

## Hell of a Vision: Regionalism and the Modern American West

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wegians erected statues of Norwegian American heroes such as Colonel Hans Christian Heg. According to Olson, commemorative activities such as these served to strengthen ties and bolster a common national identity between Norwegian Americans and homeland Norwegians.

Olson details the macro-process of identity formation through a source base that is grounded in the rich and often complicated interactions that took place in local communities. The vast majority of Norwegian immigrants settled in the upper Midwest, so it is not surprising that this is where the bulk of Olson's story unfolds. As a result, the history of the upper Midwest is an important backdrop to Olson's larger story about the construction of transnational identity. Readers are introduced to the struggle over identity that took place among Norwegian Americans in urban areas such as Minneapolis and Chicago as well as in rural environs such as the Red River Valley in Minnesota and North Dakota, the Fox River settlement in Illinois, and Decorah, Iowa. A real strength of the book is its attention to the tensions between urban and rural Norwegian Americans.

*Vikings across the Atlantic* makes a compelling contribution to studies of Norwegian American immigration and Norwegian nationalism. The book also speaks to larger debates about migration, transnationalism, identity, and ethnicity and can inspire thoughtful discussion of these topics beyond the particulars of the Norwegian/Norwegian American case.

*Hell of a Vision: Regionalism and the Modern American West*, by Robert L. Dorman. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2012. xi, 256 pp. Maps, illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$50.00 hardcover.

Reviewer Edward Watts is professor of English at Michigan State University. His books include *An American Colony: Regionalism and the Roots of Midwestern Culture* (2002).

Early in his introduction to this intriguing book, Robert Dorman sets forth a three-pronged working definition of *regionalism*: "the spatial conceptualization of a region, which can be represented by a map but also by visual art and narrative description; the identity of a region, that is, its qualities and characteristics; and self-identification, or the feeling that one is a native, inhabitant, or otherwise has special ties to a particular region. All of the dimensions of regionalism contribute to that amorphous yet concrete experience known as *the sense of place*" (3). While this definition is itself somewhat amorphous, it is deliber-

ately and appropriately broad: Dorman is not really writing a history of western regionalism, but rather a history of regionalism in the West.

His primary subject, then, is how a “sense of place” developed and has survived in the century-and-a-half since the Civil War, a time when the vast preponderance of the nation’s cultural, economic, and political activities demanded a broader focus—national, first, then, more recently, global. The entangled struggles between localism and extra-localism, then, as they occurred in the American West between 1865 and 2010 and as they were played out in policymaking, literary representation, racial and gender-based rhetorics, and virtually all other materials make this book much more than just another book about the West.

First, it privileges the internalized aspects of regional self-identification. Pre-industrial forms of regional boundary drawing were linked to watersheds and other geophysical dividers (“drainage is destiny”). Dorman, however, assumes that there have perhaps been as many Wests as there have been westerners—as a sense of place is necessarily subjective—and that those Wests, since 1865, range from Wisconsin to California in terms of cartography and from single counties to the entire western two-thirds of the United States in terms of scope. By studying the interplay of place-specific localism and the universalist/global forces that challenge it, Dorman arrives at a necessarily interstitial finding: that regionalism is more orientation than ideology, and that its relation to nation is always shifting: “Yet regionalism in the West and elsewhere in the United States might still be considered a ‘soft’ form of cultural nationalism. American regionalists would do much the same things that cultural nationalists did in other countries—create magazines, produce art, write poetry and prose, establish museums, build monuments, preserve historic sites and natural landscapes. But they would do all these things without going the final step of requiring an independent political entity to embody their ‘people’s’ newly defined culture” (14).

*Hell of a Region*, then, studies the various subnationalist projects, movements, texts, and other iterations as they struggle against delocalization. Dorman clearly champions the localists, but he never sets them in unqualified opposition to nationalists, as critical regionalists too often do. However, what makes the book especially interesting is its engagement in a “meta-”level of analysis. That is, even as he studies regionalist authors, texts, and movements, Dorman tracks the evolution of regional or area studies as an academic discipline or discourse often entangled with simultaneous cultural productions. For example, Larry McMurtry and Patricia Nelson Limerick are discussed in the

same paragraph describing the dark vision of the West as the Cold War's conclusion no longer required a triumphalist western narrative of individuality to set against the Eastern bloc's collectivism.

In fact, Dorman traces that tension back to early proposals to protect the West from the individualism that had allowed the settlement of the wetter, eastern regions of the nation, and to protect individuals from the drier and less forgiving western region. John Wesley Powell and others are credited for seeking a more place-specific and cooperative paradigm while Frederick Jackson Turner and his followers insisted on the imposition of the eastern model. Mixing analyses of policy, historiography, polemic, and geography, Dorman finally turns to literary writing as representations of the conflicts implicit in the assertion of a distinct and more cooperative West at the turn of the century. For Dorman, Hamlin Garland, Willa Cather, Mari Sandoz, Mary Austin, and Owen Wister play out these tensions, with Wister most closely aligned with Turnerian democratic individualism, the nationalistic version that would predominate throughout most of the twentieth century.

As such, *Hell of a Vision* should ultimately engage scholars of all sub- or non-national ways of thinking about the relation of specific places to the global institutions—private or public—that would eliminate or erode their distinctiveness. Because Dorman maintains a critical distance from even the regionalist movement he most clearly admires, however, the book triumphs over the partisan and biased tendencies in most regionalist scholarship to serve as an excellent model for moving beyond the very generations of regional scholarship the book itself studies.

*Lynching Beyond Dixie: American Mob Violence Outside of the South*, edited by Michael J. Pfeifer. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2013. ix, 336 pp. Maps, notes, appendix, index. \$90.00 hardcover, \$28.00 paperback.

Reviewer Shawn Leigh Alexander is associate professor of African and African American studies at the University of Kansas. He is the author of *An Army of Lions: The Civil Rights Struggle before the NAACP* (2012) and is completing a book tentatively titled *Reconstruction, Violence, and the Ku Klux Klan Hearings*.

Since the early 1990s there have been numerous studies on the subject of lynching and mob violence in the post-emancipation era. The best of these studies include W. Fitzhugh Brundage's *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880–1930* (1993), Michael J. Pfeifer's *Rough Justice: Lynching and American Society, 1874–1947* (2004), Amy Louise