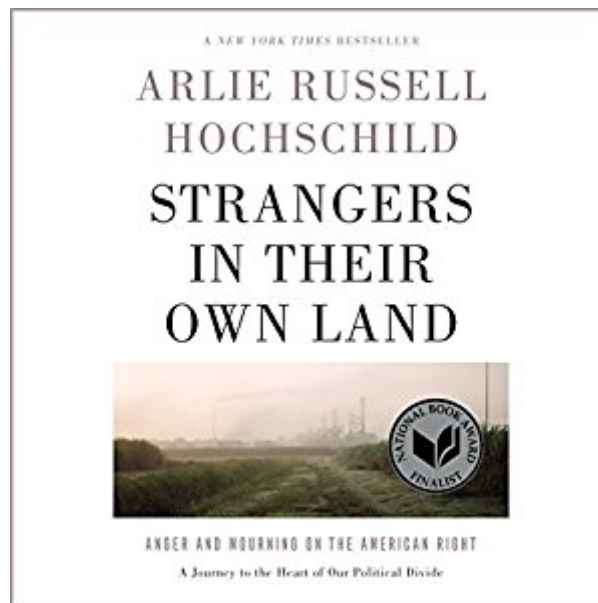




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Strangers In Their Own Land: Anger And Mourning On The American Right



Synopsis

In *Strangers in Their Own Land*, the renowned sociologist Arlie Hochschild embarks on a thought-provoking journey from her liberal hometown of Berkeley, California, deep into Louisiana bayou country - a stronghold of the conservative right. As she gets to know people who strongly oppose many of the ideas she famously champions, Hochschild nevertheless finds common ground and quickly warms to the people she meets, among them a Tea Party activist whose town has been swallowed by a sinkhole caused by a drilling accident - people whose concerns are actually ones that all Americans share: the desire for community, the embrace of family, and hopes for their children. *Strangers in Their Own Land* goes beyond the commonplace liberal idea that these are people who have been duped into voting against their own interests. Instead Hochschild finds lives ripped apart by stagnant wages, a loss of home, an elusive American dream - and political choices and views that make sense in the context of their lives. Hochschild draws on her expert knowledge of the sociology of emotion to help us understand what it feels like to live in "red" America. Along the way she finds answers to one of the crucial questions of contemporary American politics: Why do the people who would seem to benefit most from "liberal" government intervention abhor the very idea? Cover image © Richard Misrach, courtesy Fraenkel Gallery, San Francisco, Pace/MacGill Gallery, New York and Marc Selwyn Fine Art, Los Angeles

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Customer Reviews

Arlie R Hochschild is a sociology professor at UC Berkley. In this book she has compiled an interesting story of how people think on the right. She was concerned about the increasingly hostile split in our nation between two political camps. To do this, she spent about five years in Louisiana talking with people on the other side of her empathy wall as she calls it. The empathy wall is defined as an obstacle that prevents a deep understanding with another person. It can make us feel hostile or indifferent to the beliefs of others. The book is divided into four main parts: The Great Paradox, The Social Terrain, the Deep Story and the People in It, and, finally, Going Natural. She picked Louisiana because it presented an extreme example of what she called the great paradox. Statistics show that this state ranks very low in human development - it ranks 49th. In overall health, it ranked last, it ranked 48th in eight-grade reading, 49th out of 50 in eight-grade math, and 49th in child well-being. Yet these same people will spurn most federal help. Even so, 44 percent of the state's budget comes from the federal government. As Alec MacGillis of the NY Times stated, "People in red states who need Medicaid and food stamps welcome them but don't vote while those a little higher on the class ladder, white conservatives, don't need them and do vote against public dollars for the poor." When it comes to the significant pollution from the petrochemical industry, the logic is the more oil, the more jobs. The more jobs, the more prosperity, and the less need for government the better off they will be. In the subsequent chapters of Part II, the author enters the social terrain of the people to investigate how the basic institutions of industry, state government, church, and the press influenced their feelings about life. The author has many conversations with the people living there and relates the narratives for us. We get a firsthand look at just how the people think, and what influences their opinions. In Part III, the author discusses the deep story of the people. She defines this as the story feelings tell in the language of symbols, removing judgement and fact. It allows both sides to explore the subjective prism through which the party on the other side sees the world. It represents, in metaphorical form, the hopes, fears, pride, shame, resentment, and anxiety in the lives of those she talked to. We see how racism, discrimination, sexism, oppression, gender issues, class, and immigration play into their sympathies. In the final section, the author provides a contrast between the 1860s and the 1960s before delving into something called collective effervescence, referring to the state of emotional excitation felt by those who join with others they take to be fellow members of a moral biological tribe. In her travels, Hochschild was humbled by the complexity and height of the empathy wall, but felt that the people

she met in Louisiana showed that the wall could easily come down, and that there is a possibility for practical cooperation. The book concludes with three appendixes. Appendix A describes the research, Appendix B talks about the relationship of politics and pollution, and Appendix C covers fact-checking.

I took a particular interest in this book because I am actually from Lake Charles and grew up there, until leaving at 17 to join the Navy. I felt the author did a fair job in setting the scene. At first she made it sound like a primitive back-woods kind of place, but eased into a more flattering depiction once she was talking to some of the local people. That's what makes South La great anyway, the people. The book offers several interesting paradoxes: the main paradox of why people are so right-leaning, big government hating in a state that relies so heavily on federal subsidies, and also the juxtaposition of people needing big industry for their livelihoods, but also hating that they have to live with its pollution and corruption within the state government. She uses a lot of statistics and facts to make her points, and for the most part, I found it's an objective analysis of the state and explaining it's political leaning.

I have been fortunate to become familiar with the places and people of Louisiana described in this book and I can't begin to express how grateful I am to the author for delving into explaining "the great paradox". I am Californian born and raised and originally traveled to southwest Louisiana to pick up an accordion made by Mark Savoy in Eunice LA. I keep returning because the people I met, and friends I made, are as kind, gentle, open and intelligent as the folks described here. But, try as I might to reconcile the differences in our social/political views I failed....until I read this book! Thank-you Arlie Russell Hochschild for offering this bridge between the right and the left. Fellow MSNBC watchers, after reading this book I urge you to visit southwest Louisiana yourself - you will never view "the South" or Southerners, the same.

Ever since Jeffrey Sachs hit me between the eyes with a two-by-four with *The Price of Civilization* I have been devouring every book I can find on the subject of the American voter who seems to be voting the country into destruction by ignoring what is happening all around us. The spotlight seems to have settled on the segment of society described in *White Trash*, *Hillbilly Elegy*, Thomas Frank's book about Kansas and a number of others, all attempting to understand what we now see as a Trump supporter. *Strangers in Their Own Land*, in my opinion, is one of the best of these books I have read. The author is different in that she has much more compassion for her subjects and does

not sink to ridicule out of exasperation...a common reflex when people seem to be acting against all reason and prudence...but she makes a real effort to understand them and the source of this perplexing behavior. I have learned that there is no arguing with their point of view, but for those of us trying to make sure that we ourselves are not losing our minds, the statistical information in this book is clear and relevant and to me, worth the price of the book.

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