

Read the information and use the map to answer the questions that follow in the spaces provided.

The soldiers creeping to the small Pennsylvania town on June 30, 1863, had no intention of making the town famous. All they wanted was to find shoes, for they had none. But five days later, the name *Gettysburg* had become one which would be written in history. One of the greatest battles of the American Civil War began there simply because soldiers of the two sides bumped into each other almost by accident. Today, Gettysburg is the site of a national military park that attracts thousands of visitors from around the world each year.

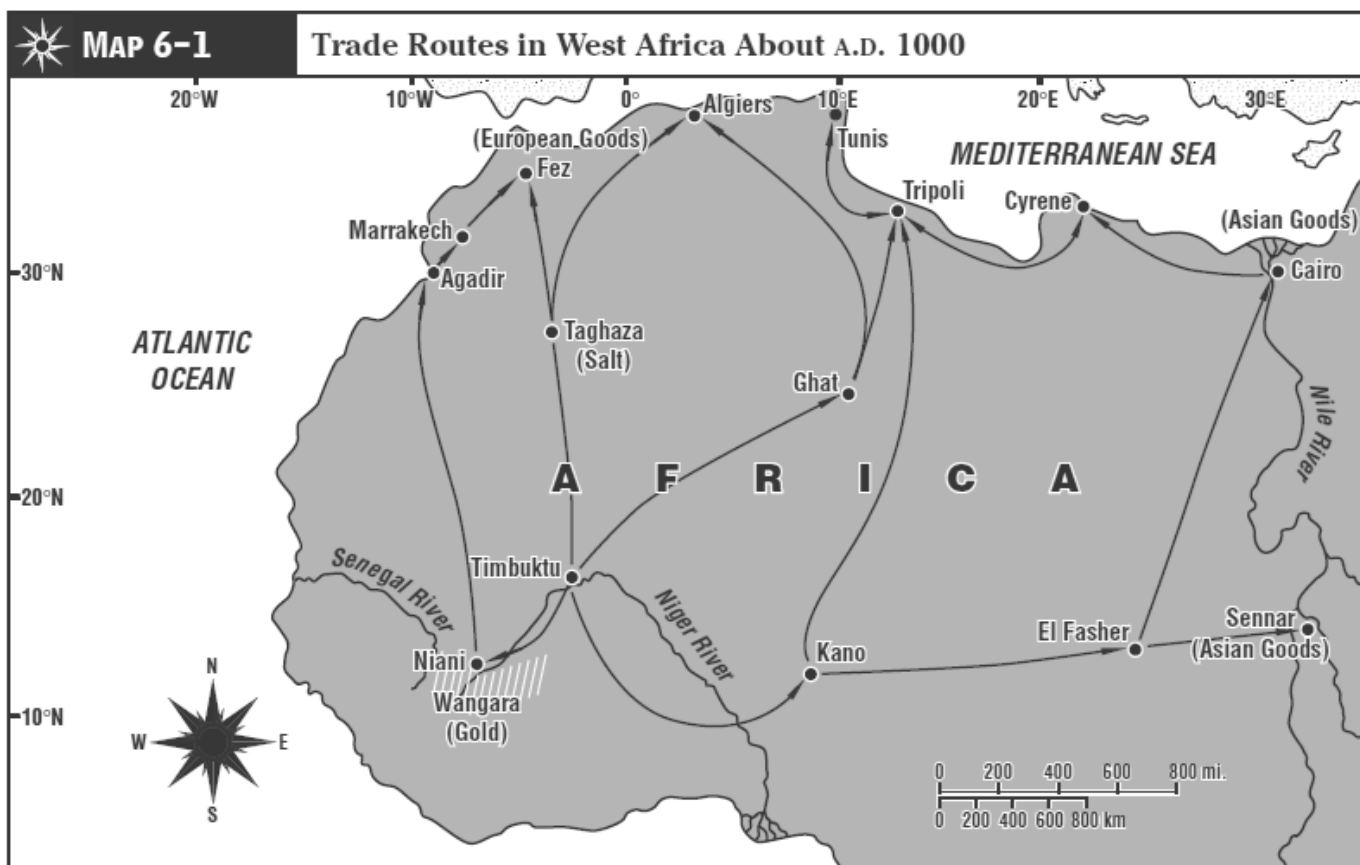
Why did the importance of Gettysburg's location change? The importance of Gettysburg's location changed because of events that took place there. The town is far more important today than it would be if the battle had been fought somewhere else.

