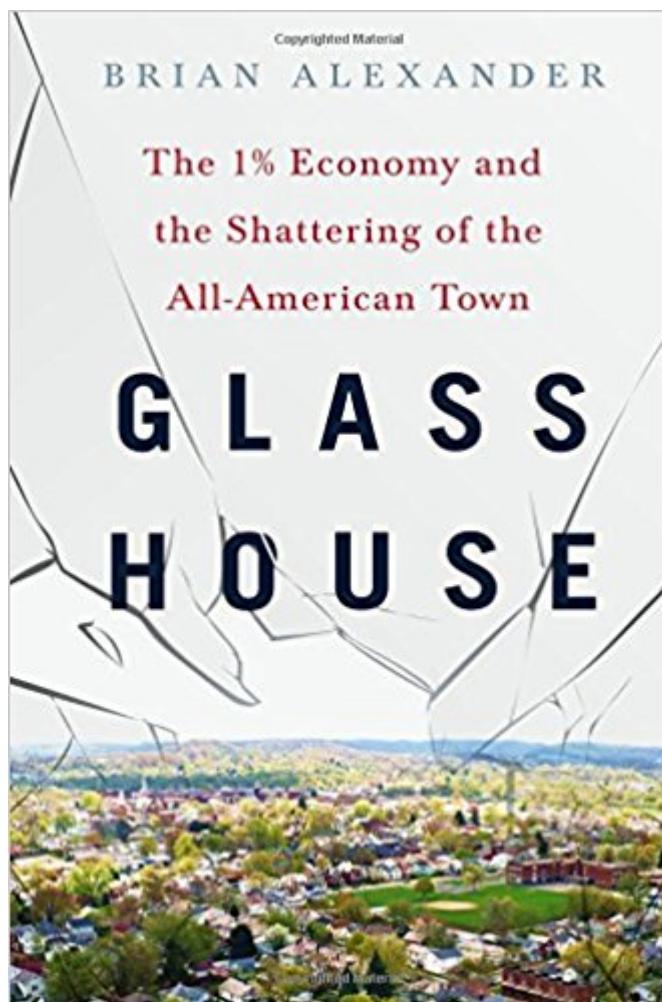


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Glass House: The 1% Economy And The Shattering Of The All-American Town



Synopsis

For readers of *Hillbilly Elegy* and *Strangers in Their Own Land***A New York Post Must-Read Book, a Newsweek Best New Book, one of The Week's 20 Books to Read in 2017, one of Bustle's 16 Best Nonfiction Books Coming in February 2017***"A devastating read...For anyone wondering why swing-state America voted against the establishment in 2016, Mr. Alexander supplies plenty of answers." —The Wall Street Journal"This book hunts bigger game." —Laura Miller, SlateIn 1947, Forbes magazine declared Lancaster, Ohio the epitome of the all-American town. Today it is damaged, discouraged, and fighting for its future. In *Glass House*, journalist Brian Alexander uses the story of one town to show how seeds sown 35 years ago have sprouted to give us Trumpism, inequality, and an eroding national cohesion. The Anchor Hocking Glass Company, once the world's largest maker of glass tableware, was the base on which Lancaster's society was built. As *Glass House* unfolds, bankruptcy looms. With access to the company and its leaders, and Lancaster's citizens, Alexander shows how financial engineering took hold in the 1980s, accelerated in the 21st Century, and wrecked the company. We follow CEO Sam Solomon, an African-American leading the nearly all-white town's biggest private employer, as he tries to rescue the company from the New York private equity firm that hired him. Meanwhile, Alexander goes behind the scenes, entwined with the lives of residents as they wrestle with heroin, politics, high-interest lenders, low wage jobs, technology, and the new demands of American life: people like Brian Gossett, the fourth generation to work at Anchor Hocking; Joe Piccolo, first-time director of the annual music festival who discovers the town relies on him, and it, for salvation; Jason Roach, who police believed may have been Lancaster's biggest drug dealer; and Eric Brown, a local football hero-turned-cop who comes to realize that he can never arrest Lancaster's real problems.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"Glass House is among the best of the books to hit shelves in the last several years exploring what's happened to the nation and the role that greed and the collapse of once solid institutions played in the demise of small-town, middle-class America. Among the others are George Packer's *The Unwinding* and J.D. Vance's *Hillbilly Elegy*."

