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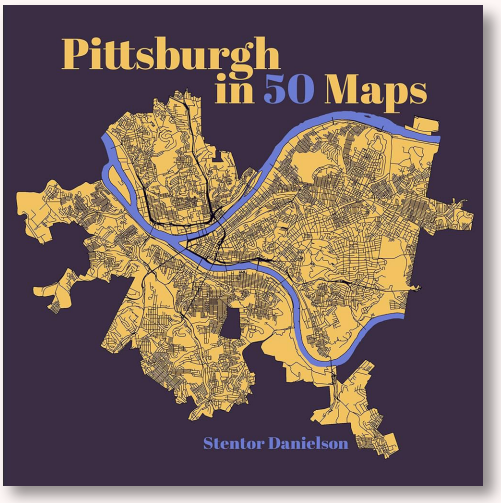

PITTSBURGH IN 50 MAPS

By Stentor Danielson

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Review by: Quinn E. Cowing

Right off the bat, *Pittsburgh in 50 Maps* frames its examination of the city with a quote from the cartoon *Calvin and Hobbes* (5):

> Calvin: "I wonder where we go when we die."
> Hobbes: "Pittsburgh?"
> Calvin: "You mean if we're good or if we're bad?"
>
> (Bill Watterson, 1985)

One of the newest installments in Belt Publishing's *50 Maps* series (including *Boston in 50 Maps* and *Detroit in 50 Maps*), this book seeks to show you what it is that makes Pittsburgh unique through a series of maps on a wide array of topics. In fifty-six maps, this book reveals that there is more to Pittsburgh than steel and stairs.

In full transparency, one of my best friends has just moved to Pittsburgh, so I read this book primarily to learn more about the city I'm destined to visit in the near future. While *Pittsburgh in 50 Maps* is well-suited to the needs of a soon-to-be Pittsburgh tourist, it is also a perfect starting place for anyone generally curious about the city.

The book is divided into four broadly thematic sections. "Situating the City" uses maps of Indigenous displacement, geology, and shifting urban and neighborhood boundaries to contextualize Pittsburgh. "Getting Around the City" shows how the city's locals—known as Yinzers—move about, with maps of Pittsburgh's highways, numerous bridges, and dense networks of stairways. One map (61) details a decades-long dispute over a single, inconveniently placed parking spot on one of the city's major thoroughfares. The third section, "Communities and Neighborhoods," takes a deep dive into demographics and social inequalities, with maps of neighborhoods, gentrification, tree cover, and food deserts. "Places and People in the City" is the final section, and it focuses, unsurprisingly, on the locations of a variety of places of interest, many associated with prominent residents and visitors to the city.

In the first section, we learn about the land upon which Pittsburgh was founded, and how the city developed. We also get a first glance into the culture that grew and evolved with the city. Today's city lies nestled in a fertile landscape at the confluence of three rivers—known nowadays as the Allegheny, Monongahela, and Ohio—an area that has long been inhabited by numerous Indigenous groups. In a story similar to that of other burgeoning cities in early American history, an influx of white settlers forced native peoples from their ancestral lands. The rivers that fed the surrounding habitat and Indigenous communities became highways for transporting iron ore and coal to fuel the rapidly growing steel industry, one which polluted those same rivers, but also brought Pittsburgh to its peak population. As the population grew, so did the boundaries of the city—reaching its current extent in 1951. While this growth trajectory is shared by numerous US cities, Pittsburgh stands alone with the unique spelling of its name. In the late nineteenth century, the federal

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government imposed a standardized spelling on the thirty-four US municipalities named Pittsburgh—forcing them to drop the silent h—relenting only in 1911, and only for Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

This section contains a diverse range of map types illustrating changing boundaries, landmarks, and even the aquifer underlying the city. The minimalist nature of the maps allows for easy interpretation and familiarizes you with Pittsburgh's complex outline. The map of the "City of Hills" (14–15) is a simple shaded slope map with points locating the city's highest and lowest points, as well as the steepest street in the city. The accompanying text draws a direct line from the prevalence of steep slopes in the city to the many disastrous landslides that occur there to this day. The best map in this section is a general reference map that focuses on the folk tale that Pittsburgh's famous Point State Park fountain—situated on the point of land where the Allegheny and Monongahela rivers join to become the Ohio—is fed by a secret fourth river (16–17). This map clearly outlines both the surface water drainage and the underlying aquifer that abuts the three rivers—showing that it constitutes a very real fourth water source feeding the fountain.

