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**Review of *All Over the Map: Rethinking American Regions* By
Edward L. Ayers, Patricia Nelson Limerick, Stephen Nissenbaum,
and Peter S. Onuf**

Thomas D. Isern
North Dakota State University

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All Over the Map: Rethinking American Regions. By Edward L. Ayers, Patricia Nelson Limerick, Stephen Nissenbaum, and Peter S. Onuf. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996. Notes, index. viii + 136 pp. \$35.00 cloth, \$13.95 paper.

"People *will* think spatially and historically," observes Ayers in his essay on Southern identity for this book. "But we can be more self-conscious about the *way* we think in these dimensions." His remarks offer a good rationale for this collection of essays on American regions, originally a series of lectures delivered at Johns Hopkins University. In addition to Ayers on the South, the volume includes

Onuf on the origins of American sectionalism, Nissenbaum on New England, and Limerick on the West.

For the student of Great Plains regionalism, every essay offers insights, either theoretical or comparative. Onuf, for instance, works from the premise that sectionalism was "integral to the original conception and construction of the federal system," a conception that set up a struggle of center versus periphery, with watchful republicans on guard against "the domination of a powerful metropolis." This line of analysis, developed in a national framework by Onuf, fits nicely with the international literature on dependency that has enlightened the history of temperate grasslands worldwide. Nissenbaum's chronicle of how the morally superior nucleated village, replete with well-kept green, was invented mythically by industrial New England has clear parallels on the Plains, where communities today are constructing ethnic and pastoral facades that scarcely resemble their historical material culture. Ayers, in his discussion of the importance of Southern stereotypes, points out that "we are provincial in our understanding of provinciality"—a spur to students of American regionalism to consider international context.

The Limerick essay on the West offers less to scholars of the Great Plains than might be expected. Most of the material is familiar by now. The value added is the author's rationale for devoting scholarly attention to what seems "the most dismissable category of all," region. The rationale is utilitarian: to understand "the challenge of American diversity" and thereby "make us better neighbors" by focusing on a particular place. Relegation of region to the status of mere variable or even setting does little to advance its understanding. It is only fair to observe, however, that such advancement is not Limerick's intent.

THOMAS D. ISERN
Department of History
North Dakota State University