

(RE)IMAGINE ALL THE (RUST BELT) PEOPLE: LIVING LIFE IN TODAY'S POST-
INDUSTRIAL UTICA, NEW YORK

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ABSTRACT

Utica, New York was a typical reflection of the American Rust Belt. Job loss, depopulation, and pessimism dominated the city throughout the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. In recent years, however, refugees, Rust Belt recovery, and rebirth have transformed this small city in upstate New York. Through the reuse of deindustrialized space, various investment opportunities, and communal ties, Utica is emerging from decades of post-industrial decline. This thesis primarily relies on interviews with businesspeople and community members from the city, but also analyzes local news articles and Rust Belt literature to better understand and contextualize Utica. The city has embraced refugees, who have helped end decades of population decline. Moreover, emergent vibrant communities have renovated houses and started restaurants, fostering the transmission of culture in the city. Entrepreneurs are investing in neighborhoods like Bagg's Square, and New York's state government has incentivized General Electric to return to the area. Younger generations are redefining the city's Rust Belt character, shifting attitudes and encouraging cultural development. Utica, New York, in the American Rust Belt is enjoying stable economic growth and its residents are increasingly optimistic about its future. This thesis traces these recent trends and claims that emergent vibrant communities in Utica, New York, are reusing industrial sites and redefining space in ways that reflect the area's burgeoning optimism and self-belief in the wake of decades of decline.

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INTRODUCTION

The American Rust Belt encompasses large swaths of the Northeast and Midwest. As will be explored in this thesis, cities in this region throughout the late twentieth century suffered from dramatic population decline as manufacturing companies relocated either to the south or abroad. Those left behind experienced certain trauma. Companies broke promises to their employees with every job lost, every warehouse shuttered, and every dollar invested elsewhere. The Rust Belt is defined by its inhabitants' loss and memory. In Rust Belt textile towns and fallen metropolises people remember their cities' past stability and simplicity. During manufacturing's heyday, from the early twentieth century to the mid-to late twentieth century, employment was a given. A family's grandfather, father, and son might all work in the steel or textile mill. This expectation has not been the case for decades, and a return to such order is not happening anytime soon. The Rust Belt today is rooted in the past as industrial structures and certain communal ties remain and in so doing maintain memory.

In the Rust Belt the past endures through societal factors, physical landscapes, and the interplay of the two. Community connections and structural relics keep memories alive in the region. warehouses, smelters, and factories left behind by departed companies serve as constant reminders of both the positive personal ties formed there and the negative economic trauma of the past. Decrepit sites are nearly everywhere in the Rust Belt, including boarded up houses, abandoned businesses, and brownfields. The personal connections made at the steel mill remain, however, remain even after the site is shut down, and people who lived through the decline (and who remain in the area) ensure that the past stays alive in their conversations with each other.

This paper examines one specific city in the Rust Belt. Utica, New York, is on the verge of defying economic and cultural stagnation. The city is shifting its identity—immigrants are making a living there, significant investment is both happening and promised, and the city is young. Refugees play a key role and with their arrival population decline has stopped and investment has increased. Utica still reflects characteristics of the Rust Belt—vacant houses, departed businesses, and blight can be found throughout the city—but according to Phillip Bean, a Utica historian, “The process of reinvention and redefinition, which is a continuous aspect of human experience but more arguably characteristic of American culture than any other in modern times [is Utican].”¹ It is the reinvention, redefinition, and reuse of space that form the crux of this paper. Entrepreneurs and citizens in Utica commit to the city by taking industrial, residential, and commercial space left behind in the turmoil of the Rust Belt and reimagine it in ways that reflect the city’s past and its hopes for the future.

To understand Utica one needs to appreciate four key terms that lie at the heart of this thesis: emergent vibrant communities, Rust Belt recovery, rebirth and deindustrialized space. Emergent vibrant communities are impactful groups of people characterized by either a common ethnic identity or activity who have coalesced around this common grouping or pursuit. For example, Burmese refugees and a soccer club are both emergent vibrant communities under this definition. The former is a new group of people that is changing the city’s physical and social nature. The latter is a recent organization comprised of people who came together around a shared activity.

Rust Belt recovery and rebirth are linked as economic stability affects community and narrative but they are also unique in their own right. Rust Belt recovery refers explicitly to

¹ Phillip Bean, *The Urban Colonists: Italian American Identity & Politics in Utica, New York*, Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2010, 384.

economic growth while rebirth points solely to the cultural component (how people perceive and feel about the area and its prospects). The Rust Belt is deindustrialization—jobs lost, vacant industrial sites, population decline—and its recovery is the return of economic stability through increased access to jobs and prosperity. Most Rust Belt cities are not likely to return to economic vitality anytime soon, but stability is a modest, attainable, and desirous aim. Utica is not going to become an industrial and economic powerhouse, but it is enjoying stability that is unique within the Rust Belt and that provides a foundation for sustained reasonable growth. Rebirth points to the city’s vibrant arts scene and how its people have begun to embrace Utica’s optimism. Uticans are increasingly moving beyond a perception of their city that emphasizes the dire past in favor of a belief in its future prospects and each other.

Deindustrialized spaces go far beyond warehouses, factories, and assembly lines (in other words, anything related to manufacturing). When industry left the Rust Belt for the south and for other countries, people left as well, leaving vacant houses behind and boarded-up churches devoid of congregants. Deindustrialized space includes anything impacted by the departure of manufacturing—even those spaces not explicitly linked to industry. In Utica, New York, refugees are revitalizing homes and entrepreneurs are transforming warehouses into everything from lofts to a Halloween horror realm. Evaluating space that was explicitly used for manufacturing would not provide a full understanding of the dynamics in this city. For instance, I assumed that Utica’s refugees were re-using industrial space, but the Director of the Utica Children’s Museum, Elizabeth Slocum Brando, noted that refugees are not reusing industrial space—Cayo Industrial Horror Realm and Utica Coffee Roasting Company (which will be discussed at length in later chapters) are not frequented by Burmese and Somali refugees. An understanding that non-

industrial space shares the story of industrial space, therefore, is critical to appreciate the forces at play in Utica, New York. As industry left the area people went with it, and businesses (e.g., restaurants) suffered, houses were abandoned, and community centers like houses of faith lost too many parishioners to remain viable. This project considers Bosnian restaurants in East Utica, the Bosnian Islamic Association of Utica (a Methodist Church renovated and transformed into a mosque), and buildings in the Bagg's Square neighborhood as deindustrialized space.

This thesis relies on interviews for its primary source material, with the understanding that each interviewee approaches Utica with different (and perhaps biased) perspectives. Chris Lawrence, a planner in Utica's Department of Urban & Economic Development, and Michelle Truett, of the Bagg's Square Association, both have a vested interest in building up Utica. As representatives of the Mayor's office and of an emerging neighborhood, respectively, the two stand to benefit from positive public press about the city.² I tried to balance such interviews with more objective people, such as Oneida County Historical Society Director Brian Howard and Professors John Bartle and Douglas Ambrose of Hamilton College (who are both long-time Uticans). These men understand the objectivity necessary for scholarly work, and in our conversations tried to convey accurate information about the region's history, current situation, and promise. Other interviewees include businesspeople such as Joshua Reale of Cayo Industrial Horror Realm, Frank Elias of Utica Coffee Roasting Company, and Tony Esposito of JetNet. All three have invested significant time and money into the city, but as on-the-ground figures in the local economy each spoke confidently about what their enterprises have meant for Utica's recent

² During our interview Michelle Truett also introduced me to Vitaly Venerich, who is renovating spaces in Bagg's Square.

revival. Scott Colvin of Odyssey Sport Soccer Club,³ Shelly Callahan, the Executive Director of the Mohawk Valley Resource Center for Refugees, Elizabeth Slocum Brando of the Utica Children’s Museum, and Darby O’Brien of the Utica Public Library talked about the role their organizations play in the area. All of these interviewees were carefully selected for their unique perspectives on Utica, but further research should include more critical sources. Regardless, I supplemented these qualitative primary sources with quantitative census data and similarly objective information to support the interviewees’ observations.

This work also draws from other sources. A lot has been written and produced about this region, which is understandable considering the expansiveness of the Rust Belt. Youngstown, Detroit, Cleveland and other cities are common foci. The departure of jobs and opportunities from the Midwest, Pennsylvania, and upstate New York has left an indelible mark and inspired a significant amount of scholarly work. With this in mind, this study contributes in two important ways: in its focus on Utica and by its emphasis on an emerging culture in the Rust Belt, both done through the lens of the reuse of space. Focusing on this city brings it into the Rust Belt discussion. Moreover, Utica complicates and deepens conversations about cities in the Rust Belt and the death of manufacturing. Utica, unlike much of the Rust Belt, is growing (in large part due to its burgeoning refugee population). This city is defying prevalent Rust Belt trends, and this alone makes it unique and worthy of more critical analysis.

Academic sources provide valuable and necessary context to the project, and this thesis brings Utica into the conversations that often analyze other cities. There are various materials on

³ This soccer club is based out of Oneida, New York, which is about 20 or so miles from Utica. The interview took place when I was considering researching Oneida County rather than just the City of Utica.

economic, social, and cultural forces at work in the region. For economic issues, works such as Laura Fox’s “Are Business Improvement Districts Perceived as Effective for Revitalizing Mid-Sized Rust Belt Cities?” and Howard Gillette Jr.’s “The Wages of Disinvestment: How Money and Politics Aided the Decline of Camden, New Jersey” help one understand the myriad fiscal problems faced by a Rust Belt town as a result of political decisions. Utica, as a small city, provides a different context for Laura Fox’s research, while the downstate-upstate political divide in New York State demonstrates another aspect of how fiscal policy can affect a Rust Belt city like Utica. Social studies such as Steve May and Laura Morrison’s “Making Sense of Restructuring: Narratives of Accommodation among Downsized Workers” and Peter Dreier’s “Rust Belt Radicals: Community Organizing in Buffalo” discuss community identities in the rust belt. Utica, with its emergent vibrant communities (refugees and those in the Bagg’s Square neighborhood, for instance) builds upon the community maintained from the factory floor and reflects the unique social fabric of this particular Rust Belt city. Articles like Richey Piiparinen and Anne Trubek’s *Rust Belt Chic: The Cleveland Anthology* and the documentary *Detropia* give insight into the culture of the Rust Belt region. Many who reuse space in Utica are drawn by the idea of Rust Belt chic, and try to maintain the building’s industrial character and exposed brick as they transform it into a horror realm, a loft, or an office space. Uticans today are trying to remember the city’s industrial past—as many in *Detropia* do—while crafting a new future for their home.

This thesis builds upon sources that specifically focus on the City of Utica. *The Urban Colonists* by author Phillip Bean emphasizes the city as an Italian enclave, but the recent and on-going influx of refugees which this thesis investigates is integral to Utica’s present character.

Relatedly, *Bosnian Refugees in America* by Reed Coughlan and Judith Owens-Manley addresses Bosnian life in this city, but my research approaches the roles of refugees through the reuse of space and connects this development to other efforts in the city. New people have changed the composition of Utica and, in one sense, as industry left the city so too did its Italian identity. This thesis uses these sources to better understand present-day Utica as it links these academic texts to both the recent reuse of space and experiential perspectives gleaned from the various interviewees.

The theme of loss and struggle is a common theme regardless of the Rust Belt city or town. Utica in many ways is no different than Buffalo, Youngstown, or Detroit—except that the latter three cities have been the focus of previous literature and critical analysis. All of these cities have an industrial heritage, and each is grappling with how to cope with the aftereffects of manufacturing’s departure. Moreover, writing about or otherwise engaging with culture in the Rust Belt is not new. Academic texts and documentaries like *Detropia* discuss this feature at length. Focusing on the reuse of warehouse spaces is not unique either—Luke James Petrusic’s “Transforming the Rust Belt: Adaptive Reuse of Industrial Buildings in the Context of the Rust Belt” shows as much. The synthesis of these discussions, however, is important and original since not enough has been written on the confluence of culture and the reuse of space.

This traditional written thesis is supplemented by a short introductory video⁴ and an interactive map of Utica⁵ that showcase the sites to be discussed here. This project is something

⁴ The video is available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KajaH9Jqz5g>.

⁵ The map is available here: <https://blogs.commonsgorgetown.edu/apd44/>.

more than a scholarly exercise—it is meant to be a source for those interested in Utica and a call to, in the words of Michelle Truett, “get on the cool train” and believe in the city’s promise.⁶ The video and map relate to the three key themes of this thesis—refugees, Rust Belt recovery, and rebirth—and seek to encourage Uticans and non-Uticans alike to believe in the city’s recent transformation. A thesis might not attract a lot of attention outside of scholarly circles, but perhaps this video and map will appeal to audiences beyond this select cadre of people.

The first chapter of this study is a brief history of the American Rust Belt and Utica. In order to understand the Rust Belt, and how Utica fits into it, one needs context. This chapter will look at Utica’s historical development through some case study examples such as Youngstown, Ohio, and Detroit, Michigan, in order to better understand and appreciate the vibrancy that exists in the small pocket of upstate New York that is the focus of this thesis. Moreover, it will introduce those unfamiliar with Utica to its rich industrial and cultural legacies.

Chapter two focuses on how the refugee population in Utica contributes to the city’s revitalization. The region is orienting itself towards youthful multicultural ventures. Houses are being refurbished, ethnic restaurants are opening their doors, and plans for future development are being written. Although refugees may not have many explicit connections to the older white residents who have been in the area, they are an integral part of the new energy in the area and are changing the landscape of the city.

The third section of this paper looks at Utica through the lens of Rust Belt recovery, with an emphasis on deindustrialized space. Investment has revitalized parts of the city and changed the Rust Belt narrative here. Through the reuse of city blocks, boarded-up sites, and largely

⁶ Michelle Truett, interview by author, October 24, 2015.

abandoned neighborhoods the area is (finally) emerging from its Rust Belt trauma. Michelle Truett thinks “people are sitting back, watching, and waiting.”⁷ The area is fast approaching a turning point, but many people in the area are tentative—in the Rust Belt, memories of false hope loom large. It is this promise, however, that helps distinguish Utica from the Rust Belt because recent and forthcoming investments are driving rapid change.

