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Sprawl: A Compact History

Nonfiction

Sprawl: A Compact History
ROBERT **BRUEGMANN**. Univ. of Chicago,
\$27.50 (288p) ISBN 0-226-07690-3

After 70 years of suffering the slings and arrows of academic criticism, suburban life finally finds a compelling defender in *Bruegmann*. A professor of art history and urban planning at the University of Illinois-Chicago, *Bruegmann* demonstrates that urban sprawl is a natural process as old as the world's oldest cities, wherein large metropolises reach a point of maturity and those with financial means escape the congestion and high prices of city life. What has changed over the past century, the author says, is that an increasing number of citizens have achieved the financial means to participate in what was once an exclusive luxury of the wealthy. Bruegmann acknowledges that the effects on cities are not always positive, but he also demonstrates that many of the criticisms of suburban sprawl--e.g., that it is culturally deficient and environmentally noxious--are greatly exaggerated and ignore the very real benefits sprawl offers in terms of privacy, mobility and choice. With his disdain for doomsday predictions and his disregard for the academic consensus, *Bruegmann's* thorough analysis is sure to be controversial, but a shot of controversy ought to do the field, and public dialogue about it, some good. 25 b&w illus., 5 maps. Agent, Carl Brandt. (Oct.)