

Michael Greenberg

Environmental & Social
Justice Challenges Near
America's Most Popular
Museums, Parks, Zoos
& Other Heritage
Attractions


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This book is dedicated to our three youngest grandchildren Lola, Layla, and Luna Suggs who are 7, 6, and 4 years old, respectively. They make me smile, laugh and think about the future.

Preface

Every book has a story to tell about its author. When I was a pre-teenager, I had no idea that I lived near so many famous places, that is, good and infamous symbols of New York City and in many cases the United States. They included the Bronx Zoo, Yankee Stadium, the Grand Concourse, and the New York Botanical Gardens. Each was only a few minutes away by foot or bicycle. My parents never had to worry about me running away from home because home was the launching pad for visits to those attractions. If we were feeling more adventurous, we would ride the subway for 20–30 minutes and go to the American Museum of Natural History, the Hayden Planetarium, Central Park, and many other attractions in Manhattan. My friends and I argued about which attraction to visit. It was like deciding what flavor ice cream to buy; you couldn't make a bad choice. Five of these attractions mentioned in this paragraph are among the more than 70 attractions included in this book.

Also located 5 minutes from our one-bedroom apartment was another kind of attraction for young boys: explosions and noise. The Cross Bronx Expressway (CBE), a new road, was under construction across the Bronx. Under the direction of the much praised and despised Robert Moses, the CBE was a wonder for little boys. If we got up early enough, we would run to the excavation site under the Grand Concourse, look down and west to see and hear the explosions loosening up the granite base for the expressway. We loved those explosions. They were more entertaining than July 4th fireworks. My parents and grandparents opposed the CBE; they were angry at Robert Moses, who was Jewish. My grandmother Rose had a choice Yiddish label for him: a *Paskudnik*, which means evil person. Frankly, I loved the Expressway until Dr. Goldberg, our physician, explained to me that he had to move his office because of all the noise and explosions interfered with his practice located in the medical building next to the intersection of the Grand Concourse and the CBE. I became more upset when some of my school friends had to relocate because of the project. Eventually, the CBE became an American icon of imposing social and environmental justice inequities.

In addition to the CBE, our neighborhood was quietly being stigmatized by the Home Owner's Loan Corporation (HOLC), a federal agency, charged with advising lenders on where to invest. HOLC categorized our neighborhood of apartments and

single-family homes as “definitely declining” (the color was yellow on their map) and “infiltrated by Russians with a moderate number of relief families.” My father always wondered why he could not get a loan to buy a house on that street and why the apartment house owners would not keep up the apartments. Years later, when he learned about this practice, he was livid because he had worked in a hazardous job during World War II and felt betrayed. HOLC was bad enough for our College Avenue location, but worse four blocks to the east which was characterized as “hazardous” (the color red on the map), and the HOLC note was that the redlined area had 15% Negro residents. (See Chap. 1 for more about redlining and Fig. 9.1.)

My introduction to good and bad physical symbols of America continued when I was 11, and we moved 9 miles north to southeast Yonkers, NY, in prestigious Westchester County. My father and mother had saved enough money to buy a small house in southeast Yonkers. Little did they know that the HOLC had classified this part of Yonkers as “definitely declining” and said that the area was occupied by “less than desirable types of native Whites.” My parents were required to put down half of the money to obtain mortgage in this “yellow” zoned area. But my father got his workshop, and I was introduced to two more physical attractions: the Hillview Reservoir where New York City’s water is stored before flowing south into the city, and the Yonkers Raceway and now Empire Casino, which is located adjacent to reservoir. I loved those places. The reservoir was surrounded by a 2-mile long running path. As a teenager, we ran around the 2-mile oval. I especially loved the east-facing hill next to the reservoir. We went for picnics, we watched the horses training, and on a clear day, we could see Long Island Sound 6 miles away. I was lucky to have these well-known attractions near me. However, southeast Yonkers was marked by segregation by race/ethnicity and religion. Yonkers was the symbol of a city that opposed housing and school segregation, and it was the first city sued by the federal government for both, which badly hurt its reputation and cost it federal funding for many years. The school across the street from our family home became a symbol of school segregation, and eventually, our baseball field was appropriated to build a bigger school to accommodate a desegregated school system. Years later, I analyzed social and environmental justice on the Bronx-Yonkers border using some of the data sources used in this book. One of my colleagues called it my catharsis paper.

