

will be valuable in teaching as a summary of most major dimensions of regional inequality and as a guide to policy options.

Reference:

Lewis, J.R. and Townsend, A.R. (eds.) (1989). *The North-South Divide: Regional Change in Britain in the 1980s*. London: Paul Chapman.

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CONTEMPORARY AUSTRALIA: EXPLORATIONS IN ECONOMY, SOCIETY AND GEOGRAPHY by D.J. Walmsley and A.D. Sorensen. Melbourne: Longman Cheshire, 1990.

Images of Australia are characterized by myths. For example: many of the country's cultural symbols are linked to its harsh rural outback, while the vast majority of its population resides in comfortable urban areas; the economy of the "western" urbanized nation, in turn, resembles that of a Third World country, with its reliance on mining and primary production.

The book sets to clarify some of these myths by providing a comprehensive and systematic account of the geography, economy and society of today's Australia. This challenging goal is made even more ambitious by the book's attempts to trace the country's history and project its future development. In short, as testified by the authors: "the book is a journey from the past to the future" (p. xvi).

This massive task, however, is undertaken with considerable aptitude. The book begins with documenting the "peopling" of the continent and analyzing the changing social structure of its population—from a British outpost into a multiethnic society. The following three chapters provide detailed accounts of the evolution of the main characteristics of Australian society: the second chapter deals with the economy, the third examines its (mainly social) quality of life, while the fourth describes its political system. The fifth chapter examines Australia's role in an increasingly unified global economy, while the sixth draws several likely scenarios for the nation's future and analyzes their relative merits.

The approach taken is generally descriptive, which is appropriate given the book's self-proclaimed purpose to provide a text for early university studies. The approach is also genuinely multidisciplinary, not only due to the all-encompassing purpose of the book, but also because the authors believe that: "political, economic and social events are interdependent... and are influenced by geographical circumstances" (p. 307). A wealth of empirical data supplement the text, providing an abundance of useful tables, maps, diagrams, and figures. Theories, methods and techniques are clearly (albeit briefly) explained in the relevant places. Another useful feature of the book as a teaching

text is the relative independence of each chapter, which could be read in isolation without sacrificing clarity and consistency.

Several key issues are identified by the authors as central to the understanding of Australia's present and future. One such issue is the tension created between the rapid pace of social and economic change "forced" on Australia by an ever-changing world and the country's rigid social and political structures. Another is the constant dependence of Australia on foreign ideas, technology and finance. Yet another key issue is the growing levels of societal inequalities in the allocation of wealth which expose inter-ethnic, class and city-country tensions, thus threatening the delicate social fabric of contemporary Australia. Australia's future, the book concludes, is likely to develop along one of three possible scenarios: "muddling through," premature postmodernism or economic rationalism. The evaluation of these scenarios, which emphasizes their geographical consequences, is one of the highlights of the book (pp. 270-304).

Some weaknesses should also be noted. First, given the book's emphasis on urban and regional geography and the attention given to future developments, the role of urban and regional planning should have been discussed in more depth. The authors thus commit the sin they attribute to Australian politicians who, they claim, generally overlook "the potential of planning in redressing the inequalities in society and in providing for the overall well-being of the population" (p. 152). Second, the book provides a fairly comprehensive review of commentary on (mainly urban) Australia, but neglects to mention of views of two of the nation's most prominent urban analysts: Hugh Stretton and Brian McLoughlin. Third, the (generally accurate) description of social processes in Australia is confined to a mainstream perspective, lacking critical discussion of these processes and largely ignoring the considerable impact of two important recent forces: the environmental and feminist movements. Finally (and more technically), several (but not all) chapters lack an introduction and a conclusion, a significant deficiency for a textbook.

In general, however, the book's strengths far outweigh its problems. It is a bold attempt to sketch the "big picture," essential for the understanding of every society. For that reason, it should make a good addition to the libraries of most academics and students in the field of geography, sociology, economics, and urban planning, particularly in Australia. The book is of less value to international readers, although its comprehensive and systematic analysis of Australia within the context of rapid universal changes affecting the "global village" may present a useful addition to literature dealing with contemporary problems of (post) modern societies.

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