



Where the Tea Party Rules

Lima, Ohio, has been struggling for decades – and the GOP's radical policies are making it even worse

By [Janet Reitman](#) | October 14, 2014

Dewey Chaffins was 19 years old when he left Appalachia for northwestern Ohio in 1958. The youngest of 10, he'd grown up in Garrett, Kentucky, a hardscrabble coal town where his family had lived and mined for generations. During the 1950s, when the coal industry in eastern Kentucky fell into a steep decline, scores of young men packed up all they had and headed north toward the industrial Midwest. Chaffins found opportunity in the city of Lima, a manufacturing boomtown where there were so many factories, as one retired autoworker recently told me, "you could walk into a place, get a job without even a high school diploma, and if you didn't like it, you could quit, walk across the street and have another job that afternoon." By the time Dewey and his 18-year-old wife, Linda, settled in Lima, seven of his siblings, their spouses and some of their in-laws were living in and around the city, where they quickly found work in the automotive plants or tire factories or steel mills, joined the UAW or other unions, and set about raising their children in a manner none of them had ever dreamed possible.

Dewey and Linda worked for Hayes-Albion, a Michigan-based company whose Lima plant provided Ford with chrome and trim. Their combined annual income was almost \$50,000 a year, not a lot but enough at the time to buy a home in the middle-class suburb of Bath Township, just east of Lima. By the end of the 1980s, each of their four children had graduated from high school, and two had gone on to college. There was no reason to doubt that their family's continued upward mobility was secure.

One recent morning, I went to visit Dewey's son Scott Chaffins, who still lives in Bath, in a small three-bedroom house he shares with his wife, Lori, and their two college-age kids, Joshua, 21, and Alyssa, 18. Now 50, Scott is a burly guy who meets me dressed in long cutoffs, a blue polo shirt and flip-flops. He shuffles through his kitchen followed by the family's big brown Lab, Brutus. Stopping briefly to say hello, Scott then excuses himself to lie down. "It's his blood pressure," Lori says, apologetically. A chemist and former college professor, Scott's been out of work for six months. "Stress adds a lot of health issues, as you can imagine," she says.

A short, round woman wearing a pink T-shirt and shorts, Lori Chaffins sits at a long, rectangular wooden table, drinking Dr Pepper. It's a Friday afternoon, and she's off for the summer from her job driving a school bus and working in the nearby middle-school cafeteria. The schedule isn't bad, she says – working only nine months out of the year means she's had more time to spend

with her kids. On the other hand, her annual income is roughly \$25,000, and she hasn't had a raise in six years. Since her husband's been out of work, they've liquidated Scott's retirement and drained most of their savings, about \$60,000 in total. Still, they have close to \$160,000 in debt between their mortgage (\$1,200 per month), car payments (\$305), health insurance (\$300 per month, with a \$1,750 deductible per person) and the loans (\$7,000) they took out to help pay for Joshua's living expenses at Bowling Green State. Their home, which they purchased in 1999, along with 20 acres of land, for \$170,000, has depreciated by a third, Lori says, "and we're still upside-down on our loan." She shakes her head with the tight, exhausted expression of a woman who's just barely hanging on. "I mean, when a family can't afford to buy steak at seven to 10 bucks a pound, that's ridiculous. But ground beef at \$4.99 a pound? That's outrageous," she says, her voice rising in frustration. Last year, their family had \$18,000 in medical bills. "And that was with our insurance," she says. "I just get so mad when people say the economy is turning around. Are you kidding me? I'm poorer today than when my husband was in college."



Photo: Geordie Wood

Lori grew up in the nearby town of Elida. Her father, a nonunion carpenter, made less than \$4.50 per hour, when he worked at all. "We had an outhouse in the 1970s," she says. "I mean, we were dirt-poor. I refused to raise my children like that."

Scott, who has a chemistry degree from Ohio State, was the first member of his immediate family to go to college, which at the time cost him \$1,500 per year in tuition. While he was in school, Lori helped pay their bills by waitressing at a Pizza Hut, and she kept working as they

moved from Columbus to Bowling Green, where Scott studied for his master's, to Cincinnati. They had no intention of returning to Lima to live, but after the kids were born, they began to think it would be good to be closer to their families. So in 1999, Scott, then 34, went to work in the oil industry, managing 30 other chemists at the city's large oil refinery, the longtime anchor of the community. Depending on his bonus, Lori says, he would go on to make between \$100,000 and \$125,000 a year, a small fortune in an area where most people earn less than \$60,000 annually.

That was a good period, Lori says as light streams in through sliding--glass doors and reflects on a series of wall photographs: Yellowstone, the Grand Tetons, the Pacific Coast. Scott took those, she explains, back in the days when they could afford to take family vacations. Today, she says, they can barely afford to go to the movies. "The last movie I saw was *Harry Potter*, in 2011," she says. "We had no idea it would get as bad as it did."

Lori traces her family's downward spiral to before the recession, in 2007, when Scott quit his job to teach college chemistry. Though the pay was good, working for the oil industry presented Scott with philosophical challenges. During the late 1980s and early 1990s, Lima's refinery complex, then owned by British Petroleum, was the largest source of toxic chemical pollution in the northeastern United States. Though the refinery reduced its toxic emissions considerably in subsequent years, Lima had disproportionately high rates of cancer, and there would still be occasional chemical releases that would cake the grass and trees in a white dust that ate through the paint on the cars. There were days when people who lived near the plant would be told to shut their windows and air conditioners and stuff towels under their doors. One summer, the river ran brown and the fish died. Scott, whose job was to monitor levels of benzene to make sure they adhered to what the EPA considered safe for dumping, felt complicit. "It wasn't so much the actual safety as it was the morality," he says. "It's Big Oil, and Big Oil has always been about big profit. There is very little concern, obviously, for the environment beyond what's regulatory and required."

Leaving the refinery cleared Scott's conscience. It also meant he took a 60 percent pay cut to become an assistant professor at the local community college, Rhodes State. To make ends meet, he and Lori got rid of two of their three cars, clipped coupons and stopped eating out almost entirely. But without the Ph.D. required for a tenured position, Scott knew he'd never make more than \$50,000 a year. So in the spring of 2013, with Joshua finishing his sophomore year of college, Scott decided to give up teaching and return to industry. Nothing, so far, has worked out. "Not many opportunities, at least in this area, for chemists," says Scott, who, having woken from his nap, joins his wife at the table. He's hoping something will come through soon, but if it doesn't, he will have to look for work in Columbus or farther away. In the past few years, some of his family members who've fallen on hard times have turned to government assistance – something Scott never thought he'd have to do. But now, who knows. "We've about exhausted all of our resources," he says.

The air in the Chaffins' kitchen feels thick. It could be the roast smoking in the slow cooker, or the dog, or maybe it's just the choking reality of being stuck in a place no one expected to be. "You know, before my dad died in 2002, he asked me if he'd given me what I wanted in life," Scott muses. "I said, 'No, but you gave me what I needed.' I look back at what they went through and see where we are now, and I really wonder if we're better off."



