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Blake Gumprecht, *The American College Town* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2008, $34.95). Pp. 448. ISBN 978 55849 671 2.

Winner this year of the J. B. Jackson Prize of the Association of American Geographers for presenting the ideas of professional geography in language accessible to a lay audience, *The American College Town* is a highly readable book. Handsomely produced with over ninety illustrations, photos and maps in a large-format edition, it may indeed be bought, if not read, by nonacademicians. Whether scholars interested in the history of towns and universities will find it compelling or even useful is in doubt.

Blake Gumprecht correctly notes that college towns in the United States have attracted little systematic study, although he never is fully convincing that this is a gross oversight. While readily conceding that whether a city is or is not a college town "is in the eye of the beholder" (4), he believes that a place deserves that moniker if "the number of four-year college students equals at least 20% of the town's population" (2), if it is not situated in a city of larger than 350,000 people and is physically separated from any adjacent larger city, and if it has a distinct identity and is perceived as a college town (2). Working from this definition, he narrows the number of college towns in the United States to 305. Of these, he chose to study sixty, although he neglects to explain how he selected this sample beyond stating that he sought diversity. (Gumprecht does note that he studied four historically black colleges, and omitted traditionally women's colleges from his sample.) A map pinpointing the universities' locations shows that, in addition to a smattering of west-coast universities, the western half of the United States was virtually ignored, whereas universities in the the mid-Atlantic and the so-called Rust Belt states are overrepresented.

How significant these sixty universities were to Gumprecht's study is not clear. He never refers specifically to these schools. His list of the characteristics that distinguish college towns – they are "youthful places" (4), where people are highly educated, "likely to work in white-collar jobs" (5) and relatively affluent; they are "transient" (10), with a disproportionate number of renters and a comparatively high cost of living; they are cosmopolitan, unconventional, and have a "high" quality of life (15) – may be based on a close look at the sixty universities. But many of these qualities – youthful, transient, educated – could just as easily have been the product of logical thought.

The core chapters of *The American College Town* present case studies of eight universities and the towns in which they are situated: Auburn University in Auburn, GA; the University of Georgia in Atlanta; the University of Michigan in Lansing; the University of Delaware in Newark; the University of Oklahoma in Norman; Kansas State University in Manhattan; the University of California at Davis; and Cornell University in Ithaca, NY. All of these schools have large (over 20,000) student populations; seven are public institutions and one is a public–private hybrid. The eight are thus hardly representative college towns as Gumprecht defined them in his introduction, but he states that he selected these locales because each reflected a defining quality of college-town life. Alumni of any of the eight institutions may

enjoy the historical details about frat and student housing (Ithaca), intercollegiate sports (Auburn), the music scene (Athens), the bar scene and business district (Manhattan), town-versus-gown tensions (Newark), high-tech industry (Lansing), cultural amenities (Norman), and alternative politics and lifestyles (Davis).

Scholars, however, are likely to find this book puzzling and unsatisfying. The book contains small errors, such as the claim, in the chapter on Lansing and high-tech industry, that the University of Michigan's decision in the late 1960s to prohibit classified defense research on campus has seriously hampered Lansing's ability since then to foster high-tech business ventures. Almost all universities banned such research; neither the Route 128 corridor of which Cambridge is a part, nor Silicon Valley, which encompasses the Stanford campus, were affected negatively by the decision. History is not Gumprecht's field, however, which makes somewhat puzzling his decision to tell the story of each university town from a historical perspective, particularly because his case histories do not seem to add up to much. The story he tells of Manhattan's collegiate culture and bar scene, in which unintellectual co-eds carouse drunkenly on the streets of the city's business district, raises the question whether this town really fits the definition that he sets out at the beginning of the book. And this story is so dramatically different from the one he relates about Davis, which focusses on the political engagement and liberal activism of the town's residents, that one wonders whether their differences outweigh the fact that both are homes to large universities. Perhaps the key to understanding the places is in a more particularized study of each that can focus on its history as it relates to the locale's unique politics, history and geography.

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