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## Small Towns Must Struggle: The Impact of President Lyndon B. Johnson's "War on Poverty" in Ellenville, New York, 1960-present

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Small Towns Must Struggle: The Impact of President Lyndon B. Johnson's "War on Poverty"  
in Ellenville, New York, 1960-present

Senior Project Submitted to  
The Division of Social Studies  
of Bard College

by  
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Annandale-on-Hudson, New York  
May 2022



This Senior Project is dedicated to the Ulster Heights Owner's Corp., one of the last remaining seasonal residential communities near Ellenville, New York. Because of UHOC, my family and I have been able to experience the wonders of the Catskill Mountains every summer.



I would like to thank my mother, sister, grandmother, partner, and friends for their support throughout my research process.

Special thanks to the staff members and volunteers at the Ellenville Public Library and Museum for welcoming me into the archives with open arms, as well as the research librarians at the Bard Stevenson Library.

And of course, thank you to my Senior Project advisor Professor Jeannette Estruth who helped me every step of the way.



## Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1: The Imperial Schrade Corporation .....	7
Chapter 2: The Ellenville Urban Renewal Agency.....	17
Chapter 3: The Eastern New York Correctional Facility .....	27
Chapter 4: The Production of Historical Memory .....	35
Conclusion.....	41
Bibliography.....	45





## Introduction

On August 4th, 2021, the Village of Ellenville announced the future arrival of a new manufacturer, promising to bring roughly three hundred jobs back to town. Cresco Labs, a medicinal and recreational cannabis manufacturer, made public their plans to buy roughly seventy acres of abandoned land that was once home to one of Ellenville's largest employers, an aluminum fabrication plant named Channel Master. News spread rapidly, embellished with comments that expressed excitement that Ellenville may return to the "business hub... it once was".<sup>1</sup>

This announcement is but a contemporary example of a long history featuring various attempts to "revitalize" Ellenville's economy. The Village, having only memories of job stability and community success in the 1940s, has repeatedly attempted to entice large corporations into the region with hopes that it will solve the decades-long depression they have been experiencing. Ellenville also implemented urban renewal projects in the 1960s, sold roughly 3,000 acres of its land for a safety net in the 1990s, and almost convinced a grand casino to open in 2009.<sup>2</sup> Despite numerous attempts to combat economic depression, the anti-poverty policies put forth by President Lyndon B. Johnson's administration has prevented Ellenville from becoming economically stable.

Ellenville is located roughly two hours North of New York City, and forty-five minutes West of the Hudson River (Figure 1). Its population size, in both the mid-twentieth century and

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<sup>1</sup> Destination\_ellenville, "Today is the biggest day for Ellenville." *Instagram*, August 4, 2021. Accessed April 18, 2022. [https://www.instagram.com/p/CSKUc\\_ULlFD/](https://www.instagram.com/p/CSKUc_ULlFD/)

<sup>2</sup> "Sell Ellenville Mountain? OK, But Start the Bidding at \$5Mil.," *Ellenville Press*, June 29, 1994, pp. 1.; Phyllis Lennert, Margaret Smodis, and Rita Helgesen, interview by author, Ellenville Public Library, February 18, 2022; *Ellenville- Then and Now, YouTube* (YouTube, 2014), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ix9B-tUs6o8>.

# New York

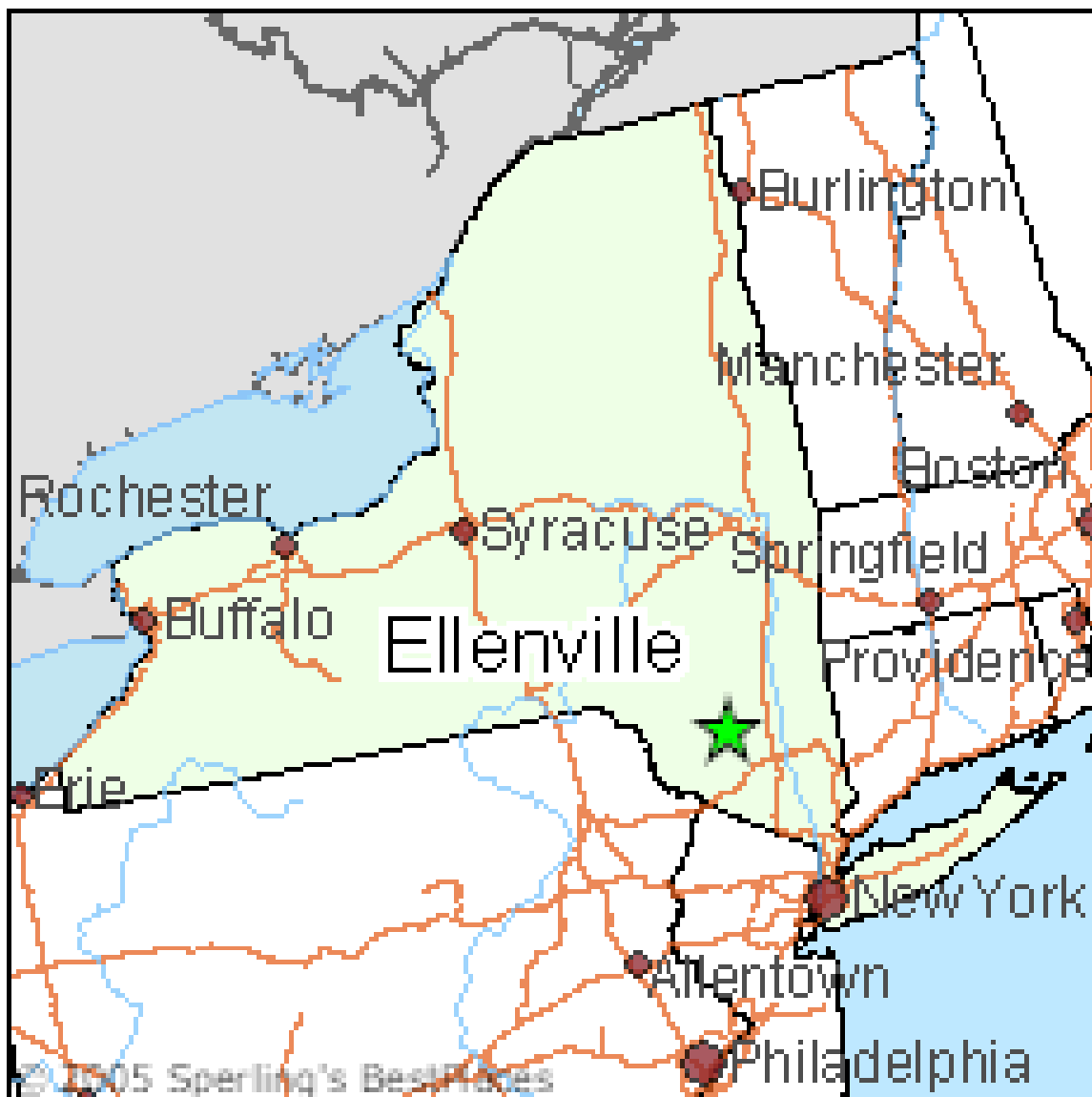


Figure 1. Best places to live in Ellenville, New York. Accessed April 7, 2022.

[https://www.bestplaces.net/city/new\\_york/ellenville](https://www.bestplaces.net/city/new_york/ellenville).

today, is roughly 4,500 residents. The downtown portion of Ellenville features a thirty-person theater for live performances, multiple restaurants, a bakery, a public library, a city hall, a village police department, a paper printing store that oddly doubles as a crystal shop, over ten religious institutions, a Taco Bell, McDonald's, and Dunkin Donuts, a Stewarts gas station, and more. Though the number of businesses may seem contrary to some definitions of a "small town", Ellenville's population size, singular school district, and close-knit community makes this town small.<sup>3</sup>

From the closing of the O&W Railroad in 1957, to the early twenty first century which witnessed the closing, bankruptcy, or relocation of more than 3 manufacturers, Ellenville has been hard hit by unstable and unreliable economic infrastructure.<sup>4</sup> The median household income is \$47,000, but twenty-five percent of the population makes less than \$25,000 and thus live in poverty.<sup>5</sup> More than half of Ellenville's residents rent their home, and Ellenville High School, the only high school in Ellenville School District, is ranked 943rd out of 1266 high schools in New York State; its graduation/retention rate is eighty percent, over sixty percent of students are economically disadvantaged, roughly half of the student's identify as being apart of a minority group, and nearly ten percent of students are English Language learners.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Amy Plitt, "Ellenville, N.Y.: 'A Tight-Knit Community' With Room to Grow ," *The New York Times*, February 9, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/09/realestate/ellenville-ny.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Sylvia Saunders. "Schrade Will Buy Antenna Factory." *Times Herald Record* (Kingston, NY), May 31, 1984.

<sup>5</sup> Cleargov. Accessed April 7, 2022. <https://cleargov.com/new-york/ulster/village/ellenville/demographics>.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.; "Census Profile: Ellenville, NY." Census Reporter. Accessed April 7, 2022.

<https://censusreporter.org/profiles/16000US3623965-ellenville-ny/>; "Ellenville High School in Ellenville, NY - US News Best ..." Accessed April 7, 2022. <https://www.usnews.com/education/best-high-schools/new-york/districts/ellenville-central-school-district/ellenville-high-school-13663>.

