



American Nations: A History of the Eleven Rival Regional Cultures of North America

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- *A New Republic* Best Book of the Year - *The Globalist* Top Books of the Year - Winner of the Maine Literary Award for Non-fiction -

Particularly relevant in understanding who voted for who in this presidential election year, this is an endlessly fascinating look at American regionalism and the eleven "nations" that continue to shape North America

According to award-winning journalist and historian Colin Woodard, North America is made up of eleven distinct nations, each with its own unique historical roots. In *American Nations* he takes readers on a journey through the history of our fractured continent, offering a revolutionary and revelatory take on American identity, and how the conflicts between them have shaped our past and continue to mold our future. From the Deep South to the Far West, to Yankeedom to El Norte, Woodard (author of *American Character: A History of the Epic Struggle Between Individual Liberty and the Common Good*) reveals how each region continues to uphold its distinguishing ideals and identities today, with results that can be seen in the composition of the U.S. Congress or on the county-by-county election maps of this year's Trump versus Clinton presidential election.

American Nations: A History of the Eleven Rival Regional Cultures of North America Details

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From Reader Review American Nations: A History of the Eleven Rival Regional Cultures of North America for online ebook

Christian Geirsson says

An incredible, paradigm-shifting cultural studies book, for my understanding personally. I considered giving it 5 stars, but generally reserve that rating for the spiritually-moving, like *Zen and the Art and Life of Pi*, and fiction of that ilk. Anyway, a re-orienting learning experience that changes the way one can contemplate American history and culture.

Essentially, this is the story of 11 distinct cultures playing influential roles on each other and the geopolitical development of North America and particularly the United States. What makes this book fascinating is the way these cultures' vast differences in values and morals explain contemporary problems of cooperation in our nation. To get an insight into why so many of us hate Obamacare, it helps learning how much the Deep South or Appalachians resented, absolutely hated the federal government involvement, preferring to handle its community business and the well-being of its citizens by itself, thank you. The descriptions of these nations - Yankeedom, Tidewater, Greater Appalachia, the Deep South, the Midlands, the Left Coast, New France, New Amsterdam, First Nation, and El Norte, and the Far West - provide an excellent explanation on why the hell we can't get along with other parts of the country - and probably never will. Woodard predicts either a splinter of the American Union and a significant change in the Canadian, Mexican and US borders, unless American cultures can agree to make serious compromises in its views of government intervention, and crucial understandings of freedom and liberty.

It's fascinating to learn and understand who founded what areas, what their intents were, what parts of Europe they came from, who they didn't get along with in the old country and here in the new continent and to what extent the federal government, various religious orders, public education and Native American populations influenced their new regional identities. You can see how Deep Southern aristocrats deeply resented the righteousness of New England pious congregations, how New Amsterdam-ers wanted to preserve equality, diversity and the right to free speech above all else, and how poor Quakers were at governing Pennsylvania. The most interesting culture reading about to me was Greater Appalachia. What would consider hillbillies today, these people loved to fight, and hated government intervention of any kind. Their bond to their family bonds was strong, but their relationship with their neighbors often shifted depending who pissed them off the most at a given time. These communities cared little for public education or personal salvation for the most part, but played an under-appreciated role in the federation's development, playing a major role in crafting early 19th-century American policy, producing a healthy number of Presidents, and supplying a disproportionate number of troops to serve in the Armed Forces. So while it's easy to criticize this population - this nation - as being ignorant, anti-government hillbillies, it's important to remember that their values or bold protection of freedoms and skepticism of government intervention played an important role in tempering the Yankees (New Englanders) at times oppressive righteousness and moral lecturing.

