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Why Place Matters: Geography, Identity, and Civic Life in Modern America ed. by Wilfred M. McClay and Ted V. McAllister (review)

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smartly reviews the history and culture of this neglected region. It helps to fill a historiographical gap and gives scholars a starting point for future research. It is also one of the best written and most comprehensive edited works that this reviewer has read. Anyone who studies, or cares about, this region will want to have a copy on his or her bookshelf.

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Wilfred M. McClay and Ted V. McAllister, eds., *Why Place Matters: Geography, Identity, and Civic Life in Modern America*. New York: Encounter Books, 2014. 296 pp. \$25.99.

The essays in this volume edited by Wilfred M. McClay, a historian at the University of Oklahoma, and Ted V. McAllister, a professor of public policy at Pepperdine University, emerged out of conferences on the subject of place in March 2011 and March 2012 at Pepperdine's School of Public Policy in Malibu, California. A book focusing upon the importance of place in people's lives will be of special interest to readers of a journal devoted to Middle Western history and culture.

Although the only reference to the Midwest in the index is to Andrew R. L. Cayton and Peter S. Onuf's *The Midwest and the Nation* (1990), several of the sixteen authors whose essays appear in the volume hail from the region: Joseph A. Amato, whose essay focuses on local history; Philip Bess, who writes on urban design and the built environment; and Yi-Fu Tuan, who focuses on place, space, identity, and the home. Amato is the only one to directly address the theme of regional history, which he fixes firmly within a spatial matrix starting with family and local history and proceeding to regional, national, and even global levels of analysis. Drawing upon his extensive research and previous books on local and regional history and concentrating especially upon southwestern Minnesota and the area around the town of Marshall, his essay crackles and sparks with fertile ideas that help to illuminate matters of place, environment, region, and associated matters.

Students of midwestern history and culture will gain much, too, from the other essays included in this wide-ranging collection. Former chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts Dana Gioia's exuberant de-

fense of and cheerleading for Los Angeles against all the attacks and snide remarks aimed at its sprawl, traffic tie-ups, smog, commercialism, and alleged blandness may be a little too boosterish for every critical taste, but he makes a strong case for LA as a viable and influential model for twenty-first century urban development.

Midwestern residents who might feel defensive about their own region's Detroit, Flints, and Pruitt-Igoe housing complexes or flinch at such outspoken Los Angeles boosterism will find instructive commentary in essays addressing the issue of "cosmopolitanism," whose universal, inclusive mindset and values are often set off against allegedly narrow, provincial, and self-serving stances and approaches associated with localism. Public intellectual Russell Jacoby warns of the dangers of cosmopolitanism while articulating the virtues of particularism, but he also is aware of the complexity surrounding the subject and recognizes that cosmopolitanism carries with it both peril and promise. Mark T. Mitchell likewise perceives the downside of uncritical political and cultural cosmopolitanism, while simultaneously advocating a "humane localism" that embodies limits, long-term commitments and duties, a sense of vocation and stewardship, and the cultivation of neighborliness and friendship. These are the kinds of qualities often associated with midwestern residents, and essays of this type can serve to stimulate discussion on these issues.

Acknowledging that the Midwest possesses its share of industrial, urban, and metropolitan complexes, the region has long been especially attached in the public mind to its agricultural base and multitudinous small towns. However, the reader will not find much about small towns in this volume, which is heavily oriented toward city life. Along with Roger Scruton and Wilfred McClay in their essays, the distinguished urbanist Witold Rybcynski in "The Demand Side of Urbanism" pays obeisance to Jane Jacobs's classic *Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961). He addresses the question of the kinds of places that people want: waterfronts, historically layered neighborhoods, mixed-use areas, and (for some at least) denser population. Essays by Ari Schulman and Gary Toth look at the impact of the automobile and other technologies, as well as the unintended consequences of road construction (such as urban sprawl) and stress the need for learning from experience and for applying place-based thinking to our social problems.

As with many variables, mobility—a characteristic feature of American society—carries with it both positive and negative consequences and implications. Often the unintended consequences of our decisions and

actions outweigh the intended ones. Planning itself has been highly controversial since the mid-twentieth century, and several of the essays touch upon the issue. This leads into a discussion of democratic decision making and who has the right or responsibility to make decisions about transportation, land use, buildings, education policy, and institutional direction. Several essays draw conservative lessons from their investigations, suggesting that the closer to home decisions are made the more democratic they will be, leading them therefore to be more practical and desirable, too. Clearly, discussions of place, as is pointed out in essays by Ted V. McAllister, Pete Peterson, Christine Rosen, and others, expand into discussions of what the “good life” is and how vital community can best be enhanced. Place and community are inextricably intertwined. Partisan politics plays little role in these essays, but pieces by Brian Brown and William A. Schambra make it clear that groups and individuals ranging from left to right on the political spectrum make place a major concern of theirs.

In the end, I come back to the essay by Joe Amato, whose writing has done as much as anybody’s to help us rethink place, locality, region, and community thriving. Perhaps in part because he was trained as a European historian, the wildly eclectic and innovative ideas and concepts that he brings to the study of the regional history of the Midwest (and local history in general) provide a kaleidoscopic kit of tools for investigating our particular places or regions. His advocacy of rural and regional history as “a natural link between immediate experience and history” helps put all of the other essays in this volume into useful context. “It confirms,” he contends, “the idea that one’s own home—thus, one’s youth—is worthy of study and, again in the words of [Lewis] Mumford, promotes ‘a decent self-respect,’ and it is that ‘form of self-knowledge which is the beginning of sound knowledge about anyone else’” (222).

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Lisa Knopp, *What the River Carries: Encounters with the Mississippi, Missouri, and Platte*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2012. 248 pp. \$19.95, paper.

In her collection, *What the River Carries*, Lisa Knopp starts by letting readers know that she originally hails from Catfish Bend and concludes by describ-