My research on Ellenville, New York, is a case study that probes the ways in which small towns have been researched by scholars in the past. I specifically use President Lyndon B. Johnson's Great Society programs to exemplify how policies put forth on a national level negatively impact the economic and social wellbeing of small towns, and continue to do so to this day. I begin my essay in the 1950's with Ellenville's once-thriving Imperial Schrade Corporation, and end in the contemporary COVID-19 era. Chapter One focuses on the Imperial Schrade Corp, a knife manufacturer that highlighted the unwavering role of industry in a small town's economic stability, and how public-facing discourse ensured such importance. Chapter Two discusses the questionable motivations and outcomes of Ellenville's Urban Renewal Agency in context with President Johnson's "War on Poverty." Chapter Three focuses on the role of the Eastern New York Correctional Facility in Ellenville's economy, and more generally, how the rise of mass incarceration in the 1960s outline weaknesses in the United States' economic traditions. Chapter four discusses the formation of historical memory in small towns and the pervasiveness of business-oriented economic philosophy on the minds of residents that, to this day, have continuously reinforced such philosophies both in conversation and action. I conclude my research with the ways in which Ellenville has responded to the rapidly changing Hudson Valley since the beginning of the COVID-19 era (2020-present), and how Ellenville may best combat these abrupt changes going forward.

Scholars, who have produced work about small towns and cities, often concentrate their research in the Southern, Southwestern, and Midwestern regions of the United States, and discuss economic depression in context with the fall of agricultural industries.<sup>7</sup> Topics such as

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<sup>7</sup> Timothy R. Mahoney, "The Small City in American History", *Indiana Magazine of History* 99, no.4 (2003), 311-30.

urban renewal have been tirelessly probed, yet most research focuses on urban renewal in large cities-- ignoring its impact on small and rural towns such as Ellenville.<sup>8</sup> Since 2000, there has been an increasing number of scholars that focus on small-city urban renewal projects, such as Andrea Smith and Rachel Scarpato, who examine Easton, Pennsylvania in context with its seemingly ‘integrated’ communities.<sup>9</sup> These small cities have population sizes around 30,000 persons, however, which is about six times the size of Ellenville.<sup>10</sup> Recently, there has been an increase in scholarly work regarding suburbanization--specifically property, poverty, and infrastructure-- in the small communities of the Hudson Valley, but such work largely focuses on contemporary trends that were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>11</sup>

This essay draws from an array of primary sources, including local and national newspaper articles, corporate newsletters, interviews with life-long Ellenville residents conducted both by myself and by curious others, advertisements, municipal paperwork, and federal and state government documents. I collected much of these archival materials from the Ellenville Public Library and Museum, a small archive that is only open twice a week and operated by volunteers. During my archival collection process, I was confronted with the challenges of conducting a case study of a low-income small town. These challenges include a

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<sup>8</sup> Lizabeth Cohen, “Buying into Downtown Revival: The Centrality of Retail to Postwar Urban Renewal in American Cities”, *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 611, (2007): 82–95.; N.D.B. Connolly, *A World More Concrete: Real Estate and the Remaking of Jim Crow South Florida* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014); Robert Fairbanks, “The Failure of Urban Renewal in the Southwest: From City Needs to Individual Rights”, *The Western Historical Quarterly* 37, no. 3 (2006): 303-25; Kevin Fox Gotham, “A City without Slums: Urban Renewal, Public Housing, and Downtown Revitalization in Kansas City, Missouri,” *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 60 (2001): 292.

<sup>9</sup>Andrea Smith and Rachel Scarpato, “The Language of ‘Blight’ and Easton’s “Lebanese Town”: Understanding a Neighborhood’s Loss to Urban Renewal”, *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 134, No. 2 (April 2010): 127-164.

<sup>10</sup> Smith and Scarpato, “The Language”, 129.

<sup>11</sup> Leonard Navarez and Joshua Simons, “Small-City Dualism in the Metro Hinterland: The Racialized “Brooklynization” of New York’s Hudson Valley”, *City & Community* 19, no. 1 (March 2020): 16-43.; Beryl Satter, “Property is Bad: Recent Trends in American Studies”, *American Quarterly* 68, no. 2 (2016): 471-485.

two month-long closure of the Ellenville Public Library and Museum due to pipe/water damage, staffing shortages due to various COVID-19 cases and exposures, personal car trouble, random and unannounced canceling of visitor hours, and the permanent closure the Wawarsing Historical Society and Knife Museum. Luckily, the volunteers of the Ellenville Public Library and Museum are life-long residents of Ellenville, and due to their generosity and friendliness, I was able to conduct an oral history that provided a level of historical richness greater than any physical material I collected.

## Chapter One: The Imperial Schrade Corporation

About two hours North of New York City lies the Town of Ellenville-- a small, close-knit community in Ulster County located at the intersection of the Hudson Valley and the Catskill Mountains. Ellenville's small population of roughly 4,500 residents and relatively isolated location has maintained a dependency on local, large-scale employment, most often factory work, manufacturing, and correctional/prison work. The number one source of employment is the Eastern New York Correctional Facility, second being various forms of inconsistent manufacturing positions. The Imperial Schrade Corporation, a long time major employer in Ellenville, supplying roughly 300 jobs to the local economy from its arrival to Ellenville in 1958, left hundreds of Ellenville's citizens without stable wages and salaries when its factory shut down in 2004.<sup>12</sup> By analyzing the legacy of the Imperial Schrade Corporation, the connection between President Lyndon B. Johnson's "War on Poverty" and the repeated failure of small town economies are exemplified.

In the twentieth century, scholars who specialized in the industries of small towns often paid particularly close attention to the influence of agriculture in the Midwest and Southern regions of the United States.<sup>13</sup> This academic trend is completely logical as it mirrors the decline of agriculture as sustainable employment that took place in the 1950s and 1960s. In the past twenty years, however, there has been an increase in scholarship that not only recognizes this twentieth century habit of solely connecting the rural to the agricultural, but also examines how

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<sup>12</sup> Marion M. Dumond, "Forward, into the Past: Schrade... and Before: a 130-year Legacy of Knife Making in Wawarsing," *Wawarsing.net Magazine*, September 2004.

<sup>13</sup> John Fraser Hart, "Small Towns and Manufacturing," *Geographical Review* 78, no. 3 (1988): 272-87. <https://doi.org/10.2307/215001>.



contemporary scholars have attempted to break such connection.<sup>14</sup> This scrutiny has proven vital to improving research in the field of rural history, but these scholars often stop after they have successfully identified and evidenced such academic trends, and thus abandon any significant analysis into the non-agricultural small towns industries of the Northeast.<sup>15</sup> This examination of the mid-century role of the Imperial Schrade Corp. in Ellenville, New York, or, of a non-agricultural industry in a small town community--in context with national and global circumstances-- both addresses and responds to these scholarly habits.

Ellenville experienced a boom in industrial success from the mid-to-late nineteenth century and into the twentieth century. This was made possible by the presence of two high-functioning systems of transportation, the Delaware and Hudson (D&H) Canal, whose route began in Honesdale, Pennsylvania and ended in Kingston, New York, and the O&W railway.<sup>16</sup> The presence of the D&H canal made Ellenville attractive for entrepreneurs looking to begin new projects or scale upward what had already been established, as transporting materials and final products was easily conducted and managed.<sup>17</sup> The other transportation line was the Ontario and Western Railway (O&W). This railway primarily transported freight from the years 1868 to 1957, and took on the role of cargo importation and exportation after the closure of the D&H Canal.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Peter A. Coclanis and Louis M. Kyriakouides, "Selling Which South?: Economic Change in Rural and Small-Town North Carolina in an Era of Globalization, 1940–2007." *Southern Cultures* 13, no. 4 (2007): 86–102. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26391734>; John E. Miller, "Midwestern Small Towns," In *Finding a New Midwestern History*, edited by Jon K. Lauck, Gleaves Whitney, and Joseph Hogan, 129–42. University of Nebraska Press, 2018. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv75d8gv.12>.

<sup>15</sup> Cecilia Tacoli, "Why Small Towns Matter: Urbanisation, Rural Transformations and Food Security." International Institute for Environment and Development, 2017. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep02594>.

<sup>16</sup> "History," O&W Rail Trail, accessed April 6, 2022, [https://theoandwtrail.org/?page\\_id=118](https://theoandwtrail.org/?page_id=118).

<sup>17</sup> "D&H Canal," National Park Service, accessed November 30, 2021, <https://www.nps.gov/upde/learn/historyculture/dhcanal.htm>.

<sup>18</sup> A brief history, accessed April 6, 2022, <http://www.nyow.org/midland.html>.

One particular industry that thrived in Ellenville due to the above listed factors was knife manufacturing, beginning around the year 1870 and surviving roughly 130 years.<sup>19</sup> Just as the Civil War concluded, the potential of the Ellenville knife business began to gain serious attention from investors near and far.<sup>20</sup> The foundational years of knife manufacturing in Ellenville were ever-changing-- 1871 saw the beginning of the Ellenville Co-Operative Cutlery Company, which then was reorganized as a stock company under the name Ellenville Knife Company in 1872, then again, rebranded as the Ulster Knife Co. in 1875.<sup>21</sup> Eventually one man, Dwight Divine, bought out the other shareholders in 1876, and came to own Imperial Schrade Corp., the business that maintained a reliable and seemingly unshakable industry centered in the heart of the village until his death in 1933.<sup>22</sup>

Knife manufacturing, however, was not the only thriving industry in Ellenville. Glass, clothing, and aluminum manufacturing also prevailed, in addition to seasonal tourist attractions such as the 420-guest room resort The Nevele, and a booming summer camp community up the Catskill mountains towards Ulster Heights.<sup>23</sup> There is also the Eastern Correctional Facility in Napanoch which began operations in 1900 and is still, in 2021, the largest employer to the Town of Wawarsing.<sup>24</sup> In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Ellenville was perceived as the archetype of the American industrial city: it was supported by two systems of transportation, hundreds of workforce-ready individuals, and a variety of industries driven by wealthy businessmen. These factors framed Ellenville as a place that brings the American Dream into

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<sup>19</sup> Dumond, "Forward", 3.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>23</sup> Plitt, "Ellenville, N.Y.: A 'Tight-Knit...'", 1.