Newsweek "[The book] really comes alive in Alexander's portraits of the people caught up in the town's unraveling...If you want to understand the despair that grips so much of this country, and the love of place that gives so many the strength to keep going, Glass House is a place to start." Christian Science Monitor "A valuable contribution...Lays out a step-by-step account of Anchor Hocking's slide, benefitting not only from Alexander's strong reporting, but from candid interviews with key players. What is revealed is a complex system Alexander argues it is deliberately complex - that allows savvy investors to make relatively small, highly leveraged bets on companies like Anchor Hocking."

Forbes "Gripping...There are those who argue that leveraged acquisitions and restructurings of the sort that Anchor Hocking has endured make companies more efficient and steer capital to better uses...Alexander makes a persuasive case, though, that from the perspective of Lancaster, it's been one big fleecing." Bloomberg Businessweek "For those still trying to fathom why the land of the free and the home of the brave opted for a crass, vituperative huckster with an unwavering fondness for alternative facts instead of the flawed oligarch Democrats served up, Brian Alexander has a story for you." The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette "Lancaster, Ohio, was declared the All-American Town by Forbes in 1947; its Anchor Hocking Glass Company was the foundation of a healthy, booming community. The town began to crumble as the factory shut down, as with too many other once-vibrant American hubs, leaving its citizens dreaming of the good old days. This well-reported book is all the stronger given the author's connection to it: Lancaster is Alexander's hometown. Shades of JD Vance's 'Hillbilly Elegy.'"

The New York Post "Reads like an odd and oddly satisfying fusion of George Packer's *The Unwinding* and one of Michael Lewis's real-life financial thrillers." Laura Miller, Slate "A devastating read...For anyone wondering why swing-state

America voted against the establishment in 2016, Mr. Alexander supplies plenty of answers." "The Wall Street Journal" "An examination of a town in Ohio that quite literally fell apart. From drug dealers to cops, from industry to finance, Alexander goes deep into the heart of what ails us and takes no prisoners." "Newsweek's "The Week in Reading"" "If you liked *Hillbilly Elegy*, this should be next on your list." "The Oklahoman" "Provocative." "The Columbus Dispatch" "Shows in fine-grained detail how the American dream of opportunity and fairness died in Lancaster and in similar towns all across the middle of the country... *Glass House* has the style and structure of a grand panoramic novel as Alexander follows a cast of characters located in every strata of Lancaster society." "Sojourners" "Powerful." "The Australian" "Alexander sheds light on how white, working-class Americans came to lose faith in the institutions of our democracy and in the basic social contract... To read *Glass House* is to understand how hollow it is to take satisfaction in any comeuppance for white working-class voters from an administration that embodies many of the forces that caused their problems in the first place." "Ruth Conniff, *The Progressive*" "It's the book *Hillbilly Elegy* should have been. It's unsettling and unforgiving, but so is its subject." "Matt Reed, *Inside Higher Ed*" "Alexander deftly shows how Lancaster represents the collapse of the American dream in microcosm. The other Ohio. The other America. No New Deal awaits them. Their predicament is not covered on the evening news. But they have Trump." "Inequality.org" "A well documented examination of how this once flourishing Ohio town became something else altogether." "Dayton Daily News" "A particularly timely read for our tumultuous and divisive era." "Publishers Weekly" "Those mystified by the election of Donald Trump could well start here... A devastating and illuminating book that shows how a city and a country got where they are and how difficult it can be to reverse course." "Kirkus Reviews (starred review)" "[An] essential book to understand American reality and politics." "The Washington Book Review" "Offers insights into how economic trends are tied to the financial and health problems plaguing many middle- and low-income Americans." "CBS News" "Brian Alexander's moving new book "Glass House" explores how the undermining by venture capital of once-enviable factory jobs in Lancaster, Ohio, has nearly killed that once-thriving town. You could write the same book about half of the country." "Chris Jones, *The Chicago Tribune*" "An extraordinary book." "Vick Mickunas, Book Nook, WYSO, Miami Valley" "As Alexander carefully documents, Anchor Hocking and Lancaster were not undone by foreign competition, but by domestic corporate raiders, unshackled from regulations during the Reagan administration." "John Warner, *The Chicago Tribune*" "Emotionally striking... Alexander has combined his considerable journalistic talent

