



# **Camden After the Fall: Decline and Renewal in a Post-Industrial City**

*Howard Gillette Jr.*

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## Camden After the Fall: Decline and Renewal in a Post-Industrial City Howard Gillette Jr.

Camden After the Fall Decline and Renewal in a Post-Industrial City Howard Gillette, Jr. Winner of the 2005 Kenneth Jackson Best Book Award from the Urban History Association Winner of the 2006 Author's Award of the New Jersey Studies Academic Alliance Winner of the 2007 Richard P. McCormick Prize of the New Jersey Historical Commission "A masterly narrative of the twists and turns of Camden's renewal politics from the perspective of local politicians, regional and state power brokers, and citizens groups."--*Journal of American History* "A fascinating and frequently eloquent exploration of the city's history since World War II."--*Camden Courier Post* "The best study so far about the virtual collapse in the late twentieth century of South Jersey's largest city."--*New York Times* **Howard Gillette, Jr.**, is Professor of History at Rutgers University and the author of *Between Justice and Beauty: Race, Planning, and the Failure of Urban Policy in Washington, D.C.*, also available from the University of Pennsylvania Press. Politics and Culture in Modern America 2005 344 pages 6 x 9 34 illus. ISBN 978-0-8122-3897-6 Cloth \$49.95s ?32.50 ISBN 978-0-8122-1968-5 Paper \$26.50s ?17.50 ISBN 978-0-8122-0527-5 Ebook \$26.50s ?17.50 World Rights American History, Public Policy Short copy: *Camden After the Fall* chronicles the history of a classic post-industrial American city and points toward a sustained urban revitalization strategy for the twenty-first century.

## Camden After the Fall: Decline and Renewal in a Post-Industrial City Details

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# From Reader Review Camden After the Fall: Decline and Renewal in a Post-Industrial City for online ebook

## Ty says

Easily the most important, thorough, and insightful book I have encountered regarding post-industrial America, white flight, urban decay, and the complicity of the suburbs in the condition of America's cities. To understand how the great Eastern industrial hubs declined to their current impoverished, crime-plagued incarnations, this book provides a vivid case study. While Gillette overly romanticizes "Old Camden," fails to sufficiently engage the role of race in the city's neglect, and bogs down in the logistics of modern political chicanery, he also writes a searing, accessible look into America's greatest shame. Rather than blaming shifts in industrial geography, Gillette makes a compelling case for the central role of suburban zoning and post-War development incentives in urban decay. Moreover, Gillette unexpectedly brings in the landmark *Mt. Laurel* New Jersey decisions to argue persuasively for the distribution of low-income housing as a remedy for suburban apathy to concentrated urban poverty.

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## Matteo says

A very good accounting of how deindustrialization, capital flight and white flight devastated the city of Camden - and of the struggles of those who fought against that decline.

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## adrienne says

comprehensive analysis of camden's political and socio-economic state in postwar america

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## Justine says

An okay intro to how Camden and its people have been so thoroughly neglected. Could have used a timeline, though- it jumped around a lot, which was annoying/confusing. I wish there were more books written about Camden so this wouldn't always be the "go to" book. Oh well.

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## Sawy-o says

One star accounts for me always being more enthusiastic about books relating to the Garden State. An interesting study of a smaller post- industrial city, with attention to the Camden in relation to/ as differing from national trends. My favorite part was the discussion of politics and learning about the ominously powerful Camden County political machine. Interesting to learn how former governors got their start in local politics and how Camden's politics intersected with the state's. Interesting documentation of how Camden came to be the city it is today.

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## **Chris says**

more of us should spend more time thinking about Camden, NJ.

Gillette's is a careful and self-aware history of America's posterchild for life after heavy industry.

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## **Michael Lewyn says**

The most interesting chapters of this book are the first few, which paint a picture of Camden's decline and fall in the 1960s. In 1950, Camden was a prosperous, mostly industrial and working-class, city. By the early 1970s, much of Camden's nonpoor population had been driven out by escalating violence. Gillette tells a simple story: manufacturing jobs left Camden, causing people to get angry and start behaving disruptively. And because suburban zoning kept the poor out of suburbs, it was easy for the middle class to leave but hard for the poor to leave.

But I wonder. The 1960s were a time of low unemployment and escalating prosperity nationally, but also a time of escalating violence and "white flight" from older neighborhoods. Did every declining city suffer the kind of job loss that Camden did? (If not, Gillette's correlation seems weaker). And how do we do we that job loss caused violence and not vice versa? And since employer and union discrimination kept blacks out of many manufacturing jobs, why was the loss of those jobs so harmful?

