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Review of *Regionalism and the Humanities* edited and  
with an introduction by Timothy R. Mahoney and  
Wendy J. Katz

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## BOOK REVIEWS

*Regionalism and the Humanities.* Edited and with an introduction by Timothy R. Mahoney and Wendy J. Katz. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008. xviii + 343 pp. \$30.00 paper.

Emerging out of a 2003 conference in Lincoln, Nebraska, organized by the Consortium of Regional Humanities Centers, the sixteen disparate essays included in this engaging volume, ably edited and introduced by Timothy Mahoney and Wendy Katz, testify to the catholicity and vitality of the “new regionalism” in American studies. They both illustrate and justify what has been labeled by some the “local turn” in humanities scholarship. Because of the location of the conference on the border between the Midwest and the Great Plains, half of these essays focus upon those two regions. Each author assumes that place matters—that in addition to the standard explanatory variables of class, race, ethnicity, gender, demography, and so forth, geography needs to be assigned high priority in any cultural analysis.

These regionalist scholars have moved a long distance from the geographical determinists of an earlier day, such as Frederick Jackson Turner, who is mentioned in six of the essays. Both implicitly and sometimes explicitly they champion multiplicity, contingency, indeterminacy, permeability, contestedness, ambiguity, and change. Beyond that, they reflect a growing consensus that regional studies in the twenty-first century need to be interdisciplinary, methodologically flexible, and creative.

The essays reflect originality and imagination, although, as might be expected, some

speak with greater clarity and persuasiveness than others. Most of the authors choose a particular theme, person, group, or episode to illustrate how regionalism operates as a factor in society and history, among them William Slaymaker’s ruminations on ecology, Barbara Handy-Marchello’s essay on a Bismarck woman’s booster newspaper articles during the settlement period, chapters by Guy Reynolds and Mark Robison on Willa Cather, Stephen Behrendt’s discussion of naming, Edward Watts’s notion of the Midwest as a colony, Larry Moore’s analysis of Vachel Lindsay’s poetry, Cheryl Glotfelty’s assessment of Nevada’s exceptionalism, Kurt Kinbacher’s description of Nebraska Territory, and Nicolas Witschi’s sprightly take on staged gunfights on the streets of Palisade, Nevada.

More intriguing to readers looking for commentary upon or analysis of regionalism as a concept are theoretical ruminations contained in pieces by Annie Proulx on landscape in American fiction, Mark Busby on defining the Southwest as a region, Maggie Valentine on the process of mapping Southwestern architecture, Ginette Aley on Midwestern regional identity, Patrick Lewis on Grecian-style architecture in the trans-Appalachian West, and Michael Saffle on music in the South Atlantic region. There is grist here for everyone’s mill, and the University of Nebraska Press is to be commended for producing this thought-provoking volume.

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