

Schwartz

The Mismapping of America

Maps have always been powerful instruments for the dissemination of information. Symbolizing the world, identifying landmasses and waterways, and defining our borders, maps help to create the context in which we live and the history that we study. At times, in projecting information, maps initiate or perpetuate errors. At times, explorers and cartographers have depicted fancies rather than facts, and wishes rather than wisdom. Maps have misinformed! The Mismapping of America presents and analyzes the significant cartographic errors that have shaped the history of the United States. Perhaps the most blatant error is the very name "America," that honors Amerigo Vespucci, who not only never set foot on North American soil, but also played no significant role in the discovery of South America. The appearance of the name "America" imprinted on a map ensured its permanence. Other significant errors explored in The Mismapping of America include: Giovanni da Verrazzano's misinterpretation of Pamlico or Albermarle Sound for the Pacific Ocean, thereby suggesting the presence of an isthmus in the middle of the North American continent, the existence of a direct North West passage between the Atlantic and Pacific oceans, the misconception that California was an island, and the insertion on Lake Superior of a fictitious island that is specifically referred to in defining the boundary of the United States. The inclusion of pertinent rare maps enhances this rich and revealing narrative of several intriguing episodes in the history of the geographic evolution of the United States. Seymour I. Schwartz is the Distinguished Alumni Professor of Surgery at the University of Rochester, and an expert on the history of mapping America. He is the coauthor of Mapping of America and author of The French and Indian War 1754-1763: The Imperial Struggle for North America and This Land is Your Land. He is also the editor of An Englishman's Journey Along America's Eastern Waterways [University of Rochester Press]



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