



The Small-Town Midwest: Resilience and Hope in the Twenty-First Century (Iowa and the Midwest Experience)

Julianne Couch

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Most people in the United States live in urban areas; still, there are nearly fifty million people living in small towns of just a few thousand people or less. Some towns are within a short drive of a metropolitan area where people can work, shop, or go to school; some are an hour or more from any sort of urban hub. In this book, Julianne Couch sets out to illuminate the lives and hopes of these small-town residents.

The people featured live—by choice or circumstances—in one of nine small communities in five states in the Midwest and Great Plains: Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, and Wyoming. Daily they witness people moving out, heading to more urban areas, small businesses closing down, connected infrastructure drying up, entrepreneurs becoming discouraged, and more people thinking about leaving. This is the story we hear in the news, the story told by abandoned farms, consolidated schools, and boarded-up Main Streets.

But it's not the whole story. As Couch found in her travels throughout the Midwest, many people long to return to these towns, places where they may have deep family roots or where they can enjoy short commutes, familiar neighbors, and proximity to rural and wild places. And many of the residents of small midwestern towns are not just accepting the trend toward urbanization with a sigh. They are betting that the tide of rural population loss can't go out forever, and they're backing those bets with creatively repurposed schools, entrepreneurial innovation, and community commitment. From Bellevue, Iowa, to Centennial, Wyoming, the region's small-town residents remain both hopeful and resilient.

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