

BANKRUPT BRITAIN: AN ATLAS OF SOCIAL CHANGE/ Daniel Dorling and Bethan Thomas. Bristol: Policy Press, 2011. Pp. 208.; 163 maps. ISBN-13 978-1847427472 (paper), £29.99.

You know those books that open with smarmy acknowledgements that crescendo to the wife and kids who put up with its writing? *Bankrupt Britain* isn't one of them. Daniel Dorling and Bethan Thomas conclude their brief but heartfelt acknowledgements by pointing out that the dedication of their atlas to David Cameron and Nick Clegg was *not* meant as a compliment. Indeed, anything but.

Indeed, this is a depressing book, a catalogue of the many ways in which Britain is going bankrupt – not just financially but residentially, politically, morally, emotionally, and environmentally. Since the one country it regularly points to as failing more comprehensively is the United States, it's even more depressing for an American, for America too has rewarded bankers at the expense of everyone else and has an inexplicable homeless population, a first-past-the-post electoral system, an out-of-control bullying problem, an insatiable appetite for drugs of every kind, and more murderous, polluting cars than any other country on earth.

Given this fact, it may be a blessing in disguise that few Americans will be able to easily follow the discussion or make much of the 163 maps, to say nothing of all the graphs, charts, and tables. This is not because of any lack of concision or clarity on the book's part. It's because few Americans will have the deep familiarity with Britain's geography that *Bankrupt Britain* assumes. Nor is it that the book fails to provide guides; on the contrary, it opens with 21 maps (many with satellite locator maps) that situate Britain's towns and cities on the population cartogram that is the atlas's "base map," its towns and cities, government office regions, local authorities, local education authorities, ancient counties, parliamentary constituencies, fire and rescue service areas, and primary-care trust and local health board areas. Everything's included, and it's attractively laid out. It's just that, quite aside from the continual switching from one set of areas to another (called for by the data sources, which are meticulously spelled out), a stranger can't have a local's grasp of the connotations of the Tower Hamlets, say, *vis-à-vis* Kensington and Chelsea. Much of what would immediately be taken up by the local is invisible to a stranger.

The disguised blessing this confers is the ease with which an American can substitute Compton and Beverly Hills, and so read *Bankrupt Britain* as *Bankrupt America*. This turns an atlas of intimate particularity into one of transcendent relevance. Certainly I read *Bankrupt Britain* as a description of the situation in the United States, and whereas I missed much (because I had no idea what to

substitute for the Chiltern district, for Oswestry), I'm pretty sure I usually got the point. This way of reading often rendered the maps irrelevant (because opaque). Invariably, for me, the meat was in the text, but the maps and the data behind them were always at hand to quash – if with some effort – any quibbling doubt that things could really be so bad. Or so venal.

For it's the venality that gets under Dorling's and Thomas's skins, the venality that so inequitably distributes Britain's still considerable wealth among its fabulously wealthy and its desperately poor. A typical sentence reads, "The chapter begins with the very richest of homeowners, because the continued protection of their wealth is the key to understanding why so many others are still so poorly housed" (p. 28). A sentence like this would be cried up as "class warfare" in the United States, where talk of inequality is verboten. But of course it's *Bankrupt Britain's* very point that class warfare is precisely what the rich have been waging against the poor. The atlas's brilliance is to unfold the *consequences* of this warfare on housing, politics, morality, mental health, and environmental harm. With respect to under-age sex, for example, the authors point out that "commentators on under-age sex often suggest that rates in Britain are high because of some failing of parents or teachers to instruct their children properly, including in the mechanics of sex and contraception" (p. 75). Dorling and Thomas ask, What if they weren't so poor? "These commentators tend to routinely ignore the link between high rates of inequality and child poverty in the UK, as compared to countries like the Netherlands, and the high rates of under-age conception in the UK which result" (p. 75). Of course, as the rich have always said, the poor only get what they deserve.

I especially like the twists in their arguments that distinguish Dorling and Thomas as serious thinkers, not policy wonks. Their first example of antisocial behaviour is not writing graffiti but "claiming loudly that benefit claimants are scroungers in a time of economic austerity"; this, they suggest, "is not unlike shouting fire in a crowded cinema and causing a stampede" (p. 76). Of course they're right, but then this is precisely why Tories have been making that claim as loudly as they can, they and their US clones. Even closer to my heart is the atlas's consideration of cars under the heading of "environmental harm." Usually the effect of the car gets hidden under the rubric "pollution," where it can be conflated with every other source, but in *Bankrupt Britain* it starts with the carnage. Pollution from auto exhaust in Britain is terrible, but "by age 10, cars are the greatest danger to children when all risk categories are compared" (p. 113), and, of course, taking all ages into account, cars kill 30,000 people a year. That's 10 times as many as were killed in the 9/11 attacks. Those changed our lives immediately. Why don't we give cars the same attention? And that's just the carnage. There's still the

pollution, the destruction of urban life, and all the rest of it. “The car damages our local and global environment more significantly than any other recent invention,” Dorling and Thomas note (p. 113). I add, “Too right!”

