Diversity, Conflict, and State Politics: Regionalism in Illinois

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In the course of 180 pages, Bradshaw thus offers a concise introduction to the issue of regionalism in the late twentieth-century United States. Americans with good memories or an accurate knowledge of history will note certain minor errors. For example, Spiro Agnew was from Maryland, not Virginia (92), and the chairman of the TVA was David Lilienthal, not John Lilienthal (130–31). Bradshaw also fails to consider interstate compacts as tools of multistate planning and development. Yet Bradshaw does remind readers of the continuing significance of the concept of region, and he offers insights useful to students of recent public policy.


REVIEWED BY THOMAS G. RYAN, UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

The concept of regionalism (or sectionalism) is of long standing in the study of American history, life, and politics. Whether we think in terms of East and West, North and South, or, more recently, Frostbelt and Sunbelt, many attempts to understand and interpret the American experience include a consciousness of two or more distinct regions or parts of the United States. Many individuals have a feeling of identity with and loyalty to a particular geographical area of the country. The concept of regionalism frequently, perhaps usually, includes a belief in the homogeneity and distinctiveness of the residents of a particular area. According to Frederick Jackson Turner, "sectionalism was the dominant influence in shaping our political history upon all important measures." Although most historians think of regionalism in the context of the nation, some behavioral scientists apply the concept to the study of smaller political units, exploring substate regionalism.

Diversity, Conflict, and State Politics, for example, applies the concept of substate regionalism to Illinois, one of the more heterogeneous of the American states. Editor Peter Nardulli and his collaborators conclude that Illinois has five regions: the city of Chicago, its "suburban collar," northern Illinois, central Illinois, and southern Illinois. They note that "the choice of Chicago and its suburban collar was the easiest," and that the most "meaningful divisions of the state may vary depending on the time frame with which one is concerned or the substance of one’s concerns (political, social, economic)" (22–23).
The volume emerged from a larger effort to study "geo-political cleavages" within the state. The Institute of Government and Public Affairs at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and a number of Illinois-based corporations and foundations sponsored a series of activities toward that end. Social and behavioral scientists prepared a series of background papers for a conference on regionalism in Illinois. The eleven essays in the published volume are a subset of the papers presented at that conference.

The fourteen contributors (five essays were joint ventures) represent six academic disciplines: six of the fourteen (including the editor) are political scientists, four are economists, and there is one each from history, public administration, sociology, and statistics. Three contributions examine "the roots of regionalism" in Illinois; the remaining six investigate twentieth-century developments, with particular attention to the period since 1950.

As in most volumes of this type, the essays vary considerably in quality. Among the most useful are Jeremy Atack's "The Evolution of Regional Economic Differences within Illinois, 1818-1950"; "Regional Demographic Trends in Illinois, 1950-1987," by Cheng H. Chiang and Ann Geraci, both of whom are state government officials; and "The Changing Economy of Metropolitan Chicago: Past, Present, and Future," by Marcus Alexis and John F. McDonald. Michael B. Preston's "Political Change in the City: Black Politics in Chicago, 1871-1987" is also valuable but fails to include in its list of references either Paul Kleppner's Chicago Divided: The Making of a Black Mayor (1985) or the series of essays edited by Melvin G. Holli and Paul M. Green, The Making of the Mayor: Chicago 1983 (1984). These are two of the best volumes on the recent history of race and politics in Chicago. Failure to note the Holli-Green volume is especially striking in view of Preston's role as one of the contributors to it.

One of the most disappointing essays is the one by the only historian-contributor. Robert F. Sutton's description of "The Politics of Regionalism, Nineteenth-Century Style" relies far too heavily on older accounts of the first century of the Illinois experience. He lists fifty-four references, but it is difficult to take seriously a mid-1980s essay on nineteenth-century Illinois politics that fails to list among its sources any of the numerous works by Richard Jensen and Paul Kleppner on political conflict in the Prairie State.

Many of the chapters use quantitative materials to explore demographic and economic change in Illinois during the past 170 years. The authors of these essays use maps, charts, graphs, and tables effectively to illustrate several types of demographic and economic change and to communicate the quantitative data underlying their studies.
Historian Sutton is the only contributor who uses no graphics as part of his attempt to describe and analyze regionalism in Illinois. This illustrates that historians as a group use graphics much less frequently than those in other social/behavioral science disciplines. Historians who use demographic and economic quantitative data could learn much in this regard from their fellow academics in related disciplines.

What is the significance, if any, of this volume for the study of Iowa history? Iowa is considerably less varied than Illinois. Unlike its neighbor to the east, no metropolitan area dominates the state to the extent that Chicago dominates, or did dominate, Illinois. Just as Iowa has no Chicago, it does not have a Chicago-type “suburban collar” that increasingly is becoming the most important part of the state in population, wealth, economic activity, and political influence. Lacking a Chicago, Iowa also lacks the large African-American population that has become a major factor in the life of both the city and the state. And Iowa lacks the sheer physical variety of a state that extends from Wisconsin to southern Kentucky and Missouri, and nearly to Tennessee and Arkansas. Iowa also lacks the ethnic diversity of Illinois, especially Chicago.

If Iowa is less varied than Illinois, it nonetheless is less homogeneous than we often assume. Its variety is apparent in many ways: in the quality of farmland, in ethnic settlement patterns, in church membership statistics, in differences in voting behavior from area to area. At least some of these variations have contributed to “geopolitical cleavages,” that is, to political differences, often political conflict, between various parts of the state. These political differences are, in turn, related to other, most often ethnic and religious differences. Although this hardly leads to a need for a volume on substate regionalism in Iowa, it does underline the need to be sensitive to possible regional interpretations of political differences within the state, particularly during the pre–World War II years.


REVIEWED BY MICHAEL J. SMITH, PUTNAM MUSEUM

*History Museums in the United States* is a collection of essays about the challenges and opportunities facing history museums entering the 1990s. The editors, Warren Leon, formerly director of interpretation at Old Sturbridge Village in Massachusetts, and Roy Rosenzweig of the