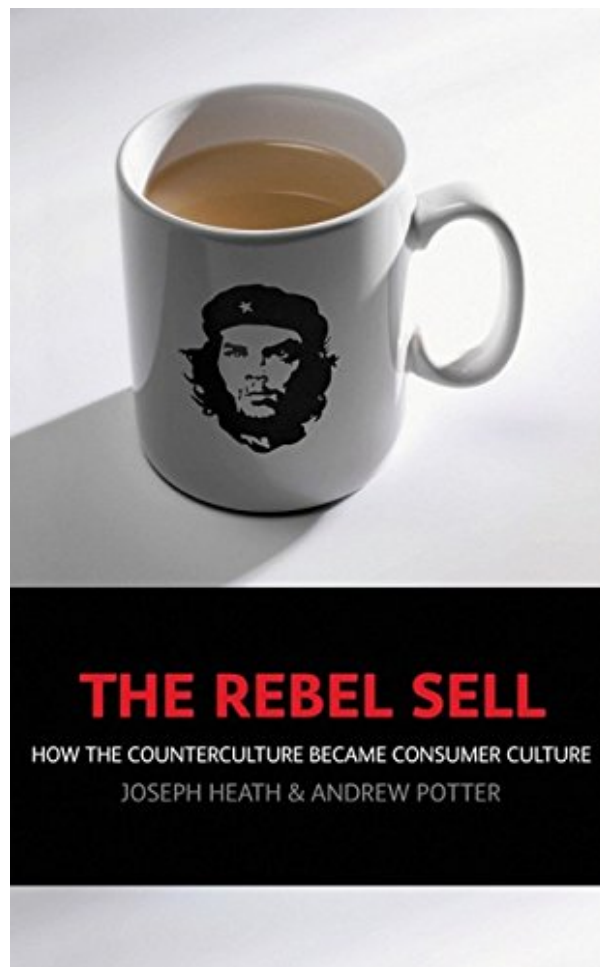


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6 of 7 people found the following review helpful.

Worthy of your time and consideration

By E. Lemieux

This book does say that there is a system. It says that the system exists to regulate the rules and realities around us. It argues that instead of wasting time by fighting the establishment through countercultural behaviour, we should make the effort to reform and improve the structures that exist.

It goes on to further show how counterculture behaviour cannot only arrest development, but that its antisocial ideas and actions can harm us. Instead of behaving like adolescents, pointing fingers at the corporations that only sell us what we demand, we should be building a better society through real political process. This distinguishes thoughts and actions between dissent and deviance.

Perhaps you're like me, having already read "No Logo" & "Fast Food Nation". You were a punk in high school and are still seeking ways to "smash the system". Instead of trying to destroy 2000 years of culture, as Atari Teenage Riot would have us do, we should follow the conclusions that the authors reach. This book actually offers sound advice, rather than simply complain. Their ideas are practical and realistic.

Anyone interested in evolutionary psychology will feel at home with terms like "competitive consumption". The authors recognize that our quest for status affects those around us. What they object to is when your aspirations begin to harm society, when it is threatened by zero-sum games. Your attempts at distinguishing yourself from the masses could not only be pointless, but damaging. See their sections on the prisoner's dilemma, where they expand on that borrowed concept.

The authors rarely self-identify during the book, and I found this single voice to facilitate the reading experience. It was a wise decision. Overall, the writing is excellent, especially considering the critical nature of the topic. They also include the word "smacktard", which should be added to your everyday conversation.

17 of 19 people found the following review helpful.

Defending social justice from counterproductive radicalism

By pmusaraj

The Rebel Sell is the most thought-provoking and enjoyable critique of contemporary social and political myths that I have read in a long while. It is carefully argued and extremely engaging. It's a ruthless critique of many icons of contemporary thought, from Klein to Foucault, from Marx to Freud as well as a fascinating

interpretation of North-American culture, from American Beauty to Kurt Cobain, from alternative culture to environmentalists. And this is the exact reason why those involved social critique and political activism should read this.

The central argument of the Rebel Sell is simple: since the 50s and 60s, the problem with left-wing politics is that it misdiagnoses the source of problems in society. While the critique of mass society identifies the source of problems in the inhuman and deeply repressive nature of "the system", Heath and Potter argue that 1) there is no such thing as the system and 2) most problems in our society are "collective action problems". The book is excellent at demonstrating the deeply individualistic and entrepreneurial nature of counter-culture and at showing how it feeds, and not rejects, the 'system'.

I was personally fascinated by the role of 'collective action problems' and the left's failure to address them. For instance, the authors argue that the source of most violence in society is rational. Following Freud, the left has ignored this fact, and focused on emotions and instincts. Similarly, the authors argue that consumerism is very much a product of defensive competition in the struggle to maintain status in society. Hence, SUVs, gun ownership, tuition fees, etc. are 'collective action problems', the solution to which does not rest in individual choices, but rather in collective decision-making.

There is a lot more in the book than just this. The authors in fact do an impressively good job at moving from philosophical arguments to actual examples. The sections on the social construction of taste, the importance of cool as a positional good and the discussion of alternative lifestyle are fascinating. In addition, the book has a great index and a very accurate bibliography.

For anyone that is genuinely interested in the social problems of contemporary society, this book is a must-read. It is not a manifesto for political action: in fact, it's most successful achievement is the accurate critique of the most prominent movements and ideas of our time. It is fascinating (and deeply troubling) to see how hypocritical and misguided political movements have been recently. A focus re-shift is necessary, and here's where to start.

5 of 7 people found the following review helpful.

good idea bad execution

By C. Williams

don't get me wrong. the rebel sell has some great ideas in it, ideas about how we each reinforce the social system even at the same time we denounce it. ie. you can't refer to the masses unless you include yourself as well. The Rebel Sell is a good critique of the modern counter-cultural idea. But unfortunately the book's concept is not well formed and readers may have a tough time trying to tie it all together.

The Rebel Sell suffers from terrible writing, endless pointless examples that had me dreading turning the next page, hoping in vain that I would find a stunning conclusion, and not just another dismissive tirade. let me give you an example of my biggest annoyance. One of the first chapters takes us through Freud's concepts on the mind and how they still influence our thinking and hence our cultural perspective today. It's a wonderful chapter that had me nodding my head, intrigued, until the chapter abruptly ends with 'but Freud was proven wrong and discredited, so there.' umm, what? care to elaborate? the authors make a lot of these statements. I think the authors mistook a plethora of examples for concrete arguments. the chapters themselves do not vary alot, and i found you could pick up any page, read a few paragraphs, find another page at random, and feel like you didn't miss a thing.

Also, the authors consistently come off as incredibly condescending, and I got the ironic impression that they were trying to start a counter-counterculture movement, or I'm so uber-punk that i've come full circle and wear a suit and work at Halliburton. Actually that sums up the book well.

but if you can get through the book and distill the concepts, it may change the way you look at all our various cultures, counter-cultures and subcultures.

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