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**Review of *The American Midwest: Essays on Regional History*
Edited by Andrew R. L. Cayton and Susan E. Gray**

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west is both homogenous and diverse. Beginning with an excellent introduction that summarizes the historiography of the idea of the Middle West as a region, the ten essays in the collection seek both to explore more deeply the idea and construction of the Middle West as a region and to provide case studies in the development of the concept. In the former category are Andrew Cayton's comprehensive "The Anti-Region," in which he investigates various cultural descriptions of the region, and Doug Hurt's wry statistical summary of the "middleness" of the Middle West. In the latter category are John Larson's droll essay, "Pig in Space," which looks for the source of Hoosier identity and finds it in the first years of settlement, and Kathleen Cozens's "Pi-ing the Type," an analysis of a woman editor's role in the creation of regional identity in Minnesota.

The strengths of the book lie in its organization and fresh approach. Clearly, the editors kept a sure hand on the conceptualization of the anthology—not always an easy task. Each author was also free to integrate his or her personal experience into the essays as a touchstone for the topic and interpretation. A reader gleams some idea of the historian behind the history. The coverage of the region is extensive and varied, including attention to gender, race, and ethnicity, although the editors bemoan the absence of a "Chicago" essay. As a result, the collection will attract both the general reader interested in things Midwestern and the instructor in the market for a good classroom text. Finally, the essays are all uniformly interesting, well written, and, from time to time, witty.

Yet not all is "beer and skittles." Despite a map that includes North and South Dakota, Kansas, and Nebraska, and except for a few brief discussions of Willa Cather and scattered references to other persons or places, the Midwestern Plains states receive little attention from the essayists. Conceivably, a case might be made that these states (or their area) constitute a liminal zone between the Middle and Far Wests and, in consequence, differ from

The American Midwest: Essays on Regional History. Edited by Andrew R. L. Cayton and Susan E. Gray. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001. Maps, notes, contributor, index. vii + 251 pp. \$35.00.

While the South, West, and New England have always possessed distinctive regional identities, the Middle West has been either a substitute for national character or described variously as "dull," "ordinary," or just plain "nice." Yet, as the essayists point out, the Mid-

the general characterization of the Midwest evident in the collection.

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