

Power Steering: Global Automakers and the Transformation of Rural Communities, by Michele M. Hoyman. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1997. x, 262 pp. Map, tables, graphs, notes, appendix, bibliography, index. \$35.00 cloth, \$17.95 paper.

REVIEWED BY JON K. LAUCK, MINNEAPOLIS

As farms grow bigger and farmers grow older and fewer in number, rural areas and the small towns that were supported by farmers struggle to survive. The retreat of agriculture as the economic mainstay of rural areas has prompted various government policies to help those areas sustain their existence. The recruitment of industry to rural areas was a policy plank for FDR when campaigning in the desperate rural areas of the country in 1932, only a decade after a majority of the country became non-rural. The Eisenhower administration further developed the idea in the 1950s, providing funding and a home for the issue in the Department of Agriculture, making "economic development" a permanent part of the rural political landscape.

Michele Hoyman's timely book attempts to assess the rural economic development efforts of states in recent years. Specifically, she studies the emergence of large auto plants (Saturn, Nissan, Toyota, Honda) in small towns in Tennessee, Kentucky, and Ohio. As a political scientist, she spends a great deal of time studying the emergence of economic development as a political issue and weighing public administration problems like public debts and budget issues driven by changing needs for fire protection, police, water, sewage, and other public services. The parts of the book dealing with the frictions between local "good old boys" and the outside professionals of the automakers—producing a "new politics"—and the cultural transformation brought on by the new plant will probably be of greatest interest to historians interested in changes in rural life.

The book is written in the political science vein, but would have benefited from a deeper exploration of issues debated by historians in recent years. The work of Catherine McNicol Stock on the clash between the old and new middle classes on the northern Great Plains as a precursor or parallel to the "new politics" would have been useful. Also, the large body of literature that has emerged in recent years studying the impact of large-scale meatpacking operations on small towns on the Great Plains was neglected, even though it would have provided a perfect parallel to the auto plants. More widely, the work in the area of historical political economy could have helped deepen the analysis by more closely connecting the book to issues such as the "fall of the New Deal order" or the erosion of union power since

World War II and the implications of promoting international trading regimes, all of which help to explain plant placement decisions made by global automakers.

Hoyman also chooses an odd jumping off point given the evidence she cites. She begins with a doomsday twist, best used by Osha Grey Davidson in *Broken Heartland: The Rise of America's Rural Ghetto* (1990); the scope of rural America's problems, she claims, is "unparalleled since the Great Depression," and small towns are "im-peril[ed]" and "endangered." She provides little evidence of a panic-stricken rural America, however, and many of the people she talked to about the results of the establishment of the auto plants were very positive and hopeful.

Copyright of *Annals of Iowa* is the property of State of Iowa, by & through the State Historical Society of Iowa and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.