

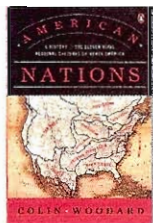


Nations hiding in plain sight

Our true founders didn't have an "original intent" that we can refer back to in challenging times such as this, observes historian and journalist Colin Woodard. Instead, they had original intents—plural. In his intriguing book *American Nations: A History of the Eleven Rival Regional Cultures of North America* (Penguin, 2011), Woodard points out that there has never really been one America. From the beginning there have been several Americas.



A theme heard again and again in the U.S. in times of crisis, Woodard notices, is that Americans have become divided on account of having strayed from the core principles on which their country was founded, and that they must return to those if unity is to be restored. But this theme, he finds, ignores glaring historical fact. Each of our eleven founding cultures had its own set of cherished principles, and many contradicted each other.



The real driving forces

America's states, provinces, and federations are the official forums through which political power is exercised and expressed. But Woodard finds that they mask the real forces that drive the continent's affairs: the eleven stateless "nations" that have been hiding in plain sight throughout our history. Each one has a common culture, ethnic origin, language, historical experience, artifacts, and symbols. And some are far from seeing eye to eye with each other.

One might expect that over the generations these nations would have long since melted into one another, but that hasn't happened. Instead, Woodard finds, they all have altered the places to which they emigrated, keeping their identity while assimilating into the surrounding culture.

We confuse nations and states

Author Colin Woodard finds that Americans often confuse the terms *state* and *nation* and use them interchangeably. Their meanings differ in ways we tend to ignore.

*What's a state?
What's a nation?*

In Woodard's view, a *state* is a sovereign political entity of the kind that is shown on standard maps and might be eligible for membership in the United Nations. But a *nation* is a group of people who share (or believe they share) a common culture, ethnic origin, language, historical experience, artifacts, and symbols.

Woodard explains that some nations are presently stateless. The Kurdish nation, which is so prominent in current news and overlaps several states, is one of those. Other nations control and dominate their own *nation-state*, which they typically name for themselves. Examples of these are France, Germany, Japan, and Turkey. But also there are plenty of states—some of them federated—that aren't dominated by any one nation. Examples of these are Belgium, Switzerland, and the three states of North America: Canada, the United States, and Mexico.

A book that can fill important gaps

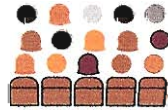


Reading Woodard's book, I kept having to remind myself of this distinction that he was using. Like the other confused Americans he refers to, I tend to use the word "nation" or "country" when I mean what he calls a federation, nation-state, or state. And I think of a state as a subdivision of one of those, such as Texas or New York. I wished he had used some other term such as "cultural group" instead of "nation." But despite this minor obstacle, I found *American Nations* valuable as well as interesting.

I was taught American history and world history in very simplistic forms (as many other Americans evidently also were) without being told how diverse early America was or how developments in the arts, science, religion, culture, and philosophy influenced wars, territorial conquests, and politics. So I appreciated this book's filling in many gaps. Recognizing the influence of the nations that Woodard describes also showed me more reasons for the current conflict within U.S. religious groups, as well as in U.S. politics. Thus I highly recommend *American Nations*.

Eleven regional nations

- The nation that Colin Woodard calls **Yankeedom** was founded on the shores of Massachusetts Bay by radical Calvinists as a religious utopia in the New England wilderness. It was settled by stable, educated families. From New England, it spread westward across the northern U.S. From its outset, Woodard explains, it has put great emphasis on education, local political control, and the pursuit of the “greater good” of the community, even if that required individual self-denial.



Of all the eleven American nations, Woodard finds, Yankees have the greatest faith in the potential of government to improve people’s lives. They tend to see it as an extension of the citizenry, a vital bulwark against grasping aristocrats, corporations, or outside powers. Woodard observes that Yankeedom has been locked in nearly perpetual combat with the Deep South for control of the federal government for as long as that government has existed.



For more than four centuries, Yankees have sought to build a more perfect society here on earth through social engineering, relatively extensive citizen involvement in the political process, and the aggressive assimilation of foreigners. Its religious zeal has waned over time, but not its underlying drive to improve the world, or its set of moral and social values.

