



## La cultura del piagnisteo

Robert Hughes , Marina Antonielli (Translator)

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## **La cultura del piagnisteo** Robert Hughes , Marina Antonielli (Translator)

«La cultura del piagnisteo è il cadavere del liberalismo degli anni Sessanta, è il frutto dell'ossessione per i diritti civili e dell'esaltazione vittimistica delle minoranze. Ma, a ben guardare, le origini di questa cultura sono più antiche. L'America è una nazione fondata sull'emigrazione e da sempre i diversi gruppi di emigranti sono entrati in collisione tra loro ... Nel contempo però questi emigranti volevano costruire una società utopica, parlavano di missione, pensavano a un nuovo mondo che doveva convertire l'Europa degenerata». Della voga del politicamente corretto non poteva esserci miglior evocatore, narratore e interprete di Robert Hughes, polemista formidabile e testimone lucidissimo. Dietro l'occasione, che appartiene ormai alla storia – spesso esilarante – del costume quotidiano, Hughes lascia intravedere una prospettiva non lieta su ciò che la cultura in genere cerca di diventare nel prossimo futuro.

## **La cultura del piagnisteo Details**

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## From Reader Review La cultura del piagnisteo for online ebook

### **Brian says**

One of my favorite books of all time.

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### **Katy Lohman says**

Why does this critique have to be still so deadly accurate 15 year later?

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### **David says**

excellent - it ALL true.....

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### **Juan says**

Read it twice. It's a great, great book.

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### **Deborah J says**

Hughes was one of those clever people whose work it's great to read but whom I would have hesitated to meet in person - you just know he'd immediately have spotted your weaknesses and delusions and commented accordingly. Some of this made me laugh out loud, some scared me. As a non-American I can see that where America led with the cult of self-esteem, and, ultimately, the race to dumb down (at least in some circles), we are already following. I like the fact that he doesn't save his vitriol for one "side", but spares no stupidity, wherever he spots it. The bits about the sanctity, or otherwise, of the literary canon and the fear of elitism and excellence are truly thought-provoking. And this is a meaty book - unlike many books of so-called ideas, he really does have ideas, in the plural. He doesn't just rehash one in different words. Not an easy read but definitely worth the effort.

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### **Tim says**

I would LOVE to get hold of this book again, given the reading I have done on America and art since then. At the time (late 90s) I loved it, but as an artist trained in a more modernist environment, I was suspicious of postmodernism in the art world, sometimes justifiably so, but I realise now, also often out of ignorance.

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### **Andrew Hodgson says**

Interesting read more about art than I expected. I thought it would be about America being obsessed with complaining but not finding actual solutions, but only the first essay really touched on that. Surprisingly undated- 25 years later the PC battles and right verses left are the same.

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### **Ken says**

Among the most rewarding of recent rereads, given its startling prescience. Based on a series of lectures given in New York a little over a quarter-century ago, collected and adapted as “Culture of Complaint,” the acerbic Australian art critic Robert Hughes located and illuminated a “ground zero” of cultural moments in his adopted country that have since burgeoned into what we’re witnessing today, with certain extremes now in play that even Hughes, had he lived to see it, might not have thought possible. Assuming for the moment that “commonsense diatribe” is workable, that’s the best description of Hughes’ whip-smart, wide-ranging criticisms, most of which are hard to argue with. It also has the benefit of containing a little something for everyone, no matter where one falls on the political spectrum, while never coming off as muddled or equivocal.

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### **Richard says**

A dated collection of lectures in which the author spends 244 pages complaining. Disclaimer: I skimmed.

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### **Dfordoom says**

Hughes takes aim at political correctness and at our modern culture of whining. Great book. Annoy your leftist friends by buying it for them.