Okay, I didn’t appreciate the maps, what came to a numbing repetition of the population cartogram, especially since, given the salience of London, the maps bulged in a queasy way, like a hernia about to pop. But what *Bankrupt Britain* proves is that in an atlas it’s the content that matters most, not how pretty the maps are. The maps here sign, seal, and deliver the point that income inequality is turning Britain into bankrupt mess, a dire kind of twenty-first-century hellhole. And who needs pretty maps to deliver that message?

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A MALLEABLE MAP: GEOGRAPHIES OF RESTORATION IN CENTRAL JAPAN, 1600–1912 / Karen Wigen. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010. Pp. 340. ISBN-13 978-0520-2591-88 (cloth), US\$45.00, £30.95.

Karen Wigen’s delightfully well written and structurally integrated book *A Malleable Map* examines different modes of mapping in Japan. There is special focus on the province of Shinano, and it is at the provincial scale that Wigen’s focus remains throughout the book.

Wigen follows Matthew Edney’s (1997) tripartite division of mapping into chorographic, charting, and topographic modes, noting how each of these modes gradually comes into being in Japan, evolving complex layers in which Shinano is both foregrounded pictorially (in earlier times) and buried beneath burgeoning mathematical cartographies (in more modern times). Wigen is very careful to demonstrate that she is avoiding teleological and “progress”-driven narratives that would see the story of cartography devolve into a history of constant improvement and shedding of outmoded technologies.

The book is divided into two parts, with three chapters in each. Part 1 looks at maps of Shinano as they fit into the larger picture of Japan’s shifting landscape of power through eras in which locally controlled *shogun*, *daimyo*, and fiefdom power structures eventually give way to national- and global-level restoration, centralization, and modernization efforts.

After a very useful Introduction, the reader jumps into chapter 1 led by a series of beautiful original and reproduced black and white maps. The original maps are clear and concise, while reproductions are legible and well integrated into the text. We see here the beginnings in Japan, viewed from the perspective of Shinano, of a quest for identity and power not yet conscious of itself on the world stage.

Chapter 2 zooms in on Shinano itself, focusing on the self-construction of this province as exemplified in and through

its maps and nascent cartographies. Here is a fascinating discussion of what Wigen calls the “neighbor’s-eye view” and the “river’s-eye view,” two evolving Edo-era mapping conventions that resulted in very specific province-level spatial identities.

Chapter 2 is separated from chapter 3 by a series of beautifully reproduced colour maps, which are referred to throughout Part 1. These maps enhance the value of *The Malleable Map* and make it a much more enjoyable journey, adding vibrancy to an already vibrant text.

Chapter 3 charts the entry of Japan into the world picture and the ensuing reaction to Japan’s opening to modernity, reflected in Meiji-era restoration maps. Military and state mapping projects come to the fore as the driving forces in the standardization and alignment of cartographic conventions in line with European and Western standards.

Part 2 takes the focus off maps, although the focus remains spatial through various documents and texts ranging from gazetteers to educational textbooks to newspapers. There is explicit reference here to both Thongchai Winichakul’s *Siam Mapped* (which is lauded theoretically, but in the end judged inapplicable to the case of Japan because of insurmountable differences between Thailand and Japan) and Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities*.

Chapter 4 looks at gazetteers poetically, that is, from the perspective of form. Wigen’s analysis of categories reveals much about the evolving priorities of Japanese governmentalities aimed at calculating, and slowly beginning to quantify, attributes of territories, resources, and populations. Chapter 5 examines educational texts as they move from pedantic tomes of rote learning to more child-centred and skills-based competencies aimed at providing knowledge foundations for the development of industry in Japan.

Chapter 6 shows how newspapers address collective spatial identities in a much less unified manner than previous chorographic media did. The voices of individual writers aligned in time (the newspaper is daily) address a collective audience with a collection of images, texts, and figures. The present era of multimedia and geo-Web maps and media is faintly adumbrated here.

My only hesitation about this book is the emphasis it places upon the ephemerality of maps and mapping. This tendency, possibly inherited from Edney (1997, 57–58), relates to the division of mapping into *incorporating* and *inscribing* map cultures. While both can be present within the same mapping process, the former (incorporating) is associated with indigenous mapping, while the latter (inscribing) is usually linked to colonial, state, or corporate ventures.

The problem arises when Wigen, toward the middle and end of Part 1, begins to stress that certain mapping modes remain as traces beneath newer modes. It is at this point that both Wigen and Edney (1997, 59) find themselves on