

Article Review

How America is Putting Itself Back Together

By James Fallows with Deborah Fallows
Published in The Atlantic, March 2016.

The Tease.

“Most Americans believe the country is going to hell. They’re wrong. What a three-year journey by single-engine plane reveals about reinvention and renewal – and about how the Second Gilded Age might end.” This is a great encouragement to those wanting to feel good about small-town America.

The Conclusion.

“James and Deborah Fallows made extended visits to two dozen cities, and shorter stops in another two dozen” from 2013 to 2015. He has been on Charlie Rose and other television programs discussing his findings and expressing his optimism that once you turn off the “talking heads”, once you get out of the Beltway and the political-speak spewing from the Potomac region, America is a place of investment, re-investment and resurgence, especially in small cities and towns.

Small Town Virtues.

The most telling findings that relate to small cities and towns were:

- They found...” people with first rate talents and ambitions who decided that someplace other than the biggest cities offered the best overall opportunities.”
- “Mini-mills” were discovered producing steel in North America. Meat packing plants were repurposed into tire manufacturing plants.
- “An art revolution is transforming small towns”.
- The article reports a study by the Kauffman Foundation that ranks cities using a “start-up density”. Miami, New York and Orlando were the top three followed by Austin, Denver and Tampa. The advantage of smaller places between the coasts is that if they are “connected” they are attractive based on lifestyle and cheaper real estate.
- An aside from Deborah Fallows: “As we traveled around the U.S. reporting on the revival of towns and cities, we always made the local library an early stop. We’d hit the newspaper offices, the chamber of commerce, city hall and Main Street for an introduction to the economics, politics and stresses of a town. The visit to the public library revealed its heart and soul.”

“Eleven Signs a City will Succeed” offered by the article’s authors.

1. Divisive national politics seems a distant concern.
2. You can pick out the local patriots.
3. “Public-private partnerships” are real.
4. People know the civic story.
5. They have a downtown.
6. They are near a research university.
7. They have, and care about, a community college.
8. They have unusual schools.
9. They make themselves open (as in receptive and welcoming to immigrants).
10. They have big plans.
11. They have craft breweries.