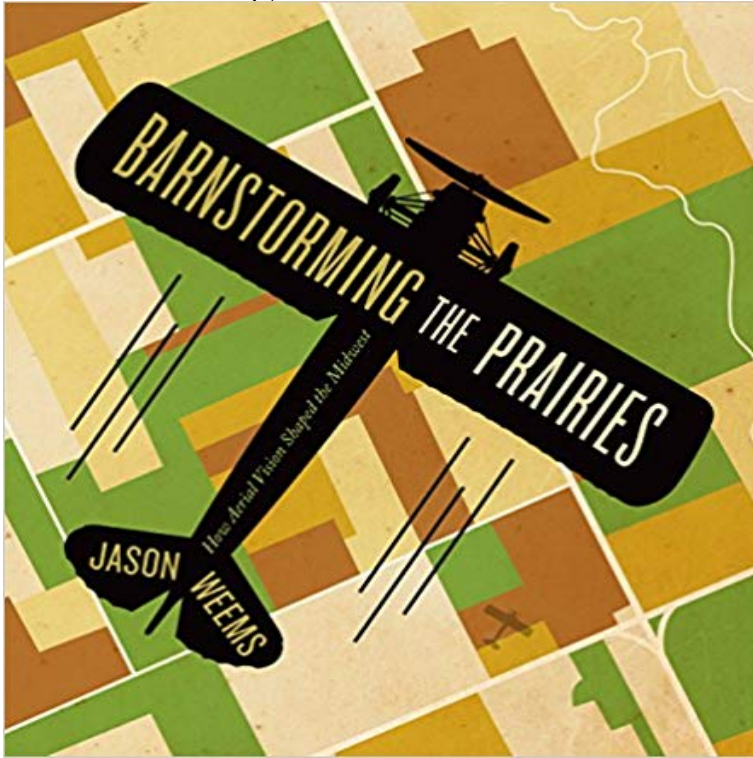


Barnstorming the Prairies: How Aerial Vision Shaped the Midwest



To Midwesterners tucked into small towns or farms early in the twentieth century, the landscape of the American heartland reached the horizon and then imagination had to provide what lay beyond. But when aviation took off and scenes of the Midwest were no longer earthbound, the Midwestern landscape was transformed and with it, Jason Weems suggests in this book, the very idea of the Midwest itself. *Barnstorming the Prairies* offers a panoramic vista of the transformative nature and power of the aerial vision that remade the Midwest in the wake of the airplane. This new perspective from above enabled Americans to conceptualize the region as something other than isolated and unchanging, and to see it instead as a dynamic space where people worked to harmonize the core traditions of America's agrarian character with the more abstract forms of twentieth-century modernity. In the maps and aerial survey photography of the Midwest, as well as the painting, cinema, animation, and suburban landscapes that arose through flight, Weems also finds a different and provocative view of modernity in the making. In representations of the Midwest, from Grant Woods iconic images to the Prairie style of Frank Lloyd Wright to the design of greenbelt suburbs, Weems reveals aerial visions fundamental contribution to regional identity to Midwesternness as we understand it. Reading comparatively across these images, Weems explores how the cognitive and perceptual practices of aerial vision helped to resymbolize the Midwestern landscape amid the technological change and social uncertainty of the early twentieth century.

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