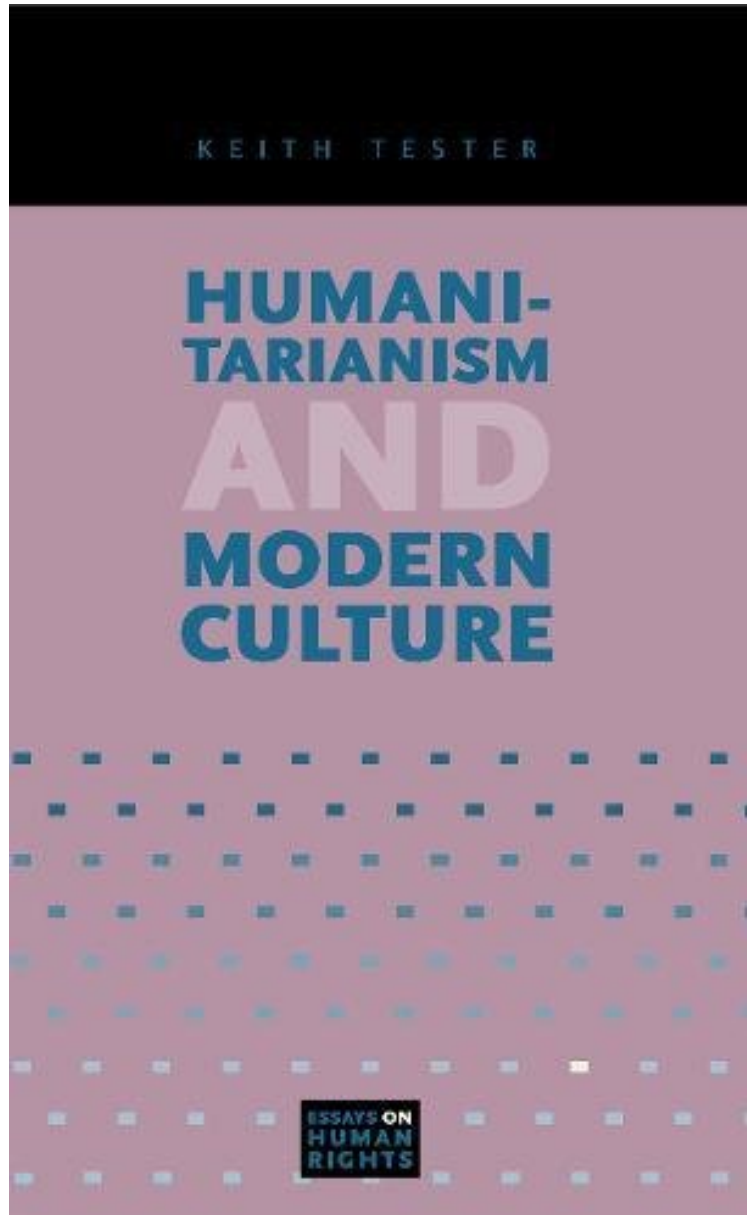


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## Humanitarianism and Modern Culture (Essays on Human Rights)

*Keith Tester*

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**Keith Tester : Humanitarianism and Modern Culture (Essays on Human Rights)** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Humanitarianism and Modern Culture (Essays on Human Rights):

It seems paradoxical that in the West the predominant mode of expressing concern about suffering in the Third World comes through participation in various forms of popular culture such as buying tickets to a rock concert like Live Aid in 1985 rather than through political action based on expert knowledge. Keith Tester's aim in this book is to explore the phenomenon of what he calls commonsense humanitarianism, the reasons for its hegemony as the principal way for people in the West to relate to distant suffering, and its ramifications for our moral and social lives. As a remnant of the West's past imperial legacy, this phenomenon is most clearly manifested in humanitarian activities directed at Africa, and that continent is the geographical focus of this critical sociology of humanitarianism, which places the role of the media at the center of its analysis.

In all the frenzy of celebrity humanitarianism, where famous idols call attention to the world's suffering (and to themselves), Keith Tester's trenchant book provides the critical eye necessary to understand how Western culture exploits humanitarian crisis. In the field of human rights today, there is a disturbing trend toward making human rights another cause célèbre, packaged for the consumption of the world's fortunate consumers. How has the commercialization and consumerization of human rights affected the course of global emancipation from suffering? Tester's book provides some unsettling but crucial answers. Thomas Cushman, Wellesley College Humanitarianism and Modern Culture is a timely and fascinating book that cuts across reportage of pop literary references to illuminate our understanding of the role of popular culture in shaping humanitarian discourse. Ruti Teitel, Ernst C. Stiefel Professor of Comparative Law, New York Law School Tester charmingly revives the spirit of Roland Barthes' *Mythologies* (1957) in a few wonderful, deconstructive readings of Bob Geldof's photographs of Africa, which illustrate his claim that Western humanitarianism rests on a number of mythic images and aestheticizing notions of cultural difference, for example the "gorgeous Ethiopian." Matthew Specter, *Human Rights About the Author* Keith Tester is Professor of Sociology at the University of Hull in England and Professor of Sociology at Kyung Hee University in Seoul, Korea. He is the author of numerous books, including the prize-winning *Animals and Society: The Humanity of Animal Rights* (1991), *Civil Society* (1992), *Media, Culture, and Morality* (1994), *Moral Culture* (1997), and *Compassion, Morality, and the Media* (2001).