



The Tribes of America: Journalistic Discoveries of Our People and Their Cultures

Paul Cowan

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First published in 1979 and long out of print, *The Tribes of America* is an overlooked classic—a prescient and deeply empathetic work based on seven years of reporting from the front lines of the culture wars that continue to divide America. Long before Tom Frank asked, “What’s the matter with Kansas?” *Village Voice* reporter and civil rights activist Paul Cowan set out to “to cross the sound barrier of dogma and test [his] beliefs against the realities of American life” by investigating what he called the “professional, religious, ethnic, and racial tribes—the Tribes of America.” From reporting on a vicious battle over school textbooks in West Virginia, the school busing crisis in Boston, and the miners’ strike in Harlan County, Kentucky, to the fight over low-income housing in Forest Hills, Queens, and the 1972 conspiracy trial of Eqbal Ahmad, Father Philip Berrigan, and others, Cowan journeyed deep into misunderstood communities across the nation to depict American struggles, prejudices, and hopes.

In his introduction, Rick Perlstein writes that Cowan’s “agonized sensitivity to battlefields then barely emergent makes for one of the most remarkable books I have ever read by any journalist.” *The Tribes of America* is a powerful model for engaged journalism and an enormously illuminating portrait of a nation at war with itself.

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