



Rude Democracy: Civility and Incivility in American Politics

Susan Herbst

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Democracy is, by its very nature, often rude. But there are limits to how uncivil we should be. In her timely and important book, *Rude Democracy*, Susan Herbst explores the ways we discuss public policy, how we treat each other as we do, and how we can create a more civil national culture.

Herbst uses the examples of Sarah Palin and Barack Obama to illustrate her case. She scrutinizes Palin as both victim and perpetrator of incivility, including close analysis of her speeches on the 2008 campaign trail, the tone at her rallies, and her interactions with her audience. Turning to Barack Obama, Herbst argues that a key 2009 speech reveals much about his own perspective on American civility as it pertains to contentious issues such as abortion, and notes, too, what the controversy surrounding the speech reveals about the nature of public opinion in the United States. She also dissects Palin's and Obama's roles in the 2009 health care debate. Finally, in a fascinating chapter, Herbst examines how young people come to form their own attitudes about civility and political argument.

In *Rude Democracy*, Susan Herbst insists that Americans need to recognize the bad tendencies and habits we have developed, use new media for more effective debate, and develop a tougher and more strategic political skin. She urges us to boost both the intelligence and productivity of our debates, noting that the effort demands a commitment to the nature of argument itself. *Rude Democracy* outlines a plan for moving forward and creating a more civil climate for American politics.

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