<sup>24</sup> "Tour Invitation Launches Eastern NY CF Centennial Events," Eastern NY Correctional Facility centennial opener, accessed April 6, 2022, <http://www.correctionhistory.org/easternny100/opener.html>.

fruition-- a place for scalable business, a place for a self-sustaining community, and a place for citizens to remain employed, housed, and content.

The Imperial Schrade Corp. occupied the headlines of local newspapers and press with overt patriotism, framing itself not only as an essential material provider for its employees in Ellenville, but also as a community business-- one that contributes and gives back to the people and local area it serves.<sup>25</sup> This manicured self image, communicated by local news, press, and word of mouth, was crafted strategically by its founder and subsequent owners.<sup>26</sup> Founder Devine was a veteran of the Civil War, son of a mercantile business owner, and a businessman himself. Devine (owner from 1876-1933), along with the subsequent knife company owners Albert Bear and Henry Bear (owners from 1941-end), carefully curated a positive image of Imperial Schrade, beginning with the inner workings of the factory and the people it employed.

Employees of the Imperial Schrade Corp. enjoyed reasonable and sustainable benefits for both themselves and their families. Coverage for pregnancy and childbirth, doctor's visits, and even mental health crises were largely covered.<sup>27</sup> When it came time to retire, employees that contributed twenty five years or more were able to retire with a full pension-- a luxury that not many were afforded both then and now.<sup>28</sup> And as most factory benefits go, there were also benefits for "accidental dismemberment", along with other, more obscure but necessary reasons for claim.<sup>29</sup> Schrade provided a sense of security to its employees that stretched beyond the

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<sup>25</sup> "Good Neighbors." *Ellenville Press*, June 13, 1984.; "Schrade to Expand, Add New Jobs." *Ellenville Press*, July 29, 1987.

<sup>26</sup> Dumond, "Forward", 1-2.

<sup>27</sup> *Group Insurance for You and Your Family* (Hartford, CT: The Traveler's Insurance Company, n.d.).

<sup>28</sup> *Retirement Plan Imperial Knife Associated Companies, Inc. and Affiliated Companies* (Hartford, CT: The Travelers Insurance Company, 1977).

<sup>29</sup> *Group Insurance Benefits* (Hartford, CT: The Travelers Insurance Company, n.d.).

employee population-- this security also influenced the community in which it resided by guaranteeing individuals with steady income that supported community growth.

On the inside, Schrade employees reaped the pros of a decent salary and benefits that offered security and comfort. On the outside, the company put enormous effort into creating a public-facing image that communicated positive perceptions of the manufacturer. For example, Schrade sought to support local organizations and institutions, such as the Ellenville School District, where “200 centennial knives” were designed and created to benefit the school district’s quarterly senior citizens breakfast by donating the proceeds of the centennial sale.<sup>30</sup> Imperial Schrade Corp. framed itself as a community member first and an employer second-- a business objective supported by advertisement strategies that pressed on traditional notions of environmental dominance and masculinity within the Hudson Valley landscape and beyond.

For example, one advertisement pictures an extremely muscular, male-presenting figure, with horns protruding from his shoulders and bulging, almost absurdly large muscles.<sup>31</sup> This half-man- half-beast stands aggressively, facing the reader with intimidation and determination. The creature, with its claw-like toenails and fingernails, and a posture insinuating a potential “pounce” at any second-- displays characteristics of a ‘wild’ and ‘untamed’ being, one that could be both the victim and the user of a sharp utility. A picture of “The New Old Timer Lockback” knife is placed in front of the ferocious figure, blocking only a small portion of the body.<sup>32</sup> The title of the advertisement states “The Ultimate Beauty with the Heart of a Beast” (Figure 2).

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<sup>30</sup> “Schrade Plans Special Knife Issue To Observe School District's 100th Anniversary.” *Ellenville Journal*, December 3, 1988.

<sup>31</sup> “The Ultimate Beauty with the Heart of a Beast,” advertisement, *Old Timer Knife Almanac*, March 1977, 3.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

M.V.F. ELLENVILLE BUSINESS-----MANUFACTURERS---IMPERIAL SCHRADE CORP.---Schrade Cutlery Corp

## The Ultimate Beauty with the Heart of a Beast.

**The New Old Timer® Lockback.**  
 Outside, it's the ultimate beauty of lockbacks. Inside, it has the heart of a beast. The 3½ inch blade of high carbon tool steel stands up to any test—on the trail or on the job. The pivot post of Schrade + Steel® insures a rigid construction that makes the beast tough. It takes over 100 hand operations and inspections to make this Old Timer Lockback a beast—and ultimately, that's beautiful.

**SCHRADE**  
 The World's Most Advertised Knives

Schrade Cutlery Corp., Ellenville, NY 12428 Established 1904

Figure 2. “The Ultimate Beauty with the Heart of a Beast,” advertisement. *Old Timer Knife Almanac*, March 1977, 3.

Figure one provides an example of the broader societal discussion that positions land and the environment at the mercy of humans. President Johnson's policies set forth the notion that the federal government, and thus humans and industries, were in control of land proprietorship. This is best seen in the urban renewal projects whose lasting effects allowed for the continuation of federal dominance over land. Probing the transition from pre-industrial to industrial society, Ronald Inglehart and Wayne E. Baker cite the work of Daniel Bell and state:

Pre-industrial life, Bell (1976) argues, was a "game against nature" in which "one's sense of the world is conditioned by the vicissitudes of the elements—the seasons, the storms, the fertility of the soil, the amount of water, the depth of the mine seams, the droughts and the floods" (p. 147). Industrialization brought less dependence on nature, which had been seen as inscrutable, capricious, uncontrollable forces or anthropomorphic spirits. Life now became a "game against fabricated nature" (Bell 1973:147), a technical, mechanical, rationalized, bureaucratic world directed toward the external problem of creating and dominating the environment".<sup>33</sup>

Shrade's advertisements published roughly a decade after this industrial shift present a scenario that reflects the claims above, as the nature-derived creature used multiple times to sell new knife collections quite literally depict a "game against fabricated nature"; the technical and mechanical presentation of an Ulster-made pocket knife directly challenges the environment-- and even further, land holding policy-- that dominate the Hudson Valley and America as a whole. And just as Schrade aligned closely with the environmental presentations of tradition within an industrial economy and society, it also helped to ensure that Ellenville experience the "growth" and "rising productivity" that characterized the immediate period after the Second World War, where "large

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<sup>33</sup> Ronald Inglehart and Wayne E. Baker, "Modernization, Cultural Change, and the Persistence of Traditional Values," *American Sociological Review* 65, no. 1 (2000): 21, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2657288>.

numbers of workers had discretionary income” and “enjoyed paid vacations, holidays, pensions, and health insurance”.<sup>34</sup>

Ellenville’s economy, dependent on large-scale local employment, thrived during the postwar period of consumerism and industrialization. Looming beyond this industrial success, however, are the foreign policies pursued by the United States that ultimately challenged the all-American business model seen in the Imperial Schrade Corp.. Because the United States focused on easing friendship between foreign states by lifting tariffs for imports that encouraged exportation specifically with Japan, industries within the United States were not only unaware of the impacts of this shift, but left with little reconciliation once it became evident that outsourcing industries was the least costly method of production.<sup>35</sup>

Judith Stein’s work focuses primarily on the 1960s and 1970s, a period in which factories “fell” in America and financial industries thrived.<sup>36</sup> Although Ellenville’s knife industry remained up until the early 2000s, the domestic economic circumstances-- both industrial (1940s/50s) and postindustrial (1970s-present)-- reflect the international and domestic policies of the United States. Imperial Schrade Corp., a once-stable and thriving community business, began to experience the faults of economic decisions made by administrations in post-war America.<sup>37</sup> President Johnson’s “War on Poverty” social programs, such as urban renewal, expanded the power of the federal government by instating revised land holding policies in communities small

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<sup>34</sup> Judith Stein, *Pivotal Decade : How the United States Traded Factories for Finance in the Seventies* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2010), 2.  
<https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=cat03691a&AN=bard.b2350207&site=eds-live&scope=sit>  
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<sup>35</sup> Alfred E. Eckes Jr. and Thomas W. Zeiler, *Globalization and the American Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 157–58.

<sup>36</sup> Stein, *Pivotal Decade*, 6.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

and large. These policies mandated that a community adhere to the federal government's discretion over land ownership, which involved the creation of business districts and industrial expansion, and ultimately ignored the "fall" of the factory that came from the increasingly interdependent global trade circumstance.

Imperial Schrade Corp. has been labeled as a vital actor in the immediate Ellenville economy, but if we look deeper, we can begin to uncover experiences shared collectively between rural communities and temporary industrial success. Imperial Schrade reiterated the larger political ideologies of the domestic and foreign United States: it reinforced notions of manhood through advertisements, it reiterated the importance of craftsmanship, and it provided a perfect example of how a private corporation can, under capitalism, positively contribute to the public institutions and its people. But, like such domestic and global trends, it also shielded Ellenville residents from certain phenomena that eventually contributed to its downfall.

