

1 Rural Deindustrialization, Decline, and Rebirth

On a frigid, sunny morning in December of 2014, I drove several miles up a steep, winding dirt road above Reliance, Washington, to interview Louise and Roger Clark, a retired couple who had lived in the Paradise Valley region for sixteen years.¹ Despite being narrow and dangerous due to the sharp drop-off on one side, the private road was extremely well maintained. Thankfully it had been plowed to the gravel; otherwise it would have been impassable in the brutal cold, which frequently turned snow into glassy ice. Nonetheless, the drive was frightening in my old Prius, the road so steep at times that I had to downshift to make sure I didn't lose speed. When I finally arrived at the Clark house, a large open-concept ranch with a wraparound porch at the top of the hill, the snow was piled so high on all sides that I could not figure out how to enter it or even where to knock. I had to call the Clarks, who let me in through the garage, which was the only passable entrance.

Inside, I understood why this home was worth the winter hassles. The beautiful interior was constructed of solid wood in the light hue that is common across Paradise Valley. Much of the furniture was made of similar rough-cut wood, a style popular in the area's vacation rentals as well. We sat in a large, airy living room with vast bay windows looking out onto

a gorgeous, sprawling view of snow-covered mountains in all directions. As we gazed at the valley below, Louise and Roger described what enticed them from the Seattle area to retire in this remote place where they had no prior social connections. They spoke about having visited the valley on camping and hunting trips when they were younger and of growing tired of the rain after decades on Washington's west side. They talked about the incredible views from their secluded mountain home. The dream to relocate permanently to Paradise Valley really began with an emotional response to witnessing the beauty of the place. The Clarks were struck by the valley's splendor. Louise told me that on her first visit she was awed by "the apple blossoms down south from Eagle Flat coming up valley. It was just so pretty, I never forgot that."

I heard similar tales from recent in-migrants across Paradise Valley during the ten months that I conducted research there. It was a common experience to be astounded by the impressive scale of nature in this place, to be so moved by it as to want to make the valley one's home. With its stunning physical landscape and remote but vibrant community, Paradise Valley perfectly represents what is for many Americans the idyllic image of the rural West. The combination of scale, beauty, and isolation are for many Americans intrinsic parts of idealized visions of rural America. Like generations of white settlers before them, and undoubtedly many still to come, the Clarks succumbed to the call of the rural idyll and decided to make Paradise Valley their retirement home.

What exactly is the rural dream that so many have chased here? Scholars define the rural idyll in multiple ways, most focusing on the romanticized vision of rural life as wholesome, innocent, virtuous, and simple compared to the rapid pace, modern inconveniences, and potential danger and risk of urban places.² The imagined rural is often a vision of a lost Eden, of a past perfection now mostly lost to urbanization and industrialization. This imaginary is often "divorced from harsher realities of rural life and masking exploitation and oppression."³ In this vision of rural perfection, the rougher aspects of modern rural communities are obscured by our longing for utopia coupled with desires for peace, tranquility, and infinite space.⁴ As this book illustrates, this powerful albeit somewhat inaccurate and naïve image has held sway since early waves of white settlers first pushed the Native populations from rural America.

This longing for rural utopia continues to inspire both young families and older retirees like Louise and Roger to invest in their own private pieces of paradise. It is a choice made at the individual level for often very personal reasons and seldom with thought regarding the social impacts of this type of movement of people and resources across space and place.

This book is not about the desire to settle in a beautiful location, although these narratives and pull factors are an important part of the story. Rather, it is about the human costs of the commodification of the rural ideal and the underlying assumptions and understandings regarding who does and does not have the right to live in desirable places. Although much recent discussion of rural areas, both in the press and in academic treatments, has focused on decline, destruction, and despair, this book focuses instead on rural success and growth.⁵ It is a story about one of rural America's seemingly best options for progress, development, and economic stability. It is also about the tolls this takes on the populations who have lived in rural communities since an earlier time, when rural places were valued more for the resources that could be extracted than for the amenities that could be reserved for elite recreation and enjoyment.