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### **Johnny says**

Although written during the Clinton Administration, this compilation of three very seminal essays is as relevant today as when they were first published. Hughes is a historian and art critic, but *Culture of Complaint* qualifies as a philosophical counterbalance to Allen Bloom’s *The Closing of the American Mind*. To be sure, there are some points where Bloom and Hughes might find agreement. Both would agree that our current culture has sold out to some inconsistent ideals of multicultural idealism, but they would have very different means of righting the ship of culture. Bloom would have us return to a purely classical monoculture, what the apostles of multiculturalism call Eurocentric. Hughes would have us celebrate our multiplicity of backgrounds without neglecting our foundation of western tradition.

“In society as in farming, monoculture works poorly. It exhausts the soil.” (p. 14) But Hughes doesn’t follow

the fetishists of ethnicity and pseudo-nationalism, recognizing much of the academic talk around multiculturalism for what it is—hot air (p. 15). As he notes: “A student can be punished under academic law for verbal offences and breaches of etiquette which carry no penalty off-campus, under the real law of the land. …But in practice it may impede the student’s progress from protected childhood to capable adulthood.” (p. 26).

One of the things I enjoyed about the book was that Hughes spent equal time between cautioning concerning the PCs of political correctness and the PCs of patriotic correctness (p. 28). But the most horrifying part of the book and the most topical was how he demonstrated what prostitutes the media has become since the era of Reagan.

“In the 80s, as never before in America, we saw statecraft fuse with image-management. Too many things in this supposedly open republic got done out of sight of the citizens. Or they were presented in terms that mocked public intelligence by their brevity and cartoon-like simplicity. This was known as ‘Letting Reagan be Reagan,’ and it accorded perfectly with the dictates of TV.” (p. 40) He went on to call Reagan “the world’s most successful anchorman.” (p. 41) He noted how Reagan “educated America down to his level” and “left his country a little stupider in 1988 than it had been in 1980,” as well as “a lot more tolerant of lies, because his style of image presentation cut the connective tissue of argument between ideas and hence fostered the defeat of thought itself.” (p. 41)

“Celebrity politics for an age of celebrity journalism.” (p. 42)

Well, that’s what we had in the 80s and it seems to have reappeared on the other side of the aisle in the 00s. Personally, I despised it then—calling Reagan the Anti-Christ (supporting my illogical rhetoric with the 6 letters in each of his names)—and I despise it now, finding myself emotionally resonating with Rush Limbaugh for the first time as he refers to the current President-Elect as “The Chosen.”

I enjoyed a lot of Hughes’ metaphorical riffs in the book. He quotes Dinesh D’Souza as describing academic leftists as “Visigoths in tweed.” (p. 58) and waxes eloquently when he states that “Marxism is dead; …Its carcass will continue to make sounds and smells, as fluids drain and pockets of gas expand; …” (p. 73) Or check out this terrific bit of wisdom, “In the literary zero-sum game of Canon talk, if you read X it means that you don’t read Y.” (p. 104) Or quoting Baudelaire: “We have all of us got the republican spirit in our veins, a we have the pox in our bones: we are democratized and syphilized.” (p. 106) He really pounded the point home with “The first trouble with a rigid, exclusionary canon of Great Writing is that it can never be complete: it is always in some sense a prosthetic device, …” (p. 107).

Perhaps, one of the most profound sections in the book was when he explained the development of Western Civilization as a college course by starting during WWI as a course in “war issues” designed to turn young students into “thinking bayonets.” (p. 61) After the war was over, the course was adapted into Contemporary Civilization for the purpose, not of making “thinking bayonets,” but of making students “safe for democracy.” In short, one of the courses considered foundational for college students was designed as propaganda. (p. 61)

I was also intrigued by another section where he touched on a supreme irony regarding the Portland Baseline Essays. Here, Afro-centric “scholars” actually states that black children are “impelled by their genetic heritage to ‘process information differently’ from white ones—a claim which white supremacists, from their side of the fence, have been making since before the Civil War.” (p. 148) Another provocative section was when he demythologized Mapplethorpe as an artist (p. 159), the Helms amendment (on the NEA appropriations bill) as ludicrous (p. 162), and how neo-conservatives attacked the NEA on moral grounds because, “Having lost the barbarian at the gates, they went for the fairy at the bottom of the garden.” (p.

