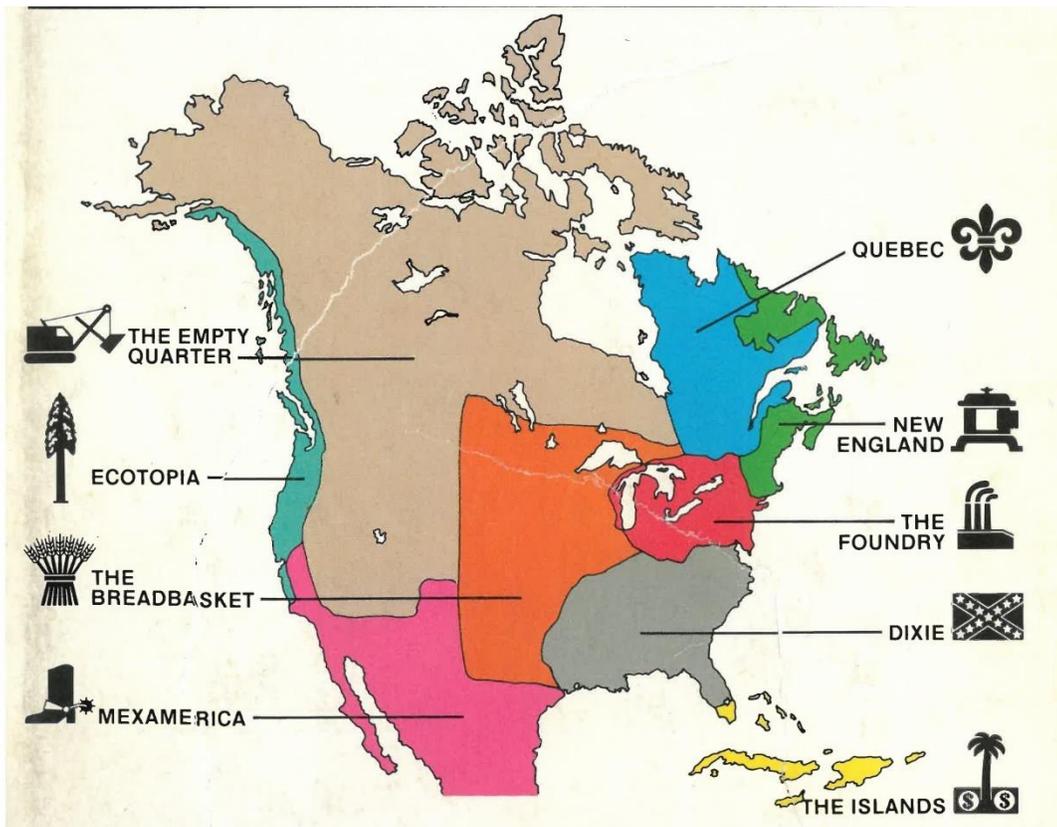


# Regional Cultures of the United States

## The Problem of Serial Interdisciplinarity

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§0. Introduction, Warning, Spoiler

In this paper I stitch together abstracts and graphics to anticipate an answer to a puzzle. I puzzle that more than 50 years after the late Daniel Elazar offered a set of theoretical conjectures<sup>1</sup> for U. S. political subcultures, many scholars have tinkered with, tweaked, or overhauled Elazar's formulation(s), yet prominent textbooks memorialize Elazar's three-part scheme with little notice of alternative schemata or subsequent developments. I answer my puzzle by means of the phrase "Serial Interdisciplinarity." Elazar's Conjecture—as I shall call his scheme, interpretations, conceptual framework(s), or models—approximated one conception of explanation common to political science and cognate disciplines—especially disciplines that communicate findings amid book-length studies—to a far greater extent than did almost all succeeding studies. Many of these succeeding studies conceived of explanation more statistically, more formulaically, and more inductively [I should be impolite to add atheoretically so I shall not so add]. In the journals of political science and cognate social sciences, presumptions of operationalization, replicability, and reliability led authors to discard—when they did not deride as impressionistic—the "thick description" of Elazar, at least some of his predecessors [especially V. O. Key], and Elazar's successors in understanding U. S. politicking and governing at once more holistically and more meticulously. Many but not all inductive or self-consciously "scientific" or allegedly "empirical" studies that purported to test or to validate Elazar have yielded few lessons that profitably might have been tucked into elementary texts [or anywhere else the moon does shine]. As a result, I contend in this paper, the holistic, interpretive, theoretical, and speculative syntheses of Professor Elazar and limited, inductive, empirical, quantitative analyses have not informed or refined each the other despite some shared disciplinary ties, topics, and predilections. Spoiler alert! This is the answer to my puzzle I explore herein.<sup>2</sup>

I proceed in jaunty manner and perhaps perverse way to consider "Serial Interdisciplinarity" in contrast to a "Synergetic Interdisciplinarity" that might promote refined understandings of subcultures in the United States. I argue in a brief first section that Elazar based his conjecture on classic works, almost exclusively published in books, that adopted approaches and orientations common in and to multiple disciplines of their day. I then note in section two that Elazar mixed disciplines and approached culture self-consciously and thoughtfully but not as behaviorally, quantitatively, or positivistically as had become fashionable in articles by the late 1960s. In section three I do not wonder, then, that initial reactions from attitudinal behaviorists and statistical methodologists, published mostly in journals peer-reviewed,<sup>3</sup> favored alternative mixes of disciplines and methods and frowned on work deemed perspectivist, impressionistic or interpretive. Those who styled themselves rigorous, scientific, hard-nosed, empirical testers of hypotheses were interdisciplinary yet discounted or disdained some disciplinary approaches pursued by Elazar as well as Elazar's predecessors. This resulted, I assert, in "serial interdisciplinarity:" researches and reports needlessly isolated one from another and thus informing and enriching each other less than they

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<sup>1</sup> The late Daniel Elazar's three sub-cultures have been characterized variously as a theory (Herzik 1985; Nardulli 1990), a conceptual framework (Nardulli 1990), and the like. I use "Elazar's Conjecture" in this paper to avoid needless disputation about the status of the tripartite system.

<sup>2</sup> I do not, in this paper, consider other answers to my puzzle, including this text's emulation of that text for marketing's sake.

<sup>3</sup> Sharkansky's books seem to me less scientific and more open-minded, which of course reinforces my suspicion that fashions in and expectations of peer-reviewed journals may incline authors toward formulaic approaches and invidious attitudes.

might have. In a fourth section I argue that different mixes of approaches might make for manifold interdisciplinaritys that would promote studies that would improve Elazar's Conjecture and provide experienced scholars and beginning students alike greater understanding. In the fifth section I suggest that such integration of perspectivist and positivistic is more likely in books than in articles. Throughout my expository, I intersperse graphic representations that illustrate why introductory texts stick with variants on Elazar's three-way scheme. If my reader(s) and I have unearned luck, by the end of this sortie, "serial interdisciplinarity" will explain at least to some degree why Elazar's Conjecture persists and some forms of "synergistic interdisciplinarity" might seem prudent.

§ 1 It Did Not Start with Elazar

Elazar's evolving contributions occurred amid studies of regional cultures and subcultures. Were these studies as "impressionistic" as a prominent article in the *American Political Science Review* self-servingly proclaimed (Erickson, McIver, & Wright 1987:797-798),<sup>4</sup> they were and are also classic repositories of critical reflections, thoughtful conceptions, and penetrating observations on *e pluribus unum*. To cite the easiest and most obvious example, V. O. Key in his classic *Southern Politics in State and Nation* (1984) used all that was there to use [a phrase I borrow from literary critic and theorist Kenneth Burke]. Although one could not fairly expect even the longest introduction to U. S. politics and governance or to subnational governance and politicking in the United States to recapitulate this ongoing and evolving academic tradition and scholarly literature, one should acknowledge Elazar's Conjecture as a peak amid as well as a peek into longstanding inquiry.

Elazar's Conjecture stands out in part because it recapitulates the journalistic, theoretical, speculative, and interpretive excellences in the ongoing, evolving tradition and literature that preceded him. This is the interdisciplinarity, synergistic if not synthetic, with which I contrast *infra* "serial interdisciplinarity." While Elazar explicitly grounded his methods in anthropological theory (Elazar 2003:280-281, nn. 1-3), he brought to bear as well as the methods and aims of political science, sociology, geography, demographics, history, and—yes—even high-brow journalism.