- **New Netherland** began as a 17th-century Dutch colony. It was short-lived but had lasting impact by laying down the cultural DNA for what is now Greater New York City. The New Netherland nation is the most densely populated part of North America.



A global corporation, the Dutch West India Company, dominated the city’s affairs and formally governed New Netherland for its first few decades. Established as a fur-trading post, it was an unabashedly commercial settlement with little concern for either social cohesion or the creation of a model society.

However, it nurtured two Dutch innovations that were considered subversive by most other European states at the time: profound tolerance of diversity, and, uniquely among the people of 17th-century Europe, commitment to the freedom of inquiry. Dutch universities were second to none, at-

tracting thinkers from countries where the use of reason was curtailed. The Netherlands was also a haven for persecuted people across Europe.

Among its émigré intellectuals was René Descartes, whose ideas formed the basis of modern science and were first published in the Netherlands, as was one of Galileo’s books that effectively founded modern physics. Also, Baruch Spinoza, an excommunicated Amsterdam Jew, published philosophical texts that have been credited with inspiring everything from biblical criticism to deep ecology. And while in exile in Amsterdam, John Locke composed his letter that argued for separation of church and state. In addition, Dutch scientists invented the telescope and microscope.



These thinkers were able to share their discoveries and ideas with the world because Dutch officials accepted the freedom of the press. Dutch printers are estimated to have been responsible for half of all the books published in the seventeenth century. So in many ways, Holland’s tiny oasis of intellectual freedom was the incubator for the modern world.



Forced on the other nations at the Constitutional Convention, New Netherland’s ideals of diversity and free inquiry have been passed down to us as the Bill of Rights. And its influence over the continent’s media, publishing, fashion, and intellectual and economic life is hard to overstate.

- **The Midlands** was founded by English Quakers. It was pluralistic and organized around the middle class. It spawned the culture of Middle America and the Heartland, where ethnic and ideological purity have never been a priority, government has been seen as an unwelcome intrusion, and political opinion has been moderate, even apathetic. Many of this nation’s ancestors fled from European tyrannies, so believed that society should be organized to benefit ordinary people.



- **Tidewater** was the most powerful nation during the colonial period and the early republic. George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and others of our best known founders were part of it, but Woodard sees it as a nation in decline today. It has always been a fundamentally conservative region, he observes, with a high value placed on respect for authority and tradition and less on equality or public participation in politics.



The Tidewater nation was founded by sons of southern English gentry who aimed to reproduce the semifuedal manorial society of the English countryside, where economic, political, and social affairs were run by and for landed aristocrats. This nation was thus responsible for many aristocratic inflections in the U.S. Constitution, including the Electoral College and Senate.

- **Greater Appalachia** was founded in the early 18th century by what Woodard calls wave upon wave of rough, bellicose settlers from the war-ravaged borderlands of Northern Ireland, Northern England, and the Scottish lowlands. It gradually spread all the way to the Hill Country of Texas, clashing with Indians, Mexicans, and Yankees as its people migrated.



Greater Appalachia has consistently had a warrior ethic and a deep commitment to individual liberty and personal sovereignty. It has been suspicious of aristocrats and social reformers. Its combative culture has provided a large proportion of the U. S. military. It has given us bluegrass and country music, stock-car racing, and Evangelical fundamentalism. And surveys find that its people almost always answer simply "American" when census takers ask for their nationality or ethnicity.

- **The Deep South**, Colin Woodard finds, was founded by Barbados slave lords as a West Indies-style slave society, a cruel and despotic system. It has been a bastion of white supremacy, aristocratic privilege, and a version of classical Republicanism molded on the slave states of the ancient world, where democracy was a privilege of the few and enslavement the natural lot of the many. Race, says Woodard, remains the primary determinant of one's political affiliations here. Beginning from its Charleston beachhead, the Deep South spread across the Southern lowlands, eventually extend-

ing to Arkansas and east Texas. It became the center of the states' rights movement, racial segregation, and labor and environmental deregulation. It has been the well-spring of African-American culture. Having forged an uneasy "Dixie" coalition with Appalachia and Tidewater in the 1870s, says Colin Woodard, the Deep South is locked in an epic battle with Yankeedom and its Left Coast and New Netherland allies for the future of the U. S. federation.



