
In 2016 Donald Trump found little appetite in booming Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania – now the ‘Silicon Valley of the East’, but once America’s ‘Steel City’ – for his call to “put American steel back into the backbone of our country”. But across the city’s wider metropolitan area and in the Ohio River mill towns just beyond it, many of them left behind by global industrial and economic change, Trump’s message resonated widely, delivering large enough majorities to swing Pennsylvania, and the White House, his way. The results pointed to the existence of a vast – and growing – political, cultural and socio-economic divide between the postindustrial city and its periphery.

Tracy Neumann’s comparative study of the postindustrial transformation of Pittsburgh and the Canadian city of Hamilton, two hundred miles north, goes some way to explaining both the origins of this dichotomy and its destructive repercussions. *Remaking the Rust Belt* takes as its focus the active creation and proliferation of a transnational “postindustrialism” – defined as, alternatively, a network, an ideology, an imaginary, and above all a strategy for urban development – from the 1950s to the present day, driven by “growth coalitions” of public officials and corporate elites working across various geographical, political and institutional contexts. As Neumann demonstrates, in both Pittsburgh and Hamilton postindustrialism proved profoundly transformative; developing new economies, modes of employment, urban spaces and visions of both citizenship and cities, but also uneven development, spatial displacement, a weakening commitment to social democracy and glaring socio-economic inequalities. As such, *Remaking the Rust Belt* also contributes to a burgeoning and increasingly historical literature on neoliberal urbanism initially mapped out by geographers such as David Harvey and, more recently, Jamie Peck and Jason Hackworth.

For Neumann, deindustrialisation was not simply the inevitable by-product of “natural business cycles and neutral market forces” (p. 3) nor always the
cynical, callous disinvestment and speculation illustrated in activist works such as Barry Bluestone and Bennett Harrison’s *The Deindustrialization of America* (1982). Instead, her identification of a strategy of postindustrialism offers two major insights. First, that rather than an immediate response to the industrial and economic crises of the 1970s, postindustrialism constituted a longer-term, more deliberative, process, its roots in post-war federal urban renewal programmes (in the United States) or provincial growth strategies (in Canada). In *Remaking the Rust Belt*, it is the end of the Second World War (and, in particular, the 1944 Allegheny Conference on Community Development), not 1973, which represents the key historical moment, Neumann’s “moment of transition” (p. 24). Such periodization allows us to see the scaffolding on which postindustrialism was consistently redesigned and rescaled across the latter part of the twentieth century, from post-war redevelopment partnerships to sophisticated urban branding campaigns. Second, while postindustrialism was a calculated and conscious approach, forged in both cities via shared concepts, models and networks, it was always pragmatic rather than ideological.

Neumann largely avoids censuring public officials such as Pittsburgh’s Richard Caligiuri or Hamilton’s Victor Copps for utilising state power to pursue postindustrialism, and argues its destructive consequences were an “unintentional outcome of limited resources” (p. 13) and “neoliberalism by default” (p. 58) rather than, as is often argued in regard to a more celebrated example of urban restructuring, the New York City fiscal crisis, deliberate policy or design.

Neumann’s comparative approach also illustrates that this process of neoliberal urban and industrial transformation was not linear but in fact significantly conditioned by important contextual differences between the United States and Canada. Contrasting institutional structures and arrangements, ideological traditions and business or political cultures ensured Pittsburgh and Hamilton underwent their postindustrial transformation at varying speeds and intensities and with divergent outcomes for both cities. In both cases, distinctive municipal, regional and national contexts also conspired to produce diverse forms of strategy, partnership and, consequently, postindustrialism. In seeking to both contextualise and historicise postindustrialism, then, Neumann challenges many popular and politically-loaded narratives which apply a rather uniform or monolithic quality to this project of urban restructuring.
*Remaking the Rust Belt* is not without its faults. The book does not always quite deliver on its commitment to comparative analysis. The discussions of Hamilton lack the empirical depth and richness of those of Pittsburgh, perhaps reflecting a rather limited and less varied source base on the Canadian side, but also perhaps a wider methodological issue; be it in its industrial past or its reformed postindustrial present, Hamilton was, and is, simply not as comparatively significant or symbolic as its American equivalent. Equally, Neumann’s exploration of the wider social impacts of postindustrialism on Pittsburgh and Hamilton, in particular the typically working class voices of resistance to this process in both cities addressed in chapters three and five, feel less complete than her analysis of the decision-making, coalition-building or urban branding of the cities’ political and corporate interests. In both cases, this may be a question of sources and their availability, or methodology (this is, after all, policy history and largely a study of elites), but it leads to a rather awkward attempt in the conclusions to both acknowledge the exclusivity and “persistent inequality” (p. 216) engendered by postindustrialism but also its unintended or accidental quality.

Nonetheless, *Remaking the Rust Belt* is a powerful book which has much to offer, not just to historians of urban policy and political economy but also those seeking to understand the wider political, cultural and psephological shifts underway in the American industrial Northeast and Midwest. Whether it can stimulate a new kind of paradigm shift, similar in scope to that pursued by its major protagonists, is another matter entirely.