Beyond being a story of rurality itself, however, this book reveals the tension between a leisure class and a working class, illuminating the ways in which Americans' differences divide us and impede our abilities to understand or care about one another. It is a tale of the impacts of the rapid and disastrous growth of inequality in the United States and the resulting loss of access to the iconic American Dream for many, as more and more resources are accumulated by a few.⁶ It is also a story of the ways in which loss, anger, and disenfranchisement intersect with privilege, apathy, and denial to divide and undermine a community and a nation. The story of Paradise Valley demonstrates the human impacts of inequality from both sides of the divide, illustrating the mechanisms and processes by which we come to accept such extreme levels of inequality as normal, natural, and deserved. Increasingly divided experiences and perspectives contribute to the alienation, lack of empathy, and dehumanization that drive cycles of increasing social and political polarization in this community, as in the larger nation. The case of Paradise Valley illustrates that as these differences and divisions become more deeply entrenched, we come to believe more and more in the righteousness of those most like us, and

the inherent undeservingness of those on the other side of the divide. This book provides a critique of these processes and their inevitable outcomes, offering a window into understanding the experiences, motivations, and challenges faced by well-meaning individuals from both perspectives.

LOSS AND RESILIENCE IN PARADISE VALLEY

In order to understand the larger case, it is necessary first to understand Paradise Valley itself and how it came to be divided. Paradise Valley's history and present trajectory are tied into the history of the rural West more generally. Once seen as an endless frontier, the West was "tamed" through the efforts of Manifest Destiny, the belief that it was God's will that white Americans settle and populate the entire continent of North America. Throughout the nineteenth and into the twentieth centuries, westward expansion relied on small-scale agriculture, later giving way to extractive and land-based industries including mining, logging, oil drilling, and industrial agriculture that came to dominate in the mid-twentieth century.⁷ The era of these industries turned out to be short-lived for rural America, however, as global competition combined with neoliberal agendas to move extraction and production overseas in search of cheaper inputs and wages as well as weaker regulations.⁸

Subsequently, as deindustrialization occurred across the United States, these and other natural resource-based economies collapsed and declined, leaving many rural places economically devastated in their wake.⁹ The victims of deindustrialization are scattered throughout rural America, visible from coast to coast and throughout the Heartland and the Rust Belt. The loss of manufacturing and extraction jobs during the late twentieth century left much of rural America in economic ruin, and rural communities experienced population loss, declining infrastructure, and high unemployment.¹⁰ Frequently these concerns were compounded by lack of access to high-quality public schools and/or higher education, which helped to fuel cycles of out-migration that further impeded rural communities' chances of competing for new economic opportunities.¹¹

The impacts of these trends have been shattering for rural communities across the United States, which were faced with the loss of mainly

men's jobs in sectors that had long provided stable, living-wage, unionized, and full-time and/or year-round work. In many places jobs in such sectors as manufacturing and resource extraction were not replaced, or they were replaced by service-sector jobs that tended to be low-wage, nonunionized, lacking benefits, feminized, insecure, and part-time and/or seasonal.¹² Rural communities that were dominated by single industries had their labor markets ravaged by industrial decline. This shift in the nature of available jobs has resulted in widespread working poverty as well as changes in the gendered nature of rural work.¹³ These trends were further exacerbated by national and global economic challenges including the Great Recession in the early 2000s, which hit rural America particularly hard.¹⁴ Together, these macro trends left many rural American communities hollowed out and struggling to sustain themselves into the twenty-first century.¹⁵

Despite the historic and cultural ties to land-based industries, the forces of neoliberal global capitalism have been unrelenting, and most rural communities will not see these industries return to their past significance in terms of either economic activity or job creation. Among the long-standing impacts of economic restructuring in recent decades is that by almost all definitions, poverty and unemployment have been higher in rural than in urban areas.¹⁶ Given the combination of geographic isolation, lack of infrastructure (particularly in areas like broadband and other digital technologies), and lack of highly educated workers, many rural communities face extremely limited options for economic development. Even in those places where new resource-based industries are viable, such as areas where natural gas can be extracted through fracking, development often occurs in boom-and-bust cycles and there is limited job creation for the local workforce.¹⁷

Accompanying these trends, political and economic winds have shifted away from protecting rural communities. Neoliberal attitudes and agendas have focused increasingly on deregulation of many spheres of the American economy, resulting in decreasing restrictions on corporations, lower tax burdens on corporations and the wealthy, and fewer protections for both workers and the poor.¹⁸ The results have been a forty-year period of unprecedented growth in American inequality, as corporate profits grew and corporations kept more for themselves, and wages grew quickly

for the wealthy but stagnated or fell for less educated and skilled workers.¹⁹ These processes ravaged rural communities, where the losses of unionized jobs in manufacturing and resource extraction have left gaping holes in labor markets, and available service-sector jobs do not support basic survival, let alone upward mobility.²⁰ New industries increasingly cluster in the nation's booming urban centers, while its hollowed-out rural places become increasingly depressed, impoverished, and viewed as undesirable and expendable.²¹ The result has been economic suffering in rural America as well as frustration and anger at liberals, the political machine, and urban Americans more generally.²²

