



★ **The Distance from Slaughter County: Lessons from Flyover Country**

Steven Moore

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Steven Moore's nuanced, hypnotic essays about growing up in the Midwest balance nostalgia with critique, sharing childhood memories that were formative to his identity.

An Iowan now based in Oregon, Moore has insider knowledge and an outsider's perspective on the politics and culture of the Midwest. His essays are wistful for the best of his upbringing—his parents' hard work running a gas station, his love of movies and country music—though they also express feelings of alienation because of the region's growing conservatism.

"The Problem of Landing" confronts dueling stereotypes that reinforce the rural/urban divide. In 2006, Moore was a college freshman caught up in Obama fervor (to his Republican family's chagrin). To him, Iowa City was an intellectual metropolis. But when he moved to the West Coast, he felt obligated to defend his home state. Iowa is "more than one thing," he insists; "The Midwest must make itself reappear constantly." Yet, he cautions, this is not achieved by sneering at urban hipsters.

"Central Crossings" and "True North" expand on the contrasting locales of Moore's life—including Afghanistan, where he was deployed. "Distance from the Question" decries the difficulty of discussing war with those who haven't seen it firsthand. "Indefatigable Zeal" traces the history of Standard Oil and how Ida Tarbell's investigative journalism broke its monopoly.

Other selections take on pop culture: the tropes of the television show *Home Improvement*, the fate of video store chains. "Of Prerogative!", a highlight, explains Moore's enduring love for Shania Twain's feminist energy despite his suspicion of country music's narrow patriotism. Some pieces read like prose poetry, with repeated phrases, looping narrative threads, and enchanting rhythms.

If "estrangement toward place ... is an estrangement toward self," these essays, with their sensitive probing of geographical identities, chart the way back to harmony.

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