

Concrete jungles: urban pollution and the politics of difference in the Caribbean

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Abstrak

In the popular imagination, Caribbean islands represent tropical paradise. This image underlies the efforts of many environmentalists to protect Caribbean coral reefs, mangroves, and rainforests. Much less attention is given to environmental conditions in urban areas, where the islands poorer citizens suffer from exposure to garbage, untreated sewage, and air pollution. *Concrete Jungles* explores why these issues tend to be ignored, demonstrating how mainstream environmentalism reflects and reproduces class and race inequalities. Based on over a decade of research in Kingston, Jamaica, and Willemstad, Curaçao, the book contrasts the uptown environmentalism of largely middle-class professionals with the downtown environmentalism of inner-city residents. It combines an original and sophisticated theoretical discussion of the politics of difference with rich ethnographic detail, including vivid depictions of Caribbean ghettos and elite enclaves. The book presents a novel approach to environmental injustice, combining a political economy perspective with attention to the cultural politics that naturalize socio-ecological inequalities. One of the first works to extend environmental anthropological theory to explicitly include the study of cities, the book shows how divergent forms of environmentalism articulate class, race, and urban space. Forms of environmentalism that implicitly or explicitly understand cities as opposed to nature, and poor people as a threat to environmental purity, contribute to urban naturalisms that naturalize social hierarchies and the unequal distribution of environmental problems.