Scholars and public intellectuals of various persuasions have pondered and understood culture and subcultures in the United States by means of methods appropriate to and appropriated by different mixes of disciplines and methods, just as Elazar's predecessors, contemporaries, and successors did. In his classic conceptions of subcultures Elazar explicitly invoked an holistic approach, perhaps too anthropological or certainly too interpretive for the tastes of some social scientists and leading social science journals but for that very reason theoretical and rich and bursting with potential for thicker description and deeper insights than truncated, cookie-cutter analyses suitable for articles in mainstream journals of social sciences. Elazar's Conjecture fit in with approaches that merged or mixed historical insights [such as shifting frontiers]; demographic dynamics [patterns of immigration, migration, and stasis]; interrelations of physical geography [terrain, climate] with evolving human geography [persisting sectionalism, ethnicity, religion];

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<sup>4</sup> I suppose this is not the place to debate whether the work of Elazar's predecessors was as "largely impressionistic" as Erikson, McIver, and Wright state. I shall not, therefore, explore herein the degree to which "impressionistic" is a calumny or "largely impressionistic" is a cunning calumny [because "largely" is so vague a modifier]. Nor need I convey my impression that pre-Elazar works are less impressionistic than "Political Culture and Public Opinion" (Erickson, McIver, & Wright 1987) is theoretically inconsequential and, in its frequent use of "causal" to characterize dialectics of culture, attitudes, and opinion, linguistically if not conceptually obtuse.

economics [agriculture versus extraction versus maritime]; and descriptions or analyses of institutions and processes [U. S. Constitution and constitutions, varieties and vagaries of federalismS]. In contrast to static, formulaic snapshots in most self-consciously scientific works in articles in mainstream journals, descriptions—I apologize for using another term of scientific disapprobation—in this scholarship were developmental, dynamic, cohesive, rich, and suggestive. No wonder Elazar should be emblematic. If Elazar’s Conjecture be [mis]taken for impressionistic, but the impressions that even tyros glean from Elazar’s formulations may account to an extent for its persistence in modern introductory texts.

## § 2 Owed to Elazar

Herzik’s distillation of Elazar’s Conjecture informed my rendering [pun intended] of synergistic interdisciplinarity: “... the interplay of four decisive<sup>5</sup> elements of American development: the frontier, migration, sectionalism, and federalism. The interaction of these elements through time has produced three distinct subcultures within the American federal union; subcultures that are made manifest and, in a sense, maintained by the very way in which politics is practiced within particular states and regions” (Herzik 1985:413). Please note in this formulation overlaps and overarching aims. Those overlaps are a signal virtue of the work of Elazar as well as others, particularly Key. From such overlapping students and teachers alike can appreciate richness of learning and panoply of techniques by which Elazar integrated interviews, interpretations, and other data-gathering (see Elazar 2003). Moreover, Elazar explicitly grounded his interpretations and conjectures in anthropological theory as well as methods common to social sciences and history. Elazar’s eclectic, “holistic” approach has not, that I am aware, been matched as of 1 November 2019. By contrast, quasi-scientific and pseudo-nomothetic efforts yielded pathetic conclusions (Erickson, McIver, & Wright 1987) and constipated interpretations. If Chinni and Gimpel (2010) and Woodard (2012) offer us hope for future synergies—through their maps if nothing else!—that hope may take the form of emulating the perspectivistic scholarship of Elazar.<sup>6</sup> Elazar’s overarching aims were capacious and imbued with implications for theory positive and normative. Elazar in his original formulation and elsewhere treated of Democracy and democracies, Equality and inequalities, Communities and institutions and processes that make for distinguishable modes and models of politicking and governing that make the United States as *e pluribus unum* in actuality as in shibboleth.

Elazar practiced “thick description” in the best traditions of social science of his time.<sup>7</sup> In a perhaps tendentious manner I claim that Elazar attempted to integrate studies of history [especially evolution], sectionalism, religion, ethnicity, values, beliefs, attitudes. Such integration—it might be too much to claim synthesis—endowed Elazar’s insights with heft and depth that even novices might appreciate. Moreover, dynamics both motivated and adorned Elazar’s Conjecture, especially in statigraphic displays. These virtues, notwithstanding vices attributed by critics, may account for persistence of Elazar’s conjectures.

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<sup>5</sup> *Nota bene*. Professor Herzik label elements of the development “causal.”

<sup>6</sup> I should be gratuitous to note an irony that journalists often contribute more and better than “scientists.” Thus, I shall not so note. D’oh!

<sup>7</sup> For examples both of Elazar’s methods and of his methodological presumptions, please see Elazar (1966, 1972, 1980, 1984, 2003). By “thick description” I allude to Clifford Geertz’s famous essay on anthropological or ethnographic method (Geertz 2019).

Thus, Elazar erected his conceptual framework by means of approaches, presumptions, and orientations drawn from multiple disciplines with distinctive methods and published mostly in books. By contrast, initial reactions from attitudinal behaviorists and statistical methodologists who favored alternative mixes of disciplines and eschewed impressionistic or interpretive work were published mostly in journals and were often peer-reviewed. Such rigorous, scientific, hard-nosed, empirical testers of hypotheses were interdisciplinary still but discounted many of the disciplinary approaches pursued by Elazar as well as Elazar's predecessors. Behold the etiology of "serial interdisciplinarity:" researchers and reports needlessly isolated one from another and thus informing and enriching each other less than they might. Different mixes and rich interplay of and among approaches make for manifold enrichments of Elazar's Conjecture; instead, authors who introduce cultures and subcultures rehearse a three-way split half a century old.

### § 3 Scientific Critiques of Elazar

The scholarly tradition in which Elazar thought, researched, and wrote made Elazar's Conjecture an apt feature of introductory materials. That conjecture has not yet been displaced, I argue in this paper, because much of the response of social scientists has been inapt when not inept. In general, appropriations of Elazar's Conjecture have been inept because Elazar's theoretical framework is too capacious and abstract to serve as an hypothesis to be tested or a nomothetic, scientific theory. One might as well ask how to operationalize Weber's *The Protestant Ethic* or Veblen's *Theory of the Leisure Class*! Each scientific or statistical tweak or "refinement" of Elazar's Conjecture simplified and expedited specifications of equations but by that very act greatly complicated refinement of Elazar's Conjecture and communication of refinements to readers of introductory texts. In this section I briefly review three specific manifestations of the "serial interdisciplinarity" practiced in dozens of articles. Perhaps I need not add that my "sample" is not representative all or even most articles. Instead, my sample is heuristic.

#### §3.1 "The Utility of Elazar's Political Culture: A Research Note"

Perhaps owing to rigors of composing a "research note," Sharkansky could scarcely have been clearer in performing positivism. I urge a generous reading that admires the brio and the drollery and overlooks what may be snark:<sup>8</sup>

Herein Professor Sharkansky attempts to take an impressionistic concept—Daniel Elazar's well-known theory of state political cultures—and find out empirically whether there is anything to it. He finds that, with some modifications, it is an empirically useful concept, and that it makes an "additive" contribution to our store of knowledge about state politics. It is good to learn, occasionally, that traditional observation can be validated (Sharkansky 1969:66).

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<sup>8</sup> Keep in mind, please, that this is an abstract. I resist the temptation to respond to a snarky reading of that abstract—for example that "... it makes an 'additive' contribution to our store of knowledge ... " might more elegantly be "... it adds to our knowledge ..."—and urge other readers to do the same. I trust that I do not have to highlight the unfortunate—I barely stop short of saying "impertinent"—phrasings in this abstract. It may interest my reader(s) to know that Sharkansky's books on regionalism strike less scientific poses. Since I persistently claim that books will tend to present ideas more thoughtfully than will articles in journals given to formulaic inquiry, I am not surprised that Sharkansky's books do not gush quasi-nomothetic bilge.

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Source: *American Federalism: A View from the States* by Daniel J. Elazar, copyright © 1966 by Thomas Y. Crowell Company, Inc. with permission of the Publisher.

An Early Rendition of Elazar's Conjecture (Sharkansky 1972:41)

Do I go too far too abruptly to claim that even the title of Sharkansky's research note is a tell? "The Utility of Elazar's Political Culture" asks about utility for whom and for what? According to the abstract, Elazar's Conjecture is at once an impressionistic concept and a well-known theory that, properly modified, may become an empirically useful concept that contributes "additively" to knowledge. I do not mean to overread an abstract that Professor Sharkansky may not have written. Nonetheless, the confusions with which the abstract teems symptomize a clash of genres if not of methodologies. I urge my reader(s) to review that abstract to determine whether I even need write more of this early scientific response to Elazar's Conjecture.

