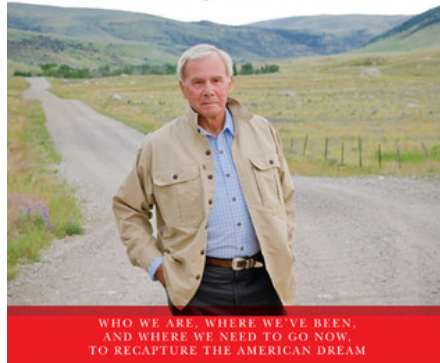


# THE TIME OF OUR LIVES

A CONVERSATION ABOUT AMERICA

## TOM BROKAW

*New York Times* bestselling author of *The Greatest Generation*



## **The Time of Our Lives: A conversation about America; Who we are, where we've been, and where we need to go now, to recapture the American dream**

*Tom Brokaw*

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*Tom Brokaw*

## **The Time of Our Lives: A conversation about America; Who we are, where we've been, and where we need to go now, to recapture the American dream** Tom Brokaw

Tom Brokaw, known and beloved for his landmark work in American journalism and for the *New York Times* bestsellers *The Greatest Generation* and *Boom!*, now turns his attention to the challenges that face America in the new millennium, to offer reflections on how we can restore America's greatness.

“What happened to the America I thought I knew?” Brokaw writes. “Have we simply wandered off course, but only temporarily? Or have we allowed ourselves to be so divided that we're easy prey for hijackers who could steer us onto a path to a crash landing? . . . I do have some thoughts, original and inspired by others, for our journey into the heart of a new century.”

Rooted in the values, lessons, and verities of generations past and of his South Dakota upbringing, Brokaw weaves together inspiring stories of Americans who are making a difference and personal stories from his own family history, to engage us in a conversation about our country and to offer ideas for how we can revitalize the promise of the American Dream.

Inviting us to foster a rebirth of family, community, and civic engagement as profound as the one that won World War II, built our postwar prosperity, and ushered in the Civil Rights era, Brokaw traces the exciting, unnerving changes in modern life—in values, education, public service, housing, the Internet, and more—that have transformed our society in the decades since the age of thrift in which he was raised. Offering ideas from Americans who are change agents in their communities, in *The Time of Our Lives*, Brokaw gives us, a wise, honest, and wide-ranging book, a nourishing vision of hopefulness in an age of diminished expectations.

*From the Hardcover edition.*

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## **From Reader Review *The Time of Our Lives: A conversation about America; Who we are, where we've been, and where we need to go now, to recapture the American dream* for online ebook**

### **Erin says**

I was so horribly disappointed in this book. I grew up watching Tom Brokaw on Nightly News every single night for years and years. I like him as a journalist, and thought that with all of those many years of studying politics, cultures and the like, maybe he'd have some good things to say about our future as a generation and a nation. But no. The vast majority of the "solutions" he suggests I believe to be very misguided. His chapters on education almost made me physically ill... I had to read those chapters in really short bursts they were so painful to read.

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### **Rickey says**

I listened to this as an audio book. A respected journalist and newscaster since the mid 1960's, Tom Brokaw's voice was a pleasure for me to listen to. This book covers a wide range of topics from politics, his personal life, America then and now, and his views on the wide range of changes he's seen in the last fifty years. At times it was a look at the future, yet at other times it was a nostalgic look at the past. He offered suggestions, not magic solutions, on how to make America's future stronger. I enjoyed the book, and it made me realize, which we sometimes forget, the amazing changes that have occurred during the last fifty years.

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### **Marjorie says**

Little did I know that another #metoo scandal would erupt over the author of the random book I had selected to read this week. While the claims are still being hotly debated, his sermonizing commentary comes across as sanctimonious for now.

Still, this book gives insight in American life in a fashion that only Tom Brokaw, former editor of NBC Nightly News for over twenty years, can provide.

He starts each chapter with a fact, followed by a question. The opening chapter starts with a real zinger:

“FACT: In every century of America's history we have been the beneficiaries of sacrifice and selflessness in the face of great odds to build a stronger country: The Founding Fathers of the eighteenth century fought a bloody revolution for freedom. The great losses of the Civil War were necessary to preserve the union.

The pioneers who pushed west endured countless hardships as they opened the rest of the continent. The generation that came of age in the Great Depression helped save the world in World War II and gave us modern America.

