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STRANGERS
IN THEIR
OWN LAND



ARLIE AND WORKING ON THE AMERICAN RIGHT
A Journey to the Heart of Our Political Divide

***Strangers in Their Own Land* by Arlie Russell Hochschild**

Sociologist Arlie Hochschild embarks on a thought-provoking journey from her liberal hometown of Berkeley, California, deep into the heart of the bayou of Lake Charles, Louisiana, a stronghold of the conservative Right.

Why you'll like it: *Politics and global affairs. Impartial. Thoughtful.*

About the Author: Arlie Russell Hochschild, a professor of sociology at the University of California, Berkeley, is the author of two New York Times Notable Books of the Year, *THE SECOND SHIFT* and *THE MANAGED HEART*. She has received numerous awards, including a Guggenheim Fellowship and a research grant from the National Institute of Mental Health. Her articles have appeared in *Harper's*, *Mother Jones*, and *Psychology Today*, among others. She lives in San Francisco with her husband, the writer Adam Hochschild. (Publisher Provided)

Questions for Discussion

1. Early in the book, when introducing her important idea of “empathy walls,” Hochschild mentions that in 1960 fewer than 5 percent of Americans would have been disturbed if their child married a member of the opposite political party, while in 2010 over 30 percent would find it troubling. Clearly this speaks to our ever-increasing political divide. Have you yourself experienced or observed this phenomenon in your community? (p.6)
2. Hochschild argues that our political split has widened because “the right has moved right – not because the left has moved left.” Do you agree or disagree? Is her evidence persuasive? What are the implications for our democracy? (p.7)
3. What does Hochschild consider “the Great Paradox” and why is Louisiana an extreme example? (p.8)
4. Early on as well as later in the book, Hochschild mentions the friendship of Sally Cappel and Shirley Slack and says she believes “their friendship models what our country needs to forge: the capacity to connect across difference.” Do you agree? Do you have friends from across the political divide? What challenges do these “across-the-divide” friendships present? (pp.13,240)
5. Discuss the story of Lee Sherman – how does he represent “the Great Paradox through a keyhole”? How is it possible for an environmentalist whistle blower to also be a member of the Tea Party? (p.33)
6. When telling the story of Harold Areno, Hochschild quotes him as saying, “If you shoot an endangered brown pelican, they’ll put in jail. But if a company kills the brown pelican by poisoning the fish he eats? They let it go. I think they *overregulate* the *bottom* because it’s *harder* to regulate the *top*.” Hochschild mentions the brown pelican throughout the book – how does the pelican function as an important motif in the book? (pp.52, 138, 212)

7. When spending time with the General, whom Hochschild calls an “empathy wall leaper,” she writes that Louisiana residents prize the freedom to do certain things but resent the *freedom from* things like gun violence or toxic pollution, even when such restrictions might improve their lives. How does the General deal with what he calls the “psychological program”? (p.71)
8. Hochschild provides overwhelming evidence that establishes a correlation between pollution and red states. She also discusses a report from the 1980s that helped identify communities that would not resist “locally undesirable land use.” Do you think she’s right to connect this profile of the “least resistant personality” with the General’s idea of the “psychological program”? (p.81, Appendix B)
9. In a moment of feeling stuck on her own side of the empathy wall, Hochschild asks Mike Schaff what the federal has done that he feels grateful for. What do you make of his answer and the idea that the less you depend on the government, the higher your status? Do you feel one’s status is diminished by receiving government help of any sort? Do others you know feel this way – and why? Do you think people generally feel less gratitude to the government today than in the past? What are you grateful for from the government? (pp.113-114)
10. Discuss the role of religion in the lives of the individuals Hochschild profiles in determining their political choices, priorities, and outlook. How does it contribute to the Great Paradox? What do you make of Hochschild’s observation that the churches she visited “seemed to focus more on a person’s moral strength to endure than on the will to change the circumstances that called on that strength “? (pp.124, 179)
11. Hochschild says the Fox News exerts a powerful influence over her Tea Party friends – what is it about Fox that appeals to them and what do they find troubling about liberal commentators? Is all media biased? What media do you read, watch, or listen to, and do you think it is impartial? (p.126)
12. In the chapter “The Deep Story,” Hochschild presents the perspective of people she meets to understand and explain their point of view, focusing on feeling and emotions. Does this ring true to you? Hochschild says we all have a “deep story” - do you agree? What is yours? (p.135)
13. In this same chapter, Hochschild suggests that blue-collar Americans have felt marginalized in a number of ways, including by the election of President Obama. How do you think these feelings culminated in the election of Trump? What role did racism possibly play in the election? Later Hochschild attends a Trump rally – why does she call him an “emotions candidate”? (pp. 140, 225)
14. How does Hochschild’s idea of racism differ from Mike Schaff’s? Which resonates more with you? (pp.147)

(Questions provided by publisher)

MORE QUESTIONS CAN BE FOUND IN THE BACK OF THE BOOK



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