At the beginning of the book, he identifies current political figures lamenting about the lack of unity in America, and the need to "re-unite to find our original common bond." This research shows we never were united, and we never will be, because our neighbors' moral values are often so different from ours, we never fought for the same purposes, and never shared common rewards other than national protection in international affairs. Most interesting to me were the re-evaluations of the American Revolution. I'm not going to try to attempt to summarize the reasons for entering the Revolution, because every student of history knows the general reasons why the colonies united to fight a distant monarch, and those traditionally-

viewed reasons aren't altered greatly in Woodard's book. But what I find interesting are the individual fights each ethnic regions had with each other while we as a fresh nation fought a foreign invader. To believe the Yankees in the north were fighting the Revolutionary War for the same reasons as those in Tidewater or the Deep Southerners, or the Midlanders (Quakers originally - and terrible, awful municipal leaders) of Pennsylvania held the same opinion about fighting for independence and preserving liberty as the Scots-Irish of Appalachia, is to greatly misunderstand the development of the United States, and the origins of the different cultures that who settled the regions of this continent. We never thought the same way, didn't fight for the same things, and continue to essentially disagree rather than agree about key governing concepts. And we probably never will. Perhaps one day, our borders will more realistically reflect how different clusters of North Americans choose to live their lives.

As revolutionary a read of American history as Howard Zinn's "A People's History of the United States", this book helped re-shape my understanding of American history right up to the 21st century, including motivations for regional developments, cultural wars, and military interventions. I highly recommend this book as an essential read for an expanded, enlightened insight into our multiple cultural identities, our constant arguing and splintered values, and a modern understanding of why we just can't agree with our fellow countrymen.

Jill says

The good first: I buy the premise of this book, that the U.S. is made up of rival nations with borders vastly different from the regions depicted on common maps of the country. And I enjoyed the parts that seek to illustrate the founding and spreading of U.S. colonies and what later became U.S. territory.

When Woodard tries to characterize the people of the land, however, he brushes with broad, unflattering strokes that I found hard to take seriously. His discussion concerns missionaries, slave lords, congressmen, etc.; yet he casually refers to "Midlanders" or "Yankees" as though he has provided any insight whatsoever to the women, minority residents, or political moderates of that region.

Woodard's personal prejudices are made most evident by the facts and events he chooses to discuss, and the ones he ignores. He laments the railway land grants in the Far West, but handily excludes of any thoughtful consideration of New Netherlands/Yankee *ownership* of these railroad companies. He obviously lambasts the Deep South for its commitment to slavery, but obscures New England's history of violent relations with Native Americans. Other events are presented in contentious and sometimes bizarre ways: Reconstruction in the South, for example, is described as a benevolent, peaceful outpouring of New English charity.

I expected from this book a thoughtful consideration of the areas that don't quite fit the regions we've often assigned them to: Woodard's El Norte, Tidewater and parts of Appalachia, for example. And the book's discussion of these areas is rewarding at times. But in the long run, his re-drawing of the U.S. map is just a qualification for his broad-stroke stereotyping of the people in those regions. What could have been a good synthesis of the acquisition and founding of U.S. territory devolves into something flat and unconvincing – often annoying.

The writing is accessible but lazy, with inconsistent parentheses, recycled chapter openings, and formulaic sentence structures. There are un-cited quotes, and phrases put in gimmicky quotations for no apparent reason other than that the author doesn't want to take responsibility for them.

Two stars is generous, but it's a cool map.

Bill says

Our country finally makes sense. The facts haven't changed, and even the history we were taught in high school and college retains its basic outlines. But why we are the way we are, with all the frustrations we suffer because of our politics, our religions, our battling/baffling cultural wars: now I begin to understand.

Of course we all knew that the parts of North America were settled by people with different - wildly different, as it turns out - origins. But because American history as it's usually taught so heavily emphasizes what began with the Mayflower, all the other beginners are dismissed as outliers. What Colin Woodard does is begin with all the founding groups, taking them at their face value. Each group - he names them Yankeedom, Midlands, Deep South, El Norte, Greater Appalachia, New France, The Far West, The Left Coast, New Netherland, Tidewater, and First Nation - bore cultural expectations and political/cultural desires, with (in most cases) an expectation of hegemony and control. As the Nations expanded, they clashed. Those clashes shine in today's political world, and they are likely to continue as long as North America is populated, for the nations do not blend easily.