In case I need write more, I shall now write more. The opening paragraphs of the article (Sharkansky 1969:67-68) reinforce the abstract's self-parodying positivism. After congratulating current research and researchers for the ever-increasing sophistication of their [and, I presume, Sharkansky's] understanding of political, economic, and social entities, Sharkansky intones

Current research is marked by empirical theory, the use of advanced statistical techniques, data that are interval in character, and an additive relationship among the results of the scholarship being produced. Note only do we know more about the American states than we did a few years ago, but we are far more certain of our knowledge than in the days when we relied upon intuitive assessments or inquiries into the events of one or a few states.

No sooner has Sharkansky delivered what I read as a triumph to “the behavioral persuasion in politics” than he contrasts such marked progress, growing sophistication, and rigorous methodology to Elazar’s Conjecture:

In curious juxtaposition to much of the work that is currently being done in the comparative state field is the identification of “political culture” by Daniel J. Elazar. . . . Elazar describes three principal cultures in the American states (Moralist, Individualist, and Traditionalist<sup>9</sup>). Then he identifies the cultural type that prevails in each of the 48 mainland states and 228 sub-areas of the states. Elazar’s research techniques are admittedly imprecise. His designations of prevailing cultures reflect his own judgement, disciplined by several years of observation.

Sharkansky then contrasts Elazar’s candid, explicit reliance on published research bearing on cultures and subcultures, histories, official pronouncements, newspapers, voting data, and observations in each of the 48 states with “. . . precise statements made with the authority of hard data and established statistical techniques . . .” to the detriment of Elazar’s Conjecture. Still, Sharkansky recognizes that “. . . it would be shortsighted to overlook the potential contribution of a sensitive observer.” [I know not whether this concession soothed the late Professor Elazar.] In sum, Elazar’s Conjecture might have potential and might have utility once transmuted from theory or conceptual framework to operational propositions.

I certainly do not object to Sharkansky’s framing his research note in terms to which referees and editors of a mainstream journal may be sympathetic. Nor do I pretend to be shocked that the author of an article would compare invidiously the “intuitive” work of predecessors with “scientific” labors of the author. I do insist that transmogrifying a conjecture or conception into an operationalized hypothesis advances Elazar’s project less than a more sensible [albeit less savvy for prospects for publication as a research note] response might. I take seriously the claim that Sharkansky’s note is “additive” rather than synergistic.

Even if Sharkansky improves Elazar’s Conjecture more than I think it does, this research note and many others like it cannot enrich understanding of subcultures in ways that redound to the benefit authors and readers of introductions. Pulling the useful Elazar Conjecture out by the roots to transplant it to a positivist garden added little that could or would benefit beginners.

§3.2 “Classifying the American States: An Empirical Attempt to Identify Internal Variations”

Although Professor Luttbeg reduced states into four classes that he deemed tantamount to regional cultures, the manner in which he did so guaranteed that such results would guide no introductory students because no publishable introduction would be able to make sense of Luttbeg’s “science.” Indeed, the abstract of the article reported a candidly inductive application of statistics

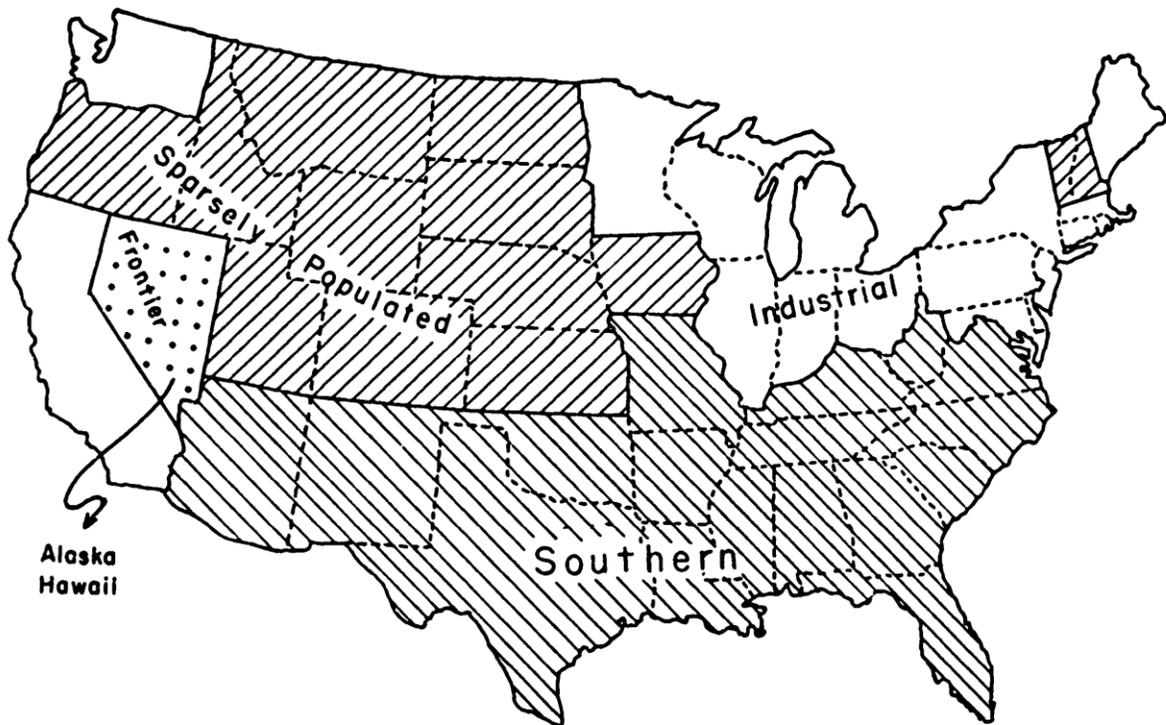
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<sup>9</sup> I note that Sharkansky truncates Elazar’s labels in a manner that may be diagnostic. Elazar called his subcultures “Moralistic,” “Individualistic,” and “Traditionalistic.” These labels seem to me more characteristic of the cultural orientations of whole communities or regions than of individuals. By contrast, “moralist,” “individualist,” and “traditionalist” strike me as nouns appropriate to individuals. Since Sharkansky amid his second paragraph transits from Elazar’s characterizations of cultural orientations to the characteristics of individuals who more or less adopt or adapt to those collective orientations, Sharkansky may inadvertently be slipping from Elazar’s collective perspective to a individualistic perspective friendlier to Sharkansky’s behavioral persuasion.

that attested to an absence of any guiding theory or conception that might instruct. My reader(s) should try to keep the phrase “fishing expedition” out of mind in reviewing the abstract:

This study utilizes 118 political, economic, and policy variables as indicators of cultural similarity among the 50 states. Using Q factor analysis the states are aggregated into four classes or cultures which, while somewhat geographically contiguous, vary considerably from previous regional groupings. This improved classification more completely captures variations among the states than do previous classifications based on research traditions or Bureau of Census breakdowns. Better than 50 percent of the typical state's behavior on these variables is accounted for by its class.

What undergraduate would not drool to pore over such quantitative derring-do? What author would let this study anywhere near an introductory text? What political scientist or political science major would adjudge Luttbeg's map to improve on Elazar's?



Professor Luttbeg's fishing expedition may not much impress trained social scientists,<sup>10</sup> but the more pertinent point for the present paper is that his “catch” will not much edify tyros.

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<sup>10</sup> Those trained in factor analysis, for example, know how tricky it is to say that an exploratory factor analysis “accounts” for half or more of the variance in the variables heaped into the computer. Serial interdisciplinarity may be indicated by Luttbeg's asserting that such 118 variables measure culture validly. Studies derided as “impressionistic” [or what Luttbeg calls “research traditions”] would be expected to manifest greater face validity.

What may be worse, Luttbeg's measures follow boundaries of 48 states [Alaska and Hawaii have no boundaries included but are attached as if by a presidential Sharpie]. For many purposes states' borders may matter, but I doubt that many introductions to national or subnational governance would fail to note states and why they matter. To categorize whole states by means of this or that "measure" is to a nontrivial degree to deracinate regions or sections. Whatever challenges await newcomers in mastering three or nine or eleven or a dozen regions and the institutions and ideologies and processes and policies distinctive of each region, juggling fifty variants would be daunting.

Lucky for students, then, Luttbeg reduces the cacophony of 48 or 50 states to four regions. Those regions, however, are far from intuitive. This is to be expected from overreliance of factor analysis or clustering, for principal loadings do not interpret themselves. Still, "Sparsely Populated," "Frontier," and "Industrial" are not very rich or revealing conceptions, although "Southern" may work just fine [especially if the work of V. O. Key is readmitted to supply some richness].

