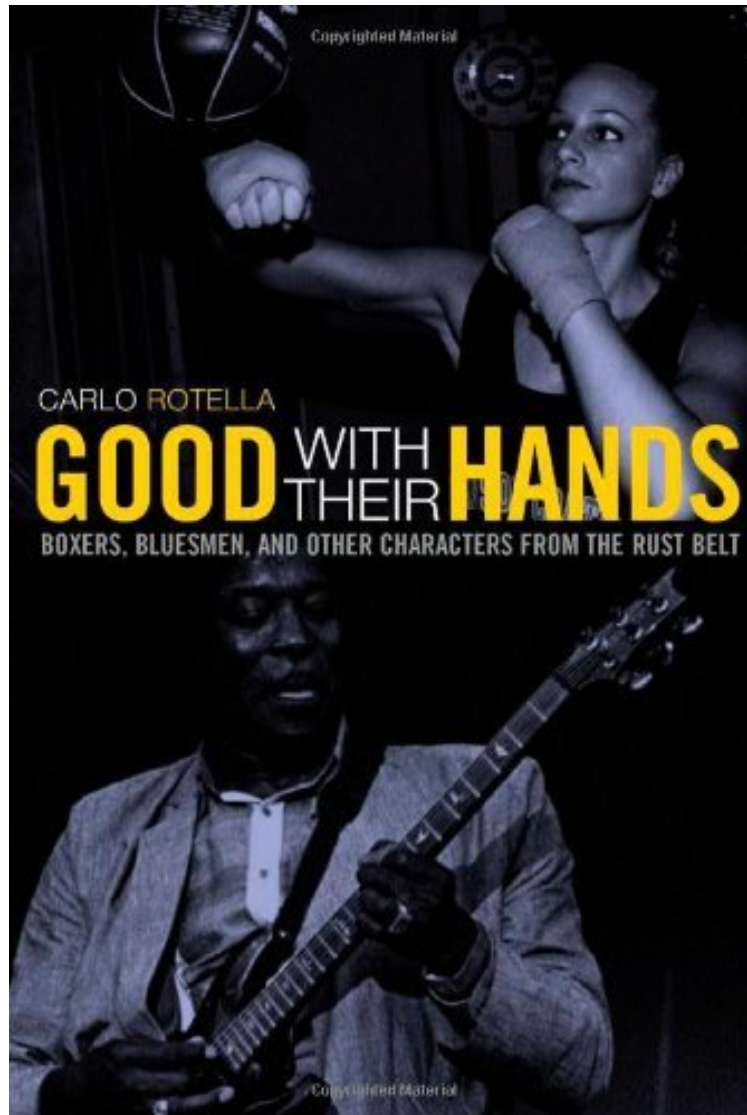


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# Good with Their Hands: Boxers, Bluesmen, and Other Characters from the Rust Belt

Carlo Rotella

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**Carlo Rotella : Good with Their Hands: Boxers, Bluesmen, and Other Characters from the Rust Belt** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Good with Their Hands: Boxers, Bluesmen, and Other Characters from the Rust Belt:

This eloquent, streetwise book is a paean to America's Rust Belt and a compelling exploration of four milieus caught

up in a great transformation of city life. With loving attention to detail and a fine sense of historical context, Carlo Rotella explores women's boxing in Erie, Pennsylvania; Buddy Guy and the blues scene in Chicago; police work and crime stories in New York City, especially as they converged in the making of the movie *The French Connection*; and attempts at urban renewal in the classic mill city of Brockton, Massachusetts. Navigating through accrued layers of cultural, economic, and personal history, Rotella shows how stories of city life can be found in a boxing match, a guitar solo, a chase scene in a movie, or a landscape. The stories he tells dramatize the coming of the postindustrial era in places once defined by their factories, a sweeping set of changes that has remade the form and meaning of American urbanism. A native of the Rust Belt whose own life resonates with these stories, Rotella has gone to the home turfs of his characters, hanging out in boxing gyms and blues clubs, riding along with cops and moviemakers, discussing the future of Brockton with a visionary artist and a pitbull-fancying janitor who both plan to save the city's soul. These people make culture with their hands, and hands become an expressive metaphor for Rotella as he traces the links between their individual talents and the urban scenes in which they flourish. His writing elegantly connects what happens on the street to the larger story of urban transformation, especially the shift from a way of life that demanded individuals be "good with their hands" to one that depends on the intellectual and social skills fostered by formal education and service work. Strong feelings emerge in this book about what has been lost and gained in the long, slow aging-out of the industrial city. But Rotella's journey through the streets has its ultimate reward in discovering deep-rooted instances of what he calls "truth and beauty in the Rust Belt."

From Booklist Rotella, a Boston College professor, undertakes to draw a connection between four people who are good with their hands ("a deceptively unsimple virtue"). Concentrating on cities in the Rust Belt, he profiles a female boxer in Pennsylvania, a blues musician in Chicago, a New York cop-turned-movie-producer, and a Massachusetts landscape artist. But these aren't merely biographies of interesting people; they're portraits of the environments that produced them. The author's profile of bluesman Buddy Guy, for example, includes a capsule history of the Chicago music scene. His profile of Sonny Grosso, the cop-producer, includes a long look at the making of *The French Connection*, the gritty film in which New York itself is a major character. In each case, the author uses the notion of being good with one's hands to suggest an ability to interact with the landscape. It's a tricky conceit, but in Rotella's hands, it helps us understand the way that music, art, film, and even sports reflect both the participants and their environments. A smart, straightforward, and wholly engaging book, delightfully free of jargon. David Pitt Copyright copy; American Library Association. All rights reserved "Carlo Rotella might or might not be good with his hands, but to borrow Lyle Lovett's phrase, he has 'lights in his fingers.'" Rotella has written a well-crafted book--a meditation, really--on the fate of industrial culture in a postindustrial age.--"Chicago Tribune From the Inside Flap" This is a brilliant study, warm and frequently thrilling, of an inspired combination of subjects. Postindustrial American urban culture has found its great poet-theorist in Carlo Rotella."mdash;William Finnegan, author of *Cold New World: Growing Up in a Harder Country* "In the hands of others, we have learned much about the process of deindustrialization. Rotella powerfully brings the reader to the core of these socio-economic transitions in a manner that is almost palpable in its ability to connect the reader to any one of his subjects. Rotella held me, taught me, opened my eyes to an appreciation of new ways of seeing. The writing is electric, the broader conceptual framework is rich and complex, and his touch is deft throughout the book."mdash;Nick Salvatore, coauthor of *We All Got History: The Memory Books of Amos Webber*