Imperial Schrade provided full time employment with benefits, but only to those who had an 'in' to the company, who were mostly white men. Within its championing of craftmanship hid the realities of global outsourcing, the rise of higher education, and the literal fall of craftsmanship. By supporting public institutions with its private revenue, Imperial Schrade shielded Ellenville from gaps in state and federal funding that other rural communities were experiencing. It reinforced the fallacious idea that private business was the best avenue for rural economic growth-- sowing seeds of economic misinformation into the minds of its citizens, which has proven to be one of the hardiest seeds ever planted, as it is still flourishing today.





## Chapter Two: The Ellenville Urban Renewal Agency

At the beginning of the 1960s, the Ellenville Urban Renewal Agency (EURA) was established to “revitalize” the appearance and infrastructure of the village. This revitalization sought to attract newcomers by creating department stores and up-scale shopping malls, upgrading and repairing vital infrastructure such as major water mains and storm drains, and creating public and affordable housing units. The EURA received extensive federal and state funding to buy properties of interest that would either be demolished or entirely renovated, oftentimes at below-market value, or to fund projects such as water main repairs or affordable housing units. Though urban renewal projects were implemented under a beneficial guise, such actions put forth by President Johnson’s administration had grave consequences for the economy of small towns across the United States, specifically Ellenville.

Urban renewal programs increased federal power on a local and state level by enforcing land distribution and ownership policies that dictated whose land, and therefore assets, could generationally survive. Small towns in particular endured the consequences of this urban and suburban-centered land policy because rural towns are neither urban or suburban; while the GI Bill created suburbs and generational wealth almost exclusively for white Americans, non-white “others” were placed or relocated into urban centers.<sup>38</sup> These urban centers were soon the victims of President Johnson’s “War on Poverty” through the implementation of urban renewal programs that pursued slum clearance and forced displacement. By analyzing urban renewal in Ellenville, the underlying motivations behind such federal policy become increasingly clear. Urban renewal was implemented to promote generational wealth among white middle class Americans by

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<sup>38</sup> Kasey Keeler, “Putting People Where They Belong: American Indian Housing Policy in the Mid-Twentieth Century”, *NAIS: Journal of Native American and Indigenous Studies Association* 3, no. 2 (2016): 70-104.

forcibly displacing non-white and low-income families from their land. It also expanded the influence of business in communities, all while being concealed under erroneous promises of a life-changing “revitalization” of a downtown center.

The Ellenville Urban Renewal Agency was among a plethora of localized urban renewal agencies that operated under the federal Urban Renewal Agency (URA), which was created in Title I of the 1949 Housing Act to administer the operations of the Urban Renewal Program.<sup>39</sup> The URA was placed under the Housing and Home Finance Agency, which had jurisdiction over the two New Deal programs: the Federal Housing Administration, which insured mortgages, and the Public Housing Administration, which headed the production and management of “public housing”.<sup>40</sup> This convoluted structure of power endured a series of reorganizations, which in 1965, included the creation of the Housing and Urban Development department (HUD).<sup>41</sup>

This disorganization was probed in 1973 by Richard T. LeGates, who explains how the bureaucracy of federal urban renewal assigned local redevelopment agencies as the “intermediary recipients of federal social welfare grant monies”.<sup>42</sup> In Ellenville, this intermediary recipient was the EURA, who had to respond to the well-developed and long-standing constituency of the Ellenville Village Board, whose goals and priorities often conflicted with those of the new federal social welfare bureaucracies, such as HUD.<sup>43</sup> The various reorganizations of power were not exclusive to the federal and state levels, however. Reorganization was also seen in the Village of Ellenville; within the seventeen years of

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<sup>39</sup> Richard T. Legates, “Can the Federal Welfare Bureaucracies Control Their Programs: The Case of HUD and Urban Renewal”, *The Urban Lawyer* 5, no. 2 (1973): 228-63.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 229.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

operation, more than 3 relocation officers of the EURA resigned.<sup>44</sup> In March of 1970, the EURA's relocation officer Thomas J. Koulas resigned due to "inaction by the [village] board", and also hinted at larger discrepancies between the employees of the EURA and members of the Village Board.<sup>45</sup> Fuel for such discrepancies were located in the impactful changes to land proprietorship required by first the Workable Program and eventually the urban renewal projects.

The federal funding allotted to each urban renewal project depended on the "credit" earned by the village. In 1969, officials of the EURA met with a representative from HUD to "develop an application for a Workable Program for the Village of Ellenville for the next two years", which must be approved by HUD's New York office, then ultimately from "Washington".

<sup>46</sup> The HUD official defined the Workable Program as a "prerequisite for federal funding for community improvements", where projects completed within the two-year period are counted as "credits" towards federal funding, provided that such projects are completed.<sup>47</sup> The implementation of a Workable Program was required by state and federal agencies in order to receive urban renewal monies.<sup>48</sup>

The federal funding prerequisites fulfilled by the completion of Ellenville's Workable Program stretched beyond building community parks, however. According to urban historian Robert Fairbanks, the provisions of a Workable Program outlined in the Housing Act of 1954 included seven elements: citizen participation, appropriate housing and building codes and

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<sup>44</sup> "Ellenville's Demolition Derby ... aka the Federal Urban Renewal Program." *Ellenville Press*, January 7, 1998.; "Walpole Quits as UR Director", *Ellenville Journal*, April 5, 1973.

<sup>45</sup> "UR Relocation Officer Submits Resignation", *Ellenville Journal*, March 19, 1970.

<sup>46</sup> "Ellenville Urban Renewal Developing Workable Program for 2-Year Period," *Ellenville Journal*, October 23, 1969.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Robert B. Fairbanks. *The War on Slums in the Southwest: Public Housing and Slum Clearance in Texas, Arizona, and New Mexico, 1935-1965*, Temple University Press, 2014: 165. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt14bsspp>

ordinances, comprehensive community planning, neighborhood analysis, administrative organization, financing, and housing for displaced families.<sup>49</sup> Despite supposed efforts to prioritize the citizen participation aspect, far more impactful was the requirement that a municipality implement new or revised housing codes and zoning ordinances. The concept of uniform, city-wide housing codes were a recent development, having been introduced in the early twentieth century.<sup>50</sup> Many cities were reluctant to adopt such ordinances because they allowed certain individuals to have enormous power over community land, but with the enticing offer of urban renewal monies dangling before them, in addition to the universally mandated expansion of federal power excused by the Vietnam War, most municipalities submitted.<sup>51</sup>

The Workable Program in Ellenville was implemented later than that of larger Southwestern cities, such as Houston, Texas, and Phoenix, Arizona. As opposed to emphasis on civic and social goals which embellished federal housing policies in the 1950s, the Workable Program in the 1960s focused on economic outcomes that attracted project developers and city builders. This shift in the urban renewal ideology took place during President Lyndon B. Johnson's Great Society program and his declared "War on Poverty." Both movements featured an overt emphasis on industrialization and urban renewal, and within that, incarceration (Chapter Three). Prerequisite projects fulfilled by Ellenville's Workable Program seemingly responded to the needs of the community, as they featured a teen center, a mini park, a Narcotics Guidance Council, and street upgrading.<sup>52</sup> These smaller projects, however, were accompanied by the

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 121.

<sup>50</sup> Thomas L. Daniels, *When City and Country Collide: Managing Growth in the Metropolitan Fringe* (Washington D.C.: Island Press, 1999).

<sup>51</sup> Fairbanks, *The War on Slums*, 230.

<sup>52</sup> "Ellenville Urban Renewal Developing", 1.

implementation of new zoning and housing ordinances, and thus guaranteed corporations the ability to participate in the soon-to-be-approved urban renewal projects.

Upon the completion of said prerequisites, larger projects, such as the creation of a public housing authority, were approved to commence. These larger projects are not entirely covered by the federal government, however-- three quarters of the cost is covered by HUD, while “the state and village contribute one eighth each with credit given [to] Ellenville for expenditures on sewage and water, state highways, and school construction”.<sup>53</sup> Ellenville and other small towns alike were required to spend money on these business-oriented, “credit building” projects in order to receive funding for fundamental human resources, such as clean water, sewage treatment, education and transportation infrastructures.<sup>54</sup>

Lizabeth Cohen’s analysis of the urban renewal projects of Boston, Massachusetts and New Haven, Connecticut, provides insight into the larger economic philosophies that powered such projects.<sup>55</sup> Retail was among the most popular methods of economic revitalization and development following the “face of the explosion of suburbanization” that followed World War II specifically in big cities. Urban renewal projects in these cities called for:

“...thousands more off-street parking spaces, the streamlining of traffic flow in congested retail centers, new roadways that sped shoppers directly from their suburban homes into downtown, improvements in mass transportation, slum clearance of of “gray belt” neighborhoods bordering retail cores, and updated shopping environments that resembled the new modern malls beginning to appear in suburban areas” (85).<sup>56</sup>

The Village of Ellenville, however, was not a major city like Boston or New Haven. Unlike these highly dense urban centers, Ellenville did not experience a drastic outflow of citizens, but it did

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<sup>53</sup> “Urban Renewal Plan Revisions Under Study”, *Ellenville Journal*, August 28, 1969.

<sup>54</sup> “Ellenville Urban Renewal Developing Workable Program for 2-Year Period.” *Ellenville Journal*. October 23, 1969.

