
BOOK REVIEW

My Los Angeles: From Economic Restructuring to Regional Urbanization by Edward W. Soja

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Beginning with the title, it is clear that Edward Soja's latest work, *My Los Angeles: From Urban Restructuring to Regional Urbanization*, is his most personal. In it, the renowned geographer-planner and cofounder of the "LA School" of urbanism invites readers to follow him on a journey through the utopic and dystopic landscape of the Southern California region. In doing so, he carries us through a summarized version of much—if not all—of his previous scholarship. In this sense, *My Los Angeles* is both a road map of Los Angeles and of the mind of its author.

Those familiar with Soja's work may be discouraged to find that there is not much new research presented here. The chapters unfold as a kind of CliffsNotes to many of the theories and insights for which he is most well known, and Soja rather heavily cites the books, articles, and even videos he has authored or contributed to should readers want a more in-depth explanation. In some cases, he has even reprinted portions of chapters from his previous books.

That said, the success of *My Los Angeles* is its ability to reify and clarify the complex theoretical underpinnings of Soja's major bodies of work. Indeed, one of the biggest criticisms of the author's publications—if not among academics, certainly among students—has been that the density of his material and occasionally daunting language renders them unapproachable. *Reading My Los Angeles* is like having Soja explain, thoroughly and carefully, what he has tried to accomplish throughout his career. In some instances, he even offers his own reflection on his writing: "In a way, I felt trapped in part 3 of *Postmetropolis*. How could I possibly meet the ambitious objectives of an unbounded and almost infinitely complex thirdspace approach?" In *My Los Angeles*, we are not so much reading Soja, as Soja is reading to us.

For those new to Soja, it is worth knowing that he is an avid contributor to "new regionalism," which emphasizes studying urban phenomena at the regional level, or, as Soja says, "between the local and the global, the macro and the micro, endogenous and exogenous forces." This in-between area of inquiry focuses on the big picture. Thus, in *My Los Angeles* we are carried around the urban landscape of Southern California as if flying a helicopter,

touching down only briefly here and there to view what Soja feels is most important to “taking apart” Los Angeles: the Bonaventure Hotel, Orange County, the San Fernando Valley, and Occupy LA, among others. This is not to say that *My Los Angeles* only gives us a glimpse of the surface. The depth of social and historical context Soja provides is extraordinary. As is evident from his detailed accounts of local social movements and political battles, Soja’s roots run deep in his city.

Throughout Soja’s work is his insistence that what has happened to Los Angeles—with regards to urban restructuring and regional urbanization—is crucial, because the same is likely to occur in cities around the world. He is quite adamant on this, calling Los Angeles one of the most “evocative, representative, and trendsetting urban regions in the world.” If you are unfamiliar with the “LA School” of urbanism, or if your perceptions of LA are limited to sunny beaches and Hollywood Boulevard, it may take more than just *My Los Angeles* to convince you. However, if you approach this book and, as is intended, take the time to explore the plethora of references (which include film, literature, news media, as well as academic research), then Soja’s likening of LA to Jorge Luis Borges’s Aleph becomes clear, as a “space that contains all other spaces.” ■

REFERENCES

Soja, Edward W. *From Economic Restructuring to Regional Urbanization*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2014. 296 pp. ISBN: 978-0-520281-74-5.