

Review: Review

Reviewed Work(s): Why the Garden Club Couldn't Save Youngstown: The Transformation of the Rust Belt by Sean Safford

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The American labor movement has suffered severe setbacks in recent decades. The one area in which it seemingly maintained a stronghold was in the public sector. However, even that doesn't seem to be the case anymore as public officials, including those in Pennsylvania, have sought or are seeking concessions, wage freezes and rollbacks, and increased contributions to health, welfare, and pension funds. Indeed, one needs only look at the actions of Wisconsin's governor and assembly to see that public sector workers have been under attack. Yet they have fired back with much vehemence that has even gained some public support. Indeed, *AFSCME's Philadelphia Story* shows how public sector workers banded together in the wake of opposition much like public sector workers are attempting to do so today. Perhaps the author sums up it up best when he states, "AFSCME's Philadelphia story is a fitting one in this historic city of hope, telling how a set of poor men and their families forged what would become the most powerful working people's organization in the nation."

*AFSCME's Philadelphia Story* is extremely well researched and contains a comprehensive bibliography that includes author interviews with key players and workers. The book's numerous photographs, many of which come from Temple University's Archives, enhance the story. In addition, Ryan writes with an ease that makes the sometimes complicated world of labor history easier to follow and understand. The book is highly recommended for those interested in urban affairs, labor history, public policy, political science, and, of course, history. It is, indeed, an excellent contribution to a slowly growing literature on twentieth- and early twenty-first-century Pennsylvania history.

KENNETH C. WOLENSKY

Sean Safford. *Why the Garden Club Couldn't Save Youngstown: The Transformation of the Rust Belt*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009. Pp. xviii, 224. Charts, graphs, appendixes, notes, bibliography, index. Cloth, \$29.95.)

Why is it that some cities in the so-called American Rust Belt appear to have successfully weathered the crippling industrial declines of the 1980s, while other cities remain trapped within a cycle of infrastructural decay and population

loss? Despite a push in the canon of social history to move “beyond the ruins” of deindustrialization, historians still seek a method to explore ways in which communities successfully or unsuccessfully economically remake themselves in the postindustrial era. Sean Safford, in *Why the Garden Club Couldn't Save Youngstown*, utilizes social capital theory to conceptualize how leaders within societal networks, such as those within industry and civic organizations, ultimately shaped the reactions and resilience of the communities of Allentown, Pennsylvania, and Youngstown, Ohio. In turn, Safford's argument devises a new way of investigating economic and social histories that moves beyond the average declension narrative. However, he oversimplifies regional context; his assumption that Allentown and Youngstown are geographically similar misleads readers and, therefore, reveals a broad gap in the author's work. However, due to the significant way that the author defends his claim using social capital theory, *Why the Garden Club Couldn't Save Youngstown* contributes to the existing literature on postindustrialization.

Within the first chapter Safford introduces his readers to the common thread that links Allentown, Youngstown, and other American Rust Belt cities—fear of “*hollowing out*” and “[becoming] shells of their once prosperous pasts” (1). Basing his analysis in social capital theory, Safford argues the community leadership ultimately fueled that fear and, hence, generated the frameworks within which Allentown prospered and Youngstown stagnated. For instance, the author describes Allentown as a place where “community” was defined by a solid employer/employee relationship, whereas in Youngstown “community” consisted of ethnic enclaves without bridges, such as economic wealth, to span the cultural gap. By discovering how the two communities developed, Safford's explanation of social capital theory examines Allentown's ability to overcome its fear, while Youngstown remained idle within its own socially and culturally stratified groups.

Following an introduction that explains the importance of the two cities' social capital, the author discussed developmental trends within Allentown and Youngstown's distinct social and economic identities. The author illustrates Allentown's recovery since the collapse of steel and specifically asks “why outcomes in Allentown have been consistently better than in Youngstown in the last twenty-five years” (127). Where and why, Safford asks, did Allentown and Youngstown diverge on their economic paths? Safford contends that the organizations that formed within Youngstown and Allentown demonstrate how social leadership within industry and civic life drive the actions and reactions of a community (33). Hence, the author claims that the collapse of steel led to

stress upon these leaders and, due to their driving of the community, defined Allentown and Youngstown's ability to overcome economic crisis (35–36).

