

ideal pioneer past and, contradictorily, from a dynamic belief in the stages of civilization that found the ideal in an enlightened urban society. While Smith finds this contradiction to be a problem for intellectual historians, Weber believes that it is a necessary ingredient of the best midwestern writing. "This central ambivalence within Midwestern life . . .," he writes, "has enriched its literature in the sense of providing it with recurring situations of leaving-taking and return as well as . . . an underlying complexity of conflicting and unresolved attitudes" (p. 24).

In the chapters that follow Weber applies his theory in lucid, cogent, and imaginative prose to the best works of the midwestern ascendancy. Beginning with Joseph Kirkland, E. W. Howe, and Edward Eggleston, Weber methodically works his way through the pantheon of the region's writers, offering biographical sketches, summarizing the most important books, analyzing each contribution in terms of its qualities of sympathy and resistance, and placing each author's contribution in the context of what has previously been discussed. While Indiana Golden Age adherents may resent Weber's dismissal of its leading lights, they will have a difficult time disagreeing with the author's arguments. In all, *The Midwestern Ascendancy* is a masterful performance and an essential book for those interested in regionalism, American literary realism, or midwestern writing.

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Revolt of the Provinces: The Regionalist Movement in America, 1920-1945. By Robert L. Dorman. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993. Pp. xiv, 366. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$45.00.)

Regionalism has enjoyed a revival of sorts in recent years. A number of universities have established regional study centers, and a stream of books, both popular and scholarly, have appeared on regionalism in America. A new generation of scholars has eagerly substituted region for the frontier process as an organizing principle in western history. But the current regionalism lacks the fire, breadth, and aspirations of the influential cultural movement that preceded it in the 1920s and 1930s. Although major aspects of the interwar regionalism are well known, it has not received an encompassing historical interpretation until now.

Revolt of the Provinces, by Robert L. Dorman, maps the highways and byways traveled by artists and intellectuals who perceived the possibilities of regionalism as a restorative response to the blight of industrialism and urbanization on American society and culture. The author charts the intersections of thought and

feeling among all the significant regionalist leaders of the time—novelists, literary critics, artists, historians, folklorists, sociologists, planners, publishers, publicists, and other intellectuals who defy easy classification.

Dorman interprets regionalism as a critique of American society. He recounts how Lewis Mumford, B. A. Botkin, Howard Odum, Mari Sandoz, Mary Austin, Walter Prescott Webb, and many other cultural luminaries, all distressed by the urbanized, commercialized, mechanized, standardized characteristics of modern society, posed regionalism “as the means toward a richer, freer, and more humane way of life” (p. xii). Thus, in Dorman’s view, they sought to “fashion regionalism into a democratic civic religion, a utopian ideology, and a radical politics” (p. xiii).

Dorman organizes his book accordingly. Regionalism as democratic civic religion is treated in the first part, which includes biographical material on the major participants in the movement, analyzes the effort to fuse Indian and folk materials into American art, and examines the agrarian revolt against modernism. The second part probes the utopian ideology of regionalism, which in Dorman’s view illuminates the origins of contemporary multiculturalism. The final part examines the programmatic or political dimension of regionalism in the 1930s and its termination during World War II.

Although Dorman often writes skillfully, his style tends to be ponderous and sometimes convoluted. His erudition and intelligence is everywhere evident, but these same virtues alert him to possible ambiguities. Apparently driven to clarify his ideas, he jumbles sentences with too many ideas or too much information. His text is cluttered with a plethora of words in quotation marks and plagued with parenthetical explanations.

But the virtues of this book far outweigh its defects. It is based on research as admirable as it is exhaustive. It offers a useful interpretation of an important but neglected chapter in American cultural history.

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The Shaping of America: A Geographical Perspective on 500 Years of History; Volume 2: Continental America, 1800–1867. By D. W. Meinig. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993. Pp. xix, 636. Maps, illustrations, tables, notes, bibliography, index. \$45.00.)

Continental America, the second of four volumes intended to provide a “geographical perspective” on American history, exam-