171).

What was most appreciated was the fact that Hughes deflates the egotistical posturing on both sides of the multicultural politically correct versus patriotically correct issue. What was saddest about the book was that he tends to blame evangelicals of all stripes, not just right-wing extremists, as adding to the polarization of the U.S. Regardless, *Culture of Complaint* is a fascinating work that is as relevant today as when it was initially published.

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### **Elizabeth says**

I'll be travelling in the US soon, in September 2018, my first time back since the 2016 elections. I was looking for titles in the library which might be good to read ahead of my trip. This work, which was published in 1993, nonetheless seemed like something which could shed light on the current situation. And it does - several times I thought, "Oh Robert, you should see things now." The culture of complaint is so much more ingrained, the role of narcissism in society ever more larger, and silos people live in ever more impenetrable.

Like any reasonable person I have some issues with Robert Hughes but he was an erudite, broadly knowledgeable writer, absolutely unafraid to share his opinion. I agreed at times, disagreed at others, sometimes had no idea what he was talking about.

If I cared just a little more I could see re-reading it.

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### **Andrew Carr says**

The 1990s are back. In music, fashion, and it would seem intellectually as well. Our politics once again involves anti-globalisation anger and demands for recognition and respect for culture. The daily contest is once more dominated by the 'sterile confrontation between the two PCs – the politically and the patriotically correct'.

While Robert Hughes' *Culture of Complaint* was published in 1994, much of it feels very current and relevant. Some of the names (Jesse Helms) and controversies (Piss Christ) may have drifted from the collective memory, but the central absurdities of both the left and right remain. Twenty-four years on, Hughes efforts to skewer them is still compelling.

The book is effectively three long (55ish page) essays. Originally given as lectures, and then magazine articles, they were later fleshed out for formal publication. At times this enlargement process has left more fat than muscle, with meandering personal anecdotes and tangents laid out before the business of the day is directly addressed. This is a common flaw of the modern essay form, and while Hughes is among the finest writers Australia has ever produced, even he can not escape its indulgent structure.

What struck me most while reading this book —albeit not a point I think Hughes was trying to make — was the sheer irrelevance of criticism. Hughes outlines the right's criticisms of the left, the left's criticisms of the right, and provides his own broadsides against each. Yet, virtually every defect and flaw he notes in the

practice of these ideologies in the 1980s and 1990s remains in our own time. In many aspects they have worsened, with the modern right less tolerant of the culture of others while the left today is less tolerant of its own.

The failure of criticism to affect change is particularly a problem for the left which seeks ‘progress’, yet seems obsessed with criticism as a vehicle for change. Without a clear ideology or picture of what it wants to achieve, the left has substituted a focus on identifying and striking at what it wants to remove. This is most clearly seen with language where removing offensive words is inexplicably treated as a serious effort to change people’s social conditions. Yet as Barbara Ehrenreich — who has done much to show just how tough the social conditions of the poor and dispossessed actually are— puts it ‘verbal uplift is not the revolution’.

By profession, Hughes was a ‘critic’. Where his criticism is strongest is where it is not simply undermining the shibboleths of others. While his political attacks often seem to rest uneasily on an implicit preference for common sense —as if that was always obvious— he stands firm and proud upon the mountain top of ‘elitism’ when critiquing the art world.

With such a foundation under his feet, a position from which to identify not only what is wrong but to encourage what is best, Hughes’ art criticism is sharp and insightful. The point of art he charges is not supporting difference, but work which looks for ‘real excellence’. Work that ‘in aesthetic terms [will] challenge, refine, criticize or in any way extend the thinking of the status quo’. His willingness to stand firmly for elitism gives true power to his critique of mediocrity and expression in art.

