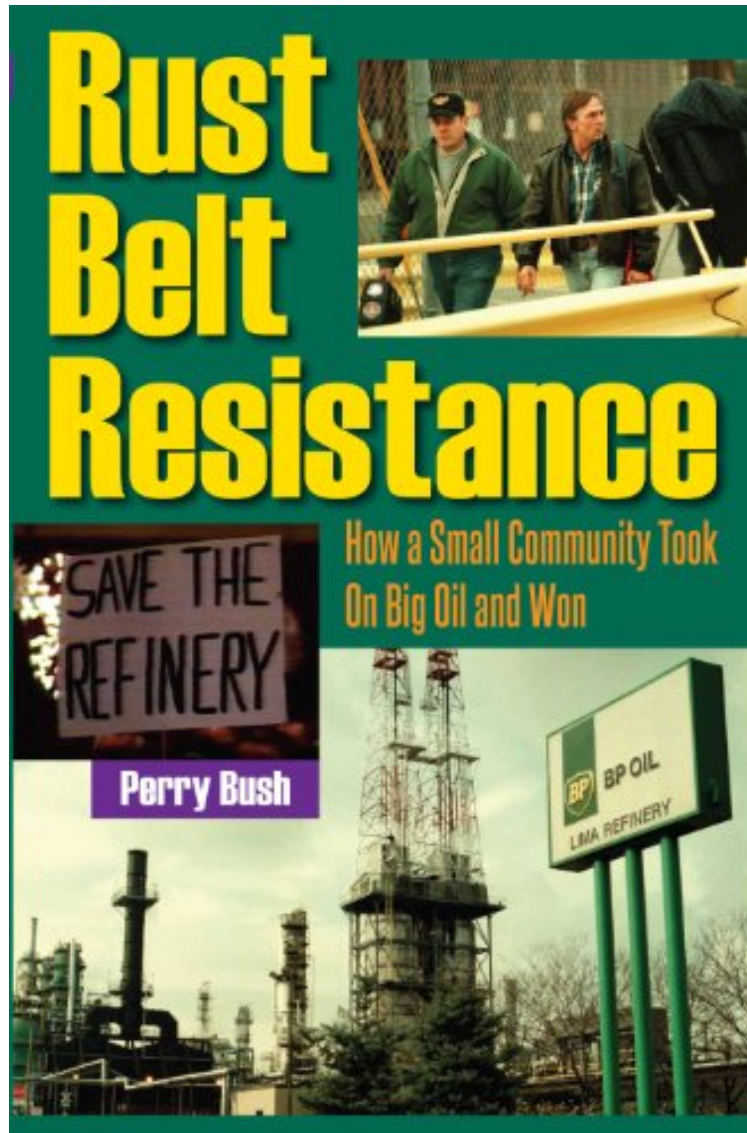


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# Rust Belt Resistance: How a Small Community Took on Big Oil and Won

*Perry Bush*

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**Perry Bush : Rust Belt Resistance: How a Small Community Took on Big Oil and Won** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Rust Belt Resistance: How a Small Community Took on Big Oil and Won:

6 of 6 people found the following review helpful. An important and highly readable bookBy CustomerPerry Bush's Rust Belt Resistance: How a Small Community Took on Big Oil and Won (Kent State University Press, 2012) deserves broad readership and serious consideration for original historical investigation. It's an astonishing piece of