Luttbeg's "refinement" of Elazar's Conjecture, in sum, is not a strong candidate for replacing Elazar in introductory texts. Its manifest inferiority to Elazar's "intuitive," "impressionistic," "imprecise" formulation accounts for its being excluded from textbooks.

### §3.3 "Political Culture in American States: Elazar's Formulation Examined"

In his reconsideration of Elazar's Conjecture, Charles Johnson (1976) treats the theory perhaps more gently but nonetheless instrumentally:

This paper explores the utility of political culture in explaining state political system characteristics. The theory of state political cultures discussed by Daniel Elazar is used to develop measures of political cultures and to derive propositions relating political cultures to political system characteristics. Indices of moralistic, individualistic, and traditionalistic political cultures are constructed using religious census data for each state. Using discriminant analysis, the author is mildly successful in replicating the classification of states by the dominant political culture set forth by Elazar. Expected relationships between political culture and eight dependent variables are specified and tested. Significant correlations in the predicted direction are found for six dependent variables: government activities, local emphasis and administration of programs, innovative activity by the government, encouragement of popular participation in elections, popular participation in elections, and party competition. Hypothesized relationships were not supported for two dependent variables: centralized governmental decisionmaking and the importance of political parties.

### **MODULE = DISCRIMINANT WITH SEEDS WHERE SEEDS = OVERLAPPING "PURE" STATES**

Please note that Johnson explicitly invokes utility, as Sharkansky had in his very title. This conception of utility is so familiar that even experienced practitioners are likely to overlook how selective is the query "Are Elazar's ideas, notions, or concepts easily operationalized into measures that then can be inserted into equations?" What is more, Johnson reviews studies in a manner that

makes clear Johnson's orientation: "In each of these efforts evidence is presented that cultural variations, as distinguished from variations in political or economic attributes, independently account for state political characteristics" (Johnson 1976:491). I do not object, of course, to assaying the "independent" contributions of this or that variable. Such is a standard social science maneuver. However, this workaday approach to analysis has at least two drawbacks. First, matters "empirically" inseparable from one another are distinguished analytically, an ironic detachment of statistical work from the empiric. Second, equations and estimates demand operationalizations that pare or impair the richness and validity of cultural wholes. Whatever my willingness to sacrifice on the altar of operationalization, such sacrifices are not likely to generate results that interest or inform undergraduates.<sup>11</sup>

In addition, Johnson produces three scores, one per subculture, a result to be preferred to assigning a single dominant political culture designation or even, I guess, a mix of M's, T's, and I's. When Johnson notes that these threefold scores improve on Elazar's three concepts "measured" at the nominal level, he makes clear that the utility he assesses presumes that interval or ratio levels are superior.<sup>12</sup> For assessments of analytically independent estimates of alleged effects of political cultures and subcultures interval or ratio would be preferred. For better understanding of regionalism in the United States, the superiority of interval or ratio levels is at best debatable. Hence, Johnson better serves statistical specialists than elementary students. I find faultless Johnson's analysis as a usual strategy in social science, but I insist that such strategy is likely to lead away from rich, holistic appreciation of political cultures and thus, I think it follows, to impoverish "political culture" and render the concept less useful to educated citizens.

An additional consideration may impair students' use of Johnson's refinement more than that consideration bears on "serial interdisciplinarity:" classifying based on values observed or estimated for states. Scoring or, if one insists, "measuring" states attenuates the contiguity of regions that Sharkansky expected. For some instruction of beginners, classifying, comparing, and contrasting states' values may be straightforward and revealing, to be sure. However, if authors and adopters of texts aspire to provide students more than one but fewer than a passel of characteristic U. S. politicking and governing, regions or sections or both might be apposite. While such matters may seem apart from "serial interdisciplinarity," I submit that the matters are not apart. Interdisciplinary scholarship tied to "hard data" must adapt to extant data, which means that statewide data may enthrall analysts whatever the suitability of such data to objects of instant researches. Scientific researchers will be more likely to subordinate their aims to explore regions or sections to the vicissitudes of gathered data the more committed to statistical empiricism—to deploy an oxymoron—they are. Researchers who hope to enrich Elazar's Conjecture or to establish the salience of sectional or regional theorizing, by contrast, might go with less tantalizing data or with no data at all. So reliance on state-level data may incline authors to engage in serial rather than in synergistic interdisciplinarity.

I might proliferate the three "heuristic" examples above many times, but such a demonstration would not gainsay dozens of studies that exhibit little or no "serial interdisciplinarity." Hence, I

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<sup>11</sup> Whether such sacrifices truly inform or increase the understanding of social scientists is a topic for another paper. That such sacrifices increase the likelihood of publishing scientific papers is not debatable in my view.

<sup>12</sup> This paper is not the occasion for anticipating the perils and pitfalls of relying on discriminant analyses, as Charles Johnson did, as opposed to factor analysis or clustering. If one seeds the discriminant equation with archetypical moralistic, traditionalistic, and individualistic states, one may thereby generate interval-appearing "measures."

must concede that misplaced positivism and scientific posturing are at most partly responsible for the inability over a half century to furnish writers of textbooks with refinements of the Elazar Conjecture. That concession admitted, I turn now to an example of how interdisciplinary statistical work might be less “serial” and more “synergistic” and analyses might yet yield syntheses.

#### §4 Toward Synergistic or Synthetic Interdisciplinarity

In his magisterial article “Regional Subcultures of the United States” (1993) Lieske demonstrated how inductive, statistical work could build on and toward theoretical and eclectic work. If the reader’s heart sinks on reading in the article’s abstract that induction and inferences from factor analysis and cluster analysis on 45 measures will drive most of Lieske’s exposition, the reader’s spirits should rise at least a bit that Lieske aims those measures at categories familiar from Elazar’s framework—racial origin, ethnic ancestry, religious affiliation, and social structure—and that Lieske possesses a capacious understanding of how those four elements of culture would bear on, contextualize, or even account for social and political behaviors. Thus does Lieske promise to build in as he builds on not only Elazar but other scholars and journalists involved in interpretive, synthetic work. Lieske’s interdisciplinary report is much more synergistic or synthetic than the serial interdisciplinarity I have scored above.

All the same, the utility of Lieske’s improvements for undergraduate instruction and hence inclusion in introductory texts must be substantially compromised by the technicalities of Lieske’s analyses. These technicalities are evident in the abstract to Lieske’s article:

This study develops the case, theory, and statistical methodology for a new measure of American regional subcultures. Using principal component and cluster analysis on some 45 measures of racial origin, ethnic ancestry, religious affiliation, and social structure, I show how the entire population of U.S. counties can be partitioned into 10 distinctive, regional subcultures that are relatively homogeneous and contiguous. Next, I identify the cultural characteristics of each subculture and relate my new classification scheme to the work of Elazar, Gastil, Garreau, and Fischer. Finally, I compare the relative utility of this new measure with Elazar’s typology in explaining the variation in a number of social, political, and policy indicators (Lieske 1993:910).

It is beyond the scope of this paper to parse the abstract and the conclusion reproduced above, which is too bad because Lieske’s abstract and conclusion exhibit both serial and synergistic virtuosity. For purposes of the puzzle that I have posited, it suffices to note the tactics by which Lieske proposes to accomplish his strategy:

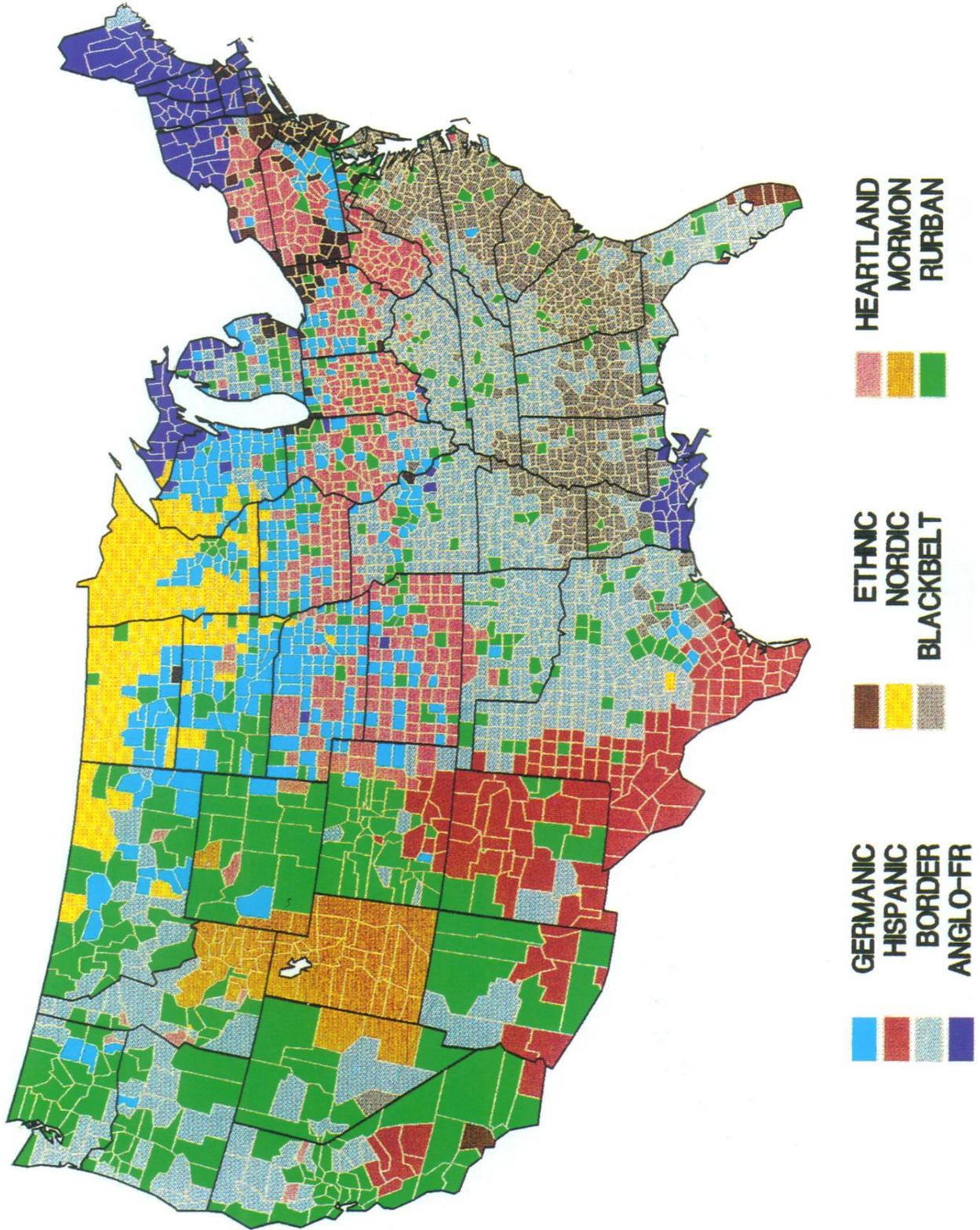
The purpose of this study is to develop and analyze a new measure of American subculture that has these properties:

1. It is derivable from an explicit and replicable set of mathematical and statistical algorithms.
2. It reflects current cultural conditions.
3. It distinguishes subcultural differences down to the county level.
4. It is based entirely on "nonpolitical" measures of American culture.

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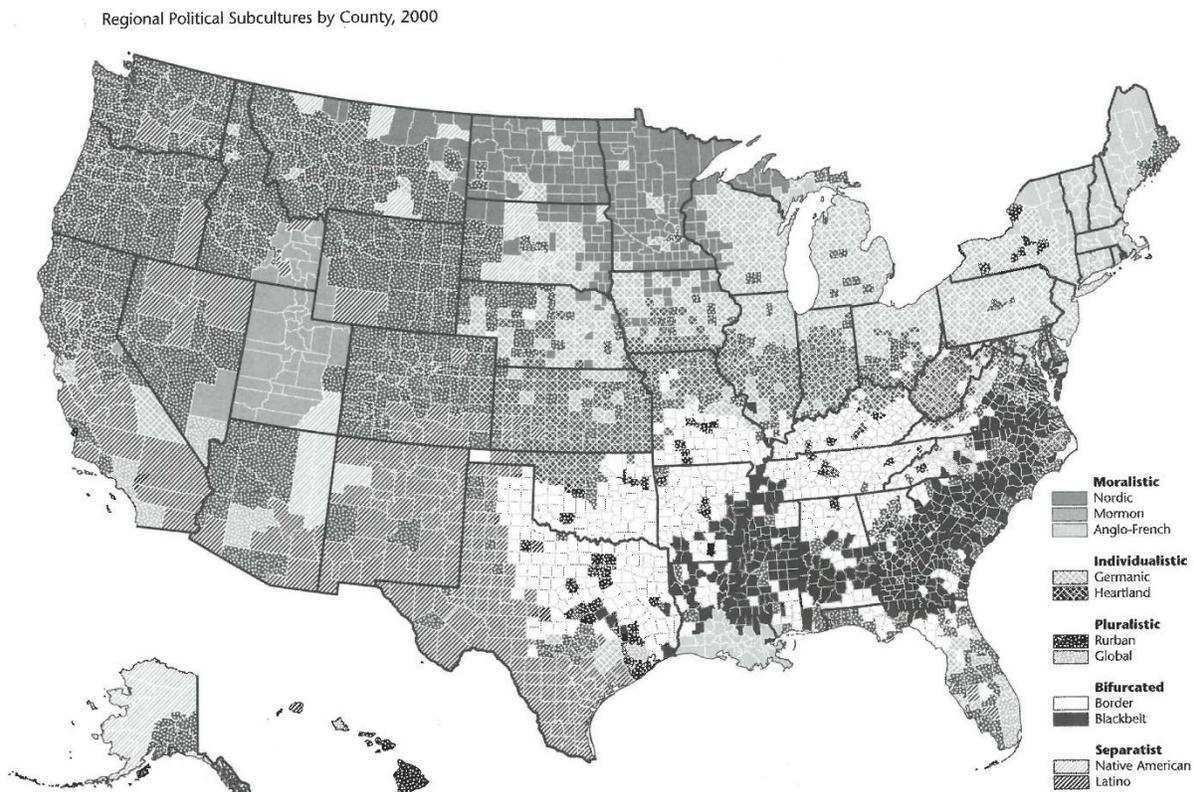
Each of these purposes and the measure(s) derived must daunt instructors in a graduate seminar, so conveying them in introductory writings seems impossible [and perhaps inadvisable anyway].

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However, one introduction to state and local politics has used Lieske’s intriguing map to propose to beginners how regional subcultures might matter (Gray et al. 2013:22). Even in black and white, Lieske’s map might improve on at least some of Elazar’s maps in instructing newcomers regarding the varieties of county and local self-governance that might be expected, imparting new significance to *E pluribus unum* and other slogans and shibboleths and—Is this too much to hope?—extending introductory texts and courses in American politics and government to the 100,000 or so governments and the countless species of political interactions to more than three but fewer than 15 genera. Lieske’s map might also direct readers to noncontiguous subcultures that would sustain comparisons and contrasts. For example, juxtaposing politics and government in New England, the upper peninsula of Michigan, and southern Louisiana might make for a jaunty semester paper. Germanic outposts in Texas or eastern Washington could be compared to Germanic regions that might be familiar to students—say, eastern Pennsylvania and Wisconsin—and those that might never have occurred to most students, such as the Dakotas, Nebraska, and Montana.



SOURCE: Calculated by the author from data supplied by Joel Lieske. Joel Lieske, “The Changing Regional Subcultures of the American States and the Utility of a New Cultural Measure,” *Political Research Quarterly* 63 (2010): 538–552.

(Gray 2013:22)

For all the potential of presenting readers subcultures more numerous and more intricate than Elazar's three, the rigors of such presentations must concern authors and instructors. To move from three archetypes of subnational subcultures to ten might command many pages of explanation and guidance and risk much confusion. Elazar's formulation, whatever its flaws, is far more accessible and elegant. The contrast between Lieske's map and the version of Elazar's mapping offered in Donovan, Mooney, and Smith (2013) *infra* is stark. Legibility will also challenge students if the map selected cannot be published in colors. Moreover, candid critics must acknowledge that Grey sticks with Elazar's trinity in pages that explain a black-and-white version of Lieske's map and uses two of Elazar's original subcultures to regroup of Lieske's now eleven classes of data into five subcultures.

Promising as Lieske's works have been, Lieske's map reveals anew an answer to my puzzle that I have rehearsed throughout this paper: in the half-century since Elazar debuted his three subcultures, authors have not found ways to improve on Elazar's rich elegance in pithy, understandable prose and graphics.