Chapter four focuses on Utica’s rebirth. The Rust Belt is an experience in memory, loss, and community solidarity because those in the Rust belt remember a bygone era. In the absence of mills, displaced workers have banded together and can “describe—in personal, familial terms—their sense of belonging with their co-workers. Finally, they remember and reimagine a more idyllic community that reaffirms their values.”⁸ Utica today remembers its industrial legacy and what that means for its identity. The city’s population, however, is trending younger and older generations—those with acute memories of past trauma—are dying or leaving for warmer climes. People increasingly believe in the future because Utica has made it through the lean times and is now looking ahead to what may come next.

The Rust Belt is defined by its inhabitants’ loss and memory. Industrial relics and other sites (boarded-up houses, abandoned businesses, and brownfields) are constant reminders of economic trauma. The way space in Utica, New York, is being reused, and by whom, is unique within the Rust Belt. No longer is this spot of upstate New York on the decline. No longer are residents

⁷ Truett, interview by author, 2015.

⁸ Steve May and Laura Morrison, “Making Sense of Restructuring: Narratives of Accommodation among Downsized Workers” in *Beyond the Ruins: The Meanings of Deindustrialization*, edited by Jefferson Cowie and Joseph Heathcott, 259-283, (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2003), 261.

driving around with bumper stickers that say “Last one out of Utica, please turn out the lights.”⁹

My thesis’ central claim is that emergent vibrant communities in Utica, New York, are reusing industrial sites and redefining space in ways that reflect the area’s burgeoning optimism and self-belief in the wake of decades of decline.

⁹ It is worth bearing in mind that many other Rust Belt cities had similar messages. This speaks to the common experience of the Rust Belt, regardless of the industry lost by a particular city or the depopulation that ensued. Rust Belt communities share certain similarities, as the next chapter will illustrate.

Chapter One: History

Placing Utica within the Rust Belt connects it to common themes in the region and highlights the prevalence of such similarities. Most Rust Belt literature focuses on cities like Youngstown, Ohio, and Detroit, Michigan. Comparing these two cities to Utica links this city in upstate New York to the Rust Belt and demonstrate trends common to the area pertinent to this research. Utica shares several similarities with the rest of the Rust Belt, but also has a few important distinguishing features. These three cities all clung to one primary industry in the early to mid-twentieth century, enjoyed rapid economic growth during their industrial heyday, and suffered from population loss. There are many other commonalities, but these factors are integral to each city's story. Utica is different in a few significant ways. The city's continued favorable location and recent embrace of diversity in all forms—from people to the economy—has prepared it for a period of growth unprecedented in recent memory. Later chapters will describe these unique factors at length, while this chapter will focus on deindustrialization and Utica's particular experience with the departure of industry.

To understand today's Rust Belt one needs to know its history. Utica, for example, is a place where memories of a bygone industrial era are still present in the thoughts of its longtime residents and in the presence of long-abandoned, corroding structures of manufacturing past. The current desolation characteristic of upstate New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Michigan begs the question: How? What were the factors that led to the decline of metropolises big and small and of industries new and old? Like any history, no single reason explains the devastation wrought by systemic economic change in the Rust Belt. It helps to know Utica's fuller history

because, like Youngstown and Detroit, it conveys a common narrative but, unlike the other two cities, is not commonly written about in the context of the Rust Belt.

Utica's location was (and still is) a valuable asset. In the 1700s a village sprouted from Fort Schulyer, a stronghold situated on the Mohawk River¹⁰ on one of the only spots with both a ford and a break in the mountains.¹¹ This location spurred Utica's development in the post-Revolutionary War era. To traverse upstate New York by water at this time one might start in Albany, stop at Fort Schulyer, move to a nearby creek and continue from there.¹² One of the city's most prominent early inhabitants, Moses Bagg, arrived in the area in 1794 and started a hotel.¹³ In 1798 the name "Utica"¹⁴ was pulled out of a hat in this very hotel, and the community had its name.¹⁵ The area rose to prominence with the digging of the Erie Canal, (lock 19 is just eight miles away from the city).¹⁶ Work began in 1817 and took eight years to complete.¹⁷ Governor DeWitt Clinton commemorated the Canal's completion on November 4, 1825, in the New York City harbor with a jug of fresh water from Lake Erie in the "wedding of the

¹⁰ Brian Howard, interview by author, October 23, 2015.

¹¹ Truett, interview by author, 2015.

¹² Howard, interview by author, 2015.

¹³ Truett, interview by author, 2015.

¹⁴ The name "Utica" relates to a city in antiquity.

¹⁵ Truett, interview by author, 2015.

¹⁶ "Erie Canal State Park and NYS Barge Canal," *City of Utica*," accessed April 18, 2016, <http://www.cityofutica.com/departments/parks-and-recreation/erie-canal-state-park-and-nys-barge-canal/index>

¹⁷ Howard, interview by author, 2015.

waters” [see figure one].¹⁸ Soon thereafter, Utica’s population exploded, and in 1832 it was incorporated as a city.¹⁹ Population grew along with upstate New York’s economy as warehouses and factories popped up along the Canal and across the region.²⁰ In a word, the Erie Canal was transformative. Its completion meant New York City to Buffalo was the only “water level route” from the Atlantic Ocean to interior states, and cities like Utica capitalized on their prime spots along the man-made waterway.²¹ Utica catered to travelers along the Canal and became a hub for textile manufacturing.

Throughout the 1800s and early 1900s Utica embraced its ideal location and industry.

According to Dr. T. Wood Clarke, author of a history book on Utica:

The industrial expansion which had been going on for several years reached a high point in 1893. The Mohawk Valley Cotton Mills doubled its capital and the size of its mill; the Kernan Furnace Company increased its capital 150% and erected a new building in East Utica; the Skenandoa Mills completed its extensive addition; and the Utica Knitting Company built another new mill on Erie Street.²²

In the early 1990s the Globe Woolen Mills, Oneita Knitting Mill, and Utica Steam Cotton were among the city’s biggest employers.²³ People flocked to the city to work with cotton and craft

¹⁸ Douglas M. Preston, “The Erie Canal: Only 4 feet deep, but it was gateway to the West,” *The Grand Old Days of the Erie Canal*, supplement to the Utica Observer-Dispatch, Thursday, September 3, 1987, print, 3.

¹⁹ Howard, interview by author, 2015.

²⁰ Douglas M. Preston, “The Erie Canal,” *The Grand Old Days of the Erie Canal*, supplement to the Observer-Dispatch, 1987, print.

²¹ Ibid.

²² T Wood Clarke, *Utica for a Century and a Half*, (Utica, NY: The Widtman Press, 1952), 73.

²³ Howard, interview by author, 2015.

undergarments, making Utica the 66th largest city in the United States in 1900.²⁴ Chris Lawrence, a planner for the city of Utica, describes the city as the “knit good capital of the world.”²⁵ The output did not stop there. In the 19th century Utica had a number of breweries, and hops farming was a lucrative enterprise throughout Oneida County.²⁶ Brewing beer was so lucrative that by the end of the 19th century there were more than a dozen breweries in the city.²⁷ Today only the F.X. Matt Brewery, founded in 1888, remains.²⁸ Throughout this development, Utica’s prime location remained its key asset. In the words of Brian Howard, the Director of the Oneida County Historical Society, Utica was a “crossroads of commerce.”²⁹ People accompanied the goods coming through the city, spent money in Utica, and in so doing ensured the municipality’s centrality in the region and importance to the United States. Utica’s rise was typical throughout what was to become the Rust Belt, as demonstrated by the similar experiences of Youngstown and Detroit. This commonality is one reason why Utica deserves to be a part of Rust Belt thought and writing.

Youngstown was a steel city, and its output supported everything from war efforts to construction as cities embraced skyscrapers and grew upward. One of the most iconic

²⁴ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Table 13. Population of the 100 Largest Urban Places: 1900*, Internet release date: June 15, 1998, <https://www.census.gov/history/pdf/nyc-sf-pops-1900.pdf>.

²⁵ Chris Lawrence, interview by author, October 23, 2015.

²⁶ Howard, interview by author, 2015.

²⁷ Howard, interview by author, 2015.

²⁸ Joseph P. Bottini and James L. Davis, *Utica: Then & Now*, (Charleston, South Carolina: Arcadia Publishing), 2007, 52.

²⁹ Lawrence, interview by author, 2015.

components of Youngstown’s industrial character was the Jeannette Blast Furnace, which opened on September 20, 1918.³⁰ This came on the heels of several decades of development in which mills opened, consolidated, and collectively made the city the second largest steel-producing area in the country (it briefly became the largest steel-producing area, surpassing Pittsburgh, just nine years later).³¹ Similar to what happened in Utica, population trends matched economic trends. According to the U.S. Census of Population, 44,885 people called Youngstown home in 1900; in 1930, 170,002 lived in the city.³² Most jobs in the steel mills required long hours for paltry pay—many employees toiled at least twelve hours per day for an insignificant annual sum of around \$440.³³ In addition to their attempts to keep wages down, companies in Youngstown tried to leverage ethnic and social divisions. According to the authors of *Steeltown U.S.A.*, Sherry Linkon and John Russo, “the companies . . . recognized the value of keeping the various nationalities separated since wariness about different people and language barriers could help keep workers from organizing to seek better wages or working conditions.”³⁴ Despite such malicious practices, Youngstown community members established a reputation for themselves

³⁰ Sherry Lee Linkon and John Russo, *Steeltown U.S.A.*, (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2002), 24.

³¹ Linkon and Russo, *Steeltown U.S.A.*, 25.

³² Linkon and Russo, *Steeltown U.S.A.*, 27.

³³ Linkon and Russo, *Steeltown U.S.A.*, 28.

³⁴ Linkon and Russo, *Steeltown U.S.A.*, 32.

and for their city. “The Steel City” from World War I through the 1960s was known nationwide for its high levels of home ownership and its skilled workers.³⁵

This positive connotation was also evident in Detroit. With the advent of assembly lines and the growth of the American middle class in the mid-nineteenth century Detroit’s car companies generally thrived. As industry reigned, so too did the city. The city’s population of around 1,850,000 residents in 1950 made it the fifth largest city in the United States.³⁶ As Detroit worked for America, it worked for its residents. The motor vehicle industry alone accounted for a quarter to a third of all jobs in Detroit, and union-negotiated contracts ensured wages and benefits beyond most work elsewhere at the time.³⁷ These manufacturing jobs, of course, supported other sectors. Those who worked for the big three automakers bought homes, went out to dinner, and shopped in the area. The country noticed this relative prosperity, and “Americans had grown accustomed by the early 1960s to seeing the Midwest as the dynamic heart of the industrial economy of the United States.”³⁸ This city was not the depressed shell of itself that we see today; it was the engine room of America, literally giving Americans the horsepower they needed to get to work, to leisure, and to prosperity. Moreover, that this area was the “dynamic

³⁵ John Russo and Sherry Lee Linkon, “Collateral Damage: Deindustrialization and the Uses of Youngstown” in *Beyond the Ruins: The Meanings of Deindustrialization*, edited by Jefferson Cowie and Joseph Heathcott, 201-218, (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2003), 202.

³⁶ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Table 18. Population of the 100 Largest Urban Places: 1950*, Internet release date: June 15, 1998, <https://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0027/tab18.txt>.

³⁷ Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press), 2005, 95.

³⁸ Steven High, *Industrial Sunset: The Making of North America’s Rust Belt, 1969-1984*, (Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press), 2003, 20.

heart” of industry goes far beyond the tangible output of its factories and workers. Detroit was a vibrant cultural hub, giving America Motown music in 1959.³⁹

These three cities all provided for their residents as their output spread across the country. Utica produced textiles, Youngstown steel, and Detroit cars. Each city was known across the country for its respective industry and rose to prominence through the laborers who filled warehouses, mills, and factories. Utica’s rise was remarkably similar to those of Youngstown and Detroit, demonstrating common themes in the Rust Belt. By acknowledging this similarity across the three cities we can better understand the story of Utica within the macroscopic narrative of the Rust Belt at large—each city, like many others in the region, grew and thrived upon a certain aspect of manufacturing. This overreliance on one particular industry, however—coupled with various external forces—condemned dozens of cities throughout the Rust Belt.

Utica peaked around the same time as Youngstown and before Detroit, but fell sooner and faster than both of these cities. The textile industry in the city started to struggle in the 1920s, and after a brief resurgence during World War II this industry evaporated.⁴⁰ Local efforts struggled to compete with southern manufacturing, and wartime orders just barely kept Utica’s textile and garment factories running.⁴¹ In one sense, Utica should have been a warning sign for other Rust Belt cities that likewise invested heavily in one industry. Utica’s population reached

³⁹ “Motown: The Sound That Changed America,” Motown Museum, accessed January 20, 2015, <https://www.motownmuseum.org/story/motown/>.

⁴⁰ Bean, *The Urban Colonists*, 304.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

its highest point relatively early, at around 110,000 people in 1932,⁴² and its main industry left before those of Detroit and Youngstown. For example, Oneita, which had been in Utica for decades, opened a plant in Andrews, South Carolina, in 1952.⁴³ The company, “being unable to operate its mills in Utica profitably, closed it in December 1955 and transferred all its operations and equipment [south].”⁴⁴ Manufacturers were attracted to the south by lower transportation costs (cotton had to be shipped to Utica) and fewer labor unions.⁴⁵ Textile manufacturing left the Rust Belt before auto and steel manufacturing did the same, and cumulatively such downsizings and eventual closings meant fifteen thousand Uticans (15 percent of the city) in 1946 were unemployed.⁴⁶ The city was struggling, and Utica’s lost luster was similar to the devastation evident throughout the region.

Mill and factory closings wracked cities from upstate New York to the Midwest. In Youngstown, Youngstown Sheet and Tube closed the nearby Campbell Works on September 19, 1977, on what became known as “Black Monday.”⁴⁷ Soon after the same company closed the Brier Hill Works, U.S. Steel shuttered the Ohio and McDonald works, and Republic Steel

⁴² Lawrence, interview by author, 2015.