Two economic decisions in the 1970s proved beneficial for Allentown. A proactive approach to the industrial shift of steel to locales where raw materials were cheaper and the improvement of deteriorating infrastructure eased the commuters' drive from Allentown to Pennsylvania's city of Philadelphia, as well as to New Jersey and New York City, which brought increased economic opportunity in a set of diverse markets beyond steel (72–74). Youngstown, on the other hand, formed around a "class-based cohesion," meaning that the industrial and civic leadership were one and the same (92–95). The social capital of Youngstown, then, consisted of economic leaders who focused both on the management of the city and on the management of their companies out of fear that the community's economy would fail (94–95). Allentown, however, was able to allow economic leaders to concentrate specifically upon the implications of the changing economy and the growing interconnectedness of the global markets (100–101). By the 1990s Allentown had united the Lehigh Valley into "a regional unit" that consisted of economic leaders, while these leaders remained "deeply intertwined at the nexus of local [economic and civic] relationships." Youngstown, as Safford simply stated, did not (134). The author consequently argues that the divergence of the economic trajectories of Allentown and Youngstown lies with the crafting of their identities via the social capital that each community relied upon.

Despite his introduction of a new framework for economic, regional, and local history, Safford cobbles together his historical analysis and oversimplifies the regional context within which he compares Allentown and Youngstown. The main focus throughout *Why the Garden Club Couldn't Save Youngstown* revolves around the assertion that leadership, not economic differences, dictated the evolution of community identity and ability to overcome crisis. While Safford constructs an argument on social capital that provides historians with a new method for forming historical analysis, his comparison of Allentown and Youngstown is misleading. The author labels both communities as "minor centers of production within the larger industrial complex" and "secondary production centers tied to the broader mosaic [of industrialization]" (18). While these descriptions may be accurate in a general sense, Safford states that Allentown's proximity to Philadelphia compares to Youngstown's connections to the cities of Akron and Cleveland. Philadelphia, since the Revolutionary era, has been a major national and international hub of business; Akron and Cleveland economically have never

compared to Philadelphia's prominence. Therefore, by positioning Allentown and Youngstown as economically grounded in similar urban markets, the author assumes too much, thus promoting a regional comparison between two cities that are incomparable.

Despite this problematic structure, historians will find much to admire in Safford's examination of social capital theory. His emphasis on Allentown's effective adjustment to a postindustrial, global economy provides historians with a discussion of identifying the reasons "why some places have had an easier time reknitting . . . [and strengthening] the fabric" of industry (16). Drawing from recent innovations in metropolitan histories, Safford considers not only the inciting incidents behind a community's push toward postindustrial society, but also how the society's historical backdrop and its leadership determine the path that the society will take. Therefore, Safford links *Why the Garden Club Couldn't Save Youngstown* to the broader themes of historical research, while advancing the means by which the research can be framed.

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Lorraine Smith Pangle. *The Political Philosophy of Benjamin Franklin*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007. Pp. xi, 277. Notes, index. Cloth, \$45.00; Paper \$20.95.)

Alan Houston. *Benjamin Franklin and the Politics of Improvement*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008. Pp. xi, 321. Maps, illustrations, appendix, notes, bibliography, index. Cloth, \$35.00.)

From today's vantage point, Benjamin Franklin appears omnipresent in the American eighteenth century. A son of Massachusetts who can seem instrumental in almost everything central to the period, Franklin made himself pivotal—and wealthy—in the most dynamic and diverse province of British North America, helped to define its culture through bestselling almanacs, involved himself in imperial politics and bureaucracy, achieved scientific fame across the Atlantic, became a leading voice for American independence,