My own family comes mostly from Yankeedom, which probably explains why I wrote my doctoral dissertation on John Milton. But I have lived in Midlands, Tidewater, El Norte, and Deep South. This book helps explain what I experienced.

Woodard pulls you quickly into his story, and each of his Nations becomes a character fighting its way into the future. He makes you understand their strengths and, especially, their failings. You will be captivated by his story, written with such skill that you may find it hard to put down.

John Parris says

It was good, but particularly toward the end became more the author's opinion rather than statistical evidence or other facts. He is from Maine and allowed his prejudices to show. According to him, all Southerners (comprised of Tidewater, Deep South, and Appalachia) are Republicans, conservative, racist, backward and so on with the usual stereotypes. New Englanders are, of course, progressive, educated, and egalitarian, though he does admit to past intolerance. I live here and let me tell you that is not quite the full story or even predominant characteristics of the people who live here.

His premise is that North America is made of of various nations, each with its own unique characteristics: Left Coast, Yankeedom, Tidewater, Appalachia, Deep South etc. While I agree with his assessment of the existence of the various "nations," I don't agree with his boundaries. He Has Appalachia extending from Western Pennsylvania to Eastern Texas. I am sorry, but, not only are Texas and Pennsylvania very different cultures, Texas and the South (whether Tidewater, Deep South or Appalachia) are different cultures with different manners, accents, ways of doing things etc. Texas is more western than anything. He also has Tidewater ending in northeastern North Carolina, while I would argue that it goes further south and further west as far as Charlotte. He also claims that much of the Midwest is part of Yankeedom and barely discusses the enormous Scandinavian influence.

I also think the author oversimplifies and generalizes too much. He also fails to take into account the full influence of migration of all sorts of people to different areas. Half the people who live in Dallas are not from there and the same is true of much of North Carolina where I'm from and all of California. He is from New England, arguably the most homogeneous and insular area of the country and assumes that the rest of the "nations" are like that also.

Sharon says

Growing up in the South I always wondered why my family was so different from those around us. We were friendly with the people in our community but when serious discussions came up my parents grew quiet. Our friends and neighbors had no such reservations. They were opinionated and always eager for a fight of any kind whether with fists or words. We lived side and by side and spoke the same language but I always got the sense that we were just not 'one of them.'

My family was never really gung-ho when it came to discussions about the Confederacy or flying the flag. They were proud of being southern but it seemed to stop there. They were Republicans back in the days when everyone else was a Democrat. We just did not 'fit'.

Doing family history I learned that my mother's people were New England Quakers who gradually made their way into the south. My father's people lived in the North Carolina Highlands where they intermarried with the Cherokee. This was all very interesting but I honestly thought it was all ancient history until I read this book American Nations.

A light suddenly came on in my head. My mother's people came out of Yankeedom! My father's people were those Borderlanders who lived in Appalachia and remained loyal to the Union because they hated the southern planters of the Tidewater and the 'fake' aristocracy they believed they wished to bring to America.

If this sounds like some kind of secret code rest assured it is not. Colin Woodard has outlined a theory as to why America is so divided along cultural and political lines. It all goes back to the very beginnings of this country where politics and culture were determined by who settled where and what their dreams were.

All of the different groups brought positives and negatives with them when they decided to settle here. Some wished to recreate the old world in a new setting, such as the younger sons of the British aristocracy who settled in the Tidewater and the Deep South. Some, like the Puritans and Pilgrims of New England, wanted a brand new utopia, a city on the hill in Yankeedom. The German settlers of the Midlands wanted nothing more than to farm and raise their families in a place free of restrictions and restraint. In New Amsterdam, the Dutch opted for a multi-cultural commerce center that became New York City. The Scots-Irish came here because they could. They were the tough ones, not afraid of a good fight who settled the wilderness and formed a civilization without a government in Appalachia.