## §5 How the Book-Form May or Might Improve Synergistic or Synthetic Interdisciplinarity

I have highlighted revisions of Elazar's Conjecture in leading journals of political science.<sup>13</sup> These peer-reviewed, sophisticated articles are constrained to brevity, especially in research notes. Might the inability of authors over the decades to "dress up" Elazar's Conjecture be due in part to the format and demands of articles? Might researchers publish in book-form accounts of subcultures that could then be transformed into introductory materials? In answer to these questions I offer below some good news and some bad news. My good news is that multiple books combine sophisticated statistical techniques with revealing narratives to foment the synergistic or synthetic interdisciplinarity that advances deep, rich understanding of subcultures. My bad news is that I see no way to reduce such combinations of quantitative and narrative representation to a few pages and a couple graphics in an introductory volume in which pages come at a premium.

### §5.1 *Our Patchwork Nation: The Surprising Truth about the "Real" America*

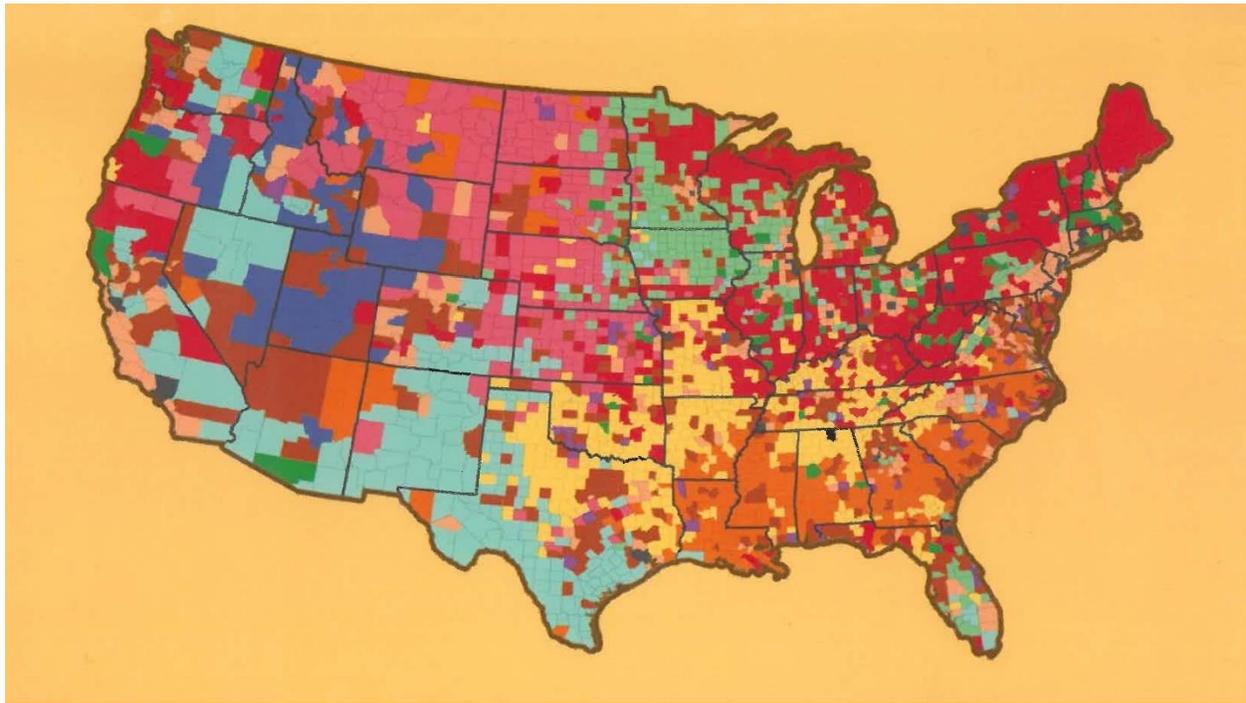
One way to mingle quantitative sophistication with descriptive depth is to brigade a journalist with a social scientist. *Our Patchwork Nation* (Chinni and Gimpel 2010) paired Dante Chinni, an experienced political correspondent, with James Gimpel, a statistically inclined political geographer. Gimpel performed the factor analyses that yielded 12 types of communities in a manner that seems reliable and reproducible, validated his statistical derivations to a degree far beyond most of the articles in leading journals of political science [in which—*quelle surprise*—attention to the validity of indicators or "measures" was less than optimal], and fashioned a technical appendix complete with dataset. Chinni then investigated and characterized each community to deepen and enrich understanding of each of the types. This collusion between rigorous, algorithmic, statistical methods and probing, zetetic, journalistic methods does yield [as the book cover blares] "The 12 Community Types that Make Up Our Nation." It also strikes me as synergistic. The

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<sup>13</sup> Although I hope that I have not scrutinized articles in a misleading manner, my reader(s) should be advised that I have not commented on dozens of articles, especially in *Publius*, bearing on Elazar's Conjecture or alternative schemes or both.

authors also pursue implications of their findings for economic, political, and cultural continuities and changes distinctive to or common across the twelve categories.

The bad news is that no accessible representations, graphic or prosaic, suitable for introductory coursework issue from Chinni and Gimpel’s labors. The leading exemplars of each community type proposed are highlighted on a map of the United States with counties outlined. In their appendix the authors supply maps of the 3141 counties (Chinni and Gimpel 2010: 239-244, Figures 17-28) on which readers may locate their own counties and see that county’s scores on each of the twelve community types.<sup>14</sup> These, respectively, nominal-level and interval-level [albeit grouped] graphics must daunt students who would find out more than their home county’s scores.



Key: Boom Towns Campus & Careers Emptying Nests Evangelical Epicenters Immigration Nation Industrial Metropolis  
Military Bastions Minority Central Monied Burbs Mormon Outposts Service Worker Centers Tractor Country

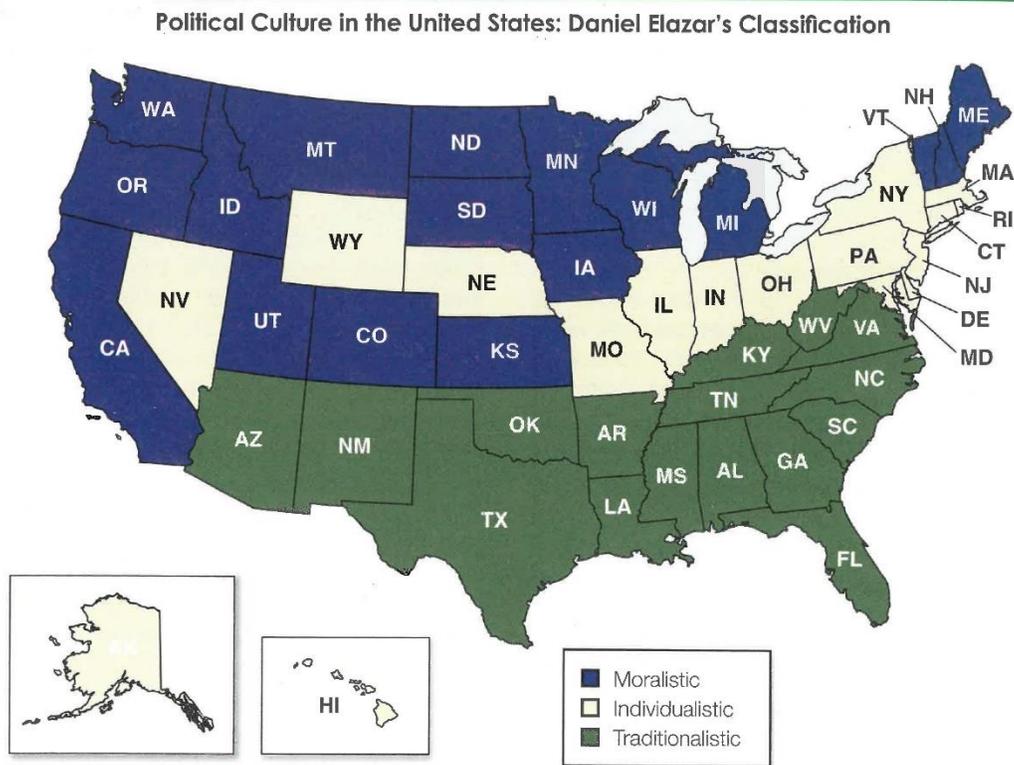
The worse news is that the graphic representation of “Our Patchwork Nation” displays regions in a variegated, finer-grained manner that will make even more difficult conveying Chinni’s and Gimpel’s results in an understandable few pages in an introductory text. I hold it salutary that, for example, the community type “Immigration Nation” stretches its light blue hue across “patches” in California and New Mexico, central Washington, southern Texas, southern Arizona, and counties in Oregon, Nevada, and Idaho. If it does not get lost in the national map, this would be a strikingly current presentation of community. An author of a text might single out such an exemplary finding

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<sup>14</sup> Indeed, the authors list the counties alphabetically by state (Chinni and Gimpel 2010: 245-306)

and direct students to Chinni and Gimpel’s exploration (55-64) of this community type. To sew together the 12 patches into a cognitive quilt, however, must defy authors and adopters of texts.

