

# BOOK REVIEWS



## ***Remaking the Rust Belt: The Postindustrial Transformation of North America***

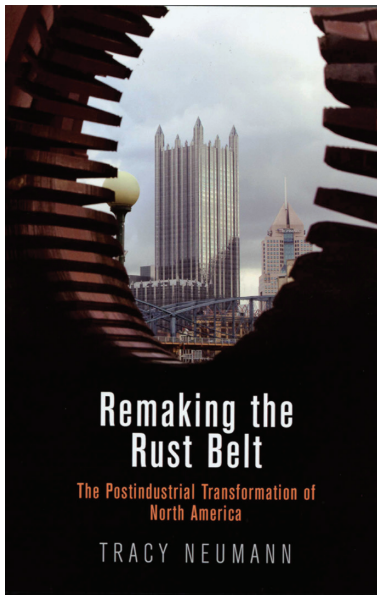
By Tracy Neumann

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Since 1985, Pittsburgh has been hailed as a model of the livable city. Just like in the heady days of the steel industry when delegations arrived to learn industrial secrets, today they come to learn the secrets of civic rebirth. Tracy Neumann's *Remaking the Rust Belt: The Postindustrial Transformation of North America* is part of a growing historical literature that challenges a popular narrative

of postindustrialism which treats the recent transformation of cities as an inevitable outcome of modern capitalism.<sup>1</sup> Neumann persuasively argues that in the United States and Canada (she uses Hamilton, Ontario as a counterpoint to Pittsburgh) the remade city is the product of intentional actions by elite growth coalitions that “narrowly focused on creating the jobs, services, leisure activities, and cultural institutions that they believed would attract middle class professionals. In doing so, local officials abandoned social democratic goals in favor of corporate welfare programs, fostering an increasing economic inequality among their residents in the process.”<sup>2</sup>

Her first two chapters examine the formation, and reformation, of elite growth coalitions like the Allegheny Conference on Community Development in Pittsburgh and the Central Area Plan Advisory Committee in Hamilton. During the 1950s and '60s, civic elites sought to promote a model of urban change that linked the physical redevelopment of downtown with progress.<sup>3</sup> By the late 1970s and into the 1980s, due to diminishing federal support for large scale projects, each partnership embraced a service and technology-oriented vision for urban change.<sup>4</sup> While this is a familiar story, Neumann's addition of the comparative perspective helps to reinforce her arguments about the primary of place and reflects an important new direction for scholarship of the postindustrial city.

This vision was not without contest, and Chapter Three examines largely failed reindustrialization efforts. Here, *Remaking the Rust Belt* argues that political and structural reasons conspired to limit their effectiveness, leading instead to a vision where the creation of white-collar service sector jobs and new exports like education and advanced technology became a critical economic development goal. Consequently, downtown commercial spaces were targeted for private and local funds at the expense of working class neighborhoods

and struggling mill communities. Big projects like Hamilton's Civic Square, modeled after Pittsburgh's Renaissance II, became the visible evidence each city was successfully negotiating the dangerous shoals of postindustrialism.<sup>5</sup>

Neumann's final two chapters are some of the most interesting and innovative. In Chapter Five, she shows how former and, in the case of Hamilton, still-operating mill sites and surrounding neighborhoods (South Side and North End) were repurposed to support the new economy. This project was fraught with risk and required a conscious effort to market the remade city to the corporate executives and middle managers who made up the postindustrial working class. Advertising campaigns like “Seven Pittsburghs” and Dynamic Pittsburgh” as well as Hamilton's “The Beautiful Side of Hard Headed Facts,” showed that both cities had transcended their industrial past, and were worthy of middle-class livability.<sup>6</sup>

*Remaking the Rust Belt* is grounded in an impressive array of primary sources including the papers of civic development organizations, public economic development agencies, and elected officials. It is an important and valuable contribution to this dynamic area of scholarship. One hopes that a current generation of civic leadership will consult it as they attempt to lay the groundwork for the next iteration of the postindustrial city. 🌟

<sup>1</sup> *Remaking the Rust Belt* can productively be read in tandem with Allen Dietrich-Ward, *Beyond Rust: Metropolitan Pittsburgh and the Fate of Urban America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016). One of the best recent collections of this scholarship can be found in the “Pittsburgh's Renaissance Revisited” section of *Journal of Urban History*, vol. 41, no. 1 (January 2015).

<sup>2</sup> Neumann, *Remaking the Rust Belt*, 3.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 27; 31.

<sup>4</sup> The classic overview of the recent transformation of Pittsburgh is Roy Lubove, *Twentieth Century Pittsburgh*, Vol. 2. (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1996). Neumann, 58; 71-72.

<sup>5</sup> Neumann, *Remaking the Rust Belt*, 92-93; 99-100. She notes that the unique nature of the Canadian political system and particularities of place for Hamilton meant that reindustrialization efforts were less visible than in Pittsburgh, 105.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 190-207.