Lori, Joshua, Alyssa and Scott are drowning in debt. (Photo: Geordie Wood)

Like many Ohioans, the Chaffinses are independents and have voted with their conscience in every presidential election. "The first president I voted for was Reagan," says Lori. "My father would have killed me if he'd known, but I thought at the time Reagan would do a better job. I thought America was going to turn around and change."

She felt the same about Barack Obama, whom both she and her husband voted for in 2008, though they have since become disillusioned. "He's very eloquent," says Lori. "I was in awe of him when I first heard him on *Oprah*. But I don't think he has America's interest at heart." Scott, who calls himself a "political agnostic," doesn't draw the line at Obama or the Democrats. "It's all of them," he says. "I don't think Obama has the leadership skills I'd hoped for. And it saddens me to see our government throwing all kinds of money at the banks, which hasn't helped the average American. But the Republicans are just as shady as the Democrats. I thought the shutdown was crazy. I see all of it as a desperate attempt by people who think they're doing the best for the country to take the country back. But it's all just extremism."

Lori tells me she's simply too busy to pay attention to politics. She's concerned about the Second Amendment and suspects Obama may harbor "more Islamic interest than he cares to share." But she's also concerned about gas prices, her health care premiums and her union contract, which she tells me "isn't worth the paper it's printed on." During the last general election, in 2012, Scott, in protest of Obama's fiscal and foreign policies, voted for Mitt Romney. Lori, despite her fears, couldn't decide. "I didn't feel confident that either choice was worse – they were both bad," she says. "So I wrote in Mickey Mouse."

Lima is a working-class city in Allen County, Ohio, situated on Interstate 75, roughly halfway between Dayton and Toledo. Set amid the rich soybean and corn fields that still provide the region with a quarter of its revenue, it's a town with some of the cheapest housing stock in America – last year, the average home in Lima sold for just over \$39,000 – and a long boom-and-bust history, starting in 1885, when a local paper--mill owner named Benjamin Faurot discovered oil on his property along the banks of the Ottawa River. Within two years, Lima's oil fields were on their way to becoming the world's largest producer of crude, and Standard Oil had moved in, building wells and pipelines, as well as a large refinery on the south side of town. By 1900, Ohio's oil fields were largely tapped out, but the refinery remained, processing oil pumped up from Texas and the Gulf of Mexico. For more than a century, oil remained the city's mainstay, providing thousands of local jobs and serving as an anchor for the steel and other manufacturing-related industries that came to Lima, much like it did for Youngstown and Toledo in Ohio, as well as Pittsburgh, Detroit and many other cities from industrial New England to the Great Lakes.

But it was the auto industry that defined the city's character. In 1955, Ford Motor Co. began work on a 950,000-square-foot engine plant just east of Lima's city limits. For the next 20 years, it would be the city's largest employer, fed by a myriad of smaller companies that provided the industry with raw materials or parts. Thousands of people streamed in to Lima to work in the auto sector, many settling just outside the city in places like Shawnee, American or Bath. These "townships," as they were known, paid no city taxes and were politically independent from Lima, yet relied on the city for basic services. With good schools and tree-lined streets, the townships soon became a haven for Lima's white workforce, while its African--American workers, who comprised roughly one-quarter of the population, lived closer to the plants within the city itself. By 1958, Lima had more than 55,000 citizens, with the township population exceeding it by the mid-Sixties.



Photo: Geordie Wood

By the 1970s, the slump in American manufacturing led Lima's factories to cut their workforces, and some began to close. As unemployment rose, so did crime. The city's white population, which had been moving to the townships for years, now fled in record numbers. In Lima proper, race riots broke out during the late 1960s, driving home prices down even further. By the early 1980s, the city, now a major stop on the heroin route up I-75, was emptied of all but its poorest residents.

In 2013, the University of Vermont named Lima, whose steadily declining population now stands at roughly 38,000, as one of the country's "saddest" cities, just behind Memphis, Tennessee, and Flint, Michigan. It is also fairly representative of many towns across the United States: not a poster child for urban decay, as is true for places like Detroit or Camden, New Jersey, but not thriving in the manner of Pittsburgh, which has been reborn as a technology hub. Instead, Lima has limped along in a diminished capacity, with limited opportunities for those who have chosen or have no option but to stay. This is true within the city limits as well as throughout Lima's townships, miles upon miles of subdivisions whose quiet, beige emptiness now typifies the American ex-urban experience. "It's subtle what's happened here," says Gavin DeVore Leonard, a public-policy expert with the nonpartisan group One Ohio Now, whose family goes back three generations in Lima. "There used to be a buzz and an energy here. It was a thriving place to be part of the middle class. Now, people may look like they're OK, but in fact, a lot of them are right on the edge."

Early one evening, I drive around Shawnee, Lima's wealthiest township, with Sandie Kinkle, a retired nursing instructor and the mother of a friend. Passing through the sleepy enclaves with names like Breezewood Estates or Amanda Lakes, I see gigantic homes on lots with their own private ponds, each of them a near-mirror image of one another. Out on the broad, open streets, the faceless strip malls, chain hotels and smaller one- and two-story houses fade into a seamless tableau. Even in Lima's urban neighborhoods, where, Kinkle tells me, some of her friends from the country club refuse to go, there is a strange homogeneity. Kids ride their bikes down streets once ravaged by gang warfare. Blighted, broken-down homes have been replaced by new government housing. Looking at a group of school-children playing basketball in a neighborhood park, it's almost easy to be lulled into the belief that things aren't really that bad.

But 34 percent of Lima's citizens, and nearly 20 percent of those in Allen County, live beneath the poverty line. The average household income in Lima is \$28,000 a year; significantly lower than the state average of \$48,000 – nationally, the average is \$53,000. Lima's unemployment rate has consistently hovered at around six percent – several notches higher than the state average – which fails to take into account the longtime unemployed whose benefits have run out and who have fallen off the rolls altogether. Kinkle points out how few "for sale" signs there are in Shawnee. It's not because people don't want to move, she says, "it's because their houses are worth so much less than what they paid for them. They can't sell."

Bill Faith, executive director of the Coalition on Homelessness and Housing in Ohio, says he's seen the same patterns in towns all over the state. "Really, all of this speaks to the broader picture of how the middle class in America is struggling to exist," he says. "The economy is stabilizing somewhat, there are businesses coming back, but we're talking about half the size of what it used to be. You see politicians try to appeal to people in places like Lima and say, 'We're going to bring back manufacturing. We're going to get these companies to come back.' The reality is, you've got to incrementally bring back employment of whatever kind you can bring back."

