



Hope in Hard Times: Norvelt and the Struggle for Community During the Great Depression

Timothy Kelly, Margaret Power, Michael Cary

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Of the many recipients of federal support during the Great Depression, the citizens of Norvelt, Pennsylvania, stand out as model reminders of the vital importance of New Deal programs. Hoping to transform their desperate situation, the two hundred and fifty families of this western Pennsylvania town worked with the federal government to envision a new kind of community that would raise standards of living through a cooperative lifestyle and enhanced civic engagement. Their efforts won them a nearly mythic status among those familiar with Norvelt's history.

Hope in Hard Times explores the many transitions faced by those who undertook this experiment. With the aid of the New Deal, these residents, who hailed from the hardworking and underserved class that Jacob Riis a generation earlier had called the "other half," created a middle-class community that would become an exemplar of the success of such programs. Despite this, many current residents of Norvelt—the children and grandchildren of the first inhabitants—oppose government intervention and support political candidates who advocate scrutinizing and even eliminating public programs.

Authors Timothy Kelly, Margaret Power, and Michael Cary examine this still-unfolding narrative of transformation in one Pennsylvania town, and the struggles and successes of its original residents against the backdrop of one of the most ambitious federal endeavors in United States history.

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