⁴³ Oneita Knitting Mills, “A Brief History of Oneita Knitting Mills for the Centennial Celebration in Andrews, South Carolina, April 3-4, 1976” (Oneita, 1976).

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Bean, *The Urban Colonists*, 49.

⁴⁶ Bean, *The Urban Colonists*, 304-305.

⁴⁷ Linkon and Russo, *Steeltown U.S.A.*, 47-48.

stopped production at its Youngstown works.⁴⁸ In Detroit, four major economic downturns between 1949 and 1960 challenged auto manufacturing—an industry particularly sensitive to diminished demand.⁴⁹ Detroit’s second largest automobile factory, Dodge Main—which had more than 35,000 workers in the 1940s—cut several thousand jobs in the late 1950s.⁵⁰ Downturns before this point had not resulted in such dramatic outcomes, but between 1947 and 1963 Detroit saw 134,000 manufacturing jobs cut or leave while its working-age population increased.⁵¹ Steel production became increasingly concentrated near bodies of water, impacting a certain land-locked city in eastern Ohio.⁵² Steel manufacturers in the city did not invest in new technologies, letting foreign companies innovate and attract investment.⁵³ Similarly, Detroit’s Big Three—Ford, General Motors, and Chrysler—decentralized production, built factories closer to regional bases, and combatted labor costs.⁵⁴ Decision-makers shuttered plants in the city in favor of locations in the American south, which had lower wages and access to post-war highways (meaning an industry’s location in the Midwest was less important than it used to be).⁵⁵

⁴⁸ Linkon and Russo, *Steeltown U.S.A.*, 47

⁴⁹ Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis*, 126.

⁵⁰ Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis*, 125-126.

⁵¹ Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis*, 126.

⁵² Linkon and Russo, *Steeltown U.S.A.*, 48.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Scott Martelle, *Detroit: A Biography*, (Chicago, Illinois: Chicago Review Press), 2012, 175.

⁵⁵ Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis*, 127.

Additionally, many companies automated processes on the assembly line, which hurt the labor force through significant job loss.⁵⁶ As the primary industry left in Detroit so, too, did support and related fields—tool manufacturers, metalworking groups, and parts industries left the area.⁵⁷ The examples of Utica, Youngstown, and Detroit show the common mal-effects of deindustrialization in the region and the sheer devastation wrought by industry closings. Whether it was Oneita, Youngstown Sheet and Tube, or Dodge Main, the stories were the same.

The numbers from such closing events are harrowing. The working class of Youngstown lost \$1.3 billion in annual manufacturing wages, and unemployment was near 25 percent in 1983.⁵⁸ According to the Ohio Bureau of Employment Services, fifty thousand steel and related industries jobs were lost in the area.⁵⁹ Manufacturing in Detroit accounted for fewer than 27,000 jobs in 2011 compared to around 296,000 positions in 1950.⁶⁰ Although 27,000 represents tens of thousands of jobs, it pales to the hundreds of thousands of jobs that once fueled much of Detroit. In sum, the economies of Utica, Youngstown and Detroit collapsed without their respective industries. Youngstown without the Jeannette Blast Furnace belching fire was like Utica without its many textile warehouses, and the “Jenny” was torn down in January 1997.⁶¹ In 1950, 56

⁵⁶ Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis*, 130-131.

⁵⁷ Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis*, 129.

⁵⁸ Linkon and Russo, *Steeltown U.S.A.*, 47.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Jeff Green and Mark Clothier, “U.S. Automakers Thrive as Detroit Goes Bankrupt,” *Bloomberg*, July 19, 2013, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2013-07-19/u-s-automakers-thrive-as-detroit-goes-bankrupt>.

⁶¹ Linkon and Russo, *Steeltown U.S.A.*, 58.

percent of all automobile employment in the United States was in Michigan but by 1960 just 40 percent of all automobile employment was in the state.⁶² Manufacturing's departure sparked various responses in each city. The loss of textiles in Utica, steel in Youngstown, and the diminished role of autos in Detroit all encouraged the cities and their people to respond or—as was so often the case—move away. Loss of industry was a shock to the collective system, and in the wake of initial troubles each city responded in one way or another, but all were generally unsuccessful in the mid- to late twentieth century.

Granted, Utica lost something when textile manufacturing left but quickly adjusted. In the 1940s and 1950s the city experienced “Loom to Boom” as new and better-paying jobs took hold in large part due to East Utica's Democratic engine.⁶³ For instance:

In 1946, at the outset of the area's economic crisis, Elefante [a local leader] persuaded Senator James Mead . . . to use his influence in Washington to ensure that a wartime air base located in Rome, Utica's [nearby] sister city, would be retained and expanded . . . this military installation eventually created eight thousand civilian jobs and was pouring nearly fifty million dollars in wages alone into the regional economy in 1960.⁶⁴

This kind of political maneuvering kept Utica from the brink. Chicago Nomadic, Bendix, and General Electric soon opened factories in and around the city, sustaining some residents and allaying decline.⁶⁵ These technology-based companies defined Utica in the post-textile era.⁶⁶ A continued focus on a singular industry, however, reflects one of Utica's most enduring—and

⁶² Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis*, 128.

⁶³ Bean, *The Urban Colonists*, 305.

⁶⁴ Bean, *The Urban Colonists*, 312-313.

⁶⁵ Lawrence, interview by author, 2015.

⁶⁶ Howard, interview by author, 2015.

damaging—characteristics. The city, like many others in the Rust Belt, continually clung to one economic driver. Utica’s loss of one industry (textiles), resurgence (from low-tech manufacturing) and loss again is unique within the Rust Belt. Because textile manufacturing declined as industries like steel and auto manufacturing were still growing, Utica had the ability to temporarily adjust its downward course, but the result was ultimately the same.⁶⁷ Historian Brian Howard believes the city needs to learn from its past and not “hang [its] hat on any one particular industry. If this region does that, it’s creating the same situation that has defined Utica’s boom/bust cycle for the past 200 years.”⁶⁸ Like textile manufacturing, technology manufacturing from the likes of General Electric ultimately left the city, leaving many residents jobless and despondent.⁶⁹

The 1990s and 2000s in Utica were largely defined by deindustrialization and the accompanying vacant warehouses, empty houses, and decline in population. In 2000, just 60,651 Uticans remained,⁷⁰ which is especially small considering the city’s high mark of around 110,000 people in 1932 (this decline is not unique; Detroit’s population dropped from around 1.8 million people to 680,000 or so more recently).⁷¹ In effect, Utica without industry became a city without people, and both Youngstown and Detroit experienced similar declines. For decades after

⁶⁷This statement stems from a conversation with my advisor, Sherry Linkon Ph.D.

⁶⁸ Howard, interview by author, 2015.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Alan G. Hevesi, Office of the New York State Comptroller, *Population Trends in New York State’s Cities*, https://www.osc.state.ny.us/localgov/pubs/research/pop_trends.pdf.

⁷¹ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *QuickFacts: Detroit City, Michigan*, accessed April 17, 2016, <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/26/2622000.html>.

the many mill closings Youngstown was a national leader in unemployment, poverty rates, population decline, foreclosures, and bankruptcies.⁷² The Motor City became the condemned city as its fate rested on the future and location of car manufacturing. In “1979, the automobile, symbol of the American Dream, mass production, and conspicuous consumption, had come to symbolize what was wrong with the old industrial heartland.”⁷³ Chrysler’s near-bankruptcy in 1979 was not just associated with but directly linked to the health of Detroit, and this Midwestern city became the focal point of deindustrialization and the Rust Belt.⁷⁴ The aforementioned Dodge Main plant, which employed 35,000 in its heyday, was demolished in 1981.⁷⁵ This thesis challenges such treatment of former industrial space, insisting the reuse of such space reveals economic and cultural shifts in the region. In this instance, such destruction demonstrates the dearth of opportunity characteristic of Detroit at the time. Detroit in 2013 entered bankruptcy, and although this process formally ended in 2014 when the city emerged from court protection, it is still a struggling municipal center.⁷⁶ The city that gave birth to Motown lost its groove in the national and global economy.

These cities are but three case studies in a long list of condemned communities, towns and metropolises abandoned by the industries that once defined them. In each community

⁷² Russo and Linkon, *Collateral Damage*, 202.

⁷³ Steven High, *Industrial Sunset*, 25.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ Steven High and David W. Lewis, *Corporate Wasteland: The Landscape and Memory of Deindustrialization*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007), 23.

⁷⁶ Monica Davey, “Detroit Is Out of Bankruptcy, but Not Out of the Woods,” *New York Times*, December 10, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/11/us/detroit-bankruptcy-ending.html>.

experiencing deindustrialization, a collective trauma is endured and internalized by its people. As Linkon and Russo put it,

A sense of helplessness may develop as deindustrialization is normalized as part of the ‘natural’ economic order of shifting capital and competition. After deindustrialization, communities face the loss of self-esteem as the population declines efforts to attract reinvestment fail, and social and economic conditions decay.⁷⁷

Steel’s heyday in Youngstown is long past and the city has struggled by nearly any metric one uses to evaluate an area’s health. Detroit was the once-proud synonym of auto manufacturing in America, and although it is still connected to its industrial legacy, the city is now also synonymous with poverty and decay. Utica lost tens of thousands of residents, and only recently has it begun to show glimmers of a brighter future.

There are commonalities shared by cities throughout the Rust Belt. Most areas clung to one primary component of manufacturing—textiles (then technology) in Utica, steel in Youngstown, and autos in Detroit. Without such industries, however, these towns and their people were left behind. According to Brian Howard, the “Rust Belt [is] indicative of . . . what was once the most powerful region in the United States, the northeast.”⁷⁸ Utica was the city of textiles and garments, Youngstown was Steeltown U.S.A, and Detroit was the Motor City. Such prominence did not last. Utica’s moniker, “The City That God Forgot,”⁷⁹ holds true for almost every city in the Rust Belt. The memory of past industrial and economic stability makes it necessary to evaluate the fall of the northeast and the Midwest because history is not an abstract concept—it

⁷⁷ Russo and Linkon, *Collateral Damage*, 202.

⁷⁸ Howard, interview by author, 2015.

⁷⁹ *The Worst Snow Globe: Life in the City That God Forgot* (blog), <http://theworstsnowglobe.blogspot.com/>.

looms large in the Rust Belt. Even the term Rust Belt forces people to reflect on industrial legacies, on the structures that long ago turned to rust. Recent trends in Utica, as this project will demonstrate, reflect rust renewed. The city embraces refugees to a unique degree, enjoys investment from a variety of local and non-local sources, and its people are fostering a new consensus culture informed by past industry, multiculturalism, and optimism. This defies Rust Belt trends, and although the past will always be present in this city, how Uticans interact with it and that which was left behind is promising for the area and the Rust Belt at large.

Chapter Two: Refugees

The Rust Belt experienced all sorts of loss. Jobs, money, and especially people left the region. Places like Utica, Youngstown, and Detroit all experienced this demographic decline. In recent years, however, Utica has managed to defy this downward trend. The Mohawk Valley Resource Center for Refugees (MVRRCR) and the people it has brought to and supported in the city are key players in this recent uptick. Utica has become a home for individuals from all around the world, and just as these people have benefitted from the area, so too has the city benefitted from these new residents. Refugees are an emergent vibrant group, and collectively these people have ended population decline, fostered economic development by renovating deindustrialized space, and encouraged hope in the region.

Using immigrants to offset the depopulation that occurs with deindustrialization is not necessarily unique within the Rust Belt. In the Detroit metro area Middle Eastern immigrants transformed some communities.⁸⁰ Dayton, Ohio, encouraged immigrants to come to the city in 2011 with its “Welcoming Dayton” plan and has experienced growth in recent years as a result of

⁸⁰ John Russo, “Deindustrialization, Depopulation, and the Refugee Crisis,” *newgeography*, December 2, 2015, <http://www.newgeography.com/content/005113-deindustrialization-depopulation-and-refugee-crisis>.

population influx.⁸¹ Cities across the Rust Belt that have invested in refugees arrest or turn around population decline and soon enjoy an economic boon. John Russo summarizes it best:

Rust Belt communities have the infrastructure and housing to accommodate many refugees. In turn, the new immigrants could establish microeconomic communities, complement established markets, invest earnings and consume in the local economy and become a source for new tax revenue.⁸²

Refugees stop population and economic decline. Another deindustrialized city in upstate New York—Buffalo—demonstrates as much. Refugees moved into the west side of the city and, similar to what has happened in Utica, renovated vacant houses and businesses.⁸³ Just as important, however, is the shift in perspective that occurred in Buffalo. Denise Beehag, director of refugee and employment services at the International Institute of Buffalo, gives credit to refugees for “changing the overall vibe of the area and making it a more desirable place to live.”⁸⁴ Refugees change the way Rust Belt cities perceive themselves. This hope is unquantifiable, but significant.

In this sense, Utica’s move to accept refugees was smart. The gamble, if there was one, was welcoming the number of refugees that it did—but the resulting economic growth⁸⁵ and renewed hope in the city speak for themselves. Utica needed to gamble on something that would ensure

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Joel Rose, “Resettled Refugees Help to ‘Bring Buffalo Back,’” *NPR*, December 2, 2015, <http://www.npr.org/2015/12/02/458007064/resettled-refugees-help-to-bring-buffalo-back>.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ As will be covered extensively in the next chapter.

some modicum of economic viability. With low-cost real estate and available low-skill jobs the city had things that would appeal to refugees—but it also needed vision. In 2006 Paul Hagstrom, an economics professor at Hamilton College,⁸⁶ calculated that it would take around twelve years for the city to see a return on its resettlement investment.⁸⁷ The city has made it through the time when refugees are more burden than boon, and its current promise reflects its patience and prescience.

The figures alone illustrate the impact refugees have had in Utica and the Mohawk Valley. As of 2010, the MVRCCR had helped over ten thousand refugees transition to life in upstate New York.⁸⁸ According to Shelly Callahan, the Executive Director of the MVRCCR, this number now stands at over 15,000 people⁸⁹ and the population in Utica is “now at 62,000 largely due to refugee and other immigrant resettlement.” Hagstrom supports this conclusion, stating “the migration out of the [Utica-Rome Metropolitan Statistical Area] MSA is mitigated by international migration into the area.”⁹⁰ 62,000 represents an uptick of almost 2,000 people from the 2000 census to the 2010 census,⁹¹ meaning refugees not only stopped the population decline from older residents dying or departing, but helped Utica grow. According to the 2010 U.S.

