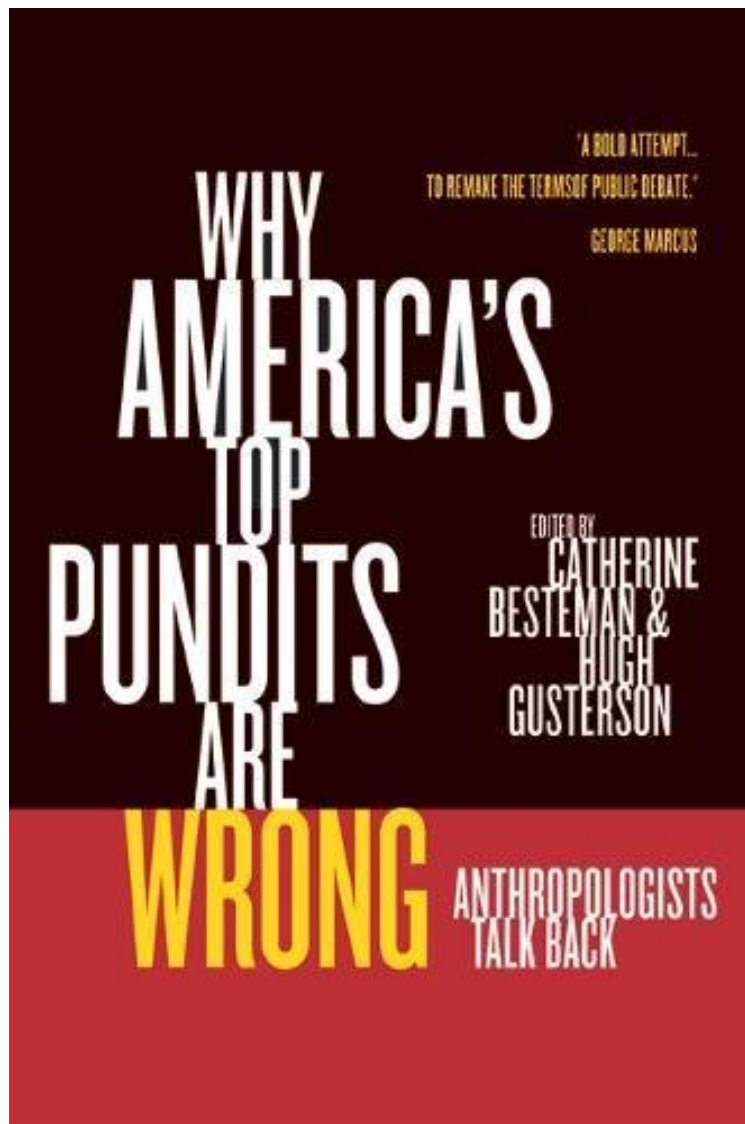


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## Why Americas Top Pundits Are Wrong: Anthropologists Talk Back (California Series in Public Anthropology)

From Catherine Besteman

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#977883 in Books Catherine Besteman 2005-01-17 2005-01-17 Original language: English PDF # 1 9.00 x .63 x 6.001, .88 #File Name: 0520243560282 pages Why America s Top Pundits Are Wrong Anthropologists Talk Back | File size: 19.Mb

From Catherine Besteman : **Why Americas Top Pundits Are Wrong: Anthropologists Talk Back (California Series in Public Anthropology)** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Why Americas Top Pundits Are Wrong: Anthropologists Talk Back (California Series in Public Anthropology):