Even today living in this area which was settled by all of these groups you can see faint reminders of these earlier cultures all around us. Is it too fantastical to think that sitting down with a varied group of residents we could find out just by listening to the tone of their conversation who their ancestors were? I believe it is possible.

The book answered so many questions. Why was integration so much harder to implement in the Deep South? Why are the states of the Pacific Northwest in the 'blue' category? Why did the Scots-Irish not side with the rest of the south until AFTER the Civil War?

The negatives of each group are also highlighted. Yankeedom brought the concept of the town hall meeting and democracy but they were also religiously intolerant. New Netherlands gave us slavery which was taken advantage of in the Tidewater and Deep South. The Scots-Irish were the Marines of their day. They were the first to fight and never backed down from a challenge. Unfortunately, this tenacity could also translate into just plain old hard headiness which caused many a roadblock politically and socially.

The role of religion in each 'nation' is discussed in detail. He includes similar developments in Canada which are valuable information for serious students of this school of thought. He gives several chapters to the earlier Spanish explorations, the French settling of the Gulf Coast and to later immigrant arrivals. Who settled where and why in the American West is given equal time which was information I used to just skim over.

I would, however, caution the reader that Woodard can seem to come across in the later chapters as caustic toward certain regions and certain ideals. If you are of Scots-Irish descent you might want to take him to task for this and I fully expect you will but otherwise, it is an interesting and fascinating read for all of those out there wondering 'Why are we the way we are and how did we come to this? Will we ever truly be a 'United' nation?

Christian says

Enlightening, imperfect and potentially dangerous. Woodard creates a narrative of the US as several nations living side by side. The story is compelling enough to ring true in my experience. So many competing cultural values are articulately described as having roots in various waves of immigration. Unfortunately, it needs better citation and more evidence to be really mind blowing. He relies heavily on the work of David Hackett Fischer but is much more judgmental. The dangerous part is that it gets enough right that it feeds a sort of factionalism in me that never really existed before. Suddenly endless compromise on our politics seems less likely, even less desirable. Suddenly people I'd only thought of as American before start to look more alien than I'd realized. Deep South I'm looking at you.

Becky says

My problem with broad-stroke history books is that they are far too broad, and that you cannot really make claims or assertions because there simply isn't enough evidence provided to back them up. Ultimately this is the greatest weakness of Woodard's book. It's a very interesting premise, and one that I largely find to be true and intuitive if you travel and live in different places in this country. I grew up in Nebraska, and found my time in North Carolina to be an interesting study, mostly in what "self-reliance" meant to different people, because it's everything to the individual in my Germanic-Midwestern upbringing, but had a more communal definition in the south. It's just that there wasn't enough evidence provided behind each separate American nation mentioned in the book to make a very strong argument. I certainly think he COULD make a strong argument, but then this would have needed to be a series of books. In a series of books there could have been a greater look at how the importation of various slave nations changed the language and cultures in Tidewater and the Deep South, and how they changed them differently. There could have been a greater look at how these various cultures freed or repressed women and other minorities. But it was a broad-stroke book, and there was just no time for details.

Still, it's probably a good, and important book for people to read that don't delve a lot into history. It covers a good chunk of time, does spend at least some time looking at the treatment of the majority and the minority in each culture, and will make a lot of things on the news make sense. Like, why can't we just all get along? Short answer- because we never have, and we probably never will. It clips along at a pretty decent pace, so if you aren't an avid history reader (which is totally fine, btw, I don't ever ready mysteries myself) then this won't bore you, and will be a decent outline.

In particular I would have loved a much greater section on the newly growing but always present First Nation, particularly in Canada and other countries. We could learn so much by increasing the inclusivity of native people's into our governments. I would have also loved to read more particularly about the El Norte power struggle. Alas, like with so many books, I have found new and interesting information and just want to go further into the rabbit hole.