For decades, one of the few rays of light in the rural economic development landscape has been amenity-based tourism, promoted for its potential to reverse downward trends and replace declining rural industries.²³ This form of development cashes in on privileged urban dwellers' desires to temporarily experience the peace and tranquility of the imagined rural idyll. Research into amenity-based tourism development has suggested it can contribute to population growth, job growth, higher incomes, and lower poverty rates, while attracting young, educated, highly skilled in-migrants and stemming the flow of out-migration and "brain drain" in rural communities.²⁴ Although researchers have also identified numerous potential downsides of this form of development—from cost-of-living increases, to decreased community attachment, to culture clashes, to the growth of low-wage employment—building an amenity-tourism economy is still pursued as a goal by rural communities across the nation in the hopes that it can help overturn their economic fortunes.²⁵ While research suggests that results of this form of development are mixed at best, it represents for many communities their best chance for achieving new prosperity.

Paradise Valley is one of many rural communities that trusted its fortunes and its future to amenity tourism, in the hopes that it could remake itself in the wake of the forest industry's decline in the Pacific Northwest. Situated amid some of the most stunning natural landscapes in the West, within a day's drive of major cities including Seattle and Portland, its chances were good. Although it took decades for the investments into tourism to fully pay off, over time it has caught hold in the region. Modern Paradise Valley is an exemplar of the transition from an

extraction-dependent economy to a tourism- and amenity-focused one. The region has been particularly conscious, thoughtful, and critical of this form of development even as it pursued it, with leaders and vocal citizens who made wise choices along the way so as to retain the rural and small-town feel of their community versus seeing it grow into a place they could not recognize. Paradise Valley is an extremely successful rural community both in terms of building a strong economy based in amenity tourism and in-migration as well as in terms of retaining its essential character. Yet as this book describes, even for this rural success story, rebirth comes at a price.

PARADISE VALLEY'S TRIUMPHS AND CHALLENGES

Paradise Valley lies on the eastern slopes of the Cascade Mountains in Washington State. The valley's exact boundaries are unclear, but most locals agree on a roughly sixty-mile area that contains four distinct (but not all incorporated) communities, each with fewer than one thousand residents living within town boundaries. These communities include Outpost, Pinedale, Eagle Flat, and Reliance, the latter two having the largest populations. The school district, which includes this same region and adjacent unincorporated areas, has a population of roughly five thousand year-round residents. The towns differ in the types of tourists, second-home owners, and in-migrants they attract, but all of the communities are economically reliant on amenity-driven tourism and in-migration to some degree.

Like many high-amenity communities in the rural West, Paradise Valley has built its tourism economy around a combination of celebrating its western cultural heritage and commodification of its physical landscape and the myriad outdoor activities that can be pursued in and around the valley. Various promotional websites tout the region's options for outdoor sports, food, arts, and entertainment. As chapter 2 describes in more depth, over time the area has come to rely not just on visiting tourists for its economic base but also on part-time residents with primary homes elsewhere as well as on amenity migrants like Louise and Roger Clark. This combination of visitors and new residents has allowed

Paradise Valley to attain a surprising amount of success in terms of economic growth and development.

However, as this book discusses in detail, these victories are not without their challenges. Although Paradise Valley provides an exemplary case of rural success through amenity development, it is also an exemplary case of the unequal distribution of that success. Paradise Valley was ultimately able to reinvent itself only through sacrificing some of its opportunities for working-class residents' survival.²⁶ The community's mostly working-class "old-timers," themselves relative newcomers into a land that they settled during its earlier period of resource extraction, have not necessarily been included in the valley's impressive rebirth and reinvention. Among the documented potential downsides of amenity development are issues including gentrification, social and cultural clash, and reorganization of local power structures in favor of better resourced in-migrants—all of which are visible in Paradise Valley.²⁷

While previous scholars have uncovered the multiple forms these negative outcomes can take, this book explores the processes by which these types of social inequality are produced and reproduced as well as their impacts on individuals and the larger community and society. Highlighted in this exploration are the roles of real and symbolic resources in creating and sustaining the growth of inequality in this community, illustrating the multiple dimensions along which unequal access to advantage and distribution of privilege occur. As inequality deepens, the impacts of access to both real and symbolic resources are exaggerated, increasing opportunity for some while deepening marginalization for others. These processes, while highly visible in a small rural community, are not unique to it. The story this book tells is a small-scale version of social forces that are playing out across the nation and on a global scale.