- **New France** is the most overtly nationalistic of the nations and has the most liberal people on the continent, Woodard finds. It includes southeastern Canada and the "Cajun" parts of Louisiana.

- What Woodard calls **El Norte** is the oldest of the Euro-American nations, dating back to the late 16th century when the Spanish empire founded northern outposts. It spreads from the U.S.-Mexico border in both directions. It is overwhelmingly Hispanic, but its economy is oriented toward the U.S. rather than Mexico City. It is expected to be increasingly influential within the U.S. in coming years.



- **The Left Coast** is a strip from Monterey, California to Juneau, Alaska. It includes four progressive metropolises and is in Woodard's words "a wet region of staggering natural beauty." It was originally colonized by merchants, missionaries, and woodsmen from New England, who arrived by sea and controlled the towns, and farmers, prospectors, and fur traders from Greater Appalachia, who came by wagon and dominated the countryside. It has retained a strong strain of New England intellectualism and idealism even as it embraced a culture of individual fulfillment. Today it combines the Yankee faith in good government and social reform with a commitment to individual self-exploration and discovery. It is the birthplace of the modern environmental movement and the global informa-



Many back issues, a list of back issues, and a list of books I've written about, plus more *Connections*-related information, are available free from my web site, www.connectionsonline.org. To get *Connections* monthly by e-mail, let me know at BCWendland@aol.com. Please include your name, city, and state or country. To start getting *Connections* monthly by U.S. Mail, send me your name, address, and \$5 for the coming year's issues. For paper copies of any of the 21 years' back issues, send me \$5 for each year or any 12 issues.



I'm a lay United Methodist and neither a church employee nor a clergyman's wife. *Connections* is a one-person ministry that I do on my own initiative, speaking only for myself. Many readers make monetary contributions but I pay most of the cost myself. *Connections* goes to several thousand people in all U.S. states and some other countries—laity and clergy in more than a dozen denominations, and some nonchurchgoers. *Connections* is my effort to stimulate fresh thought and new insight about topics I feel Christians need to consider and churches need to address.

tion revolution, and the cofounder (along with New Netherland) of the gay rights movement, the peace movement, and the cultural revolution of the 1960s.

• **The Far West**, Woodard finds, is the only American nation in which environmental factors have trumped ethnic ones. "High, dry, and remote," he explains, "the interior west presented conditions so severe that they effectively destroyed those who tried to apply the farming and lifestyle techniques used in other nations." With minor exceptions, colonizing this vast region required the deployment of vast industrial resources, thus was facilitated and directed by large corporations headquartered in distant cities or by the federal government.

• Like the Far West, the **First Nation** encompasses a vast region with a hostile climate, in the far north, largely in Alaska and Canada. But unlike the Far West, the First Nation's indigenous inhabitants still occupy the area in force and still retain cultural practices and knowledge that let them survive in the region on its own terms.

In a future *Connections*, I expect to report some of Colin Woodard's observations from *American Nations* about how these eleven nations have influenced the religious development of the U.S. and its current religious conflict.



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Nations hiding in plain sight

July 2014

July opportunities in Texas

Temple area

If you live in or near Temple, I hope you'll come to the Temple Literacy Council's monthly "Books for Lunch" on the 3rd floor of the Temple Public Library at 12:00 on July 9. I'll be speaking about my book, *Misfits*. You may not hear anything new, but I'll greatly appreciate your moral support. The event is free, and no reservations are needed. You can bring your lunch if you wish; drinks will be provided. The library is downtown, on Adams between 1st and 3rd streets.



Dallas area

If you live in or near Dallas, I hope you'll support July events exposing and opposing ALEC, the "secret legislature" that I wrote about on page 1 of the May *Connections*. ALEC will hold its annual meeting in Dallas from July 30 to August 1, and a coalition of groups opposing it will present movies, discussions, rallies, speakers, and food on July 30. For times, places, and other details, see jobs-with-justice-Texas on Facebook, e-mail jobswithjusticetexas@gmail.com, or call Rosemarie at 214-632-5695.