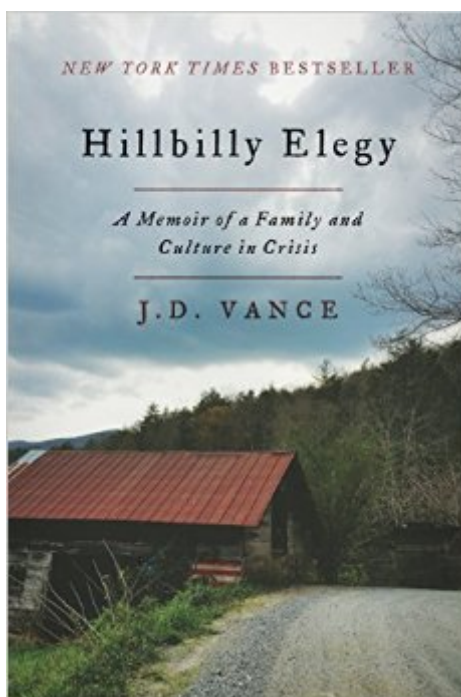


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# Hillbilly Elegy: A Memoir Of A Family And Culture In Crisis



## Synopsis

#1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER "You will not read a more important book about America this year." "The Economist" "A riveting book." "The Wall Street Journal" "Essential reading." "David Brooks," "New York Times" From a former marine and Yale Law School graduate, a powerful account of growing up in a poor Rust Belt town that offers a broader, probing look at the struggles of America's white working class. *Hillbilly Elegy* is a passionate and personal analysis of a culture in crisis—that of white working-class Americans. The decline of this group, a demographic of our country that has been slowly disintegrating over forty years, has been reported on with growing frequency and alarm, but has never before been written about as searingly from the inside. J. D. Vance tells the true story of what a social, regional, and class decline feels like when you were born with it hung around your neck. The Vance family story begins hopefully in postwar America. J. D.'s grandparents were "red dirt" poor and in love, and moved north from Kentucky's Appalachia region to Ohio in the hopes of escaping the dreadful poverty around them. They raised a middle-class family, and eventually their grandchild (the author) would graduate from Yale Law School, a conventional marker of their success in achieving generational upward mobility. But as the family saga of *Hillbilly Elegy* plays out, we learn that this is only the short, superficial version. Vance's grandparents, aunt, uncle, sister, and, most of all, his mother, struggled profoundly with the demands of their new middle-class life, and were never able to fully escape the legacy of abuse, alcoholism, poverty, and trauma so characteristic of their part of America. Vance piercingly shows how he himself still carries around the demons of their chaotic family history. A deeply moving memoir with its share of humor and vividly colorful figures, *Hillbilly Elegy* is the story of how upward mobility really feels. And it is an urgent and troubling meditation on the loss of the American dream for a large segment of this country.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

There is a lot to take in here, even for someone that's seen this life up close in many of its many guises. While ostensibly about the particular culture of the West Virginia Scots-Irish underclass, anyone that has seen white poverty in America's flyover states will recognize much of what is written about here. It is a life on the very edge of plausibility, without the sense of extra-family community that serves as a stabilizing agent in many first-generation immigrant communities or communities of color. Drugs, crime, jail time, abusive interactions without any knowledge of other forms of interaction, children growing up in a wild mix of stoned mother care, foster care, and care by temporary "boyfriends," and in general, an image of life on the edge of survival where even the heroes are distinctly flawed for lack of knowledge and experience of any other way of living. This is a story that many of the "upwardly mobile middle class" in the coastal areas, often so quick to judge the lifestyles and politics of "those people" in middle America, has no clue about. I speak from experience as someone that grew up in the heartland but has spent years in often elite circles on either coast. Two things struck me most about this book. First, the unflinching yet not judgmental portrayal of the circumstances and of the people involved. It is difficult to write on this subject without either glossing over the ugliness and making warm and fuzzy appeals to idealism and human nature, Hollywood style, or without on the other hand descending into attempts at political persuasion and calls to activism. This book manages to paint the picture, in deeply moving ways, without committing either sin, to my eye.

J D Vance is a hillbilly. He comes from a long line of hillbillies and although he grew up in Middletown, Ohio, his roots are in Kentucky "hollers" that are as close to Middletown as Route 23 can make them. He grew up as the son of a mother who has suffered from addiction most of her life, and his life - and that of his sister - were largely dependent on the love and care they received from their maternal grandparents. He was the first of his extended family to graduate from college, and then went on to earn a law degree from Yale University. He was also a Marine for four years of active service. Where did this hillbilly go right? And what can his success mean for others born and raised in a difficult atmosphere of drugs, fighting, and unemployment? You'll have to read his

memoir, "Hillbilly Elegy: A Memoir of a Family and a Culture in Crisis" to gain a perspective on what it's like to grow up white and disadvantaged. J.D. Vance wears the self-described Scots-Irish hillbilly title with both pride and defensiveness. Descended from a long line of Kentucky miners who eked out livings in the hollers of the state, his family was filled with prideful people quick to anger and quick to take offense at what others said. A quality of hot-headedness certainly makes decisions difficult to make and carry out. Many of these people saw economic advantages in the northern states and many settled in southern Ohio after WW2. But along with themselves, they carried the culture they grew up with in Kentucky. J.D.'s own family had a redeeming feature: the love and steadiness of his maternal grandparents, "Mamaw" and "Papaw".

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