<sup>55</sup> Cohen, “Buying into Downtown”, 82.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

experience an outflow of major employers, such as Channel Master and Imperial Schrade.<sup>57</sup> This places Ellenville in a unique position in context with urban renewal projects because Ellenville was never a densely populated metropolitan center to begin with. In fact, the small community of Ellenville is actually at the center of four larger metropolitan areas in the Hudson Valley and Catskill region: 40 miles Northeast is Kingston, 40 miles South is Middletown, 40 miles West is Monticello, and 40 miles East is Poughkeepsie.<sup>58</sup>

The incongruent characteristics of Ellenville to that of urban centers was not so much an obstacle but a condition that hindered the success of many of the EURA projects. An article published by the Ellenville Press in 1998 titled “Ellenville’s Demolition Derby ... aka the Federal Urban Renewal Program” described the project about twenty years after its conclusion, stating “... administered in chaotic fashion under several directors, the program never really followed a sensible pattern, with many vacant lots still evident where some historical structures were removed with no new construction replacing them” (Figure 3).<sup>59</sup> At the time, the EURA-- and thus the state and federal government-- convinced Ellenville that urban renewal-- defined by demolition, reconstruction, and relocation--was necessary in order to “revitalize” its economy, but in fact many of its projects were not completed.<sup>60</sup> Of the \$2.7M federal grants approved for Ellenville’s urban renewal projects, only \$1.4M were dispersed.<sup>61</sup>

For Cohen, New Haven’s Chapel Square Mall project planners had “vaguely assumed many small stores would come into the Chapel Square Mall when it was finished, but made no

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<sup>57</sup> "Ellenville, New York Population 2022," chart, World Population Review, 2022, <https://worldpopulationreview.com/us-cities/ellenville-ny-population>.

<sup>58</sup> Helgesen, Lennert, Smadis, interview.

<sup>59</sup> “Ellenville’s Demolition Derby ... aka the Federal Urban Renewal Program”, *Ellenville Press*, January 7, 1998.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> US Department of Housing and Urban Development, *Urban Renewal Directory: June 30 1974* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1975): 23.

allowance for how they would survive until then or find the capital to relocate in such expensive real estate, even with the 10 percent rental discount promised after the merchants protested".<sup>62</sup>

The project planners of the Ellenville Urban Renewal Agency pursued similar, short-sighted decisions, where local businesses and families were forced to relocate with only a 10% rental discount, and their subsequent resistance labeled as a "problem" for the renewal agency.<sup>63</sup> The Agency's relocation director Adrian Milton, stated that "two major relocation problems that have

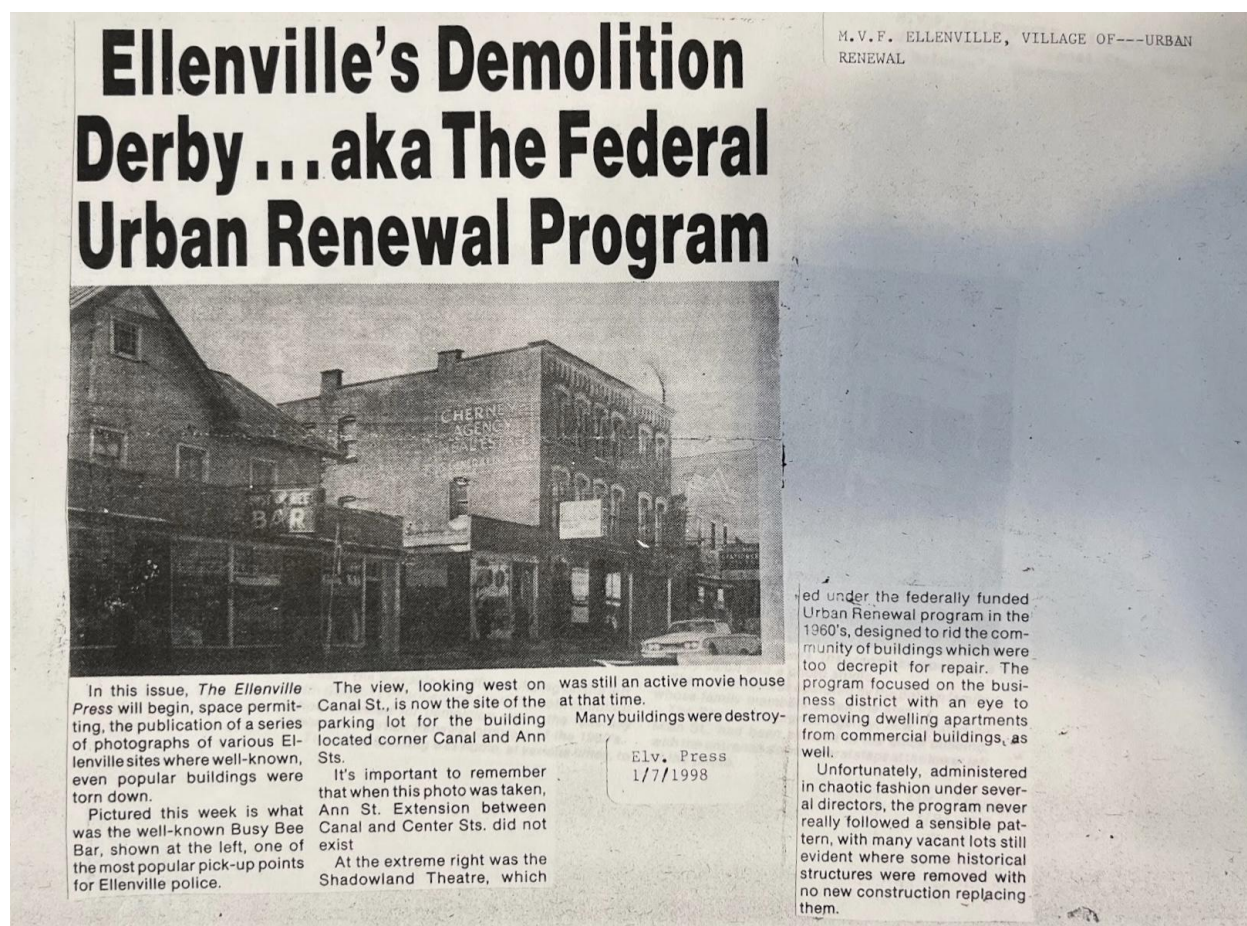


Figure 3. "Ellenville's Demolition Derby... aka The Federal Urban Renewal Program."

*Ellenville Press*, January 7 1998.

<sup>62</sup> Cohen, "Buying into Downtown", 87.

<sup>63</sup> "Rent Cut Voted by Urban Renewal," *Ellenville Journal*, September 16, 1971, 1.



been plaguing the project have apparently been resolved” in his debrief of plans to demolish the JCD-Korn building, which provided both housing for families and store-front space for Harry Rudolph plumbing business.<sup>64</sup> Both the family and the business initially refused to move, but after a series of negotiations including a slightly higher rent discount, both parties reluctantly relocated.<sup>65</sup>

This is but one instance of the perils of the EURA’s projects. With the assistance of government funding earned through the Workable Program’s “credit system”, renewal planners were able to relentlessly pursue projects that drastically altered the well-being and livelihood of Ellenville’s citizens under the guise of “urban revitalization”. Perhaps the most ironic part of the Urban Renewal Agency is that Ellenville was and remains far from being urban. Its population at the beginning and height of the urban renewal projects was about the same as today, with just under 5000 citizens.<sup>66</sup> In comparison, the population of New Haven at the same time was about 22,000, Boston about 700,000.<sup>67</sup>

Tom Daniels, in his work titled “When City and Country Collide”, touches on the concept of urban renewal in metropolitan areas, but fails to acknowledge that urban renewal did in fact take place in smaller towns.<sup>68</sup> In discussing the role of architecture in urban renewal planning, Daniels highlights this gap in scholarly research, stating “While America’s central cities were struggling with schemes for urban renewal, the rapid and vast growth of the suburbs reflected in

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> “Comprehensive Plan - Ulstercountyny.gov.” Accessed April 12, 2022.

<https://ulstercountyny.gov/sites/default/files/documents/ellenville-compplan.pdf>.

<sup>67</sup> “Population 1900-1960.” CT.gov. Accessed April 12, 2022.

<https://portal.ct.gov/SOTS/Register-Manual/Section-VII/Population-1900-1960>.; “Population Trends in Boston 1640 - 1990.” Boston Historic Population Trends - iBoston.org. Accessed April 12, 2022.

<http://www.iboston.org/mcp.php?pid=popFig>.

<sup>68</sup> Daniels, *When City and Country Collide*, 20.

part the vision of the great American architect Frank Lloyd Wright”.<sup>69</sup> Daniel’s research acknowledges the absent connection between the urban, suburban, and rural--and even introduces a term to define intermediary communities between the suburban and rural: “the rural-urban fringe” or the “metropolitan fringe”.<sup>70</sup> Still, this progressive intervention abandons small communities like Ellenville, which found itself a victim of semi-mandated urban policies within a rural landscape.



Figure 4. “Down, Down It Goes...” *Ellenville Press*, August 7 1998.

The perils of urban renewal experienced by Ellenville were also experienced by 175 other small towns across the Northeast, which, according to the Urban Renewal Directory, are

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, xiii.

municipalities with populations less than 5,000.<sup>71</sup> Despite this vast quantity of small town sufferings, there is very little peer-reviewed scholarship that focuses particularly on these subjects. Local historical societies, historians, and journalists, such as Newburgh Restoration and Ellenville's own Ellenville Press, have published fantastic work that seeks to fill the gaps found in these more 'prestigious' historical journals.<sup>72</sup> These groundbreaking local histories, however, gain little attention by said prestigious historical judges because they fail to meet rigorous requirements that are more easily fulfilled by university-based researchers. Thus, centering this case study around Ellenville not only paves the way for improved methods of historiography, but it also reinforces the importance of the local town historian and their adjacents.