If the Obama administration has been plagued by slow job growth and a faltering economy, conservatives in Congress and state government have helped exacerbate the problem by blocking any reforms the administration has put forward. One of the Republican Party's leading obstructionists is Jim Jordan, Lima's representative in the House. Jordan, who spent more than a decade in the Ohio Statehouse before coming to Washington in 2006, is one of the Tea Party's quiet strategists, best known for his behind-the-scenes steering of House conservatives during their 2013 campaign to shut down the government. A persistent thorn in the side of House Speaker John Boehner, Jordan regularly bucks the Republican leadership, opposing virtually any government-spending proposal: the TARP stimulus package, the auto bailout, the repeal of the Bush tax cuts, raising the debt ceiling, even emergency aid to the victims of Hurricane Sandy. He has voted to defund the Affordable Care Act 52 times. "The thing about Jordan is, he's a purist," says one Lima-area journalist. "There are some people who say they believe in limited government, but they make exceptions – Jordan doesn't do that. In some ways, he's everything I'd ask for in a congressman: He's earnest and hardworking, and you'll find no dirt – he's squeaky clean. But he takes a very hard-line view of the Constitution; he believes his rights are a gift from God, and he wants almost no taxes. He's a true believer."

Ohio's governor, John Kasich, who also claims an ideological kinship with the Tea Party, has a similar, if sometimes more pragmatic, outlook. A staunch social and fiscal conservative – as a congressman in the Nineties, he played a part in shutting down the government twice – he ran an unsuccessful presidential primary campaign in 2000, and then left politics for close to a decade to become a commentator at Fox News and an adviser at Lehman Brothers, where he made over \$1 million in 2008, the year the company, and the U.S. economy, failed. Two years later, as Ohio's own economy hit rock bottom, Kasich rode the Republican wave and was elected governor by a narrow margin. Having benefited from the perceived economic failures of his Democratic predecessor, Ted Strickland (in fact, Ohio's economy had shown signs of improving during Strickland's last year in office), Kasich was faced with a budget gap of about \$8 billion. Promising to reduce taxes on small-business owners and eliminate personal-income taxes, his administration cut the budget and privatized a wide range of formerly state-run entities, including Ohio's economic development agency, which Kasich replaced with a corporation called JobsOhio, run by Silicon Valley venture capitalist Mark Kvamme, a former director of LinkedIn.

By the summer of 2012, Ohio's unemployment rate had fallen from nine percent to 7.2 percent – a full point below the national average at the time. Today, it hovers around 5.7 percent, still lower than the national rate of 6.1 percent. The state also claims an \$800 million budget surplus and has built its so-called Rainy Day reserve fund from 89 cents, when Kasich took office, to \$1.5 billion by 2013. Kasich has called this the "Ohio Miracle."

But many policy experts in Ohio say the "miracle" is a myth. "We have the fourth-worst job-creation rate among states since aggressive tax-cutting began in 2005," notes Amy Hanauer, director of the progressive think tank Policy Matters Ohio, which recently came out with a report showing that changes to Ohio's tax system in the past nine years have cut taxes for the wealthiest one percent by \$20,000 while the bottom three-fifths have seen their taxes increase. Though Ohio's job market has slightly improved, it is still more than 100,000 jobs below its pre-recession numbers. As for the balanced budget, Hanauer and others note that these gains generally came at the expense of Ohio's municipalities, which lost half of their funding, as well as public-school budgets, which lost \$1.8 billion.

At the same time, the state invested nearly \$1 billion in mostly underperforming charter schools, to the primary benefit of Republican donors. This August, the nonpartisan public-policy group Innovation Ohio issued a report on Kasich's education record, noting that two of Ohio's largest

charter-school operators, David Brennan and William Lager, also happened to be the state GOP's largest individual donors, contributing more than \$5 million to the Republican Party since the 1990s. Starting in 1998, schools run by the two men have reaped roughly one-quarter of all the taxpayer-funded charter money – about \$1.7 billion. Ohio's charter-school operators have successfully claimed that the money given to charter-management companies is no longer public, leaving them exempt from government audits or any other public scrutiny.

Progressive groups in Ohio have consistently challenged the legality of private organizations accepting public money, and in 2010, the left-leaning ProgressOhio accused JobsOhio of violating the state's constitution by accepting public funds – a challenge that was taken to the Supreme Court. In June 2014, the court dismissed the claim by ProgressOhio, stating that it didn't have sufficient standing to sue. But even Tea Party activists agreed with the leftist group, says Brian Rothenberg, executive director of ProgressOhio. "It's not just privatization that is problematic in Ohio, it is the transfer of public dollars into private coffers with little accountability or transparency," says Rothenberg. Kasich, who once described Rothenberg as a "nihilist" for objecting to his agenda, has shut down all state audits of private contractors until the end of his second term. "So now, prisoners have maggots in food served by private vendors, and home-health-care aides making minimum wage have to wait months for their pay because the state privatized the Medicaid--Medicare billing system," Rothenberg continues. "But then again, when you elect a Lehman Brothers executive as governor, you just bring in the same intricate Wall Street shell games that bog down our economy nationally."

The impact of these policies has been to shift the burden onto the taxpayers, who now must decide which municipal services they'd like to pay for, in lieu of state funds. In the town of Elida, for instance, the Lima suburb where Lori Chaffins grew up, voters recently rejected a \$1.9 million levy on their property taxes that would have gone to support the local school district. In nearby Perry Township, voters agreed to a \$90,000 levy to pay for municipal expenses like road repair. In Lima itself, where property taxes are the lowest in the area, Mayor David Berger had to close two of the city's five fire stations and cut the municipal workforce nearly in half to stay out of bankruptcy. He estimates that the combined loss of federal and state money has been about \$3 million to \$4 million a year, a sizable portion of the city's \$25 million budget. "This is the new normal," says Berger, who lacks either a secretary or a chief of staff. "Shrunken."



Kenneth Long and Shawn Smith didn't want to leave the rough neighborhoods they grew up in but have struggled to find work. (Photo: Geordie Wood)

A courtly, bearded 60-year-old, Berger, a progressive, is Lima's longest-serving mayor, having been elected in 1989. Since then, he's been fighting to keep his town afloat. In 1996, the city had a near-death experience when BP announced it would close Lima's refinery, which would have eliminated 500 jobs and a payroll worth more than \$31 million. Berger and a coalition of local leaders fought to save the refinery over the next two years, and in 1998, they won when a surprise buyer emerged in the small St. Louis petroleum company Clark Oil, which purchased the refinery for \$215 million. The facility has changed hands three times since then, and under its current owner, the Canadian Husky Energy, the 1,100-acre complex has expanded to include eight refining and chemical businesses employing more than 1,000 full-time workers.

Berger sees this as a positive sign. "I think the refinery is here for at least another generation," he says. But the city's larger industrial base faces a less certain future. Lima, unlike some Rust Belt cities, emerged from the recession of 2008 "stable," as Berger puts it, because it didn't have much more to lose. Its worst economic crisis happened during the manufacturing downturn of the 1980s and 1990s, and most of the jobs lost then never returned. What rushed in to fill the void were increasingly lower-wage jobs in the health care and retail sectors, creating a problem less of unemployment than of underemployment, where people now must hold two or even three jobs to make ends meet.

