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# Toxic Town: IBM, Pollution, And Industrial Risks



## Synopsis

In 1924, IBM built its first plant in Endicott, New York. Now, Endicott is a contested toxic waste site. With its landscape thoroughly contaminated by carcinogens, Endicott is the subject of one of the nation's largest corporate-state mitigation efforts. Yet despite the efforts of IBM and the U.S. government, Endicott residents remain skeptical that the mitigation systems employed were designed with their best interests at heart. *In Toxic Town*, Peter C.

Little tracks and critically diagnoses the experiences of Endicott residents as they learn to live with high-tech pollution, community transformation, scientific expertise, corporate-state power, and risk mitigation technologies. By weaving together the insights of anthropology, political ecology, disaster studies, and science and technology studies, the book explores questions of theoretical and practical import for understanding the politics of risk and the ironies of technological disaster response in a time when IBM's stated mission is to build a "Smarter Planet." Little critically reflects on IBM's new corporate tagline, arguing for a political ecology of corporate social and environmental responsibility and accountability that places the social and environmental politics of risk mitigation front and center. Ultimately, Little argues that we will need much more than hollow corporate taglines, claims of corporate responsibility, and attempts to mitigate high-tech disasters to truly build a smarter planet.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"This carefully crafted ethnographic account affirms the deep and adverse footprint of market-based

industrial production on contemporary human lives and communities. "By exploring the personal experience of exposure to the toxic risk produced by irresponsible corporate actions in a contaminated community, Little tells the occupational and environment story of our times: deindustrialization has left behind doubly damaged communities but helped to spark hope-affirming grassroots activism. This book makes clear the contributions of anthropology to the framing of a political ecological theory of human-environmental relations."-Merrill Singer, University of Connecticut at Storrs

"[T]his is an important and well-researched study of the resurfacing narratives of the U.S. tech industry's erstwhile model village that tragically descended into Computer Age ruin. American Anthropologist

"Takes studies of contaminated communities into the 21st century drawing out the sobering limits of environmental remediation and mitigation, and the way industrial decline both dissolves and calls out community. Little makes Vapor Intrusion and the challenges it creates for science, regulation, and those living within it into a sentinel condition of our times. The book is beautifully analyzed and written, and darkly evocative. Nuanced, but nevertheless maddening. Kim Fortun, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute

"This intense local study offers an important contribution, melding a keen application of key concepts in science and technology studies with ethnographic engagement with local people deeply affected by living with the consequences of the Computer Age. Toxic Town will be of interest not only to anthropologists but to scholars across many disciplines who seek to understand triumphal technocapitalism's central role in creating and sustaining the pollution crisis. Medical Anthropology Quarterly

Peter C. Little is Assistant Professor of Anthropology at the Rhode Island College. He has published in a variety of academic journals, including Medical Anthropology Quarterly, Human Organization, Ethos, and Capitalism Nature Socialism.

Great read tons of information. I think the 2 star comment person doesn't understand what an ethnography does.

Very interesting and well written. I highly recommend this book to anyone who is interested in the IBM story!

Fascinating account!

I know about this situation and although Mr. Little makes some good points, his constant use of references in the text and academic terminology makes this a slog to read. Considering the population, his research is thin on data in that his conclusions are based on a very small number of interviews. He offers criticism but not much in the way of solutions. He constantly is referencing what his book is intended to do instead of letting the writing demonstrate his intent. It at times comes across as pompous and self serving in a way that is a disservice to the population he writes about.

Very strong work. I used this book in my advanced course on human dimensions of the environment. The students really enjoyed it, and it demonstrates many themes of the course: toxic risks, scientific uncertainty, politics and power, and environmental justice.

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