work. Bush, professor of American history, Bluffton College, demonstrates mastery of a broad range of critical issues in American economic, social, and political history over the last century. Equally important, he is a terrific storyteller. The result is a book that is compelling reading for both ordinary citizens as well as scholars. *Rust Belt Resistance* is timely, beginning with a simple challenge - can a relatively small town hope to match the power of a huge, international corporation, British Petroleum in this case? In answer, Bush frames his narrative in two ways. First, he reviews how American jurisprudence over the past 120 years has made the corporation a highly privileged entity, indeed, a person. That review, in itself, should inform public discourse about the direction our democracy seems to be taking. Second, he recounts how Lima, Ohio, once a true economic powerhouse on the American prairie, lost most of its industrial base after World War II, as one major company after another downsized, or pulled out of town or simply went out of business. Bush devotes the bulk of his work to describing the battle of wills (late-1980s to late-1990s) between a corporate powerhouse and a small city. The issue was whether to shut down the then and still very successful Lima refinery. Using both public and inside information, he demonstrates that the actions of key BP executives, both in Cleveland - then the company's American headquarters - and in London, were often cynical, even duplicitous. Bush recounts, too, how the people of Lima, their Mayor (a still-serving progressive in a very conservative community), the right-wing editor of the local newspaper, the union, and even a few BP executives, who disagreed with the company's actions, formed an unlikely alliance to ensure that the refinery would remain open. The campaign they waged was savvy, tenacious and, despite many setbacks over the years, successful. Together, they saved hundreds of jobs and preserved the base for the region's revitalization. The central question driving *Rust Belt Resistance* is open-ended. Can other communities take on large private conglomerates with any hope of winning when the economy's rules so favor corporate power? In describing the dynamics of the struggle between Lima, Ohio and BP, with great clarity and meticulous scholarship, Perry Bush offers hope. It is a hope rooted in our founding promise - that citizens, pulling together, can prevail and, in doing so, bend the moral arc of the universe a bit closer toward justice. On those grounds, I consider Bush's book a gift to the nation. Lance C. Buhl, Ph.D, American History ('69 Harvard University); Program Officer, Manager, then Director, Corporate Contributions, BP America (1981-93) July 2012

0 people found the following review helpful. He was a brilliant, non college man who worked himself to one ... By Brenda Watters The refinery is in my near by town and I was thrilled to see that my deceased husband was part of this story. He was a brilliant, non college man who worked himself to one of the top positions in the refinery. He was always thinking of what to do and how he could improve the refinery; he was constantly worried about the employees and their safety. Perry Bush did a great job getting the facts from the people involved. My cousin was in the Caribbean sitting on a beach; his daughters bought him this book because he was in the oil industry. While reading the book he came across the story about Steve Watters ...he looked at his wife and with a loud excited voice he said, "This book has my cousin in it". She texted me and asked me if Steve worked at the refinery, I said yes, she said the book has a story about him. I immediately bought it for myself and the children. So happy Perry wrote this.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Inspiring, valuable -- and a page-turner! By Mike Lackey *Rust Belt Resistance* is the inspiring story of a small Midwestern industrial city fighting to hold its place in a global economy ruled by forces far beyond its control. Specifically, it is the story of Mayor David Berger and an unlikely coalition of allies and their tenacious years-long battle to keep British Petroleum from closing its Lima refinery and eliminating hundreds of badly-needed jobs. Perry Bush turns the tale into a true page-turner, and he does a terrific job of getting to the untold stories behind the headlines. I worked for *The Lima News* during the years this drama was played out and I was astonished at how much I didn't know before reading this book. *Rust Belt Resistance* is both a first-rate work of history and a tremendous job of detective work. In our increasingly global economy, it is also full of lessons that will be of value to communities across the country and beyond.

Since the 1970s, urban communities across the country have had to face the wrenching process of economic restructuring. As the media announce the latest plant closings and politicians slam each other for outsourcing jobs, events are too often framed with a kind of economic determinism that denies agency to individual communities. To what degree can industrial cities in such an era still imagine themselves as authors of their own economic fates? In *Rust Belt Resistance*, author Perry Bush explores this question by focusing on the small midwestern city of Lima, Ohio. When British Petroleum (BP) announced late in 1996 that it would close and demolish its refinery there; which at the time employed 500 people with a \$31.5 million payroll; economic desperation loomed. Lima's story, however, deviated from the usual sad narrative of other Midwest plant closures and began to assume a drama of its own. Led by an unlikely cast of characters; an uncommonly stubborn set of civic leaders, a conservative local newspaper publisher, and the city's determined and progressive mayor; Lima refused to take its place quietly on the industrial scrap heap. Instead of collapsing in despair, the refinery's workers continued to function as a model of industrial efficiency and hard work, partly in a determined effort to build profitability and preserve their jobs and also because hard work was the essence and tradition of this blue-collar town. In a story replete with a number of dramatic twists and turns, Bush describes how this collection of individuals led a resistant multinational corporation to a financial deal it could not refuse, located an acceptable buyer for the refinery,

and saved not only a sizable share of the city's financial foundation but also the community's identity and self-respect. *Rust Belt Resistance* is a valuable instructional lesson for business and community leaders, scholars, and anyone interested in the continuing viability of American industrial cities.

**About the Author** Perry Bush is professor of history at Bluffton University, a short drive from Lima, Ohio, and is a local political activist. He received his Ph.D. in history from Carnegie Mellon University and is the author of two previous books, along with thirty articles and book reviews in both the academic and popular press.