3.5 out of 5, rounding down to 3 because it doesn't really belong in the 4's with some of my favorite microcosm histories, but maybe you can just chalk that up to tastes. If Woodard wrote more about his theory, I would certainly continue to read about it, because I do think he has mostly hit the nail on the head as far as the larger culture goes. I would also love to read more about subcultures in those broader strokes.

Steve Kettmann says

Jon Stewart can't do it all alone. The Daily Show has evolved toward more open-minded consideration of the issues of the day and less outright comedy because Stewart still thinks honest people of good faith can cut through the nonsense and figure out problems in a way any reasonable person can admit makes sense. Colin Woodard's *American Nations: A History of the Eleven Rival Regional Cultures of North America* pulls off the unlikely feat of both offering the tools for just such a broader, deeper understanding—and demonstrates why, in a larger sense, that effort is doomed.

Advertisement

Many readers will be skeptical at first, and I was, too. No doubt Thomas Frank (*What's the Matter With Kansas?: How Conservatives Won the Heart of America*) and others have done valuable work in looking deeper than the familiar red state/blue state divide to try to explain why people in different regions think and vote the way they do. But come on! Eleven nations? And right there in the map on the cover of Woodard's book, we can see that the bottom half of Florida has simply been ignored, included in no "nation," left uncolored as if by a kindergartner who got called to recess before he or she could finish drawing.

In fact Woodard pulls it off. He compellingly lays out his vision of why it makes sense to throw state boundaries out the window for the most part and think instead of 11 nations, each defined by its history, by a common culture and set of assumptions about government and life. I always hated the term "Left Coast," the way any self-respecting San Franciscan hates the term "Frisco," since it seemed to carry the hint that even someone like me, fourth-generation Californian on both sides, was somehow not part of America. Yes, Woodard explains, that is exactly right: "Left Coast" culture, running in a coastal strip from around just north of San Luis Obispo, California, up to British Columbia, does in key respects stand apart from "the Far West," "El Norte," "First Nation," "New France," "the Midlands," "Greater Appalachia," "the Deep South," "Tidewater," "the New Netherlands," and "Yankeedom."

"The United States is a federation comprised of the whole or part of 11 regional nations, some of which truly

do not see eye to eye with one another."

"America's most essential and abiding divisions are not between red states and blue states, conservatives and liberals, capital and labor, blacks and whites, the faithful and the secular," Woodard writes in his introduction. "Rather, our divisions stem from this fact: the United States is a federation comprised of the whole or part of 11 regional nations, some of which truly do not see eye to eye with one another ... Few have shown any indication that they are melting into some sort of unified American culture. On the contrary, since 1960 the fault lines between these nations have been growing wider, fueling culture wars, constitutional struggles, and ever more frequent pleas for unity."

The key to the book's effectiveness is Woodard's skill—and irreverence—in delving into history with no qualms about being both brisk and contrarian. New Yorkers, for example, are not always going to feel great stirrings of pride in reading about the history of New Amsterdam, especially the period shortly before the Civil War when residents of Manhattan were far from the forefront of anti-slavery. Yankees come off the worst, though, as important as they have been to U.S. history, and Woodard seems particularly aghast at their eagerness to claim the U.S. narrative as their own. He takes glee in pointing out that rebellion in the North American colonies against the rule of a distant king started not in the 1770s, but in the 1680s, and not "as a united force of Americans eager to create a new nation, but in a series of separate rebellions, each seeking to preserve a distinct regional culture, political system, and religious tradition threatened by the distant seat of empire."

Rather than playing around with his concepts, Woodard focuses most of the book on giving the history of each of his 11 nations; we're more than 250 pages in by the time he finishes off the "Founding the Far West" chapter. What could have been an entire book-length riff of its own, "The Struggle for Power," gets squeezed into two short chapters near the end, in which Woodard explains how the balance of power in the U.S. has shifted based on how swing nations align themselves—either with the northern alliance of Yankeedom, the New Netherlands and the Left Coast or with the Dixie alliance, the Deep South and Greater Appalachia joined by the "junior partner" Tidewater. The better we understand the orientation of each of the nations, the better we can grasp the way individual politicians have set about cobbling together support.

