

Vancouver and Its Region, edited by Graeme Wynn and Timothy Oke. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1992. x, 349 pp. Photos, maps, tables. \$29.95 paper; \$45.00 cloth.

Vancouver and Its Region is an important and successful book. It is important in several respects: for the nature and scope of its approach; for its attempt to relate the richness of geographic enquiry to both the general public and the broader scholarly community; for serving as a model of how other books about Canadian cities might be organized; and for the passion it displays about keeping Vancouver as a "livable city." In all of these areas it is successful: at times the analyses are brilliantly focused, at times perhaps tritely mundane, but never are the majority of insights and comments without meaning and significance. Written collaboratively by some eighteen members of the University of British Columbia's Department of Geography, this strong collection of essays, richly illustrated by many maps and photographs, offers a reasoned and informative interpretation of the unfolding geography of one of Canada's most important cities.

In conceiving the book, in part inspired by the fact that the UBC geographers were playing host to a national conference of geographers, editors Graeme Wynn and Timothy Oke were entirely conscious of the divide that sometimes plagues Geography. All too often, physical and human geographers have gone their separate ways, mired in specialization, but not in this volume. In writing about Vancouver as a specific place, where the interaction of the physical environment and people is an essential focus, a sensible balance has been achieved. After a splendid aerial introduction to some historical views of the metropolitan region by Alfred Siemens, we are introduced to the "primordial environment" — the Vancouver region as it existed largely before European contact. This is the basic stuff of physical geography, with the story made accessible to all when told by scholars (Olav Slaymaker, Michael Bovis, Margaret North, Tim Oke, and June Ryder) who have been researching Vancouver's climate, vegetation, hydrology, and other physical factors for many years.

With the physical stage set, the play begins. Cole Harris, a historical geographer, explores the population and settlement geography of the Lower Mainland in the nineteenth century, demonstrating ably how the European plot and design was acted out, slowly at first but eventually finding a permanent presence in the survey systems, town plans, and peopling of the region; and in the process, pushing native peoples to the fringe of this new society. Co-editor Wynn next takes

the stage, recounting the rise and urban development of Vancouver. Wynn covers a broad compass, and almost all quarters of the urban container are assessed. The sections on architecture, suburbanization processes, and residential development in general are nuggets of universal importance. Important too, given the book's theme of relevancy and concern for managing the environment, is his discussion of the healthy, beautiful, and efficient city. This treatment, and others on social structure and immigration, provide continuity and context when these subjects are reintroduced in later chapters. The theme of change continues in a chapter authored by Co-editor Oke and his colleagues Margaret North and Olav Slaymaker. Selecting several local sites, placed in context, the authors show how the powerful force of urbanization has reshaped the Vancouver environment. Their conclusion — "Urban physical geography is an active and important part of every person's daily life. We ignore it at our collective peril, cost, and shame" — at first seems a little trite; but on reflection, the message has great import for all readers.

At this point, this book takes a decisive swing to the present. Vancouver is emerging as an important actor in the Pacific Rim region, and with the restructuring of the global economy as cities and countries shift from a Fordist to a post-Fordist world, a new economic geography has come to the fore. The Fordist/post-Fordist dialectic is one of several theoretical stances that find expression in the book, but its language and premises are handled sympathetically here by Trevor Barnes, David Edgington, Ken Denike, and Terry McGee. They show that Vancouver's economy is no longer tied so strongly to natural resource production, as producer-service economic functions gain prominence. The implications of economic change for the well-being of the Vancouver region are ignored for the moment, but do gain pride of place in Robert North and Walter Hardwick's chapter on the changing economic geography of Vancouver since World War II. Hardwick, of course, through his teaching and political careers, has long-contributed to debates on issues like "the livable region," and discussion of such sensitive political issues is another example of how the book speaks to an audience beyond the university.

This audience will surely appreciate the chapter on society and politics by David Ley, Daniel Hiebert, and Geraldine Pratt. Addressing the theme of alternative visions — whether Vancouver will remain an urban village or suffer the degrading effects of an exploding world city — we are given a masterful synthesis of the contemporary social scene (immigration, crime, housing, and gender issues, for example)

that provides solid evidence for considering whether Vancouver can retain its village image at the expense of becoming more "worldly" in character. One may wish that the authors were bolder, or at least more forthcoming, in their predictions, but their ability to discuss the dynamics of the situation reinforces a central theme of the book, that is, recounting the unfolding maturity of this west coast city. The last thematic chapter, by David Steyn, Michael Bovis, Margaret North, and Olav Slaymaker, returns to the biophysical environment and the interplay between physical processes of change and human agency. Air pollution, water pollution, and various natural hazards are assessed, and the plea is made for their abatement, if only to avoid further degradation of an "incredible" environment. In a brief epilogue, Derek Gregory speaks to the importance of geography, particularly as a way of understanding change in an ever-changing world. It is a timely reminder, and supports the thrust of the substantive essays.

Vancouver and its Region is an important contribution to Canadian urban studies. Written by geographers and in a decidedly co-operative and multi-disciplinary spirit, it deserves a wide audience across other disciplines and within the public at large. Through its editors' strong insistence on integrated essays built around substantive themes (especially the nature of dynamic geographic change), its passionate concern for the environment, and its accessibility to the public at large, it stands as a model framework for comparative studies of other Canadian cities. Supporting this undertaking, UBC Press is to be congratulated for producing such a handsome, useful, and timely volume.

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