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Review of *Living Blue in the Red States* Edited by David Starkey

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Living Blue in the Red States. Edited by David Starkey. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007. 344 pp. \$19.95 paper.

I swear I once read in one of my mother's *Reader's Digests*: "This is a book that all true Americans should be forced to read." Maybe that's a false memory from my youth, but *Living Blue in the Red States* certainly is one of those books.

Living Blue in the Red States should have a "No Spin Zone" warning on the cover—it could be dangerous for politicians to read. The pollsters and punsters would have us believe we live in the bowels of a Blue state/Red state monster, each political splinter group desperately clinging to its little wedge issue of cheese floating about in the politicians' vitriol. David Romtvedt, Poet Laureate of Wyoming, reminds us that "the coding of our states as red or blue . . . tells us very little about the people with whom we are passing our lives."

Meanwhile, back in Nebraska, Jonis Agee's narrator does something ordinary: bring in a man to get rid of pesky raccoons on her property. A rational act by a person who thinks she's in control of her life, she rediscovers for us something about politics that is one of the major themes of this book—that all our actions have consequences that resonate far beyond what we may think of as our own sphere of influence. As the left keeps chanting about the war in Iraq, "It's all about the oil," these writers spell it out for us—"Politics: It's all about the people."

The book's geographical movement from west to southeast is a road map through the subterranean landscape beneath the American

political/psychological landscape, one pockmarked with shell holes of racism, bigotry, hypocrisy, and double standards. From the initial essay by Sherry Simpson on the use of language in the public debate regarding the fate of the brown bears at Alaska's McNeil River State Game Sanctuary, to the final essay by the editor detailing the fracture lines the politicians love that threaten to split this country apart forever, essay after essay takes us on inner journeys to the issues behind "The Issues." Imbued with a spirit of gentleness and forgiveness, *Living Blue in the Red States* reminds us that we are in this together, left and right, trying to survive an ongoing political Katrina.

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