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Bad Feminist: Essays

Bad
Feminist

Essays

Roxane

Gay

Read by Bahni Turpin



Synopsis

A collection of essays spanning politics, criticism, and feminism from one of the most-watched young cultural observers of her generation, Roxane Gay. "Pink is my favorite color. I used to say my favorite color was black to be cool, but it is pink - all shades of pink. If I have an accessory, it is probably pink. I read Vogue, and I'm not doing it ironically, though it might seem that way. I once live-tweeted the September issue." In these funny and insightful essays, Roxane Gay takes us through the journey of her evolution as a woman (Sweet Valley High) of color (The Help) while also taking listeners on a ride through culture of the last few years (Girls, Django in Chains) and commenting on the state of feminism today (abortion, Chris Brown). The portrait that emerges is not only one of an incredibly insightful woman continually growing to understand herself and our society, but also one of our culture. >Bad Feminist is a sharp, funny, and spot-on look at the ways in which the culture we consume becomes who we are, and an inspiring call-to-arms of all the ways we still need to do better.

Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

Listening Length: 11 hours and 46 minutes

Program Type: Audiobook

Version: Unabridged

Publisher: HarperAudio

Audible.com Release Date: August 5, 2014

Whispersync for Voice: Ready

Language: English

ASIN: B00LML1CWG

Best Sellers Rank: #4 in Books > Literature & Fiction > History & Criticism > Movements & Periods > Feminist #5 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Women's Studies > Women Writers #7 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > Fiction & Literature > Literary Criticism

Customer Reviews

made me read this book. It kept showing up in suggestions, and it is an editor's pick. Then Huffington Post chose it as the book they are talking about this week. I was in a grumpy mood about it since the blurb didn't invite my interest. Collections of essays so often are an excuse to show the author as witty and relevant. So the first essay of this book is self deprecating and explained the title. Gay is a bad feminist; she often does not aspire to the politically correct stance and can, at

time, act as a girly girl. (gasp) Still I was not in love. But the book was creeping on me. I love this book. Interestingly the final sell was the chapter on likability in literature and in life. In taking issue with literary criticism that pans a book for unlikable characters, Gay put into words an idea that had been brewing in my own mind. She is a fan of the flawed character. She cares about the person who risks not meeting the standards of a the good girl, and she champions the authors who craft these women. The writing is unpretentious but literary and smart. In adding an essay about her own experiences of being a professional who risks her popularity to be herself, Gay rounded a well spoken discussion with humanity. Gay is dignified in her defiance, and like all my favorite writers, she struggles to be objective on her own short comings. I mean, the woman loves Scrabble. I am also a fan of Gay's approach to how society views women in general. She uses literature with a well balanced hand. I especially appreciate her mix of classic and contemporary fiction in her critiques. Some of the books are not high literature, and I appreciate this. While many of us would like to be seen as citizens of the literary world, I would guess that most people are like Gay is and like I am. I read junk sometimes. I share her guilty pleasure: reality TV. But I really laud the objective stance she takes with these pleasures and how she explores the picture of women that emerges. Gay widens her dissuasion with an exposition of how we portray our villains and victims. What does it mean that the Boston Marathon bomber was viewed with such empathy in Rolling Stone while the same magazine spent not a word on the black victim of the George Zimmerman shooting? It's a good question. So in summary, thank you to the critics that nagged me into reading this book. I hope you add my voice to your consideration and read it yourself.

I chose to read this book after hearing a radio interview with the author, in which she was absolutely amazing. So my expectations were high. Too high, because while I agree with almost everything Gay says, I wasn't as impressed as anticipated. This book contains essays on a wide range of topics; only a few are about being a feminist, though plenty of others discuss subjects of interest to feminists, such as the representation of women in the media (books, movies, music, the news media), responses to sexual violence, and the state of reproductive freedom in the U.S. Many are also about race - mostly on portrayals of African-Americans in the news media and in fiction. Then there are a few miscellaneous topics: happy endings, global tragedies, Scrabble tournaments. Some of the essays have a personal focus, but the majority concentrate on cultural commentary. So the essays do feel a bit scattered, as if they were thrown together from a blog archive. Some are very relevant, such as the essays on how to deal with privilege or the insistence on "likeable" female characters. Others are less so. Some arrive at no conclusions: for instance, the essay on trigger

warnings that boils down to "I find them kind of counterproductive and condescending, but if other people want them, well, okay." Others date themselves with their focus on cultural moments with little lasting relevance: while the problems they represent are still with us, what do we care, now, about Todd Akin or Jerry Sandusky? The essays about representation in the media also underwhelmed me, perhaps because I read many articles and reviews on these topics online. When Gay turns her attention to well-known works, her analysis adds little to what many others have said before: yes, *Fifty Shades* romanticizes abusive behavior; yes, *The Help* turns the lives of black maids into feel-good stories for white people. When she focuses on works with which I'm unfamiliar (and outside of my areas of interest I pretty much live under a rock. I haven't seen *Django*, or anything by Tyler Perry. I've never heard of Diana Spechler's *Skinny*. I don't know who Daniel Tosh is), she lost me. Gay is an English professor, and like most academic criticism, her analysis tends to focus on the specifics of the work in question, with the assumption that readers are already familiar with it. And since most of these essays are about problematic works, you probably won't come away with a reading list either. Even a critically-minded book-lover like me can only get so much enjoyment reading about problems in works I've never heard of. In the end, my favorite essays were the personal ones, while the others were a mixed bag. This is a worthwhile read, perhaps especially so for those who are immersed in pop culture but haven't given much thought to it; the writing is accessible without being simplistic. And I think Roxane Gay is a great person and am glad other people are reading and loving her work. Unfortunately, very high expectations made it a disappointment for me.

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