

Praise for

THE GOOD HAND

A Memoir of Work, Brotherhood, and Transformation in an American Boomtown
by Michael Patrick F. Smith

(Viking / February 16, 2021 / \$29.00 / 9781984881519)

★ “...a remarkable book....This is the book that *Hillbilly Elegy* should have been... Smith’s narrative, like Ben Ehrenreich’s *Desert Notes*, brims with intelligence and foreboding....a penetrating, blazing look at people whom many of us have forgotten—but who are the nation’s truly essential workers.”

—[Kirkus](#), **Starred Review**

“Smith impresses in this fascinating debut memoir... Modeling his life on Teddy Roosevelt, who transformed himself from a ‘squeaky-voiced four-eyed dork’ to an ‘Indiana Jones president,’ Smith set out to mature from a self-indulgent kid into a man ‘tough as a hickory knot’ by ‘be[ing] beaten and pummeled, knocked down’ by hard labor.... Smith’s prose shines when sharing how his experience on the oil rig shaped his idea of what it means to live a meaningful life. This page-turner delivers.”

—[Publishers Weekly](#)

“...affecting snapshot of blue-collar America in a singular place and time.”—**Booklist**

“A sprawling epic about life in the boom times—North Dakota, oil and cash coming down like rain. Think Samuel Clemens in San Francisco during the Rush or Jack London in the Klondike. **THE GOOD HAND** is a wonderful feat of storytelling that illuminates a city, a moment, and the American character at large.”—**Rich Cohen, author of *The Last Pirate Ship of New York***

“Thrillingly and wrenchingly funny, *Candide* in the oil fields of North Dakota. What Michael Patrick Smith found there, along with hustlers, brawlers, and fast-buck and fast-spend artists, was a gusher of a story about the national character. Like *Educated* and *Hillbilly Elegy*, **THE GOOD HAND** is one of those brilliant close-ups that suddenly flips to become a wide shot of the American moment. Smith has put together an engrossing combination of participation, reportage, self-discovery, and witness.”

—**David Lipsky,**

New York Times* bestselling author of *Although of Course You End Up Becoming Yourself

“This land, despite what Woody Guthrie sang, is not our land, and the violence involved with extracting its resources infects all our lives, starting with the lives of the men who show up to take it. In **THE GOOD HAND**, Michael Patrick Smith guides us through a long muddy year in North Dakota’s oil boom, telling the story as if it were a Sam Shepard play that can’t be stopped even though people are about to get badly hurt. It’s a surprisingly tender account of a man who is searching for salvation—from the sins of his family, from the drunken and drugged-up sins of a world broken by corporations—while trying desperately to find himself through work. He discovers that, like digging for oil, formed for years under great pressure, digging out the past is grueling, but worth the wait.”

—**Robert Sullivan, author of *The Thoreau You Don’t Know***

“A sincere and colorful account of down-and-out men trying to make it and maybe grow up in the eternal dreary tailgate party and crushing dangerous toil of the fracking boom. As one of Smith’s mentors tells him, ‘now you know why gas is so expensive.’” —**William T. Vollmann, author of *The Lucky Star***

“A fine successor to Orwell’s *Down and Out in Paris and London*, translated to the epic scope and sweep of the prairie West. While telling his bruisingly candid tales of toiling in a North Dakota oil field (‘if this breaks me, then I’ll know what breaks me’), Smith paints a larger portrait of the American worker’s heroically tragic struggle for a thin slice of the pie.”

—**John Strausbaugh, author of *Victory City* and *City of Sedition***

“A thrill-read—*There Will Be Blood* made modern, and with added wit—**THE GOOD HAND** is that

rare literary treasure: all things, all at once. By mixing memoir with reportage and analysis, and telling his tale with rigor and joy, Michael Patrick Smith gives us a hoot that also feels necessary. The book comprises its own impossible boom story: Smith has drilled barrel after barrel of crude fun from the dust and stone of American capitalism.”

—**Darin Strauss**, NBCC-Award winning author of *Half a Life* and *The Queen of Tuesday*

“Novelistic, gritty reportage, very large in heart, with memorable characters on almost every page, **THE GOOD HAND** will remind readers of the best of Orwell and Ehrenreich. A beautifully evoked, compelling memoir of hard work in a hard place.”

—**Philip Dray**, author of *There is Power in a Union: The Epic Story of Labor in America*