Instructors who assigned such elementary texts would have to assist students in seeing that the usages of “community” in *Our Patchwork Nation* differ greatly from traditional usages of “section” in historical and in contemporary examination of sectionalism in the United States. Chinni and Gimpel’s “community types” impress me as intriguingly informative but dizzyingly centrifugal; I wonder if readers of introductory texts would find the patchwork neither all that informative nor all that interpretable. The multidimensionality of *Our Patchwork Nation* is a virtue for experienced observers and a vice for inexperienced students; how does the author of a textbook convey this chasm between potential adopter and potential reader? By contrast, Donovan, Mooney, and Smith provide contiguous regions [albeit tidied up with states’ borders] that recall centuries of sectionalism in the United States as well as shifting meanings of federalism.



Note: See the text for definitions of Elazar's categories of political culture.

Source: Daniel J. Elazar, 1984. *American Federalism: A View from the States*. 3rd ed. New York: Harper and Row, 136-7.

(Donovan, Mooney, and Smith 2013)

Nor does *Our Patchwork Nation* convey the history and historiography of immigration, migration, and moving frontiers as well as even simple versions of the Elazar Conjecture! The stratigraphic representations of moralistic, traditionalistic, and individualistic resettlements in Donovan, Mooney, and Smith (2013) recall U. S. history elegantly; *Our Patchwork Nation* depicts the

21<sup>st</sup> century U. S. kaleidoscopically.<sup>15</sup> Unwieldiness and the absence of dynamics, history, evolution, and development make *Our Patchwork Nation* less attractive than the Elazar Conjecture. Indeed, the very metaphor of a patchwork quilt may suggest less to beginning students than Elazar’s Conjecture even if the average college student knows much of or about patchwork quilts.

§5 .2 *American Nations: The History of the Eleven Rival Regional Cultures of North America*

To insert Colin Woodard’s *American Nations* into a section headed “How the Book-Form May or Might Improve Synergistic or Synthetic Interdisciplinarity” risks even more misunderstanding than my foregoing prose, so I must emphasize the “May or Might” in the section heading. I regard *American Nations* as popular writing but reasonably highbrow journalism, journalism of the sorts on which Elazar and others have been wont to rely.<sup>16</sup> Journalist Woodard invested, that I have ascertained, very little effort in understanding scientific, statistical, and predominately presentist analyses in social science journals, so his work would seem less interdisciplinary even than some of the number-crunching that I have glossed *supra*. However, Woodard does integrate historical sources into a cultural or subcultural map of the United States that **might** advance or replace the Elazar Conjecture **with** some assistance from impressionistic, descriptive scholars of subnational government and politics whom scientific analysts have cast aside. Were readers of Professor Gimpel and other practitioners of synergy—albeit presentist leaning synergy—to respond to Woodard’s “History of the Eleven Rival Regional Cultures of North America,” a splendid popular synthesis of statics and dynamics, of present and past **might** yield results that might adorn even introductory texts.

Woodard’s books (Woodard 2016; Woodard 2012) describe thickly differences in values and worldviews within and between “rival regional cultures,” which redirects students and scholars alike from easily measured attitudes and votes to less ephemeral, more enduring shapers of disparate cultures and subcultures. In a book that does not, as far as I can tell,<sup>17</sup> mention Elazar, journalist Woodard nonetheless retraces the histories of regions and sections in a manner that **could** and **might** complement Elazar’s descriptions in and derivation of his conjecture.

Hence, my hope for Woodard’s history is itself conjectural. Woodard’s work is to the positivist political scientist not even “impressionistic;” it is wildly interpretive and at times it is stereotypical, popular interpretation. Less defensive and more open-minded social scientists, by contrast, may gather from Woodard surmises and suspicions that will inform efforts to enrich and enhance Elazar’s Conjecture.

What might Woodard and other journalists and popularizers do for synergistic interdisciplinarity? For one thing, they might redirect attention to enduring values and persistent beliefs that differ between regions. Elazar’s moralistic, traditionalistic, and individualistic heavy on beliefs, especially sectarian beliefs, and concomitant hierarchies of values. Elazar’s “four decisive elements

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<sup>15</sup> The similar *Patchwork Nation: Sectionalism and Political Change in American Politics* (Gimpel and Schuknecht 2004) improves in book-form on an earlier journal article (Gimpel & Schuknecht 2002) but each relies on electoral numbers without accompanying observations and interpretations to make data more interesting to beginners or to this reader.

<sup>16</sup> Please recall that Sharkansky faulted Elazar for relying on journalism.

<sup>17</sup> I deployed “Look inside!” to *American Nations* at Amazon.com. My search for “Elazar” returned no hits.

of American development: the frontier; migration; sectionalism; and federalism” (Herzik 1985:413) far transcend passels of attitudes, voting behaviors, policy preferences, and other static “measures” that have been reduced to factors and clusters to make too many articles not so much beside Elazar’s point as “beneath” Elazar’s Conjecture. I have protested above that many scientific, positivistic studies hijacked Elazar’s Conjecture for studies of political behavior. Little wonder that such studies turned up attitudes and behaviors that suited electoral settings. Indeed, in instances I am too decorous to cite, Elazar’s Conjecture has been applied to states to yield results that improve little on the red, the blue, and the purple states preferred and proffered by members of the chattering classes.

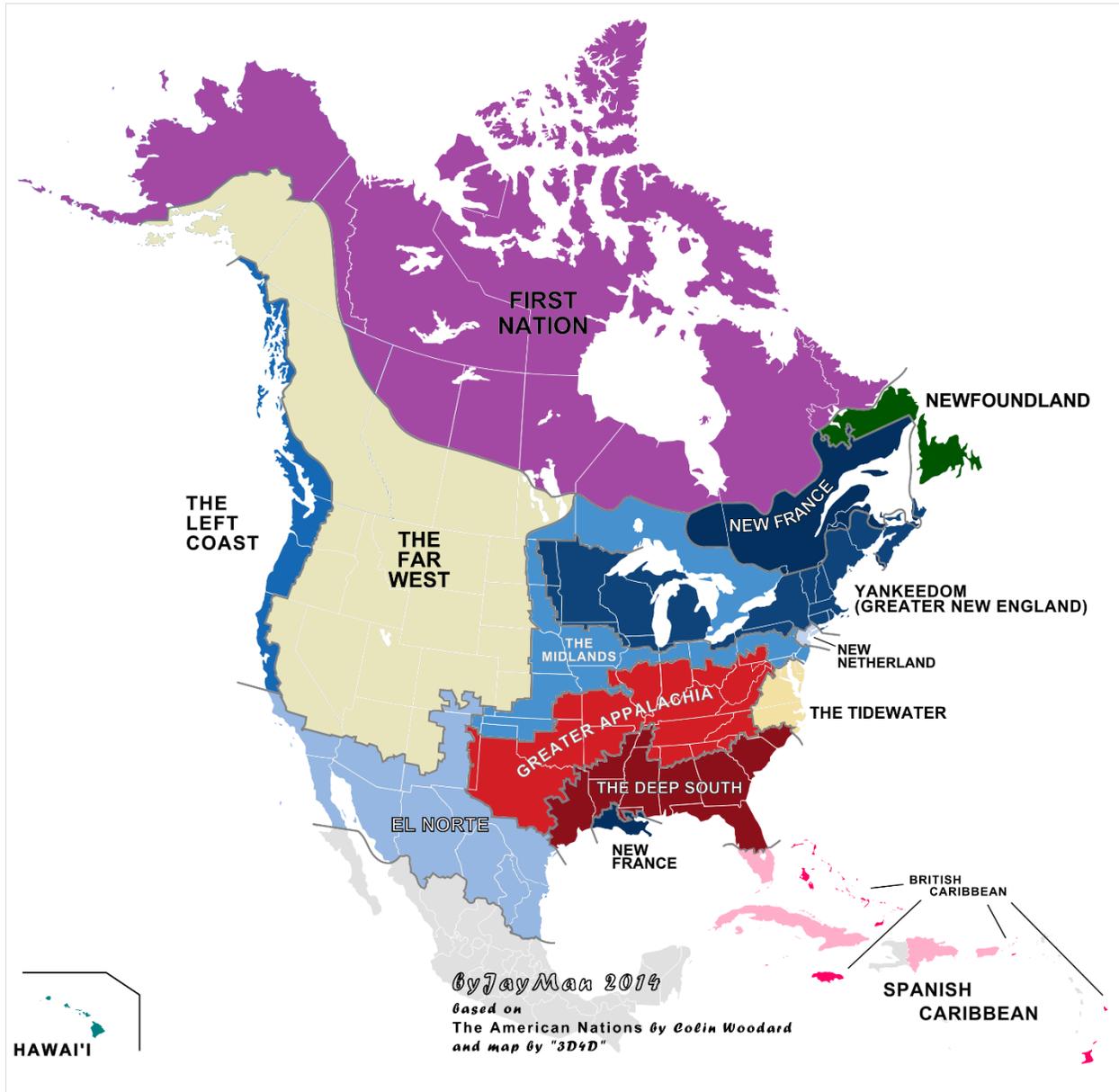


SOURCE: COLIN WOODARD, *AMERICAN NATIONS: A HISTORY OF THE ELEVEN RIVAL REGIONAL CULTURES OF NORTH AMERICA* (VIKING PRESS, 2011). ©COLIN WOODARD.

