

## New Titles

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for the evolution of social groups. But Wilson's focus remains on the humans, with urban biodiversity being discussed primarily in terms of its value for human psychological health.

Appealing personal stories of the citizens of Binghamton are woven together with those of scientists throughout Wilson's broad narrative, but trouble arises when these individual stories are filtered by the author's overarching vision in ways that distort their essence. I was particularly struck by the tale of the student Omar Eldakar. Wilson depicts Omar as a "street-smart" minority kid, who performed poorly in grade school, excelled at athletics, exhibited antisocial traits, but grew (under the good professor's benevolent influence) into a brilliant scholar of human social behavior and evolution. All this sounds great, until you contemplate Omar's background. He is also the well-loved son of well-educated Egyptian parents. His mother is an engineer with a PhD; his father is a caring parent who imparted his love for biology to his son and migrated to the United States for a better life. This profile does not exactly fit the stereotype of a street-smart minority kid. Could Omar's poor performance on standardized tests not simply be a result of being raised within a different cultural background rather than of innate (or culturally conditioned) Machiavellian tendencies?

Overall, the real strength of *The Neighborhood Project* is its detailed depiction of Wilson's ongoing experiment of the BNP. Given the urgency of social and environmental problems facing humanity these days, any new experimental approach must be welcomed, but its performance must also be closely observed and measured using the naturalistic scientific methodology championed, but not rigorously applied, in this book. If science works hand in hand with community development, so much the better for us egghead professors searching for implementation of our theories—but only if we are not too wedded to them.

Karl Marx (1886) observed, "The philosophers have only interpreted the

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world, in various ways; the point is to change it." Evolutionary biologists have only recently begun to interpret the city, and in doing so, many are also beginning to change it, because in the city, where most of us now live, it is possible—even necessary—to engage in philosophy and action at the same time. We need both a deeper understanding of urban and human social systems and ways to make a better world for ourselves and our fellow life forms. We must, however, also guard against the hubris of thinking that our particular disciplinary approach holds the key (or the commandments) to unlocking human potential when a diversity of tools, perspectives, and policies may be more adaptive in a heterogeneous world.

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