⁸⁶ Hamilton College is just 7 or so miles from Utica.

⁸⁷ David Chanatry, “Utica, N.Y., Draws Immigrant Population,” *NPR*, February 1, 2006, accessed January 31, 2016, <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5182157>.

⁸⁸ Bean, *The Urban Colonists*, 382.

⁸⁹ Shelly Callahan, interview by author, November 24, 2015.

⁹⁰ Paul Hagstrom, “The Fiscal Impact of Refugee Resettlement In the Mohawk Valley,” June 2000, 13.

⁹¹ Elizabeth Cooper, “Census ’10: Region’s Population Stabilizes,” *Utica Observer-Dispatch*, March 24, 2011, <http://www.uticaod.com/article/20110324/NEWS/303249911>.

census, 17.6 percent of Uticans were foreign born and a language other than English was spoken in 26.6 percent of Utica households.⁹² That same census, according to Director of the Utica Public Library Darby O'Brien, represented the first increase in Utica's population since 1930.⁹³ Having such a large refugee population is unique by comparative standards. As of 2002, the city's refugee population comprised around 12 percent of the total population, the fourth highest per capita concentration of refugees in the United States.⁹⁴ By figures alone, refugees have meant much to the city.

Utica is a prime city for refugee resettlement. To those unfamiliar with the city this may come as a shock: What could possibly make a deindustrialized city in the middle of upstate New York appealing to those seeking a new life in the United States? In fact, it is in large part the city's deindustrialized nature that makes it so fruitful for foreign-born newcomers. Low-skill jobs abound in the area, and refugees are needed to fill these positions.⁹⁵ Bob O'Reilly, the director of ConMed's human resources department in 2005, put this need in blunt terms: "[t]he company probably would not be here without these refugees."⁹⁶ The availability of these jobs might not attract native-born citizens to the harsh climate of the region, but for job-hungry refugees these positions are welcome on-ramps to gainful employment. As the area's economy "bottomed out,

⁹² "Foreign Born Populations," Mohawk Valley Resource Center for Refugees, accessed 16 November 2015, <https://www.mvrccr.org/about/populations/>.

⁹³ Darby O'Brien, interview by author, January 6, 2016.

⁹⁴ Reed Coughlan and Judith Owens-Manley, *Bosnian Refugees in America: New Communities, New Cultures*, (New York: Springer Science+Business Media, Inc.), 2006, 28-29.

⁹⁵ Chanatry, "Utica, N.Y., Draws Immigrant Population.

⁹⁶ Ray Wilkinson, "The Town That Loves Refugees," *Refugees*, 1 no. 138, (2005): 13.

many jobs on offer, though not high tech, had the advantage of allowing people who often did not speak English or have the skills . . . immediately find employment.”⁹⁷ In other words, Utica’s unfavorable conditions for long-term residents were extremely favorable to incoming refugees. In the mid-2000s, companies like ConMed relied on refugee labor,⁹⁸ and in recent years companies like Chobani⁹⁹ have utilized this workforce.¹⁰⁰ The jobs throughout upstate central New York tend to be minimum or low-wage entry-level positions.¹⁰¹ For example, Bosnians have thrived in the city and sociologists determined that Bosnian refugees in particular were more successful regarding labor market integration in Utica than elsewhere¹⁰² in large part because “in Utica . . . the labor market was able to absorb both English speakers *and* those with virtually no ability to speak English, with the result that there was almost full employment in the Bosnian community.”¹⁰³ Refugees came to Utica and were cared for.

Uticans embraced the diversity these outsiders brought to their community. Peter Vogelaar, the former Executive Director of MVRVR, insisted in a recent podcast that Utica has a “warm

⁹⁷ Wilkinson, 13-14.

⁹⁸ Wilkinson, 13.

⁹⁹ Chobani’s founder, by the way, is a refugee. To learn more about his story, check out this CNN story: <http://money.cnn.com/video/news/2015/09/21/chobani-ceo-hamdi-ulukaya-fills-his-plants-with-refugees.cnnmoney/>

¹⁰⁰ Shelly Callahan, interview by author, November 24, 2015.

¹⁰¹ Callahan, interview by author, 2015.

¹⁰² Coughlan and Owens-Manley, *Bosnian Refugees in America*, 129.

¹⁰³ Coughlan and Owens-Manley, *Bosnian Refugees in America*, 113.

heart.”¹⁰⁴ A 2005 report from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) referring to Utica as “The Town That Loves Refugees” echoes Vogelaar’s sentiment. Sometimes, when new people move into a Rust Belt town they replace older generations because of their willingness to work for lower wages and that sparks tension, anger, or outright xenophobia. Lynn Nottage’s play *Sweat* illustrates the struggle of new individuals moving into deindustrialized communities.¹⁰⁵ In this play, a conflict results when Latino immigrants move into a Pennsylvania Rust Belt town and displace the long-term residents. As of 2000, however, there was little indication in Utica that refugees were negatively affecting employment prospects of older residents.¹⁰⁶ Granted, the city is not entirely free of its problems regarding refugee integration,¹⁰⁷ but its history and dire straits made the city—if not willing to welcome refugees—then at least needing to accept refugees.¹⁰⁸

Ethnic groups in Utica include Bosnians, Burmese, and Karen (an ethnic minority in Burma)¹⁰⁹ among many others. Certain groups have tended to cluster in particular sections of the city. The Bosnians have largely settled in East Utica, while the Burmese and Karen have tended

¹⁰⁴ “Utica, NY: City With a Warm Heart,” *State of the Re:Union*, <http://stateofthereunion.com/utica-ny-city-with-a-warm-heart/>.

¹⁰⁵ “Sweat,” by Lynn Nottage, directed by Kate Whoriskey, Arena Stage: The Mead Center for American Theater, Washington, DC, February 10, 2016.

¹⁰⁶ Hagstrom, “The Fiscal Impact of Refugee Resettlement in the Mohawk Valley,” 3.

¹⁰⁷ As can be seen in the public school system, which will be discussed later on in the chapter.

¹⁰⁸ Wilkinson, 13.

¹⁰⁹ “The Karen People,” *Karen Buddhist Dhamma Dhutta Foundation*, http://www.karen.org.au/karen_people.htm.

to live in the Cornhill neighborhood of the city.¹¹⁰ With Utica’s population decline, houses, businesses, and city blocks were left vacant, but because of the large inventory of empty homes, prices were very affordable. This rings true across other parts of the Rust Belt according to John Russo: “They [refugees] bought low-priced homes and rehabbed them, began to pay taxes, and purchased goods and services.”¹¹¹ With the recent refugee influx, such vacant spaces have been reclaimed. In the words of Shelly Callahan, “It’s restaurants, it’s stores, it’s actually refurbishing house-by-house, street-by-street, so taking entire neighborhoods and really revitalizing them. The Bosnians impacted East Utica in that very way: home ownership, refurbishing and buying, refurbishing and buying.”¹¹² Within particular city blocks and sections of the city refugees have carved out a life for themselves in upstate New York and replicated or created new norms in the United States. Bosnians, for instance, have a distinctive style for the houses they invest in—exterior stucco.¹¹³

A lot of difficulties come with moving to a new city, let alone a new country. According to Shelly Callahan, “English is the key to everything.”¹¹⁴ Of course, most refugees come to the city with no English or recognized job skills.¹¹⁵ Accordingly, the MVRCCR has strategies regarding employment and the development of language and other skills for its refugees. For example, the

¹¹⁰ Callahan, interview by author, 2015.

¹¹¹ Russo, “Deindustrialization, Depopulation, and the Refugee Crisis,” 2015.

¹¹² Callahan, interview by author, 2015.

¹¹³ Doug Ambrose and John Bartle, interview by author, November 24, 2015.

¹¹⁴ Callahan, interview by author, 2015.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

Center works with the Mohawk Valley Community College to provide employment-related courses.¹¹⁶ Furthermore, MVRCCR assists around 50 employers in the area who hire refugees with cultural competency training to facilitate cross-cultural understanding for a productive workplace.¹¹⁷ These services ensure newcomers are looked after and cared for as they settle into life in a new country.

Such relative stability allows refugee communities to transmit various parts of their traditional culture to the area, including food, as they grow increasingly accustomed to life in upstate New York. The restaurant scene in Utica has come to be defined by invention, multiculturalism, and community support, the likes of which one would be hard-pressed to find elsewhere. Throughout the twentieth century, Utica was predominately Italian. A quick glance at its traditional foods—greens, chicken riggies, and the like—reflects that character. As the composition of the city has changed, however, so too has its palate: “Restaurant choices have expanded beyond what used to be traditional ethnic food; East Utica Italian and West Utica Polish and Lebanese establishments have made room for a Vietnamese eatery, Bosnian restaurants and nightclubs, and Oriental groceries.”¹¹⁸ This kind of invention and change is vital to a community in the Rust Belt. It defies stagnation and integrates unique people. Utica, with its emerging vibrant community of refugees from different countries, has latched onto the new folkways of its residents. According to MVRCCR Executive Director Shelly Callahan, “For a city

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Coughlan and Owens-Manley, *Bosnian Refugees in America*, 27.

this small the ethnic food choices are high in number and great.”¹¹⁹ A local resident or a visitor can enjoy pasta just as easily as one can enjoy a traditional Bosnian meal. Moreover, as refugees bring their native foods to Utica, they also adopt traditional local fare—the transmission of culture is a two-way street. Just as Italian-American or Polish-American families that have lived in Utica for generations have supported new ethnic restaurants, these same restaurants have catered to local tastes. For example, Secret Garden Restaurant—owned by a Bosnian family—won the local “Riggiefest” several years ago¹²⁰ and has some truly amazing food, including Italian fare. There is an exchange of culture and taste through these restaurants. As Bosnian-owned stores adjust to local taste-buds, so too do local residents avail themselves to the incredible array of ethnic options available to them. Moreover, refugee-owned restaurants are often re-using and redefining space aligning with Utica’s burgeoning optimism and multiculturalism. Refugees are breathing life into houses, restaurants, and all types of space across the city. The Bosnian-owned Europa Restaurant is located in what used to be an Italian restaurant.¹²¹ Ruznic is another Bosnian enterprise and is in a former firehouse.¹²²

Houses of worship have likewise been transformed in the area. Religious faith in Utica is incredibly diverse. Like most of the rest of the United States, Christianity dominated Utica throughout the 20th century. As the century progressed many Uticsans left the area, churches

¹¹⁹ Callahan, interview by author, 2015.

¹²⁰ “Dinner Menu,” *Secret Garden Restaurant*, accessed January 31, 2016, <http://sgrestaurant.com/menu/>.

¹²¹ Ambrose and Bartle, interview by author, 2015.

¹²² *Ibid.*

suffered without people in the pews, and many shuttered their doors. With the introduction of refugees and their diverse faith traditions the religious composition of the area changed. Non-Christian traditions such as Islam and Buddhism were increasingly practiced in the city and houses of faith facilitated these traditions. The Bosnian Islamic Association of Utica is perhaps the most visible manifestation of this shift [see figures two¹²³ and three¹²⁴]:

In this faded industrial town on the Erie Canal, the old United Methodist church downtown is being turned into a mosque, the old roof topped with minarets, the crescent moon and star of Islam on new white stucco replacing the familiar red-brick facade. Like the immigrants and refugees making up an ever-increasing share of the local population and the 42 languages spoken in the local schools, it is one more sign of how much the familiar world here is fading into the past.¹²⁵

Such an effort—a mere block from Utica’s City Hall—redefines space in the city and reflects the emergent vibrant communities that exist within the area.

Local support was integral to the creation of such a tangible and striking reflection of Utica’s refugee and faith-based communities. Reusing this structure benefitted more than just Bosnian Muslims. According to Utica’s former mayor, David Roefaro, razing the former Central United Methodist Church would have cost almost a million dollars.¹²⁶ The mosque saved the City of Utica from that expense, maintained the distinctive structure of the former Christian church, and provided Bosnian Muslims with a community center. According to Mirsen Durmisevic of the

¹²³ Chinki Sinha, “Former Utica church may become mosque,” *Utica Observer-Dispatch*, March 29, 2008, accessed January 31, 2016, <http://www.uticaod.com/article/20080329/NEWS/303299934>.

¹²⁴ “Galerija,” *Bosnian Islamic Association of Utica*, accessed January 31, 2016, <http://bosniana.weebly.com/galerija.html>.

¹²⁵ Peter Applebome, “In This Town, Open Arms for A Mosque,” *The New York Times*, August 18, 2010, accessed November 29, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/19/nyregion/19towns.html?_r=0.

¹²⁶ Sinha, “Former Utica church may become mosque.”

Secret Garden Restaurant, “We wanted to have a mosque. I mean you’re talking about 6,000 people [Bosnians] living here. The city helped us. The city had, I think, eight or nine churches that were abandoned, and they were like ‘pick one and see.’”¹²⁷ Such local support shows how Uticans have embraced and supported new residents. It is a city that has made itself an oasis of welcome for people from around the world. A Methodist gathering place is now a hub for Bosnian Muslims, and another former church has likewise given way to new Uticans.

The All Saints Episcopal Church gave way to the Midtown Utica Community Center (MUCC) within the last couple years, and the site became a home for a different sort of community.¹²⁸ MUCC works to assist hundreds of refugees every week and is supported by a network of around 100 regular volunteers from all around the region.¹²⁹ This again reflects the dedication of those in Utica and the Mohawk Valley region to the new people living in their midst. The Bosnian Islamic Association of Utica and MUCC both reuse former sites of Christian worship to foster community in the city—the former through faith and the latter through services like case management and tutoring.¹³⁰

Older and newer residents have all taken to the task of community building. Elizabeth Slocum Brando, the executive director of the Utica Children’s museum, reflects this characteristic of the city. The museum recently re-opened in April 2015 and has not done much direct outreach to Utica’s refugees because it has been in “start-up mode” and simply trying to

¹²⁷ “Genesee Lights,” *Digital Humanities Initiative*, <https://vimeo.com/77416716>.

