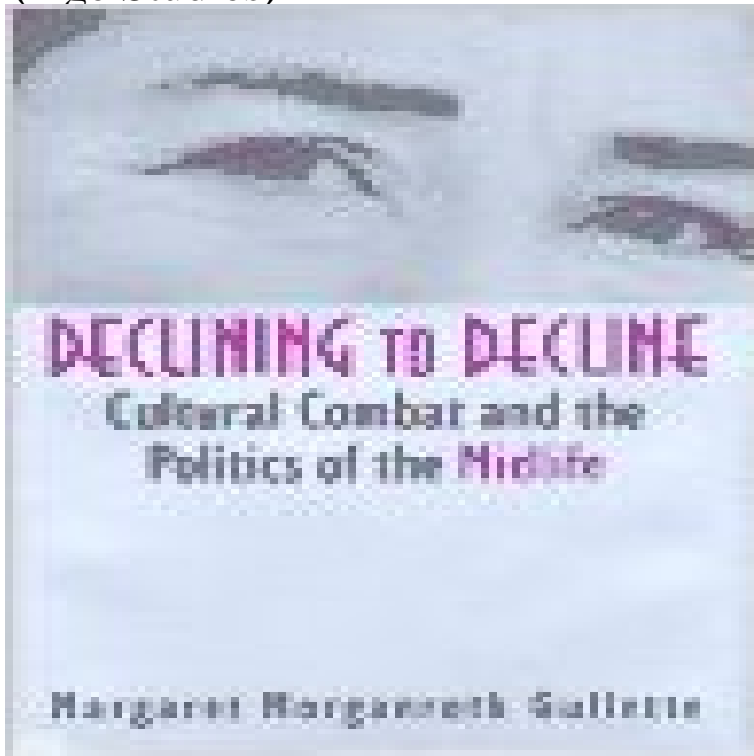


Declining to Decline: Cultural Combat and the Politics of the Midlife (Age Studies)



In *Cultural Combat*, Margaret Morganroth Gullette argues that in America aging is a culturally constructed disease with an adolescent exposure and a midlife onset. Targeting men as well as women, our culture pressures us to shed youthful attributes and optimism about the future. This, she says, constitutes the midlife crisis of our time -- not a private psychological condition but a collective problem. Even our reactions have been channeled: buying remedies, telling stories of self-hating nostalgia, feeling envy of youth, alienation from the elderly, and fear of fifty. Gullette asks us to open our eyes to this manipulation and to resist it. This controversial call to arms is part autobiography, part cultural commentary, part theory, and part passion. In moving, skeptical, funny stories Gullette reflects on her childhood revenge fantasies, her political anguish, the early diagnosis of her arthritis, the rifts between midlife mothers and adult children, and her 25th college reunion. Analyzing cartoons, fiction, films, and news, *Cultural Combat* addresses the full spectrum of midlife phenomena, from the sexual politics of midlife male bodies, to the contradictions of menopausal discourse, to how middle-ageism comes into play in a downsizing economy. Gullette reasons that forming a new anti-middle age-ist community depends on understanding how thoroughly and subtly culture now constructs midlife selfhood and expects our subservience. Evolving out of this subservience, the author proposes the concept of age identity, a

complex and satisfying way of telling our narratives of being and becoming over the entire life course.

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