This is one of the less-heralded facts hidden behind the rosy job numbers coming out of both Columbus and Washington. As Jason Perlman, political director- for the Ohio AFL-CIO, tells me, "The new normal is, 'Be happy you have a job – any job.' But how do those jobs pay?" According to a recent Innovation Ohio report, the number of low-wage jobs paying between \$7 and \$13.39 an hour now outnumber both medium- and higher-wage jobs and, in fact, account for virtually all the job growth in the state. "So who's really winning if you can't take care of your family?" Perlman says.

We're dying very slowly and it's a terrible death," says John Paradore, who directs the local community-action program for the United Auto Workers union. On a hot afternoon, we meet near the town square, once Lima's bustling shopping district. With most of its stores having long ago relocated to the Lima Mall, or simply closed altogether, the area has a hollowed-out feel. In a small urban park, a group of men in their undershirts idle on benches, drinking iced tea. City Hall is wide open, the receptionist who used to man the front desk having long been laid off. Though Lima does have a sparkling new civic center – host to the Lima Symphony – there is almost nowhere to grab a sandwich or a cup of coffee. One of the first things an outsider notices is that Lima and its townships lack what, for most communities, is the first sign of upward mobility, a Starbucks.

During industrialization's heyday, the wealthy people in Lima lived on the west side of town, says Paradore, as we drive down Market Street. Stately stone mansions with turreted roofs and huge, well-tended colonials go by; one Victorian mansion houses the Allen County Museum. The rest, or what remains of them, are empty and for sale, or inhabited by doctors or lawyers – though a lot of them have moved out too, says Paradore. "There's nothing but old people here now," he says.

Paradore heads south of Market, into the city's low-rent core, where all the houses- seem in need of fresh paint. A warehouse here, some police tape there, a Dollar General. Lima has quite a few dollar stores or similar establishments. In one shopping center, we pass a Rent-a-Center, a Dollar Tree, an American Budget Co. and a Check Into Cash, as well as the requisite nail salon and pet-supply shops. There is also a gigantic Walmart Supercenter fronting an empty lot. That used to be Rays, a supermarket, Paradore tells me. A few years ago, a smaller Walmart opened

around the corner from Rays, but its lease agreement prohibited it from selling grocery items. So Walmart decided to move from the strip mall to a lot just behind it, where it built a new, expanded facility. By 2013, Rays had closed. "Don't even get me started on Walmart," Paradore says.

Paradore is 64 and grew up in Lima. In 1973, when he was 22, he went to work on the assembly line at Ford, and stayed at the company until his retirement in 2004. Over that period, he bore witness to Lima's industrial decline. It started slowly, with a wave of layoffs at Ford in the late 1970s, he notes, as we drive past the Husky Energy refinery and a giant chemical plant, toward the city's old industrial core. Skeletons of some of the old factories remain, but elsewhere, there are only vacant lots. Soon after, layoffs had spread to Westinghouse, Dana, Ex-Cello and Clark Equipment. Superior Coach, one of the city's oldest factories and once the nation's largest-producer of buses, sold to private investors in 1981. Even Ford, whose 2.4-million--square-foot engine plant now spreads across more than 300 acres, reduced its workforce from 4,500 to 1,600 by 1983.

In the late 1980s, the economy improved and plants once again began hiring. But the tenor of the town had changed. To stay alive, many of Lima's surviving businesses had been sold to large conglomerates with only a tenuous connection to the region, let alone the city. In the early 1990s, a new wave of devastating closings hit. There were large cuts at the U.S. Army tank plant, now owned by General Dynamics, which had been the country's largest producer of tanks during World War II. Over the years, its workforce had dwindled from 4,000 to less than 500. By the end of the 1990s, notes Perry Bush, a historian at Bluffton University and author of *Rust Belt Resistance*, which chronicles Lima's industrial decline, the combined impact of the lost jobs and the loss in tax revenue had cost the local economy \$250 million.

The unions, which once represented almost a third of the area's workers, were now in a precarious position. Since the 1960s, a combination of racial divisions in the workforce, the shift of industry overseas or to the de-unionized South, and the increasing use of union-busting consulting firms to intimidate striking workers had weakened the American labor movement to the point that, by the 1980s, broad anti-union sentiment began to seep into even bedrock industrial communities like Lima. To keep their people at work, the United Auto Workers and other unions now agreed to concessions with management that systematically stripped collective bargaining of much of its power. At Hayes-Albion, the Ford supplier where Dewey Chaffins worked for 30 years, managers came to their employees in the late 1980s with a deal: accept a cap on their salaries – and a 50-cent bonus as a thank-you – or run the risk of being let go. Older workers, like Dewey, refused. But younger employees said yes, and the yeses won. With those concessions, wages began to steadily drop until, by the time Dewey retired in 2002, he was making less than he had a decade earlier. A union man all his life, Dewey saw the changes and was angry at the UAW for giving in, says Scott Chaffins; but he was even angrier at the workers for not realizing what was happening to them. "My parents' generation wanted a better life for their children, and those children, having lived a better life, didn't know what it was like to struggle," says Scott. "It was like the farther they got away from their history of struggle, the more complacent they became."

Today, UAW representation in Lima is vastly diminished. To John Paradore's dismay, "even people who work in the factories think unions are bad," he says. "It's hard to really understand it. You have a lot of guys who did well because of the union. But their attitude is, 'I got mine, and who cares about the other guy.'"

Some plants, like Honda, have never been unionized, though they adhere to policies set by labor unions in Japan. At Ford, however, the UAW agreed to wage cuts during the most recent downturn, the result being that, today, a new factory worker at Ford might start at \$19 an hour, "which is good," Paradore notes, though he or she will often be working side by side with someone who, hired under a previous, more robust contract, is making nearly twice as much. In many companies, workers start at \$14 an hour, or even less. In 2010, International Brake Industries, which was founded in Lima in 1967 and was acquired by a Michigan-based company in 1999, went from paying workers \$14 per hour to asking the UAW to agree to new wages of \$9 per hour. The union said no, and in the spring of 2011, International Brake decided to close its Lima plant and move operations to Indiana. One-hundred--and-ninety-eight people lost their jobs. To avoid further dealings with the union, the company also told employees its Indiana plant would hire contract workers.

Contract work, which is often not full time, is rapidly becoming the major source of employment in Lima, as in many parts of the country. There are a number of temporary agencies – also known as staffing services – in Lima, who supply local businesses- with both blue- and white-collar workers. "We used to see a cycle of employment where someone would be hired for 89 days" – a traditional cutoff between temporary and permanent employment," says Jacqueline Fox, CEO of the Lima Allen Council on Community Affairs, a local community--action organization. "Get laid off, go on unemployment and then get hired again, sometimes by getting reassigned to a different company, while the first one hires another temp." But now, Fox notes, temp jobs can last a lot longer – "indefinitely," she says. Many businesses often use temp agencies as a way to prescreen for permanent employees; others, though, base their entire business plan on temporary hires. Says Fox, "We can't get employers to make a long-term commitment to employees to move them from temp to permanent because, in my opinion, it's a cost-savings measure. You don't have to pay health insurance if you have temporary employees. And they're easily replaced."

