

Book reviews

The American college town, by Blake Gumprecht, Amherst, University of Massachusetts Press, 2008, xx+438 pp., US\$34.95 (hardback), ISBN 978-1-55849-671-2

If a friend should ever ask for a book that epitomizes the best that geography can offer, I recommend Blake Gumprecht's new volume as a near-perfect candidate. In *The American College Town* he takes a landscape familiar to every reader of this journal and makes us see it afresh. He dissects its complexity with astonishing thoroughness, using a rich mix of archival material, personal observation, and field interviews. He offers deep case studies, but remembers the need for broader context. Finally, he assembles the total package with spirited, clean prose, some of the best academic writing I have ever seen.

The American College Town is a beautifully designed and well-conceived book. Sandwiched between an introduction that defines the subject and a conclusion about its future are eight thematic chapters. These range in length between 29 and 44 pages, and each illustrates a characteristic of such towns with focus on a particular community. In order these are: the campus as public space (Norman, Oklahoma), fraternity rows and other distinctive residential areas (Ithaca, New York), campus business districts (Manhattan, Kansas), progressive political attitudes (Davis, California), alternative life styles (Athens, Georgia), sports culture (Auburn, Alabama), high-tech centers (Ann Arbor, Michigan), and town-gown tensions (Newark, Delaware). Each chapter is organized historically and illustrated by 10 or so well-chosen photographs and reference maps. The author, one soon learns, is as skilled with camera and mapping software as he is with words.

College towns are a classic example of 'voluntary' culture areas, those created by people who migrate to wherever they think they will find like-minded souls. As such, we might have expected scholarly work on this subject before 2008. Gumprecht blames the neglect on "academic farsightedness and the natural human tendency to overlook what is all around us" (p. xvii), but I hope this book's success will inspire parallel probes into the many other self-sorted places, from retirement centers to the Pacific Northwest's 'ecotopia.'

Extensive work underlies this book. One gets an initial feel for this by paging through 64 pages of endnotes and reading that personal interviews numbered over 200. It is clearer still when reading astonishingly detailed accounts of, say, the evolution of Manhattan's Aggieville business district or Davis's political culture and realizing that these were assembled from

primary materials such as city hall minutes, old Sanborn maps, nineteenth-century diaries, and on-the-spot interviews. Most telling of all, perhaps, is the author's sad confession that this book ultimately sapped so much time and energy that it hastened the collapse of his marriage.

Even readers who have spent decades in college towns can glean much from Gumprecht's work. The first chapter, for example, is an interesting exercise in definition. If one selects American cities where university students constitute 20% or more of the total population and, of these, eliminates big cities and suburbs, the result is about 300 college towns. He notes how these entities are rare in other countries (where urban universities are the rule), explains why they are so numerous here (state as opposed to federal control, a scattered population, religious sponsorship, and local boosterism), and identifies six subtypes. He also relates how many of the phenomenon's characteristic traits emerged only after an enrollment surge in the late 1940s.

The thematic chapters are uniformly rich. The University of Oklahoma, with its wooded groves, formal gardens, and public auditoria is a perfect demonstration of the open, verdant nature of most American campuses. Their contrast with cloistered, inward-looking universities in Europe is stark. One learns that fraternities at Ithaca were outgrowths of literary societies and at Manhattan that Aggieville bars were scarce until the 1960s when women were first allowed to enter them freely. Documentation of progressive political initiatives at Davis and the music and art scenes at Athens is interesting, too, including a contradictory reluctance in these increasingly middle-class towns to promote social justice and provide affordable housing. Such conflict between alternative and corporate culture reaches a peak in the Ann Arbor discussion on that town's love-hate relationship with pharmaceutical companies and military contractors.

Unlike any other professors I know, Gumprecht has worked previously as a newspaper reporter, sportswriter, librarian, and music executive. This experience flows into the book. His arguments for five of the chapters also have been honed through previous publication in scholarly journals. All this has helped him to achieve balance between detail and overview, history and the present scene, scholarship and storytelling. In fact, I see self-indulgence in only two places: the preface where he nostalgically recalls his drifter days in Lawrence, Kansas, and the Athens chapter where he obviously identifies with the six artisans he profiles. If I were his editor, I would have shortened these discussions.

A related problem comes from a compulsion to be thorough. Even though this book is a pleasure to read at 348 pages, I think it would have been even better cut by a third. With a little less detail on 'Shug' Jordan's coaching career at Auburn, Ann Arbor's industries, and Newark's landlords, we would still have a clear picture of the uniqueness of college

towns. The bonus might have been Gumprecht's dream – to interest a trade publisher in the project and to create one of the few geographer's books ever to capture the attention of the elusive general public.

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The geography of religion: faith, place and space, by Roger W. Stump, Lanham, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2008, xviii+422 pp., US\$64.95 (hardback), ISBN 978-0-7425-1080-7

Until now, scholars interested in the geography of religion have had only a few broad surveys available. Pierre Deffontaines' (1948) text remains untranslated from its original French. David Sopher's (1967) and Chris Park's (1994) introductory texts have been critiqued for their writing styles. Roger Stump's new book *The Geography of Religion* (2008) fills this gap and stimulates future research in this understudied field. Social science undergraduate students and their instructors interested in the intersections of faith, space and place will appreciate the book's organizational structure and thematic clarity, provocative examples of both traditional and new religious movements and trends across multiple scales, and especially Stump's own passion for religion and politics.

Roger Stump reasons that if cultural geographers are indeed interested in human products and meaning across space and through time then careful attention must be paid to religion as a central element in cultural life. As articulated by the author, "Religion is interpreted throughout this volume as a cultural system, an integrated complex of meanings, symbols, and behaviors articulated by a community of adherents" (p. 7). In the introduction he hooks the reader with an intriguing case of a Manhattan Jewish *eruv*, a ritual space used by Orthodox Jews during observance of the Sabbath. Like so many of the poignant examples offered throughout the book, Stump's analysis of the *eruv* illustrates several spatial processes and concepts central to the geographic study of religion including: movement, diffusion, distribution, localization, place, space, and meaning.

The book's chapters are organized around four main themes: (1) the spatial dynamics of religious distributions; (2) the contextuality of religions; (3) religious territoriality in secular space; and (4) the meanings and uses of sacred space. Much of the material on the emergence, diffusion and localization of the world's religions will be familiar to veteran scholars and is readily available in other sources. However, Stump's passion for religion and politics comes through in his discussion of religious territoriality, the focus of the fourth chapter. Religious groups

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