These early experiences on College Avenue and in Hyatt Avenue in southeast Yonkers have led to a life-long interest in the spatial intersection of physical attractions and social and environmental justice challenges. I do not take what I see in the street at face value. Over the course of the last half-century, when I visit attractions, I look for evidence of social and environmental injustice. For example, when I visited Yellowstone National Park, I enjoyed the park. Yet, I walked around the two of the neighborhoods just outside the park to get a feel for who lived nearby. The neighborhood visits outside of Yellowstone were very early in the morning in late December when the temperature was between -5 and -20 °F (see Fig. 2.2). I admit to being a little crazy, but only a little – I did see quite a bit.

My personal history merged with an academic one when I began to study social and environmental justice issues associated with small hazardous waste sites, National Priority List sites, US ports, chemical weapons storage facilities, and

nuclear weapons sites. I learned how to use spatial data sets to look for social and environmental justice issues.

My curiosity about people who live near attractions led me to write this book about the association of popular attractions and social and environmental justice. In essence, I wanted to learn who lives near popular attractions; what, if any, social and environmental justice challenges these places represent; and what solutions exist and are being implemented.

The book should have two primary audiences. One is the strong and growing social and environmental justice community that has increasingly been scrutinizing parks and many other icons for evidence of injustice. This book will interest them, even though all the results do not consistently support their positions. The second audience is businesses, not-for-profits, and government agencies who manage parks, zoos, museums, and other attractions. I expect they will also be interested in the findings, albeit some may resist them. This belief is the product of my studies of hazardous waste sites and other so-called “noxious” facilities. Some managers argue that they have been unfairly branded, and they are not responsible for the conditions in the community. Lastly, some resist because they do not want to hear or read what makes them uncomfortable. However, they have read or have been briefed about the research findings. My hope is that the breadth of places examined and the effort to consistently apply data and tools to the issue will allow members of these groups to embrace the challenge rather than try to avoid it because it is not going away.

Highland Park, NJ, USA
May 15, 2022

Michael Greenberg

Acknowledgments

I was primed to love museums, parks, and zoos by my family, friends, and neighbors. My father painted, sketched, and built clocks. I have many of them. My mother played the piano, and my sister was an opera singer and a music teacher. My aunt Beatrice had a beautiful singing voice, and my cousin Geraldine received a scholarship from NYU for her artistic skills. Our Bronx neighbors, Cutlers played musical instruments, and when the Greenbergs and Cutlers got together, there was a lot of talent on display. Fast forward a few decades, my nuclear family has similar interests. My wife Gwen sings and draws, as does our daughter Alexandra. I'm in my home office looking at several of their drawings and paintings. All of us love going to museums, zoos, and parks. I have no artistic talents, but I learned to appreciate the culture found in heritage attractions.

Many of my Rutgers and Columbia University colleagues have pushed me to think about what I am seeing and not just settle for the obvious relationships such as environmental and social justice challenges are associated with refineries, ports, and other locally unwanted land uses. Peeling back the layers to find associations between social and environmental justice and heritage attractions is not an obvious task. I acknowledge my father Sydney, my mother Mildred, and my uncle Sol as well as my PhD thesis advisor George Carey, Douglas McManis, Leonard Zabler, William Vickrey, Rose Keisler, Charles Lee, Donald Krueckeberg, Henry Mayer, Dona Schneider, and other colleagues and friends who always had more questions for me to answer, especially if they led me to confront conundrums. I owe all of you a hearty thanks. I thank Tamara Swedberg, my Rutgers colleague, for helping me with the technology required to compile and manage the documents.

I wanted to do the research for this book for decades. However, it would not have been possible to do a credible study without the intervention of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the University of Wisconsin. EPA created the idea of a public database that would provide anyone in the United States with a computer, iPad, or cell phone the opportunity to look at data and create maps of demographic and environmental conditions. The first release occurred in 2019, and the second in 2022. The data already have made a difference in how we view where we live, and the 2022 release improves

on what already was an extremely valuable tool. I know it will only get better. A big hole in the EPA 2019 database for public-health oriented people like me was the absence of health data. The EPA's 2022 EJScreen release, which has data for heart disease, asthma, and life expectancy, begins to address that gap. You will see quite a few maps from EJScreen in this book. While EJScreen has some health data, the 500 cities project now called PLACES was created by CDC to allow us to see information about 27 health behaviors and outcomes at the census tract scale in large American cities. I used these data throughout the book. The University of Wisconsin's Population Health Institute (2022) created and maintains a county-scale database with demographic, environmental, health, and local asset information.