"What we experienced here is that the Great Recession really became an employer's market," says Marilyn Horstman, deputy director of social services at the Allen County Jobs and Family Services. Between 2008 and 2010, the worst years of the recession, unemployment in Allen County rose from 7.9 percent to more than 12 percent. "If a company wanted rocket scientists to work on the floor of a manufacturing facility, they could get it," says Horstman. Before people even realized what was happening, she adds, companies started to increasingly rely on temp agencies, which they saw as more cost-efficient. "Some of these companies didn't have HR departments, and if they had them, they would still have whole areas, like a whole warehouse, that was all run through a temp agency."

Horstman tells me about one employer that has hired hundreds of temporary workers, a number of who can't afford their own cars to get to work. Though the city does have bus service, it only covers a limited area and doesn't run all night, leaving those who work the late shifts out of luck. Many workers without cars either find a ride with a friend or take taxis, which some temp agencies pay for by deducting the fare from a worker's check. "After that deduction," says Horstman, "some people wind up making around \$2 an hour."

Before she started driving a school bus, Lori Chaffins had a job through a temporary agency at the nearby Honda plant, driving cars across the plant for \$13 an hour. "I didn't have the benefits, I didn't have the bonus, I didn't have insurance. And on Saturday, I would get time and a half like everybody else, but I worked right next to someone doing the same job and making \$35 an hour," she says.

Thirty-eight-year-old Kenneth Long spent seven years as a contractor, most recently driving a forklift at Procter & Gamble. In Lima, he says, contractors did most of the physical work while P&G's full-time employees generally sat behind computers. But for someone lacking a college degree, it was the only way to get a job. "It's like legalized extortion," he says.

Long and his 41-year-old cousin, Shawn Smith, are sitting on the porch of Shawn's mother's house on the south side of Lima. Their families have lived in Lima even longer than the Chaffinses, having arrived during the Great Migration of the early 20th century, a period when millions of African-Americans traveled up from the rural South to work in northern industrial cities. In Lima, where Ohio Steel was flooded with military contracts during the buildup to World War II, steel titan John Galvin, needing more workers, recruited thousands of African-Americans- from Alabama, Georgia and Mississippi, promising them free transportation and steady, if menial, work in an industry known for its lack of workforce protection. To house these new workers, Galvin built temporary homes on the southern edge of the city, which, motivated by wartime spirit, he named "Victory Village." The homes were squalid and cramped – "not much of a victory at all," as Perry Bush writes – and overall, life for blacks in Lima, in some ways, replicated the Jim Crow South they'd left behind. Yet people stayed, ultimately buying small plots of land in Lima as well as in rural Perry Township next door, and lived however they could.



Photo: Geordie Wood

Smith and Long were born in Lima and never wanted to leave, even after the plants started closing and crime began to rise and people in their neighborhoods, caught up in gang wars and drugs, started getting killed in record numbers. Lima has consistently had one of the highest crime rates in Ohio – a study released by CQ Press in 2013 listed it as one of Ohio's most dangerous cities – and it also ranks among the 100 most-dangerous cities in America, based on FBI data. During the 1980s and 1990s, the city was so violent that it was known as "Little

Detroit." Smith can recall the boys he played football with as a kid, only nine of whom are still alive; another three high school friends are currently on death row. "I'm lucky to be even sitting here with you," he says. And he was even luckier to find a union job paying \$20 an hour.

Smith was a football and basketball star at Lima High School in the late 1980s, and even though he had a kid by the time he was 17 and never graduated, his luck was always better than most. Smith got job offers, usually from people who remembered watching him play. In 1997, having earned a GED, he went to work a few miles away as a welder for Accubuilt, a company that makes hearses and specialty limousines. But the glow of high school football stardom lasts only so long, even in a place like Lima, which recently invested close to \$2 million to upgrade its high school football stadium, and by the time he was in his thirties, Smith was looking at a limited future. "I got to a point where I couldn't do no more," he says. "They weren't offering me no type of actual management positions. So I was already 13, 14, 15 years in, and that was it for me. I mean, I kinda want to be more."

So Smith did something risky: Following a longtime obsession with wind turbines, he decided to switch careers and become a wind technician. In 2011, after training at a technical school in Sweetwater, Texas, he quit his job at Accubuilt. Unable to find work in Ohio, he was hired by AES, a *Fortune* 200 energy company with a large wind farm in Troy, Pennsylvania, about 470 miles away. Within his first year on the job, he says, he'd learned everything there was to know about fixing wind turbines, as well as many basic business skills. He soon advanced to become an environmental coordinator at the facility, handling emergency management plans. But living so far from home was untenable. He had four kids by different mothers, ranging in age from two to 24. On Friday evenings, after his shift, he'd make the nine-and-a-half-hour trip back to Ohio. He'd arrive on Saturday morning, stay for a day – "though I used to say it was 36 hours to make myself feel better" – and then drive back again. "You want to keep making that good money, but you don't want to leave," he says. "I didn't say 'bye' a lot of times. You get tired of saying 'bye.'"

Sometimes, Smith would drive all the way back to Pennsylvania too depressed to even listen to music. Back at work, he did his job but otherwise kept to himself. Finally, it all got to be too much for him, and he did what he felt he had to do, realizing it was about as financially unwise as anything he'd ever done: He left his job and moved back to Lima to take his chances.

But he still couldn't find work in Ohio's nascent alternative-energy sector, which at one point trailed only California's in its growth potential. Today, he doesn't hold out much hope that he ever will. Though Ohio's wind-energy production is one of the highest in the nation, and renewable energy overall provides Ohio with 25,000 jobs, Gov. Kasich recently put the kibosh on further expansion for at least the next few years. In June, after heavy pressure from the Koch Brothers-funded Americans for Prosperity and the American Legislative Exchange Council, and against the wishes of Ohio voters, environmentalists and many traditional industries, Kasich signed a bill freezing a state requirement that utility companies transition to using more renewable--energy sources like wind and solar. "You know, I quit a well-paying- job to pursue what I wanted to do, but I now can't do what I want to do, because there's not an opportunity for me to do it," says Smith. So he called his former HR director, now at a factory in nearby Columbus Grove, who gave him a job in the maintenance department. He was way overqualified she told him, but it was the only thing she had. "Really, she did me a favor," he says.

