

Book Review

North Carolina: People and Environments, 2nd Edition

Ole Gade, Arthur B. Rex, and James E. Young, with L. Baker Perry. Parkway Publishers, Inc., Boone, NC, 2002. 602 pp., photos, maps, 3 appendices, 4 indices, tables, figures, boxes, bibliography. \$64.50 hardcover (ISBN 1-887905-63-4), \$44.50 paper (ISBN 1-887905-64-2).

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For many years, geographers have needed a good, readable, college-level textbook to use in classes on the regional geography of North Carolina. The authors of *North Carolina: People and Environments* have made a valiant effort towards fulfilling that challenge. This massive text (602 pages) is more than twice the size and weight of the first edition (284 pages). This massive volume is encyclopedic in scope. Thousands of up-to-date facts, including the 2000 census data, make this book a valuable tool for anyone looking for information about the physical, cultural, or economic geography of our state. It can and probably will be an excellent reference tool not only for college and university professors and students, but also for planners, business leaders, community public servants and interested North Carolinian citizens from all walks of life. The book is visualized by the authors not only as a textbook, but also as a way of helping the citizens of North Carolina understand "aspects of land, life, and livelihood at the onset of the 3rd millennium."

North Carolina: People and Environments is divided into three major sections that cover the breadth of our state's physical and cultural landscapes. The first three chapters describe the physical geography, including fascinating accounts of severe weather events as well as the standard lengthy descriptions of soils and vegetation patterns across the state. Chapters 4 through 7 deal with human environments—population and economic geography, while chapter 8 provides an overview of one of the basic themes of geography—the interaction between the human population and the fragile environment in which we live. The last part of the book, which is

about half of the text material, can be categorized as regional geography. Chapter 9 tackles the problem of regionalization—how to best divide this varied and complicated state into manageable units of investigation and administration. Then, in chapters 10 through 13, the four major regions—Tidewater, Coastal Plain, Piedmont, and Mountains—are analyzed in much detail with interesting specific issues and problems of each region highlighted. These detailed regional chapters cover the last 234 pages of the text, and if pulled out and used as a separate text, would provide the reader with an excellent portrayal of the physical and cultural geography of the state.

Each of the regional chapters in *North Carolina: People and Environments* contains numerous maps and illustrations that help the reader see and understand better the geographic and spatial aspects of each respective region. One of the strongest highlights of this book is the inclusion of numerous sections of color plates (photographs) that profusely illustrate many aspects of our state's geography. In fact the liberal use of illustrations (861) includes 257 maps (31 in full color), 379 photos (234 in full color) and 225 other illustrations. As the reader thumbs through the pages, it's almost like taking a "virtual" field trip as one sees the different geographical features on the North Carolina environment.

For the public school teachers of North Carolina, the "five themes of geography" as developed by the National Geographic Society—the themes of location, place, human-environment relationships, movement, and region—can all be gleaned from the organization of this book. There is a natural pro-

gression of geographic information from the broad introductory physical chapters, continuing with the impact of the human population of the landscapes of North Carolina, and culminating in the regionalization of the state from the four main regions down to the individual county level.

I used *North Carolina: People and Environments* as a textbook in my GGY 282—"Geography of North Carolina" in the summer of 2003. Generally the students liked the amount of information in the book, especially the visual information provided by the abundant illustrations. *North Carolina: People and Environments* is mostly well-written, easy to understand, and most of my students who used this textbook found it "user-friendly." The first section on physical geography and especially the last four chapters on regional geography, with the analysis of individual counties and interesting case studies, were endorsed enthusiastically by the students.

But in the middle of the book, students were a little overwhelmed by all the statistical detail that gives much of those chapters the characteristics of an almanac. This section on economic geography tended to be the least well received part of the book. The problem, pointed out by several readers, was that most of it was a collection of facts, figures, tables, and generally "dismal" and boring information that would probably best be relegated to a lengthy appendix. Chapter 7 on social issues, health, education, and civic justice seemed to be the stumbling block in an otherwise fairly readable textbook.

In summary, I feel that *North Carolina: People and Environments* very adequately serves the needs of providing information about North Carolina to its various audiences, for the students who use it to the general citizens who add it to their libraries. There are no glaring deficiencies, and *North Carolina: People and Environments* can serve as a good model for providing a rather complete comprehensive overview of the facts and figures pertinent to the understanding of other state geographies.