"George W. Bush may have been the son of a Yankee president and raised in far western Texas, but he was a creature of east Texas, where he lived, built his political career, found God, and cultivated his business interests and political alliances," he writes. "His domestic policy priorities as president were those of the Deep Southern oligarchy; cut taxes for the wealthy, privatize Social Security, deregulate energy markets... Meanwhile, Bush garnered support among ordinary Dixie residents by advertising his fundamentalist Christian beliefs, banning stem-cell research and late-term abortions, and attempting to transfer government welfare programs to religious institutions."

I'd have preferred to see more application of the ideas to contemporary politics, but maybe that will have to wait for the next book. In the meantime, American Nations may not leave much room for optimism about our dysfunctional political dynamic improving any time soon, but in offering us a way to better understand the forces at play in the rumpus room of current American politics, Colin Woodard has scored a true triumph. I am going to order copies for my father and sister immediately—and I hope Woodard gets a wide hearing for this fascinating study.

This review originally appeared at:

<http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles...>

Christoph says

Reading the reviews of this book on goodreads I am struck by how little people know about American history, and that is, the American continent, not the false association of America as the United States. The fact is that the thesis presented in American Nations is not really a very innovative concept, but more of a nuanced one. The melting pot versus salad bowl concept has been around for going on generations now. The historian David Hendrickson just a few years ago put out a book, Peace Pact, with the thesis that during the revolution each of the 13 colonies acted like individual nation-states and provided some speculation as to what would have happened if federalism had failed producing a Europe of the west. The author himself provides a few inspirational jumping points along the way of this notion. Quite frankly, this model of American history should be all but apparent and is clearly compelling, evident by the numerous testimonials amongst the reviews from a seemingly diverse group of readers.

Woodard in this analysis of American history provides a strongly reasoned, objective review of origins of the American continent. He brilliantly historicizes the cultural origins of each region of the country tracing them from creation to the eventual presiding of the dominant culture then analyzes the tensions and bonds created amongst these regions. Having spent time or lived in almost all of these regions (except those of the Canadian northeast), these contrasts are woefully apparent. The majority of my time was spent in the Deep South, and his characterization of this bastion of authoritarianism and anti-equality is spot-on. I am struck by Woodard's ability to objectively view both historical and contemporary culture with the exact same non-partisan eye, yet with the acute familiarity and sense of belonging to each of these cultures.

At the end of the day, it is important to note with any sociological analysis, especially one rooted in historicity, that this is a model. Applying too much weight to this view of society is detrimental because this is not "how things are" but merely a way of deciphering the complexity of interpersonal and intersocial relations of the United States.

Perhaps the greatest aspect of this analysis is the conclusion here. The purpose of this book is not just a new historical tradition in a vain attempt to gain notoriety or provide a pop historical trend, but the results of this analysis are prescriptive. Woodard cautions strongly that many of the conditions that got us into our current partisan landscape are not inevitabilities let alone unfixable. A strong need to understand all of our means of becoming the cultures we have grown up is necessary if we wish to work ourselves out of the contemporary social problems that we are immersed in. Ironically, it is none of the cultural traditions of Yankeeism or Southernness or even Westernness that he sees as the model for salvation of the American way of life. The saving grace of America is indigenous. If this continent is to stop the ever-increasing decline and even possible foreign exploitation slowly working its way into our institutions, we must adopt the sustainable and cooperative traditions of native Inuits. That alone is worthy of another volume.

BookSweetie says

Forget the conventional North America map and take a look instead at the map on the cover of AMERICAN NATIONS...

Yankeedom? New Netherland? the Midlands? Tidewater? Greater Appalachia? The Deep South? New France? El Norte? The Left Coast? the Far West? First Nation?? What kind of North American map is that??