Some of the best employment--related news to come out of Lima in the past year was an announcement in March that Ford would add 300 union jobs to its engine plant there. Smith's sister, who works at Ford, was one of 1,000 employees who were given referral forms to give to friends or family members who needed a job. Another 1,000 forms were given to the Allen

County Jobs and Family Services- office, where, on the morning the forms were handed out, people began lining up at 3 a.m. By seven, hundreds of cars clogged traffic over the Metcalf Street Bridge, effectively closing it down, so people began to make the journey on foot. By eight, the forms were gone, and yet people kept coming, recalls Horstman. "These were not even applications," she explains. They were numbered forms that, once filled out, were sent to Ford, which then entered them in a random lottery. Those who won the lottery were invited to take a test, and then fill out an application.

But Long and Smith heard that Ford was looking to hire only 150 people, or even less. "So they closed down a bridge for 150 jobs," Smith says, shaking his head. "That's the kind of stuff that's going on around here."

As we talk, Long sits quietly on the porch, looking as if he might cry. He, too, had to move to Pennsylvania for work, in his case for a full-time position at a Procter & Gamble plant eight hours away. It pays him \$8 an hour more than he was making in Lima. But he yearns to come home. "I wanted one of those Ford jobs," he says. "I got out there at 5:30 a.m." But his number was never called. "It feels like I'm in prison sometimes," he says.

Allen county is one of the most consistently red counties in Ohio, and always has been – its residents often boast that it was one of just five Ohio counties to vote for Barry Goldwater in 1964. Until recently, its sole local paper, *The Lima News*, was owned by the libertarian Freedom Communications, whose management promoted a stringently anti-government, - anti-tax message in its news coverage. In some ways, notes Mayor Berger, who grew up a couple of hours east in Mansfield, "what the rest of the country has been listening to with the rise of the Tea Party, Lima and Allen County have been listening to for more than a half-century."

Further calcifying the area's politics has been redistricting, which in Ohio, a traditionally purple state, was raised to an art form in 2010. That year, the state's Republican-dominated Legislature, under the watchful eye, it's widely believed, of House Speaker John Boehner, redrew Ohio's political map by locking Democrats into four, largely urban districts, leaving the rest of the state to the GOP. While Democratic candidates in "safe" districts weren't affected by the change, longtime allies Dennis Kucinich and Marcy Kaptur, whose Cleveland and Toledo districts, respectively, were carved up and parceled out, now found themselves facing each other in the 2012 Democratic primary, which ultimately cost Kucinich, one of the most liberal members of Congress, his seat. In the general election, Obama won Ohio by three points, and Republican candidates got 51 percent of the overall votes cast. But the GOP won 75 percent of the House seats in the congressional delegation. In the Ohio Legislature, Republicans won 83 percent of the seats in the state Senate, and 61 percent of the seats in the Assembly. "For the Republicans, it was a brilliant feat of political engineering," notes election-law specialist Dan Tokaji, a professor at Ohio State University. "They were trying to build a firewall so that even in a great Democratic year, they'd hold a majority-Republican delegation, and they did it."

Ohio's Fourth District, which includes all of Allen County, is among the most gerry-mandered in the state. Extending from Urbana and Lima in the west all the way to Toledo and the city of Elyria, on the shores of Lake Erie in the northeast, it spans about 4,500 square miles and "kind of looks like a deformed salamander," as one dispirited Lima Democrat tells me, shaking his head with dismay.

Jim Jordan, who has represented Allen County for a total of 14 years – eight in Congress, and another six in the Ohio Senate – received 59 percent of the vote in his 2012 race and, having won close to 70 percent in previous years, is considered a lock for re-election. His latest

opponent, Janet Garrett, is a 61-year-old kindergarten teacher from Oberlin, his district's one liberal stronghold, who got herself on the ballot as a write-in candidate after no other Democrat was willing to throw their hat in the ring. Garrett told me this summer that she's running to give her district's voters "a choice," though having raised just \$30,000 – \$10,000 short of what she'd need to do a mass mailing – it's hard to tell how effective she'll be. Jordan has nearly \$1 million cash on hand, much of it coming from corporate interests and deep-pocketed donors like the Koch Brothers, and seems to draw a blank when I mention Garrett, as if he's not even sure who she is.

I meet Jordan at his Capitol Hill office in mid-September, a week or so before Congress officially breaks to allow its members to go home to campaign. He seems unfazed by the prospect, too busy, it appears, with more pressing issues such as the first public hearing of the Select Committee on Benghazi, of which Jordan is one of seven Republican members, and the recent debate on whether to arm the Syrian rebels, something Jordan, who believes Obama has a "weak" strategy against ISIS, voted against. A short, square-built man in shirt-sleeves and a yellow tie, he barrels into his smallish office in the Longworth House Office Building and maneuvers himself into a chair. Jordan was an all-state high school and Division One college wrestling champion, and he still moves like a jock, angling for a position where he can keep one eye on me and the other on the clock. The office is his D.C. home: He keeps a cot in a closet, explains one of his aides, along with a few pillows and a blanket, and a couple of shirts, and showers and shaves at the House gym. In keeping with that low-fi existence, Jordan's décor is similarly Spartan. Furnished with just a desk, a modest leather couch, a table and a few chairs, his office has none of the requisite political trophies or plaques; no photos of the congressman posed with D.C. luminaries; not even any Ohio memorabilia. On his bookshelf, he has displayed a pair of red-white-and-blue sneakers, a gift from the 2012 Olympic wrestling team, as well as a long row of family photos and a framed copy of HR 2560, the failed 2011 balanced budget bill that Jordan co-sponsored. A huge volume titled *The History of Collegiate Wrestling* leans against the bookcase, easily the most prominent book in the room. On his desk is a used Tupperware container, apparently left over from lunch.

Jordan has been described to me by a number of Ohioans as "Tea Party before Tea Party was cool." He is decidedly uncool – his favorite musician is Brad Paisley – which makes him the ideal specimen of what the Tea Party purports to be. A devout Christian, he made banning or restricting access to abortion one of his centerpiece issues while in the Ohio Statehouse, and has pushed that agenda in Washington – he has co-sponsored at least nine bills in the House that would restrict access to abortion, including support for the Personhood bill. But in keeping with the GOP's new approach to neutralizing the Tea Party's more extremist tendencies, Jordan has recently been playing down the social issues to focus on the economy, which, along with "fighting for middle-class families," is why he insists he came to Washington in the first place.

"One of the reasons I love the House of Representatives," he tells me, with total earnestness, "is because the founders, in their wisdom, wanted the House to be the body closest to the people." And Jordan makes a point of fulfilling that wish, returning home every weekend to his house outside of Urbana, near where he was born and raised. He goes home to see his family, he says, "but also because that's what I'm supposed to do. I'm supposed to go home and see my constituents, they're supposed to have an opportunity to yell at me, they're supposed to have an opportunity to ask me questions and give me advice, and then I'm supposed to come back here, listen to the debate, ask the questions, talk to my colleagues and make a decision on their behalf. That is an amazing system." Jordan tells me that what he hears most from his constituents is tremendous frustration with Washington. "I believe the average family believes this town is rigged against them. And I think they're right."

