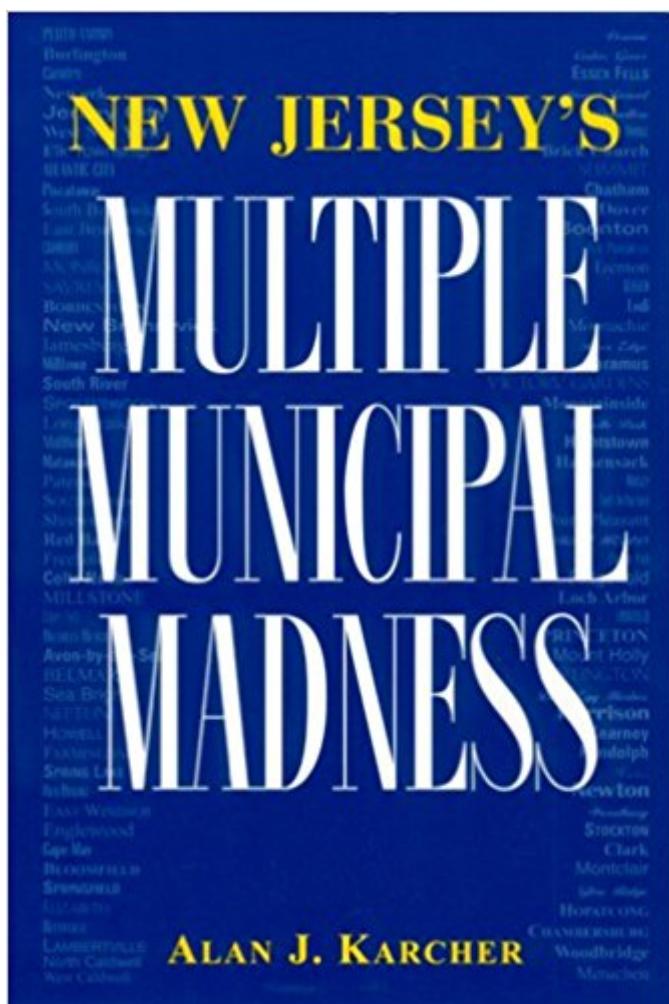


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New Jersey's Multiple Municipal Madness



Synopsis

A critical look at how and why the boundary lines of New Jersey's 566 municipalities were drawn, pointing to the irrationality of these excessive divisions. Alan Karcher looks at the history and high cost of New Jersey's multiple municipalities. He investigates the economic considerations, political pressures, and personal agendas that created the bizarre configurations dividing the Garden State, while analyzing the public policies that allowed and even encouraged the formation of new municipalities. Karcher also examines the political dynamics that thwarted every effort of New Jersey metropolises to join the front ranks of major American cities. Karcher identifies the major motivations behind the unparalleled experience of New Jersey's municipal multiplication. He delves deeply into the primary causes of new lines being drawn, such as road appropriations, the location of a railroad station, control of a local school district, the regulation of alcohol sales, and the preservation of exclusivity prior to the acceptance of zoning. He also assesses the present situation and what has happened in the past 60 years since the municipal multiplication madness ceased, calling on elected officials to confront reality and correct yesterday's excesses. The genesis of the present political map of the state is a story that while interesting is not always charming, while fascinating is far from edifying. Little in the history can be called quaint. Rather it is a story of separation and exclusion, of division and greed, of preservation of prerogatives and prejudices. It is a story that supports the conclusion that these lines are rarely the product of chance, rather they were drawn by politicians with very human foibles and frailties, and with very narrow agendas-agendas that have proven to be egregiously expensive for today's taxpayers. Alan Karcher, the former Speaker of the New Jersey Assembly during the activist 1980s, currently practices municipal law in Middlesex County. He represents the third generation of his family to serve as a member of the New Jersey State Legislature.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

ALAN KARCHER, the former Speaker of the New Jersey Assembly during the activist 1980s, currently practices municipal law in Middlesex County. He represents the third generation of his family to serve as a member of the New Jersey State Legislature.

It was okay, but it wasn't what I expected. I thought the book would address more of how tax money is wasted by both municipal and state levels of government. It read more like a history book highlighting various cities, railroad depots, school districts, dry towns, etc. in NJ going back to the 1800's. I was expecting more up to date information from the past Assemblyman.

