



ENQUIRY

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Review: *Hillbilly Elegy*

By WILL UTZSCHNEIDER
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

The current political landscape has provoked conversations on the plight of the white working class. Many have been astonished that a billionaire like Mr. Trump has captivated the passions and anxieties of this group: some polls show him winning the support of two-thirds of white voters without a college degree.

A recently released memoir by J.D. Vance, *Hillbilly Elegy: A Memoir of a Family and Culture in Crisis*, paints a harrowing picture and tough-love analysis of white working class America. It provides a civil, sobering discussion of complex and grim issues in a year of chaos and rage. Since its release, the book has received a great deal of publicity.

On paper, J.D. Vance seems like he has had it all: he served in the Marine Corps for several years, graduated from Yale Law School, where he edited the prestigious *Yale Law Journal*, and currently works alongside Peter Thiel as a principal at a Silicon Valley investment firm.

Upon arriving at Yale Law School, however, Vance felt like an outsider: he had emerged from a chaotic hillbilly Appalachian family to the world of “the elites,” as his friends from back home call it. At one law firm recruiting dinner while at Yale, Vance is confused when offered sparkling water—he had never heard the term before.

Vance was born in Appalachian Kentucky to a family of Scots-Irish descent. “Poverty is the family tradition,” he writes. Many of his ancestors worked physical jobs—sharecroppers, coal miners, machinists, and millworkers. Many of these jobs had since vanished, leaving Vance’s beloved hometown “a hub of misery,” and forcing his family and his neighbors to relocate.

Vance’s father, whom he still doesn’t know, abandoned the family when Vance was young. His mother cycled through multiple boyfriends and struggled with opioid addiction, moving in and out of several rehabs. As a result, Vance was raised by his grandmother and, at times, his own sister.

Unfortunately, growing up in

conditions similar to the author’s is not uncommon. Issues such as domestic violence, alcohol and drug abuse, detachment from work, and familial dysfunction are rampant in many working class communities, Vance notes.

To find work, Vance’s family was forced to relocate to Ohio, home to multitudes of industrial factories. Armco Steel was the lifeblood of his vibrant yet fleeting hometown of Middletown. It employed thousands and allowed those who lacked education to earn good wages. But when Armco merged with a Japanese company, these jobs vanished and Middletown, Ohio, became “little more than a relic of American industrial glory.”

“Issues such as domestic violence, alcohol and drug abuse, detachment from work, and familial dysfunction are rampant in many working class communities”

Despite the decline of industrial jobs that served as the backbone of Middletown and other similar communities, Vance argues that the main cause of poverty

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Equality: A Hypothetical Progression

By ANDREW JUCHNO
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

A wide range of today’s social movements are motivated by a call to ensure social, political, racial, or gender equality. In the current national discourse on equality, partisan affiliation erodes substantive debate founded on principle. It is increasingly easy and convenient to dismiss a policy simply because it is associated with the opposing party. Take the minimum wage discussion as an example. I have heard fellow Republicans blithely write off the possibility of a higher minimum wage singularly because it is “too liberal.” I find this concerning; in order to have intelligent views, one must understand the main underpinnings, not blindly

This Week’s News in 140 Characters

EDITORIAL REPORT



Brett McCracken @brettmccracken · Oct 13
@austingohn @Evan_McMullin Of course! Evan's presence in this election gives me hope for a renewed/rebooted conservatism.

10 retweets, 8 likes



Nathan Hale @NH92276 · 40m
Trump is not a conservative. Just reminding you.

5 retweets, 12 likes



Grover Norquist @GroverNorquist · 14m
December 25/26, 2016 is the 25th anniversary of the End of the Soviet Union. Puts today's troubles in perspective.

2 retweets, 6 likes



Sean Hannity @seanhannity · 4h
In 10 yrs @wikileaks has gotten nothing wrong & no one's been killed bc of the info released. #freejulianassange #freeinternet for all.