Jordan has made a myriad of public statements about what he's called the "arrogant and out-of-control federal government," a perspective that – be it rooted in genuine frustration or in the perspective of right-wing media – has now become synonymous with the white working class, a group that's held fast to these ideals since the Reagan era. Jordan's own father, a longtime plant worker for General Motors and a member of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, was a Reagan Democrat who, having switched parties in 1980, never swung back. In the mid-Nineties, he retired from GM and started a business making handcrafted bows for hunters. He now listens to Rush Limbaugh. "He's as conservative as they come," says Jordan.

In Jordan's view, Lima's future lies in the businesses it already has: oil, chemicals, health care, construction. I mention alternative energy and Shawn Smith, who – just as Jordan says his father once advised him as a kid – worked hard, set a goal and trusted that good things would happen. Except, in Smith's case they didn't. "For every one of those examples, we have examples of what we do have happening," Jordan says. "I'm 100 percent for green energy. I'm for ethanol, I'm for wind power, that's all great. But I don't believe in picking winners and losers by giving tax breaks to some industries and not to others. You don't want bureaucrats in Washington deciding what works and what doesn't; you want people to decide in the grand marketplace we have."

The problem with this argument, though, is that government exists in part to help manage economic crisis. Nobel Prize-winning economist Joseph Stiglitz, whose 2012 book, *The Price of Inequality*, deconstructs the effects of income inequality, believes the only way out of the current crisis is a comprehensive overhaul of the economic structure. "And that's where government has failed," he says. "We have a few jobs in high-tech, but even Apple has only about 50,000 jobs, more than half of which are retail. That's not going to create a middle-class economy. You've got huge jobs in North Dakota from fracking, but that's not going to create the millions of jobs you need. Meanwhile, the right wing is condemning these communities to death. Their answer is the market will take care of it. Well, we've been watching, and it hasn't happened."

Many of the people I meet in Lima tell me they feel adrift in the new economy. This is particularly true for those who have always hoped for more than just life in a sluggish industrial town. Nate McKenzie, 33, is a bibliophile and film buff who has a dream of starting an independent movie theater in Lima. This is the type of alternative business that advocates talk about when they speak of "re-imagining" a community, and McKenzie, who grew up in Bath, envisions Lima as a cultural mecca. It's not an unrealistic idea: With three local colleges, and another three or four in the area, there are thousands of students, and with the right incentive, the city could be a draw for young creatives who might be priced out of Columbus' rising rents. But, given his financial situation, McKenzie is almost certain it will never happen. "I have bad credit, and I don't have anything to put up against a loan, and nobody knows me," he says. "I'd like to be more than just a server, but that's just not available in this town."



Nate McKenzie (with son Ezra) wanted to make Lima a cultural mecca. (Photo: Geordie Wood)

McKenzie, an aspiring writer who blogs in verse and writes reviews for a small culture website, - TheCultDen.com, has spent much of his adult life in the service industry. He graduated from Bath High School in 2000, and for the next six years held a series of jobs, mainly as a waiter. Hoping to chart a new path, he enrolled at Ohio State's Lima campus in 2006, but dropped out after two years, having decided that college was a waste of time. Maybe if he'd majored in something like business, it would be different. "But I was an English major, which meant I'd wind up being a server anyway," he says. Since 2008, he's bounced around, working at a Verizon store, a Sprint store, a couple of factories, none for very long. He made decent money for a while at Olive Garden and Ruby Tuesday, but that was all prior to 2010. "Things got really bad after the recession," he says. "It's been one shit job after another."

McKenzie currently does tech support in the call center at WatchTV, an Ohio Internet-cable provider. He works an average of 24 hours a week and makes \$9 an hour. Though he'd like to work 40 hours a week, he's been told repeatedly that full-time employment isn't available, and even at 30 hours, his company would have to pay him benefits. To make ends meet, Mc-Kenzie recently applied for a second job, as an assembly-line worker at a factory. But that job, through a temp agency that didn't even tell him what factory it was, paid just \$8 an hour and had a "flexible" schedule, which made it impossible to hold two jobs at the same time. "A lot of these factories will have you come in at 7 a.m. and let you know if they need you for the day," he says. "Who can do anything with that?"

McKenzie is still looking for a second job. In the meantime, he's making a little more than \$200 per week at WatchTV, half of which goes for taxes and child support for his eight-year-old son, Ezra. He can't afford a car, so he walks or bikes everywhere. Until recently, he was sleeping on his father's couch, but he now lives with a friend and pays \$350 per month in rent. After food, utilities and his cellphone bill, he has basically nothing left. So he sells his plasma twice a week, which nets him another \$50. He estimates that his total debt from student loans and other bills is \$20,000, though, who knows. The chance of his ever getting out of debt, he says, is pretty much nil, "though there's always hope," he says, laughing.

I meet McKenzie at a party at the home of his friends Marc and Carissa Reinicke. Like McKenzie, the Reinicks, both 37, were English majors at OSU at Lima. Unlike McKenzie, Marc Reinicke comes from a wealthy Lima family – his father was a former counsel for Westinghouse – which gave him options, as well as a certain amount of financial leverage. In 2009, the couple spotted an opportunity when a large supplier of wine and craft beer closed its Lima operation, and they decided to open their own specialty wine and beer shop. Today, Vino Bellissimo is in its third location in upscale Shawnee and, with its attached patio and beer garden, attracts an eclectic crowd of young professionals in their thirties and forties, as well as younger wage slaves like McKenzie, who comes for the conversation as much as for the craft beer.



Marc and Carissa Reinicke opened a wine and beer shop in Lima. (Photo: Geordie Wood)

The Reinicks are progressives, something of a rarity in Lima, but they try to keep it under wraps. "You don't come out and say you're a Democrat if you want to be successful," says Marc, a bearded, easy-going guy who says he had one customer who, assuming they were all on the same page, told him point-blank that he'd never spend money in a "liberal" establishment.

"People really say that here," Carissa, a dark-haired, somewhat hippie-ish woman, marvels. "My grandmother had a parakeet that said, 'Vote Republican' – put it that way," says Marc. "To be anything left of the far right is really frowned upon here."

McKenzie has a different political stance from his friends. If anything, he says, he's an anarchist. He doesn't even bother voting, which he sees as his way of voicing displeasure with the system. "It's a waste of time when everything is corrupted," he says. Nor has he taken advantage of the government services he might otherwise have benefited from. He doesn't have health insurance, for instance, which he feels certain he couldn't afford even under Obamacare. Though he would probably qualify for Medicaid, McKenzie says that's not an option – though several months after we meet, he tells me he recently applied for food stamps. "It's for the sake of my son," he says. "I need to have food in the house when he comes to visit." Though he hasn't heard if he'll be accepted, McKenzie already feels ashamed. "I never thought I would seek government assistance

– I see it as a weakness," he says. "And I refuse to fall into a pattern I despise. So many people in this town are just relying on the government."

