

Book Review

The North Carolina Atlas: Portrait for a New Century.

Douglas M. Orr, Jr. and Alfred W. Start, eds. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000. 461pp., photos, maps, tables, figs, index. \$45.00 (ISBN 0-8078-2507-7).

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This volume is large in information on North Carolina. There are 275 maps, 52 color photographs, and 48 tables. This volume is even larger in analysis. Twenty-eight different authors penned nearly a quarter million words of supportive and interpretive text. All of this information and knowledge is organized into 20 coherent chapters edited by an experienced North Carolina atlas team that has produced high quality urban, state, and regional atlas products over the past 25 years. After a short introductory chapter, the natural environment provides one of the largest chapters followed by a chapter detailing the history of human occupation of this environment. Accounts of contemporary demographic patterns and processes followed by an evaluation of North Carolina's record of urbanization provide the next chapters. A general chapter dealing with the state's rapidly changing economy is then followed by individual chapters documenting primary economic activities, secondary economic activities, transportation and utilities, and service sector activities. A large chapter detailing the state's government and politics is followed by a sequence of issue oriented or topically specific chapters. These include air quality, water resources, crime, public education, higher education, health, culture, and recreation. The closing chapter provides an insightful synthesis of North Carolina's past and future prospects.

The North Carolina atlas team must be commended for developing a handsome volume that is wonderfully illustrated and well written. Despite the fragmentation into many chapters by numerous authors, the editors have done an outstanding job of integrating and standardizing so that the flow of information is smooth and continuous. The very substantial commitment to portray environmental and

social issues that are faced by the state sets this atlas project apart from previous state atlases. Additionally, the volume and the depth of narrative analysis are quite remarkable for an atlas project. Many of the authors are not geographers and it is clear that this source largely explains the significant variation in graphic density that distinguishes some chapters from others. For instance the atlas, in its entirety, is 25 percent graphic and 75 percent text (as measured by page area). This general narrative density is actually quite high compared to most atlas products.

In some chapters it is the graphics that supports the narrative instead of the reverse. More than 175 pages of chapter content contain no graphic illustration. For geographers' perusal, this is unusual and at times disconcerting, but the frequency of these pages is far greater in chapters authored by non-geographers. For instance, the transportation and utilities chapter (by Wayne Walcott and David Hartgen) is the most graphically intense at 37 percent of page area while the large chapter that deals with government and politics (authored by a political scientist) is only 17 percent graphic in content. In such a case, expected graphics are indeed missing. The government and politics chapter has no maps of voting behaviors or changes in that behavior, e.g., voter registration, voter turnout, party affiliation, etc. Although the prose is excellent, most geographers will wish to see more of such topics in graphic form. One of the graphic categories most amiss is photographs, especially those that portray the North Carolina rural and urban landscapes. Twelve of the 20 chapters contain only one or two photos and there are only 48 in total. An important opportunity to illustrate the real world of North Carolina has been missed.

Although geographers might take issue with the sparseness of graphics in some chapters, they should be unanimous in their admiration of graphic quality. The maps and graphs are well done, and their immediate legibility, aesthetic quality, and varied symbolization lure the reader from page to page in search of more. Arguable exceptions include several choropleth maps that break with the cartographic convention of employing data standardization, although since North Carolina has similarly sized counties as enumeration units, this break with tradition is understandable. Although five-class choropleth, county level maps dominate the thematic cartography, atlas readers are treated to dot maps, graduated circle maps, flow maps, and isarithmic maps. Bar graphs, pie charts, and line graphs are all well designed, and the photographs are nicely composed and seem to be uniformly interesting. Omitted from the maps are the uses of three dimensional or other techniques to portray the physical regions, or the incorporation of remotely sensed imagery. As a result, exciting advances in cartographic visualization and data representation are not represented in the work. Overall, however, given the quality of their production, most readers will want to see more maps and graphs after finishing the first read.

The editors are quite aware of the unique quality of their current atlas project. In fact they have labeled their product as an "analytic atlas" to set it apart from other atlases that are more graphically and perhaps descriptively oriented. Another issue that the editors are aware of is the awkward timing of the volume's release. With the atlas publication date corresponding to the execution of the 2000 census, much of the raw data that sets the current North Carolina demographic and socioeconomic scene will be viewed as dated by the majority of readers. Of course, this cannot defeat the desire to provide historical context or longer-term trends, which are generally handled very well.

The editors must be applauded for the effort to portray issues and significant challenges facing North Carolina. Not only do readers become intimate with North Carolina's natural environment but they are also informed with substantial depth about air quality problems, problems of water supply and water quality, increasing exposure to natural hazards, and the

deterioration of the coastal environs. Readers become intimate with North Carolina's economic landscape, but they are also informed with substantial depth about rural poverty and development issues, suburban sprawl, unemployment, accessibility issues associated with gender and ethnicity, central city decay, and the effects of globalization. Readers become intimate with North Carolina's social and cultural landscapes, but they are also informed of issues associated with access to health care, educational attainment, crime, and historic preservation.

There can be no doubt that the editors and the 26 other contributors have provided a great service to the citizens of North Carolina. This atlas is a wonderful addition to important references about the state. The volume belongs in many places. It belongs in Raleigh with every elected official and every bureaucrat. It belongs in every library in the state. It belongs in every classroom in the state as a resource for every teacher and many students. It also belongs with those people and those agencies that must cope with the many issues that face North Carolina. And, since you're reading this review, it belongs on your bookshelf and your friends' coffee tables.

The North Carolina Atlas: Portrait for a New Century, like many other state atlases that precede it, illustrates the important role that geographers can play in the life of a place. The capacities for meaningful graphic portrayal, and for integration and synthesis, are rare, and most non-geographers are impressed when they witness them. This atlas emerges as a valuable marketing tool for geography and geographic thinking. North Carolina geographers should pause to express gratitude to the editors and the contributors for a job well done. North Carolina geographers are all encouraged to share this volume with colleagues and acquaintances. The atlas provides an opportunity to elevate our discipline within the state.