



Pests in the City: Flies, Bedbugs, Cockroaches, and Rats

Dawn Day Biehler, William Cronon (Foreword)

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From tenements to alleyways to latrines, twentieth-century American cities created spaces where pests flourished and people struggled for healthy living conditions. In *Pests in the City*, Dawn Day Biehler argues that the urban ecologies that supported pests were shaped not only by the physical features of cities but also by social inequalities, housing policies, and ideas about domestic space.

Community activists and social reformers strived to control pests in cities such as Washington, DC, Chicago, Baltimore, New York, and Milwaukee, but such efforts fell short when authorities blamed families and neighborhood culture for infestations rather than attacking racial segregation or urban disinvestment. Pest-control campaigns tended to target public or private spaces, but pests and pesticides moved readily across the porous boundaries between homes and neighborhoods.

This story of flies, bedbugs, cockroaches, and rats reveals that such creatures thrived on lax code enforcement and the marginalization of the poor, immigrants, and people of color. As Biehler shows, urban pests have remained a persistent problem at the intersection of public health, politics, and environmental justice, even amid promises of modernity and sustainability in American cities.

Watch the trailer: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GG9PFxLY7K4&a...>

Pests in the City: Flies, Bedbugs, Cockroaches, and Rats Details

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From Reader Review Pests in the City: Flies, Bedbugs, Cockroaches, and Rats for online ebook

Rhonda says

4 stars for effort: this book reads like an extended academic article yet makes the point that the scourge of urban pests (rats, roaches and bed bugs) is not separate from issues of racism, classism, politics, etc. I learned a lot about these vermin-companions of city residents in Baltimore and other cities. Fascinating. Kudos to the writer for her research and expose.

Nathan says

This is one of those books that makes me realize that Goodreads really needs to allow half-star increments. This one gets 4 stars for content but maybe 3 stars for presentation. A potentially fascinating topic which really should have pushed all my buttons, existing as it does at the intersection of social justice, ecology and public health. Some good investigation of the tensions that arise at various social (tenant/landlord/government, public/private), geographic and economic boundaries when confronted by animals that don't recognize them and that can, despite our ongoing efforts, almost effortlessly cross them. Also nicely highlights all the progress we haven't made -- we've bred a lot of pesticide-resistant pests, but the only one of the four that has been largely eliminated as a nuisance was dealt with by accident rather than by any sort of scientific pest management techniques. Lots of interesting stuff here.

And yet it's a pretty dry read -- kind of a slog even at only around 200 pages. The first half of the book comprises a chapter each dedicated to the four animals mentioned in the title, and the first three especially are very repetitive, both within and between the chapters, often hitting the same themes and even the exact same points over and over again. I can't help but think a better structure, maybe a chronological approach or thematically-grouped chapters, could have helped made this a more enjoyable read.

I also would have liked more information, maybe, on the natural history of the species in question and how they have adapted to cohabitation with humans -- the book covers much of the 20th century, but it would have been interesting to get an idea of what the life cycle of these animals looked like before they entered the urban environment. Where did bedbugs live before they lived under beds? What was the cockroach's niche before hollow-walled buildings became popular?

In the end, a slightly dry book and a little more limited in scope than I would have preferred, but covers a lot of interesting ground.

Jeanette says

Some of the information was helpful and informative. But not the majority. I was actually fairly disappointed in the proportion of description/discovery/cures, history and pattern, or attempted cures to the proportion of politico speechifying for her own nuance and opinion in this book.

I've seen Norway rats overcome a clean and uncrowded neighborhood and also have seen that scenario

reversed. Vermin can establish in just a year or two and it takes 5 more to rid. And it does take poisons. Individuals need to absolutely be super vigilant over placements of garbage or any wood, cardboard or plastic throw-away products. It's not always "the landlord's" fault. Complete cooperation to bug extermination is not always probable, let alone possible. The best parts of the book were the illustrations to fuming, methods of inspection etc. Constant survey and open contact (all doors/closets/cabinets open) is imperative for cooperation.

Putting public housing in high rises is the worst of the worst. And not just for human association, but for this issue- absolutely. This vermin kills more people within dense cities, always has, than the violence you hear so much more about. Accepting pests as part of "life" or your living arrangements is just not an acceptable situation, despite "guilt" or "shame" in the procuring of solutions.

It truly bothers me when terms such as "urban disinvestment" and other erudite phrases of "marginalization" are repeated so often. Especially when millions and millions of dollars are spent in disproportion to other, sometimes poorer too, or more densely populated neighborhoods. The bugs and pests don't care about anything but having the prime environments for their species and stomachs. And you have to vigilantly deny those conditions and transport. And I disagree with some of her other "cultural" comments, as well. Like Asian Carp or Emerald Ash Bore or bedbugs of a new breed and endurance level (be they introduced by accident or not)- habits of exchange or cultural norm for one culture is not or may not be present or "norm" in others.
