet resources throughout the world. <p> Since I am an Americanist, I focused mostly on the materials regarding North America. I was disappointed that there are no maps on the twentieth century posted yet. However, some of the resources prior to 1898 are quite good. Interactive maps on territorial expansion provide an easy way to demonstrate the changing shape of the United States. There are also maps illustrating the geographic status and growth of slavery. Some of the featured interactive maps include the Louisiana Purchase, the Lewis and Clark expedition, the Missouri Compromise, Southern Cotton Production, and the Indian wars. The interactive maps capture change-over-time in a way no printed map or transparency ever could. Although Powerpoint software is not compatible with all JPEG images, one could convert desired downloads to gif or bitmap files using any of several viewer programs available through the Web. <p> Unfortunately, these maps are not entirely user-friendly. Legends on the interactive maps do not automatically appear; one has to mouse-click to include them. More serious is the fact that one cannot pause the interactive maps–they simply restart. This would be wonderful if one is trying to show change over time, but would be very problematic if one is trying to lecture while showing geographical changes. The site should be adapted to accommodate the instructor's pace. Furthermore, some maps feature invasions, territorial claims, or movements of certain groups. Unfortunately, they do not allow one to demonstrate more than one group at a time. This makes it difficult to demonstrate disputed territories or simultaneous movements or invasions. Using this site can also prove time-consuming. I would not recommend using a modem less powerful than 14,400 bpps. <p> These technical issues aside, my most serious reservations about the site stem from its historical inaccuracies. For example, a map featuring the United States After the Treaty of Paris nicely shows each state's year of settlement, progression of colonial statuses, and territorial claims. But then one reads more closely. The same map informs us that New York and Pennsylvania adopted U.S. constitutions in 1777 and 1776 respectively. <p> My Europeanist colleague also found some careless errors. The map featuring Trade with the Roman Empire omits the silk routes to China and India. The map of Sumerian Empire covers far too large an area beyond Babylon. Furthermore, the Hittites did not even exist at the same time as the some of the societies they are shown attacking. <p> Despite these reservations, I think this

site is a worthwhile resource. I urge instructors to utilize it, but to do so carefully. I look forward to the site's future growth–and improvement. <p>

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