

Rebecca Solnit: Whose Story Is This? [C1]

Considerata una delle pensatrici attualmente più influenti, la saggista che ha elaborato il concetto di 'mansplaining' pubblica una riflessione sullo stato attuale del femminismo e sulla lotta per conservare o sovvertire i privilegi.



A product of the public education system, American writer and activist Rebecca Solnit has explored [issues](#) such as history, social movements and the human response to catastrophic events with a distinctly feminist perspective. Born in 1961 to a Jewish father and an Irish Catholic mother, she grew up in California, in a home where gender violence regularly occurred.

MANSPLAINING

Solnit graduated from San Francisco State University and received a Master's degree in journalism from the University of California, Berkeley. In the 1980s, she was already involved in environmental and human rights campaigns. Her interests became increasingly more focused on the anti-war movement, climate change and, especially, violence against women. With the [release](#) of her [essay](#) Men Explain Things to Me, she gained credit for identifying what she called 'mansplaining'. This [portmanteau word](#) has become a

widely-used term: it refers to a common tendency of men to explain things to women at great length and in a patronising tone, things which those women often already know.

WHOSE STORY IS THIS?

A contributor to publications such as The Guardian and Harper's Magazine, Solnit has written seventeen books. Her 2019 collection of essays *Whose Story Is This?* looks at the world through her own unique feminist lens. In it, she is concerned with the issue of whose voices are being heard, which are being legitimised, and which are being put at the forefront of the conversation. That preoccupation is in itself an indication of her intersectional approach to feminism, and she is extremely mindful of leaving no woman behind. A press conference about this collection marked an opportunity for Speak Up to find out more about Solnit's political views. As she explained, while she is proud of how far social movements have come, she still believes there is a lot of work left to be done. **Rebecca Solnit (American accent)**: The world has changed for the better in many ways. That does not mean it's changed enough and everything is fine and we can all go home now... So I see two things, not only these new movies in which women have strong roles and that are about women's lives, in which women talk to each other and not even necessarily about men... but I also see, and this has been a fascinating thing in the US — I don't know how it is in other countries — that we go back to look at movies we thought were wonderful, were funny... and we find out how sexist, how racist, how homophobic... how cruel they were.

POLITICS AND EMPATHY

Solnit emphasises the importance of empathy in politics. She believes that hate crimes and the different shapes they take on are directly connected to the inability to see the humanity in one another. **Rebecca Solnit (American accent)**: I often see racism and sexism as the result of training people to

limit their empathy, to not see the humanity of other people, which can be very effective. Those horrific old pictures of [lynching parties](#) in the American South, where black men were tortured and murdered and white people came out and had picnics and took photos and treated it all like fun... to me were examples of people celebrating that they had killed their own capacity for empathy, that they had completely separated themselves from another human being and another whole category of human beings.

RELIGION IN SOCIETY

She also [reflects](#) on religion, and [tackles](#) the interesting and ambiguous role it plays in relation to social justice. **Rebecca Solnit (American accent):** I think that religion can be liberatory, religion can be in service of human rights. I am a bad Buddhist, but [something of](#) a Buddhist and I also know Buddhists doing great human rights work and I think of it as, at its best, a deeply humanising religion and practice of compassion and connectedness.

INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

An important aspect of Solnit's political views is the huge role she believes indigenous communities have in leading social movements. She sees this [being the case](#) especially when it comes to climate change. **Rebecca Solnit (American accent):** This was my great intellectual education almost more than anything, and that made me [hopeful](#): the resurgence of indigenous peoples around the world, and the power of their world views for our thinking about nature, the environment, our relationships, the stories we can tell, etcetera. So I feel like my lifetime has been a huge revolution and I wasn't really aware of it at twenty, I am now and lots of things including climate have gotten worse but so much has gotten better.

CANCEL CULTURE?

Solnit is also very clear about her support for the trans community and finds the treatment they receive in multiple European countries to be shocking. However, she also believes that [so-called](#) 'cancel culture' is not a real

problem. **Rebecca Solnit (American accent):** There's very little transphobia in US feminism, **almost none**, it's kind of shocking to see how different Britain and parts of Europe are these days... But to **the broader question**: 'cancel culture' is a bullshit term used largely by the US right which assumes that some people not only have the right to be successful, to be listened to, to be popular, but that nobody has the right to oppose them. Aren't there lots of people who were not heard historically? There are lots of people who are not heard now, and so we have the comic spectacle often of somebody writing an editorial in The New York Times, or being on national television talking about how they've been silenced. And essentially what they're saying is: not only do I have the right to speak but I have the right to not be criticised.

Glossary

- **take on** = adottare
- **issues** = questioni
- **release** = pubblicazione
- **essay** = saggio
- **portmanteau word** = parola composta
- **patronising** = paternalistico
- **at the forefront** = all'avanguardia
- **there is a lot of work left to be done** = c'è ancora molto lavoro da fare
- **reflects** = riflettere
- **tackles** = affrontare
- **something of** = una sorta di
- **almost none** = quasi per niente
- **the broader question** = la questione più generale
- **approach** = approccio
- **inability** = incapacità
- **hopeful** = ottimista
- **so-called** = cosiddetta
- **widely-used** = usata frequentemente
- **concerned** = preoccupata
- **shapes** = forme
- **at great length** = in lungo e in largo
- **mindful** = consapevole
- **lynching parties** = bande di linciaggio
- **being the case** = essere il caso