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A must read...By Madalina A.for students of history, political sciences, sociology and anthropology. The authors of every chapter debunk the hasty conclusions (of some famous authors/faculty from prestigious North American universities) about the state of the world today, and about the causes that explain the state of the world. The critical thinking skills of the authors of each chapter are excellent; they patiently and carefully point at many inconsistencies that authors such as Samuel Huntington are responsible for. The reader is likely to conclude that these "pundits" (e.g. Huntington) were so driven by their ideological (mostly conservative) beliefs that they disregarded the most elementary guidelines of good empirical research, and jumped to conclusions meant to fit their schema about the world.26 of 37 people found the following review helpful. Wrong-headed Pundits make myths and policies!By L. F ShermanRead the excellent introduction and at least the chapters on the pundits you read, listen to, or who influence policies that are of concern. The writers are anthropologists of the contemporary world who are terrific for the most part (the essay on lineage and family critiquing Huntington's metaphors was less valuable than the first analysis perhaps).These pundits have such broad impact that you may want to read the entire book.Often I feel that most pundits are wrong, simplistic, or polemicists most of the time. Rarely does notoriety of their books seem justified. But they are promoted, publicized, applauded - usually by those who share similar bias, stand to make money on their work or just want an easy read or entertainment - and some sense that they "know" - without having to think critically. .In an age of well funded think tanks and endowed Chairs, of textbooks and case studies designed more for job training than of education and independent thinking about history or the presumptions hard wired into their training --debate is narrow in scope if there is debate at all. Money and publicity replace questioning authority. People are conditioned to parrot, to believe absurdities uncritically - and sometimes manipulated by their fears. Feeling they "know" better, are superior, and deserve to be so replaces competent critical analysis and questioning presumptions. Assertion replaces careful making the case. Quips and metaphors replace evidence. Where there is evidence it is often used in a sloppy manner comparing falsely unlike cases (Murray's black students generally with whites and Asians from educated families expecting and `pushing' education.)Even if you entirely disagree with this "take" on public "discourse" you are likely to read (or at least be much effected by second hand versions of) Samuel Huntington; Robert Kaplan; Thomas Friedman (and Bernard Lewis's recent polemics parading as history) regarding foreign matters and/or Dinesh D'Souza; Charles Murray, and Sociobiology's commentators on race, poverty, sexism. Most politicians when trying to sound authoritative and much work from think tanks are but "lite" versions of the same travesty. Generally are all so remote and isolated from what the great majority of people experience that they are totally out of touch.Everyone who reads or listens to anything more serious than "talk radio" needs to read this book. Everyone! It will enlighten most and organize the thinking of others. If you choose to follow the footnotes (often worthwhile here) there are important lessons about manipulated programs outsiders saw (and continue to see) as ancient rivalries in the Balkans and Rwanda; about policies of governments and the IMF that cause disasters attributed entirely to primitive (and racially inferior) people and their innate inferiority and violent nature. Not traditionalism but new fears and new economic crises explain much. The "olive tree" people and Seattle protestors are concerned about economic and social justice and taking care of their families not just thoughtless reactionaries. It is always the dirty poor rather than the clean elites (who finance, control, and buy the work of pundits after all) who inevitably are the cause of their own misery. Self fulfilling prophecy and self fulfilling policy are both evident from a critical reading rarely even26 of 42 people found the following review helpful. Distorts public perception of anthropology.By D.The editors' presentation of this book as a dismantling of blowhards at the hands of academics is misleading in the sense that it suggests the contributors speak for academia - for the discipline of anthropology - and not a particular political clique - That is, I expected a discussion of what separates the academic from the unacademic when I bought it. Rather, the book unfolds predictably as its dedication would suggest: "To Franz Boas and Margaret Mead." - How much you'll appreciate it will likely coincide with how much you appreciate the political stances of these two. The anthropologists stick to arguments that attempt to appear uplifting and moral while their pundit opponents are always the cruel, imperialistic, genetic determinists who are too negative about human nature. This is not to say that the pundits criticized don't deserve it, or that the contributors' articles are not in some sense coherent, but the book follows a political thrust as opposed to a scientific one. The pundits are sometimes confronted for their non-academic views, as they should be, but at other times are denounced for not having the same political opinions as the essayists who, to me, come off as using the title "anthropologist" as a way to give themselves authority in a piece that itself enters the realm of punditry.

