

REGIONS

The Economics and Politics of Territory

Ann Markusen

Northwestern University

ROWMAN & LITTLEFIELD
PUBLISHERS

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Preface and Acknowledgments

This book is about regions and regionalism in the United States. Its central preoccupation is the construction of regions as socioeconomic, often conflictual, collectivities of people, rather than with regions as inert, natural chunks of territory. Regions as units of societal structure are built on concrete economic foundations, with beams roughed up out of political systems, framing set from cultural practices, and finishing overlaid by the ingenuity of their residents. They are bound by the shape of the terrain and the idiosyncracies of climate. Built to last, they may prove highly resistant to change. Yet the foundations may shift or crack, the beams rot, roofs leak, the siding fall. And concerted human action can raise the roof beams higher, knock out a constraining wall, or add an extension.

In some ways, this book is a companion to my volume *Profit Cycles, Oligopoly, and Regional Development*. Here, I present the political counterpart to the economic analysis laid out in that book, in a less technical, more historical and interdisciplinary manner. Yet its scope goes far beyond the political ramifications of the profit cycle model for regional development. In probing regionalism, it treats received cultures, political institutions, secular economic transformation, and militarism as forces complementary to the dynamics of industrial location.

I began a comprehensive study of the political economy of regionalism in 1978. At the time, I was driven by several concerns. First, I believed that a book of this sort was badly needed because we had no adequate framework for analyzing and interpreting American regionalism. Students trained in the postwar period, as I was, were offered multiple toolkits for dissecting regional phenomena, one in each social science discipline, with little regard for the potential fit among them. And, much like the American resistance to going metric, the separate disciplines found their investments in existing technique so great that despite a resurgent interest in interdisciplinary research, and despite the growth of professions like planning and public policy eager to use its products, they continued to find each other's preoccupations beside the point.

Second, I had spent a number of years, sequentially, in the East, Midwest and Intermountain West. In each location, I found strikingly distinct cultures and political controversies. I became convinced that despite the national consensus forged during the New Deal, and despite

the apparent convergence in regional per capita incomes, regions in the United States possess quite distinctive economic structures and developmental dynamics. In the 1970s, these erupted into powerful political antagonisms, along Frostbelt-Sunbelt and East-West lines. I was interested in creating an analytical framework which would be powerful enough to explain the origins, intensity, and outcome of these conflicts. Emerging European theories of regionalism seemed inapt for the United States, chiefly because they were so heavily predicated on a unitary and centralized state and because the spatial patterning of the economies in question was so different from that of the United States.

Third, I found almost all of the existing regional literature remarkably ahistorical, especially in economics and regional science, my fields. It seemed clear that the passions and political effectiveness of regional organizing could be understood only by appreciating the ways in which settlement patterns, livelihoods, social skills, and political institutions had evolved over time. In particular, the North-South conflict of the 1970s seemed incomprehensible without a fairly extensive analysis of these regions' nineteenth-century encounters, which permanently placed their mark on the people, economies, and politics of each.

A final concern was the tendency within the neo-Marxist literature, which I thought to be generally a tremendous improvement on existing scholarship, to belittle the role of human agency and collective action as shapers of regional destiny. The preoccupation with the laws of motion of capital tended to generate the specter of a mechanically relentless capitalism sweeping across regions and altering their fortunes regardless of human response. In my view, capitalism was in turn significantly altered by the resistance of people in places, just as it has been by responses of workers in their workplace. I wanted to demonstrate this empirically.

I also had a strong interest in the normative aspects of regionalism. Involvement in state and local politics led me to believe that nationally oriented political platforms would fail unless they became more sensitive to regional particularities. At the same time, regional movements sometimes become chauvinistic, their constituents succumbing to the view that a problem is the fault of another region, or the federal government, rather than a more complex set of forces. Yet regional movements possessed a great potential which I believed was far too often overlooked or disparaged by both left theorists and those trying to fashion a new progressive alternative.

After the better part of a decade, I still maintain these concerns. Writing this book has not completely resolved the scholastic challenges of regionalism, even in my own mind. That is really a life's project. But I can now offer both scholars and regional protagonists some methods of attack which are interdisciplinary, historically minded, and empirically weighed, and which facilitate an evaluation of the human potential of regionalism.

