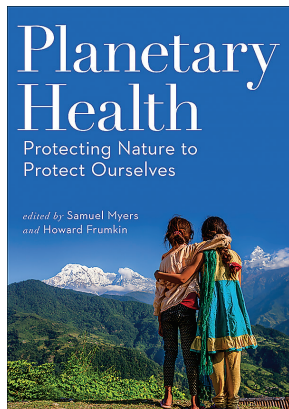


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# AN EXTRAORDINARY MOMENT IN HUMAN HISTORY

The planet's health is an unfolding drama, but it's not time to give up hope. *By Harold Henderson*



**Planetary Health: Protecting Nature to Protect Ourselves**

*Edited by Samuel Myers (Harvard) and Howard Frumkin (University of Washington), 2020, Island Press, 513 pp.; \$39 paper, \$38.99 e-book*

“THE SAME EXTRAORDINARY scientific and technological developments that have pulled humanity out of poverty ... are also fueling an extraordinary ballooning of humanity’s ecological footprint,” write the editors in their introduction. These dangerous changes are said to be coming in “at least six dimensions: disruption of the global climate system; widespread pollution of air, water, and soils; rapid biodiversity loss; pervasive changes in land use and land cover; and depletion of resources including fresh water and arable land.”

Nevertheless, the editors are not giving up hope—quite the opposite. They want their student readers in particular to rally to the cause. “We are still in time,” write the six authors of Chapter 13 on urban places, “to retrofit existing cities and to ensure that the urban buildup that will be occurring in middle- and low-income countries promotes health and the environment.”

Every way in which cities may degrade the environment can also be seen as “an important opportunity to reduce [cities’] ecological footprint.” Thus, the authors say, we can build better buildings, zone for mixed uses, upgrade mass transit, and “turn solid waste and sewage into energy, water, compost, and fertilizer.” And, even better, when we undertake urban greening, we can be aware that it could just facilitate gentrification—perhaps by “promoting mixed-income housing and reducing displacements associated with neighborhood improvements.”

Planners and students can benefit from the authors’ and editors’ authoritative and wide-ranging overview (as well as their sincere optimism), but readers may have to look elsewhere for details on mobilizing the clout to move more cities and suburbs off the dime.

**‘We are still in time to retrofit existing cities to ensure that the urban build-up in middle- and low-income countries promotes health and the environment.’**

—PLANETARY HEALTH



**Smart Cities**

*By Germaine R. Halegoua (University of Kansas), 2020, MIT Press, 221 pp., \$15.95 paper*

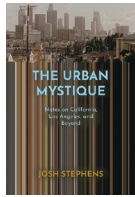
“SMART CITY DEVELOPERS need to work more closely with local communities to understand their preexisting relationships to urban place and realize the limits of technological fixes,” writes the author. “However, city government, smart city developers, and urban residents don’t always know how to have these conversations.” Her small, concise book strives to help.

Sometimes conversations may not happen at all. The author quotes Edgar Pieterse’s *City Futures* on how certain infrastructure has been prioritized: “expressways, logistics ports, airports, and telecommunication networks that support economic growth, attract entrepreneurial talent and businesses, and improve the mobility and security needs of ‘high-end service and manufacturing sectors.’” Even less promising is one company’s hope for cities that “operate like large computers.”

More promising ventures involve “putting sensors in the hands of underprivileged teens, teaching them to use these technologies, and asking and answering questions about their environment through data collection and analysis.” The author also notes feminist geographers who “consider people as creative, active agents who have capacities to change the meaning of urban plans and built environments ... rather than being passive recipients of top-down articulations of space.” There is a lot more conversation to be had here.

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**The Urban Mystique:  
Notes on California,  
Los Angeles, and Beyond**

By Josh Stephens (California Planning & Development Report), 2020, Solimar Books via lulu.com, 340 pp., \$23 paper

THE AUTHOR OFFERS 60 short pieces originally published between 2007 and 2018; the title comes from Betty Friedan’s 1963 feminist classic. In the 1960s Friedan grappled with the “problem that has no name”; in the 2010s Stephens, a journalist focused on cities and mostly on California, finds plenty of problems and plenty of names.

His zest for combat is omnidirectional. He crosses swords with pro-sprawlers Joel Kotkin, Robert Bruegmann, and Wendell Cox, as well as with Peter Moskowitz’s attack on gentrification. Seeking clues as to her many wins in New York City, he quizzed Janette Sadikh-Kahn whether NIMBYs “had ever given her pause or caused her team to alter a project.”

Sometimes Stephens floats proposals, such as a regularly scheduled revote on California’s notorious ballot measures. When he leaves the state, he is disappointed to find Honolulu looking like “Houston with volcanoes.” How so? “The American urban form . . . is more out of place in Honolulu than anywhere else. The militarism that won the islands in the first place is on full display.”

Spanning a decade and shifting topics, the book is choppy. The minimal table of contents and absence of an index leave readers on their own when they seek to retrieve a nice turn of phrase.

**[P3s] are not just a source of funding, but a sophisticated financing and procurement methodology for projects of all sizes.’**

—CITIZEN’S GUIDE TO P3 PROJECTS



**Citizen’s Guide to P3 Projects:  
A Legal Primer for Public-  
Private Partnerships**

By Ernest C. Brown, Esq., PE (Ernest Brown & Co.), 2020, iuniverse.com, 241 pp., \$39.95 cloth, \$30.95 paper, \$19.95 e-book,

“THE VOTING PUBLIC is distrustful of raising property taxes or otherwise financing urgently needed projects,” writes Ernest C. Brown in introducing this fairly technical manual. “Thus, we desperately need private investment vehicles such as P3s [public-private partnerships] to make our roads, bridges, airports and hospitals safe.” The author makes the case that P3 projects “are not just a source of funding, but a sophisticated financing and procurement methodology for projects of all sizes.” Unlike traditional government projects, where elected officials define the task and then hire private contractors based on the lowest responsible bid, P3s come in many flavors and require professional attention to make sure risks are fairly allocated.

Chapters include financial structuring, procurement, design and construction, long-term operations and maintenance, dispute resolution, the operational phase, and more. But the book’s fundamental argument seems rather thin. “Hostility to new taxes” is given as one reason that governments at all levels are not keeping up with infrastructure maintenance and thus need P3 projects. Yet when the author turns to making the case for more P3 projects, it turns out that “The people of the United States are willing to pay for infrastructure, one way or another.”



**Green, Fair, and Prosperous:  
Paths to a Sustainable Iowa**

By Charles Connerly (University of Iowa), 2020, University of Iowa Press, 187 pp., \$15 paper, \$15 e-book

CAN IOWA SAVE ITSELF? The author, a professor of urban and regional planning, thinks so, provided that it seeks economic development, environmental protection, and social justice—things that the state has not always been good at.

Most of this slim book deals with the state’s not always admirable history on these pillars of sustainability. It winds up with a dozen fairly specific recommendations under those three headings:

**SUPPORT** and grow the state’s middle class by allowing public employees to bargain for wages and benefits, restore support for higher education, raise the minimum wage, and make itself more attractive for recreation, entertainment, and the arts.

**RESTORE** Iowa water quality and plan for climate change: fund the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture; work to improve its water quality, including subsidies and regulations; give local governments more control over concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs, which are anything but attractive); and plan for mitigating and adapting to climate change.

**REJECT** racism and embrace diversity, including Black, white, Hispanic, and Asian residents.

Henderson is Planning’s regular book reviewer. Send new books and news of forthcoming publications to him at 1355 W. Springville Road, LaPorte, IN 46350; email [librarytraveler@gmail.com](mailto:librarytraveler@gmail.com).