

Urban History Review Revue d'histoire urbaine

URBAN HISTORY REVIEW
REVUE D'HISTOIRE URBAINE

Berry, B.J.L., ed. *The Social Burdens of Environmental Pollution; A Comparative Metropolitan Data Source*. Cambridge, Mass.: Ballinger Publishing Company, 1977. Pp. 613

Colin J. B. Wood

Numéro 3-77, february 1978

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1019512ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1019512ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine

ISSN

0703-0428 (imprimé)

1918-5138 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Wood, C. J. B. (1978). Compte rendu de [Berry, B.J.L., ed. *The Social Burdens of Environmental Pollution; A Comparative Metropolitan Data Source*. Cambridge, Mass.: Ballinger Publishing Company, 1977. Pp. 613]. *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine*, (3-77), 116–119. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1019512ar>

Several of the essays attempt to draw comparisons with other regions, but on balance, these efforts are not as prominent as one might expect given the stated goals of the editors.

What, then, is the value of this volume? First, as an attempt to comprehend the South as a whole, it provides a needed overview of urbanization in a region neglected by urban historians. Second, the limitations of the extant literature which form the basis of these essays are clearly evident, so that researches may use this volume to identify problems in need of further investigation. And third, as a well-integrated, chronological survey, it can serve as a comprehensive textbook for students beginning the study of the urban South.

T.E. Vadney
Department of History
University of Manitoba

* * *

Berry, B.J.L., ed. The Social Burdens of Environmental Pollution: A Comparative Metropolitan Data Source. Cambridge, Mass.: Ballinger Publishing Company, 1977. Pp. 613.

Who bears the main impact and cost of pollution in the American city? Is it the residents of the inner city, who tend to be poor, members of minority groups and lacking political weight or is pollution modern society's eighth deadly sin, pervading the metropolis and affecting all urban dwellers irrespective of income and status? In what ways do different types of pollution namely air, water, noise and solid waste vary in distribution and are there significant inter-metropolitan variations across the United States?

This lengthy volume is basically a research report compiled under the editorship of B.J.L. Berry to examine these three complex, interrelated aspects of environmental pollution. That anyone should even conceive of tackling such a monumental task is in itself commendable. The clear statement of approach and the enumeration of the operational

difficulties which present themselves to this "macro scale" research serve the general purpose of the volume well, that is, to provide a source of information on metropolitan environmental pollution and a model for bringing together and handling quantitative pollution data. The specific issue to which the authors address themselves is whether the inhabitants of the inner city who tend to be poor and disadvantaged experience a larger proportion of environmental pollution than other residents. Using data from the 1970 Census of Population and Housing, six variables are chosen as surrogates of socio-economic class--namely, age of housing, population density, use of public transportation, stage in life cycle, minority populations and mean family income. These are then mapped for Chicago and twelve other metropolitan regions, representative of the main metropolitan types of the U.S. - Baltimore, Washington, Providence, St. Louis, Rochester, Cincinnati, Jacksonville, Birmingham, Oklahoma City, Denver, Seattle and San Diego - to show the pattern of location of the urban disadvantaged.

The direction of the report then turns to a detailed examination of the water quality of Chicago as a model for both the intra- and inter-urban environmental quality analysis. This is undertaken by a description of the physical hydrological environment, the measurement (tolerance) standards set by legislation and then a series of maps of the spatial pattern of specific types of environmental pollution based on information retrieved from appropriate agency data banks such as STORET. STORET is the acronym for the information bank used to store data on water quality control by the Environmental Protection Agency. Succeeding chapters examine water and air quality, urban noise, and solid waste for each of the twelve metropolitan regions.

It is here that the reader begins to appreciate the magnitude and problems of the task of constructing an overall picture of the variation in urban environmental quality. For some regions the data is non-existent for certain variables, making cross comparison difficult or even impossible. Occasionally the date is erroneously coded into the data bank. More often than not, there are too few recording stations to show meaningful patterns. The retrieved data is portrayed in 426 maps,

giving the volume an atlas-like quality. This effect is apparently intentional yet, while the authors' claim "that many of the maps speak for themselves," some are redundant because of the data deficiencies mentioned above. The small scale, lack of colour, difficulty in direct comparison between maps due to their arrangement by pollution type rather than metropolitan centre, detract from the book's qualities as an atlas. This stems in part from the desire to document the state of environmental pollution in respect to a specific hypothesis, and presumably the cost of producing a more elaborate version. A second general criticism is that the cartographic "eyeball" method of correlation is open to significant subjective interpretation. However, these criticisms of data presentation and analysis become subdued when placed in the context of the quantity and breadth of material covered.

If, as the authors state, the first 560 pages are a prologue, to what extent are the remaining 30 pages a suitable denouement? Once again, the authors are emasculated by the data availability problem. In the final chapter, in discussing variation in environmental pollution within the central city, having shown in the previous chapters that this is where pollution is concentrated, they can deal with only a few parameters for a restricted number of cities. The comparisons, again, have no statistical sophistication and the reader is required to judge for himself whether they are significant. With this criticism aside, the evidence to support the central hypothesis is extremely strong. The poor of the central city do experience, in percentage terms, a high exposure to environmental pollution, a situation from which many of the rich and middle class have fled, but even these may be faced in exurbia with poor quality water and excessive noise from airports.

The value of this volume lies in its role as a signpost pointing out what and where quantitative data is available; what needs to be gathered and how the information can be presented in a reasonably comprehensive form. This should be useful in formulating environmental quality standards, techniques of evaluation and the framing of suitable legislation.

The book provides a substantial documentation of the state of

environmental quality in urban America in the 1970's, demonstrating the existence once again of public squalor and private minority squalor amid private affluence. The egalitarian purpose of the volume, although subdued in tone, is successful because it relies upon the sheer weight of supporting quantitative evidence. There could be no more shocking indictment of the environment of the 20th century American city than the map which shows the variation in density of rat bites in Chicago.

Colin J.B. Wood
Department of Geography
University of Victoria

* * *

Johnston, R.J., ed. Urbanisation in New Zealand: Geographical Essays.
Wellington: Reed Education, 1973. Pp. 328. Maps.

New Zealand, a country with over 75 per cent of its population living in urban centres, has seen major changes to its urban patterns, even though the basic framework for the urban system dates back to the earliest days of European settlement. With technological, demographic, and socio-cultural changes, however, new patterns of inter- and intra-urban interaction have emerged, especially since WWII. This collection of fifteen well written, well integrated, original essays examines a variety of topics relating to the major themes of regional development, transport systems, and population migration and mobility. Many of the essays have an historical perspective. For urban historians and historical geographers, the most interesting essays would include: Peter J. Rimmer, "The Changing Status of New Zealand Seaports 1853-1968," L.D.B. Heenan, "The Urbanisation of New Zealand's Population: Demographic Patterns in the South Island, 1881-1961," and A.D. Trlin, "Immigrants in the Cities." Some of the essays provide a further development of historical reconstructions and analyses that are found in the earlier collection of original essays, R.F. Watters, ed., Land and Society