



The Progressive Patriot

Billy Bragg

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What does it mean to be English? What does it mean to be British? Is the cross of St. George a proud symbol of a great tradition, or the badge of a neo-Nazi? In a world where British citizens can lay bombs to kill their countrymen, where religious fundamentalism is on the increase, and where the BNP are somehow part of the democratic process, what does patriotism actually mean? Identity can change depending on what company a person are in. For example, someone could describe themselves British to one person, Scottish to another and, say, a Londoner to another, and be right every time. But problems arise when someone tries to tell you what you are, based on your skin tone, religion, accent, surname, or whatever. This book is Billy Bragg's urgent, eloquent, and passionate response to the events of July 7, 2005, when four bombs tore through a busy morning in London, killing 52 innocent people and injuring many more. A firm believer in tolerance and diversity, he felt himself hemmed in by fascists on one side and religious fanatics on the other. The suicide bombers were all British-born and well integrated into our multicultural society. Yet, they felt no compunction in murdering and maiming their fellow citizens. Inclusivity is important, but without a sense of belonging to accompany it, what chance social cohesion? But where does a sense of belonging come from? Can it be conferred by a legal document? Is it a matter of blood and soil? Can it be taught? Is it nature or nurture? This book pulls no punches in its insights, and its radical vision offers a positive hope for a country teetering on the brink of catastrophe.

The Progressive Patriot Details

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From Reader Review The Progressive Patriot for online ebook

Cathie Strover says

I'm a long time Billy fan - love his music, lyrics, and refreshing honesty.

Not sure that this book knows what it wants to be - there are big sections on the history of Barking, for example, that not everyone needs to know - but a brave attempt at exploring being english, which is especially pertinent post -Brexit. Interesting that this was written over 10 years ago but is already talking about the rise of racism and what are 'British values' (now embedded in Ofsted expectations and part of education training).

But for anyone born around the late 50s or early 60s with any love of British music history, the chapter on rock against racism, the rise of punk and the Clash and the Jam, should speak to your soul.

James says

'The Progressive Patriot' is an intelligent, fascinating and thought provoking look at what exactly it does, or might mean to be 'British' and a Patriot' in a modern 21st century multi-cultural society.

Billy Bragg's book attempts to blend his own personal memoir with social history and for the most part does this very successfully. To some extent 'The Progressive Patriot' is all about reclaiming patriotism without its hitherto repugnant association with fascism and the far/alt-right. It is about, as the title would suggest, considering a more progressive (as opposed to repressive, oppressive or regressive) reinterpretation of patriotism.

Britain and the British have a lot to be proud of and equally have a lot to be ashamed about - more so than many countries and less so than others. Certainly one of the key questions raised by Bragg's book is perhaps, if we are proud to be 'British' - what exactly are we proud of, what does that mean and importantly, why?

It is also important to remember that Patriotism (whilst often confused with) is not necessarily the same as Nationalism - which is generally a more extreme form of Patriotism, veering more towards xenophobia and chauvinism.

Having said that, it is worth remembering and considering, in the words of Samuel Johnson: "Patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel".

Billy Bragg has given us an important and thought-provoking book, food for thought and well worth a read.

Sally McRogerson says

Thomas Paine's father was a Quaker. Why didn't I know this? Well I do now, so the book was of some use in educating me, although it's gonna take more books than I have time for in this lifetime to complete the process I can't help thinking. (Thomas Paine wrote a pamphlet called "Common Sense", which convinced the States to ditch the British monarchy and become a republic in 1776).

Felt a bit as though I was walking through treacle at the beginning cos I'm not English in the Essex sense, but Billy Bragg is and it was worth ploughing through the stuff that didn't feel relevant to me to find the stuff that does.

His musical influences have set me off on a whole new shopping expedition (and I don't do shopping!). His ideas for a democratic written Bill of Rights (to counter the many, many responsibilities which seem to rain down on us every time a group of M.P.'s put their bums on those benches) decided by groups of citizens in collaboration, i.e. grass-roots decisions, is well worth further deliberation.

If you're a fan of Bill's song lyrics, then you'll probably think this book worth a few hours of your time. You don't change your politics with your genre!

Andy Carrington says

Didn't actually mind it first time around. Second time, it was more obvious that this is just basically a glorified wank rag for Bragg's idealistic views on England.