with love for his broken hometown, producing an incredible, unshaking look at the true story of the American working class." *Booklist* "[Alexander] moves the story along with the force of a novel, interweaving the saga of the business itself with the lives of four friends." *Economic Principals* "So few journalists today spend time in America's small towns, even though the people residing in them represent roughly half of the American population. In his remarkably nuanced *Glass House*, Brian Alexander gives readers an imbedded, close-up view of one iconic Ohio town" his hometown that illuminates the lives that most politicians and urban dwellers seem to have forgotten. Part sociological study and part investigative business reporting, this book should be required reading for people trying to understand Trumpism, inequality, and the sad state of a needlessly wrecked rural America. I wish I had written it." *Beth Macy*, author of *Factory Man* and *Truevine* "Brian Alexander's *Glass House* dramatizes vividly how a half-century of economic progress has dismantled America's once-sturdy middle class. By focusing his narrative on the inhabitants of Lancaster, Ohio, Alexander personalizes this familiar story in a compelling, often surprising, and utterly heartbreakingly way." *Timothy Noah*, author of *The Great Divergence: America's Growing Inequality Crisis and What We Can Do About It* "Brian Alexander's *Glass House* reads more like a great novel. But I've driven by the Anchor Hocking plant (the Glass House of the title) at least several times a year since the mid-70s and seen its decay firsthand. *Glass House* is a fascinating, multi-layered, and superbly written account of how politics, corporate greed, low wages, and the recent heroin epidemic have nearly destroyed a once prosperous Midwestern city. This is a must read for anyone interested in really understanding the anger and frustration of blue collar workers and the middle class in America today." *Donald Ray Pollock*, author of *The Heavenly Table* and *The Devil All the Time* "Glass House is a compelling and harrowing look at the corrosion of the social and economic institutions that once held us all together, from the corporate boardroom to the factory floor. It's the most heartbreakingly tale of a city since Mike Davis's *City of Quartz*." *Victor Fleischer*, Professor of Law, University of San Diego, and *New York Times* columnist "A compassionate but clear-eyed description of how deindustrialization, financial speculation, union-busting and deregulation undermined the social fabric of Alexander's home town, illustrated with gripping personal stories." *Stephanie Coontz*, author of *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* "An an extraordinarily important book at the exact moment it is most needed... *Glass House* concludes that, rather than some ill-explained and spontaneous decision of working people to suddenly become shiftless and lazy, there are actual real, straightforward and

understandable institutional reasons for Lancaster's decline...Please, read Glass House. Read it especially if you read Hillbilly Elegy... a smart, sensible, approachable and eye-opening book that treats a complex topic with necessary sophistication while treating the real human beings at its center with the respect they deserve." —Craig Calcaterra

Brian Alexander has written about American culture for decades. A former contributing editor to Wired magazine, he has been recognized by Medill School of Journalism's John Bartlow Martin awards for public interest journalism and other organizations. He grew up in Lancaster, with a family history in the glass business. He lives in California.

