

New Brunswick, New Jersey: The Decline and Revitalization of Urban America**David Listokin, Dorothea Berkhout, and James W. Hughes****Rutgers University Press, 2016****294 pages****\$35.00 (hardcover)****ISBN: 9780813575148****DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.14713/njs.v4i1.115>**

New Brunswick, New Jersey: The Decline and Revitalization of Urban America by David Listokin, Dorothea Berkhout, and James W. Hughes is a fascinating look at the City of New Brunswick and its urban decline and rebirth. A book on this subject could not have been better written, as the three authors are eminent authorities in their fields. David Listokin is a distinguished professor and co-director of the Center for Urban Policy and Research at the Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy at Rutgers University, New Brunswick. Dorothea Berkhout and James W. Hughes are associate dean and distinguished professor and dean, respectively, also of the Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy. Their combined experience and intimate knowledge of the city has given them a unique viewpoint to narrate New Brunswick's story and place it within a larger context.

New Brunswick developed along the banks of the Raritan River at the site of an early overland route and at the head of navigation for the river. Rebuilding efforts after the Revolutionary War also placed the burgeoning city in a position for robust growth. The opening of the Delaware and Raritan Canal in the 1830s and the building of a railroad connection by the 1840s helped solidify the city's role as a major center of trade and transportation. The city flourished during the industrial revolution and became a powerhouse of major industries including rubber production, wallpaper and pharmaceutical supplies, the latter mainly produced by Johnson & Johnson. New Brunswick had all the major ingredients to develop as a bustling center of activity

with industry, education, government, transportation connections, health care, banking, the arts and music, against the backdrop of a diverse population.

As with many urban environments, the post war years were not kind to New Brunswick. The collapse of industry, suburbanization, and a decaying housing stock all impacted the city. The authors point out that a number of “favorable circumstances” were in place to help New Brunswick regrow including the “presence of significant institutions: a Fortune 500 corporation, the county seat of government, large hospitals, and a state university campus.”

The authors also argue that “New Brunswick deserves our attention both as a mirror of the challenges facing urban America and as a specific case study of a city’s quest to raise its economic fortunes and retool its economy to fit changing needs.” The six chapters of the book explore this theme and examine the history of the city, the population makeup over time, the national context of urban revitalization, the transformation of New Brunswick and the history of revitalization efforts. Graphs and charts underscore the authors’ narrative and photographs covering the period of significant revitalization efforts in the 1970s and 1980s help to contrast the highlight landscape.

A powerful component of the book is the extensive oral history interviews that include insights from the movers and shakers of the various revitalization efforts. These interviews add value and give a voice to the narrative.

The authors also do not shy away from controversy, exploring the tensions between redevelopment in the commercial districts and the viewpoints of those living in the neighborhoods. They also discuss the impact that development had on historic preservation in the city and the loss of significant structures.

The text ultimately leads to questions about the success of revitalization. The authors readily note that the outcome has been mixed and that “much has been accomplished and much

remains to be improved in the future.” Readers can also draw their own conclusions, as the text, graphs, photographs and oral history interviews are presented in such a way as to encourage further debate.

Mark Nonestied
Middlesex County Office of Arts and History