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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. Preface, introduction, photographs, notes, bibliography, index. xiv + 366 pp. \$45.

Since its brief flowering in the third and fourth decades of this century, regionalism has been generally dismissed as insignificant by students of American culture. While the U.S. intellectual mainstream rushed off toward both modernism and the movies, regionalists remained determined denizens of their various backwaters. Painter Thomas Hart Benton's rejection of New York abstraction for heartland folk murals in Missouri is both well known and emblematic. In his book, *Revolt of the Provinces*, Robert Dorman has reopened the subject of regionalism in thought-provoking fashion. Dorman claims for regionalism a wider significance than has been granted by many critics. He argues that the motley group of artists, writers, academics, city planners, and other intellectuals loosely unified under the rubric of "regionalism" were, in fact, cultural radicals who sought to produce a new, integrated American culture and society. Facing the vulgarities of mass culture and industrial society, regionalists relied on sense of place as an antidote, grounding themselves firmly in the local particularities of American earth.

From this vantage point they celebrated the comforts of place, "the lived environment as a unique historical, cultural, and physical entity, and as a key to a fully human life" (p. 23).

In demonstrating these claims, Dorman ranges widely, from Willa Cather and the Nebraska State Capitol, through Native American writers like John Joseph Mathews and D'Arcy McNickle, to the North Carolina sociologists revolving around Howard Odum. Along the way he touches on many others, including writer Mari Sandoz and regional planners Lewis Mumford and Benton MacKaye. Although he concedes that these scattered individuals never constituted a formal movement, his intellectual history suggests convincingly that they shared common goals of reshaping and maintaining American community, diversity, and tradition in the face of threats that included looming fascism.

The regionalist program ultimately foundered, Dorman claims, on the insufficiency of a vision that was "intentionally transformative" (p. 79), yet also eschewed the use of power (p. 262). The 1920s saw the articulation of regionalist perspectives in art and literature, but the depression of the 1930s triggered a crisis that lacked regionalists' responses. Without a concrete political program, they had no means other than ineffectual cultural persuasion for implementing their vision.

Dorman suggests, however, that the movement is more than a historical curiosity. He points to a substantial cultural legacy, in the form of books, regionally centered university presses, and journals like the *Southern Review* and the *Great Plains Quarterly*. In addition he identifies modern successors, such as Edward Abbey, and, by way of Aldo Leopold's influential *Sand County Almanac*, the modern environmental movement. His study is a masterful synthesis of disparate material, marred by repetition, excessive length, and some notoriously circuitous writing.

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