

Bring on the Books for Everybody: How Literary Culture Became Popular Culture

Jim Collins

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In January 2009, the National Endowment for the Arts issued a report titled *Reading on the Rise*. Jim Collins explores the milieu that enabled this rise in *Bring on the Books for Everybody*. But this monograph isn't a dry report. Although it's an academic text, the book is neither arcane nor slogging. Rather, Collins writes in a zingy style with subheadings such as "Sex and the Post-Literary City," "Popular Culture as Finishing School," and "McBooks, or Carnegie Superstores."

Collins is in a unique position as a professor with a joint appointment in English and film, teaching courses in both postmodern literature and contemporary Hollywood. Collins does not unequivocally favor academe. His book opens in a Barnes & Noble bookstore where he witnesses a debate over Harry Potter while he reviews his literature syllabus. In this moment, he realizes the absurdity of "presuming to teach my students anything about contemporary literature without taking superstores, blockbuster film adaptations, and television book clubs into account."

This epiphany has developed into a book-length fresh perspective. As Collins forewarns his readers, this book is not an "exposé of the Evils of the Culture Industry, or a snappy remix of 'I Sing the Culture Electric'"; Collins's is a less-iterated understanding. His claims are newly picked and long cultivated.

Bring on the Books for Everybody is a state-of-the-book-industry address. Its purview is broad—including the architecture of superstore bookshops, the unprecedented success of Miramax films in the late 1990s, Oprah and other high-profile literary taste arbiters, the universal library, the interplay between romantic and literary love, and the user interface of Amazon.com. Yes, these topics are related; Collins reveals their intricate interconnections. The author has taken on an ambitious task by explicating the culture industry—in all its breadth—as it relates to books. In another bold endeavor, Collins takes on fraught topics such as the "t-word" (taste), "how one acquires cultivation," and turf wars over what characterizes the "literary."

For those who wonder why they read what they do, for writers who want to know how to cater to an audience, for book marketers who want to know how to reach consumers, for everybody wanting an up-to-date and insightful take on contemporary American culture—bring on this book.

JANELLE ADSIT (May / June 2010)

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