The rest of the book tells the story of Camden's attempt to recover over the last few decades, mostly focused on attempts at "trickle down development" (that is, subsidizing large private-public partnerships designed to gentrify the city or bring in tourists, which in turn was supposed to mean more tax revenue for everyone in the long run). Here Gillette gives us a dense cover of detail, sometimes too dense to be interesting. Having said that, he occasionally leaves out details that I wish he'd spent more space on. In particular, he suggests that Camden's last remaining strong neighborhoods were destroyed by an early 1990s tax revaluation, but doesn't really explain much about the revaluation, why it happened, or why it was so toxic.

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## **Jess says**

This is probably one of my favorite books since I work in Camden. I now have a way better understanding of the city's history. I think a lot of the problems started when companies left, which as a result meant that there were fewer jobs. I think racism also played a major role in why the city went down hill. The politics in Camden are screwed up and many of institutions in the city are backwards. If you drive a couple miles down the road, you'll see and learn that things are a lot different in the surrounding suburbs.

The book definitely does a good job of highlighting what went wrong, and it had very little to do with the people who moved there. Although Camden has a very high poverty and crime rate, I've found from my own personal experience that there are a lot of really great people who grew up and are still living there. However, something needs to change structurally in order to improve the future of the city.

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## Christian says

This is terrific scholarly research and a definitive text for Camden's history and understanding America's post-industrial cities.

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## David says

This book was excellent to commiserate with in order to understand aspects of the decline in Gary, Indiana, which has many similarities to Camden. They each are in close proximity to a larger metropolitan area- Gary is nearby Chicago and Camden is nearby Philadelphia. They both began as White ethnic cities that had a large influx of Southern Blacks. Their economies relied on large industry that laid off many people in the 1970s. The dynamic of White Flight and capital disinvestment hit both cities hard. And finally they both became hyper-ghettos by the 1990s.

*Camden After the Fall* was an illustrative recounting of how a city can go from thriving all the way to blighted over a span of fifty years. Gillette efficiently covered how Camden thrived in the early 20th century as a center for manufacturing and quickly got to his focus on how the city declined. Although he was able to highlight some inspiring activists that found ways to develop supportive community structures the prevailing political and economic superstructure always cast a frustrating shadow.

Gillette's history illuminated many lessons within the story of Camden's distress. One lesson was the ineffectiveness of "trickle-down development". He showed that residential neighborhood abandonment did not get improved by focusing redevelopment on downtown areas. In the early 1990s the state provided millions of dollars to build an aquarium at the waterfront in Camden in the hopes to spur development. It was successful in attracting visitors at first but basically ended up being a "tourist reservation" that did not enhance the lives of residents as many of the promises to hire local residents were not fulfilled.

Another relevant theme, especially in its similarity to Gary, was the way suburbanization, that began in the 1960s, exacerbated economic and racial segregation. "'As residents retreated into suburbs... the barriers they erected against outsiders grew higher, and their conception of 'the public good' correspondingly narrowed'". Around Camden one major blow came from the "Mount Laurel" court decision. This decision set a precedent that allowed suburban developers to pay Camden to put all their affordable housing obligations in Camden rather than the suburb where the new development was coming up. So although the developers did create affordable housing, as required by law, they were able to isolate most of it in Camden creating a hyper-ghetto.

Thankfully, amongst the illustration of the overwhelming decline Gillette highlighted some positive ideas that could help ameliorate conditions. Gillette discussed how reducing inequality and segregation needs to use a combination of two strategies. One, which is often the first and most politically safe strategy, to create conditions that gentrify areas so that middle class people will move back. This strategy often ends in displacing poor residents. The second strategy is a "mobility strategy" which was described by John A. Powell as a strategy to disperse disadvantaged populations closer to opportunity. "'Advocates of mobility strategies believe that if people who are segregated and isolated by race and poverty can move into neighborhoods with adequate community resources, they will gain access to the means and mechanisms of progress.'" So the

combination of dispersing disadvantaged people into other more prosperous areas and attracting some middle class people to struggling areas with a goal not to displace people seems like a very applicable strategy for Gary. But it is politically challenging because many suburbs will not want to take in people who need resources and cities could have their Black voting base diluted.

*Camden After the Fall* easily illustrated how inequality can grow and fester. How it can be ignored for years and be a daunting uphill battle to get a blighted city back on track. Places like Camden and Gary prove that inequality is an inherent aspect of the United States. Like Gillette concludes, "As long as inequality of place remained protected in law and sustained by popular and political opinion, then, the poor would continue to suffer disproportionately."

P.S.- The book does not address the public education system in Camden at all. With some of the current events in Gary this was something I was hoping to be able to compare. I imagine the school system of Camden like many of the other social services suffered a lot. Gary now has an emergency manager and is closing schools and discovering a deeper and deeper hole in the public school budget.  
<http://www.nwitimes.com/news/local/go...>

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### **Angel Fuentes says**

If you really want to know the history of Camden; i.e., from the 40's to the 90's this is a must read book. Very interesting and its politics.

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