Packed with plenty of Liberal / Champagne-Socialist sentiments, of course.

He really does love this country.

Meh.

John says

An enjoyable journey through Billy Bragg's life and politics.

Colin Heber-Percy says

This reads almost like a collection of themed essays. But the central aim is to wrest ideas of national pride and patriotism from the right and to set out an argument for understanding Englishness within a progressive, left wing social / historical context. Billy Bragg is passionate and engaging and well informed but this book was written before the rise of UKIP, before the current government came to power, and it's impossible not feel that the tide has turned against him: the reactionaries have gained ground, not lost it.

It's particularly interesting to read in the light of Scotland's bid for independence. The Union is changing, and the English are being forced to examine themselves as they haven't for centuries. As Bragg points out, the English have no parliament or assembly of their own; they have no passport and no national anthem. And to fly the cross of St George is seen as a badge of bigotry and racism. Why is the same not true for Scotland or Wales? These questions are all raised in the book, and have become more relevant and interesting since its publication.

Bob says

I like Billy Bragg; his music, his politics and what I knew of the bloke himself, so it's hardly a surprise that I liked this book. That being said, I couldn't claim that this is as good as George Orwell, whom he quotes and obviously admires, on the subject of Englishness. No major complaint there; not many people are as good as Orwell.

Billy is good on the development of music that lead to Punk and Rock against Racism. He's pretty good on the politics of the Civil War and the rise of unionism, though I'd have liked a lot more of both, especially the Civil War. I think he's especially good at being himself, the lad who can admit that his first real musical love was Simon and Garfunkel and whose first real musical ambition was to turn into one of the Rolling Stones. He's proud of his dad for having fought in the second world war, of his granddad for having taken part in a major London dock strike and of Barking for having been an important place back before the Romans arrived.

Annabelle says

I loved reading this book, it combines my two favourite subjects - music and politics. It's well written and thought provoking. Informative on many issues such as culture and even history which is a subject I'm previously not all that well read up on. Very absorbing!

Thomas Strömquist says

Very interesting and enjoyable by alternative rocker Billy Bragg. If you are in the least intrigued by the title, I can promise you won't be disappointed. Kind of loosely held together and associative more than following a logical path at times (but never lacking in logical reasoning). This does not distract in my opinion, but makes this kind of book very personal and very readable. You don't even have to agree with Billy's views on all and everything to appreciate *The Progressive Patriot*.

Rebecca Jones says

Made me think, really enjoyed it, and actually made me glad to be English, thanks Billy

Ian Wood says

'The Progressive Patriot' is Billy Bragg's first book but I suspect it will not be his last. Following on from his previous album 'England, Half English' he is continuing his theme of what is national identity in a multicultural society, fuelled by the far right BNP being elected onto the council of his native Barking and the realisation that the London suicide bombers were British Nationals, Billy is looking for an inclusive

patriotism that welcomes all under the National Banners.

The contradictions of what is traditionally considered to be British Patriotism from the Whig histories and the fact that the mother of all democracies did not have universal suffrage until the twentieth century do not make this an easy subject and Billy attempts to bridge the gap of his own ancestry and experience and how although that it could alienate him from the English genius instead it shows how it can give us an inclusive citizenship. Billy leads us through his family history and fits this into the history of both Barking and the Nation. Coupled with this Billy shares with us his formative years and shows us how, somewhat bizarrely, Paul Simon and Bob Dylan informed his love of English folk music and The Clash informed not only his politics but also his internationalism.

The book is very timely and while the government considers such ludicrous suggestions as to introduce citizen tests and school children pledging allegiance to the Queen, Billy Bragg is taking the lead with realistic ideas that are not impositions but a realistic appreciation and inclusiveness.

Reading this book made me think of my own ideas on patriotism and my ancestry with a similar stand point to Billy Bragg with our both being lovers of George Orwell's 'The Lion and the Unicorn' and having both being politicised by music. I brought to mind my Grandmother rushing home in the thirties to avoid Oswald Mosley's Blackshirts marching through Leeds. She got the heel of her shoe stuck in the tram lines and had to break it off to get away. History has never felt so relevant.

