



Children of Crisis: Selections from the Pulitzer Prize-winning five-volume Children of Crisis series

Robert Coles

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In the 1950s Robert Coles began studying, living among, and, above all, listening to American children. The results of his efforts--revealed in five volumes published between 1967 and 1977--constitute one of the most searching and vigorous social studies ever undertaken by one person in the United States. Here, heard often in their own voices, are America's "children of crisis": African American children caught in the throes of the South's racial integration; The children of impoverished migrant workers in Appalachia; Children whose families were transformed by the migration from South to North, from rural to urban communities; Latino, Native American, and Eskimo children in the poorest communities of the American West; The children of America's wealthiest families confronting the burden of their own privilege. This volume restores to print a masterwork of psychological and sociological inquiry--a book that, in its focus on how children learn and develop in the face of rapid change and social upheaval, speaks directly and pointedly to our own times. Robert Coles is a professor of psychiatry and medical humanities at the Harvard Medical School, a research psychiatrist for the Harvard University Health Services, and the James Agee Professor of Social Ethics at Harvard College.

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From Reader Review Children of Crisis: Selections from the Pulitzer Prize-winning five-volume Children of Crisis series for online ebook

mirela Darau says

I guess reading a rich and quite thick book also entitles to a fairly large review...:)

It's an interesting experience, reading this book. It's like a long travel back in time, seeing hardship and great people, simple people, ordinary people coping with it. And there's of course the advantage of being part of the future -with respect to those times- which allows for a zoom out and a detachment every now and then.

It teaches me every page more that judgement is not something within our handreach, because we're so limited and cannot see in an overview manner, while situations are so complex in themselves. Even abject - as i would sometimes too easily say- people look more human once they're allowed to speak for themselves. For instance i remember now reading the telling of a white woman from the south who had to go for some time in new york (in the 60s) and had to share bathroom with others, among which a black woman, and all the foundation-shaking she went through and the consequences this had on her life afterwards. I could hardly believe what i read...

It's a book of history as much as of psychology and sociology, an interesting (so far, at least) dictionary of human behavior.

Just went a little past half of the book, and was already thinking the situation is quite depressing for so many people: some are angry, others submissive, others are marked and unable to deviate from the course of life of their parents. A lot of struggle for food, for a home, for the choice to make, and the only sparkle of hope in their lives are their children. In the middle of this, I encountered today something similar to an oasis. The paragraph is called 'Black Fathers'. Well, it's more about one particular father and his thoughts, his being being different. Through those pages there is an open question in the air: how come he is so different, where does his presence of spirit, his way talking and thinking, his character development come from...

I put just one example that struck me with the deep truth it contained [not a universal truth, but a fact i saw true throughout the book:] "A man doesn't know what his wife goes through all day. All he knows is his own troubles. He forgets what it means to bring up kids - and i mean *bring* them up, not drag them up."

Now, looking back to the book as a whole, I must say it was a journey worth taking, an interesting mirror into various children's and grown-ups' life, an enriching experience.

My favorite was the first part, the one describing black children in the South. I found it dynamic, objective (many points of view given), humanizing.

There were chapters when I felt tired of so much poverty and lack of perspective: nothing to hope for in the future for so many kids, a gloomy life cycle, tired parents, lack of food, prejudiced, stupid teachers, low-set goals.

But I found the last chapter of 'the privileged ones' very inspired, as to completing the picture, though much shorter in length and resource than the other ones. As among the poor, wealthy children can also be unsatisfied, careless (though in different ways and aspects) or disciplined, caring and interested, with big plans and hopes.

I very much enjoyed the conclusion of the book, the example of the 'spoilt' girl (also the slightly funny observation of Coles " *So much for psychiatry, its normative judgements, and the uses to which they are put.*") and the words of the maid, as to the importance of the questions we ask ourselves, and James Agee's statement:

All that each person is, and experiences, and shall never experience, in body and mind, all these things are differing expressions of himself and of one root, and are identical: and not one of these things nor one of these persons is ever quite to be duplicated, nor replaced, nor has it ever quite had precedent; but each is a new and uncommunicably tender life, wounded in every breath and almost as hardly killed as easily wounded: sustaining, for a while, without defense, the enormous assaults of the universe.

Dr. Robin Markowitz says

Brilliant work. Coles wrote a number of volumes regarding his work with children. I read the individual volumes.