The culture of complaint Hughes identifies throughout this book is still very much with us. About the only absurdity of the 1990s that seems to have disappeared is the confessional talk show. Yet it was not through criticism of this bad TV that today’s excellent range of dramas and miniseries came about. Criticism is necessary, but it is also ultimately hollow unless it is just as grounded in a sense of what is right, as of what is wrong.

The ultimate problem of our culture is that few in our politics seem to have much if any sense of what is right. Of what ought to be. And so they, like their 1990s predecessors endlessly peck at what is easily identified as wrong. This may drive ratings, but ultimately leaves society spinning on its heels. Escaping the pull of the 1990s will therefore require moving beyond mere criticism to the active effort of building anew towards something of ‘real excellence’.

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### Nichi says

I started reading the book sympathetic to Hughes’s main points, and remain so. The book presents the state of affairs of art as therapeutic and calls for a return to quality. This comes to a climax in part six of lecture three. As other reviews say, the third lecture is really the best of the three, though the first two set the stage for it.

At its best, *Culture of Complaint* presents a telling of history explaining why we were where we were in 1992. In 2017 we remain in a pretty similar situation. Some of the specifics have changed, but the core ideals remain pretty similar. (Which is nice to see in the midst of all the doomsayers today. They were warning us of the same doom twenty-five years ago.)

At its worst, *Culture of Complaint* makes the (all-too-common) move of taking aim at some good ideas,

finding some people who make a terrible case for them, and then call it a day. This leads to the biggest problem: Hughes writes as though everyone who disagrees with him is a moron. I'm sure there's some good reasons people disagree with him, but no inkling of those is engaged with.

As a polemic, it works well enough, though as he attacks in several directions, a deeper understanding of any one of them that he caricatures casts suspicion on all of his attacks. I'm happy to see a critique of art's current function as reinforcing messages people already believe with no regard for craft, but this presentation seems to be doing a pretty similar thing.

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## **Makomai says**

### **Non sono nervoso: sono diversamente calmo!**

Questo non e' un commento (anche perche' il libro e' ancora in lettura).

Il linguaggio politically correct ha spesso dell'assurdo, comportando l'adozione di termini inutilmente ipocriti ("audioleso" al posto di "sordo"), ridicoli ("verticalmente svantaggiato" e tutti gli aggettivi preceduti da "diversamente"), contrari all'uso consolidato ("humankind" invece di "mankind"), cacofonici ("magistrata"), inutilmente ambigui ("operatore ecologico" al posto di "netturbino") o semplicemente sbagliati ("Ambasciatrice" non e' altri che la moglie dell'Ambasciatore, al di la' delle sensibilita' sessiste che cio' comporti). Nondimeno, l'assunto di base e' sano: non usare termini che possano ferire la sensibilita' di chi ascolta. Non si puo' quindi fare di tutta un'erba un fascio: "culattone" e "frocio" sono termini obiettivamente offensivi e non li userei. Diversamente abile mi suona non necessario, mentre non avrei nulla contro "disabile". Netturbino non mi sembra offensivo e non userei mai operatore ecologico. Come sempre, non si puo' che ricorrere ad un mix di descrittivismo e prescrittivismo, usando il buon senso come discriminante. Inoltre, trovo che il linguaggio comunichi non solo informazioni sull'oggetto ma anche sul soggetto (spesso solo su questo: se un discorso puo' essere di contenuto informativo nullo rispetto all'oggetto della discussione, raramente lo e' rispetto alla forma mentis di chi parla); l'uso di determinate espressioni, di un determinato lessico fornisce informazioni sul parlante, in quanto non puo' fare a meno di riflettere la sua mentalita' e la sua formazione. Ad esempio, l'uso di espressioni di disprezzo per il proprio Paese quali "l'Italia fa schifo" (purtroppo letta spessa anche in gruppi su Anobii) denota essenzialmente due cose: che la persona tiene in poco conto la sensibilita' dei propri compatrioti al riguardo (del resto "coerentemente": se si disprezza il Paese si tiene in poco conto la comunita' nazionale) e che questa ritiene il proprio Paese immeritevole di quel rispetto che e' la sostanza stessa della nazione. Fuor di metafora, se uno dice che disprezza il proprio Paese, non mi attendo da lui che poi nella vita quotidiana dimostri invece rispetto, magari non insozzando le strade, pagando tutte le tasse e comportandosi in generale da buon cittadino. E non mi si risponda che si puo' provare "schifo" per il proprio Paese ed al contempo essere buoni cittadini. In primo luogo mi e' difficile crederlo, in secondo luogo quello che e' in discussione e' l'immagine che uno da' di se' usando certi termini. E l'immagine corrisponde esattamente a quella di chi contribuisce a dare del proprio Paese quella stessa immagine negativa che egli stigmatizza. Come a dire che si e' concausa di cio' che si disprezza. Parimenti, chi usa il termine "culattoni" denota una mentalita' machista. Resta da domandarsi perche' "frocio" o "negro" offendono anche chi e' bianco ed eterosessuale e non useremmo (spero) tali termini in alcun contesto, mentre ci sentiamo autorizzati a dire che l'Italia "fa schifo". Forse perche' non e' "di moda" apparire razzisti o sessisti, mentre lo e' essere ferocemente antinazionali? Al di la'delle mode, conosciamo la differenza tra sentimento nazionale e nazionalismo? In caso affermativo, come si puo' credere di contribuire a migliorare il proprio Paese se non si ha sentimento nazionale?

