

disputes. He helped build up Harvard Law School. He wrote muckraking pamphlets and lasting works of legal scholarship. He helped invent the notion of pro bono legal work.

Oddly, however, Urofsky's treatment of Brandeis's jurisprudence itself is not especially rich. The book is weighted in favor of lengthy discussions of intra-Zionist politics and railroad regulation in New England at the expense of the great jurisprudential arguments during Brandeis's service on the Supreme Court. Urofsky does an excellent job explicating Brandeis's role in the shift away from the legal classicism of the turn of the century, but the sheer volume of other material downplays his role on the Court.

The book has other quirks. For example, Urofsky seems to make a point of de-emphasizing anti-Semitism as a factor in Brandeis's life—even where its role is glaringly obvious, such as in the ugly battle that preceded his confirmation to the Court. In the main, however, the book takes on a sweeping set of subjects in the person of Louis Brandeis and offers, through him, an often-moving tour of a period of great change and tumult in the law.

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Ghosts of the Heartland

Reviewed by Sarah L. Courteau

A SIGN ON THE OUTSKIRTS of Jewell, Iowa, greets visitors with the homey slogan, "A Gem in a Friendly Setting." By the railroad tracks that bisect Main Street, a grain silo stands as a totem of the soybean and corn fields that tickle the yards at the town limits. The population recorded by the census of 1990—the year after my family moved to Jewell when I was 13—was 1,106. South Hamilton High School, housed in a low building at the edge of town,

HOLLOWING OUT THE MIDDLE:

The Rural Brain Drain and What It Means for America.

By Patrick J. Carr and Maria J. Kefalas. Beacon. 239 pp. \$26.95

METHLAND:
The Death and Life of an American Small Town.

By Nick Reding. Bloomsbury. 255 pp. \$25

launched me into the world every way it could, even hiring me as an office assistant to give me a little spending money. My calculus teacher tutored me during her free period. My English teacher directed me on independent study projects. The guidance counselor coached me through the college application process and, at one point, put me up in his home while my family was out of town. The summer after I graduated, my family moved away, and I left for an East Coast college. I've been back once.

I am what husband-and-wife sociologists Patrick J. Carr and Maria J. Kefalas, authors of *Hollowing Out the Middle*, term an "Achiever," and I'm part of a big American problem: a rural brain drain that siphons educated young people from "flyover country" into the urban centers they've seen on television sitcoms. In 1940, the authors note, only one in 20 Americans possessed a college degree, and professionals such as doctors and lawyers were scattered around the country fairly evenly. In 1970, five years after President Lyndon B. Johnson signed legislation that created a federal financial aid system, five percentage points separated the most- and least-educated regions of the country. By 2000 the "regional education gap" had more than doubled, to 13 percentage points, reinforcing "a level of uneven development not seen since the Civil War." Carr and Kefalas moved to a small town in northeastern Iowa, which they dub "Ellis" to preserve its anonymity, and interviewed hundreds of young Iowa natives to try to pin down the factors that influence a person to stay, leave, or return.

Increased educational opportunities are only a part of the story. As journalist Nick Reding documents in his brilliant and hard-won book *Methland*, a new economy has fundamentally altered the rural landscape, even as many of us continue to harbor Mayberry images of Main Streets populated by salt-of-the-earth types, the kind of people who represent "America's backbone" in political commercials. Over the course of four years, Reding spent countless hours with the residents of Oelwein, a town of less than 7,000 that, like Ellis, is located in northeastern Iowa, to document the methamphetamine epidemic that is devastating rural working-class communities. The problem has

tentacles in immigration patterns (meth is moving along the same invisible conduits as illegal immigrant workers, as Mexican cartels take over the trade from homegrown meth mixologists); the consolidation of agribusiness that rendered small farmers nearly extinct; the powerful lobbying efforts of pharmaceutical giants that don't want restrictions on the sales of cold medicine, a primary meth ingredient; and the forces of globalization that send manufacturing jobs out of the country or simply shrink wages—say, from \$18 an hour to \$6.20, as happened at Oelwein's meat processing plant when it was bought by Gillette in 1992.

Meth helps people work harder and longer at demanding jobs—on slaughterhouse floors and in long-haul truck cabs—and thus escapes the stigma of being a “recreational” drug in the minds of many users. It also fills the void of low morale in places where good work—and the good life that results—is in short supply. As local storefronts darken and sheriffs learn to dismantle hazardous meth labs, rural populations are withering. In the mince-no-words view of Clay Hallberg, Oelwein's general practitioner, “How 'bout the first people to leave are of course the smart ones, and the people with enough money to get out. What you're left with—and I'm sorry, okay?—doesn't qualify Oelwein High as a feeder school for Harvard, okay?”

Carr and Kefalas make much of the fact that adults, particularly teachers, in small towns curry high-achieving students to leave while ignoring the “Stayers.” That may be so, but even the authors concede that the “careful cultivation of the ‘cream of the crop’” is unlikely to change—and probably shouldn't. Still, more technical training for Stayers, as Carr and Kefalas advocate, is certainly in order. Green energy and sustainable agriculture initiatives that can reinvigorate local economies are also part of the solution, as are policies that will assimilate immigrants who may be the best hope for towns that would otherwise shrivel into nothing. But it's difficult to read these earnest prescriptions without a sinking feeling.

What Reding describes in *Methland* is a sea change in American life that wind turbines and community colleges can't reverse. Among Reding's

bleak statistics and grim anecdotes, the only real cause for hope is the efforts of individuals—particularly Oelwein's mayor, Larry Murphy, whom Reding calls a hero—who dig in their heels and stick around to make a difference. They're bucking a stacked deck, and we need to deal them any cards we can. Reding himself moved back to the Midwest (he was born in Missouri) while writing his book, for which I admire him. That doesn't mean I plan to return to Jewell anytime soon.

SARAH L. COURTEAU is literary editor of *The Wilson Quarterly*.

The Good and the Bad in the Ugly

Reviewed by Troy Jollimore

BETWEEN THE TERRORIST attacks of 2001 and the near destruction of New Orleans four years later, the 21st century's first decade has given Americans ample opportunity to reflect on disaster. But, argues Rebecca

Solnit in *A Paradise Built in Hell*, we have yet to learn the crucial lessons that such calamities ought to teach us.

Solnit—the author of an impressively eclectic series of books on subjects ranging from political activism to the English photographer Eadweard Muybridge—surveys several disasters over roughly the last century, including the 1906 San Francisco earthquake, the Mexico City earthquake of 1985, and, of course, 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina. She contends that “disaster throws us into the temporary utopia of a transformed human nature and society, one that is bolder, freer, less attached and divided than in ordinary times.”

The example that most clearly illustrates Solnit's contention is the San Francisco earthquake, which transformed the cityscape into a patchwork quilt of “spontaneously launched community centers and relief projects.” People opened their homes to strangers or simply gathered in the streets to create improvised rooming houses and cafés. What many written reports emphasize is not the hardship but

A PARADISE BUILT IN HELL:

The Extraordinary Communities That Arise in Disaster.

By Rebecca Solnit.
Viking. 353 pp. \$27.95