QUESTION: A hundred years from now, what will be our indelible and measureable legacy? What will our grandchildren say of us? Of our country? Historians will not judge our time by Barack Obama, George W.

Bush, or the Tea Party alone. We're all in the dock."

He covers a vasy array of political topics from educational reform to voting along party lines, mainly concentrating on the baby boomer generation, with a sprinkling of the greatest generation and the bridge generation that followed.

He is unexpectedly funny, although it occurs sparsely in the book and is never indulgent about it.

"Rush Limbaugh took to the airwaves to declare me a "self-hating liberal." Rush, of all people, should know that those of us who make a very good living listening to the sound of our own voices are incapable of self-hate. We think we're grand, and I include Rush in that fraternity.

Rush is at least an original, and his power is indisputable. He relishes his influence and the financial rewards that come with it. However you regard his message or personal style, he has earned his fortune by creating an enormous audience of the faithful, or "ditto-heads," as they like to be called. A ditto-head is someone who worships at the altar of Limbaugh's preaching, never questioning his conclusions or reasoning. Equivalents can be found on the left as well, slavishly loyal to the shibboleths spouted by the liberal faithful. You'll find very little self-doubt or second thoughts on left-leaning websites such as Daily Kos or MoveOn. Org."

Ditto-heads and shibboleths. Nice new additions to my own vocabulary.

When he started discussing the Great Depression and the "thrift gene" that accompanied that generation, I sat up and took notes.

"There was a common belief that it could happen again, a conditioning that stayed with this generation, and largely with their children, for the rest of their lives. That thrift gene from the Depression was built into the bloodlines on all sides of our extended family. It had to be, for survival. The cost of living was not a statistic issued by a government economist. It was a daily reality."

Brokaw lists many examples of how the dark times of the depression brought out resilience and creativity. How can we reuse mashed potatoes? Add salt, beaten eggs, and grated onions and fry in bacon for hamburger patties! Finesse with stretching the grocery items was crucial, as was treating any luxury household appliances, like a refrigerator, as crown jewels. Every family member had to be skilled in maintenance, because having the funds to pay for a repairman was out of the question.

He holds nothing back when contrasting the thrift habits of yesteryear with the extravagant spending of today. Starting with Brokaw's bridge generation, they were "still conditioned by the penurious culture of our parents but a little giddy by what we were earning and all the new opportunities to spend. Dining out became routine. A second car? Why not? Let's fly, not drive, for vacation this year."

And then the subject of homes, one of my favorite focuses of the book.

"The increasing size of the family home and the rising ownership of second homes seemed to have happened with little commentary or examination. There may not be a more telling example of the differences in spending habits than the housing model. In the 1950s and early '60s, the Rocky Mountain ski areas were quaint villages; they erupted into glossy sprawls of trophy homes and condos. Florida coastlines and Arizona and California deserts blossomed with sun-dappled expensive weekend and winter housing. In every state,

second homes morphed from rudimentary cabins on lakes and rivers to residences a huge percentage of the world's population would consider palaces.”

Brokaw's own parents, both highly intelligent with intense work ethics, lived in mobile homes and rented apartments for over twenty years before they could finally purchase a modest three-bedroom apartment with one bathroom and two door garage on a corner lot. I came away from that entire chapter very humbled and questioning my own assumptions about what is normal as determined by current culture.

“The average size of an American house expanded by 140 percent between 1950 and 2007, from just under 1,000 square feet to more than 2,400 square feet. That's twice the average size of homes in France and Germany.”

After reading this book, I'm appreciative of Brokaw's skill at contrasting current generations with the past. His ability to isolate the positive qualities from both bears a hopeful tone for the future.

