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In this innovative historical exploration, Levine not only traces the emergence of such familiar categories as highbrow and lowbrow at the turn of the century, but helps us to understand more clearly both the process of cultural change and the nature of culture in American society. Mehr lesen Weniger lesen

Spanning over one hundred and fifty years, Lawrence W. Levine's Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America, charts the development of culture beginning in the late eighteenth century to the early twentieth century.

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Levine, Lawrence W. Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1988. Argument Levine demonstrates the emergence of a schism in American culture towards the end of the 19th century as conductors, directors, curators, and critics began to elevate certain art.

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In "Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America", Lawrence W. Levine writes, "The idea that Americans, long after they declared their political independence, retained a colonial mentality in matters of culture and intellect is a shrewd perception that deserves serious consideration" (pg. 2).

"Highbrow" was first used in the 1880s to describe intellectual or aesthetic superiority, and "lowbrow" first used in 1900 to denote that which was not very refined or intellectual; both terms were derived from phrenology of racial types (221-22).

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The opposite of highbrow is lowbrow, and between them is middlebrow, describing culture that is neither high nor low; as a usage, middlebrow is derogatory, as in Virginia Woolf's unsent letter to the New Statesman, written in the 1930s and published in The Death of the Moth and Other Essays (1942).

Highbrow/Lowbrow sinks its teeth into our smug cultural assumptions and holds on for dear life. " —Carlin Romano, The Washington Post Book World " Provides just the kind of balanced, historically informed assessment that can be of immediate value at a time when appeals to eternal truth fly thick and fast.

Levine's Highbrow/Lowbrow shows us a period of American history when the classification of art was far less important than it is today, when an event could be both culturally important and hugely popular. Levine draws a picture of nineteenth-century America in which William Shakespeare was the most performed playwright in the nation, symphonies played popular music as much as they did the works of the great masters, and museums exhibited painting and sculpture alongside mastodon bones.

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