As with all research efforts, this one has its regrettable omissions, imposed by time constraints. The empirical analysis would have benefited by including Canada, which has a similar political structure and many analogous land-based differentials. Canada, however, has a very different political history and a cross-cutting set of ethnic conflicts not present in the United States.* I chose to leave it for a later, thoroughly comparative treatment, which might include Europe, Australia, and some developing countries.

I also regret not being able to research in greater depth the Populist and New Deal eras as examples of periods when regional antagonisms were overridden by more powerful cross-regional coalitions. Each period would, I think, cast a great deal of useful light on the progressive potential of regionalism and regional alliances in national politics.

My thinking on regionalism, which I still view as a cantankerous topic, has evolved through many years of conversation and correspondence with colleagues and friends. I received a great deal of constructive feedback on several earlier versions of the theoretical work.† This included discussions with members of my Kapitalistate collective and my western urban/regional policy group, particularly Jim O'Connor, Patricia Morgan, Dick Walker, Mike Lugar, Erica Schoenberger, David Wilmoth, Candace Howes, Michael Storper, and Doug Greenberg. Linda Collins helped me with the cultural question.

Over the years, I have enjoyed an intensive debate and extensive correspondence with colleagues from many "regions." In the United States, with Ben Harrison, Ed Soja, Matt Edel, Rick Simon, and Patricia Wilson-Salinas. In Europe, with Doreen Massey, Elizabeth Lebas, Frank Moulaert, Margit Mayer, and Luis Sanz. In Australia, Evan Jones, Frank Stillwell, and John Browett. In Mexico, Jose Luis Medina Aguiar, and in Brazil, my colleagues Roberto Luis and Donald Sawyer at CEDEPLAR. My views also changed under the scrutiny of many of my former students, particularly Marjorie Bennett, Richard Osborne, Jose Curbelo, Sonja Barrios, and Jose Oswaldo Lasmar.

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*For recent analyses of Canadian regionalism, see Schwartz (1974), Stevenson (1979), Knight (1982b), and Matthews (1983).

†Markusen (1979b), Markusen (1980), and Markusen (1983).

A number of people read the earlier versions of the manuscript and offered useful suggestions on content and reorganization, among them John Friedmann, Gordon Clark, Ben Harrison, Niles Hansen, Gill Lim, and John Mollenkopf. My editor at Rowman & Littlefield, Paul Lee, could not have been more charming or patient. Much of the theoretical work was completed in 1980–81, including the Appendix, and does not review the recent outpouring of research, especially in geography and sociology, on “space.”

Many people were interviewed concerning or have commented upon the empirical research. On the Native American section, I would like to thank Jack Forbes, Mina Caulfield, Ray Pratt, and Debbie LeVein. On the South in the contemporary period, and the Southern Growth Policies Board in particular, Bud Weinstein, David Godschalk, Tom Schlesinger, Jesse White, Janet Papke, Bud Skinner, and Sandra Copeland. On the Northeast, my thanks to Ben Harrison and David Merkwitz. On the West, Gail Stoltz, Nancy Owens, Ed Marston, and Margaret MacDonald. My interpretation owes a great deal to conversations with Kit Muller, Ted Nace, and Amy Glasmeier on organizing in the contemporary West.

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Ann Markusen

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1

Region Building: An Introduction

Struggles over territory have been a dominant form of social upheaval in the world for centuries. Cold war, world wars, wars of independence and national liberation, regional autonomy movements, and urban riots—all appear to refute the Marxist contention that class antagonisms constitute the most fundamental form of social opposition. Unfortunately, we have better developed theories about class conflicts than we do territorial ones. Social science scholars have been remarkably reluctant to tackle the sphere of geopolitics and territoriality. It is one of the projects of this book to contribute some theoretical insights into these confounding phenomena.

In the United States territorial politics have consistently displaced or preempted class politics as a national preoccupation. The Civil War pitted northerner against southerner. Populism attempted to organize southern and western farmers against eastern capital. In the recent postwar period, the Northeast clamored against regional robbery in the guise of job loss, extortionary energy prices, and biased federal aid flows toward the Sunbelt. Indeed, the New Deal period is a singular exception in a long history of powerful interregional antagonisms. Understanding this stubborn phenomenon of American regionalism, which resists reduction to simple class, religious, race, or ethnic differences, is the second project of this book.