<http://colinwoodard.blogspot.com/2012/04/presenting-slightly-revised-american.html>

Refocused on region-wide, persistent hierarchies of values and beliefs, scholars might then trace valuations and beliefs through the histories of the “nations” that Woodard derived. These traces might be contrasted with the present-oriented, statistical efforts of Chinni and Gimpel as well as studies of scholars, observers, and even commentators such as Garreau (1989), Gastil (1975), and Zelinsky (1973). Thus might Woodard jump-start synergistic, interdisciplinary researches toward the theory or theoretical framework that might have been developed from the Elazar Conjecture. If my

whining *supra* is at all persuasive, such theory has been missing from scientific endeavors that proceeded as if scholars were engaged in somewhat nomothetic testing of hypotheses derived or derivable from Elazar. Starting anew from Woodard “back” to prior narratives, interpretations, and—yes—even impressions might “thicken” [in the Geertzian sense] our description and our understanding. Then theories and hypotheses that might be testable might be formulated.



<https://jaymans.wordpress.com/american-nations-series/>

To illustrate, I ask my reader(s) to consider labels that Woodard assigned in North America. This or that reader of Woodard might find this or that label—perhaps the sobriquet “New

France”? maybe the pun “The Left Coast”?—to intrigue or to inspire some theoretical inclination or inkling. “The Far West,” by contrast, is a nearly empty signifier holding its place in the map. “The Far West” may be less insulting than Garreau’s “The Empty Quarter” but neither label conveys much about culture or subculture, about values relatively or absolutely, or about beliefs.<sup>18</sup>

## §6 Summary

In this paper I have puzzled why interpretations of subcultures in the United States since Elazar’s *American Federalism* (1966) have not penetrated textbooks devoted to subnational politics, let alone the most common textbooks concerning American politics. My answer is that many contributions have been “serially interdisciplinary” [and I have not even broached Mondak and Canache (2014) or Miller *et al.* (2006)]. That is, Elazar’s conception of traditionalistic, individualistic, and moralistic subcultures based on religious denominations, ethnic backgrounds, the frontier, migration, sectionalism; and federalism has inspired further historical and geographical conceptions of subcultures and further proliferation of categories, but inductive efforts based on easily measured behaviors [e.g., voting or campaign contributions] have yielded too few convincing connections to complexes of values, beliefs, attitudes, institutions, processes, and policies that inspired and justified categorization of regional subcultures in the first place. Welcome as statistical, geographic, electoral, and other quantitative contributions have been, they have not enriched our appreciation of how regions tend to conduct and, more important, conceive self-governance in ways distinguishable from national and local cultures.

Scholars might remedy serial interdisciplinarity by means of synergistic interdisciplinarity. Connecting distinct regional subcultures to distinct sets of values and beliefs is likeliest if researches focus on variations within and across regions of hierarchies of values and beliefs. Scholars might tease out chronic values and beliefs by describing and analyzing 1) idealizations and realizations of Democracy [institutions, orthodoxies, norms and attitudes] (Hill 1994); 2) images and implementations of Equality [economic, ethnic, racial, gender] (Schlozman *et al.* 2013; Wilkinson and Pickett 2010; Hero 2007, 1998); 3) expansions and contractions of Civil Liberties and Civil Rights over time; and 4) evolving usages of Federalism. Each emphasis capitalized above, however distinctive in this or that region, should yield differences and commonalities, both the heterogeneity and the homogeneity that “one out of many” at once celebrates and obscures. Such emphases should assist our and then our students’ spotting pluralities that lie “beneath” the unified national culture and unities that rest atop considerable local variation. I expect the homogeneity of the national culture [the one] to be complicated profitably by learning about the heterogeneities [the many] that confound to one degree or another any singularities of the national culture. Through such emphases I should be better equipped to instruct students about the historical, geographic, religious, ethnic, and socioeconomic evolution of the U. S. and consequences for political organization, processes, and behaviors. Perhaps more important, I should be able to define three (Elazar 1966), four (Luttbeg 1971), nine (Garreau 1989), ten (Lieske 1993), eleven (Woodard 2012;

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<sup>18</sup> I shall not dwell on such mysteries as that “The Left Coast” lies west of “the Far West” or that “The Empty Quarter,” if it includes Alaska, is way more than a quarter of the area of North America and way less than a quarter of the population of North America. Having been bested by one puzzle in this paper, I shall cut my losses.

Lieske 2010), twelve (Chinni & Gimpel 2010) or more subcultures with varieties of “American Politics” than differ from the somewhat unified but never unitary culture of the United States polity.

## §7 Conclusion

Please let me conclude this paper with a welcome to action rather than a call to action.

The peculiar usage of “additive” in the abstract to Sharkansky’s research note (1969) suggested to me some notion of the advance of knowledge through agglutination. I concede that much knowledge has been accumulated through inductive explorations. Nonetheless, I insist that the abstract misinterpreted the accumulation of knowledge both on specific grounds and for general reasons. The specific misunderstanding in what I read as the abstract’s patronizing Elazar’s Conjecture lies in imagining that the late Professor Elazar was merely amassing from myriad sources arbitrary, perhaps even trivial facts, suppositions, and—brace yourself for that dirty word—impressions. One need not give Elazar’s original formulation (1966) a close reading to be struck with and by Elazar’s careful, systematic construction of his Conjecture [or theory or conceptual framework or whatever one might opt to call the three subcultures]. The more general reason to distrust abstract’s characterization is that Elazar’s original formulation, refined and represented, has endured into textbooks in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, while Sharkansky’s critique has been largely forgotten.<sup>19</sup>

From the foregoing paper and especially the immediately preceding paragraph I conclude that scholars and especially authors of introductions should welcome work that promises dialectical synergy. I have argued that a few works already have freed synergistic, dialectical thinking from the tyranny of peer-reviewed journals and the rigors of focused monographs. That is why I have praised *Our Patchwork Nation* (Chinni and Gimpel 2010) from a popular printer over the more limited [to 12 states and to electoral data] *Patchwork Nation* (Gimpel and Schuknecht 2004) from an academic publisher and both books over a constricted journal-article (Gimpel and Schuknecht 2002). I have also praised books from Colin Woodard (2012; 2016) despite—and I have in effect argued because of—their imprimaturs from Penguin Press. [Please recall that I should have preferred Woodard at the least to have cited Elazar; I should be even happier if Woodard might have made use of social science findings.]

I do not mistake myself for the sort of fellow capable of undertaking such synergies or syntheses. I know too little about subnational governments, politicking, or cultures and subcultures. Rather, as I natter into retirement, I see myself as a career teacher at a liberal arts college who would welcome assistance. Students in my introductory courses could profit greatly from perceiving tensions between nationalizing culture(s) and subnational or local subculture(s). Narrow, formulaic analyses that reduce Elazar’s Conjecture to an instrument for predictions and estimates will not assist me much, for I cannot afford a week for [weak] instruction in cluster or factor analysis to enable students to understand statistical fishing expeditions. Broader, inventive interpretations assist me more, for they pose fascinating possibilities to and for undergraduates, but how will I discipline the imaginings of students if not through systematic information from social scientists? So my solution to one puzzle leaves me at and with another.

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<sup>19</sup> I concede, of course, that the abstract could not have foreseen the Darwinian doom of the research note.

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