¹²⁸ “A Safe Place for Refugees – Part 1,” *The Signal*, December 16, 2015.

¹²⁹ “A Safe Place for Refugees – Part 2,” *The Signal*, December 17, 2015.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

get its own house in order.¹³¹ However, Brando hopes to make inroads with the refugee community.¹³² Being intentional in outreach, acknowledging cultural differences, and working with an organization like the MVRRCR are crucial for places like the Children’s Museum when attempting to interact with the thousands of refugees in Utica. Institutions across the city acknowledge the role these new Uticans play and are using the MVRRCR and the MUCC to engage with these new residents.

Utica took a risk when it began investing in refugees; now it is beginning to see a return on its investment. That being said, the city still faces challenges integrating its refugee population. Caring for people with minimal—if any—English language skills is a daunting proposition, especially for the city’s school district (which was the fifth-poorest district in New York in 2015).¹³³ Utica’s immigrants speak unique languages and this challenges a district that recently had to cut around 20 percent of its staff.¹³⁴ Utica’s school district, as of March 2016, was involved in two federal lawsuits that claim it discriminated against refugees by not letting some attend the local high school.¹³⁵ Understandably, some refugees who can afford to move have

¹³¹ Elizabeth Slocum Brando, interview with author, December 24, 2015.

¹³² *Ibid.*

¹³³ Ellen M. Blalock, “NY’s mysterious school aid formula: How some poor districts lose big,” *Syracuse.com*, June 22, 2015, accessed October 18 2015, http://www.syracuse.com/state/index.ssf/2015/06/nys_mysterious_school_aid_formula_how_some_poor_schools_lose_big.html.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ Hansi Lo Wang, “Refugees Say N.Y. School District Blocked Them From Going to High School,” *NPR*, March 1, 2016, <http://www.npr.org/2016/03/01/468246903/refugees-say-n-y-school-district-blocked-them-from-going-to-high-school>

relocated their families into the suburbs where there are better schools.¹³⁶ Fire safety is another issue resulting from differing cultural norms (such as improper decorations, which led to a recent fire in a municipal housing unit).¹³⁷ The fire department has addressed the issue by using a FEMA grant to produce fire prevention videos in different languages in order to reach refugees.¹³⁸ Finally, upstate New York is not free of xenophobia. After the Paris terrorist attacks in 2015, city Councilman Frank Vescera introduced legislation that would place a moratorium on Utica accepting Syrian refugees—even though the federal government makes the decisions on refugee resettlement.¹³⁹

These problems, however, pale in significance when one considers Utica's dire straits before the influx of thousands of refugees. The city's commitment to its refugee population reflects what has happened elsewhere in the Rust Belt. In Utica, refugees have contributed to a newfound optimism and made traditional Uticans—those whose families may have lived in the area for generations—believe in the city. Tony Esposito, a longtime Utican and Executive Vice President of JetNet (which owns a building in the city) puts it best: “I think we're going back to our booming time and I think we're going there fast.”¹⁴⁰ It's time to believe in Utica, in large part thanks to the diverse people that now call it home.

¹³⁶ Chanatry, “Utica, N.Y., Draws Immigrant Population.”

¹³⁷ Lawrence, interview by author, 2015.

¹³⁸ Lawrence, interview by author, 2015.

¹³⁹ S. Alexander Gerould, “Syrian refugee moratorium stalled by Utica council,” *Utica Observer-Dispatch*, December 2, 2015, <http://www.uticaod.com/article/20151202/NEWS/151209841/?Start=1>.

¹⁴⁰ Tony Esposito, interview with author, January 6, 2016.

Chapter Three: Rust Belt Recovery

Utica is on the cusp of something significant for its own future and the future of the region. As noted in the previous chapter, refugees stabilized and even grew the city’s population. They then revitalized homes, opened restaurants, and worked across the area. This chapter will focus on forces that suggest economic growth from non-refugee sources. Everyone from New York Governor Andrew Cuomo to Utica Coffee Roasting Company owner Frank Elias are coming together to build a better future for the city. On the local level, this is most evident through the reuse of space and a series of individuals are committing themselves to the city. Utica is currently experiencing Rust Belt recovery through a variety of local and non-local investment in vacant or underutilized space throughout the city.

Although the word “recovery” suggests a return to a previous state (e.g. pre-World War I for Utica), Rust Belt recovery does not assume the boom times will come back. We see Rust Belt recovery in the redevelopment of abandoned spaces, expanding tax bases, growth in good jobs, and a significant amount of investment from a variety of sources. Returning to a population of 110,000 residents anytime soon would be unexpected for Utica—even as the city accepts hundreds of refugees every year. Arresting decline is commendable but it is still not Rust Belt recovery. To recover, a city must grow, even minutely, and while Utica is not flourishing more

people are calling it home (which is partially why it is enjoying much-needed Rust Belt recovery). In 2015, outside organizations recognized Utica’s recent growth and Fitch Ratings upgraded the city’s financial outlook from negative to stable.¹⁴¹ Standard & Poor’s Financial Services LLC changed its outlook for Utica from stable to positive.¹⁴²

Utica’s economic growth is based on several commonalities across the Rust Belt. First and foremost is the strength of community. In the face of deindustrialization, people in the Rust Belt, according to scholars Steve May and Laura Morrison, maintained the bonds forged in the steel mill or the factory in the months after closings because

workers . . . drew on a moral economy that they believe will persist long after the company’s departure from their community. . . [This] downsizing also reaffirmed workers’ ability to sustain themselves in adversity, drawing on co-workers and the community as sources of pride and strength.¹⁴³

Granted, May and Morrison’s study was conducted several months after a 1998 downsizing¹⁴⁴ at the KEMET manufacturing plant in Shelby, North Carolina.¹⁴⁵ It is difficult, if not impossible, to discern whether communities forged when Utica’s textile and low-tech manufacturing plants closed are maintained today. The May and Morrison study does speak, however, to the prevalence and necessity of community in Rust Belt cities in the immediate aftermath of

¹⁴¹ S. Alexander Gerould, “Utica’s financial outlook makes recent gains,” *Utica Observer-Dispatch*, May 3, 2015, <http://www.uticaod.com/article/20150503/NEWS/150509878>.

¹⁴² Ibid

¹⁴³ May and Morrison, “Making Sense of Restructuring: Narratives of Accommodation among Downsized Workers,” 283.

¹⁴⁴ *Beyond the Ruins: The Meanings of Deindustrialization*, edited by Jefferson Cowie and Joseph Heathcott, (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2003), 352.

¹⁴⁵ May and Morrison, “Making Sense of Restructuring: Narratives of Accommodation among Downsized Workers,” 259.

downsizing. Marsha Music's "The Kidnapped Children of Detroit" then discusses maintaining memory in the Rust Belt as older residents educate the new (sometimes returning) arrivals.¹⁴⁶ Those who stay in the city can speak to "real city narratives, to . . . the truths of what happened here [in Detroit] from all sides."¹⁴⁷ Community in the Rust belt may have been formed largely on a factory floor, but it continues in the experiences of those who stayed.

Utica's current slogan, "Utica begins with you," is a call for residents to build a better city together. In a 1980s commercial, a similar slogan stated: "You are Utica, and Utica is You!"¹⁴⁸ However, the early commercial's language and tenor belie the underlying tension of population decline and deindustrialization that had begun taking place in the city. Shortly after the video begins, the jingle's lyrics call out to Uticans: "Without you living here, it wouldn't be the same."¹⁴⁹ Residents were leaving the city, and civic leaders attempted to arrest this departure. Today's similar slogan avoids the desperate pleas of the 1980s. Instead, it is a call to work together and realize the potential of Utica—that the city's future begins with its residents. Of course, such a slogan could be seen as merely an attempt by government officials to galvanize residents; after all, it does not explicitly reflect or call for any tangible development in the city. Slogans do not necessarily demonstrate anything true about (in this case) a city; they tend to be more a part of a wider marketing and branding scheme. Therefore, "Utica begins with you"

¹⁴⁶ Marsha Music, "The Kidnapped Children of Detroit," *Belt Magazine*, March 10, 2015, <http://beltmag.com/the-kidnapped-children-of-detroit/>.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ "You Are Utica commercial- NY 1985," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8y9-mDOuJUs>.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

should be understood as an aspirational call to its residents that is built on recent indicators of economic growth that are the focus of this chapter.

The Rust Belt has a lot of vacant and underutilized space. Companies leaving Youngstown, Detroit, or Utica often left their manufacturing facilities behind. Steel mills, car plants, and warehouses can still be found across the region, and while some sites have been repurposed, others have not. When structures lie dormant for decades, local organizations are tempted to tear down such sites. In 1990s Detroit, the city's mayors twice razed large swaths of the Heidelberg Project (an abandoned neighborhood turned art exhibit).¹⁵⁰ Developers also reimagine abandoned structures in the Rust Belt, however and in so doing spur the local economy.

The effects of the reuse of space can be seen in part through economic figures. Around the turn of the century, the city of Utica's prospects were dim. It had 29,186 housing units but 4,086 were vacant.¹⁵¹ About three in ten households made \$14,999 or less, and the median household income stood at just \$24,916.¹⁵² Comparing the dismal numbers from 2000 to more recent times demonstrates how significant the Rust Belt recovery here has been. There were fewer total households in 2010 (28,166) but the number of vacant households (3,261) also declined.¹⁵³ Similarly, the median household income in 2014 was \$31,173—an increase of \$6,257 from 14

¹⁵⁰ Dora Apel, *Beautiful Terrible Ruins: Detroit and the Anxiety of Decline*, New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2015, 107.

¹⁵¹ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Table DP-1. Profile of General Demographic Characteristics: 2000, Geographic area: Utica city, New York*," Census 2000.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

¹⁵³ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Profile of General Population and Housing Characteristics: 2010, 2010 Demographic Profile Data, Geography: Utica, New York*, 2010 Census.

years prior.¹⁵⁴ If there is reason to be concerned about Utica’s economic growth, it would be the poverty rate in the city. More people live in the city (as noted in the previous chapter) and fewer vacant households exist, but incomes have not risen for everyone. In 1999, 24.5 percent of individuals lived beneath the poverty line,¹⁵⁵ while 30.7 percent of the population in 2014 lived beneath it.¹⁵⁶ Doug Ambrose of Hamilton College believes this phenomenon reflects how, “Utica has always been a poor city.”¹⁵⁷ When compared to the two cities in chapter one, however, Utica seems to be better off at the moment. Youngstown’s poverty rate in 2014 was 37.4 percent of the population,¹⁵⁸ and in Detroit, 39.3 percent lived beneath the poverty line in the same period.¹⁵⁹ All of these rates are far higher than the national average of 15.5 percent,¹⁶⁰ which demonstrates the endemic economic strife of the Rust Belt.

Utica is held back by depressed wages and widespread poverty. Almost a third of the city lives in poverty, and many Uticans lack the disposable income and capital to simply get by—let alone invest in each other and their city. William Julius Wilson in *When Work Disappears* argues that poverty and joblessness undermine a community’s social fabric but concedes that: “A

¹⁵⁴ “Utica, NY,” *Data USA*, accessed April 16, 2016, <http://datausa.io/profile/geo/utica-ny/#economy>.

¹⁵⁵ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Table DP-1. Profile of General Demographic Characteristics: 2000, Geographic area: Utica city, New York*, Census 2000.

¹⁵⁶ “Utica, NY,” *Data USA*, accessed April 16, 2016, <http://datausa.io/profile/geo/utica-ny/#economy>.

¹⁵⁷ Ambrose and Bartle, interview by author, 2015.

¹⁵⁸ “Youngstown, OH,” *Data USA*, accessed April 16, 2016, <http://datausa.io/profile/geo/utica-ny/#economy>.

¹⁵⁹ “Detroit, MI,” *Data USA*, accessed April 16, 2016, <http://datausa.io/profile/geo/utica-ny/#economy>.

¹⁶⁰ “Utica, NY,” *Data USA*, accessed April 16, 2016, <http://datausa.io/profile/geo/utica-ny/#economy>.

neighborhood in which people are poor but employed is different from a neighborhood in which people are poor and jobless.”¹⁶¹ Therefore the Utica-Rome area’s competitive unemployment rate of 5.1 percent (in December 2015)¹⁶² helps foster community. This is not meant to understate the very real devastating effects of poverty on the city. Utica was once called “Shootica” by some residents concerned about the number of shots-fired calls and shootings in the city,¹⁶³ but Wilson insists that many problems of inner-city neighborhoods—“crime, family dissolution, welfare, low levels of social organization, and so on”—are the result of joblessness.¹⁶⁴ At the moment, Utica still has a poverty problem but not an issue with joblessness, and crime in Utica has recently been on the decline (which supports Wilson’s theory).¹⁶⁵ The difficulties associated with poverty are not as acute as they could be. Mahoning County (in which Youngstown is located) had 13.2 deaths by homicide per 100,000 people in 2015¹⁶⁶; Wayne County (in which Detroit is

¹⁶¹ William Julius Wilson, "When Work Disappears," *Political Science Quarterly*, 111, no. 4, 567-95, (Winter 1996/1997), 567.

¹⁶² United State Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Utica-Rome, NY*, accessed April 17, 2016, http://www.bls.gov/eag/eag.ny_utica_msa.htm.

¹⁶³ Micaela Parker, “Utica’s violent crime rate declines,” *Utica Observer-Dispatch*, June 21, 2015, <http://www.uticaod.com/article/20150621/NEWS/150629975>.

¹⁶⁴ Wilson. "When Work Disappears," 567.

¹⁶⁵ Parker, “Utica’s violent crime rate declines,” 2015.