Regionalism has been alternatively hallowed and disparaged by scholars with a normative bent. The southern regionalists of the 1930s and some more anarchist-leaning New Left scholars champion regionalism as both a preserver of sound traditional values and a source of great progressive and democratic impetus. Most contemporary Marxists see regionalism as a force impeding the progress of history, as a distraction, or at a minimum, a necessary manifestation of the conflict between the mobility of capital and the immobile nature of reproduction. Demonstrating that regionalism can wear many coats is the third project of this book. Its contribution to history, peace, or prosperity can be evaluated only on a case-by-case basis.

The United States manifests a unique brand of regionalism. As a

nation, it lacks some of the pre-capitalist traditions that contribute to regional cleavage in Europe and the Third World—language differences, profound religious disputes, and ethnic groups who are regionally segregated. Thus the United States offers a chance to study regionalism in a more purely capitalist economic setting, with relatively fewer cultural complications. On the other hand, it has a unique political system—federalism—which enhances the possibilities for territoriality in politics.

The richness of the American regional landscape and the eventfulness of the nation's short history have made it impossible to think about doing a full-scale comparison, even with other industrialized nations. The theoretical work is thus tailored for the United States alone, although I believe that it would also fit the Canadian case closely. One of the ideas underlying this research, however, is that the absence of empirically grounded thinking about regionalism is a major contributor to the relative poverty of theory. The particularities of received political and cultural life operate as powerful shapers of territorialism, in ways that may not transcend continental or national boundaries. My hope is that the findings of this volume can be contrasted with those of others working in the European tradition to see where generalities can and cannot be drawn.

I chose to center my research on American regionalism, for several reasons. First, European regionalism is fairly well studied, although I believe that the conclusions I draw from the American case offer insights into that continent's territorial politics as well. The European literature is almost completely devoid of references to American regionalism, and there are no full-scale contemporary treatments of the latter.

Second, the United States is one of the few modern industrialized nations to host a full-scale and heavily regionalized civil war. The conflagration and its aftermath offer an outstanding opportunity to view the formation of regional consciousness. Similarly, the conflict between Native Americans and European colonists, also a violent, territorial encounter, provide another major instance for scholarly perusal. While both these eras have been admirably researched by historians, few inferences have been drawn for regions and regionalism in general.

THE MAKING OF AMERICAN REGIONALISM: TEN THESES

This book advances a set of propositions about American regional politics and their nature, formation, and intensity. Succinctly, they can be stated as follows.

1. *The economic primacy thesis:* Economic antagonisms constitute the principal underlying impulse for regional conflict in the United States.
2. *The cyclical exacerbation thesis:* Regional antipathies wane during

periods of normalcy and wax during periods of accelerated growth or decline, especially if the fruits or burdens fall unevenly across regions.

3. *The federal hothouse thesis*: The strong territorialization of American political power, embodied in the federal Constitution, engenders interregional hostility and channels what elsewhere might be more purely class conflicts into regional ones, as oppositional claims on the central State.
4. *The multiplier thesis*: Even though economic injury may be suffered by a limited group of regional residents, regionwide solidarity will be generated if the livelihoods directly affected constitute an important and irreplaceable portion of the region's economic base.
5. *The cultural leavening thesis*: The successful translation of specific territorial economic complaints into regionalism requires a latent cultural mutuality and the absence of countervailing internal tensions.
6. *The volatility thesis*: Instances of regional sentiment and antagonism are potentially capturable by different coalitions of classes and cultural affinity groups within the region.
7. *The economic capability thesis*: The larger, more unified and robust the region's economy, the more likely that regionalist demands will tend toward separatism or the devolution of State powers, rather than toward the mere redistribution of revenues or program reformulation.
8. *The party politics thesis*: Regions with well-developed, competitive party systems will be less amenable to regionalism than regions with one dominant or several weak political parties.
9. *The mutuality thesis*: When regionalism emerges in one region, it tends to call forth a reactive regionalism, often reluctant and weak, in other regions.
10. *The potentiality thesis*: Regionalism can facilitate or retard the development of a capitalist economy and/or the transition toward a socialist alternative.

The first, second, third, and ninth of these propositions deal with the interregional and external face of regionalism—its roots in uneven economic development and nurturance within the American political system. The fourth through eighth theses treat the internal receptivity of regions to the emergence of territorial politics. The final one addresses the normative issue.