9.7K retweets, 15K likes



jimgeraghty @jimgeraghty · 11h
“Thank you for joining us, viewers; please join us for the first 2020 presidential primary debate 30 days from now.”

25 retweets, 60 likes

EQUALITY *cont.*

follow Paul Ryan. As such, I would like briefly to depoliticize inequality debates with a simple example in hopes of offering an intellectual framework for the discussion of equality.

Let us consider apples and oranges. For illustrative purposes, we will assume that in the fruit market there exist only apple farmers and orange farmers, and that there is an equal demand for both fruits. Let us also assume that we want equality between apple and orange eating.

Equality of outcome—the typical aim of today’s social movements—would dictate that people eat the same number of apples and oranges annually. This is an unreasonable expectation for both apple and orange consumers. Putting aside objections of feasibility, such as production capability, there is no regulatory

“equality for the people must be championed by the people”

apparatus that can force fruit eaters to consume in amounts different from their natural preferences. On what grounds does a government tell a woman—we will call her Peggy—who loves oranges that she ought to be eating apples?

Edward Snowden 2.0

By ELIZABETH BARRY
EDITOR IN CHIEF

Following the September release of *Snowden*, a biographical movie about the ex-Central Intelligence Agency employee turned traitor, information surfaced in the *Wall Street Journal* and other mainstream publications about yet another former government employee stealing classified information from the National Security Agency (NSA).

In early October, authorities released details to the public about a former NSA contractor who, according to the Justice Department (DOJ), amassed millions of pages of government records over the past two decades, including top-secret information about military operations.

Prosecutors arrested and charged Maryland resident Harold “Hal” Martin III with theft of government property and unauthorized removal or retention of classified documents. A new Department of Justice filing will also likely charge Mr. Martin with violating the Espionage Act, an offense that

among working class Americans is cultural, not structural.

“People talk about hard work all the time in places like Middletown,” he writes. “You can walk through a town where 30 percent of the young men work fewer than twenty hours a week and find not a single person aware of his own laziness.” In addition, Vance argues that many working class people have embraced a mindset that psychologists call “learned helplessness,” or the belief that one’s decisions have no impact on the outcome in one’s life. This leads to believing the worst about their society, he explains, that the news, politicians, and their universities are rigged against them. One of his friends quit his job because he was sick of waking up early, and subsequently complained on social media about the “Obama economy.”

While working as a cashier through high school, Vance developed an acute frustration with the nonworking white poor. He writes: “I also learned how people gamed the welfare system. They’d buy two-dozen packs of soda with food stamps and then sell them at a discount for cash. They’d ring up their order separately, buying food with food stamps, and beer, wine, and cigarettes with cash.” It frustrated him to see this large minority of poor whites live off of the dole.

Vance refers to a study conducted by a team of economists including Stanford economist Raj Chetty—concluding that economic mobility was the worst in the South, Rust Belt, and Appalachia. The economists decided that the most important factors were the prevalence of single parents and income segregation (poor people only living around other poor people). States like Mormon Utah with integrated and cohesive communities and intact families had far more economic mobility for the poor than Appalachia.

Vance doesn’t offer a simple explanation as to how he escaped, although he credits two forces in his life with helping him—his grandmother’s influence provided a social support, and his joining the Marines, which he says prepared him for adulthood. The Marines, especially, challenged the “learned helplessness” that he absorbed from his culture. “If I had learned helplessness at home, the Marines were teaching learned willfulness,” he writes.

For all of the culture’s flaws, he praises some of its strengths—notably, a certain acquired toughness. He hopes they can channel this toughness to build stronger communities. He believes that only they, and neither governments nor corporations, can fix this.

Equality of opportunity, the only fair type of equality, would mandate simply that all fruit consumers have the same right to buy both apples and oranges. As such, the role of the state is limited to prohibiting apple farmers from restricting Peggy’s consumption of oranges.

