



Why the Garden Club Couldn't Save Youngstown: The Transformation of the Rust Belt

Sean Safford

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In this book, Sean Safford compares the recent history of Allentown, Pennsylvania, with that of Youngstown, Ohio. Allentown has seen a noticeable rebound over the course of the past twenty years. Facing a collapse of its steel-making firms, its economy has reinvented itself by transforming existing companies, building an entrepreneurial sector, and attracting inward investment. Youngstown was similar to Allentown in its industrial history, the composition of its labor force, and other important variables, and yet instead of adapting in the face of acute economic crisis, it fell into a mean race to the bottom. Challenging various theoretical perspectives on regional socioeconomic change, *Why the Garden Club Couldn't Save Youngstown* argues that the structure of social networks among the cities' economic, political, and civic leaders account for the divergent trajectories of post-industrial regions. It offers a probing historical explanation for the decline, fall, and unlikely rejuvenation of the Rust Belt. Emphasizing the power of social networks to shape action, determine access to and control over information and resources, define the contexts in which problems are viewed, and enable collective action in the face of externally generated crises, this book points toward present-day policy prescriptions for the ongoing plight of mature industrial regions in the U.S. and abroad.

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