¹⁶⁶ “Youngstown, OH,” *Data USA*, accessed April 16, 2016, <http://datausa.io/profile/geo/utica-ny/#economy>.

located) had 21.6 homicide deaths by the same metric¹⁶⁷; in Oneida County, the figure was 3.2 homicide deaths per 100,000 people in 2015.¹⁶⁸

Low labor costs coupled with plentiful, cheap real estate means businesses have a relatively low start-up cost in Utica. A business in Utica can pay its employees less than it would elsewhere because the city's cost of living is over 10 percent below the national average.¹⁶⁹ In Utica even a modest salary can go a long way. Many businesses have opened or moved into the city recently—in 2015, ribbon cuttings for new businesses were the highest they have ever been.¹⁷⁰ Moreover, cheap properties contribute to Utica's business appeal, and the housing market can serve as a proxy point for comparison. In Utica, the median value of owner-occupied housing units from 2010-2014 was \$89,400¹⁷¹; the national average was almost double that at \$175,700.¹⁷² One investor, Tony Esposito of JetNet, lives and even moved his business to a site once owned by Hurd shoes:

In 2003, I was riding my bike down here [Bagg's Square] . . . Pretty much every building on this block was vacant, almost abandoned. I saw a . . . building. At the time JetNet was in the

¹⁶⁷ "Detroit, MI," *Data USA*, accessed April 16, 2016, <http://datausa.io/profile/geo/utica-ny/#economy>.

¹⁶⁸ "Utica, NY," *Data USA*, accessed April 16, 2016, <http://datausa.io/profile/geo/utica-ny/#economy>.

¹⁶⁹ "Utica, New York," *Sperling's BestPlaces*, accessed April 2, 2016, http://www.bestplaces.net/city/new_york/utica.

¹⁷⁰ Philip A. Vanno, "Gazing at a Bright Horizon," *Utica Observer-Dispatch*, February 28, 2016, print.

¹⁷¹ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *QuickFacts: Utica city New York*, accessed April 17, 2016, <http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045215/3676540>.

¹⁷² U.S. Bureau of the Census, *QuickFacts: United States*, accessed April 17, 2016, <http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045215/00>.

Adirondack Bank building. We decided we wanted to buy a building, weren't sure how to go about it, but it all clicked. The building was ridiculously cheap.¹⁷³

Frank Elias's Utica Coffee Roasting Company, which owns two buildings in downtown Utica (a storefront and a warehouse), is a purely commercial case study. By Elias's estimate, the latter building would have cost \$300,000 to build from scratch, but he got it for \$65,000 and invested an additional \$65,000 into the space for needed repairs.¹⁷⁴ In other words, he saved around \$170,000 by buying a site and renovating rather than building anew. The former site he got for just \$20,000 because, in his words, "in 2002, 2003 . . . it was a firesales [sic] in your downtowns."¹⁷⁵ Property was cheap, and entrepreneurs embraced the opportunity in front of them. Utica is experiencing Rust Belt recovery in large part because prospective employers can risk opening a business in Utica for relatively low upfront costs.

Perhaps the most unique example of redefining space in Utica is Cayo Industrial on Broad Street. This "warehouse of horror" featured four different attractions each October weekend in 2015: Archana Asylum, Biowarfare, Revelation, and Biotech [see figure four].¹⁷⁶ The former industrial character of this site is integral to the horror Cayo Industrial's owner/designer, Joshua Reale, wanted his guests to experience but in his words, "the atmosphere itself kind of sells it too."¹⁷⁷ There is something unsettling about the old industrial site that Reale wanted not only to

¹⁷³ Esposito, interview by author, 2016.

¹⁷⁴ Frank Elias, interview by author, January 6, 2016.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ "Cayo Industrial Warehouse of Horror" (advertisement handout).

¹⁷⁷ Joshua Reale, interview by author, October 24, 2015.

maintain but to exploit, and he built upon this space with his unique take on horror: “I don’t sell out; there’s no Jason or Freddie here.”¹⁷⁸ Utica’s industrial past gave Reale not just the structure but the space in which he could be creative and defy horror norms. The site is just one industrial building of many along this strip of Broad Street, and the structure itself is visibly crumbling on the outside. This does not mean guests should add building collapse to their fears while visiting Cayo Industrial. Reale has earned trust over several years of operation: “[the] city used to be real . . . strict, but now they know I know the ropes.”¹⁷⁹

Reale’s business reveals the malleable allure of former industrial buildings and demonstrates that such space can be useful for entrepreneurs. In Utica, everything from horror realms, office space, and loft apartments occupy former industrial sites. Reale does not believe all reuse of industrial space is created equal as “it’s interesting seeing them [former industrial sites] repurposed in more interesting ways than apartments.”¹⁸⁰ Different enterprises using former industrial space speaks to a draw of such sites. A warehouse is a shell and what people put inside it is up to them. What’s inside Cayo Industrial is a big attraction for the city. Visitors from Syracuse (a 50-minute drive away on the interstate) and Albany (an hour and a half drive) come to Utica to scream in this horror warehouse.¹⁸¹ These Cayo visitors, considering the driving times involved, likely spend money elsewhere in the city (e.g., downtown restaurants), spurring the

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Reale, interview by author, 2015.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Reale, interview by author, 2015.

local economy. Such innovation is needed in this city, even though dilapidated warehouses are not the type of images cities like Utica want to promote.

Chris Lawrence, a planner for the city of Utica, expresses long-term aspirations for the city while acknowledging the short-term benefits of a venture such as Cayo:

Cayo Industrial is like the ‘Walking Dead’ has come to life . . . I’m glad they’re doing it, but what does that tell us about the current look of these buildings? It should not look like a post-apocalyptic site. We’d like to see more innovative companies come in and rehab these buildings.¹⁸²

This reflects the pragmatism needed when redefining space in the Rust Belt. It is worthwhile—even necessary—for Uticans to have high hopes for former industrial sites (and other sites to be discussed in this chapter embody such aspirations). Granted, Cayo Industrial might be a long-term draw for Utica, but city planners must continue looking elsewhere in the city and on Broad Street for the possible reuse of other sites.

Downtown, not too far away from Cayo Industrial, is one of the best success stories of the neighborhood most closely associated with Utica’s Rust Belt recovery. Utica Coffee Roasting Company’s storefront and warehouse in the Bagg’s Square neighborhood have helped transform the traditional heart of the city. When Utica Coffee Roasting Company acquired its storefront, it featured double steel doors to enter and bulletproof glass on the internal windows: “It was a fortress.”¹⁸³ Today the site is transformed, and is where people from all around the area get the

¹⁸² Lawrence, interview by author, 2015.

¹⁸³ Elias, interview by author, 2016.

company's branded coffee, mugs, and shirts [see figures five¹⁸⁴ and six¹⁸⁵]. The owner of Utica Coffee Roasting Company, Frank Elias, believes Utica has a lot to offer investors like him: "Utica can be an example for other upstate cities because all the resources are here to make a business successful . . . and in this small city environment it's more possible because of small networks."¹⁸⁶ The communities within the Rust Belt support each other, and businesspeople can—and do—leverage such ties for their own advantage. For instance, Utica Bread (which is down the street from Utica Coffee) serves Frank Elias's coffee, as do other businesses in the area. Locals support each other's businesses.

On the same street as the Utica Coffee Roasting Company is the Tailor & the Cook, a premier restaurant that is one of the top 100 farm-to-table restaurants in the country, even though its neighborhood is still in the process of gentrifying.¹⁸⁷ Also on this strip is a business incubator, and several other businesses that attract Uticans and visitors to this burgeoning neighborhood. This push to redefine Bagg's Square is not without precedent. The venture is like the Business Improvement Districts of Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, and St. Louis that Laura Fox evaluated in her 2013 Masters of Arts in Urban and Environmental Planning and Policy thesis: "Are Business

¹⁸⁴ "Utica Coffee Roasting Co.," *Utica Coffee Roasting Store*, last accessed April 19, 2016, <http://wakethehellup.com/pages/about-us>.

¹⁸⁵ "Utica Coffee Roasting Co.," *Utica Coffee Roasting Store*, last accessed April 19, 2016, <http://wakethehellup.com/pages/about-us>.

¹⁸⁶ Elias, interview by author, 2016.

¹⁸⁷ Esposito, interview by author, 2016.

Improvement Districts Perceived as Effective for Revitalizing Mid-Sized Rust Belt Cities?"¹⁸⁸ In her work, Fox concludes the three "downtown BIDs were contributors to making their downtowns a better place for investors and visitors."¹⁸⁹ Fox evaluated larger cities than Utica, but the theme holds true.

The Bagg's Square Association changes people's negative perceptions about one of Utica's most historic zones by rebranding the neighborhood. In 1798 Utica was named here by drawing suggestions from a hat¹⁹⁰ but despite this legacy Bagg's Square was neglected in recent decades before its recent upturn. Chris Lawrence insists that "Bagg's Square is Utica's oldest neighborhood and for years you didn't go there unless you had to go there."¹⁹¹ Michelle Truett of the Bagg's Square Association helped lead a 2014 public survey, and the responses led her and others involved with Bagg's Square to rebrand themselves under the slogan: "Always making history."¹⁹² Like the rest of the Rust Belt, history looms large in Utica. Such a slogan does not run from the city's past, but embraces it. Bagg's Square gave Utica its name and is likely to continue playing a key role in the city's future.

The neighborhood employs baristas and waiters, and serves Uticans and people from around the region alike. It is developing into a focal point for the city, and the current renovation of the

¹⁸⁸ Laura Fox, "Are Business Improvement Districts Perceived as Effective for Revitalizing Mid-Sized Rust Belt Cities?" Order No. 1538601, Tufts University, 2013, <http://proxy.library.georgetown.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/1400268756?accountid=11091> (accessed April 16, 2016), 84.

¹⁸⁹ Fox, "Are Business Improvement Districts Perceived as Effective for Revitalizing Mid-Sized Rust Belt Cities?," 81.

¹⁹⁰ Truett, interview by author, 2015.

¹⁹¹ Lawrence, interview by author, 2015.

¹⁹² Truett, interview by author, 2015.

arterial—a vital road that bisects Utica—facilitates easy access into and out of the city. Some, are concerned this project makes it easy for residents to do the latter and Professor Ambrose of Hamilton College referred to past city councilman Jim Zecca’s sentiment when he stated “what it [the arterial] does—and what it’s always done—is get people the hell out of Utica.”¹⁹³ Regardless, such a visible project modernizes part of Utica’s infrastructure and signals investment is taking place there. If the arterial facilitates an influx of workers and visitors to the city, businesses in Bagg’s Square and elsewhere in Utica will benefit and can live up to Tony Esposito’s optimism: “I think every building [in Bagg’s Square] worth renovating is going to be renovated.”¹⁹⁴ This aspiration, of course, belies how difficult it is to transform old industrial and commercial spaces.

Redeveloping space in the Rust Belt can be difficult. Almost every interviewee commented on the difficulty of adjusting space in order to suit their needs. Reale’s Cayo Industrial Realm gets washed out every time it rains, demonstrating how entrepreneurs must “[b]e prepared for the unexpected” when working with deindustrialized sites.¹⁹⁵ Lawrence commented on the unexpected costs that might arise with old spaces, such as costly environmental remediation or the aftereffects of being stripped by a previous owner.¹⁹⁶ Elizabeth Brando of the Children’s Museum was preoccupied for five months with simply cleaning, painting, and sanding the space

¹⁹³ Ambrose and Bartle, interview by author, 2015.

¹⁹⁴ Esposito, interview by author, 2016.

¹⁹⁵ Reale, interview by author, 2015.

¹⁹⁶ Lawrence, interview by author, 2015.

to make it usable again for families.¹⁹⁷ Elias decried the upstate-downstate political divide in New York, and believes “[w]e as an upstate community should seriously look at changing the form of government that represents upstate New York to ensure that we are properly represented and not overly influenced by downstate interests that are often burdensome.”¹⁹⁸ Brian Howard of the Oneida County Historical Society agrees: Utica is “one of the most highly taxed, business unfriendly areas of the country.”¹⁹⁹ New York’s 2014 Tax Freedom Day (how long a taxpayer has to work into the year to pay all taxes for the year) was May 4th, only surpassed by Connecticut and New Jersey (both of which were May 9th).²⁰⁰ Although Utica has an affordable labor pool for employers and cheap spaces, such tax policies can deter investment—although soon-to-be-discussed state-level efforts indicate this is not as much of a deterrent to investment in the city as it could be. For a multitude of reasons, it is not easy to reuse space in the Rust Belt.

Structural issues, environmental worries, time-intensive labor, and government entities that may have imposed undue burdens on entrepreneurs do not account for the sense of purpose one can get from investing in post-industrial space. Esposito, born and raised in Utica,²⁰¹ shows it is all worth it. The last living president of Hurd visited him several years ago, and Esposito told

¹⁹⁷ Brando, interview by author, 2015.

¹⁹⁸ Elias, interview by author, 2016.

¹⁹⁹ Howard, interview by author, 2015.

²⁰⁰ “Facts & Figures: How Does Your State Compare?,” *Tax Foundation*, 2015, http://taxfoundation.org/sites/taxfoundation.org/files/docs/Fact%26Figures_15_web_9_2.pdf.

²⁰¹ Esposito, interview by author, 2016

him he would forever call it the Hurd building.²⁰² The president was overjoyed, and gave Esposito the old Hurd corporate seal, company signs, and told him more about the family history in Utica.²⁰³ When walking around the building that JetNet calls home, one can still see signs of the past—these Hurd signs given to Esposito, the exposed brick, and authentic fire doors. It is a truly remarkable structure, and Esposito believes “I’ll never let this building go. This building has become a part of me.”²⁰⁴ Investing in Utica’s Rust Belt recovery through vacant or underused spaces connects entrepreneurs to the past and the character of the region.

Gentrification is a useful lens through which to evaluate Utica. Gentrification typically refers to investment by businesses and people to an impoverished city or section of a city. Sometimes gentrification has the pernicious effect of displacing residents, but that does not seem to be the case in Utica. Abandoned space is being reused and people are moving into the city, but older residents and businesses are generally not being pushed out. Washington Courts, a public housing unit in the city, was torn down in the mid-2000s but this is an exception.²⁰⁵

Utica is different from the rest of the Rust Belt for several reasons. The degree to which it has relied on refugees and the substantial investment it is enjoying by entrepreneurs like Frank Elias and Tony Esposito are changing the economic outlook for the city. The city of Utica’s

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Esposito, interview by author, 2016.