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### **Donna Hines says**

I'd start by saying we are only as good as the system and government that governs our actions . Our current system is severely broken in every way. Today's system of governing favors the wealthy and forgets the lower class . Mistakes from higher ups are now being absorbed by the middle class ie bank bailouts, WallStreet, housing market fall out. Our middle class is now almost obsolete in 2016. We need to take a serious look at our government, our policies, procedures, laws, our history, our agenda for moving forward. We can't keep kicking the can down the road. Here in PA my state governor was unable to even pass our budget. He didn't address the most important issues such as educational funding among many others too numerous to list and simply let it pass by way of signature without addressing anything of relevance or concern to the taxpayers. Everyone should have the same opportunities to make it in today's world. I noticed throughout the book much of what was stated was the spend, spend, spend and never save theory. However, I would like to note many of the products produced today do not last as they once had years ago. Warranties for service are no longer 20yrs but rather 2 yrs if you're lucky. Cars that were once made like armored tanks to withstand crashes are now being made w/o bumpers but rather airbags with many recalls and expensive repairs as everything now crumbles upon impact not bends to withstand force. The world has vastly changed and with change comes unnecessary and costly repairs that in many cases could be prevented if we simply took our time and made good quality items. So how much is spend, spend, spend, and how much is you have no choice as nothing lasts longer than 1-2yrs? We are no longer making antiques but throwaways. There's no pride in anything we make whether it's a product or infrastructure in our country today. It's always a theory of just do enough to get buy and let the next guy worry about it. I've been on newly paved roadways that had to be redone days later after cracks appeared right down the center seam. Newly placed sidewalks torn out for not being built right and angled properly. With this said, I've noticed changes in how we work together and the concern we have for one another has diminished. It seems it's every man for himself and if one person doesn't make it it's because of his/her work ethic not a system failure.

Ninety percent of citizens I know do not want handouts they are truly hard workers when given the chance. Heck I'd rather work for food than be handed food . We want work and need work but we can't get work that pays enough to support ourselves. The system is broken. The more you work the more you pay for it in taxes. The less you bring home. It's a cycle.

If you're below the poverty line and try to better yourself you'll soon learn for every dollar earned 10 is taken away. No way to get out has been the recurring theme. No matter how much you want it to work out, no matter how hard you try. You eventually even take your story to the streets, to congress, to your local leaders and politicians to learn they earn 10x more and couldn't care about your issue unless it garnishes publicity for themselves.

"Workers at the minimum wage today are paid roughly 25 percent less than their counterparts 48 years ago. "  
<http://www.epi.org/publication/the-fe...>

"Had the minimum wage risen at the same pace as productivity after 1968, it would be nearly \$19 per hour today." ( Courtesy EPI)

I've travelled to areas far and beyond and have taken in like a sponge absorbing the culture and history behind each area I visited .

I've seen a change in how we respond to others including the internet as mentioned in Tom's book but also through our lack of business etiquette. We no longer keep stores open to attend to customers. Business and family establishments and the small mom and pops no longer have the 9-5 hrs every day. They now have 1-8pm or 9-2pm and closed on Fridays while opening late on Mondays. To make it worse there is no longer open lines of communication though we live in a technologically advanced society. No longer can I pick up the phone and talk to a human being live in the present moment but rather automation in pressing numbers. You no longer can talk to someone from the USA as calls are now connected to 3rd world countries. There's now calling hours. There's now early closing hours. Contractors hired now don't show or do faulty work and leave early or never reappear. Costing much more than original estimated to re hire another worker to complete jobs properly. We live in an age where we want what the Jones's have but we want it on our terms. I always have heard work hard and you'll go places. Volunteer work has no delegation, no set system in place, no real direction as was mentioned in the book. I've worked many hours volunteering and each time I arrive there is no data bank , no online registration, no format to follow or guidelines to be developed and performed. You are pretty much on your own. No lunch is offered. No supervision is granted. Nobody cares whether you arrive or leave and nobody cares period as not one thank you is offered for giving up your time for free.

I've seen the big boy networks and the big wigs appear for non profit events and community fundraisers for self promotion not for concern of their community. It's all about the photo ops, spotlights, brag sessions online, news reports, journalistic articles about them. These higher ups leave as soon as the camera is turned off while the real hard working members/volunteers like myself are ignored and working behind the scenes without notice.

I graduated with high honors, was accepted into several elite honor society's and awarded national awards for 15 yrs of public service ( all unpaid). I was told to get somewhere you have to go after it, nobody gives handouts. I worked two jobs to put myself through college. I achieved my masters while having my son(unwed) and the birth was devastating. My son was born with medical disabilities Ie. Vater Syndrome. Prior to giving birth while working in a factory I was top producer and associate of the month. I worked so hard and so fast that my own managers asked me how I did it and fellow workers asked me why I did as they now were expected to work equally as hard. I worked this hard for \$7.25 an hr. with the skills and talent to get the job done. I stood on my feet 8 hr days, without restroom breaks because you had to beg to get one and it wasn't worth the aggravation, with timed breaks like prisoners being monitored with cameras and barbed wire fencing surrounding the beautiful landscape, and in unsatisfactory conditions. Some of those conditions included no proper air circulation ( unless you count dusty old ceiling fans) and having to breathe in co2 from the trucks exhaust that pulled up to our facility to load and unload. Exhaust fumes was what I endured every day as well as dead animals that appeared in boxes we opened. Not to mention having a 50lb metal