Economic Primacy

The United States, with its recent European heritage and Anglo-Saxon hegemony, contains no major cultural cleavages of the linguistic or religious type that compound most instances of European regional strife. It is much clearer, here, that regionalism is a function of economic differentiation. Indeed, regional cultures, such as those evoked by the

terms “Yankee,” “Texan,” “Highlander,” and “Dixie,” are often of recent vintage, created as unique identities within the last two hundred years.

Three types of economic differentiation, created by the uneven spread of capitalism, have played a role in igniting regionalism in the United States. First, regional struggle may ensue when two contesting modes of production coexist temporally but are differentiated territorially. From the outset, the new American nation became a battleground for this type of struggle between a northern economic system based on free wage labor and a southern economic system based on slave labor. Both regions’ elites levied their increasingly incompatible claims on the central State that they had recently collaborated in setting up, driving the southern partner to secession and confederation.

A second type of economic differentiation is the territorial separation of the two dominant spheres of capitalist economic activity—circulation and production. If the bulk of agents of circulation (owners of the means of transportation, financiers, and middlemen in interregional trade) reside in one region, and the bulk of producers (farmers or miners, for instance) in another, then regional conflict may erupt. Economic controversies may encompass freight rates, interest rates, commodity prices, and issues of landownership and foreclosure. Then regional strife of the Populist era, when western and southern farmers found themselves pitted against eastern railroad barons, financial magnates, and grain dealers, provides an extraordinary example of this type of economically founded regionalism.

Third, clashes among participants in territorially differentiated production sectors may also lead to regionalist politics. Sectoral specializations overlay the last two cases of regionalism noted. Southern “King” cotton opposed a northern economy thriving on textile mills, steel, and mixed farming. An eastern manufacturing establishment producing farm implements and consumer goods heightened the conflict between eastern commercial capital and a populist West and South specializing in agricultural commodities. More recently, the energy crisis has produced a new East-West sectoral differentiation which has led to regional quarreling. In all these instances, the commodities produced by one region formed the inputs into commodity production in the other, either as material or capital goods inputs (cotton, plows, fuel) or indirectly as part of the reproduction cost of labor (food, clothing, fuel), creating conflict over the terms of production and exchange in each.

The American regional mosaic lacks two types of economic differentiation that have been important elsewhere: spatial segregation of classes and of landownership. Class structure is not highly regionally differentiated in the United States, although it has been a major source of intraurban conflict. Absentee landownership is relatively unimportant in the United States, at least in the sense that land in any one region is predominantly owned by territorially identified outside interests. The only politically important “outside” landowner has been the federal

government, a factor that enhances the role of the State in the formation of American regionalism.

Cyclical Exacerbation

The pace of economic development has a special role to play in engendering regionalism. Slow change, whether it be growth or decline, is more easily accommodated than rapid change. In the former, individuals and institutions have time to find new livelihoods, adapt to dramatic community recomposition, and cope with collective needs. The severe downturns of the nineteenth century helped to ignite regional sentiment, and in the post–World War II period, regionalism resurged once sustained growth ended in 1967. Similarly, rampant growth with its own peculiar brand of unsettling consequences has created regional tensions, as it did on the frontier in the nineteenth century and has again in the late twentieth century in energy and high-tech boom areas.

Cyclical troughs and, to a lesser extent, peaks fail to prompt regionalism only when hardship or benefits are relatively evenly spread. An example is the New Deal period, when overall unemployment levels swamped interregional disparities. The nation had a common cause, captured in Roosevelt's politically astute "One Third of a Nation" phrase.

The Federal Hothouse

The federal structure of the American political system is a factor engendering interregional antagonisms. In the United States, political power is delegated spatially to a degree unusual in advanced capitalist countries (with a few exceptions such as Canada and Australia). Indeed, the initial structuring of the system—particularly the carving out of states in the western portion of the country—was the product of an intense regional conflict between uneasy partners in a national union. In trying to dominate the Congress in the interests of their sectional elites, northern and southern politicians ensured that the distribution of power in that Congress would be highly territorially configured far into the future. As a result, a major task of American political parties has been the transcendence of a narrow regional base, which has often resulted, among other anomalies, in the choice of a presidential candidate from a region where the party in question is relatively weak or weakening. Regional causes have played a major role in the formation of new parties and the demise of older ones.

