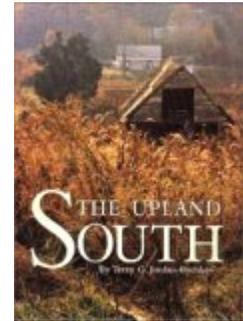


H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Terry G. Jordan-Bychkov. *The Upland South: The Making of an American Folk Region and Landscape*. Santa Fe and Harrisonburg: University Press of Virginia, 2003. xiv + 121 pp. \$30.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-930066-08-3.

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The Upland South: A Region Defined

Terry G. Jordan-Bychkov has attempted to argue that the region known as the “Upland South” is a unique and important geographic center in *The Upland South: The Making of an American Folk Region*. In his initial chapter, the author defines the Upland South as the region comprising of Arkansas, Oklahoma, and the Hill Country of Texas. This geographical region was extended eastward to Tennessee, and flowed briefly into the surrounding southern states. Jordan-Bychkov argued that this region is totally different from what traditionally has been known as the American South, and should be viewed as a different and distinct geographical area.

To support his thesis, the author chose a methodology of focusing on artifacts as evidence of the spread of the Upland South folk culture throughout this geographical region. The author notes that his work cannot be viewed as the last word on this topic, but it is clearly a labor of love with the region connected to his own family genealogy. Jordan-Bychkov chose a decidedly subjective process for understanding the scope of the Upland South, when he wrote, “I propose to sample a few items of folk culture and employ only one methodology” (p. 12). Through this process, he avoided the potential problems found in oral interviews, and instead focused on these artifacts as markers to show how this folk culture has spread through the Upland South.

Five of the seven chapters describe these markers for determining the spread of this unique folk culture. Jordan-Bychkov selected these artifacts due to

their widespread use throughout the Upland South and their particular uniqueness to the region. These objects were the use of half-dovetailing on building construction, dogtrot cabins, transverse-crib barns, Shelbyville town square/courthouse design, and the employment of grave sheds throughout the region. Each chapter is a small case study on the representative artifact with supporting end-notes. These artifacts are described through the use of illustrations (diagrams and photographs) that document the development and use of the artifact within the region. The author’s layout of illustrations, text, and end-notes is similar to *East Tennessee Cantilever Barns*, edited by Marian Moffett and Lawrence Wodenhause (1993). In the final chapter titled “A Region Revealed,” the author summarizes the arguments spelled out in the preceding chapters. Jordan-Bychkov does admit, however, that his methodology was “imperfect” (p. 82), but he believes that his research could be a conduit toward further research on this distant geographic area, which is as “American” (p. 85) as the American Midwest and West.

In his work, the author has effectively employed material culture as a useful tool to track the progress of a cultural identity through a geographic region. Jordan-Bychkov’s thesis makes a strong argument that the American South is truly a sum of a number of unique cultures forged by different nationalities. The weakness of his work is found in the use of generalizations throughout the text to “hurry” the thesis along to the analysis found in the last chapter. One example is found in the author’s generalization that Pennsylvania “Dutch” did not

expand in substantial numbers beyond the Shenandoah Valley in Virginia, except for the Moravians in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. This statement ignores the German migration into the Catawba, Yadkin, and Pee Dee River basins in North and South Carolina, which appears in German-language churches and eighteenth-century court records in Lincoln County, North Carolina. Jordan-Bychkov is clearly enamored with the Upland South region of his family's roots, but his thesis would have been better served by fleshing out his text with stronger and more specific statements regarding the development of the American South.

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