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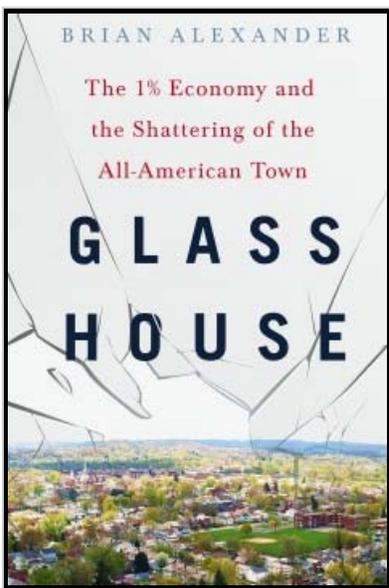


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## Glass House

The 1% Economy and the Shattering of the All-American Town

by Brian Alexander

Price: \$26.99 (Hardcover)

Published: February 14, 2017



Rating: 0.0/5 (0 votes cast)

**From the Publisher:** In 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...

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### About The Author

Brian Alexander

An award-winning journalist and author, BRIAN ALEXANDER has written about American culture for decades. He is a two-time finalist for the National Magazine Award. He has also been recognized by Medill School of Journalism's John Bartlow Martin awards for public interest journalism, the Association of...

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### What We Say

What happened to the heartland of America, the small towns that were once the backbone of the country and now seem like its biggest problem, thanks to crumbling factories and the plague of opioid addiction? Journalist Brian Alexander looks at his home town of Lancaster, Ohio, a place Forbes magazine once dubbed the "Norman Rockwell ideal" of small town life. Lancaster was anchored quite literally by the Anchor Hocking factory that made glass baking trays and measuring cups and glasses and other well-made items you could find in every household in America. He gently makes clear that the town -- once proudly known as the whitest city in America -- wasn't so idyllic for everyone. Women looking to work outside the

home, people of color, Catholics and so on weren't exactly popular (and gays weren't even acknowledged at all). Still all in all it was pretty good for the people who were visible, from blue collar workers to top executives. Business leaders and factory workers might belong to the same social club and drink in the same bars. Everyone knew everyone else and the town proudly and wisely invested in itself by building a good hospital and hotel and schools and the such -- and by investing, we mean raise taxes. Alexander shows how that all fell apart in a decades-long tale that jumps back and forth from the hollowed-out community of today (including drug addicts and weakened unions and disheartened cops) to the vagaries of the past. It's almost comical how every ill of past years is visited on the town like a plague, from Carl Icahn greenmailing the "glass house" factory into forking over tons of money to corporate raiders and private equity firms that don't even have the decency to split it up and sell it off. They just show up, take over, pay themselves to consult and walk away with tons of cash while leaving a decent business over-burdened with debt. Then someone else comes in, demands more worker concessions and does the same thing all over again. Alexander keeps widening his scope. He looks at corporations run by people who have no roots in the town their company is based in to malignant businesses that feed off poverty, like pay-day loan sharks to discount stores. He watches as judges chide addicts for personal failings while the wife of the mayor is jailed for embezzlement and then gambling away the stolen funds. Frankly, the story loses its focus time and again, with the scope becoming so broad that it all becomes fuzzy, like a scene in a movie in which the camera pulls back and back again, farther and farther away until you can't really see anything. Lengthy chapters detailing the dizzying financial firms raping and pillaging their way through Anchor Hocking are followed by a scene with one of the people Alexander tracks for years. But the main effect is that you'd almost forgotten about this or that person when they pop up again. His righteous anger is searing and his reportage is vivid and detailed. If the story gets away from him by the end, it's a poignant echo of how a functioning community has escaped the grasp of Lancaster and perhaps America as well. -- Michael Giltz

## What Others Say

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"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*

"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...

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