Well, even folks who think they don't know much about geography surely know plenty enough to do a double-take. And that's what happened to me. I saw that map and meant to keep walking, but something happened. I found myself doing an about face, one version of a double take, I suppose, and even though one hand was busy scratching my head, my other hand was heading toward that mostly red cover and before I knew it, I was skimming for an explanation of that map -- and before I knew it, I wanted to read the whole shebang.

After all, not long ago, I had finished reading Russell Shorto's *ISLAND AT THE CENTER OF THE WORLD: The Epic Story of Dutch Manhattan and the Forgotten Colony That Shaped America*. Before long it became clear that the two books are "related."

Shorto writes in detail about the colonial/settlement history of New Netherland, and New Netherland turns up as one of historian/author Colin Woodard's "eleven" American Nations. Not surprisingly, Woodard does more than acknowledge Shorto; Woodard states his agreement with Shorto's thesis that the early colonial history left a cultural stamp still evident in modern New York. Woodard, however, goes beyond New York/New Netherland, to the whole continent. He describes for readers the early colonial/settlement history of eleven North American places identified on the map of my double-take and asserts that the particular characteristics of those histories have lasted into the current era.

Woodard has a dense, though readable, book with an introduction, epilogue, index, notes, and suggested readings. The main text is organized clearly in Four Parts:

Part One: Origins 1590 to 1769 (Chapters 1-9);
Part Two: Unlikely Allies: 1770 to 1815 (Chapters 10-14);
Part Three: Wars for the West: 1816 to 1877 (Chapters 15- 21);
Part Four: Culture Wars: 1878 to 2010 (Chapters 22-28)

The experience and perspectives of a reader no doubt will influence the reaction to various sections of *AMERICAN NATIONS*. I myself was most interested when Woodard was presenting foundational settlement history and identifying each nation's values and characteristics, exhibited particularly memorably in Parts One and Two, and less well in some later parts of the book.

In evaluating *AMERICAN NATIONS*, I think it is useful to remember that this book is very consciously a *SYNTHESIS*, as Woodard himself in the very first sentence on page 323 in the section titled: Acknowledgments and Suggested Reading states:

"*AMERICAN NATIONS* is largely a work of synthesis and, as such, has many intellectual forebears, informants, and godparents."

Individuals who have studied, learned, and read widely sometimes have aha moments and the skill to organize and write information that can distill information from separate sources and still illuminate a fresh perspective for the rest of us. Thank you for that, Mr. Woodard!

Jork says

Journalist and amateur historian Colin Woodard makes a lot of interesting assertions on the back of thin evidence. Splitting North America into eleven competing “nations,” or more accurately, cultural archetypes, Woodard goes to great lengths to explain the history of the United States, not as a single hegemonic unit, but as many smaller, competing units within a federal framework.

Woodard himself explains his work as a synthesis, and looking through the footnotes of *American Nations*, one wonders at the paucity of original sources, or at the scarcity of secondary sources. Woodard puts forth broad claims about the American history or regional characteristics on the strength of few sources, to wit: McCullough’s John Adams as the primary resource on the Adams presidency. In all, Woodard’s view of his pet regions remains terribly surface.

Though his argument is engagingly presented, Woodard’s pessimistic impression, not only about the current state of inter-regional solidarity, but about the entire history of inter-regional solidarity, lends itself to Woodard’s worldview and worse, his surface-only approach to North American history. The primary drive behind the book emerges in the final two chapters, where Woodard engages in straight-faced left wing sloganeering, engineering the villainy of the Deep South against the social progressive good guys in so-called “Yankeedom.” Despite the shifting regional alliances from colonization to today mapped throughout the book, Woodard insists that the primary cultural movers retain the traditional North-South focus despite his earlier explanation that such a cultural axis possessed more complexity than he later shows. In Woodard’s estimation, all other regional groups are basically vassal-states, one way or another, to this cultural axis. In the end, Woodard’s view of regionalism, complete with names too cutesy to take seriously, presents interesting ideas, and a new way of interpreting old history, but cannot carry the freight necessary to make a compelling argument from the sources. When Woodard begins to fantasize about a United States without the former Confederacy as a socialist paradise more like Canada or Europe, he loses the thread of his own argument entirely and drifts into irrelevance. Woodard ought to try his hand at Alternate History, and leave this rank fantasy behind.

