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MAHONING VALLEY FORGOTTEN AMERICA?

A DOCUMENTARY BY
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MUSIC
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SUMMARY

Mahoning Valley, forgotten America? is a documentary that offers us a snapshot of what life is like in 2023, in this former industrial region of Ohio, 46 years after an economic, demographic and social decline following the collapse of the metallurgical industry in the late 1970s.

SYNOPSIS

Filming: septembre 2023
52mn, colors
Narration and interviews in english (USA).

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Distribution: Luckymatrix

Producer: 919Prod

Director, images: JF Debos

Editing: JF Debos & JF Henane

Post-production: 919Prod

Facilitator, interviews: AnnMarie B. Simon

Narrator: AnnMarie B. Simon

Music: Éric Verdout

The introduction sets the region's historical context, alternating short testimonials with film footages. It provides an insight into the identity of the Mahoning Valley.

The narrative of the documentary *Mahoning Valley, forgotten America?* is structured around 3 chapters.

The past

To better understand the economic greatness of the Mahoning Valley over nearly a century (1870 - 1980), we interview William Lawson and Sean Posey, historians and authors specializing in the region.

Their testimonies provide us with the chronological landmarks that explain how this region became the world's 2nd-largest steel producer, its extraordinary destiny and also its decline.

Inherited from the past, some areas are authentic open-air museums.

Such is the case of the working-class district of Soup City, home to a large part of Campbell's working-class community at the time. A visit to this district in the company of Timothy Sokoloff - president of the Iron Soup Historical Preservation Company - sheds light on what living conditions were like for families in the 19th century.

Living conditions and cohabitation between communities of different origins, cultures and religions are essential points that we hope to grasp by listening to W. Lawson and S. Posey, but also Frank Marr, a young metalworker in the late 1970s, now retired.

The chapter of the past closes with the economic and social decline of the Mahoning Valley. We look back to "Black Monday", Monday September 19, 1977, the day when everything turned upside down for over 5,000 workers who found themselves out of work following the closure of the steel mills.

Frank Marr's personal account gives us an idea of how shocking this black day was for the whole community.

The present

But to understand what's going on in the region today, we're going to meet the men and women who are working to bring about the region's renaissance. From the political, cultural and associative spheres, we see just how many and varied these initiatives are.

If Youngstown seems best equipped to initiate these changes, it's thanks in part to people like Derrick McDowell, whom we meet at the heart of the Creators' Market, which he created to showcase the work of the town's artisans and artists.

He explains how, with all the love he has for his city, he finds the motivation to develop various cultural initiatives.

Moving around the valley's towns, it's clear to us that the urban landscape has been in a state of permanent transformations for some years now.

William Lawson is also very attached to Youngstown, where he heads the Mahoning Valley Historical Society. Thanks to his eyewitness account of the town, we have a better understanding of the places that are currently undergoing major urban and social changes.

At the head of the municipalities, some particularly dynamic elected officials are keen to shake things up.

Catherine Cercone Miller, mayor of Struthers, shares her ambitions for the renewal of the town center, which she hopes will become an attractive hub for businesses and shops.

A speech supported by Tim Roddy, Chief of Police, who is very optimistic about the prospect of making his town a great place to live.

Not far from Youngstown, Warren is a particularly significant city when it comes to rehabilitating the living environment. Organizations such as the Trumbull Neighborhood Partnership work tirelessly to renovate entire neighborhoods in the city.

At the headquarters of this non-governmental organization, we interview Matt Martin and Shawn Carvin about their work with the community.

Other brief interviews with real-life actors portray the state of mind of the region's inhabitants: Christine Kusky, a tavern waitress; Richard Rowlands, founder of a museum dedicated to the railroads of the industrial era; James Di Censo, a contractor specializing in the renovation of abandoned buildings...

So many personalities who are part and parcel of a human mosaic that we want to meet.

The future...

The treatment of this subject would not be complete without a look to the future. Although the region is barely keeping its head above water from a social and economic point of view, there are nevertheless encouraging signs of future projects.

Although the city of Campbell may seem the most "fragile" of all the towns we pass through, this hasn't stopped its mayor, Bryan Tedesco, and his 1st deputy Joseph Pavlansky, from having a common dream: to completely rehabilitate the banks of the Mahoning River, which are a significant part of the city's urban area. Housing veterans, of whom there are many in the area, is a priority for the mayor.

In the same town, Timothy Sokoloff tells us about his personal project to turn Soup City into a tourist attraction dedicated to the history of the working class, and to renovate buildings to provide decent housing for veterans.

Back to Youngstown with Derrick Mc Dowell, whose vision of the future is filled with a certain philosophy.

While all the projects mentioned in the documentary are aimed at erasing the scars of the past, Derrick McDowell goes further, explaining his public initiative to transform the anniversary date of September 19, 1977 into "Identity Reclaiming Day".

We note that all the protagonists interviewed in this third chapter - including William Lawson, Catherine Cercone Miller, Frank Marr, Joseph Pavlansky - agree that agree that the valley possesses real assets, and that economic, social and demographic renaissance can only be achieved by promoting a true quality of life.

Real assets which, they believe, will help dispel the thick clouds that have blinded the valley since "Black Monday".

NOTE OF INTENT

Questioning the human to understand the territory...

The idea behind this documentary arose from the desire to reach out to territories that seem "forgotten", while the world continues to bustle around them.

The desire to approach the subject from a resolutely human angle naturally steered the writing towards a so-called social documentary.

The United States was the obvious choice, as it offers a very significant example of what a region that has sunk into oblivion can be forgotten.

Ohio, with its industrial past, seems to us to be an appropriate territory for the for this documentary, as it is rich in places that no one looks at anymore.

The narrative mechanics, based on 3 chapters, allow us to understand the causal links between prosperity and decline, as well as the economic and societal pitfalls the region has had to - and still has to - face. Finally, our desire to look to the future is inseparable from the story, to better understand the mindset of the community that lives at the heart of this territory, and their vision for the future.

Documentary

Mahoning Valley, forgotten America?

And it's at the heart of this community, as close as possible to the people and their living environment, that we wanted to film our subject to make it as precise, authentic and sensitive as possible.

This authenticity shines through thanks to the patchwork of personalities we meet, all from different social classes, backgrounds and statuses, in order to capture as accurately as possible the state of mind of the community that inhabits the Mahoning Valley.

We come to understand how far this region has come over the past 46 years, its resilience, its fears and its hopes, and provide a documented perspective that helps answer the question posed in the title: is the Mahoning Valley a *forgotten America*?

THE TEAM



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