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<sup>71</sup> *Urban Renewal Directory: June 30 1974*, 6.

<sup>72</sup> Cher, "Lost Newburgh: The Tragedy of Urban Renewal, Part 1," Newburgh Restoration, January 17, 2018, <https://newburghrestoration.com/blog/2018/01/17/lost-newburgh-the-tragedy-of-urban-renewal-part-1a/>.

### Chapter Three: The Eastern New York Correctional Facility

From the first day of operations in 1900 to present, the Eastern New York Correctional Facility (ENYCF) has been the largest employer for Ellenville residents and the larger Town of Wawarsing. ENYCF was established in the year 1900 as a large, all-male, high security state prison.<sup>73</sup> It has and continues to incarcerate roughly 1000 men, each with differing convictions and sentences.<sup>74</sup> Although this facility is about a five minute drive from the center of the village and maintains its status as Ellenville's largest employer, residents often silence or downplay its consistent opportunity for employment.<sup>75</sup> This silence has negative consequences on the potential for accurate and pragmatic economic restoration because it deters the public from understanding, and probing, the impact of the post-WWII policies of President Johnson's "War on Poverty".

Historical work about prisons and the prison-industrial complex are large in number, and probe topics that range from nation-wide systemic circumstances, to the construction of new prisons in the middle to late centuries, to the treatment of the incarcerated, to rebellions spearheaded by the incarcerated, and more.<sup>76</sup> Those who have examined specifically the relationship between small towns and prisons often focus on the targeted practices of private prisons to seek out and "recruit" small towns with failing economies by enticing such communities with promises of employment revitalization and stability.<sup>77</sup> The case of Ellenville

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<sup>73</sup> "The Eastern Story," The eastern story, accessed April 12, 2022, <http://www.correctionhistory.org/easternny100/html/eastory.html>.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Helgesen, Lennert, and Smodis, interview.

<sup>76</sup> Elizabeth Hinton. *From the War on Poverty to the War on Drugs*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016): 4.; Gerald Benjamin and Stephen P. Rappaport. "Attica and Prison Reform." *Proceedings of the Academy of Political Science* 31, no. 3 (1974): 200–213. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1173220>.

<sup>77</sup> Ernest J. Yanarella and Susan Blankenship. "Big House on the Rural Landscape: Prison Recruitment as a Policy Tool of Local Economic Development." *Journal of Appalachian Studies* 12, no. 2 (2006): 110–39. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41446750>.; Deborah Che. "Constructing a Prison in the Forest: Conflicts over Nature,

and the Eastern NY Correctional Facility provides a unique position in this incarceration discourse as the facility was constructed in 1900, unlike many of the other correctional facilities that were created after World War II.<sup>78</sup> Thus, using Ellenville as a case study to better understand the relationship between small towns and incarceration is not only adequate, but necessary for a more complete scholarly analysis of small town economic depression.

The Eastern New York Correctional Facility operated during the Great Depression, World War I and World War II, the Cold War, all the way through the recession of the 2000s to present. It has and always will be a powerful and stable operation that seeks to conform its patrons to idealized versions of the white citizen. The social control policies of the 1960's reinforced the conveniences provided by the ENYCF's location as it was originally constructed within the busy hub of the D&H canal and O&W railroad transportation systems. Both systems ran through and stopped on ENYCF grounds to deliver materials, goods, and at one point, incarcerated humans.<sup>79</sup> Despite the closure of the canal and railroad systems, the ENYCF has always been supplied with incarcerated people from various places in New York State due to the targeting social control policies of the "War on Poverty". The ENYCF's physical position, in conjunction with the national expansion of policing, contributes to its title as the largest employer to the Town of Wawarsing.<sup>80</sup>

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Paradise, and Identity." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 95, no. 4 (2005): 809–31. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3694014>.

<sup>78</sup> "Prisons & Inmates," New York State Archives, accessed April 29, 2022, <http://www.archives.nysed.gov/research/prisons-and-inmates>.

<sup>79</sup> The Eastern Story, accessed April 12, 2022, <http://www.correctionhistory.org/easternny100/html/eastory.html>.

<sup>80</sup> "The Eastern Story", accessed April 12, 2022.



Figure 5. *Castle, Eastern Correctional Facility, NY*. n.d. Photograph.

<https://mapio.net/pic/p-37142292/>.

Frank Barat conducted an e-mail interview with Angela Y. Davis in which they discuss the prison-industrial complex in context with Palestinian and Black activist ideologies.<sup>81</sup> Davis provides critical information about the origins of prisons and the questions one should ask-- and attempt to answer-- when thinking about issues like unemployment, population change, drug use, and homelessness:

So the idea that I think animated People who were working toward the abolition of prisons is that we have to think about the larger context. We can't only think about crime and punishment. We can't only think about the prison as a place of punishment for those who have committed crimes. We have to think about the larger framework. That means asking: Why is there such a disproportionate number of Black people and people of color in prison? So we have to talk about racism. Abolishing the prison is about attempting to abolish racism. Why is there so much illiteracy? Why are so many prisoners illiterate? That means we have to attend to the educational system. Why is it that the three largest psychiatric institutions in the country are jails in New York, Chicago, Los Angeles: Rikers Island, Cook County Jail, and L.A. County Jail? That means we need to think about health care issues, and especially mental health care issues. We have to figure out how to abolish homelessness.<sup>82</sup>

Davis communicates the importance of institutional histories when we discuss the specific (ENYCF) and the broad (the prison-industrial complex). If we begin to encourage a more transparent understanding of incarceration in context with national policy making, then questions such as, “Why is ENYCF the oldest industry to operate in Ellenville’s economy” or “How does the prison system relate to urban renewal, global outsourcings of industry, and decrease in tourism?” can naturally be addressed in Ellenville’s casual and political dialogues.

Elizabeth Hinton is one scholar that has addressed these systemic questions in her works. Hinton uses President Johnson’s “War on Poverty” to outline the ways in which law enforcement agencies, criminal justice institutions, and jails have been the primary public program for many

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<sup>81</sup> Angela Davis and Frank Barat, *Freedom is a Constant Struggle: Ferguson, Palestine, and the Foundations of a Movement*, (New York, NY: Haymarket Books, 2016): 23-24.

<sup>82</sup> Davis, *Freedom is a Constant Struggle*, 23-24.

low-income communities across the United States.<sup>83</sup> Beginning with President Johnson's 1965 Law Enforcement Assistance Act, which increased federal aid to local crime initiatives, to President Regan's "War on Drugs" campaign, the United States increased its incarcerated population by about 943 percent.<sup>84</sup> This increase took place alongside the period in which the factories of the United States "fell", which featured extreme job loss and unemployment that plagued small towns across the country.<sup>85</sup> The surge in policing and incarceration, therefore, sought to fill the widespread burden of manufacturing loss, thus reinforcing the Eastern NY Correctional Facility's title as Ellenville's largest and most stable employer.

President Johnson's administrative programs, which were executed on a federal, state, and local level, allowed for an increase of federal government power within small and rural communities. Seemingly beneficial social programs, such as Medicare and Medicaid, were implemented alongside more destructive orders, such as urban renewal and slum clearance. The programs of the Great Society were publicly communicated as a way to address urban-youth crime and delinquency, but in reality, these federal actions aided policymakers in their desire for increased social control.<sup>86</sup> Although programs varied greatly in their effectiveness to combat poverty in America, the act of expanding federal power via the "Great Society" programs by President Johnson paradoxically paved the way for anti-crime policies of the Nixon and Ford administrations to be turned against Johnson's own anti-poverty programs.<sup>87</sup>

When we return back to the Workable Program and urban renewal--effective under the Johnson administration-- a direct correlation between incarceration, federal policy, and

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<sup>83</sup> Hinton, *From the War on Poverty*, 4.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>85</sup> Stein, *Pivotal Decade*, 1.

<sup>86</sup> Hinton, *From the War on Poverty*, 31.

<sup>87</sup> Stein, *Pivotal Decade*, 14.



Ellenville's economy can be clearly drawn. One of the defining features of the Workable Program was the enforcement of new zoning ordinances, which fulfilled the prerequisites needed to commence urban renewal projects in cities and towns across the United States.<sup>88</sup> A majority of ENYCF's incarcerated population is from New York City, which, unsurprisingly, was victim to the perils of eminent domain and thus slum clearance, racialized zoning practices, infrastructure, and homelessness. But urban renewal, as we know, also took place in Ellenville, a community that seems completely opposite to the urban center that is NYC, but actually is more similar than one may assume-- like New York City, many of Ellenville's residents are low-income or living in poverty. The federal acceleration of delinquency prevention in large cities enabled an outstanding increase in incarceration, and in turn, prevented small towns from receiving critical attention needed to combat an already existing-- and rapidly intensifying-- occurrence of rural poverty.

Rural upstate New York towns, such as Ellenville, have witnessed a steady increase in the number of homeless teen and adult individuals, single-parent families, and couples.<sup>89</sup> Rural gentrification is a leading cause of rural homelessness, and despite the recent spike in scholarly coverage regarding rural gentrification and property value trends, such a phenomenon has been occurring for decades.<sup>90</sup> Jean Fitcher, for example, has published numerous works that probe the rapidly increasing homeless population in upstate New York. Fitcher highlights how there remains an ever-growing demand for inexpensive housing, but yet, the number of low-cost

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<sup>88</sup> Department of Housing and Urban Development, *Workable Program Expiration in 90 Days*, Judah Gribetz. New York, New York: November 1, 1966.

