ForeWord Reviews

CULTURE

Bill Moyers Journal: The Conversation Continues
Bill Moyers
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These are transcriptions of fifty interviews Moyers conducted for the third incarnation of *Bill Moyers Journal*, which ran on PBS from 2007 to 2010. Politically, he is an unapologetic New Deal/Great Society liberal (he was Lyndon Johnson's press secretary for four years), but Moyers comes across as the most gentle and earnest of partisans, one who listens carefully and makes a good faith effort to understand opposing points of views even though he knows he's not likely to be converted by them.

It's obvious that Moyers is more interested in the ideas of those he quizzes than in their celebrity. Even when he's talking to such high profile subjects as comedian Jon Stewart, actor John Lithgow, naturalist Jane Goodall, or novelist John Grisham, his focus is on their assessments of the world and why they hold them—not their current project. Probing Barbara Ehrenreich on economic inequality, Michael Pollan on the politics of food, Jeremy Scahill on America's use of for-profit armies, Karen Armstrong on the social functions of religion, and Robert Bly, Nikki Giovanni, and W. S. Merwin on the power and persistence of poetry, his interests are omnivorous.

A fair counting will show that most of the prominent figures Moyers interviews here are fellow liberals—that is, people who believe government should be an active agent in making life happier and safer for all its citizens. But he also includes opinions by such conservatives as Republican strategists Victor Gold and Ross Douthat, former Oklahoma congressman and chairman of the American Conservative Union Mickey Edwards, attorney Ted Olson, whose arguments to the Supreme Court prevailed in the Bush vs. Gore election showdown, and Shelby Steele, the noted African American professor, columnist, and long-time opponent of affirmative action and other racial entitlements. Don't look here for the outrageous statements or accusations that are now the stock-in-trade of American political discourse. Even the most impassioned commentators manage to be polite, which, fortunately, tends to inspire cerebral rather than visceral responses.

Reading this book is like attending a seminar on the ills and opportunities of modern life.

Edward Morris