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From Broken Cities, a Plea for Grassroots Fixes.

In “The Fight to Save the Town,” legal scholar Michelle Wilde Anderson shows how four poverty-struck communities fought back against austerity measures.

When Stockton, California, declared bankruptcy in 2012, it was the largest municipal failure in American history. But it wasn’t exactly a surprise: By the late 20th century, the city had already become a symbol of urban decline. Once a hub of canning, farming and manufacturing jobs, Stockton saw its major employers begin to leave the region; the city’s tax base evaporated and housing values plummeted.

As Michelle Wilde Anderson recounts in her new book, [“The Fight to Save the Town: Reimagining Discarded America,”](#) Stockton’s economic woes deepened in the wake of the Great Recession: Between 2007 and 2011, the city was saddled with 20% unemployment and suffered a higher foreclosure rate than any city in the nation apart from Detroit.

Since it couldn’t keep up with its outlandishly overleveraged bond payments, Stockton began slashing emergency, health and recreation services; in that era it cut almost \$90 million in public spending. Even as the nation recovered after 2015, joblessness rates in Stockton remained elevated and fully a quarter of people under 18 lived below the poverty line. Homicide rates soared, as did civilian killings by police.

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Bloomberg CityLab

by Michael Friedrich

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