Rivke Jaffe, *Concrete Jungles: Urban Pollution and the Politics of Difference in the Caribbean*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016. xi + 189 pp. (Paper US\$ 24.95)

Concrete Jungles introduces readers to “uptown” and “downtown” environmentalisms through an original and engaging study that employs detailed ethnographic research in four low-income urban neighborhoods. Rivke Jaffe creatively unpacks class and racialized hierarchies and the concomitant naturalization of unequally distributed physical environmental hazards that have shaped nature-society relations in Jamaican and Curaçaoan societies. Carefully crafting a comparative account of the two islands, her clear narrative leads readers from European Romanticist views on renaturalization and a “renewed interest in Caribbean wilderness” (p. 53) forged during the late nineteenth century to current environmentalisms that entangle these legacies in today’s forms of material and cultural pollution. By initially focusing on the 1850–51 cholera epidemic in Jamaica and twentieth-century approaches to sex workers and prostitution in Curaçao, she deftly sets up the basis for aligning fears of “dirt and deviance” (p. 61) with the subtexts of class and race. From this historical basis, the embedded and embodied geographies of persistent bipolar sociospatial structures form an intellectual backbone throughout the text.

While readers might at first query the comparative value to be gained from addressing two seemingly disparately scaled and driven economies, Jaffe’s thorough grounding in, and understanding of both societies, combined with a finely delivered account of anthropological, geographical, and sociological conceptual frameworks, reveal the argument in a thoroughly engaging and convincing style. Complementing this keen scope of critical theoretical analysis, her detailed and committed ethnographic research in four low-income neighborhoods provides an impressive empirical platform for the study.

With engrossing evidence and analysis, the book squarely addresses the inequalities, persistent and emergent, of real and imagined urban spaces in the two capital cities of Kingston and Willemstad. Enduring differentiation by class, gender, and ethnicity is reflected in Jaffe’s close analysis of area stigmatization, noting the more extreme uptown-downtown polarities in the Jamaican capital, compared with the differentiated and marginalized neighborhoods that evolved in response to the emergence and dominance of an oil refinery in Curaçao. She provides excellent insights into the microlocales of stigmatization, revealing the subtle hierarchies within place that are seldom disclosed without the full set of the ethnographic skills that are so evident throughout this study. Having explored external and ascribed perceptions of urban environments, her observations and her interviews with residents also unveil

the many self-represented counternarratives and the locally led “uplift” and beautification projects in the ghetto or *barrio*. These reflections provide a substantial platform from which Jaffe develops an analysis of place-based identities, leading readers into the core element of the book, an original exploration of what she calls the “urban naturalisms” that connect the cultural politics of the environment to spatial politics of urban inequality.

Jaffe pursues the trope of urban pollution to unpick the spatial and socially embedded differences within environmentalism. The argument centers on the process by which social hierarchies and inequalities are “naturalized,” and through which causal (one might add casual) links are made in many instances between polluted urban environments and lower socioeconomic status. This ongoing branch of environmental determinism is clearly charted by Jaffe, as she proposes the divergent strands of uptown “green” environmentalism and downtown “grassroots” or brown agenda environmentalism—nature-society relations riddled with socioeconomic differentiation. Poignantly drawing on her own ethnographic observations, Jaffe notes how the environmental concerns of elite individuals and institutions continue to prioritize “unspoilt” greenery, shunning the polluted urban biophysical environment. This approach yields to mis-anthropogenic forms of environmentalism, indulging in “disurbia,” or the imagined fiction of a pristine world without the troublesome interference of cities. The grassroots environmentalism of low-income urban residents, Jaffe argues, more readily connects ecological vulnerabilities with their own political, social, and economic experiences of marginalization. I read Jaffe’s *Concrete Jungles* in tandem with a popular book on conservation and bird watching in the Caribbean, an unintended but resonant companion volume. Amid the classification of vagrants, endemic species, and allocations of birds to their “natural” habitats, the beautifully illustrated text lamented the “ruined” urban landscapes of the region.

Jaffe’s excellent study provides a refreshing and meticulously derived new perspective on urban Caribbean environments, combining a comprehensive historical and ethnographic narrative of the context of people, places, and politics in the region. Insights offered on everyday livelihoods within low-income urban neighborhoods in Curaçao and Jamaica, and the contradictory urban naturalisms found across both societies, present readers with a striking comparative understanding of Caribbean cities and contribute a much welcomed further assessment of urban anthropological and nature-society relations in the urban South.

David Howard

Sustainable Urban Development, University of Oxford

david.howard@conted.ox.ac.uk