Symbolic Resources and Social Boundaries

As Paradise Valley has grown through in-migration of mostly wealthy urbanites, it has experienced many negative impacts alongside the positives. Among the most striking of these impacts is the growth of inequality in the valley along with an accompanying decline of social cohesion as it becomes increasingly split between those who do and those who do not

have easy access to social support, economic security, and other important aspects of the American Dream, including stable work and affordable housing. Connected to these issues are the systematic loss of livelihood, sense of community, and hope experienced by those with longer histories in the valley, in contrast to the various ways in which more recent in-migrants access jobs, social connection, and a sense of personal success and satisfaction there. Much of this story is about the vast differences in resources between older and newer generations of Paradise Valley residents, including disparities in both economic and noneconomic resources.

An economic gulf between the populations underlies the most basic divisions between them. Although there are differences in their abilities to compete for better-paid jobs across the valley and thus substantial income disparities, the more significant difference between Paradise Valley's old-timers and newcomers lies in their access to wealth. Sociologists have long pointed out the importance of wealth versus income in terms of structuring life chances and contributing to persistent inequality.²⁸ Earned income can be cut off easily through the loss of a job, but wealth—meaning ownership of assets including homes, cars, savings, stocks, bonds, and other types of investments—persists and grows over time and can be passed on to subsequent generations. Wealth is also important in that it often can cover large expenses for which income alone may be insufficient, such as a down payment on a home or educational tuition for children. It can also cushion against income shocks, including a seasonal layoff or job loss, providing a safety net that helps many families to afford basic necessities until steady income is reestablished. Thus access to wealth can constitute a major advantage or disadvantage for individuals and families beyond mere income level.

Although economic differences are an important source of division and inequality between social groups, they are not the only ways in which people distinguish between and hierarchically divide themselves. Sociologists also study the overlapping matrices of multiple types of social division, including differences of race, class, gender, and sexual identity.²⁹ While ostensibly noneconomic in nature, these social divisions correspond to systems of power, privilege, and access—or lack thereof—to multiple other societal resources, both economic and noneconomic in nature. They are based in differences that are more symbolic than real, constructed by

societies through the meanings that they attach to variations that may or may not be visible to the eye. While almost all human societies share this tendency to create symbolic boundaries between groups of people, the specific boundaries that are most salient depend on the characteristics and cultural norms of the populations themselves.³⁰ In-group and out-group statuses can be constructed through boundaries based in race, class, gender, culture, religion, or age, among countless other possibilities.³¹ Boundaries that reinforce inequality are maintained through both social institutions and face-to-face interactions on the micro level, in which differences are reified and reinforced.³²

More homogenous communities like Paradise Valley, with its almost entirely white population (see chapter 2 for more on the demographic makeup), may have limited access to certain forms of distinction, in this case differences by race. However, racial homogeneity does not mean that a population is lacking in ways to differentiate and divide members. Scholars of race point out that although whites are generally privileged relative to other racial groups in the United States, whiteness itself is not monolithic, and there are many variations in the degree of privilege associated with white racial status. Furthermore, the meaning of “whiteness” changes according to social context and reference groups.³³ Within the racial group there are multiple statuses that vary across other axes of privilege and experience, particularly those related to social class and related resources.

These types of class differences form the basis of most of the division discussed in this book. Like other types of difference, social class distinctions both result from and structure differential access to resources, and these distinctions are tied to both economic privilege and cultural understandings regarding the value, moral standing, and deservingness of different social groups.³⁴ Like other types of inequality, social class is often largely invisible to those who have the most advantage and privilege.³⁵ Yet despite its relative invisibility, social class is frequently one of the most significant forms of division, particularly in the modern United States.³⁶ Social class is created and reproduced through multiple mechanisms, including purely economic resources like wealth and income but also through a number of resources known to sociologists as symbolic capital.³⁷ This concept assumes that social status hierarchies are main-