



A War for the Soul of America: A History of the Culture Wars

Andrew Hartman

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When Patrick Buchanan took the stage at the Republican National Convention in 1992 and proclaimed, “There is a religious war going on for the soul of our country,” his audience knew what he was talking about: the culture wars, which had raged throughout the previous decade and would continue until the century’s end, pitting conservative and religious Americans against their liberal, secular fellow citizens. It was an era marked by polarization and posturing fueled by deep-rooted anger and insecurity.

Buchanan’s fiery speech marked a high point in the culture wars, but as Andrew Hartman shows in this richly analytical history, their roots lay farther back, in the tumult of the 1960s—and their significance is much greater than generally assumed. Far more than a mere sideshow or shouting match, the culture wars, Hartman argues, were the very public face of America’s struggle over the unprecedented social changes of the period, as the cluster of social norms that had long governed American life began to give way to a new openness to different ideas, identities, and articulations of what it meant to be an American. The hot-button issues like abortion, affirmative action, art, censorship, feminism, and homosexuality that dominated politics in the period were symptoms of the larger struggle, as conservative Americans slowly began to acknowledge—if initially through rejection—many fundamental transformations of American life.

As an ever-more partisan but also an ever-more diverse and accepting America continues to find its way in a changing world, *A War for the Soul of America* reminds us of how we got here, and what all the shouting has really been about.

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