²⁰⁵ Lawrence, interview by author, 2015.

government has had three consecutive budget surpluses cumulatively worth \$2,776,000.²⁰⁶

Perhaps the most important distinguishing factor for Utica's future is the promise of nanotechnology. On August 20, 2015, New York Governor Andrew M. Cuomo announced that General Electric—once one of the largest employers in the city—was returning to package silicon carbide power blocks at a new facility on the campus of the State University of New York Polytechnic Institute, just outside the city.²⁰⁷ Tax breaks and incentives from the State of New York totaling \$50 million enticed General Electric,²⁰⁸ while Austrian sensor-manufacturing company AMS has likewise promised to commit itself to the area through a \$2 billion investment and more than 1,000 jobs at a forthcoming “water fabrication facility.”²⁰⁹ These moves are just part of the Governor's apparent commitment to upstate New York's revitalization, which includes over \$2 billion in economic development resources announced in December 2015.²¹⁰ Local schools like Utica College and Mohawk Valley Community College are collaborating with local companies to capitalize on the promise of nanotechnology and cultivate job-readiness for

²⁰⁶ “Mayor Palmieri & Comptroller Morehouse Announce \$345,000 Operating Budget Surplus,” *City of Utica*, accessed April 17, 2016, <http://www.cityofutica.com/newsroom/press-releases/345000-operating-budget-surplus->.

²⁰⁷ Jesse McKinley, “General Electric Comes Back to Utica, and Brings Jobs Along With It,” *New York Times*, August 20, 2015, accessed September 27, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/21/nyregion/general-electric-comes-back-to-utica-and-brings-jobs-along-with-it.html>.

²⁰⁸ David Sirota, Matthew Cunningham-Cook and Andrew Perez, “Andrew Cuomo GE Deal: NY Taxpayers to Subsidize General Electric As Critics Slam Company For Toxic Pollution, Unfinished Cleanup,” August 26, 2015, accessed April 17, 2016, <http://www.ibtimes.com/andrew-cuomo-ge-deal-ny-taxpayers-subsidize-general-electric-critics-slam-company-2068579>.

²⁰⁹ McKinley, “General Electric Comes Back to Utica, and Brings Jobs Along With It,” 2015.

²¹⁰ “Governor Cuomo Announces More Than \$2 Billion in Economic Development Resources Awarded Through Upstate Revitalization Initiative and Regional Economic Development Council Competition,” *New York State*, December 10, 2015, accessed April 17, 2016, <https://www.governor.ny.gov/news/governor-cuomo-announces-more-2-billion-economic-development-resources-awarded-through-upstate>.

their students.”²¹¹ In other words, schools connect to Utica’s Rust Belt recovery. The Governor was not tepid about what this means for Utica and the area: “This is jobs, this is economic opportunity, it’s the future . . . And it will go down in the history books I think as a turning point for the Mohawk Valley and the entire state of New York.”²¹² Just as entrepreneurs are transforming the city, so too are the state government and global companies investing in the area. The significance of General Electric coming back and AMS’s arrival cannot be understated.

This state and private investment gives high hopes to Uticans about what it could mean for their city. Elizabeth Slocum Brando believes “there’s so much buzz here [in Utica].”²¹³ People are beginning to believe again in their city, and the headline-grabbing return of General Electric along with AMS’s investment are tangible signs of promise. Harkening back to the idea of Utica as a traditionally poor city, Esposito believes “we had so little and I think [nanotechnology’s arrival is] going to be very noticeable.”²¹⁴ This investment is something Uticans and others in the area can build upon. Every job at General Electric or AMS will have a residual effect in the local economy as that money gets spent nearby (perhaps in the Bagg’s Square neighborhood.) Brian Howard adds simply, “What else is that [nanotechnology] going to draw in?”²¹⁵ General Electric and AMS are springboards for sustainable progress and viability, which both builds upon and

²¹¹ John Pitarresi, “Wanted: Workers in many sectors,” *Utica Observer-Dispatch*, February 28, 2016, print.

²¹² McKinley, “General Electric Comes Back to Utica, and Brings Jobs Along With It,” 2015.

²¹³ Brando, interview by author, 2015.

²¹⁴ Esposito, interview by author, 2016.

²¹⁵ Howard, interview by author, 2015.

supports local efforts. Howard sees nanotechnology as an asset for the region but hopes Utica continues to support other ventures.²¹⁶ The city has a tremendous opportunity with this investment, and needs to make sure it continues to diversify its economy.

Utica is experiencing Rust Belt recovery. Entrepreneurs are redefining space in the city in unique and inventive ways—a horror realm, a coffee company, and office space that maintains the past aesthetic of a bygone shoe company. Granted, the city’s endemic poverty means many residents have limited capital assets and the difficulties of reusing old space can deter entrepreneurs. Likewise, Utica is not the healthiest city but local and non-local investment is changing the way the local economy operates and the way people—Uticans and other alike—think about the city. With an influx of refugees and Rust Belt recovery the city is emerging from decades of despair, and this growing hope brings with it cultural and generational revival.

Chapter Four: Rebirth

After decades of decline, Utica is attempting to rebrand and redefine itself while remaining true to its core character. Paul Graves-Brown discusses the future of deindustrialized space and asserts “we cannot turn entire countries into museum/theme parks or repositories for preserved remains, and indeed archaeologists have begun to embrace the concept of change as a part of our

²¹⁶ Ibid.

approach to conserving the past.”²¹⁷ The Rust Belt needs to evolve, economically and culturally, and Utica reflects this necessity. Historically speaking—like most other Rust Belt cities—this city had a rugged nature. Factory jobs and living in upstate New York’s cold, dark winters was not easy. Uticans remember this past, and industrial spaces serve as continual reminders of this history. That reflects the city’s Rust Belt character. New people and new ideas shift this narrative. Refugees are changing the city, as discussed in chapter one, but the city is also adjusting to widespread efforts by other actors. With deindustrialization, remaining residents further cling to Utica’s brashness as they adapt to a new era spurred by cultural rebirth. The older local culture remains but has been reevaluated in order to stay relevant. Younger generations are driving change in how its residents perceive the city, and this new attitude is re-articulating local norms. This generational shift is encouraging Uticans—old and new—to believe in the region’s promise in the midst of positive but still uncertain economic recovery.

Culture and rebirth have specific connotations within this chapter. Some think the former term refers only to high-brow capital “C” culture—opera, fine wine, and the like. Others prefer lowercase “c” culture—pop music, cheap domestic beer, and dive bars. This piece ignores these distinctions since both threads are necessary to understand Utica. High-class culture in the city—as exemplified by the Munson-Williams-Proctor Arts Institute and the Stanley Theater—and more mundane aspects of culture—such as the F.X. Matt Brewery and the band moe.—convey the city’s character and, subsequently, its rebirth. Perceptions and attitudes about Utica have shifted. Munson-Williams-Proctor, the Stanley, and the brewery endured deindustrialization.

²¹⁷ Paul Graves-Brown, “Reanimation or *Danse Macabre*? Discussing the Future of Industrial Spaces” in *Reanimating Industrial Spaces: Conducting Memory Work in Post-Industrial Societies*, edited by Hilary Orange, 235-247, (Walnut Creek, California: Left Coast Press), 2015, 236.

Culture in the Rust Belt can be focused on the past, and Utica is no different. Various venues that remain from the industrial era demonstrate this rootedness as new ventures take hold.

Art is an important component of culture, and the aforementioned Munson-Williams-Proctor Arts Institute joined with other non-traditional ventures to redefine this scene in Utica.

Established in 1919, Munson-Williams-Proctor lived through the city's peak and subsequent decline, and can draw on its substantial history to play a role in the city's recent revival.²¹⁸

Howard insists that the institute and other long-standing institutions (such as the Oneida County Historical Society and the Utica Zoo) show how the area is “growing and starting to bring people back to the region.”²¹⁹ It signifies a commitment to the community's artists and residents and, in the midst of population and economic growth, entices people to the city. Economic resurgence and the rise of the arts are interconnected—people from around the area want to be in Utica again to enjoy a dinner out and to immerse themselves in its urban appeal. In recent years artists of all stripes have been leaving their mark and seemingly everything in Utica is a canvas. For example, some trash receptacles across the city have mosaics on them,²²⁰ stemming from efforts sponsored by the Oneida Square Public Art and Design program. Here a local artist, Cathy Marsh, directs the work of formerly incarcerated individuals, parolees, and others who similarly face barriers to employment.²²¹ Bagg's Square in recent times has updated or added murals and

²¹⁸ “History of MWPAI,” *Munson Williams Proctor Arts Institute*, accessed April 17, 2016, <http://www.mwpai.org/about/history/>

²¹⁹ Howard, interview by author, 2015.

²²⁰ O'Brien, interview by author, 2016.

²²¹ S. Alexander Gerould, “Receptacles add flavor, color to Utica neighborhoods,” *Utica Observer-Dispatch*, September 2, 2015, accessed April 17, 2016, <http://www.uticaod.com/article/20150902/news/150909863>.

installed specially designed bike racks displaying the neighborhood's street layout, connecting this arts scene to the city. These efforts are frequently supported or supplemented by government and non-profit organizations such as Artspace Projects Inc., which develops affordable space for artists.²²² Artspace's recent visit to Utica was funded by a \$10,000 grant from the Community Foundation and Herkimer and Oneida Counties in addition to \$5,000 from Community Development Block Grant funds.²²³ According to Darby O'Brien, the director of the Utica Public Library, this is part of an effort to make the area "arts friendly."²²⁴ Artspace has a track record of success in Buffalo, a similarly deindustrialized city. Their interest in Utica demonstrates the appeal of Rust Belt communities to organizations focused on the arts.²²⁵ With Munson-Williams-Proctor, other local ventures, and external organizations like Artspace committing themselves to the local arts scene, the color and the culture of the city is growing. Diane Grams and Michael Warr analyzed small-scale arts programs in various Chicago neighborhoods and determined that the arts cultivate social networks, facilitate social capital, and improve an area's overall quality of life.²²⁶ This positive shift is taking place in Utica as well, transforming the city's formerly decrepit and unappealing downtown with visitors and energy.

²²² S. Alexander Gerould, "Developer seeks Utica buildings to house artists, studios," *Utica Observer-Dispatch*, November 13, 2015, accessed April 17, 2016, <http://www.uticaod.com/article/20151113/NEWS/151119785>.

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ O'Brien, interview by author, 2016.

²²⁵ Gerould, "Developer seeks Utica buildings to house artists, studios," 2015.

²²⁶ Diane Grams and Michael Warr, "Leveraging Assets: How Small Budget Arts Activities Benefit Neighborhoods," March 2003, 76, <https://tulane.edu/liberal-arts/sociology/upload/Grams-and-Warr-2003-Leveraging-Assets-March-2003.pdf>.

The Utica Comets hockey team also help attract visitors downtown. Callahan thinks “downtown is going to be much further developed. I think things like the Comets and Bagg’s Square and those loft apartments . . . are all going to come to fruition,”²²⁷ but the Comets—Utica’s relatively new AHL Hockey team—deserves credit within a cultural context for spurring development there. Utica has rallied behind this affiliate of the Vancouver Canucks, and the Utica Auditorium (The Aud) is packed for every single home game: As of February 14, 2016, the team was on its 37th consecutive sellout (dating back to the previous season).²²⁸ The name “Comets” harkens back several decades to the Clinton Comets, who played their games in the nearby village of Clinton,²²⁹ and signifies the continuation of identity in the area, albeit in a larger venue. The Aud was recently renovated, and this investment signals a commitment to local sports and reflects local hopes to attract more people downtown. Around \$6 million in state grants have funded this arena’s transformation, which allows the city to focus financial resources elsewhere.²³⁰ Emphasizing sports is common across the deindustrialized region, as evidenced by Cleveland’s attempt to revitalize its downtown.²³¹ That being said, a 1997 Brookings article asserts sports are often not the economic driver people expect:

²²⁷ Callahan, interview by author, 2015.

²²⁸ Matt Rogers, “Win or lose, Comets fans continue to sell out Aud,” *Utica Observer-Dispatch*, February 14, 2016, accessed April 17, 2016, <http://www.uticaod.com/article/20160214/NEWS/160219663>.

²²⁹ The author grew up in Clinton, New York and with the story of the Clinton Comets.

²³⁰ S. Alexander Gerould, “Utica Aud's brick facade removed as part of new look,” *Utica Observer-Dispatch*, July 7, 2015, accessed April 17 2016, <http://www.uticaod.com/article/20150707/NEWS/150709669/?Start=1>.

²³¹ Philip Suchma, “If They Built It? Stadium Dreams and Rustbelt Realities in Cleveland.” In *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 25, No. 11, 1547-1564, (September 2008), 1554.

A new sports facility has an extremely small (perhaps even negative) effect on overall economic activity and employment. No recent facility appears to have earned anything approaching a reasonable return on investment. No recent facility has been self-financing in terms of its impact on net tax revenues. Regardless of whether the unit of analysis is a local neighborhood, a city, or an entire metropolitan area, the economic benefits of sports facilities are de minimus.²³²

That the recent renovations are state-funded mitigates this risk for Utica, and the Comets team is certainly an important physical draw and morale driver for people in the area. Those across the Mohawk Valley can visit Utica, enjoy dinner downtown (strengthening the local economy), and catch a hockey game. The Comets bring people together in the Aud and foster regional pride. The team's appearance in the AHL finals (The Calder Cup) in 2015 galvanized the city, and Utica's rebirth can be seen through Comets' fans dedication to their team. People are proud to support local hockey and to identify themselves with the city.

Rust belt populations remember the past and form connections through their lost stability. Culture here stems from time spent working together and a common memory of this loss of work. Those who had their jobs or saw their parents' jobs swept out from under them can, according to scholars Steve May and Laura Morrison, "describe—in personal, familial terms—their sense of belonging with their co-workers. Finally, they remember and reimagine a more idyllic community that reaffirms their values."²³³ Community existed in factories, textile mills, and steel furnaces where company jobs were guaranteed, friends from the workplace floor were ensured, and a stable life was promised through consistent paychecks. The departure of industry

²³² Andrew Zimbalist and Roger G. Noll, "Sports, Jobs, & Taxes: Are New Stadiums Worth the Cost?," *Brookings*, (Summer 1997), accessed April 17, 2016, <http://www.brookings.edu/research/articles/1997/06/summer-taxes-noll>.