As a geologist, I also felt a connection to the "Coal City" map (26–27). The map's inset locates Pittsburgh's situation in the midst of a large coalfield, while the main map shows how much of the city has been mined. The accompanying text connects this broadly mined region to environmental impacts faced by the city at large: instability of the ground above abandoned mines, acid drainage from abandoned mines, and poor air quality stemming from extensive coal burning (the last of which has improved with the reduction of coal use). We also get the first look into Pittsburgh's rich culture with "Famous Firsts" on page 32. This map highlights fifteen landmarks connected to innovations made within the city, including the first motion picture theater in the world (the Nickelodeon, 1905), the first polio vaccine (Jonas Salk, 1955), and the first paramedic-staffed ambulances (Freedom House Ambulance Service—staffed entirely by African American paramedics, 1967).

Section two shows how Yinzers get around their city. While Pittsburgh used to be filled with trolleys and funiculars (called "inclines" by the Yinzers), today the city's infrastructure caters to cars. The "Ride the Trolley" map (54) compares the expanse of old trolley lines to the scant bus routes that run through the city today. One of my favorite maps from this section is the "City of Bridges" map (46–47). While at first the map seems straightforward—a map with a point for each recognized bridge—I couldn't help but think back to the topographic "City of Hills" map (14–15). Looking at the bridge map you can see that—in addition to bridges crossing the major rivers—the bridges are concentrated into corridors that follow the valleys shown on the topographic map. I also appreciated the "Pittsburgh Steps" map of all the public staircases in the city (53). These stairways, like the rail-mounted inclines, are a legacy of historic laborer commutes in the city. The factories were located along the banks of the rivers, while the workers' homes were atop the overlooking bluffs—requiring the workforce, daily, to descend slopes too steep for streets, and then climb them again at the end of their shift. The fact that so many are still in use today speaks to the resistance of the area's landscape to citification. Even as industrialization advanced urbanization in Pittsburgh, there are still places where roads physically can't—and even shouldn't—replace historic infrastructure.

Section three begins with a detailed map of the city neighborhoods (64–65), giving a brief overview before diving deeply into their people and culture. It is remarkable that ten of the city's ninety distinct neighborhoods have descriptors like "hill" or "slopes" in their name; another clear legacy of Pittsburgh's steep slopes. This is followed by a series of maps that detail gentrification and inequities that disproportionately affect both lower-income and Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities. This thematic thread opens with an anecdote about a certain property company's push to remove a beloved "there are Black people in the future" billboard that sat atop a prominent—but now closed—Black bar and music venue, and continues with maps on race and ethnicity, tree cover, food deserts (aptly called food apartheid by the author), and even "Old Houses and Lead Paint" (70). Immigration and religion also contribute significantly to the city's culture, and several maps are devoted to exploring their manifestation in the city. Evidence of early European immigrants survives in neighborhood names like "Polish Hill," and in the vast and deep-rooted Jewish community. However, the city's Chinese immigrant communities—many dating from the late 1800s—have faced systematic displacement by recent development projects. Lastly, while deep-rooted Catholic and Jewish influences are to be expected in a Rust Belt city housing European immigrants since the eighteenth century, the map "Muslim Pittsburgh" (91)

details the early and continued history of Muslims in the city—starting in 1932 with the first mosque in the US to be founded by native-born Americans.

While most of the maps in this "Communities and Neighborhoods" section are choropleth maps detailing, for example, differences in income and median age, one map stood out against the rest. I quite enjoyed the "Catholic Pittsburgh" map (88). Instead of simply identifying the locations of the many Catholic churches in the city, the map makes a point about dwindling congregations by detailing whether each Catholic church is open, vacant, demolished, or if it has been sold to nonprofits, sold to private businesses, or converted to a church of another denomination. I will use this map when, on my Pittsburgh visit, I pass by a beautiful Catholic church and wonder if it is one of the many relics of the city's rich European immigrant history that has been converted to a bar or apartment.

The final section, "Places and People in the City," details Pittsburgh's lasting legacy through the lens of labor, arts, and sports. The "Carnegie's Legacy" map on page 107 maps out twenty-seven locations throughout the city that had a connection to industrialist and philanthropist Andrew Carnegie—mostly libraries and museums he founded—while the accompanying text takes a deep dive into his complex story. While Andrew Carnegie was a man who came from very little and ultimately gave away ninety percent of his amassed wealth, he also believed that "working-class people couldn't be trusted with higher wages because they would waste them on 'indulgence of appetite' in contrast to his own enlightened altruism" (106). Air quality, one of the major impacts of the steel industry, is creatively addressed with a map of asthma rates (115). The map breaks the data down by neighborhood, making it easier to see the disproportionate effects this disease—linked to polluted air—has on low-income, predominantly Black, neighborhoods. The section also includes a map of the life and works of, and memorials to, the city's lauded playwright, August Wilson. Lastly, the long history of sports in the city is depicted with a map of all the professional teams that have called the city home. As one of the more famous Pittsburgh teams, the Steelers have their own special map showing the greatest (and most controversial) play in the history of the team (and of the NFL)—the 1972 "**Immaculate Reception**" (124).