Il commento (aggiunto a lettura ultimata) e': niente di nuovo, per di piu' esposto in maniera alquanto incoerente e superficiale. Chi gia' non crede nel concetto di colpa storica si trovera' d' accordo con l'A., ma niente viene detto che possa fornire a chi invece vi crede alcuna luce che consenta una lettura diversa. Manca - soprattutto - la considerazione che non si puo' valutare un fatto storico alla luce dei valori odierni: tempus regit actum (criterio che dovrebbe anche consentire di distinguere tra Storia e Storia del costume, distinzione che l'A. sovranamente ignora).

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## **Daniel Nanavati says**

Robert Hughes The Culture of Complaint

Thoughts 20 years after publication

Hughes' assumption that because we worshipped readily in the past we are always seeking to worship something – supported by a quote from Auden - is a paradigm I do not accept. Even when worshipping gods the 'mystery' in religion was a strong force and just because people want to believe in mysteries now now does not mean they worship them. The conspiracy theories we see everywhere are the banal ravings of people who have no political power and have not learned that this not the only or the strongest, power available to individuals.

He states at the outset he is not a citizen of the USA. That and his age make it useful to him to comment upon American culture as he has one foot in history. He then denigrates modern society, its loss of focus on anything much but victim-hood as an excuse never to take blame for one's own actions. To this we can quote Tacitus Histories, 'and how should it be otherwise, if the father ceases to give a laudable example?' (Book 2 chapter 4, paragraph 52. Trans Arthur Murphy) Throughout his book I did have problems wondering if anything he said was new or different from what commentators upon society have said for two thousand years.

He is right though that political correctness in its attempts to change language without changing education and therefore the foundations where ignorance grows, has done nothing but create a mass of new euphemisms. Words do matter, they will hurt, but it is ignorance that kills.

His important, unspoken, critique of American politics is true of all politics in democratic society; there will always be an element of fascism in any and all laws and mores.

On the other hand seeing multiculturalism as a new form of communism because it seeks to bring everyone under one umbrella society goes too far because acceptance in order to stem bigotry and ignorance, is not the same as demanding conformity.

Andrew Riemer's quote on 'cultural nationalism' is where these lectures really begin because multiculturalism is not a call for nations to be inclusive but a challenge to live in the world as we have colonised it. He is right that revisiting history has destroyed many national myths – and rightly so.