²³³ May and Morrison. "Making Sense of Restructuring: Narratives of Accommodation among Downsized Workers," 261.

did not eradicate the ties forged in the workplace. Rather, people here feel bonds forged by their shared experience of deindustrialization. When residents and others think of Utica they cannot miss structures built during the city's industrial heyday. Uticans know this unavoidable part of their history, but post-industrial memory fosters community in and of itself. Washington Courts, the public housing development that was demolished in the mid-2000s, had a reunion in which displaced residents returned to Utica to celebrate the community that existed there.²³⁴ This demonstrates how residents maintain memory formed by the past.

Utican culture embraces change. Like the rest of the region, this city remembers past trauma when textile mills closed in favor of fairer weather and business conditions in the south and abroad. Without textiles (and then low-tech manufacturing) Utica lost something of itself. Culture in the rust belt is an experience in loss—of jobs, of neighbors, of identity. It is also an experience in solidarity and community as displaced workers and their families support one another and coalesce around the shared pain of deindustrialization. These ties exist in the city at large, but also on more local levels. Utica's ethnic groups have traditionally supported their own and each other. The city was home to many Italian-Americans throughout its history, and “the Italian immigrant community in a place like Utica was part of Italy's unconventional but far-flung cultural empire.”²³⁵ Utica was and is a city in which ethnic pride abounds, and its people have traditionally held tight to the cultural legacies of their homeland. Typical Utican fare like the food mentioned in chapter two—greens and chicken riggies—have their roots in this Italian

²³⁴ Anne Delaney, “Reunion planned for former Washington Courts residents,” *Utica Observer-Dispatch*, July 6, 2016, accessed April 17, 2016, <http://www.uticaod.com/article/20120706/News/307069949>.

²³⁵ Bean, *The Urban Colonists*, 176.

heritage. That being said, many ethnicities have traditionally co-existed in the city. In the early twentieth century ethnic groups in Utica lived in certain neighborhoods: Italians in *colonia*, Germans in *Deuschtum*, and Poles in *Polonia*.²³⁶ Almost every major ethnic group at the time created a label for its community and through this title sought to maintain cultural ties to the past.²³⁷ The multicultural maintenance and acceptance of difference continues in Utica today through its refugee population.²³⁸ Utica's ethnicities have always maintained past cultural norms while evaluating the norms of their upstate home, and the recent arrival of refugees translate this part of the city's character for the next generation.

Utica's perception of itself can be seen in its businesses, such as the Utica Coffee Roasting Company. On its website, the company aligns itself with the city's reinterpreted civic identity: "The Utica Coffee brand is synonymous with the best qualities of Utica itself; simplicity and a no-nonsense attitude, a richness of unique and shared culture, and a strong independent streak."²³⁹ Utica Coffee, like the city from which it draws its name, is unapologetically brash. Its motto, "Wake the Hell Up!," is more than just an assertion of coffee's worth. It is a straightforward declaration that, in a sense, calls Uticans to come alive and embrace the city's rebirth. Situated as it is in Bagg's Square, Utica Coffee Roasting Company is a part of a

²³⁶ Bean, *The Urban Colonists*, 175.

²³⁷ Bean, *The Urban Colonists*, 175.

²³⁸ For more information on the impact of refugees specifically, consult chapter one.

²³⁹ "Utica Coffee Roasting Co.," *Utica Coffee Roasting Store*, last accessed April 19, 2016, <http://wakethehellup.com/pages/about-us>.

movement that goes beyond transforming the local economy; it and other similar ventures are helping redefine local culture.

Utica Coffee Roasting Company and a similar venture, the Tramontane Café (The Tram), are intrinsically linked to Utica and, as coffee shops, foster and shape community. Coffee and coffeehouses have almost always been associated with culture: “Coffee spurs the intellect . . . those drinking coffee are content to listen contemplatively . . . Reading material is widely digested in the world’s coffeehouses but not in bars.”²⁴⁰ People meet and discuss contemporary news and issues over coffee. Utica Coffee Roasting Company has comfortable seating that encourages visitors to stay, chat, and look at the various images of Utica that adorn the shop’s walls. The Tram is an incubator of sorts for local culture and community through live music by musicians such as Andrew Horn²⁴¹ and open mic nights with the Utica Poets Society.²⁴² Both sites reflect some of Utica’s enduring characteristics while fostering a renewed dynamism and belief in the area, and this kind of development has been spurred by newer generations interacting with the city’s character and redefining it for the twenty-first century.

Utica is a young city. Almost a quarter of the city in 2010 was 18 or younger,²⁴³ and local people are taking notice. According to Frank Elias of Utica Coffee Roasting Company, the city

²⁴⁰ Ray Oldenberg, *The Great Good Place: Cafes, Coffee Shops, Bookstores, Bars, Hair Salons, and Other Hangouts at the Heart of a Community*, 1st edition, New York: Paragon House, 1989, 184.

²⁴¹ Andrew Horn in 2013 came out a song titled: “Utica (I Just Wanna Be Known).” It is worth a listen as some of its lines convey notions of deindustrialization and the sense of loss that results from leaving the Rust Belt.

²⁴² TRAMONTANE CAFÉ, Facebook page, accessed April 17, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/TRAMONTANE-CAFE-129018670661/timeline>.

²⁴³ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *QuickFacts: Utica city New York*, accessed April 17, 2016, <http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045215/3676540>.

“is younger, more diverse, and more diverse from a geographic perspective . . . [People] come here to . . . maybe be a part of something that’s positive.”²⁴⁴ Figures tell the story: 44.3 percent of Utica residents were 29 or younger according to the 2010 census,²⁴⁵ which is especially impressive considering the United States as a whole is 40.7 percent younger than 30.²⁴⁶ When compared to other Rust Belt cities this figure is better still; for instance, 39.9 percent of the residents of Youngstown, Ohio, are under 30.²⁴⁷ A common thread across the Rust Belt is an aging population:

Outside of Florida almost all the retirement capitals are in the Northeast and Midwest. The second most senior region, for example, is Pittsburgh, where 18.0% of the population is over 65. The old Steel City is followed by a host of Rust Belt metro areas: Cleveland, Rochester, Providence, Hartford, St. Louis and Detroit, all of which have a senior set that makes up 14% or more of the overall population.²⁴⁸

Granted, Utica has a similarly significant part of its population which is 65 or older: 14.8 percent to be exact.²⁴⁹ This segment of the population, however, is having less and less of an impact on the city.

²⁴⁴ Elias, interview by author, 2016.

²⁴⁵ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Table DP-1, Profile of General Population and Housing Characteristics: 2010, 2010 Demographic Profile Data, Geography: Utica, New York*” Census 2010.

²⁴⁶ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Table QT-P1, Age Groups and Sex: 2010, 2010 Census Summary File 1*,” United States, Census 2010.

²⁴⁷ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Table QT-P1, Age Groups and Sex: 2010, 2010 Census Summary File 1*,” Youngstown, Ohio, Census 2010.

²⁴⁸ Joel Kotkin and Wendell Cox, “Aging America: The U.S. Cities Going Gray The Fastest,” *Forbes*, October 30, 2014, accessed April 17, 2016, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/joelkotkin/2014/10/30/aging-america-the-u-s-cities-going-gray-the-fastest/#fd85b7edd82a>.

²⁴⁹ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Table DP-1, Profile of General Population and Housing Characteristics: 2010, 2010 Demographic Profile Data, Geography: Utica, New York*,” Census 2010.

With the rise of younger Uticans, how Utica perceives itself is developing along with a new civic identity built upon traditional aspects of life there. Those under 30 are demanding more of their city and are more willing to believe in Utica than those 65 and older. According to urban planner Chris Lawrence, “For a long time we had an older population. And unfortunately as more and more of our older population is passing away or moving south in some cases you’re kinda [sic] losing that old feeling of hopelessness.²⁵⁰” Those who lived through Utica’s decline struggle to see its current promise. Many people in the region, however—especially those who did not live through the lean period—are buying into Utica and inspiring a wellspring of belief. Brian Howard thinks “there is a sense of hope and optimism in this region that I haven’t seen other than for the last really two to three years. I’ve been in Utica now for eight years, and the turnaround, socially and economically as well, has been drastic, and I think we need to capitalize on that momentum.”²⁵¹

Utica is experiencing cultural and generational rebirth. The city’s people are changing and impacting the way the city perceives and portrays itself. Some threads, either common to the Rust Belt or unique to Utica, remain. The efficacy of hard work and ruggedness common to places like Youngstown and Detroit are also apparent in Utica. The embrace of multiculturalism and the youthful nature of Utica have shifted perceptions and identity in the city. Utica’s residents are increasingly believing in, rather than running from, this municipality’s character and culture.

²⁵⁰ Lawrence, interview by author, 2015.

²⁵¹ Howard, interview by author, 2015.

Conclusion

Utica begins with you. This city in upstate New York is attempting to redefine itself and transcend the economic and cultural shifts that left it in a state of decline. Today, there are many reasons to be optimistic about the city's current character and its future prospects. This positive outlook would have been impossible just 15 years ago. Utica was dying: the city struggled to attract investment, keep residents, and had crumbling reminders everywhere of its industrial heyday. Utica past was just another suffering city in the Rust Belt, unable to adapt to the economic and cultural collapse of deindustrialization. That desolation was then. Promise is the ever-growing—and ever-realized—tenor of today. Emergent vibrant communities, Rust Belt

recovery, and rebirth are three key themes to understand Utica present. They all contribute to a city that is defying Rust Belt trends and daring to hope.

Utica is close to my heart. I was born and raised in Clinton, New York, a short five minutes' drive from the city that would come to dominate the senior year of my undergraduate career. Even though I grew up in the area, I rarely if ever went into Utica except for dentist appointments, the annual Nutcracker show at the Stanley Theater, and soccer games against predominately Bosnian teams. The city had seemingly nothing to offer me. A nearby town, New Hartford, had the movie theater, the shopping mall, and most of the restaurants—Utica by comparison had next to nothing that would appeal to a teenager. In high school I probably went to Syracuse, a 50 minute drive away, more than I went to Utica. Even when I tutored a refugee in English the summer before my senior year of high school I did not feel any sense of connection to the city. I drove in, did my business, and drove out.

It was not until I left for college that I realized my love for upstate New York and reevaluated my relationship to Utica. As I applied to colleges in my senior year of high school I knew I wanted to leave upstate New York, and I only applied to one school in the state. Soon after leaving the only house I had ever lived in for Washington, DC, I began to better appreciate what I had left behind. In a sense, two clichés explain why I researched Utica throughout this past academic year—a realization that the grass isn't always greener and that absence makes the heart grow fonder. The August 2015 *New York Times* article about General Electric's return to Utica inspired me to evaluate the city within the context of Rust Belt revitalization, and my experiences playing soccer in nearby Oneida, New York within a former industrial site gave me my lens: the reuse of space.

This thesis project was personal from the start, and that proved difficult at times. Remaining objective about a city I had come to love was almost impossible as my interviewees highlighted Utica's recent transformation. In writing my first draft I poured out my love for the city, claiming it was both unique within the context of the Rust Belt and a sterling example for other deindustrialized cities. I was wrong. What's happening in Utica is special, and perhaps the degree it has accepted and integrated refugees is unusual, but that does not make it necessarily superior to other Rust Belt communities. Almost a third of the city lives in poverty, many buildings still await investment, and the return of General Electric could be a temporary boon for what might ultimately be a fallen town. It is hard to remain objective while analyzing the potential of a place in which you are personally invested. In subsequent edits I tried to balance any bias with more objective sources and challenged myself to be more critical about my home area. After this arduous process I concluded that Utica, as seen through the reuse of space, has truly enjoyed Rust Belt recovery and generational rebirth in large part through the influx of refugees from around the world.

This city in upstate New York has more reasons to be optimistic than at any other time in recent memory. Utica begins with you. It is ready for a new era of unprecedented development and stability. Granted, there has been illusory hope in the Rust Belt many times before. Cities in this region often embrace any sign of viability or prospect for development and have suffered further when prospects go unrealized. Utica may very well suffer this same fate—investment might dry up, people could lose hope, and the city would continue to decline. There are reasons to believe, however, that Utica has truly turned a corner. Refugees, local entrepreneurs, and Governor Cuomo have all committed themselves to turning this city around. People are

appreciating the work that has been done but are also looking forward to the work to come. Residents are increasingly encouraged by the future and what it may hold rather than dwelling on the past. In the words of Chris Lawrence; “My job at the end of the day is to get my friends who have left to come back home.”²⁵² Utica now has something to offer all those who left, and people are buying into this ever-growing belief in the city. Utica—with its emergent vibrant communities, recovery, and rebirth—begins with hope. This hope is integral to the area’s emergence from decades of decline. Utica begins with refugees. Utica begins with recovery. Utica begins with rebirth. Utica begins with you.

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APPENDIX

FIGURE ONE



Douglas M. Preston, "The Erie Canal: Only 4 feet deep, but it was gateway to the West," *The Grand Old Days of the Erie Canal*, supplement to the Utica Observer-Dispatch, Thursday, September 3, 1987, print, 3.

FIGURE TWO



Chinki Sinha, "Former Utica church may become mosque," *Utica Observer-Dispatch*, March 29, 2008, accessed January 31, 2016, <http://www.uticaod.com/article/20080329/NEWS/303299934>.

FIGURE THREE



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FIGURE FOUR



“Cayo Industrial Warehouse of Horror” (advertisement handout).

FIGURE FIVE



“Utica Coffee Roasting Co.,” *Utica Coffee Roasting Store*, last accessed April 19, 2016, <http://wakethehellup.com/pages/about-us>.

FIGURE SIX



“Utica Coffee Roasting Co.,” *Utica Coffee Roasting Store*, last accessed April 19, 2016, <http://wakethehellup.com/pages/about-us>.