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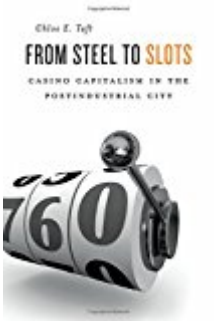
Chloe Taft. *From Steel to Slots: Casino Capitalism in the Postindustrial City.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016. 336 pp. $39.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-674-66049-6.



Reviewed by Tracy Neumann

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Commissioned by Allen J. Dieterich-Ward (Shippensburg University)

Most places are riven by social, cultural, and economic divides, but they rarely map as neatly onto local geography as they do in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, a city of approximately 75,000 split in two by the Lehigh River. In the eighteenth century, Moravians established a communitarian religious settlement on what is now the quaint, middle-class North Side. When iron and steel production came to town, the Moravians relegated it, and its blue-collar workforce, to the other side of the river. Now home to Lehigh University and the Las Vegas Sands Casino, which was built on part of the former Bethlehem Steel site, the South Side remains a working-class neighborhood and a first stop for many new immigrant families. In *From Steel to Slots: Casino Capitalism in the Postindustrial City*, Chloe Taft deftly explores the cultural and historical rifts embedded in Bethlehem's landscape, as well as the economic development agendas that have ordered and disordered the city since the Moravians' arrival. She uses the demise of "the Steel" and the opening of "the Sands" to explore "how locals have variously embraced and grappled with the remaking of their steel town as a postindustrial city" (p. 3). Along the way, Taft upends conventional narratives of deindustrialization and postindustrial rebirth. When "lived from day to day," she argues, "postindustrialism reflects an ongoing process marked by complicated, and at times paradoxical, continuities" that challenge a neat distinction between "before and after" (p. 247).

From Steel to Slots marks a welcome turn in the deindustrialization literature. In the early 1980s Barry Bluestone and Bennett Harrison supplied a foundational definition of deindustrialization as the "widespread, systematic disinvestment in the nation's basic productive capacity," which explained high unemployment rates, a "sluggish" domestic economy, and the United States' failure to successfully compete in international markets. [1] Following Bluestone and Harrison's postulation that deindustrialization pitted "capital" against "community," early research typically took the form of community studies focused on how particular industries or workforces deindus-

trialized. After the turn of the twenty-first century, scholars expanded their use of the term to encompass social, spatial, and political processes as well as economic change. In an introduction to an edited collection that has become a standard work in the field, Jefferson Cowie and Joseph Heathcott called deindustrialization "a historical transformation that marks not just a quantitative and qualitative change in employment, but a fundamental change in the social fabric on a par with industrialization itself," a definition that explicitly rejected the idea of deindustrialization as a primarily economic process. They argued that "what we call deindustrialization may best be understood with hindsight as one episode in a long series of transformations within capitalism" and that "broader meanings emerge from the de-linking of investment and place, the deinstitutionalization of labor relations machinery, de-urbanization (and new forms of urbanization), and perhaps even the loosening of the connection between identity and work."[2] A more recent wave of scholarship posits deindustrialization and postindustrial redevelopment as part of "metropolitan capitalism," as a regional or transnational rather than purely local phenomenon, and as constitutive of neoliberalism.[3]

Taft's clear-eyed analysis combines the best aspects of these various historiographical strains, all while avoiding the nostalgia trap that so many scholars have fallen into when writing about the industrial past. In Bethlehem, she finds, the "rupture between community and capital is not so complete" (p. 41). Taft's challenge to Bluestone and Harrison emerges from a persuasive blending of archival and ethnographic approaches. It is also surely influenced by the emotional distance between the mass plant closures of the late 1970s and early 1980s and the later, more gradual, and better-managed shutdown at the Steel. The company closed its Bethlehem mill in 1995, declared bankruptcy in 2001, and ceased to exist in 2003. Many of Taft's seventy-six informants are former Bethlehem Steel employees who remember it as neither good nor evil. The Steel was first major US corporation to set up a comprehensive program to help former employees deal with permanent layoffs, and workers did not see it "as a callous villain," even when layoffs took them by surprise. Taft casts her informants as ideal types, and deploys them to "represent worldviews with pseudonyms" (p. 261). She skillfully uses residents' and former residents' voices to narrate her argument about displacement, uneven development outcomes, and incomplete transitions. In an unusual move for a book on deindustrialization—most are preoccupied with the fates of the blue-collar workforce—Taft includes the stories of white-collar workers who had "built lives around the corporation's perceived stability and structures" and suffered, too, from the "disordering effects" of its closure and the loss of the broad social protections they once enjoyed (p. 25).