Initially, if an equality-of-outcome law coerces Peggy and other orange-eaters into apple-eating, apple growers will benefit. But eventually, many of these violated consumers will form a loose interest network, founded on their shared experience in the fruit market. As apple farmers, via government, increasingly block people from eating oranges, this interest group will gain support and consolidate into an economic force aiming to liberate the orange market.

How long this takes will vary greatly, depending on the extent to which the orange network is organized and communicates efficiently. Technology plays a crucial role here: the more people the network reaches, the more support it can gain quickly. Similarly, if the orange lovers lack access to mass communications, they will take much longer to coalesce and will function less efficiently.

At whatever rate the orange network grows, it continues to expand and influence the mood of the fruit market. There will come a point where no new orange eaters remain to be enlisted, and the network seeks friendly apple eaters in order to keep expanding. The orange network will appeal to their sense of justice, asking for support in order to create an equitable fruit market. As reasonable people, the apple consumers see that apple producers are blocking orange consumers, and therefore wish to fix this unjust aspect of society. With a large-enough support base, the orange consumers are likely to improve the availability of oranges because apple producers will give in. Equality of opportunity—in this case, to eat one’s preferred fruit—will be achieved.

The upshot of this example is that equality for the people must be championed by the people. In order to enact positive and tangible change, citizens must form coalitions to represent their collective interests; however, the success of such coalitions rests upon the intended goal. A coalition demanding equality of outcome could never hope to succeed, as the necessary redistributive policies would harm certain members of that coalition. For instance, a member of the coalition could lose out on a job opportunity because his employer wants to hire a more diverse candidate in the name of equality. Enough of these instances could limit support for the coalition

and ultimately cause it to fail. In contrast, coalitions championing equality of opportunity allow a broader base because they ensure equality for all members. In the future, I would urge Republicans and Democrats to put aside shallow party affiliations and instead work on policies intended to produce the greatest possible equality of opportunity.

EDWARD SNOWDEN 2.0 cont.

could result in the death penalty.

Martin, a former naval officer, most recently worked as a contractor at Booz Allen Hamilton Holding Corp., a job that placed him inside some of the government’s most secret programs at the NSA and the Pentagon. According to the DOJ, when the Federal Bureau of Investigation searched Martin’s home and car back in August, they found “thousands of pages of documents and dozens of computers and other storage devices and media containing, conservatively, fifty terabytes of information.” Fifty terabytes is more than enough space to hold up to 500 million

“he had become heavily armed, accumulating ten weapons, and had taken sophisticated steps to cover his tracks”

pages of stolen information. Additionally, the FBI found that much of the stolen information was stored in plain sight. For instance, documents, including an e-mail chain marked “top secret,” containing “highly sensitive information,” was found in Martin’s car parked outside his home.

Before a recent federal court hearing, the DOJ released a 12-page document detailing new allegations about the scope of Martin’s theft. The document also

states that he had become heavily armed, accumulating ten weapons, and had taken sophisticated steps to cover his tracks. Meanwhile, his attorney, Jim Wyda, maintains that Mr. Martin is a patriotic American who has served his country. Former associates describe Martin as a harmless hoarder who suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder.

His actions, however, raise questions about his motives and suggest that he was capable of sharing U.S. secrets with the nation’s adversaries and may have put American lives at risk. It is not yet clear whether Martin stole the classified information with, or for, another person or country. Nor have authorities uncovered his plans for the stolen information.

In an effort to get Martin released from custody, his legal team has argued that he “is neither a flight risk nor a danger to the community, and to the extent either of these factors is a concern, they can be sufficiently addressed with specific release conditions.” However, the DOJ is worried that Martin “presents a high risk of flight, a risk to the nation, and to the physical safety of others.” He worked on highly sensitive programs, including those involving an arsenal of cyber tools the government has amassed to use against other countries as well as cyber weapons that were in development.

This case, like Edward Snowden’s which preceded it, brings much needed attention to the dilapidated state of informational security in our government agencies. If those agencies do not find a way to stop hacking and espionage attacks, our enemies will eventually get their hands on classified information that could threaten the very existence of our nation.

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