HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Tennessee has three very distinct regions that make up the state: east, middle, and west. These are commonly referred to as the “grand divisions” and are represented by three stars on the state flag. The grand divisions of Tennessee are most visible by the different types of geological features across the state. Because of differences in geology and resources, the distribution of industrial and agricultural products varies widely. Furthermore, cultural differences have inspired different forms of folklife, including popular music, from blues in the west, to country in the middle, to bluegrass in the east.

West Tennessee is distinct for several reasons: it is
- Composed of 20-22 counties (differs according to source—Tennessee State Code states that there are 21)
- Situated between the Tennessee River on the east and the Mississippi River on the west
- Located on the edge of the New Madrid Seismic Zone. In 1811 and 1812, some of the strongest earthquakes ever recorded briefly changed the way the Mississippi River flowed and created Reelfoot Lake.
- Home to Tennessee’s largest city, Memphis (currently with a population of around 670,000)
- An important center for the development of blues and rock-n-roll, and home to major musical sites such as Beale Street and Graceland (both in Memphis)

SUGGESTIONS FOR TEACHERS & ADDITIONAL ONLINE RESOURCES

There are great primary sources available from the Civil War and Great Depression eras in West Tennessee, especially in the following collections: Farm Security Administration/Office of War Information Black-and-White Negatives and Map Collections. In these and other collections, you can find great sources on the effect and use of the rivers in West Tennessee, including flooding, transportation, and shipping.

Have students research the Mississippi or Tennessee Rivers in West Tennessee and how they impact the region.
- How does the river affect the landscape? How is the river important to farming?
- What kinds of transportation does each river support? How has river transportation changed over the years?
- How have the rivers impacted patterns of settlement, agriculture, invasion, and economic development over 200 years of history?
- How have the roles and importance of the rivers changed over time?

Library of Congress resources to examine:
- Primary Sources for Tennessee
- Explore the States: Tennessee
- Local Legacies: Tennessee
Also see this:
- “Geologic Zones” entry in the Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture
One of the few remaining old Mississippi River boats, Memphis, Tennessee [1935]

Erosion control on Natchez Trace Project near Lexington, Tennessee [1936]

Resettlement official investigating case of nine living in field on U.S. Route 70 between Camden and Bruceton, Tennessee, near Tennessee River [1936]

West Tennessee College, Jackson, Tennessee, [1866]

Crawford-Governor Porter House, 407 Dunlap Street, Paris, Henry County, TN (above photograph)

Shiloh National Military Park Tour Roads, Shiloh, Hardin County, TN (above photograph)
Beale Street blues [1924]

The Bessie Levee augmented with sand bags during the 1937 flood, Near Tiptonville, Tennessee.

Battle of Shiloh or Pittsburg Landing, Tennessee [1862-1865]

Edward Bates to Abraham Lincoln, Wednesday, May 04, 1864 (Opinion on Fort Pillow massacre).

Beale Street blues [1924]

Balloon barrage training center. Lilluputians at a weenie roast. This illustration is portrayed here by comparing the huge balloons and dwarfed trainees seated in picnic fashion around their instructor. Camp Tyson, Tennessee. Learn more about Camp Tyson here.

Medicine show, Huntingdon, Tennessee [1935]

Edward Bates to Abraham Lincoln, Wednesday, May 04, 1864 (Opinion on Fort Pillow massacre).
CITATIONS: TENNESSEE'S GRAND DIVISIONS– WEST TENNESSEE

Teachers: Providing these primary source replicas without source clues may enhance the inquiry experience for students. This list of citations is supplied for reference purposes to you and your students. We have followed the Chicago Manual of Style format, one of the formats recommended by the Library of Congress, for each entry below, minus the access date. The access date for each of these entries is December 14, 2009.