Yet his argument that everything in America devolves into the kitsch is ultimately searing. That museums and art galleries are locked into funding rounds that nod towards public morality. That Modernism is, in fact, a euphemism for 'publicly funded' (my deduction not his).

He claims there is a war for culture. That political prestige from cultural good works is mixed with the vision of public morality within the governments of States. Art, he says, is another therapy in a therapy culture.

His final comments, on how awed Americans were when they toured Europe in the 1850s goes to the heart of his critique of the avant garde in the USA. America has not produced an artist on a par with the best in Europe. Maybe she hasn't had the time. Maybe she hasn't had enough wars on her soil to get the grit into the consciousness of artists that makes the pearls. Or maybe she doesn't want them.

The point of Hughes' lectures is to inspire debate. He makes many good points. He may be angry but his anger has its own strength of character. He isn't looking to define art or aesthetics but he does demand that no one's narrow minded political opinion rule a whole country.

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### **Eric\_W says**

Henry Louis Gates, Jr. reviewed Robert Hughes' (author of *Fatal Shore*) new book, *The Culture of Complaint* in the April 19, 1993 issue of *The New Yorker*. Hughes takes aim at both the Right and the Left who are both involved with politicizing culture: "If someone agrees with us on the aims and uses of culture, we think him objective; if not, we accuse him of politicizing the debate. In fact, political agendas are everywhere and the American conservatives' ritual claim that their own cultural or scholarly positions are apolitical is patently untrue."

But Hughes has little time for the "hoary Victorian notions" about how art and literature can be uplifting. For example, the most universally recognized painting of the century, "Guernica" had no effect whatsoever on the conduct of the Spanish Civil War nor on Franco in particular. (One could even speculate that watching the Brady Bunch might have been more formative socially to larger numbers of people given the pervasiveness of visual media.)

"Joe Sixpack isn't looking at the virtuous feminist knockoffs of John Heartfield on the Whitney wall -- he's got a Playmate taped on the sheetrock next to the band saw, and all the Barbara Krugers in the world aren't going to get him to mend his ways."

Hughes does worry about the fragmentation of American life; the "us" vs. "them" rhetoric that "John Mitchell called 'positive Polarization.'" We are in deep trouble when "sensitivity" gets more attention than social justice. Behind our propensity for offering lexical redress to political grievances, [Robert Hughes] suspects, is the hope of creating 'a sort of linguistic Lourdes, where evil and misfortune are dispelled by a dip in the waters of euphemism.'"

Ironically, he suggests the cry from the right that Afrocentrism is a political movement is backwards. "The trick of Afrocentrism is to have supplanted real politics with a kind of group therapy. It seeks to redress the problem of poor self-esteem [borrowing language from the ubiquitous self-therapeutic movement] rather than the problem of poor life chances....Afrocentric education is presented [by its proponents] as a technique of social control, one that will contain what white America fears most -- black violence --...culture as therapy....self-love makes the world go round." The problem, of course, is that self-esteem is not just difficult to measure; it doesn't correlate with the behavior it's supposed to support. As sociologist Neil Smelser reported in a 1989 survey "The associations between self-esteem and its expected consequences are mixed, insignificant, or absent...even less can be said for the causal relationship between the two."

Hughes is a proponent of multiculturalism. "...monoculture works poorly. It exhausts the soil. The social richness of America ... comes from the diversity of its tribes. Its capacity for cohesion, for some spirit of common agreement on what is to be done, comes from the willingness of those tribes not to elevate their differences into impassable barriers and ramparts."

The reviewer suggests that "diversity" is something of a "distraction from the more serious issues of racial

immiseration [you won't find this in your little Webster's, at least I didn't -- It means a state of making miserable, great word] and economic inequality." Gates contends that the ubiquitous media or "Coca[cola]-culturalism is far more significant for the destruction of diversity -- that in Nepal ancient Hindu religious practices have been disrupted by the BBC World Service and Michael Jackson more than indigenous social fragmentation and the same thing has happened in the United States -- a kind of corporate culturalism -- which will destroy the individuality of diverse cultures.