The book opens with an overview of Bethlehem's historical development, conflict between working- and middle-class residents, and tensions among old European immigrant stock and more recent Latino and Chinese arrivals, all grounded in sometimes-internecine battles over memory, historic preservation, and the interpretation of Bethlehem's past. She concisely narrates familiar stories of labor-management conflict, industrial restructuring, and urban renewal without belaboring well-trod ground. In subsequent chapters, Taft explores what she calls "a network of market-***places*** on the former Bethlehem Steel site and the surrounding neighborhoods through which people give abstract economic actions historical, material, and cultural significance" (p. 15). The Sands' steel-themed casino, newly constructed to evoke a sanitized version of the industrial past and appease the local community by paying homage to its history, is one such site. On it the Las Vegas-based corporation negotiated competing local visions of Bethlehem's past. When "casino capitalism" came to town, the Sands promised to create a new era of prosperity for the city

through gaming. Even as some former employees of the Steel embraced the casino, many others fought what they understood to be a "postindustrial factory," and hoped to retain the social protections of the industrial order (p. 83).

Elsewhere, Taft chronicles the city's efforts to create heritage attractions on the massive Steel site, the social dislocations caused by church closures, and the anxieties of diverse groups of residents faced with changing economic circumstances and shifting demographics. The benefits of urban development, she shows over and over again, do not accrue to all residents equally. Interethnic tensions and discrimination make demanding social accountability from corporations and city governments difficult, but as Taft points out, "the postindustrial landscape is in many ways one of marginalization," a material expression of social and economic insecurity, for old (white ethnic) and new (primarily Latino) residents alike (p. 202). History, Taft tells us, can be "a tool for articulating more inclusive and equitable futures," and for overcoming, rather than merely reinforcing, cultural and geographical divisions (p. 116). The Bethlehem story, she suggests, provides a counternarrative to the notion that in today's marketplace, we must all learn to accept individual risk instead of fight for collective security. "Historically sensitive redevelopment, supported by institutions that continue to recall a time when security, stability, and accountability were part of an agreement between corporations and the communities in which they are located," Taft contends, "can be part of a global economy" (p. 242).

From Steel to Slots is very much a local story, rooted in a particular geography and in residents' experiences. At the same time, Taft masterfully reconstructs Bethlehem's international ties and role in the global economy from its origin as a center of the Moravian church in colonial North America, through the Steel's foreign investments and offshore accounts, to the "casino capitalism" that links Bethlehem to places like Macau. Readers may wish that Taft had stepped back from Bethlehem and surveyed the terrain of other small and mid-sized former industrial centers more thoroughly. As she notes, Bethlehem was unique in many ways: it lost only a small portion of its population; disinvestment and downsizing happened much more slowly there than in places like Flint or Youngstown; economic diversification into the service sector meant that Bethlehem's median incomes and homes values remained relatively high; and the adaptive reuse of the Steel site allowed the city to recover its tax base. It is also not clear from the book how Bethlehem learned, or did not learn, from cities like Pittsburgh, which lost its industry earlier and struggled in similar ways to find new uses for industrial sites. Surely Bethlehem benefited in some ways from state-level public policies forged during the first wave of plant closures in the 1980s; executives at the Steel must have also watched the protracted battles with laid-off workers that played out elsewhere in the state. Taft's occasional references leave one wanting a bit more context for Bethlehem's place in Pennsylvania's political economy and postindustrial ecosystem. And finally, Taft's central concept of networks of "market-*places*" is never as fully fleshed out as one might like, nor does she waste much time parsing the meaning of neoliberalism, an overused and underdefined term. But these quibbles do little to detract from a fantastic book that should appeal to a wide audience. One of the great strengths of *From Steel to Slots* is Taft's ability to write about complex topics in an accessible way—nonspecialists, undergraduates, and casual readers should find her stories engaging and her arguments legible. They may even find a degree of hope for a more equitable postindustrial future.

Notes

[1]. Barry Bluestone and Bennett Harrison, *The Deindustrialization of America: Plant Closings, Community Abandonment, and the Disman-*

tling of Basic Industries (New York: Basic Books, 1982).

[2]. Jefferson R. Cowie and Joseph Heathcott, eds., *Beyond the Ruins: The Meanings of Deindustrialization* (Ithaca: ILR Press, 2003), 5-6, 15.

[3]. See, for example, Allen Dieterich-Ward, *Beyond Rust: Metropolitan Pittsburgh and the Fate of Industrial America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016); Andrew R. Highsmith, *Demolition Means Progress: Flint, Michigan, and the Fate of the American Metropolis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015); and Tracy Neumann, *Remaking the Rust Belt: The Postindustrial Transformation of North America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016).