<sup>89</sup> Jean Fitcher, "Homelessness in Rural Places: Perspectives from Upstate New York," *Urban Anthropology and Studies of Cultural Systems and World Economic Development* 20, no. 2 (1991): 191.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*; Nevarez and Simmons, "Small--City Dualism", 16-43.

housing units have failed to follow such a growth trend.<sup>91</sup> Fitcher adds that, “Except for apartments for the elderly and some rehabilitation funded by federal and state grants, very little low-cost rural housing has recently been created in the public sector”.<sup>92</sup>

This homelessness that is ever-present in Ellenville corresponds to the expansion of federal social control allotted by President Johnson’s policies. Because such policies sought to address the individual crime committer, i.e., funding to local police departments, as opposed to increasing funding for actual social improvement programs, rural poverty became and continues to be a normal phenomenon. For example, as Elizabeth Hinton points out, the “conditions in low-income neighborhoods” were deemed “the result of individuals’ shortcoming rather than structural factors,” a philosophy similar to that of Ellenville’s small town urban renewal initiatives.<sup>93</sup> In lieu of addressing the social circumstances that prevented Ellenville from becoming a stable economic community, the appearance and attractiveness of the individual store fronts were blamed. Thus, the ‘problem’ of youth delinquency, of homelessness, of small town economic depression, were a direct reflection of individual-centered policies put forth by leaders with an appetite for social dominance.

The Eastern NY Correctional Facilities has survived and maintains consistency because of these national policies put forth for the Great Society programs of the United States. The one facility contributing steady employment to Ellenville residents is fueled by the same policies that prevent Ellenville from ever reaching economic revitalization and stability. This irony is seen in small towns across the United States, as rural “recruitment” by private prisons provide further evidence of such federal pervasiveness. New prison construction is still touted by lawmakers and

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<sup>91</sup> Fitcher, “Homelessness in Rural Places”, 191-92.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Hinton, *From the War on Poverty*, 32.

business officials as a viable solution to rural poverty because it provides a means to reinforce the fallacious and exacerbated control of social and economic order by the federal government. In Ellenville, citizens are not witness to the public construction of a new prison because the facility has existed for over a century. This absence of an active prison construction site has advanced the silencing of systemic incarceration operations in Ellenville. -- shielded residents from understanding the relationship between local economies and incarceration, between urban renewal and racial prejudice, between public image and private discourse.

Repeated silencing of the correctional facility provides endless information about the relationship between local economies and incarceration, between urban renewal and racial prejudice, between public image and private discourse.<sup>94</sup> Although the systemic operations of the prison are not taught in the public school system, the citizens of Wawarsing understand that the operations of the ENYCF are not admirable or prestigious. The prison has always been a feature of the Wawarsing economy that, despite its large size and unignorable presence on a busy highway, is intentionally ignored. By studying the consequences of national policy and early twentieth century prison creation in context with a historically ignored community, the systemic boundaries that carved methods of growth prevention are clearly outlined.

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<sup>94</sup> Helgesen, Lennert, and Smadis, interview.

## Chapter Four: The Production of Historical Memory

Collective historical memory plays a vital role in the maintenance of economic circumstances and habits for communities small and large. The situations that citizens remember-- and don't remember-- mend and mold policies that seek to address obstacles in the past, present, and future. The concept of collective memories is quite difficult to grasp; thinking about the past and the ways in which time and memory interact is a topic that humans have been probing for centuries, and yet, we have no definite answer or theory, just a broader realm of academic and casual discussion. Ellenville's production of historical memories emphasizes the omnipresent influence of national policy on the ideologies and morale of small town residents.

When thinking about the relationship between small towns and memory production, we first have to scrutinize how persons both within and outside the community perceive it. Contrary to many caricatures of small towns seen in news articles and social media posts-- that emphasize fairytale-like aesthetics, beauty, and quietness-- community residents often characterize their hometown by its efficiency and practicality.<sup>95</sup> Such practicality-infused descriptions of place are displayed in an interview with lifelong resident Phyllis Lennart, who states: "Well it was a village that had everything, you didn't have to go anywhere to get anything... It was good until the end of the 50s, and then the malls opened up in the area, and all the little stores in the village crashed."<sup>96</sup> One would assume that the residential logic of equating the introduction of large shopping malls with the decline of the functionality of space would carry over to philosophies

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Lennert, interview.

about large scale corporations, but the immortal tale of the Imperial Schrade Corporation proves otherwise.

The Imperial Schrade shut down has been repeatedly labeled as one of the greatest hits to Ellenville's economy.<sup>97</sup> This incident has been referenced in numerous newsletters, news articles, interviews, local documentaries, and casual conversation.<sup>98</sup> Though impactful and strenuous, the Imperial Schrade shutdown has absorbed the attention of local memory through repeated acts of remembrance via local news platforms both at the time of the shutdown to present day.<sup>99</sup> This is not to say that the Imperial Schrade shutdown didn't have a large impact on the community, because it did. Instead, the reoccurring remembrance of the Schrade shutdown in context with historical memory provides a solid example of the ravenous power of the federal government within a rural community setting. To this day, the fall of corporate industry starkly remains in the memories of Ellenville's citizens, notably connotated with a desire for its employment to return.

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Sociologists Harvey Molotch and John Logan have analyzed the impact of corporate and federal power in context with collective memory in small rural towns. In doing so, the authors contribute to a wider discussion about the increasing influence of corporations on the creation and maintenance of collective memories. Beginning with early childhood education, "Schoolchildren are taught to view local history as a series of breakthroughs in the expansion of

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<sup>97</sup> Jeremiah Horrigan, "Ellenville's Anniversary of Sadness," Record (Times Herald-Record, July 28, 2014), <https://www.recordonline.com/story/news/2014/07/28/ellenville-s-anniversary-sadness/36317890007/>.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.; Heldensen, Lennart, Smodis, interview; "Ellenville, NY Documentary: Our Story - Youtube." Accessed April 29, 2022. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wiiS52JNp90>.

<sup>99</sup> Heldensen, Lennart, Smodis, interview; *Ellenville- Then and Now, YouTube* (YouTube, 2014), [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ix9B-tUs6o8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ix9B-tUs6o8;); Horrigan, "Ellenville's Anniversary of Sadness," 2014.

<sup>100</sup> "Ellenville, NY Documentary", 2015.

the economic base of their city and region”.<sup>101</sup> This association between industrial growth and small town success is ingrained into the minds of the young, contributing to the corporate thrust to “deemphasize the connection between growth and exchange values and to reinforce the link between growth goals and better lives for the majority”.<sup>102</sup>

The pervasiveness of this growth reinforcement is evident in the ideologies of lifetime Ellenville residents. For example, in 2014, a short series of interviews were conducted in order to discuss the possibility of a casino moving into the former Nevele building.<sup>103</sup> Stan Rubin, lifelong Ellenville resident, stated that “It’s a wonderful thing to be, here. Unfortunately, the area needs help. I truly believe the Nevele could be a fantastic casino.”<sup>104</sup> Sue Sperling, another lifetime resident, states that “We were unique in our area. Besides having hotels, we had industry. And we had an incredible, strong, middle class, which came from the hotels also... We had an all-year round economy.”<sup>105</sup> Sperling later concludes that “We need something to say ‘we have a chance,’ this [the potential casino] is basically, in my opinion, the only real hope that we have. We have been waiting for this for so long, and we need--we need jobs. We need to be optimistic about the future.”<sup>106</sup>

Tom Daniels provides further clarification of the ideologies behind pro-growth strategies in rural-urban fringe communities, arguing that, like Molotch and Logan, business-oriented ideas of growth are often promoted with promises of social and economic revitalization:

Government and the private sector usually work smoothly together in pro-growth communities. The common goal of building up the community translates into

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<sup>101</sup> John Logan and Harvey Molotch, “The City as a Growth Machine,” *The Urban Sociology Reader*, 2nd ser., 2 (2005): 117.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> *Ellenville- Then and Now, YouTube* (YouTube, 2014), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ix9B-tUs6o8>.

<sup>104</sup> Stan Rubin, “Ellenville - Then and Now.”

<sup>105</sup> Sue Sperling, “Ellenville - Then and Now.”

<sup>106</sup> Sue Sperling, “Ellenville - Then and Now.”

planning, zoning, and public investment in infrastructure that permit and encourage private investment. Community leaders believe that broadening the property tax base by bringing in commercial and industrial development is the solution.<sup>107</sup>

Rural Ellenville, like that of semi-rural communities across the United States, has repeatedly embraced a “pro-growth strategy” informed by pro-business economics. Its decisions are not unusual or out of the ordinary-- they exhibit the cross-regional tendency to put all hope for economic revitalization into the hands of large corporations.

Of course, it’s not illogical to connect economic security with the presence of a thriving industry-- successful businesses *do* provide employment to the community. However, these opinions exhibit the reoccurring tendency for a small rural town to participate in “smokestack chasing”, a concept defined as the typical rural reaction response to long-term economic weakness by offering tax incentives that entice branch plants of major corporations to locate in local areas.<sup>108</sup> Ellenville residents Sperling and Rubin exhibit smokestack chasing by reiterating the misinformed belief that the introduction of a casino to the now-abandoned grounds of the Nevele is the “only hope we [Ellenville] have” to revitalize the economy.<sup>109</sup>

Furthermore, the type of industrial jobs that Sperling and Rubin believe Ellenville “needs” are not economically sustainable. According to Morgan, Lambe, and Freyer, the tourism and manufacturing employment that Ellenville continuously seeks suffers from “enormous competitive pressures in the global economy, forcing some plants to close, many to locate overseas to find lower cost of production, and others to upgrade the technology of their

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<sup>107</sup> Daniels, “When City and Country,” 67.