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### **Phil Smith says**

An outstanding book about American culture by Australian art critic Robert Hughes. I like his gritty, in-your-face assessment of the American animal. He loves his Australian heritage, to be sure, but also has a deep love for the United States. For Hughes, Australia and the United States are kindred spirits, brothers in a silly world. Put another way, this book is about tough love - showing us how ridiculous we've become but how we still have what it takes to straighten up.

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### **Roger says**

When this book was released in the early 1990s, during the height of the "cultural wars" of that time, it made quite a splash. Now, nearly twenty-five years later, much of what Hughes wrote seems to the current reader to be prophecy. The "culture of complaint" now seems to be dominant; turbo-driven by the advent of social media.

Hughes' book came out of a series of lectures he gave in New York, in which he discussed in turn politics, multiculturalism, and morality in art. One of the themes that weaves throughout the book describes the way in which both the Left and Right of the political spectrum are driving the breakup of US society into its constituent parts, creating ghettos of race, sex, sexual orientation and so on.

What Hughes does so well is punch holes in the idea that creating these ghettos actually "empowers" those who chose to identify with them in any meaningful way. While not for a moment suggesting that there hasn't been a hegemony of the "White West" for many centuries, the solution is not to retreat into a self-reflective circle of your own kind, or, conversely, to claim genius for works or ideas that don't deserve to be given that label. Hughes also exposes, in withering fashion, how those that would denigrate what has happened in the past use the same methods now to push their own barrows.

Unfortunately we have seen, since this book was written, an increase in the acceptance of the ideas that one can't criticise if you are not part of the "group" from which the work or history emanates, or that the idea of quality when it comes to art is a suspect notion that smacks of old-fashioned imperialism. We have now entered a world that Hughes predicted in this book: groups of artists and politicians speaking only to themselves, in a language only they understand, and blaming the "other" - whoever that might be - for their lack of success.

Hughes goes on to explain that this "culture of complaint" has also had an effect on those institutions that exhibit. Caught between the faux moral and religious outrage of the Right, and the equally prudish theorising of the Left, museums and galleries have played it safe with what they exhibit.

As one would expect from Hughes, it is the section on visual art that has the most meat. Hughes gives us a potted history of how art has been absorbed in America, and why it is in that place in particular that art is seen as something that should be morally uplifting and therapeutic. Hughes doubts that art can ever have those properties, in fact he believes that art is justified by its beauty alone, and that any other claims it might make - particularly political claims - are tendentious. Art doesn't change history.

His final few pages explain the irony that, at the moment in history when the West has never been more open to accepting great art without any baggage of racism, sexism or homophobia, many of these previously repressed groups have retreated from the idea of entering a mainstream of cultural life. The Balkanisation of American political and cultural life does no-one any good, least of all those who were in the past marginalised.

As Hughes writes, we happily accept, in the world of sport, that there are players of genius and that a rigorous selection process leaves the best at the top. The same should occur in art: new art should always be compared to the best, and strive to be the best.

For those who wonder how we got to where we are today, this book is worth reading. It has aged well.

Check out my other reviews at <http://aviewoverthebell.blogspot.com.au/>

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### **Huma Rashid says**

This book was written in the early to mid 90s. It takes shots at liberals and the religious right and conservatives, and is actually kind of funny. The author talks about wars and crippling debt and the growing power of the religious right and the fight to defund public broadcasting, but it seems tinged with hope, like things will get better.

I was nearly sick to my stomach the whole time I read it because it's 15 years later and things are WORSE.

I have many thoughts about and excerpts from this book. I am still updating the tag, obviously, nad have a lot left to add to it. All of that can be found **[here at my book journal](#)**.

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