Bill says

Who were the only nation that entered the FIFA 2006 Soccer World Cup that does not have their own National Anthem or passport? Bear in mind that nearly 200 countries entered the competition, it was England. Surprising to some I'm sure, but it's true. I see myself as English, but my passport says I'm British and as for the national anthem. well it's the British National Anthem (and bloody hell it's dull!) we definitely need an English anthem. I learnt some of this from Mr Bragg's book (not the bit about how dull the British National anthem is, I already knew that)

This is a great book for helping to understand what and who we English really are and what really defines us. Also how, hopefully, we have finally reclaimed the English Flag (the cross of St George) from the Fascist thugs (yes BNP that's you) who stole it.

There has been a lot of talk about patriotism since 911 and this is a book that should be read by anyone who thinks they know exactly what patriotism is and indeed those of us like me who aren't really sure.

It's well written, easy to read, well researched and very thought provoking. Give it a shot!

Mark says

This book at time suffers from a great deal of confusion about what it wants to be, part biography, part history of rock music, part genealogy and part anthropological study of the English as a nation and a race. The author repeats himself from chapter to chapter which suggests it wasn't written as a full text but is a

collection of thoughts written down over a period of time. That said, it's passionate and welcoming in its delivery with a frisson of anger that juxtaposes the chapters quite nicely. Bragg is at home when writing about music, you get the sense that he feels himself to be on safe ground in the arts where facts can quite easily be subjective. That's not to say he isn't sure footed on the politics however. There is an elegant flourish to the language and one can see why he chose to write the book in the first place. As we are now, trapped between the worlds of left and right Bragg comes at the subject of multiculturalism (the central theme of the book) from a left wing background but he refuses to adopt the traditional language and arguments of his political group, instead focusing on human interest stories to push through the narrative.

The book is a response to the victory in his old constituency of the BNP in recent local and European elections (since overturned) and horror with which he saw the news that day. There is a brief but enlightening history of the Dagenham and Barking area in London that shows just what a bastard nation we always have been in response to the BNP's "ethnic British" mythology. Bragg is angry about how fascism is once again seeping in to our culture. Having been a part of the original rock against racism he is appalled that a new generation are having to fight the same battles against the BNP and more recently the EDL. A well delivered if slightly confused book that has its heart set firmly in the right place and written by a man who cares deeply about the subjects on show.

Jared Duran says

Thoroughly enjoyable. Bragg's prose is conversational and endearing. He speaks his mind and backs his opinions with well founded research, and though the sheer amount of historical reference can become tedious at times, the man somehow manages to reign things back in to friendlier, less formal territory--after all, scholarship is the enemy of romance. In *The Progressive Patriot*, Bragg does the same great job of mixing the political with the emotional and the personal that he does with his songwriting, and what emerges is a portrait of a largely optimistic man whose faith in humanity remains strong despite its disappointing tendencies towards bigotry and hatred. As he once sang, he's got a socialism of the heart, and it is both encouraging and comforting to find someone who is still so relevant on the international stage using his celebrity to further ideals of substance.

C M says

I have been a longtime fan of Billy Bragg's music and political activism, even though I don't always agree with his positions. Having seen him recently at a concert in Chicago, where he was still thrilled about the death of Margaret Thatcher a week earlier, I decided that it was time to read his book "*The Progressive Patriot*," which I had bought many months before. Somehow, I thought the book was mainly dealing with contemporary multicultural Britain and the fight against the far right, in which Bragg has been so prominent. Instead, Bragg reflects on his life through the prism of his love for England. This leads to very different chapters: some highly personal, about his family and its ancestors; some mainly musical, about the importance of English music for American folk; and some political, about finding an alternative for both the nationalism of the far right and the internationalism of the far left. Many chapters are overly detailed and not easy to get through. Moreover, for anyone with some advanced level of knowledge about the history and politics of Britain, there is little new to the story. The chapters also don't always fit well together and there is extensive overlap, which gets annoying after a while. I found the last chapter to be the most interesting, as that deals with his vision for a modern and multicultural Britain. It is also in that chapter that Bragg shows

the most obvious naivety and selective memory, seeing all kind of positive (i.e. progressive) aspects in historical events, which never happened (at least not to the extent as stated by Bragg).

Overall, I was surprised that such a gifted lyricist as Bragg would be such a mediocre author. I know the styles are different, but I had expected them to be at least in some way related. I guess I will stick to listening to his beautiful songs then.
