A Summary and Critique of Arlie Russell Hochschild’s

*Strangers in Their Own Land: Anger and Mourning on the American Right*

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Arlie Russel Hochschild is a highly influential American sociologist who resides in Berkeley, California. Her novel *Strangers in Their Own Land: Anger and Mourning on the American Right* centers in on the strong conservative beliefs of the American Tea Party. Hochschild, who has always been a staunch liberal, desired to collect more insight on the views of the alt-right. Thus, she traveled from her immensely democratic home state to the bright red southern state of Louisiana. There, Hochschild studied the personal beliefs of 60 residents in about five years. “The keyhole focus in this book is environmental pollution.”[[1]](#footnote-1) Despite the environmental turmoil in Louisiana, residents remain to be loyal to the Tea Party. As Hochschild dug for an answer to “The Great Paradox,” she found that can be defined by various “expressions of Endurance” towards the Tea Party.

“The Great Paradox” is inspired by Thomas Frank’s book *What’s The Matter With Kansas?*.”[[2]](#footnote-2) This paradox is what sparked Hochschild’s interest of the Tea Party, especially in Louisiana. According to a handful of dismal statistics, the state of Louisiana is where this paradox occurred most often. The paradox can be summarized by the opposition to the left by low-income conservatives who would otherwise benefit from their platform. An example of this occurs with Hochschild’s subjects Lee Sherman and Harold Areno. In the 1960’s, Sherman traveled south to work for the petrochemical plant known as PPG. As a pipefitter, Sherman had seen and experienced many things that encouraged him to be an environmentalist.”[[3]](#footnote-3) The most inspirational being the dumping of lethal chemicals into the Bayou d’Inde.”[[4]](#footnote-4) This incident greatly affected the life of Hochschild’s other subject Harold Areno, whose family has lived on the bayou for many generations. Despite the efforts of the EPA to shield the environment from such incidences, the two remain to pledge their loyalty to the Tea Party. An additional example of “The Great Paradox” stems from the story of Mike Schaff; a Lake Charles resident who lost his home during the Bayou Cone Sinkhole.”[[5]](#footnote-5) Similarly to Sherman and Areno, he opposed the government’s efforts to improve the environment after the disaster, even though it worked towards his best interests.

In order to obtain a better understanding of “The Great Paradox,t” Hochschild created three labels for the different Tea Party expressions of endurance based off of the personality of her subjects. The first personality type that she introduces is known as “The Team Player” personality. Janice Areno, Harold Areno’s niece, is Hochschild’s primary example of this personality type. [[6]](#footnote-6) “The Team Player” or “Team Loyalist” personality accomplishes the team goal of supporting the Republican Party.[[7]](#footnote-7) This can be seen by Areno’s devoted collection of elephants; however, her true loyalty remains in her “never taking a dime from the government”[[8]](#footnote-8) attitude. Forty-five-year-old Jackie Tabor possesses “The Worshipper” personality. Her title stems from her devotion to Christianity; however, it also correlates with her impoverished upbringing. Hochschild describes the personality as one who “sacrifices a strong wish.”[[9]](#footnote-9) Her sacrifices occurred during her young adult life, which ultimately ended up benefiting her success in the long run. Lastly, “The Cowboy” personality affirms a fearless self.”[[10]](#footnote-10) Donny McCorquodale best represents this type of endurance through his ferocious opinions. He is not afraid to speak the first words that come to his mind, even if they could be considered offensive.

Throughout her study, Hochschild managed to befriend many people in Lake Charles, Louisiana. Despite her own political beliefs, she was able to listen, understand and, discover why members of the Tea Party felt as if they were strangers in their own land. She found that many of these members wanted to aim higher than being the downtrodden citizens of society; which is why they looked up to the elite, wealthy Republicans of the Tea Party.[[11]](#footnote-11) However, While Hochschild focused primarily on Tea Party members who lived in an impoverished area, statistics suggest that 56% of members of the Tea Party movement has earned a decent education and make more than $50,000 a year.[[12]](#footnote-12) Although Hochschild was able to gain a plethora of prominent information from the people of Lake Charles, her study could have been more reliable if she had inquired Tea Party members who resided in different locations around the country. There are a variety of other states that voted for Donald J. Trump in the last Presidential Election that are currently suffering from environmental issues; Mississippi, Texas, and Ohio being a few of the many.

President Trump won by 57.9% in the state of Mississippi.[[13]](#footnote-13) Considering Trump won by 58% in Louisiana, the neighboring states share the similar political viewpoints.[[14]](#footnote-14) In comparison to Hochschild’s description of the Environmental Protection Agency’s interference in the lives of Lake Charles residents, Jackson, Mississippi has had a similar interference since the development of Hurricane Nate. Environmental officials released 40 million gallons of partially treated wastewater to make room for the upcoming storm.[[15]](#footnote-15) This decision was made to prevent the contaminant gypsum leaking into the waterways from an abandoned fertilizer plant.[[16]](#footnote-16) Although this mainly red state detests government involvement, The EPA remains to benefit them greatly. Thus, causing it to be an example of “The Great Paradox” mentioned in Hochschild’s novel. Another example of the paradox can be seen in Texas. Trump additionally won the state of Texas over by 52%[[17]](#footnote-17) In recent events of tragedy stemming from Hurricane Harvey, the city of Houston was in turmoil. Despite this, four members of Congress voted against Harvey relief.[[18]](#footnote-18) These Congressmen were put into power through the Republican vote; Republicans that were similarly “loyalists, worshippers, and cowboys.” Ohio is known as a swing state, and in this election, Trump won by 446,841 votes.[[19]](#footnote-19) Due to an abscess of algae in Lake Erie, Toledo mayor, Paula Hicks-Hudson, is asking for more government involvement.[[20]](#footnote-20) She asserted, “ There is something very wrong with our country when our rivers and lakes turn green.”[[21]](#footnote-21) Ultimately, these situations allude to Hochschild’s findings that the American right truly does feel like strangers in their own land.

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3. Ibid,.26. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Ibid,.27. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Ibid,.107. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Ibid,.153. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Ibid,.155. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Ibid,.157 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Ibid,.155. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Ibid, [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
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