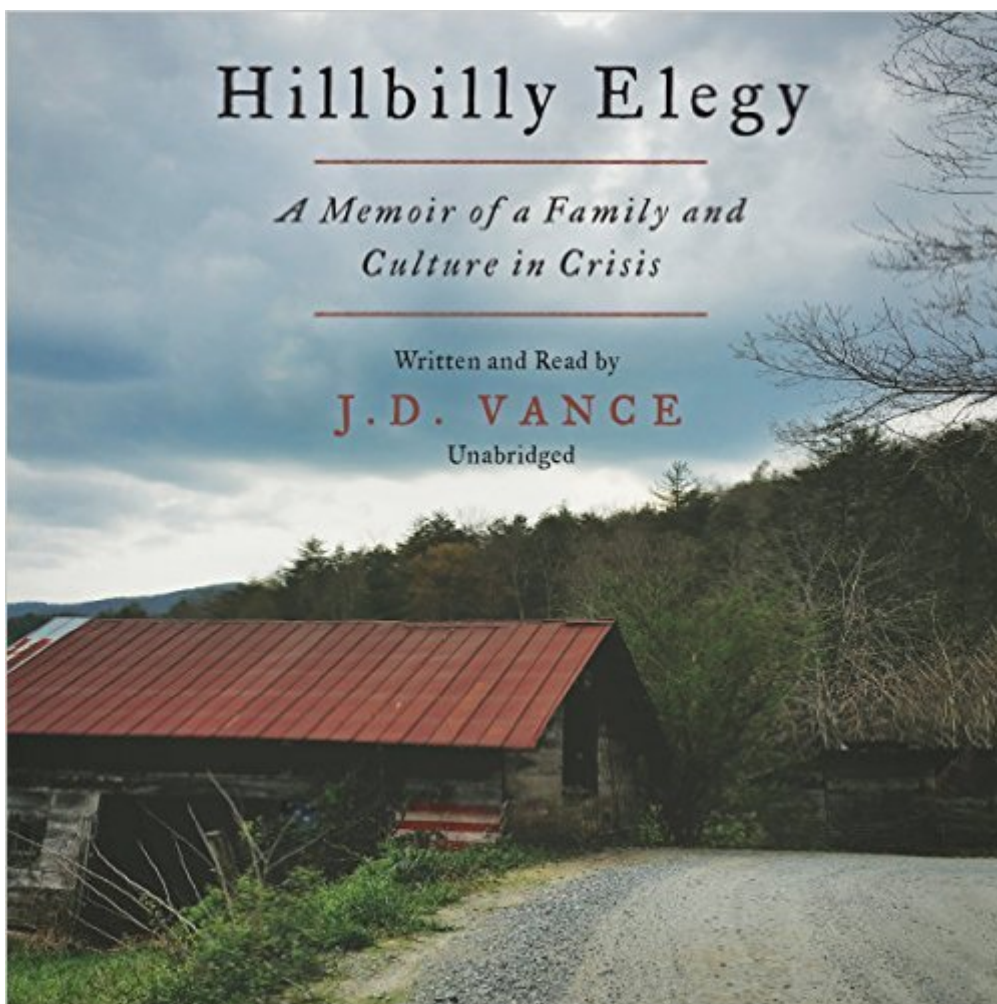


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# Hillbilly Elegy: A Memoir



## Synopsis

J. D. Vance's grandparents 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 would graduate from Yale Law School, a conventional marker of their success in achieving generational upward mobility. However, Vance's family struggled profoundly with the demands of their new middle-class life, and were never able to fully escape the legacy of poverty. A deeply moving memoir with its share of humor and 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. Second, the author's growing realization, fully present by the end of the work, that while individuals do not have total control over the shapes of their lives, their choices do in fact matter. "that even if one can't direct one's life like a film, one does always have the at least the input into life that comes from being free to make choices, every day, and in every situation. It is this latter point, combined with the general readability and writing skill in evidence here, that earns five stars from me. Despite appearances, I found this to be an inspiring book. I came away feeling empowered and edified, and almost wishing I'd become a Marine in my younger days as the author decided to do "something I've never thought or felt before. I hate to fall into self-analysis and virtue-signaling behavior in a public review, but in this case I feel compelled to say that the author really did leave with me a renewed motivation to make more of my life every day, to respect and consider the choices that confront me much more carefully, and to seize moments of opportunity with aplomb when they present themselves. Given that a Hillbilly like the author can find his way and make good choices despite the obstacles he's encountered, many readers will find themselves stripped bare and exposed "undeniably ungrateful and just a bit self-absorbed for not making more of the hand we've been dealt every day. I'm a big fan of edifying reads, and though given the subject matter one might imagine this book to be anything but, in fact this book left me significantly better than it found me in many ways. It also did much to renew my awareness of the differences that define us in this country, and of the many distinct kinds of suffering and heroism that exist. Well worth your time.

I spent most of the last 2 days reading this book and I can't stop thinking about it. I never heard of the author until I saw him on Morning Joe a few days ago but I looked him up and read several articles he wrote for various publications so I bought his book. He grew up in a family of what he describes as "hillbillies" from Kentucky but spent most of his life in Ohio. His family identified as being strongly Christian even though their behavior was frequently not particularly Christian. He was mostly raised by his grandparents along with his half-sister because his mother was an addict who

went from husband to husband and he barely knew his father. He did poorly in school and was only redeemed by the fact that a cousin pushed him into joining the Marines. From there he went to Ohio State and then to Yale Law School. He writes very directly and honestly about the problems with white, working class America and why it is in decline. While part of the problem is societal, he believes there is an internal problem that government cannot do anything about. He suggests that tribalism, mistrust of outsiders and "elites," violence and irresponsibility among family members, parents without ethics and a sense of responsibility, terrible work ethics, and an us-against-them mentality is dooming the people who live that way to becoming poorer, more addicted, and more marginalized. Excellent book and very thought-provoking.

Well written and heartfelt. I escaped inner city Baltimore (see *The Wire*) due to luck, the ability to do well in school and a few good teachers. Instead of trying to describe my early life to my family and friends, I will give them this book. Should be required high school reading. It seems that these days, the U.S. forgets that not all who live in poverty in the country are of color. Thank you, J.D.

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