Multiple Multiple Madness on the Kindle Version is a steal. The price is great as well as the viewing. The viewing online and on my mobile app is perfect for when I'm in class.

New Jersey's Multiple Municipal MadnessThe title is question-begging. The "madness" is the result of subdivision of governments by and for the people of New Jersey in order to attain a political goal. The 'Introduction' says municipal boundaries were drawn for personal and economic reasons. The 'Index' does not contain the entry "Company Town", even though it is mentioned in the text (as in *Helmetta*). Karcher does not mention how the 13 counties in 1776 became 21 counties in the 20th century. This was done for the right reasons: the people voted for it. In other states counties were created as the population increased so as to keep a manageable area. (Laura Ingalls Wilder mentions this in one of her books.) Claiming that 200 of the municipalities have small tax bases also ignores why that was not a problem under the 1844 NJ Constitution (p.4). Chapter 1 concludes with the 8 reasons they created municipalities. Karcher avoids the policies of NJ's power elite, such as the lack of Initiative & Referendum, the 1947 Constitution, etc. Any law to allow solving the problems would require a constitutional change (as in "mortmain" Chapter 2). The example of New York City as over-consolidation is due to its power elite's wish to have the greatest population in the country (p.18). Why would anyone want this for any state? Chapter 3 explains how one large township is now nine separate municipalities. Sectional conflicts created Monroe Township (p.21). Taxes also

caused conflicts (p.23). When the War Department prohibited alcohol in townships, Sayreville changed to a "borough" (p.31). Chapter 4 tells how Shrewsbury Township became 75 separate towns. Some municipalities originated from private real-estate developments (Spring Lake, Deal). Sectional conflicts, alcohol prohibition, and local school control led to this fragmentation. 'Part II' goes into more detail on issues that caused fragmentation. [Are these unique to NJ?] 'Part III' discusses the factors that prevented consolidation of the largest cities. The New England rule was to base governments on townships; in most other states it was based on counties (with multiple small villages). Karcher's envy of Connecticut and Rhode Island is not explained (p.137). The "bias" was to choose an agrarian society over an urban society (p.138). Was that for lower costs? The state law limiting the amount that a town can borrow is correct (p.139). Can we trust a politician like Alexander Hamilton (p.140)? Karcher blames the politicians on page 144, but don't they just act for the power elite? Chapter 13 provides a post-mortem on the city of Camden (pp.160-162). Chapter 14 lists the missed opportunities of Newark on pages 175-176. Chapter 15 tells the problems of Jersey City (pp.189-190). [Could the power elite have take a bribe to cripple Jersey City?] 'Part IV' asks about correcting past mistakes. Karcher lists the advantages of local municipal government: more accountable, more responsive, allows more political power, a sense of place, testing for aspiring leaders (p.202). Chapter 17 has the 'Reasons for Change'. Suburban shopping and office malls were designed by Big Oil to sell automobiles and gasoline. They could be limited to locations along public transportation lines (buses not trolleys). They could be required to provide for housing as well as parking spaces. Suggested solutions are in Chapter 18. Karcher believes NJ should have about 200 municipalities having over 40,000 people, but doesn't explain what the trade-offs would be. Perhaps Karcher's hidden agenda is on page 217: privatization of local services! Forcing people to pay more for these services is not a solution for high costs. A ruling elite that controls the political party machines will do nothing that lessens their power, money, and control. Can reshuffling the townships eliminate the graft and corruption found in the power elite? If not, where's the cure? What I learned from this book is that most of NJ's problems were caused by state government and its ruling class. Those who benefit from these oppressive policies will not correct them. Nobody should assume that everything in this book is "The Truth". Consolidation will NOT solve the problems of high property taxes which was caused by the 1947 Constitution by design ("assessed value" replaced "true value"). Florham Park was created for lower property taxes. Why doesn't this work today? Delaware has 853 thousand people in 57 municipalities and 3 counties (1,954 sq miles). New Jersey has 8,725 thousand people in 566 municipalities and 21 counties (7,407 sq miles). Karcher's claim about the number of municipalities is thus proven false

and dishonest. The bigger the municipality the greater the taxes. Karcher's solution contradicts reality. New York state has over twice the population of NJ, over twice as many counties, and about nine times the area in square miles. Their number of municipalities is about double. Yet they do not have the highest property taxes in the nation. Anyone want to explain?

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