

## **Review: A Climate of Injustice: Global Inequality, North-South Politics, and Climate Policy**

By J. Timmons Roberts and Bradley C. Parks

Reviewed by Byron Anderson

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J. Timmons Roberts and Bradley C. Parks. *A Climate of Injustice: Global Inequality, North-South Politics, and Climate Policy*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2007. xi, 404 pp. ISBN: 978-0-262-68161-2 (paperback); US\$26.00. Printed on recycled paper.

In studies conducted from 1990 to 1998, the World Bank established that 94 percent of the world's disaster deaths occurred in developing countries, and that when geographically plotted these deaths showed a major North-South divide. Roberts, Professor of Sociology and Director of the Mellon Environmental Studies Program at the College of William and Mary, and Parks, Development Policy Officer in the Department of Policy and International Relations at the Millennium Challenge Corporation, examine broad patterns in climate disasters over the last two decades focusing on hydrometeorological disasters, including windstorms, drought, floods, and heat waves.

The authors attempt to synthesize theories, examining both political causes and social and historical determinants of vulnerability to climate disasters. Authority is enhanced throughout by referencing one or more of the twenty-eight indices used that present intervening variables in climate change, such as the Total Carbon Emissions by Nation, Gini Index of Income Inequality, and GDP per Capita. From these indices, disasters are modeled, using multivariate analysis and correlations, standardized regression coefficients, and other rubrics. Synthesizing theories and modeling disasters, while effective, may be suspect to some researchers and challenging to lay readers.

The book's premise is that "the issue of global climate change is fundamentally about injustice and inequality," causing poor countries to suffer "the effect of a problem to which they contributed virtually nothing" (p. 97). There is a bias against rich countries when examining causes of climate change, and

perhaps rightfully so. Many examples are provided where undeveloped nations have suffered far high rates of death and homelessness from climate disasters than developed nations.

Recommendations are given for finding our way out of the dilemma. The most important and understudied factor in international environmental cooperation "is the level of trust among developed and developing nations" (p. 40). The climate of mistrust surrounding international negotiations is an obstacle in need of change. Disaster relief money should be spent on creating economic opportunities and preparing governments and citizens for disasters. Other variables to be considered in addressing climate changes include, for example, freedom of the press, property rights, and income inequality. Climate change cannot be addressed solely by designing better treaties or giving more aid.

Few works have combined political/economic analysis with attention to environmental implications, but this one does so in a thought-provoking and informative manner. The text is enhanced with appendices, notes, references and an index. The work is part of The MIT Press series, Global Environmental Accord: Strategies for Sustainability and Institutional Innovation. Recommended for interested individuals and collections in Environmental and Development Studies.

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