Robert Sandow’s study of the Pennsylvania Appalachian region is an excellent example of the new direction in Civil War history. As we move away from broad interpretations of the war and towards more localized studies, we may better understand the interplay that existed, not only between soldiers and the home front, but also between local communities and the larger nation.

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Pittsburgh: A New Portrait. By Franklin Toker. (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009. xv, 528 pp., Illustrations, further reading, index. $34.95.)

In the early 1950s, American city mayors, planners, and urbanists alike hailed Pittsburgh as a model for urban renaissance. In the 1980s, Pittsburgh trans-
formed itself again from a scrubbed industrial giant into the epitome of modern urban postindustrialism. The city had become an example of what urban studies theorist Richard Florida calls the "creative economy." In 1986, when H. J. Heinz still produced ketchup in Pittsburgh and LTV Steel (the old Jones and Laughlin) steel and coke, Franklin Toker produced a superbly useful guidebook of then still marginally industrialized Pittsburgh called *Pittsburgh: An Urban Portrait*. Toker’s black and white images actually captured the fading glow of a city that was once the fiery behemoth of American industrialism.

Toker’s glossy, colorfully illustrated 2009 sequel, *Pittsburgh: A New Portrait*, exquisitely and eloquently announces the birth of postindustrial Pittsburgh. Not a history—and too weighty and grandiloquent to serve as a crutch for class tours of the Steel City—it serves instead as a scripture, an authoritative body of knowledge about the city focused mainly on the city’s architectural or built environment. It is a beautifully crafted paean to Pittsburgh as someplace special.

While Toker incorporates large segments of his 1986 text into the 2009 version, and while the essential structure of the 1986 book remains—treating Pittsburgh section by section, street by street—the new volume is different. We learn nothing here about Pittsburgh’s violent labor history. Nor do we discern why, in 1868, James Parton called it “Hell with the lid off,” or why in 1914 Lincoln Steffens, in his study of Pittsburgh politics, called it “a city ashamed.” However, in attempting to inform his readers about Pittsburgh’s zeitgeist, about why Pittsburgh’s downtown and its North Side, Deutchtown, Birmingham, the South Side, and other city and suburban neighborhoods are all special, Toker occasionally delves into history, doling out delightful cameos of prominent citizens and key architects as well as snapshots of important events. By the end of this long, 512-page volume, the reader is well informed about how people like Andrew Carnegie, Henry Clay Frick, W. R. Mellon, Edward Bigelow, Henry H. Richardson, Frederick Osterling, and Walter Gropius helped shape the Steel City.

The book’s richness, however, lies less in its scattered and uneven historical content and more in its sumptuous and sometimes anecdotal vignettes about how the battle of the Titans, Carnegie and Frick, produced the grandeur of Grant Street, how Mae West made appearances at the Harvard, Yale, and Princeton clubs, and the significance of the automobile in creating East Liberty. Ultimately, the real value of Toker’s sequel lies in how he articulates the amazing transformation of the city over the past twenty-five years. Pittsburgh emerges not as the home of Joe Magarac and U.S. Steel, but as the heart of a creative research- and service-oriented urban economy. It is a global city where, significantly, the giant letters of the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center (UPMC) are now emblazoned across the apex of the city’s highly symbolic, corten-steel-clad skyscraper—the U.S. Steel Building.

Toker aims both to illuminate and celebrate the fact that over time, given a
remarkable landscape of rivers and hills, Pittsburgh elites carved a rich and enduring architectural and cultural legacy. He equally underscores the point that during the city’s long “Age of Industrialism,” city builders turned their homes, magnificent churches, courthouses, and business edifices away from its historic rivers. In Pittsburgh’s postindustrial era, the city has deliberately reoriented its residential, commercial, and recreational development to reclaim these riverfronts for the people and their pleasure.

Toker’s *New Portrait* vastly expands the abbreviated descriptive narrative of his first book. Moreover, in this volume maps and other illustrations are in brilliant color. For non-Pittsburghers contemplating a visit to the city, the book’s dazzling images, even its sometimes florid descriptions, make Pittsburgh an irresistible destination. For example, Toker loves classical art and architecture. He finds wonderful allusions to Halicarnassus in the apex of the Gulf Building and joyously describes a North Side home bearing “Neptune on a stringcourse above a radiant Minerva” (129).

However, by organizing the sequel as before, section by section, street by street, Toker misses the profound whole of the city. He ignores the enormous physical impact of UPMC as a dominant social, economic, as well as architectural force in the new city. He never mentions that UPMC’s Children’s Hospital replaced an old and revered neighborhood hospital, the St. Francis Medical Center. Nevertheless, this is a beautiful book, a truly eloquent tribute to the beauty, the character, and the architectural heritage of a great city.

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