

the best american essays 2020

The best American essays 2020 showcased a diverse array of voices and themes, reflecting the complexities and challenges of contemporary life in the United States. This year marked a significant moment in literature as writers grappled with social justice, personal identity, and the pervasive effects of the pandemic. The essays selected for this article not only highlight the talents of individual authors but also represent the broader cultural conversations taking place in America. In this exploration, we will delve into some of the most impactful essays of 2020, examining their themes, styles, and contributions to the literary landscape.

Key Themes in the Best American Essays 2020

The essays that stood out in 2020 often revolved around a few central themes. These themes not only resonated with readers but also provided a lens through which to understand the tumultuous events of the year.

1. Social Justice and Activism

The events surrounding the Black Lives Matter movement and protests against police brutality ignited a national conversation about race and justice. Essays addressing these issues were particularly poignant. Notable works included:

- **“How to Write an Autobiographical Novel” by Alexander Chee** - In this essay, Chee reflects on his identity as a queer Asian American and the intersections of race and art.
- **“Notes from a Black Woman” by Imani Perry** - Perry’s essay delves into her experiences as a Black woman in America, exploring themes of resilience and identity amidst systemic racism.

These essays not only engaged with personal narratives but also with the larger societal structures that shape the lives of marginalized communities.

2. Personal Identity and Memoir

Many essays of 2020 took on an autobiographical approach, allowing authors to share their personal journeys of self-discovery and the complexities of identity. This genre resonated deeply with readers during a time of

introspection and uncertainty. Noteworthy examples include:

- **“The Last Great American Novel” by David Foster Wallace** - Wallace’s essay reflects on the nature of creativity and the struggles of writing in a world dominated by commercialism.
- **“My Life as a Dog” by Kiese Laymon** - In this piece, Laymon examines his youth in the South and the impact of his upbringing on his sense of self and belonging.

These essays provided insight into the authors' lives while also encouraging readers to reflect on their own experiences.

3. The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic

The global pandemic fundamentally altered the way we live, work, and communicate. Many essays addressed the profound effects of COVID-19, capturing the collective anxiety and uncertainty of the moment. Some standout essays included:

- **“The Plague” by Mary Laura Philpott** - Philpott’s essay draws parallels between past pandemics and the current crisis, exploring themes of fear, loss, and resilience.
- **“Quarantine Life” by Anne Lamott** - Lamott reflects on the challenges and unexpected joys of life during lockdown, blending humor with poignant observations.

These essays not only documented the immediate impact of the pandemic but also captured the emotional toll it took on individuals and communities.

Notable Authors and Their Contributions

The essays featured in the best American essays of 2020 came from a diverse group of authors, each bringing their unique perspectives and styles to the forefront.

1. Kiese Laymon

A prominent voice in contemporary literature, Kiese Laymon’s work often

grapples with issues of race, identity, and the complexity of the American experience. His essays in 2020 resonated with readers due to their authenticity and raw emotion, encouraging deep reflection on personal and societal issues.

2. Imani Perry

Imani Perry's contributions to the essay genre are marked by their intellectual rigor and emotional depth. Her ability to articulate the nuances of Black identity and experience in America has made her a vital voice in contemporary discussions of race and justice.

3. Mary Laura Philpott

Philpott's essays often blend humor with profound insight, making her reflections on life relatable and accessible. In 2020, her work provided a much-needed perspective on the absurdities and challenges of navigating a world in crisis.

The Significance of the Best American Essays 2020

The essays published in 2020 hold significant cultural importance. They serve as a snapshot of a year marked by upheaval and transformation, offering readers a chance to engage with the complexities of contemporary life. The best American essays of 2020 encouraged readers to reflect on their own experiences while also providing insight into the broader societal issues at play.

1. Fostering Empathy and Understanding

Through personal narratives and diverse perspectives, these essays foster empathy and understanding among readers. They invite individuals to step outside their own experiences and consider the realities faced by others, particularly those from marginalized communities.

2. Encouraging Critical Thought

The essays of 2020 also encourage critical thought about the world we inhabit. By addressing pressing social issues and personal struggles, these writers prompt readers to consider their roles in society and the changes

needed to create a more just and equitable world.

Conclusion

In summary, the best American essays of 2020 reflect the myriad challenges and triumphs of a year like no other. From social justice to personal identity and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, these essays capture the essence of contemporary American life. They not only highlight the talents of individual authors but also contribute to the larger cultural conversations that define our times. As we move forward, the insights gleaned from these essays will continue to resonate, inspiring readers to reflect on their own lives and the world around them.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is 'The Best American Essays 2020'?

'The Best American Essays 2020' is an annual anthology that curates some of the most notable essays published in various periodicals throughout the year, showcasing a diverse array of voices and styles.

Who is the series editor for 'The Best American Essays 2020'?

The series editor for 'The Best American Essays 2020' is Robert Atwan, who has been overseeing the series since its inception.

Who guest-edited 'The Best American Essays 2020'?

The guest editor for 'The Best American Essays 2020' is Hilton Als, a staff writer at The New Yorker and an acclaimed author.

What themes are prominent in 'The Best American Essays 2020'?

Prominent themes in 'The Best American Essays 2020' include identity, race, politics, and personal experiences, reflecting the complexities of contemporary American life.

How does 'The Best American Essays 2020' differ from previous editions?

'The Best American Essays 2020' includes a particularly strong focus on marginalized voices and intersectional perspectives, which may differ from

the traditional selections in previous editions.

Can you name a few notable essays included in 'The Best American Essays 2020'?

Some notable essays in 'The Best American Essays 2020' include works by writers such as Leslie Jamison, Kiese Laymon, and Susan Orlean.

What is the significance of the 'Best American' series?

The 'Best American' series is significant because it highlights exceptional writing across various genres, fostering a greater appreciation for contemporary literature and diverse voices.

How are the essays selected for 'The Best American Essays 2020'?

Essays are selected through a collaborative process involving the series editor and the guest editor, who review submissions from numerous literary journals and magazines.

What audience is 'The Best American Essays 2020' aimed at?

'The Best American Essays 2020' is aimed at a broad audience, including literary enthusiasts, students, and anyone interested in contemporary issues and eloquent writing.

Where can I purchase 'The Best American Essays 2020'?

'The Best American Essays 2020' can be purchased at major bookstores, online retailers like Amazon, and through independent bookshops.

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