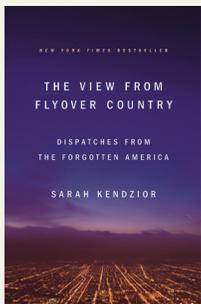


In Reading Groups

Book Discussion Guide from the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship

by Josh Speight



The View From Flyover Country by Sarah Kendzior

In this collection of essays, Sarah Kendzior—a former columnist for *Al Jazeera English*—tackles issues including labor exploitation, racism, gentrification, media bias and other aspects of the post-employment economy.

1. The author Sarah Kendzior writes in the introduction, “I believe that problems, if exposed and documented, can be solved, and that suffering can be abated. It’s never clear what the result of discussing problems will be, but ignoring them is a clear road to destruction. Blind hope, in the end, is only blindness. If we want to figure out a way out of this situation, we need to reexamine how we got into it.” (P. xiv-xv) Do you agree with her? Why are problems often ignored? What is the situation Sarah points to in her introduction?
2. “In St. Louis, you reevaluate ‘fair.’ In St. Louis,” Sarah writes in Part I of the book, “you might have it bad, but someone’s got it worse. This is the view from flyover country, where the rich are less rich and the poor are more poor, and everyone has fewer things to lose” (P. 5-6). Is here assessment accurate? Why is St. Louis the model for her discussion?
3. “Creativity – as an expression of originality, experimentation, innovation – is not a viable product. It has been priced out into irrelevance – both by the professionalization of the industries that claim it, and the soaring costs of entry to those professions” (P. 9-10). Is there a lack of creativity today? Why or why not? If creativity is stifled, why is that happening? How can creativity be promoted?
4. In *The Peril of Hipster Economics*, Sarah writes about gentrification. At the end of the chapter, she writes, “Gentrification spreads the myth of native incompetence: that people need to be imported to be important, that a sign of a neighborhood’s ‘success’ is the removal of its poorest residents. True success lies in giving those residents the services and opportunities they have long been denied” (P. 18-19). How have you experienced and/or witnessed gentrification? Why does gentrification happen? How does your city respond to gentrification?
5. “It is easy to decry a broken system. It is harder to figure out how to live in it” (P.30). Why is it easier to complain? What steps do you take to problem-solve rather than complain?
6. In the second to last paragraph on p. 44 of *Survival Is Not An Aspiration*, Sarah focuses on wealth and poverty. She writes, “Poverty is lost potential, unheard contributions, silenced voices.” What happens when we view poverty in this manner? Does your perspective change of those who live on the margins of society?
7. “When wealth is passed off as merit, bad luck is seen as bad character. This is how ideologues justify punishing the sick and the poor. But poverty is neither a crime nor a character flaw. Stigmatize those who let people die, not those who struggle to live” (P. 56). How do we treat poverty like a crime or a character flaw? Why is wealth seen as good and poverty seen as bad? How do you define poverty?
8. In *The Trial of Trayvon*, The U.S. Is Guilty, Sarah writes about the death of Trayvon Martin. It is Sarah’s contention that the death of Trayvon is the responsibility of all Americans. Additionally, she writes, “Americans should not fear riots. They should fear apathy” (p. 104). How does apathy destroy? Why is discussing the death of Trayvon Martin so divisive? Is their hope for racial justice?

9. Sarah focuses on higher education when she writes, “A higher-education system that once promoted social mobility now serves to solidify class barriers. Desperate parents compromise their principles in order to spare their children rejection. But it is the system itself that must be rejected. True merit cannot be bought – and admission should not be either” (p. 147). How is higher education a help or a hinderance? Why? What is the hope for higher education?
10. On page 171, Sarah writes, “The thing that is called social media is the biggest trouble for society right now.” Is she right? How do you view social media? Name one positive thing and one negative thing about social media.
11. In the final chapter, *Coda*, Sarah comes back to her question in the introduction when she writes, “The surest way to keep a problem from being solved is to deny that problem exists” (p. 225). How do we discuss problems with compassion and honesty? What do we do to solve together rather than blame one another?
12. How did you experience *The View From Flyover Country*? Do you agree with the author and her assessment of our country? How does the church respond to her arguments? Is there a way to work together with those whom you disagree?

NEXT MONTH



Brown Girl Dreaming by Jacqueline Woodson

Raised in South Carolina and New York, Woodson always felt halfway home in each place. In vivid poems, she shares what it was like to grow up as an African American in the 1960s and 1970s, living with the remnants of Jim Crow and her growing awareness of the Civil Rights movement.