These three databases allowed me to secure the data, map, and statistically analyze some of it. I thank these organizations and their staff for developing, maintaining, and continuing to build these databases that I believe are at the heart of what should be publicly available in a democracy. The findings, opinions, conclusions, and recommendations expressed in this book are mine and do not necessarily represent the views of the organizations that built and published these data bases.

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Part I
Context and Design

Chapter 1

Creating Attractions and Tolerating Inequity



“Man’s capacity for justice makes democracy possible; but man’s inclination to injustice makes democracy necessary.”

Reinhold Niebuhr from the foreword of Children of Light and Children of Darkness (1944)

Abstract This introductory chapter describes conditions that emerged during the industrial revolution leading to the accumulation of wealth, which in turn led to building of zoos, urban parks, museums, grand concourses, and other heritage attractions, highlighted by national parks. In urban centers, heritage attractions have become magnets for wealthy and healthy people. US housing policy favors investors. Hence, when investors and the wealthy find locations that they desire, poor and middle class people are displaced. The book uses public data sets to compare the demographic and health conditions of those who live near Central Park, the Getty Museum, the Art Institute of Chicago, and over 100 other heritage attractions. Also, it examines the environmental conditions of those areas, finding that air quality issues near most heritage attractions are about the same or worse than adjacent neighborhoods and host cities. While focusing on health and wealth clusters, the book examines economic and politically symbolic places such as the Empire State Building, Fisherman’s Wharf, and others comparing their demographic, health and environmental conditions with the heritage wealth and health clusters, as well as searching for evidence that affordable housing projects are linked to heritage attraction clusters in Boston, Chicago, New York, and San Francisco.

Keywords Heritage attractions · Industrial revolution · Zoos · Museums · National parks · Urban parks · Grand concourses · Segregation · Gentrification · Redlining · U.S. housing policy · Leisure and hospitality · American manufacturing belt · Economic imperative · Real estate industry

1.1 Introduction

Karl Paul Reinhold Niebuhr was an American ethicist and theologian. His often-quoted view about humans is a perfect entry point for this book. Creating national parks, zoos, parks, museums, art galleries and other iconic heritage attractions are what people, businesses, and elected representatives can accomplish on behalf of society. This book examines many of the most visited American heritage attractions. Yet, the tolerance for injustice in the United States has created painful realities for many people, including displacing them to accommodate the wealthy and healthy. The major focus of this book is to find out what level of environmental and social injustice has occurred near American heritage attractions during this first quarter of the 21st century and what is being done to address these challenges.

Before proceeding, it is important to define a heritage attraction site. A heritage site focuses on providing information and experiences about history and culture. Art galleries, botanical gardens, conservation areas, museums, parks and zoos are heritage attraction sites. Yes, they have gift shops, cafeterias and other commercial components and marketing associated with them. They need money. Nevertheless, each is primarily focused on providing something about U.S. or international heritage, history and culture. Heritage sites provide some entertainment in the form of short video clips, art and exotic species, but they are not amusement parks, arcades, and water parks that provide entertainment with limited reference to heritage. Bowling allies, golf courses, gyms, marinas, and ski slopes focus on recreation. A visitor might learn that the local marina once hosted a famous family's boat, or the Olympic trials were once held at the ski slope. However, trips to those sites are more about sailing and skiing than about heritage. Shopping centers, large stores, and other commercial enterprises concentrate on selling products. They also send messages about U.S. culture and history, but they exist to earn profits. A complicating reality for this study is that heritage sites may be located close to commercial facilities. But the center of attention of the book is heritage attractions, that is, places that focus on offering information and experiences about history and culture.

Figure 1.1 focuses on the processes that build heritage attraction clusters. The economic imperative that has long driven the United States privileges those who can use their resources to invest and make a good return on their investment and pick place(s) to live that allow them to enjoy the best leisure time, including places that offer the most beautiful art, music and other entertainment, the most desirable homes and shopping, access to higher education and medical care, and other privileges. Building geographical clusters displaces poor and middle class. As clusters of heritage sites grow and become exclusive residential locations, those threatened by displacement may resist. If they own property, they may make a large profit on their or the family's original investment. Nevertheless, they may be displaced by actions allowed under zoning, public health and other legal land use planning tools. In short, without strong intervention, the process of creating clusters of wealth and health around heritage attraction sites ultimately displaces poor and middle class people making them pawns in an economic process of building wealth and desirable communities and earning large returns on investments.