trolley used to carry clothes fall upon my head and the company wouldn't even call me an ambulance while I sat and bled on their factory floor from what could've been prevented by a simple netting that held properly above all workers heads. I was left years later from this factory work with 3 degenerative disks in my back in all 3 crucial areas of upper, mid, lower sections. I was left with ganglion cysts ( much like corporal tunnel) requiring surgery to scrape down the tendons in my right hand . All of these problems before the age of 40 years. Yet can you imagine the guy taking my garbage who didn't work off conveyor, who had no skills, and who wasn't clocked to produce so many units an hr made \$8.00 to start. How is this fair I used to ask. When raises came up I made 10cents per year. Yes you heard me right as a woman working 40 hr weeks ( or slightly under) so they wouldn't have to pay full time work wages I worked like a dog for 7.25 hr. Fast forward 15 yrs later and now having a family being a single mom of 3 and that same factory still pays that same wage . Has the cost of inflation not risen? How are our well educated workers supposed to make it today with this mentality? I have a dual masters, I graduated with high honors, I accepted the work hard and get promoted. It never came to fruition. I also tried volunteering to get my foot in the door to employment and worked unpaid with 12 nonprofits locally for the past 15yrs. Surely this would lead to employment right? NO! It led to others being hired, jobs being rearranged for current workers, and interns being already paid and hired but the volunteer like myself who worked unpaid and put in the time providing her business card and resume was simply ignored. While my work was good, and the employers acted as though it was appreciated it was often the employers who passed my work as their own so in essence the harder I worked for a job the better the employer looked who took my credit for finishing the jobs. I only learned this when I agreed to an interview for a local news story and told them how much I did for their nonprofit and spelled it out in writing only to have the manager fired within the end of the month. This after the manager had 20 yrs of service what happened to seniority? Right? After marrying, I then had my kids and put my career on hold to raise them for 16 yrs as my husband ( at the time) and I agreed would me more cost effective since men can make more money than women and childcare costs skyrocketed. Now 16 yrs later I divorced the narcissist abusive husband and was left with nothing more than the shirt on my back. I tried to re-enter the workforce only to be told I'm now overqualified, have no prior work experience, and no credit. Yes employers check credit too. My credit was ruined after I was left homeless, bankrupt, long term unemployed without income, assets, or credit from divorcing 3 yrs earlier.

I wish Mr. Brokaw had led a life that's reminiscent of the life of hard knocks. I wish his girls had lived the life of the middle classes and those of us below poverty. The same opportunities are not made available for those who aren't at the top 1% of wealth. I wish those of us at the bottom had money to save. Sadly I have no savings at all. I have no life insurance ( can't afford). I have no living will but it doesn't really matter as I have nothing of value to provide to my children nor can I because of the regulations for welfare recipients. I cannot save when every cent and then some goes to paying the bills to simply survive. The cost of living needs to be adjusted with the wages in this country so we don't have to borrow or use credit simply to decide whether it goes toward food, bills, or medicine daily. I've already filed bankruptcy once. I consider myself thrifty. So much so the only clothes I've worn since bearing children have been thrift store and hand me downs. I don't buy retail unless it's a clearance of 50-70% sale. I clip coupons, recycle aluminum and metal, resell used thrift store at consignments, and never take a vacation for self or family. I wish I could save even just a little but families today are barely scraping buy. There's no retirement, no pensions, no savings, no nothing for my golden years here.

In trying to obtain employment I exhausted all avenues. I applied for jobs endlessly much to the definition of insanity. I used referrals, created business cards, begged, made cold calls, revisited undergrad college and renewed my resume. I created online business sites, added my work online, used LinkedIn accounts, applied to jobs both with and without training or skills required. Today there's still no acceptance letter. While others want me to work for peanuts to simply say i'm off welfare it wouldn't be feasible nor survivable to get off at this time. It very hard when you have no money, no credit, nobody to give you that one break you need yet all of us at some time had that one person who gave us our "big break".

