

ABSTRACT

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Rust Belt Blues

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Alison Stine's Rust Belt Blues is a book-length work of linked creative nonfiction essays set in former manufacturing towns in Ohio, Indiana, and upstate New York. In pieces that range from autobiography to literary journalism, she focuses on abandoned places and people in the area known as the Rust Belt—a section of ex-industrial centers stretching from New York to Chicago—covering such topics as feral houses, graffiti, and the blues. She researches the Westinghouse factory that once employed a third of her hometown, explores a shuttered amusement park, re-visits a neglected asylum, and writes of rural poverty. In her critical introduction “The Abandoned Houses are All of Us: Toward a Rust Belt Persona,” Stine examines the work of contemporary nonfiction writers born in and / or concerned with the Rust Belt, finding that their work shares traits of deflection, obsession, lying, dark subject matter, and stubborn optimism—what she calls the defining characteristics of the emerging Rust Belt persona.