

IMAGINING SEATTLE

Social Values in Urban Governance

SERIN D. HOUSTON

"How do the normative policy goals of sustainability, creativity, and social justice end up deepening racialized and class-based inequities in a progressive, values-driven city? Houston's searching ethnographic and narrative analysis highlights the deep impacts of racism, whiteness, and classism that permeate urban governance and how they are accentuated by neoliberalism." —Julian Agyeman, professor of urban and environmental policy and planning at Tufts University

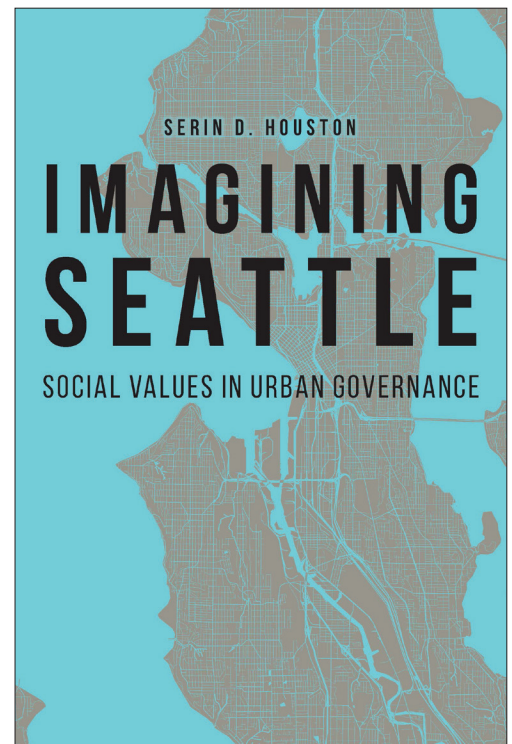
"*Imagining Seattle* helps us imagine our own cities and how they must appear to those left out of decision-making and suffering from inequities." —Wayne Feiden, *Journal of Planning Literature*

"This important and impeccably researched book lays bare the challenges that confront cities like Seattle that aspire to be genuinely progressive places." —Steve Herbert, Mark Torrance Professor of law, societies, and justice and professor of geography at the University of Washington—Seattle

Imagining Seattle dives into some of the most pressing and compelling aspects of contemporary urban governance in the United States. Serin D. Houston uses a case study of Seattle to shed light on how ideas about environmentalism, privilege, oppression, and economic growth have become entwined in contemporary discourse and practice in American cities. Seattle has, by all accounts, been hugely successful in cultivating amenities that attract a creative class. But policies aimed at burnishing Seattle's liberal reputation often unfold in ways that further disadvantage communities of color and the poor, complicating the city's claims to progressive politics.

Through ethnographic methods and a geographic perspective, Houston explores a range of recent initiatives in Seattle, including the designation of a new cultural district near downtown, the push to charge for disposable shopping bags, and the advent of training about institutional racism for municipal workers. Looking not just at what these policies say but at how they work in practice, she finds that opportunities for social justice, sustainability, and creativity are all constrained by the prevalence of market-oriented thinking and the classism and racism that seep into the architecture of many programs and policies. Houston urges us to consider how values influence actions within urban governance and emphasizes the necessity of developing effective conditions for sustainability, creativity, and social justice in this era of increasing urbanization.

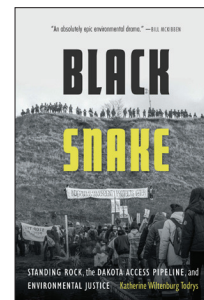
Serin D. Houston is an associate professor of geography and international relations at Mount Holyoke College.



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