I read this book through three lenses: First and foremost, as someone who grew up in Lancaster, Ohio, and whose immediate family (siblings, nieces/nephews, parents) still live there. I visit at least three times per year. Second, I have concerns about the growing wage gap and looked for a book that, without being condescending or demeaning, showed why and how a man like Trump was elected President. Third and most personally, three immediate family members are represented in the book and I wanted to see what the author had to say about them. (He was very, and perhaps unfairly, unkind in one case.) My review: There was a great deal of financial and policy content that will lose many people — I had difficulty following along, and I'm somewhat familiar with the private equity model. Additionally, he surmises that

"conservatives" are the problem, which is a generalization that will turn off anyone who believes differently. (I'm of the mindset that neither side has the best interest of people in mind, though Trump is uniquely dangerous for many reasons.) All of that said, there is a compelling case that runaway capitalism has not been good for our country. A position on which we are aligned — capitalism that does not work for the people, only for the wealthy needs to be reconsidered and given checks and balances. The most disappointing aspect of the book was the often-one-sided view from the perspective of drug abusers. There is a rampant drug problem in Lancaster, Ohio, and the author is right to acknowledge and talk about it. However, he missed any stories of the remaining middle class residents who are raising their children here. As someone noted, the story eventually felt like it should be titled, "Mark and his friends." Overall it was interesting to read and I walked away with some new knowledge. There are stories I would like to see told about my home town and its people, so that readers with no experience in Lancaster will still see its richer fabric of stories; but even without this I would recommend the book.

Since Lancaster was my hometown, it was very difficult to separate my feelings for what was done to Anchor Hocking from my feelings toward the book. On the whole, it seemed that the book was solidly researched and well written. A minor criticism is that photos would have helped readers get a more well rounded idea of just how beautiful a town Lancaster is.

I grew up in Lancaster and this provides some background and context for what we saw going on all around us. I knew some of the people and places mentioned. I've been gone for years but this captures what I see when I visit. This new American industrial revolution is probably happening in many other towns with similar results. Pretty neutral presentation politically but some observations were unavoidable. An interesting read, at least for a Lancaster alum.

Living in Ohio in a small college town being affected by heroin distribution and amazingly increased numbers of overdoses, this book resonates. The book resonates on two levels. The Newell takeover of Anchor Hocking glass is all too familiar. As listed on page 71 Newell attempted to swallow a whale when it took over our town's major employer, Rubbermaid. Newell's response to having bitten off more than they can chew was to emasculate Rubbermaid. Rubbermaid was a fantastic asset in our town. In addition to supplying employment for many of our town's citizens, it provided bright, motivated, energetic community members who lived here, became our friends, and populated most of the boards in town. Also, the company was extraordinarily generous to our non-profits including United Way. When Newell bullied it way into town it became like an absentee landlord not only not being generous, not providing employment, but also forcing those bright, energetic Rubbermaid executives who populated and energized most organizations in town to seek employment elsewhere. When we asked one of Newell's executives at a service club presentation why he didn't live in the town in which he worked he gave a lame answer that his high school age daughter had made the decision that a larger town nearby had better schools. No one in the room believed him. We came to find out that Newell does not want its employees to be part of the culture of the towns that it plunders. My guess is that Janesville WI (Parker Pen) and most of the towns that Newell plundered would offer similar stories. My reason for giving this book 4 stars is that I feel it could have been better edited to be more readable. The book tends to drag a bit while still making its point. This book coupled with Dreamland about the influx of drugs into Portsmouth Ohio tell very similar and sad stories of how opioids and illegal drugs enter and destroy a town. Our town is still fighting the drug situation but fortunately the employment crisis caused by Newell's plundering of Rubbermaid

has been largely overcome.

This was a book picked for my book club and we had a long decision on this pick. It was full of information as to why a company that has a good product can be brought down by the 1%'ers. In the same vein as "Hillbilly Eulogy" but more on the technical/economic side. I found "Glass House" interesting because I live in Ohio and went to a wedding in Lancaster. We went through the glass museum so the history was familiar to me. I think it gave me a better understanding of why it will take great effort to bring us out of our current employment difficulties. Very eye-opening.

A devastating, but accurate portrayal of how misguided economic ideas hurt real people and the country. Compelling, heartbreaking, informative, and a great insight into the dynamics that saw so many people vote for Trump as a loud collective scream that said "WE ARE HERE!". There is shame to go around on both sides of the political spectrum that so many places like Lancaster were ignored or actively harmed for so long.

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