In this fresh, literate, and biting critique of current thinking on some of today's most important and controversial topics, leading anthropologists take on some of America's top pundits.This absorbing collection of essays subjects such popular commentators as Thomas Friedman, Samuel Huntington, Robert Kaplan, and Dinesh D'Souza to cold, hard scrutiny and finds that their writing is often misleadingly simplistic, culturally ill-informed, and politically dangerous. Mixing critical reflection with insights from their own fieldwork, twelve distinguished anthropologists respond by offering fresh perspectives on globalization, ethnic violence, social justice, and the biological roots of behavior. They take on such topics as the collapse of Yugoslavia, the consumer practices of the American poor,

American foreign policy in the Balkans, and contemporary debates over race, welfare, and violence against women. In the clear, vigorous prose of the pundits themselves, these contributors reveal the hollowness of what often passes as prevailing wisdom and passionately demonstrate the need for a humanistically complex and democratic understanding of the contemporary world. Available: November 2004 Pub Date: January 2005

From Publishers Weekly Columnists like Thomas Friedman and popularizing scholars like Samuel Huntington digest a large amount of cultural information for mass audiences, but this thorough deconstruction (though not of their most recent work) aims to make readers more cautious when departing from primary sources. Huntington's *The Clash of Civilizations*, Gusterson notes acidly, cited no foreign language sources and hardly any anthropologists. Regarding Friedman's *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, Ellen Hertz and Laura Nader deftly adopt the columnists' breezy, acronym-coining style, damning him as ignoring real people but talking "to the global representatives of Madison Avenue." In another essay stimulated by Friedman, Carolyn Nordstrom charges that the author as well as many others paint globalization as a positive force but ignore crime, smuggling and other global illegalities. As for Dinesh D'Souza's *Virtue of Prosperity*, Kath Weston delineates his technique: "Interview and observe the affluent then condescend to ventriloquize the poor." Stefan Helmreich and Heather Paxson find that the authors of *A Natural History of Rape* dismiss, problematically, the distinction between "rape" in humans and "rape" in scorpionflies. Earlier versions of some essays were presented at the American Anthropological Association meetings in 2000; look for their names in letters to the editor boxes across the country. Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. "The punditocracy are our modern day mythmakers. The anthropologists assembled in this collection deftly debunk their myths and make a passionate case for the importance of anthropology to public debate. The authors present sustained, intelligent, and often biting and humorous criticisms of some of the most influential recent popular writings on social science and international relations. This is a very important book." - Bill Maurer, author of *Recharting the Caribbean*; "From an anthropological standpoint, the world increasingly looks as if it is led by glib, but uninformed, insensitive dolts. In this volume, the authors fight back against the pundits whose influential publications presume the same expertise as anthropologists. They underscore the overgeneralizations, prejudices, false reasoning, and inaccuracies of these popular authors and in doing so provide a useful corrective." - William Beeman, author of *The Study of Culture at a Distance* "From the Inside Flap" "The punditocracy are our modern day mythmakers. The anthropologists assembled in this collection deftly debunk their myths and make a passionate case for the importance of anthropology to public debate. The authors present sustained, intelligent, and often biting and humorous criticisms of some of the most influential recent popular writings on social science and international relations. This is a very important book." "Bill Maurer, author of *Recharting the Caribbean* "From an anthropological standpoint, the world increasingly looks as if it is led by glib, but uninformed, insensitive dolts. In this volume, the authors fight back against the pundits whose influential publications presume the same expertise as anthropologists. They underscore the overgeneralizations, prejudices, false reasoning, and inaccuracies of these popular authors and in doing so provide a useful corrective." "William Beeman, author of *The Study of Culture at a Distance* "This volume is a bold attempt, in language as accessible as the reigning rhetorics, to remake the terms of public debate, to lessen the fear of the primordial, and to allow Americans to understand better the challenges, the errors, and the possibilities of what is being done elsewhere in their name." "George Marcus, co-author of *Anthropology as Cultural Critique* "This 'must read' volume is *Public Anthropology* at its best. It invokes the anthropological veto, brings in voices from the margins, and talks back to society's new tribe of talking chiefs: the spin doctors, myth-makers, and pundits who reduce the richness and complexity of global and national dilemmas into bite-size and dangerous platitudes." Nancy Scheper-Hughes, author of *Death Without Weeping: the Violence of Everyday Life in Brazil*