Government assistance is a hot-button issue in Lima, where more than 30 percent of the population lives below the poverty line. Since 2008, the number of Allen County residents receiving food stamps has nearly doubled, from 8,973 in 2008 to 16,676 today, even as jobs have slowly returned to the area. In part, this is due to the stigma around food stamps having lessened thanks to the recession, but in general, "it's a matter of wages," says Fox of the Lima Allen Council on Community Affairs. "Are their wages enough to provide for their family and pay for their bills? No."

According to the self-sufficiency standard for Allen County, a single mother with two kids needs a job paying \$21.41 an hour in order to make ends meet and not need government assistance. That amounts to \$44,532 per year. Allen County's self-sufficiency standard for a single adult is \$8.39 per hour, or \$17,451 per year "and that assumes full-time work," says Fox. Most of the jobs available to working-class Limans aren't full-time work, and many pay below the self-sufficiency standard. "The groupthink among the middle class is that all low-income people are taking advantage of the system, and that's not the case," she says. "The real question is, 'What kind of system do we want?' Right now, we have a broken system."

McKenzie wouldn't argue with that fact, though, having grown up partially on food stamps, he insists the system is being manipulated. His divorced father worked sporadically during McKenzie's childhood, and since 2009 he has received disability, which McKenzie thinks he doesn't need. "I love my father, he is one of my best friends, but he is lazy. He gets disability, food stamps, and he has a plasma TV with all the HD channels." Several of McKenzie's relatives are also on disability, which he blames on the welfare system itself. "They've all been ushered through the process of how to get it, and so they take advantage. It's become the American dream to get everything for free without having to do a lot of work."

Carissa looks tired whenever McKenzie gets on his soapbox about welfare, which he does a lot. "I don't think anybody's like, 'Oh, I'm going to kick back. I'm not going to work.' I don't think they see another alternative," she says. Carissa, who now lives in a gigantic midcentury ranch house in Shawnee with Marc, whom she married in 2007, and their three children, comes from a different socio-economic background than her husband. An Air Force brat, she moved around as a child, before settling permanently in Spencerville, Ohio, a rural community about 15 miles west of Lima, when she was 10. At 23, she had a son, now 14, but soon split with the boy's father. She worked her way through college waitressing, but at one point, when her hours were cut back, she was forced to go on public assistance. "It wasn't something that I talked about," she says. "I wasn't taking advantage of anything. I had to have insurance for my son. I had to feed my son. My only other option was to drop out of school."

Most of the young middle- and working-class women I meet in Lima had children very young, many before they were 18; Allen County has one of the highest teen pregnancy rates in Ohio. And yet, Ohio has been at the forefront of recent attacks on reproductive rights. The state has some of the most restrictive abortion laws in the country, and its most recent budget placed \$1.4 million in funding for Planned Parenthood at risk, while allocating money to Christian-based "crisis pregnancy centers." Lima's one family-planning clinic offering limited abortion services recently closed down; today, a search for abortion clinics in Lima will turn up a pro-life organization called Heartbeat of Lima. Though the county health department offers free birth control, a woman wanting an abortion must travel more than an hour to Toledo, to a clinic that,

thanks to restrictions that have closed almost half of Ohio's abortion clinics in the past year, may soon be forced to shut its doors. "People don't talk about abortion in Lima," says Carissa.

McKenzie's friend Brittany Dukes, a platinum-blond 24-year-old hair stylist raised in a conservative Christian household in nearby Delphos, got pregnant at 17. It was "purely accidental," she tells me, sipping a glass of wine on the Reinickes' patio. She'd been taking the pill for two years – "to regulate my periods," she says – but just as she was in the middle of her senior year at a local vocational school, she got pregnant anyway. Her mother was "disappointed," Dukes says, smiling in a way that suggests her mother was a bit more than that. But Dukes was by no means the only person she knew in this predicament: Of the 19 girls in her senior class, seven or eight others were pregnant, too. "Most of the girls seemed excited about it," she said. "They all seemed to come from a family that almost encouraged it. It was like they grew up that way – no one was reprimanded for it; it was just how it was."

For Dukes, it was a struggle. She'd wanted to give her baby up for adoption, but her mother convinced her to keep her daughter, Aliana, now five. So while her friends went off to college, Dukes worked double shifts at Ruby Tuesday and Blockbuster Movies and also got public assistance. "I used food stamps, WIC, I got help with day care, and I worked two, three jobs at a time," she says. A lot of the girls she knew in school did the same, and many are still waitressing at Denny's or Applebees. Dukes, however, used welfare as a leg up while she worked toward her ultimate goal of opening her own hair salon, which she did last year. Her business grossed \$64,000 during its first year and had made almost that much by the middle of 2014. "I saw welfare as help for now, not a way of life," she says. "The problem is, when you're a single mom, you get a lot more help than if you're just a 19-year-old who's struggling. Nearly everybody I graduated with who had a baby currently has a situation where they have multiple children. I have one classmate who is currently on her fifth child. And she just stays at home – that's her lifestyle. She gets government assistance. It pisses me off."

Dukes complains that some of her customers who receive government assistance use it on luxury items. "They don't work, and they're walking in with, like, Michael Kors purses and getting their hair done." On the other hand, the group agrees, just about everyone is cheating the government, somehow. "Either I'm using government assistance to get a Samsung Five, or I'm taking advantage of tax loopholes and paying 15 percent of my taxes instead of 35," says Marc. "Everyone is taking advantage of the system."

"The problem is that if you grow up in, say, a lower-income family, your options are extremely limited," says Carissa. It doesn't matter what kind of grades you get in high school, she notes, as college is now a luxury for most people. And even with a college degree, then what? "It used to be you go to college, get married, have children – you did the right things, and then you'd be guaranteed some kind of future," she says. "But the whole pull-yourself-up-by-the-bootstraps American-dream thingy . . . that's kind of mythology at this point. To me, it's like a winning lottery ticket."

I think of the Chaffinses, who embodied that ideal until, suddenly, they didn't. Even Dewey, the patriarch who'd set out from Kentucky intent on changing his family's fortunes, was defeated in the end. Soon after he retired in 2002, his company's Lima division went bankrupt and workers lost most of their pensions. That September, six months after retiring, Dewey died of lung cancer at 62, though his son Scott believes he also suffered a broken heart. "Losing his and Mom's pensions, that was tragic for him," says Scott. "Everything he'd worked for all his life was gone."

At the end of July, Scott finally landed a job, managing the lab at the new ethanol plant off of I-75. It pays "in the mid-\$60,000 range, which is good for Lima," he says, though it's only half of what he made at the refinery seven years ago for essentially the same kind of work. Still, Scott feels blessed. "A lot of other people have to take what they can get, and what they get is bad," he says. But that's how it is now, he adds. "You have to claw for whatever you can get."

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