The Multiplier Effect

Direct economic conflicts between limited sets of regional actors, such as those profiting from the types of differentiated activity mentioned above, easily become regionwide. They may capture the partisanship of the majority of regional residents because of their secondary and tertiary macroeconomic effects. These include the reduced viability of

small local firms that supply the sector in decline, the business service sector (banks, advertisers, consultants, insurers), and those segments of the economy that depend upon the existing payroll—retailers, real estate, and the public sector—because their businesses depend upon consumer expenditure.

Critics of regionalism sometimes suggest that working people and other non-elite residents are hoodwinked into regional chauvinism when it is not in their interests. This interpretation is overly facile, because it denies the significance, both economic and physical, of attachment to place. The conditions of reproduction of social life, particularly families, community support systems, public sector facilities like schools, private cultural institutions such as churches—often owned and controlled, at least formally, by working people—are often hard hit when a single sector or ensemble of economic activities endures hard times. The loss of income and jobs, an environmental disruption that negatively affects other sectors, will reverberate through the local economy and touch many lives. With it comes the longer-term fear that the regional economy will not be able to sustain the current community. Outmigration, particularly of younger people, will be forced by the slow evaporation of opportunities to make a living.

Cultural Leavening

However strong the economic peculiarities and hardships of a particular region, they will not necessarily materialize in the form of regional politics. The shape and intensity of regional politics depend heavily upon the existing culture, politics, and economy of the region. Internal unity around regional disruption most often occurs when the local culture is relatively homogenous (or some route around internal differences can be found), can produce indigenous leadership, and possesses a political party structure willing to countenance and embrace the regional cause. Some of the enabling conditions are also economic—class structure, local versus outside ownership, sectoral composition—but others inure in ethnic, religious, and other cultural traits fashioned over the generations.

The Volatility of Regional Coalitions

The dominant members of a regional coalition may change with the evolution of the conflict. At the outset, a regional challenge may be mounted by seriously injured parties without any history of political participation. Their claims will be dramatic and creative, tending toward the radical—farmers in the Populist era are an example. In the effort to gain acceptance and win political battles, the initial leadership may accept or be displaced by more established regional leadership. It is not a foregone conclusion, however, that regional elites will end up controlling a regionalist impulse. In some cases, the control of region politics may pass to a new configuration of interests. The outcome in any

individual case depends upon the balance of power between competing interests within the region and on the strategic choices made by the organizers themselves.

Economic Capability

Interregional contests in the United States have consisted for the most part of competing claims levied on the federal government. There are those regional claims which fundamentally challenge the entire edifice of the federal government power and petition for the right to secede or to reorganize the entire representational system. A second type does not challenge the legitimacy of central government but demands that certain of its powers and responsibilities be reallocated among levels within it—that certain categories of public activity, spending, or decision making such as land sales, infrastructure, social services, or civil rights be reshuffled up or down the federal ladder. Finally, there is a third type of claim that accepts the distribution of functions among federal levels but argues for a reallocation of funds among regions or a reformulation of policy to correct regional imbalances.

The type of political claim levied—separatism, federal, functional restructuring or reallocation of federal funds—will depend heavily upon the regional leadership's assessment of its ability to go it alone, its faring under alternative structural arrangements, and its receipts under new federal budgetary practices. These in turn depend upon the growth prospects the region faces and whether its economic trouble derive from a surfeit of older, obsolete sectors, from a disadvantaged position with respect to the terms of international trade, or an adverse distribution of income from outside ownership and control. Regions which are growing at a healthy rate, house their own indigenous finance and industrial capital, and enjoy favorable terms of trade are least apt to register any form of regional complaint and indeed can be expected to be advocates of nationalism. Regions which possess a robust economy but suffer from outside ownership and control and/or adverse terms of trade will be apt to opt for separatism or a decentralization of powers, believing that their economic vigor can carry them alone. Regions which face poor growth prospects will not try to go it alone, but will petition for special treatment. Each of these expected postures depends upon the existing muscle of the region in question vis-à-vis the center of power.

The Role of Party Politics

Since most regionalism does end up in the political realm, at the state if not the national level, the preexisting character of politics within regions plays a powerful role in channeling regional protest and action. Regions with well-entrenched, competitive two-party systems will be less apt to evolve a regionalist politics, since it will be in the interest of at least one party to oppose the program lest it bring too much credit upon the other. An example might be the difficulty in organizing a regional