Brandon says

There's something inherently compelling about this narrative. I found myself talking about the ideas in this book nonstop to my friends and anyone who would listen. It's a powerful explanation for the evolution of politics and power in the US.

I'm always interested in stories that explore the nature and development of power-and this book definitely scratches that itch. Towards the end, I found myself making connections with recent political developments. Of course Republicans emphasize a strong military, military victory is important in cementing Appalachian allegiance to the Southern faction and military spending does the same for the Far West. Democratic strategy seems to rely on bringing El Norte into the Northern alliance, with hopes that its dramatic growth will lead to power in the Far West, as well as shaping narratives to divide faction members and hopefully pull the Midlands in as a temporary member.

I, like other reviews, felt that the author at times seemed to lose his equanimity. The author's view towards these conflicts is, by no means, unbiased. At the same time, and acknowledging my own potential fault here, I don't think he is off base here. It has the feel of someone who recognizes that the other side uses a different language and consequently gives up and just says his peace. If one side's solution to every government issue is tax cuts, then maybe it's saying something more than just what they think the immediate problem requires.

If the other side's solution is always more thorough regulation, that also tells us something about the underlying political viewpoint. Even when it got incendiary, while the implication was his, the facts did not appear to be wrong. I would not have called the Dixie bloc policies as devoted an economy of "low-wage resource colonies", but with "right to work", low minimum wage, weak social safety nets and limited government intrusions on business, that doesn't seem inherently **wrong**.

I found this book fascinating and had trouble putting it down. I couldn't stop talking about it or recommending it to friends. I learned about historical events I only knew as a sentence in a history book. I know that even if I don't totally buy the narrative of the past, this view will definitely color how I view things from here on out.

Will it change your political leanings? No

Will it make you think about them? Yes

Jim Mullen says

I don't care how much American history you know, or think you know, this book, awkwardly sub-titled "A History of the Eleven Rival Regional Cultures," is a revelation. I'll give you an example of my own -- where is the oldest building made by Europeans in the U.S? If you grew up in the Northeast, you're probably thinking it's in Boston or Philadelphia. Went to school in the Southeast, maybe it's in St. Augustine or New Orleans. So where you grew up has a lot to do with what you think you know. Don't believe me? Then why isn't The Palace of the Governors in Santa Fe, New Mexico, built ten years before the Pilgrims landed on Plymouth Rock, the first place that pops to mind? Why isn't it as famous as Plymouth Rock? Time and time again, this book reveals how our cultural roots from centuries ago still shape our worldview. It is why politics in Oregon, with towns named after the places its early European settlers came from like Portland and Salem, has more in common with New England than it does with the Midwest or California. Proof that Faulkner was right, "The past isn't dead. It's not even past."

Mike Ratner says

Recommended with reservations; the first half of the book, covering the historical origins of the 11 diverse "nations" that comprise modern United States, is brilliant. For instance, most people don't realize that the vibrant multicultural entity that is New York was just like that continuously all the way back to its founding as New Amsterdam, which was the most diverse and "progressive" city of its time. Or that Deep South was founded by Barbados plantators, unlike the "Tidewater" area of Virginia and Maryland, founded by recently transplanted gentry from England, with consequent differences in culture and policy. Etc, etc.

The second half of the book, however, is devoted to exposing the author's deeply partisan interpretation of the more recent US history, which is so biased that it makes one question the veracity of every historical fact listed in support of the author's viewpoint.

Liz says

I can't recommend this book highly enough. It explains why the different territories of the country have the

different political bents that they do. And I learned facts about American history that I had never previously heard. The ending gets a little too biased and subjective, but up until then it's fascinating.
