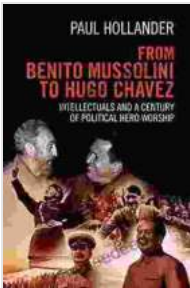


Intellectuals and the Century of Political Hero Worship



From Benito Mussolini to Hugo Chavez: Intellectuals and a Century of Political Hero Worship by Charles "Sid" Heal

★★★★☆ 4.4 out of 5

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For a century, intellectuals have been drawn to the idea of the political hero, a figure who can inspire and lead a nation. From the early 20th century's fascination with charismatic leaders like Lenin and Mussolini to the more recent adulation of figures like Obama and Bernie Sanders, intellectuals have often seen in these heroes the potential to bring about a better world.

But this hero worship has often led to disappointment and disillusionment. As the historian Tony Judt has argued, "The great flaw of hero worship is that it leads to the expectation of miracles." Heroes are expected to be infallible, to have all the answers, and to be able to solve all problems. But, of course, no one can live up to these expectations. As a result, heroes often end up disappointing their followers.

This disappointment can lead to a number of problems. First, it can make it difficult for intellectuals to hold their heroes accountable. When a hero is seen as infallible, it becomes difficult to criticize them, even when their actions are clearly wrong. This can lead to a kind of intellectual paralysis, in which intellectuals are unable to effectively challenge the status quo.

Second, hero worship can lead to a decline in intellectual standards. When intellectuals are focused on following a hero, they are less likely to engage in critical thinking and independent thought. This can lead to a decline in the quality of intellectual discourse and a loss of intellectual rigor.

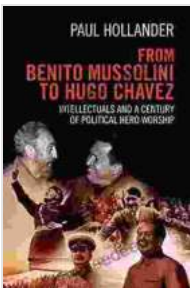
Third, hero worship can make intellectuals more susceptible to demagoguery. Demagogues are leaders who exploit the emotions of their followers by using rhetoric that is full of passion and promises. Heroes are often seen as the opposite of demagogues, as figures who are above the fray of politics and who are motivated only by a desire to do what is best for their country. But, as Judt has argued, "Heroes can be demagogues, too." When heroes use their charisma and popularity to appeal to the emotions of their followers, they can be just as dangerous as demagogues.

The century of political hero worship has been a mixed bag for intellectuals. On the one hand, it has inspired some of the best and most important work that intellectuals have produced. On the other hand, it has also led to some of the worst excesses of intellectual life. The challenge for intellectuals in the 21st century is to find a way to avoid the pitfalls of hero worship while still maintaining a belief in the power of leadership.

Here are a few suggestions for how intellectuals can avoid the pitfalls of hero worship:

- Be skeptical of heroes. Don't assume that they are infallible or that they have all the answers. Be willing to criticize them when they are wrong.
- Focus on the policies and ideas of heroes, not on their personalities. When you are evaluating a hero, pay attention to what they say and do, not to how they look or how they make you feel.
- Be independent. Don't be afraid to think for yourself. Don't let your hero tell you what to think or how to act.
- Be engaged. Don't just sit back and wait for a hero to save you. Get involved in politics and make your own voice heard.

By following these suggestions, intellectuals can help to ensure that the century of political hero worship does not become a century of intellectual decline.



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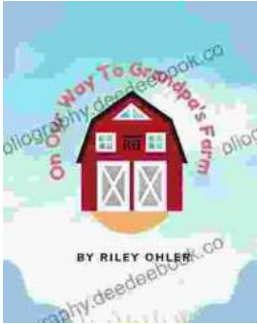
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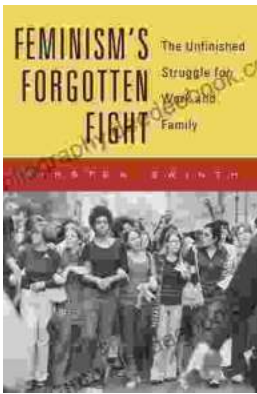
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