It's true we are the forgotten ones of the long term unemployed. We are highly skilled, highly educated, and



come with great references. Yet employers are hiring the younger men and women who don't require 401k's or pensions or family packages. These younger workers don't care so much about benefits . While security was once a good thing to possess it's no longer something attainable as many workers are being laid off in the recession that continues to this day. I often here the numbers given out about how many are unemployed. The 5% is not accurate. I know because I stand in line at the food banks. I go to our public welfare office. I visit soup kitchens and libraries to attain food. There are many of us long term unemployed who have rightfully so given up looking for jobs and after 6 months we are no longer calculated in these equations. There are also those of us who are working 2-3 jobs yet aren't being paid high enough wages to make ends meet and still must seek assistance for free aid. It's sad that non of this was addressed in this book. I have been acknowledged by Congress for my current struggles through Community Voices ( the link is available on my profile) yet nothing has changed . I've been let go even by our local food bank and denied food while living 18 k below poverty with a family of four simply because I'm not residing in the area they service yet my 3 kids attend school and my entire family attend church services in the area and ironically I volunteer for their food bank . I was told other food banks are in my area. I went to those and they served me food that in my opinion was inedible and had to be discarded such as rotten bananas with mold growing on them. I decided to live now on credit as my EBT ( food stamps) continue to be lowered daily. My housing was a waiting list for 2 yrs with an approval of 900 monthly yet only received 300 monthly. Go figure as to why? I suppose if we can get that top paying job it would be wonderful. I wish, hope, pray daily for that American Dream.

However, sometimes life is out of our hands. I cannot control employers who only hire male counterparts even though my skills are similar and in many cases better. I once was told applying for a job with state Attorney Generals office that my skills and resume was better than the man who currently offered me a possible job. Sadly the job fell through from the governor of pa's hiring freeze. I later went back and they downsized and no longer had anything to offer.

I'm not so sure of any American Dream anymore. I went to college and received a dual Masters. I now paying enormous student loan debt to sit home after filing bankruptcy. I still owe after 16 yrs of payments nearly 12k left and I was one of the lucky ones who started with 30k in student loan debt. I no longer believe a higher education is worth it since you can't use it and it becomes more a detriment than a help when employers tell you that you're more qualified than they are and refuse to hire you.

I wish this book addressed the issue of the low salaried workers and those who may have medical coverage through the state and receive what they pay for which is free aid and terrible service. Free aid for those below poverty is a blessing don't get me wrong but I've had dentist(s) who accepted my government insurance and caused more harm than good. Annual checkups that should be done within 6 months take much longer as the backup in the system of those below poverty has increased significantly yet only 1 dentist is in the area to accept the high case load of welfare recipients. I've ended up having to pay out of pocket to correct the errors made using the free dental assistance. I've also sat in waiting rooms for doctor appointments longer than the 20 min wait time actually it was closer to an hour just so that the doctors could bill medical assistance knowing it would be paid by the government. I've also seen doctors perform unnecessary procedures simply knowing your child receives medical coverage as if treating the patient as a guinea pig simply for money. Sadly braces aren't covered for children who need them like my own as well as medicine needed for children born with disabilities such as Prevacid for stomach reflux with esophageal atresia (fused esophagus) which costs over \$100 a bottle.

I can write a book myself on many different aspects of the American Dream. However, I can tell you from experience I wish employers hired older workers, offered higher livable wages, and provided family benefits. I'd leave the system immediately if I could get a job that paid enough to live. I sadly receive more living below poverty than what the employers are willing to pay in our area after taxes.

I wish and hope things change and quickly for the next generation but I see more debt, more recession, and more plain ugliness in all aspects of government in the future. Jobs now are temp, grant funded, seasonal work. We need skilled jobs, we need paying jobs, we need benefits, and we need them now.

As for the American Dream in closing I lost hope in it as I sit here 6 yrs later still searching for that one employer willing to give me a chance at it.

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### **Doug says**

I'm sorry to say that I was deeply disappointed in this book. I always respected Brokaw as a journalist and thought The Greatest Generation was one of the most spot on books I've ever read. I'm sorry to say that I found this examination of where we are and where we are going as a country to be over-simplified, condescending and borderline insulting in it's assumption of the readers lack of intelligence. I am getting very tired of people who will never have a financial worry in their lives (read politicians here also) telling me to learn to live with the idea that the "American Dream" is dead and that I'd best get used to the idea that we may well be headed toward becoming a third world country.