<sup>108</sup> Jonathan Q. Morgan, William Lambe, and Allan Freyer, “Homegrown Responses to Economic Uncertainty in Rural America” *Rural Realities* 3 (Rural Sociological Society: Missouri) no. 2 2009, 4.

<sup>109</sup> Sperling and Rubin, “Ellenville- Then and Now.”

production operations”.<sup>110</sup> When residents offered their opinions about the potential arrival of a large casino (to clarify, the casino never actually arrived), the assumed employees of said casino would generally be unskilled.<sup>111</sup> Daniels, in addition to the authors of “Rural Realities”, have communicated the vulnerability of low-skilled labor in context with the relative ‘promise’ of higher-skilled and higher-tech plants.<sup>112</sup> Despite the expansion of higher education via the GI Bill, sustainable, higher-skilled labor, however, requires an educated and trained workforce, which rural areas such as Ellenville lack.<sup>113</sup> Thus, residents of Ellenville exhibit the reproduction of rural historical memory by expressing their confidence in the possibility of increased yet unskilled employment opportunity.

Perhaps one of the most intriguing aspects of Ellenville’s production of historical memory is the absence of the prison in public discussion. The role of the Eastern New York Correctional Facility is entirely ignored in this interview with Ellenville residents. Although the State pays school taxes on the facility, the district lines have been strategically drawn to separate the prison from Ellenville, leaving Ellenville School District without tax money it rightfully deserves. The lack of property taxes paid by the state facility in conjunction with Ellenville’s suspiciously separate census tract presents a devastating scenario that positions Ellenville at the intersection of desperation and “growth machine” misinformation.<sup>114</sup> Ellenville seeks to “revitalize” its economy by luring corporations with tax breaks it can not afford to offer, while

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<sup>110</sup> Morgan, Lambe, Freyer, “Homegrown Responses”, 3.

<sup>111</sup> Charles V. Bagli, “Developers Vie to Build New Casinos in Catskills,” *The New York Times* (*The New York Times*, November 2, 2013), <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/02/nyregion/developers-vie-to-build-new-casinos-in-catskills.html>, 1.

<sup>112</sup> Daniels, “When City and Country”, 25; Morgan, Lambe, Freyer, “Rural Realities,” 4.

<sup>113</sup> “World Population Review 2022”, 2022.

<sup>114</sup> Westchester, “Taxed off: Does NY Pay School Tax in Prison Towns?,” *Press & Sun-Bulletin* (Westchester, October 31, 2016), <https://www.pressconnects.com/story/news/local/2016/10/31/ny-doesdoesnt-pay-school-tax-prison-towns/93068566/>



actively silencing the correctional facility and thus the pathway to which Ellenville's depression can be most accurately understood.

The Village of Ellenville is one of many small communities that has remained economically limited by the national provisions set forth by President Lyndon B. Johnson's administration. Digital and physical media platforms, common conversation, and public education have aided this reinforcement by continuously connecting community wellbeing to the presence or absence of a large-scale, reputable employer. Growth ideologies significantly silence aspects of the immediate and surrounding region (ENYCF) that could aid the emergence of a shared understanding of the root causes of on-going small town struggle. These ideologies can and should be combated by the expansion of scholarly research regarding the changing and unchanging economic histories of rural areas.

## Conclusion

This case study of Ellenville, New York analyzes how the federal government's influence in small towns ensures a constant production of corporate power, land displacement, incarceration, and historical memory. Despite Ellenville's attempt to "revitalize" its economy in a plethora of ways, from urban renewal projects to selling almost 4,000 acres of land, it remains in a state of economic depression. The drastic exacerbation of Hudson Valley gentrification in the past decade, particularly at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, has increased scholarly attention to the impact of national phenomenon on small, rural, struggling towns. Yet, because scholarly interest is relatively recent, there is a lack of historical works that adequately and historically address the circumstances Ellenville has been facing since the post-World War II era.

For decades, Ellenville has tried and retried various methods to revitalize its economy under the national policies and circumstances from the President Johnson Administration, but none have been entirely successful. Recently, with the exacerbation of gentrification during the COVID-19 pandemic, alternate methods toward economic success suggested by the authors of "Rural Realities" have accelerated in their development.<sup>115</sup> The authors do away with blatant or traditional "smokestack chasing" and instead suggest that struggling small towns utilize a more "homegrown response" by leveraging local assets rather than primarily attracting external investments.<sup>116</sup> These homegrown approaches include: "place-based development", which often takes the form of tourism attraction, "economic gardening", or the leveraging of local

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<sup>115</sup> Morgan, Lambe, Freyer, "Homegrown Responses", 5.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

entrepreneurs, and “cultivating creativity and talent”, or fostering an environment that is conducive to creative and new ideas.<sup>117</sup>

These suggestions are presented as alternatives to the more obvious “smokestack chasing”, but even so, such methods limit the possibility of a breakthrough because they utilize the same pathways created by national policy that has limited Ellenville and other small towns in the past. For example, tourism is viewed similarly to that of the legacy of the Imperial Schrade Corp. such that tourism “fell” in Ellenville, and residents are constantly seeking to regain outside attraction. The local entrepreneurs that have been deemed the best chance for success-- i.e., Tori Messner and Natalia Moena of Reservoir Studio, a “creative agency in the Hudson Valley... focused on branding, visual identity, and all your production needs”-- are “New York City transplant” pandemic participants that arrived in Ellenville with a dream of expanding the popularity of Ellenville’s architecture, the potential for arts, and its diversity.<sup>118</sup> Although the goal of expanding these positive aspects of Ellenville seems innocent in nature, such ideology reflects the permanent impact the “War on Poverty” has on the economies of small towns; outside investment framed as “homegrown” community engagement exemplify the ideologies set forth by, for example, the Workable Program and urban renewal initiatives.

Leonard Nevarez and Joshua Simmons have acknowledged the impact of contemporary white flight migrations to the Hudson Valley, and although they do not offer suggestions like the authors of *Rural Realities*, they concisely argue that-- unfortunately-- outdoor recreation and tourism are often the only viable livelihood left for rural communities.<sup>119</sup> For Ellenville, the

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 5-8.

<sup>118</sup> Reservoir.studio, *Biography*, <https://instagram.com/reservoir.studio?igshid=YmMyMTA2M2Y=>; Jane Anderson, “High Energy,” *Chronogram Magazine* (*Chronogram Magazine*, April 29, 2022), <https://www.chronogram.com/hudsonvalley/ellenville-reservoir-studio-creative-agency/Content?oid=14705895>

<sup>119</sup> Nevarez and Simmons, “The Racialized Brooklynization”, 17.

possibilities of outdoor recreational tourism have been challenged by desperate financial decisions made by local politicians: in 1994, Ellenville was approached by the Open Space Institute to sell roughly 4,623 acres of land the village used for recreational purposes and water.<sup>120</sup> In 1997, The Open Space Institute purchased the land for \$3.88 million (roughly \$7 million today) by convincing the community that selling the land would “stimulate recreational and tourist investment in the community”.<sup>121</sup> Because of Ellenville’s on-going struggle for financial stability created and reinforced by national policy, the village agreed to sell a section of conserved, protected, and clean land that would be invaluable in 2022.

Cresco Labs Inc. is one of the largest medical marijuana and cannabis manufacturers in the United States. This corporation was approved by the Ellenville Town Planning Board to purchase the abandoned facility of the Imperial Schrade Corporation, and it plans to provide 400 high paying jobs to the village of Ellenville. There are various caveats to Cresco Labs’ arrival, one being that one hundred percent of its annual sales will be outside of Ulster County, but within New York State, thus erasing any potential for county sales tax revenue.<sup>122</sup> Furthermore, on April 21, 2022, Cresco Labs has requested \$38 million in tax breaks. Cresco expressed that if it does not receive approval from the Ulster County Industrial Development Agency, it will look for other locations to move the facility.<sup>123</sup> Also, despite the promise of 400 high-paying jobs,

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<sup>120</sup> “Here We Go Again... Ellenville Approached to Sell Mountain Acreage”, *Ellenville Press*, April 27, 1994.

<sup>121</sup> “Ellenville Tract Lands a Sweet Deal”, *Times Herald Record*, October 17, 1997; US Inflation Calculator Staff, “Inflation Calculator: Find US Dollar's Value from 1913-2022,” US Inflation Calculator |, April 12, 2022, <https://www.usinflationcalculator.com/>; “Here We Go Again”, 2.

<sup>122</sup> Cloey Callahan, “Cresco Labs Seeks \$38 Million in Tax Breaks for Cannabis Facility,” *Times Union* (*Times Union*, April 21, 2022), <https://www.timesunion.com/hudsonvalley/news/article/Cresco-Labs-seeks-pilot-tax-breaks-17106284.php>.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*

Cresco has not specified whether such jobs would be year-round, salaried positions, or seasonal work.

Analyzing the impact of President Johnson's "War on Poverty" policies on small rural towns serves as an advocate for increased historical inquiry into rural communities and the economic limitations they experience. The inevitability of economic failure experienced by Ellenville has exemplified the drastic consequences of ignoring, generalizing, or silencing communities often viewed as less important than large metropolitan centers. Perhaps, if more attention was paid to small towns-- specifically its residents, local policy decisions, and relationship with the surrounding regions-- repetitive mistakes could be prevented by creating alternative, sustainable methods toward community success.

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