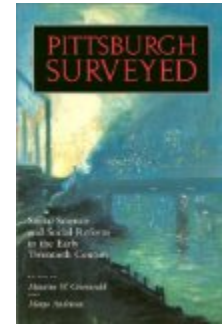


# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Maurine W. Greenwald, Margo Anderson, eds. *Pittsburgh Surveyed: Social Science and Social Reform in the Early Twentieth Century*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1996. xi+292 pp. \$24.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8229-5610-5; \$49.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8229-3956-6.

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“Six months here would justify suicide,” Herbert Spencer remarked of Pittsburgh during a visit in 1882. Three decades later, the six volume *Pittsburgh Survey* (1909-14) documented the indictment in what became a minor classic among early social surveys. The project involved several dozen researchers who produced thirty-five articles initially serialized in *The Survey* plus monographs on industrial accidents, men and women workers, and households in Homestead. Funded by the Russell Sage Foundation, and coordinated by *Survey* editor Paul Kellogg, these studies built on a tradition that included Charles Booth’s *Life and Labour of the People in London* (1889-1903), *The Hull House Papers* (1895), and W.E.B. DuBois’ *The Philadelphia Negro* (1899). Its mixture of muckraking journalism, social activism, and sociological analysis outraged Pittsburgh’s steelmakers while it inspired reformers to undertake similar surveys elsewhere, studies that numbered more than 2,500 by 1930. Yet, as revealed in the thirteen essays in *Pittsburgh Surveyed*, classics can be as interesting for their failures as for their success. Reforms failed to materialize or were subverted to different ends. In the social sciences, as one contributor puts it, empirical research on the Pittsburgh model was a “path not taken... because it...led nowhere” (p. 49).

Three opening articles provide historical perspective. Although rooted in earlier surveys, the Pittsburgh project was the first to call itself a “survey” and the first to study the “entire” life of a community, Martin Bulmer notes. By the 1920s, however, a new generation of sociologists, led by Robert Park and his Chicago colleagues, compared its combination of social investigation and social activism unfavorably to more objective “social research.” Robert Lynd in *Middletown* and William F. Ogburn and

his coworkers on *Recent Social Trends* also distanced their work from earlier surveys, while demographers administered the coup de grace so far as future influence on sociology was concerned.

In a perceptive analysis of institutional setting and self-perception, Stephen Turner traces the “mysterious” disappearance of the survey tradition to the “engineering model,” which Kellogg and others adopted in a campaign to professionalize social work. Likening communities to machines requiring expert care, this model viewed the social worker as the primary coordinator of the activities of other community professionals. But, as revealed in a 1930 bibliography of survey work, the trend instead was toward specialization without coordination, one favored by the Rockefeller and other foundations of the 1920s. Steven R. Cohen, in contrast, pictures Kellogg as a champion of “industrial democracy” rooted in an earlier “republican” tradition, another path not taken as U.S. policymakers instead embraced a collective bargaining model of labor relations.

A second group of articles considers conceptual and methodological assumptions that shaped and often skewed findings. A failure to appreciate the complexity of Pittsburgh’s social and topological geography left the Survey team unable to provide a logically defensible plan for consolidated government, while opening specific findings to criticism (Edward K. Muller). Margaret Byington’s *Homestead* (1910), the subject of analysis in separate essays by S.J. Kleinberg and Margo Anderson, was marred by assumptions concerning the “typical American family” with the father as primary wage earner. As a result, Byington ignored working class self help efforts and severely criticized ward-based schools

and alderman's courts that immigrants often preferred to more distant, bureaucratized institutions. Regarding immigrant earnings, Byington was both wrong and right: wrong in that income (as measured by consumption expenditures) was not less in 1910 than in some earlier age, but right in articulating the ideal of an adequate "family wage" that would become policy only decades later. The condescension buried in her analysis led at the time not to a demand for better wages or sensitivity to the value of immigrant traditions, but rather to child labor laws, "protections" for women workers, and finally immigration restriction. Underlining the importance of photos and illustrations for the survey, Maurine Greenwald provides an intelligent analysis of the work of Lewis Hine and Joseph Stella, concluding (as do most of the essays in one way or other) that intrinsic merit did not translate into political effectiveness.

Four final articles evaluate the survey in light of today's concerns over the environment, race, and ethnicity. The survey addressed environmental issues both with respect to city planning (author) and pollution (Joel Tarr), although the only immediate consequence was a scaled-down postwar planning project that ignored the survey's social concerns. Laurence A. Glasco mounts an interesting defense of Helen A. Tucker and Richard Wright (not the novelist), the sole African American contributors whose work (a total of twenty-six pages) has been too easily dismissed as naive in its praise of black "accomplishments" and sanguine in an age of increasing racism. Richard Ostreicher makes a convincing case that the traditional image of industry domination and worker inertia in Homestead from 1892-1937 is not only false but was constructed by elite reformers to serve their own political agenda. A comparison of Pittsburgh as seen by reformers and by immigrants is the only essay in the volume previously published elsewhere, and the only one also unfortunately marred by jargon and a preachy tone.

*Pittsburgh Surveyed* builds on studies of the survey tradition that include John F. McClymer *War and Welfare* (1980), Jean M. Converse's *Survey Research in the United States (1986)*, and *the essays in The Social Survey in Historical Perspective, 1880-1940*, ed. Martin Bulmer et al. (1991). Specialists will thus find some familiar material, especially regarding historical context. Historians of progressivism will also recognize familiar themes in the eclipse of "republicanism," the roots of welfare materialism, the agency of the dispossessed, and the narrowing effect of the cult of expertise on earlier reform. As is inevitably the case in a collaborative volume, some conflicting views are left unresolved: the image of Kellogg and "social engineer" and "industrial democrat," for example, or the relation of traditional assumptions and innovative proposals (as in Byington's ideal of a "family wage"). More attention could be given to motivations of the researchers and to their institutional settings largely absent save for Turner's analysis. Gender, although introduced indirectly in Kleinberg's analysis of the family ideal, and directly in John F. Bauman and Margaret Spratt's discussion of Pittsburgh's "Civic Leaders," could figure more prominently in the overall analysis, given the major role played by women in the survey.

By focusing narrowly on a single project, *Pittsburgh Surveyed* nonetheless adds depth and nuance to our understanding, not only of the survey tradition and its fate, but of the dynamics of reform in the late progressive era. Nicely conceived, well organized, and clearly written, these essays address and deserve a wide audience of those interested in the history of social sciences, in progressivism, and in American reform.

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