



Imagining New England: Explorations of Regional Identity from the Pilgrims to the Mid-Twentieth Century

By Joseph A. Conforti

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Say "New England" and you likely conjure up an image in the mind of your listener: the snowy woods or stone wall of a Robert Frost poem, perhaps, or that quintessential icon of the region--the idyllic white village. Such images remind us that, as Joseph Conforti notes, a region is not just a territory on the ground. It is also a place in the imagination.

This ambitious work investigates New England as a cultural invention, tracing the region's changing identity across more than three centuries. Incorporating insights from history, literature, art, material culture, and geography, it shows how succeeding generations of New Englanders created and broadcast a powerful collective identity for their region through narratives about its past. Whether these stories were told in the writings of Frost or Harriet Beecher Stowe, enacted in historical pageants or at colonial revival museums, or conveyed in the pages of a geography textbook or *Yankee* magazine, New Englanders used them to sustain their identity, revising them as needed to respond to the shifting regional landscape.

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Editorial Review

Review

Joseph Conforti's new book is a sweeping and sure-footed analysis of the New England regional identity. (Charles Reagan Wilson, Director of the Center for the Study of Southern Culture, University of Mississippi)

In this book Joseph Conforti has done what nobody else has ever attempted. A major achievement. (Stephen Nissenbaum, University of Massachusetts)

Review

[A] provocative study.--*Boston Globe*

Joseph Conforti's new book is a sweeping and sure-footed analysis of the New England regional identity. No other work about an American region so skillfully reflects our current understanding of what is significant about regional identities. Conforti's thoughtful book provides a historically grounded narrative that gives full play to the contested struggle over regional identities. Conforti shows all of us in regional studies how to reconceptualize our work on particular places.--Charles Reagan Wilson, Director of the Center for the Study of Southern Culture, University of Mississippi

Joseph Conforti has written the essential book about the history of the New England of our imagination--a region configured around Puritans, Yankees, and their literal and symbolic descendants. In a broad-ranging series of familiar (and unfamiliar) examples that range from Puritan jeremiads to *Yankee* magazine, Conforti deftly shows that the centuries-old idealization of New England has been the other side of an equally venerable tradition of worry about its decline. Above all, Conforti reveals how the New England of our imagination has long depended on the exclusion of ethnic outsiders from the region's essential identity, and his attention is never far from those other New Englanders. In this book Joseph Conforti has done what nobody else has ever attempted. A major achievement.--Stephen Nissenbaum, University of Massachusetts

Engagingly written. . . . Conforti draws on a wide range of evidence, elite and popular, visual and textual, providing fresh perspectives on such old chestnuts as the Puritan jeremiad along with analyses of such overlooked sources as 'Pilgrim' statuary. . . . Subtle and satisfying.--*Journal of American History*

[Earns] a place among the more thought-provoking revisionist works.--*Choice*

[This book is] fun to read. It is also substantive, well-organized and challenging. . . . Conforti leads the reader on a tour of New England culture seen from within and without.--*Maine Sunday Telegram*

An important book on historical misconception and mythmaking.--*American Historical Review*

About the Author

Joseph A. Conforti is professor of American and New England Studies at the University of Southern Maine in Portland. His previous books include *Jonathan Edwards, Religious Tradition, and American Culture*.

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