



Environmental Justice as Social Work Practice

Christina L. Erickson, New York, Oxford University Press, 2018, 200 pp,
€33.93 (paperback), ISBN: 978-0-19087-105-5

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BOOK REVIEW

Environmental Justice as Social Work Practice, Christina L. Erickson, New York, Oxford University Press, 2018, 200 pp, €33.93 (paperback), ISBN: 978-0-19087-105-5

Environmental Justice as Social Work Practice is written to be a main textbook in a specialised course on social work and the environment. First published in 2018, the importance of a textbook covering environmental justice for social workers has arguably only grown in the intervening years as the effects of climate change become ever more pronounced and as environmental degradation and extreme weather events bring into being experiences of forced displacement and food insecurity affecting vulnerable persons globally and particularly in the majority world (see Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change 2022). Indeed, Erickson notes that social work can be accused of being a 'latecomer' with respect to concerns for environmental justice and so the development of a comprehensive textbook addressing the area is undoubtedly both timely and welcome. Accessible and well-written, the book starts by tracing the emergence of environmentalism generally and makes connections with key historical episodes. From here, the book explores foundational social work concepts, theoretical frameworks and ethics for environmental justice before moving to look at social work practice with groups and communities, policies and organisations and holistic practice; keeping one eye towards environmentalism throughout. This latter point arguably captures one of the core strengths of the book in that this is not a text that conveys its central message as social work theory with added environmentalism, rather it is made clear that environmental and ecological matters are integral to social work and not optional extras. Concerns for justice, Erickson tells us, have always been at the heart of social work, therefore, moving to more firmly include environmental justice, particularly in the face of the large level social problems that are more and more arising from climate change and environmental degradation, is a natural corollary for social work. Moreover, given that social work as an activity has always been concerned with seeing people in their environment, broadly speaking, this does not seem forced in any way and in fact makes a great deal of sense as Erickson presents it.

A further strength of the book lies in the fact that while it is theoretically and conceptually rich, it grounds much of this in real world examples in the form of stories and descriptions which again, makes sense for a social work textbook that strives to reflect both an academic discipline and an applied profession. Having struck this balance, the text is therefore likely to be appreciated by those who seek to theorise practice and by those searching for practical and applied knowledge.

With respect to pedagogy, the book is mapped to the Council on Social Work Education Competencies which represents an American educational framework. This framework is not dissimilar to standards of proficiency frameworks in other jurisdictions meaning the book can work as an international textbook also. As a textbook, the book contains prompts and exercise boxes for students to engage their critical thinking while also linking to a suite of resources to help assist social work educators teaching in the area.

In summary, this is a book that deserves to widely read and one which would comfortably feature as an additional suggested reading or as a core textbook depending on a specific educator's needs. For those looking to develop this area of a social work curriculum, the book offers an accessible entry point for students and educators alike. For those who are perhaps already involved in teaching about environmental justice in a social work context, this book



will serve as a welcome addition to a growing literature. Now over five years old, the book would eventually benefit from an update which engages with the most recent literature in the context of environmental justice and social work.

Reference

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. 2022. *Assessment Report 6: Summary for Policy Makers*. <https://www.ipcc.ch/>.

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