While this book did a great job at getting me interested in all facets of Pittsburgh, some of the maps left me wanting more. Mostly due to my own curiosity, I felt like there were a lot of interesting threads dropped, lacking follow through, or just missing an explanation. Maybe it's the environmentalist in me, but I was disappointed that the book mentions a major tributary flowing past a chemical spill site but never mentions the specific chemical or any of the potential impacts. In another instance, the text accompanying the "City of Four Rivers?" map (16) references old rivers, streams, and ponds that are visible on old maps, but makes no effort to trace the whereabouts of these historical features on the accompanying map. Even if it was a (questionable) design choice to reduce map clutter, I would think that some sort of source note or bibliographic reference would be in order. That same map attempts to provide an explanation of how the famous Point State Park fountain—referred to in the book only as "the Point"—is fed by an aquifer, but the map is missing any marker of where the Point is. Similarly, many of the maps are either missing vital labels altogether, or lacking explanations for the ones that were provided. Starting at the beginning of the book, the author constantly mentions neighborhood names long before we get a map that indicates the whereabouts of that neighborhood.

Design choices prevented some of the maps from meeting their full potential. When I described the "City of Bridges" map (46–47), I noted that the bridges are concentrated into corridors that follow the valleys shown on the topographic "City of Hills" map (14–15). While I noticed this pattern, I feel this would be best presented by adding the terrain to the bridges map. In another case, the map of "Eds and Meds" (110–111) seeks to display the spread of the new industries throughout the city, and draw attention to the growing number of them that are exempt from property taxes. While the map does effectively show the locations of relevant sites, it doesn't display any evidence to support the assertion that these tax-exempt properties make up a third of the city's parcels. A basemap with each parcel owned by a tax-exempt party shaded a different color would be a simple way to show the extent of land that doesn't pay municipal property tax.

Just as some maps left me wanting more, some felt as if they didn't contribute much to this portrait of Pittsburgh. The "Sister Cities" map details the loose relationships between Pittsburgh and its twenty-one sister cities—supposedly tying Pittsburgh to the world stage (28–29). It seems to me that the "Famous Firsts" (32–33), "Carnegie's Legacy" (106–107), and "August Wilson" (120–121) maps

already do a thorough job at highlighting how Pittsburgh and Yinzers have changed the world. Likewise, "To Outer Space" (96–97) feels like a mishmash of random facts loosely melded together by the phrase "outer space." While some points are well founded—like the location of an observatory in the city—others are a bit of a reach: a borough named Mars that's not even in the same county; a high school far north of the city that an astronaut attended; and a township named Moon. I did, however, like that it presented the opportunity for the author to weave in the Seneca creation story beginning with the Sky Woman.

From maps that lay bare social inequalities, to maps that show where every dinosaur statue is located, this book excels at balancing the serious and the silly sides of Pittsburgh. I have already mentioned how one series of maps outlines the complex ways in which low-income and BIPOC communities continue to face disproportionate effects from housing degradation, air pollution, and gentrification. The author also provides productive social commentary through their examination of how local organizations, community members, and officials are addressing these and other challenges. Outstanding examples include the work of Tree Pittsburgh—an environmental nonprofit—planting trees in low-income neighborhoods (77) and proposals to turn vacant lots into affordable housing or community spaces (69). Meanwhile, the book spreads levity by making light of demonstrations of Yinzer persistence with examples ranging from a tiny city held within the city limits to the aforementioned Penn Ave parking dispute.

Looking back to Calvin's second question in the opening dialog—"[do we go to Pittsburgh] if we're good or if we're bad?"—it seems clear that the correct answer is "only if you are good." The diversity of reference and thematic maps in *Pittsburgh in 50 Maps* only begins to show that Pittsburgh can be a heavenly place for any nebby (Pittsburghese for nosey) wannabe-Yinzer that picks up this book. But, most importantly, after reading you'll be prepared for the Pittsburgh Left—or at least know one when you see it.