



Capturing the Beat Moment: Cultural Politics and the Poetics of Presence

Erik Mortenson

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CHOICE Outstanding Academic Title

Examining “the moment” as one of the primary motifs of Beat writing, Erik Mortenson offers the first book to investigate immediacy and its presence and importance in Beat writing. *Capturing the Beat Moment: Cultural Politics and the Poetics of Presence* places an expanded canon of Beat writers in an early postmodern context that highlights their importance in American poetics and provides an account of Beat practices that reveal how gender and race affect Beat politics of the moment.

Mortenson argues that Beat writers focused on action, desire, and spontaneity to establish an authentic connection to the world around them and believed that “living in the moment” was the only way in which they might establish the kind of life that led to good writing. With this in mind, he explores the possibility that, far from being the antithesis of their times, the Beats actually were a product of them. Mortenson outlines the effects of gender and race on Beat writing in the postwar years, as well as the Beats’ attempts to break free of the constrictive notions of time and space prevalent during the 1950s.

Mortenson discusses such topics as the importance of personal visionary experiences; the embodiment of sexuality and the moment of ecstasy in Beat writing; how the Beats used photographs to evoke the past; and the ways that Beat culture was designed to offer alternatives to existing political and social structures. Throughout the volume, Mortenson moves beyond the Kerouac-Ginsberg-Burroughs triumvirate commonly associated with Beat literature, discussing women—such as Diane di Prima, Janine Pommy Vega, and Joyce Johnson—and African American writers, including Bob Kaufman and Amiri Baraka. With the inclusion of these authors comes a richer understanding of the Beat writers’ value and influence in American literary history.



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