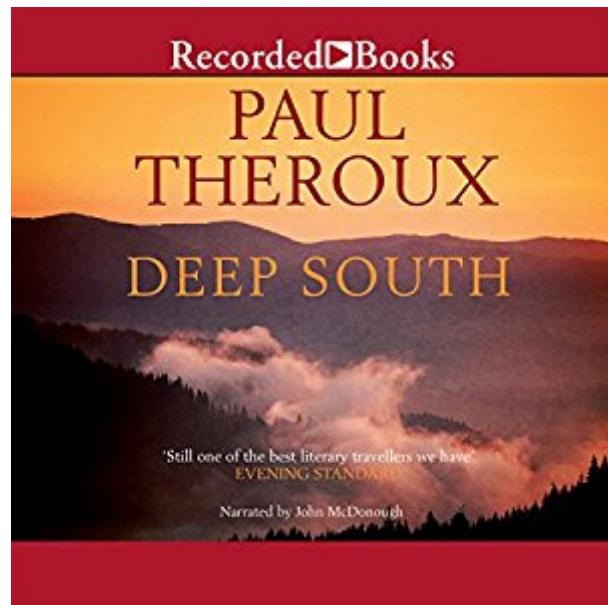


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Deep South: Four Seasons On Back Roads



Synopsis

One of the most acclaimed travel writers of our time turns his unflinching eye on an American South too often overlooked. Paul Theroux has spent 50 years crossing the globe, adventuring in the exotic, seeking the rich history and folklore of the far away. Now, for the first time, in his 10th travel book, Theroux explores a piece of America - the Deep South. He finds there a paradoxical place, full of incomparable music, unparalleled cuisine, and yet also some of the nation's worst schools, housing, and unemployment rates. It's these parts of the South, so often ignored, that have caught Theroux's keen traveler's eye. On road trips spanning four seasons, wending along rural highways, Theroux visits gun shows and small-town churches, laborers in Arkansas, and parts of Mississippi where they still call the farm up the road "the plantation". He talks to mayors and social workers, writers and reverends, the working poor and farming families - the unsung heroes of the South, the people who, despite it all, never left, and those who returned home to rebuild a place they could never live without. From the writer whose "great mission has always been to transport us beyond that reading chair, to challenge himself - and thus, to challenge us" (Boston Globe), Deep South is an ode to a region, vivid and haunting, full of life and loss alike.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Take him or leave him, Paul Theroux always brings out a lot of interesting emotions in his readers. With Deep South this is no different. In fact, it is probably even more evident. I would assume that most of his readers are American. This being a very "American" book, it is perhaps too close to home for some. I can see many Americans not liking this even if they have liked Theroux's previous

works. After all, it is easy to read about the negative aspects of a far away land. It is far harder to read about the issues that face locations closer to home. I remember reading *The Kingdom by the Sea*, which chronicles Theroux's journey around Great Britain. In the first few pages he details his observations about this island. I was living in England while I read this and I thought it was the funniest, most accurate description of the British I had ever read. The insanity of a TV license, the general tone of the people, etc. I cannot remember everything. But I felt it was totally accurate. I read these pages to several of my English friends and they got extremely upset. They thought it was total hogwash. I think *Deep South* might elicit a similar response from American readers. I've read nearly every non-fiction book Theroux has ever written. I've seen him speak in London and I feel I know the man pretty well. As well as you can know an author. He is constantly getting nailed for being misanthropic. However, I don't believe that's him at all. Quite the contrary. After all, why would someone spend this much time traveling and meeting new people? Surely you don't do this if you hate humanity. I don't even like to talk to people when I'm on a long flight! What Theroux is good at is simply observing what is what and writing it down. That's all.

Paul Theroux has fairly much travelled the world and written about his experiences, whether it is Africa, Greece or the far East. In *Deep South*, his latest travel book, Paul has decided to write about his experiences at home. Well...not quite home seeing as he is a Yankee and lives in Hawaii, but of the South, the deep South. This book was written over the course of 4 trips to the South, one in each Season and his travels take him from the Carolinas through to Arkansas and his beloved Mississippi river, "The Old Man". Unusually, rather than taking in all that the South has to offer, Paul decided to go out of his way and visit the places that people don't really want to visit. Not the tourist spots or the bustling cities but the poorest and most run down areas of the South. Paul is well versed in the travel books of others before him, "Reading made me a traveler; travel sent me back to books" and he often cites other works and authors in the text. During his travels he meets and interviews a broad spectrum of people from mayors to social workers, students to the myriad of friendly soul food diner owners. Although the book is mainly split into the four major chapters, each covering a season (with a brief interlude in-between), each chapter is really divided into lots of short stories, each only a couple of pages in length. I find this style of writing a welcome change as you can pick up the book, read a few sub-chapters and put it back down again without losing the overall plot or meanderings Paul takes.

Paul Theroux is a very good writer and he finds ways to remind us of it periodically--whether its the

affluent life its given him on Cape Cod, his frequent critical riffs on other writers (Faulkner's "over-embellishments" just for one) or how dismissive he is when someone he is interviewing calls him out on being fifteen minutes late and not calling to tell them, informing him upon arrival that it seemed disrespectful, and a condescension typical of "white privilege". To his credit, he tells the story, even though in doing so he scoffs at the idea that his lateness had showed any disrespect at all, even though the appointment, set as a courtesy for him, had been scheduled at the last moment for his convenience. There is an arrogance here--one that he would vehemently deny--and it bubbles all the more often to the surface because of the task he has set himself in "going south". He's a college-educated, wealthy white travel writer from Cape Cod, driving around "the South" to see how the poor (read: black) folks live. There are a few problems inherent in this journey right from the start and they don't really get fixed. It's interesting, maybe to the point of being a mistake, that he decides to focus on the poor, the 20% of the Deep South that live in poverty, the 20% of the southerners--he tells us--for whom "poor" is synonymous with "black". He meets a lot of these impoverished minorities on his trip through Virginia (not exactly "deep south"), Georgia, Alabama, Arkansas and Mississippi. And almost invariably they are good-hearted, welcoming (even if some are initially a bit edgy given his purpose) and helpful.

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