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Review of Regional Studies: The Interplay of Land and People

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Regional Studies: The Interplay of Land and People. Ed. Glen E. Lich. Essays on the American West, no. 12. College Station: Texas A & M Press, 1992. Maps, tables, preface. xiii + 181 pp. \$32.50.

In 1987 Baylor University sponsored a national symposium on the concepts and applications of regionalism. From all accounts, the three-day conference was a success and the sponsors were persuaded to publish the proceedings. The result is *Regional Studies: The Interplay of Land and People*, edited by Glen E. Lich.

It is difficult to get a handle on this book. The twelve essays in the collection are uniformly well written—a rare accomplishment in a proceedings of a conference. The contributing authors represent a variety of scholarly

pursuits, a welcome departure from disciplinary parochialism. The topics covered are broad in scope, ranging from geographic, economic, and political considerations through issues of gender, religion, language, and culture.

Not all the essays, however, command the attention of the reader. Several do not break new ground. They are suitable, perhaps, for stimulating discussion and initiating the exchange of ideas in a conference. They fall flat in published form.

There is an ambivalence, certainly at the conceptual level. A leading essay by Terry Jordon on the concept and method of region concludes that “. . . (a)fter two millennia of using, misusing and reusing the concept, geographers have concluded that regions do not exist.” It is not a verdict to which the other contributors subscribe. For them, “region” refers to a real, not an imagined, social phenomenon, even if they differ in and struggle over how they come to grips with conceiving, describing, and analyzing it.

As with any collection of essays, readers will differ in preferring some essays over others. This reader was particularly taken by two articles. Ann Markusen of Rutgers University offers a convincing argument that regional structure and regional consciousness in the history of the United States is a legacy of encounters between different and antagonistic modes of production. She draws attention to the fact that class structure has become unevenly distributed across the nation; a development that directly influences class conflict and class politics. She concludes by lamenting the gulf that separates scholars working on economic and political analysis of regionalism and those studying regional cultures. A point well taken.

Susan Armitage of Washington State University in Pullman seeks to explore how two contradictory historical categories—region and gender—can become complementary. Focusing on studies of the American West, she succeeds in demonstrating that studies of women that overlook regional differences are inadequate; regional studies that ignore gender

difference are incomplete. In light of the evidence she adduces, the latter conclusion is driven home with devastating effect.

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