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### **Kimball says**

This was full of so many solid principles on a variety of topics. I loved it. Plus he mentioned GIS! It doesn't get any better than that.

I'm becoming a fan of Tom Brokaw. I like his writing style and his topics. He also seems, to me, pretty unbiased. Once again he calls for political friendliness which is badly needed in this day and age. However, I think the only thing that will help us head in that direction will be nothing short of a catastrophe. He's a supporter of the military and he points out the many social and personal benefits for the potential of shaping a person to be well-rounded upon joining and serving.

He mentioned being at his 50 year high school reunion when they were about 70 years old and he asked his fellow classmates which 70 year olds they remember when they were in high school. It got me thinking "What will I hope to be able to say about my life and what I accomplished when I'm 70 and chatting with old friends from school?" Then I got real quiet and nervous and fearful.

He gives terrific advice to calibrate our lives by prudent proportion. Successful people intuitively and actively arrange their affairs so they can weather the unexpected. Also learning new things slows the aging process. Sound advice for you old fogies that watch TV all dang day.

I wish was Tom was my grandpa or relative and I could chat with him all day about life.

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### **Stan Lanier says**

I've never been a Brokaw fan, but I have respected him over the years. Never has his context as a privileged member of American society been made so clear to me as the voice and perspective in this reflection. I don't understand this penchant to ascribe equivalence between the Tea Party and figures such as Keith Olbermann. I suppose in his role as elder statesman as to the state of America, Brokaw thinks he has to adopt a "balanced" voice. I'd much rather an ACCURATE voice. Neither does his love of public-private partnerships soothe my worries about the state of our country. The names dropped by Brokaw are all people who benefit

greatly materially from the way our society operates. While he may very well be aware that millions of Americans in 2011 have to live, still, in conditions he describes as belonging to the time of his grandparents, he, at least in my opinion, addresses the nation as if we all maxed out 12 credit cards and none of us lived within our means before the Great Recession. People with money can make more things happen. All of that activity doesn't mean they necessarily calibrate the fix the way it is needed.

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### **Clif Hostetler says**

*The Time of our Lives* provides observations from an experienced sage of current affairs. Listening to the audio edition of this book was similar to sitting across a coffee shop table listening to an extended commentary about life from an erudite and enlightened observer.

Tom Brokaw is close enough to my age (he's 6 years older) that I could identify with most of his sentiments reflecting on past life experiences. If we were in a real two-way conversation I would have had a few retorts, occasionally agreeing and occasionally disagreeing. But I certainly would have found him to be a rational observer and thinker to be respected. (i.e. The sort of person I wish I could be.)

A gamut of policy issues are touched upon, but there's probably little substantive or new material here for policy wonks. He reminisces on the past, quips about the present, and expresses hopeful optimism for the future. It was published in November 2011, so comments about the present are a bit dated. But nonetheless, it's an interesting book.

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### **Joseph says**

A great book by one of the great news people/reporter/authors in American history. I listened to this as an audio, so I liked that it was his voice to his book. I read some of reviews that were negative suggesting he is out of touch, that he doesn't see a bright future for America for various reasons, his reporting on facts on some politicians, etc. Well people, most of what he said is true. The education system in America is screwed up and it needs fixing. The Dem's and Rep's usually can't agree on anything and they have really divided this country because they are so entrenched on what their respective parties beliefs are. I can see in some of the comments that Dem's took offense when he talked about a few of the Dem politicians and vice versa. It was an intelligent conversation that is worth listening to or reading. Maybe it comes across better in the audio format.

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### **Dale says**

#### **A Review of the Audiobook**

*Published in 2011 by Random House Audio*

*Read by the author, Tom Brokaw*

*Duration: 7 hours, 8 minutes*

*Unabridged*

I picked up this audiobook in the hopes that former NBC News anchor Tom Brokaw would be offering some

in-depth analysis on a wide range of issues. After all, the cover promises to look at "Who we are, where we've been and where we need to go now to recapture the American Dream."

Instead, we get a lot of amiable reminiscing about Brokaw's family, his early career, and a bit of a slanted history lesson with every chapter with some half-hearted advice that is based on discussion with industry leaders.

That is the essence of the problem Brokaw is a top-level journalist. He is a journalist emeritus - respected and admired for what he used to do but he is not doing the gritty stuff any more. He hobnobs and socializes with elites. If he wants to talk about some new trend in computers he can literally call Bill Gates and get his take.

