



Toxic Tourism: Rhetorics of Pollution, Travel, and Environmental Justice

Pelluzo, Phaedra C.

[University of Alabama Press](#), 2007

320 pages

Reviewed by: [Christopher Stanley](#), [Elmira College](#)

If the reader of this book is already familiar with toxic tours or the environmental justice movement in general, he or she is likely to come away with great further understanding and appreciation of the topic. If the reader, however, has only a slight background in the subject matter, he or she is likely to find this book tedious until the middle of Chapter 3. However, despite the numerous philosophical metaphors that interrupt the text and the paragraphs of transcribed conversations, this book was an eye-opening read.

The book is divided into five chapters, which could easily be addressed in two parts: Chapters 1 and 2 are the author's version of an introduction to the topic at hand. Terms are defined and explained, and cultural perceptions and historical trends are addressed. Chapters 3 through 5 deal specifically with the experience of toxic tours, and are clearly the most interesting and revealing pieces of the work.

The author begins with an examination of tourism and the perception of tourists by those that live at the tour destination. She discusses the "the gaze", which is, in effect, what we as tourists inevitably do wherever we travel. She also spends a great deal of time expounding upon the body's sensory perceptions during a tour – how sights and smells impact us and influence our perception of the surroundings *and the people in them*. The author further discusses the "baggage" that comes with toxic areas, and society's perceptions of how to solve the toxic problems of the world. Particularly enlightening is her analysis of the fact that we as people are more captivated by a "toxic superhero" like John Travolta from *A Civil Action* than a film where locals come together to solve the problems in their own communities.

The meat of the book, however, comes in the second half, when the author writes about her experiences on two toxic tours – one in Louisiana and the other in San Francisco. In San Francisco, the author goes on a tour with the Toxic Links Coalition (TLC). She tells the story of TLC and how this organization is fighting to change the hegemony of the institution of National Breast Cancer Awareness Month (NBCAM). This institution, although a worthy one, TLC argues, is controlled by corporate sponsors (particularly AstraZeneca) that produce pollution that causes cancer. AstraZeneca then turns around and sells expensive medication, *benefiting* from *causing* the cancer itself. The author does an excellent job of analyzing this debate and framing the rhetoric for the reader.

Toxic Tourism reads like an “indie film” on paper – it’s tough starting out, but well worth it to finish. The reader will come away with a fuller knowledge and understanding of the rhetorical battle for environmental justice in our country and the role toxic tours play in that battle. It takes about six hours to read total, and although time with any book is well spent, this work is particularly so.

The material in this book is best suited as an introduction for a student that is considering a course of study related to the environment and sociology. This student might be particularly interested in courses that deal with the history of environmentalism, political science classes on environmental policy, or sociology classes that deal with the environment in some way. A combination of the aforementioned classes would serve to prepare a student well for reading this book.