Human interaction can change the importance of a location—it can become more or less important. The change can take place quickly, as in the case of Gettysburg, or slowly over hundreds of years, as in the case of Timbuktu.

The Story of Timbuktu

The African city of Timbuktu is a good example of a location whose importance changed slowly. At first a small village, Timbuktu grew into one of the most important cities of its time. Today, it is once again a village. What happened, and why, is one of the most interesting stories in geography.

Timbuktu is located in the western part of Africa, on a bend in the Niger River, at about latitude 17°N and longitude 3°W. Can you see anything about this location that would explain why Timbuktu became a great city? Other than its location on a river, there is very little in the physical environment of Timbuktu that would explain why it became a great city.



Trade's Impact on Timbuktu

Look at **Map 6-1** showing trade routes in West Africa about the year **A.D. 1000**. Find the area marked **Wangara**. Gold was mined here. Now find the village of **Taghaza**. Salt was mined here. Find **Timbuktu**, which is between Wangara and Taghaza.

You can see that Timbuktu is located halfway between gold mines to the south and salt mines to the north. The people who had gold needed salt, and the people who had salt wanted gold.

By now you may suspect that trade, not just location, made Timbuktu a great city. However, it was Timbuktu's location that made it the ideal place for people to meet and exchange their goods.

The gold and salt mines in western Africa operated for hundreds of years. The gold was carried north to the Niger River. There traders from the south met traders from the north. The gold was traded for many kinds of goods from Europe— cloth, swords, beads, horses, and foods—but especially for salt. Salt was a necessary food. It was very important to these people who lived in a hot climate because they lost much salt through sweat each day.

The people of the area around Timbuktu needed salt so badly that sometimes they would trade a weight of gold for the same weight of salt. The salt that was so precious in Timbuktu was so common in Taghaza that houses were built of blocks of salt.

The king of the area around Timbuktu claimed much of the gold from Wangara for himself. He also taxed all the gold and salt that were brought in to be traded. As a result, the king and the traders became very rich.

A Center of Learning

Timbuktu became not only a center of trade, but also a center of learning. The rulers of Timbuktu became Muslims, followers of the religion of Islam. Muslims believe in education, because they believe that Muslims should be able to read the Quran, the book of Muslim teachings. Many Muslim traders came to live in Timbuktu. They brought their love of learning with them. The city became known for its teachers and libraries. One visitor wrote that "Here are a great store of doctors, judges, priests, and other learned men, that are bountifully maintained at the king's cost and charges. And hither are brought [many] manuscripts of written books . . . which are sold for more money than any other merchandise. . . ."

Timbuktu was a great city for hundreds of years. However, the riches of the area attracted many invaders. Shortly before the year **1600 CE**, an army from Morocco attacked. Over a period of many years, the area around Timbuktu was ruled by several different countries. Trade was broken up by wars, and the gold mines of Wangara ran out. Timbuktu once again became a poor village.

Timbuktu Today

Timbuktu is no longer a center of world trade and learning. It is still located at about latitude 17°N, longitude 3°W. Its location has not changed, but the *importance* of its location has changed.

The salt mines at Taghaza still produce salt for the people of West Africa. People come on camels and in jeeps to buy the salt, but the importance of the location of Taghaza has changed. No longer is it a stop on a trade route linking Europe with Timbuktu. No longer does gold from Timbuktu flow through Taghaza on its way to the coast to trade for goods from Europe.

1. What was important about Timbuktu's location?
2. What were the two most important items traded in West Africa around the year 1000 CE?
3. Why was salt such a valuable item in West Africa?
4. Why was Timbuktu a center of learning?
5. How was trade affected by war in the region?
6. How many miles did traders have to travel from Taghaza to Timbuktu?