But, here's the problem. Gates is no longer street-level. He's up in the clouds and he doesn't see everything any more. To make a comparison to a war situation, Brokaw is talking to the officers in their cushy offices far from the front and not talking to the people in the trenches. His sources are important people but they no longer know the realities of the daily grind. Brokaw is quoting CEOs about what is going on and not talking to the people doing the actual work.

It was most glaringly obvious in his discussions about education. He comes back to the topic time after time and his all sorts of "insights" that tell me he is talking to school corporation superintendents and not to actual classroom teachers (like me - this is my 27th year in the classroom).

For example, he refers to "charter schools" as a help to public schools. Almost no public school teacher or leader sees them that way. They see schools that are allowed to pick and choose who can attend, avoid rules that hamstring public schools (couldn't we help the public schools by removing those rules for everybody?) and hire unlicensed staff who get to become teachers with just a couple of weeks of training. A head of a school system might say that he welcomes the competition, but that's just a politician talking.

At one point Brokaw muses that maybe public schools would be better if they could use the methods that the Marines use in basic training to teach students. Sure, Tom, that would be great. Only take in the ones that make the cut (there are no physically disabled or mentally disabled Marines) and throw out anyone that won't get with the program. Tom - those are the methods that the most egregious charter schools use.

My least favorite quote from the book - I literally pulled over to write this one down because I was listening while driving:

Read more at: <http://dwdsreviews.blogspot.com/2016/...>

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## **Jen Kilpatrick says**

I'd say this book was a huge disappointment, but that would imply that I had expectations. I'm not sure why I picked it up. I suppose the only excuse I have is that Cracker Barrel's selection was struggling. I prefer to listen to non-fiction while driving, and there were only 3 options. Anyway...chapters 1 & 2 were so boring I almost turned it off, but chapter 3 was about education so I kept listening. At the end of the book, I can honestly say I have no idea what it was really about. He talked in circles and repeated himself for most of the book...so much so that I thought the CD had restarted SEVERAL times. The "storyline" was super

unorganized and not very well-connected; I had a hard time following what seems to just be Brokaw's meandering thoughts, memories, and personal anecdotes. Maybe reading it would have helped...but I wouldn't bank on it. (And I won't even get into the part where I disagreed with a large portion of his views on "America".)

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### **Mark Buehl says**

This is a very good and thought provoking read. Tom Brokaw gets you thinking about the status of America in a very logical way. He asks questions, and gives answers, thoughts, facts, and conclusions in a very thought out way. This book will get you thinking and asking why we cannot be better.

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### **Tom says**

Having read it I find Brokaw is a really nice friendly guy. However his presentation of our issues is over simplified and lacks depth. It's a "nice, nice," book. Everything is handled correctly and no judgments are made.

I am struck by the sections about his family in the depression. He looks with pride on their perseverance and independent pride. Yet his answers for today's issues consist of mushy wish lists. I don't see him drawing from yesterday's strength to address tomorrow's issues. To require our generation to exhibit guts and sacrifice like our grandparents is beyond his expectation.

Toward the end I realized that exactly what I don't like about network news is also what I didn't like about this book.

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### **Emily Mishler says**

I won a copy of this book through a goodreads giveaway.

I really enjoyed Brokaw's new book. He brought to light many salient points about the social and political scene in America today. Brokaw gently pointed out the failings of both ultra conservatives and ultra liberals in an inoffensive manner, chiding both sides for their sometimes hypocritical and often hostile behavior, especially towards each other. I particularly enjoyed the section on the dotcom age. While most of his points are hardly new, they are still worth bringing up as many people have not yet understood the potential implications of not knowing just how all of our new media is changing us and our environment. Each chapter begins with a fact and a related introspective question for the reader about our personal actions and beliefs, the future, or social/economic/political issues. These are a nice way to start a new chapter and begin to interact with the new subject before diving in.

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## **Chris Aylott says**

Brokaw surveys life in America, both now and in the past, with an eye towards what will make the future better. I enjoyed the personal reminiscences, but I think he puts a little too much stock in altruistic individuals setting inspiring examples for us all. The several pages he spends on an approving profile of largely discredited educator Michelle Rhee points out one of the pitfalls of that approach, but I think he also misses the need for incentives within a system that encourage change and improvement.

A good book for fans of history and Tom Brokaw, maybe not so good for fans of economics and the psychology of social change.

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