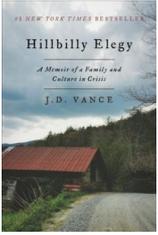


Hillbilly Elegy



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Many in the media and politics keep trying to figure out why our new President attracts so many Rust Belt and Appalachian voters. This memoir of a young man's coming of age in both regions may offer some insight.

At only thirty-one, J.D. Vance admits he's way too young to have penned a memoir. He hasn't done anything extraordinary (though he did graduate from Yale Law School, a major accomplishment for a kid from a single-parent home in a working-class town in Ohio, where many did not finish high school).

Vance writes most vividly of Jackson, his dirt-poor but beautiful ancestral home in the mountains of eastern Kentucky. He also describes his people: a great-grandmother who once killed someone, and his own Mamaw who often threatens to do the same to her husband when he comes home drunk. In fact, J.D. relates, one night he saves his Pawpaw after Mamaw poured gasoline over him and lights a match.

Though the family moves to Middletown, Ohio?anewss many do, for the jobs there?they make the trek back to Eastern Kentucky on weekends and on holidays. But J.D.'s family dynamics are not pretty. His mom, who divorces his father when he's young, then introduces a whole slew of stepfathers; one of them adopts J.D. and spends a lot of time with him, until his mother forces him to break contact. But eventually there's good news: as an older child, J.D. reconnects with his stepdad and, along with younger stepbrothers and stepsisters, the two share many happy occasions.

As a nurse, J.D.'s mom has ready access to many drugs, and soon becomes an addict, often leaving him and his younger sister alone for long periods. Soon, the pressure and lack of attention cause J.D. to start failing in school?where classmates mock his hillbilly background, making him into a tough fist-fighter. One day, while J.D. and his mother argue in the car, things rocket out of control. Speeding and driving erratically, Mom threatens to kill them both by crashing into a guardrail. When she finally stops by the side of the road, J.D. runs away, soon finding himself under the care of the authorities. But out of love for his mother, he lies to the officials who want to help him, refusing to rat on her.

Mamaw fills in for J.D.'s mother, becoming a constant, mostly positive presence in his life (aside, perhaps, from the fire incident and a stellar ?cussing? ability). Most importantly, Mamaw insists on excellence at school: under her tutelage, in fact, it becomes the only option.

A rich account of a unique childhood, *Hillbilly Elegy* also provides a lawyer's take on our current society, often from a conservative perspective, including criticism of those ?on the dole.? Together with Vance's primary theme?beating all odds and making it despite a rough environment?the two perspectives make for a heck of a tale.

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Posted by Dory L. on May 23, 2017

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