Book Reviews


For the employees of U.S. Steel and other businesses in Gary, Indiana, the likelihood of exposure to unhealthy workplace conditions has always been closely related to race and class. Nevertheless, Andrew Hurley argues, in the relatively compact pre-World War II Gary, these factors mattered little in exposure to pollution at home. After the war, however, as those whites who could afford to do so began to pursue the suburban dream, wealth became an important predictor of exposure to pollutants at home as well as at work. As middle- and upper-income whites moved to communities distant from the sources of industrial pollution, they developed an environmental movement that, with increasing effectiveness, protected their health, the beauty of their neighborhoods, and the values of their homes.

All but the poorest working-class whites moved out of the most polluted parts of Gary but, facing daily contact with toxins on the job, they focused environmental activism through their unions on workplace conditions. Black workers joined that struggle; but, trapped by lower incomes and housing discrimination in the oldest and dirtiest neighborhoods and by employment discrimination in the most toxic industrial environments, they also fought exposure to pollution through the civil rights movement.

For a brief period in the late 1960s and early 1970s the three groups coalesced into a powerful multifaceted environmental movement that forced U.S. Steel and other business interests to begin to limit industrial pollutants both inside and outside the factory gates. This coalition developed because a strong economy insulated workers from economic blackmail; a vigorous civil rights movement gave blacks political leverage, including Gary’s first black mayor, Richard Hatcher; and white middle- and upper-income environmentalists saw a chance to win important gains through collective action.

But the coalition was short-lived. Racial tensions and a weakening industrial economy allowed U.S. Steel to undermine effectively black and working-class environmental activism with threats of plant closures and job losses. Nevertheless, middle- and upper-income white environmental activists remained influential, a situation that resulted in the shift of pollution to poor and black
neighborhoods. The shift occurred because air and water pollution controls won by Gary environmentalists accelerated the demand during the 1970s for dump sites for the solid wastes removed from smokestacks and sewers. Middle- and upper-income neighborhoods remained relatively free of such dumps as their residents effectively exercised their economic and political power. Poor whites and African Americans also opposed such dumps in their neighborhoods, but they lacked the clout to force the authorities to police the dumpers effectively. By 1980 many poor and black Gary communities were urban wastelands decimated by toxic dumps and by rising unemployment.

This book is clearly written, carefully researched, and as a result is a compelling condemnation of the power of industrial capital to shape the human and natural environment to its own end. Gary's poor and black residents, as Hurley makes clear, have been and are dying for a better environment.

CHARLES F. CASEY-LEININGER teaches American history in the Evening College of the University of Cincinnati and is a research analyst for the Children's Defense Fund. He is currently revising his dissertation on the Fair Housing Movement in Cincinnati for publication.


In this illustrated volume Wayne E. Fuller continues his contribution to the history of America's rural schooling. His earlier volume, The Old Country Schools: The Story of Rural Education in the Midwest (1982), examined the ways in which rural public schools served as cradles of democratic community life for many Americans. For Fuller, rural one-room schools, deeply embedded in the American memory, remain powerful symbols of the nation's educational heritage.

One-Room Schools of the Middle West is illustrated with well-chosen photographs and visual materials from iconographic archives of midwestern county and state historical societies and universities and from the collections of the Library of Congress. Illustrations are skillfully integrated into the narrative.

The book moves from the origins to the demise of the Middle West's one-room schools, beginning with "Democracy in Small Places," a chapter that details the Land Ordinance of 1785, which reserved the sixteenth section of each township of the Northwest Territory for education.

In "Pioneer Schools," Fuller, giving guarded credence to Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis, portrays pioneer schools as