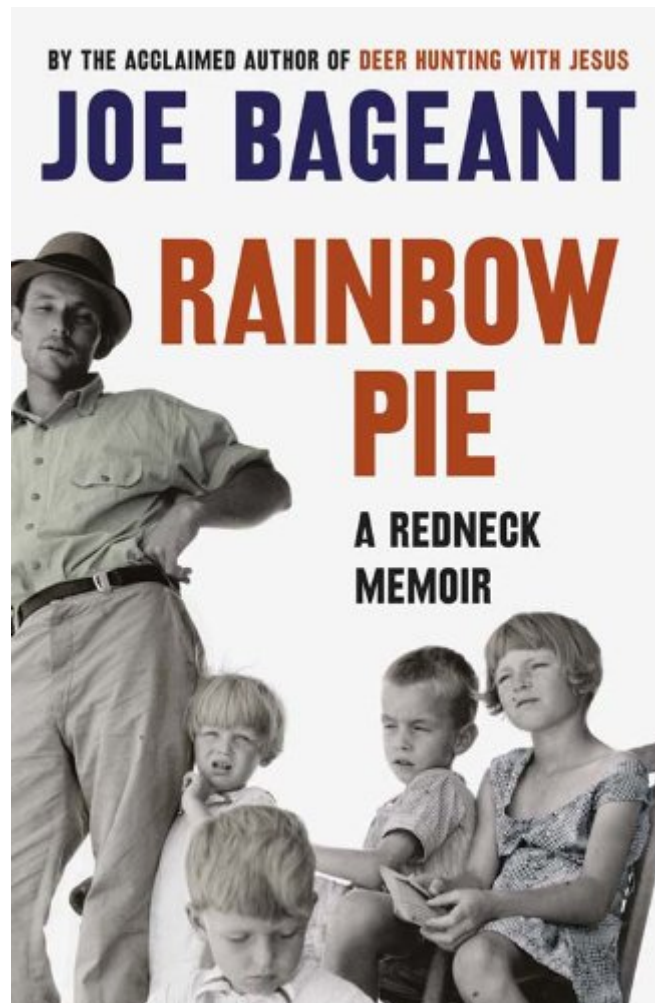




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Rainbow Pie: A Redneck Memoir



Synopsis

Set between 1950 and 1963, this coming-of-age memoir discusses one of America's most taboo subjects—social class. Combining recollection, accounts, and analysis, this book leans on Maw, Pap, Ony Mae, and other members of this rambunctious Scots-Irish family to chronicle the often-heartbreaking post-war journey of 22 million rural Americans into the cities, where they became the foundation of a permanent white underclass. Telling the stories of the gun-owning, uninsured, underemployed white tribes inhabiting America's heartlands, this record offers an intimate look at what was lost in the orchestrated post-war shift from an agricultural to an urban consumer society.

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Customer Reviews

Let me be upfront about things: I want you to buy this book. I want you to buy it not because I have any financial interest in it; I don't. I want you to buy this book because it is a magnificent memorial both by and to one of the best American writers of the waning of the 20th and dawning of the 21st centuries. I want you to buy this book because, as the line from "Death of a Salesman" notes, "Attention must be paid." In this case, the attention is to a gone America, an America that was

systematically dismantled and shipped both out of state and overseas. "Rainbow Pie" chronicles an America that became intolerable to the Corporate Giants who needed to wring every last drop of money out of the blood, bones and sweat of what was, at the time, a largely rural population. Only in paying attention and remembering do we have any hope of retaining any of the values that attended those gone generations. Joe Bageant is now part of those gone generations. It was like a kick in the gut when I learned of his death, too early, at 64, from a brain cancer. In a moment of grace from the universe, however, Joe lived to see this final work published and knew that he had done his part to preserve at least the memory of a bygone lifeway, but also to make one last attempt to help one part of America see another part of which it knows largely nothing: the mostly unmentionable white underclass. That "Rainbow Pie," is a personal memoir is certainly true. It is also, however, a panegyric to a culture very much unused to and probably uncomfortable with such treatment. Economically, it is an examination of a system that actually worked, and as such was driven to ground by a competing global system that had to crush it, regardless of the effect on the culture it displaced.

I have hanging on my wall a check that my father carried in his billfold from 28 September 1953 until his death in a tractor accident on his farm in 1977. He had sent a calf to the stockyards in hopes of selling it for twenty to fifty dollars. The check was for eight cents. It was my first lesson in the new realities of farm life. As Joe recounts, "When World War II began, 44 percent of Americans were rural, and over half of them farmed for a living. By 1970, only 5 percent were on farms." I lived that transformation. I saw how many of our farming neighbors left their farms, or took outside jobs, or their wives took outside jobs, or both took outside jobs in order to make ends meet. I elected to leave the farm and was lucky enough to receive help in pursuing an education that provided a road to success. Joe notes that many millions of Americans were not so successful. Joe's memoir is a poignant telling of what was lost in that transition, of how the game was rigged against those trying to buy into the American Dream, and of how so many found that Dream just beyond their reach. So much of the story of his family sounded like the story of my family right down to the family home burning. What a tragic loss. It had been built in the 1790s. I have urged all of my family to read this book, and now, I urge all Americans to read it. I am sure all who read "Rainbow Pie" will have a better understanding of our current situation through the life of Joe's family and many readers will recognize their own story. I hope readers will be more conscious of the poor underclass who serve as our farmers, our mechanics, our factory workers, our hair dressers, our store clerks, etc.

One of the earlier reviews on [Goodreads](#) suggested that "Rainbow Pie" should be required reading for all American schoolchildren, and I heartily agree. The picture Joe paints of what's happened "his people" in the rural south applies to working men and women everywhere in America. Far from being only the family memoir I expected, RP is really a story of the corporate takeover of America from the point-of-view of the common working man and woman. There is essentially no difference between what has become of the world Joe describes around Winchester, VA, and the world I grew up in near New Haven, CT. In both cases, the good jobs are gone, both on the land and in the factories. The chief difference between the two is that, while "Joe's people" are clinging to their guns and religion to protect them from what they see as an overreaching government, mine, in the liberal north, are clinging to the faint hope that Obama, the magic-man is going to somehow save them from their own stupidity. Both ideas are equally divorced from reality. Joe writes about the American underclass, what made them that way, and how the sinking tide is lowering all boats, except for those one-or-two-percent who really have boats of their own. It's no wonder the rural poor mistrust the government, it was government policies, forced by the Corporatocracy, that drove them off the land in the first place, only to be victimized by the deliberate destruction of the unions that kept wages high, again by government policies, forced by the same Corporatocracy. Growing-up in the 50's, I experienced the America Joe writes about, an America that's unfortunately gone forever. When I graduated from High School, even the "D" students could read, and most could write a coherent paragraph.

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