



How We Got Here: The 70's: The Decade that Brought You Modern Life (For Better or Worse)

By David Frum

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For many, the 1970s evoke the Brady Bunch and the birth of disco. In this first, thematic popular history of the decade, David Frum argues that it was the 1970s, not the 1960s, that created modern America and altered the American personality forever. A society that had valued faith, self-reliance, self-sacrifice, and family loyalty evolved in little more than a decade into one characterized by superstition, self-interest, narcissism, and guilt. Frum examines this metamorphosis through the rise to cultural dominance of faddish psychology, astrology, drugs, religious cults, and consumer debt, and profiles such prominent players of the decade as Werner Erhard, Alex Comfort, and Jerry Brown. *How We Got Here* is lively and provocative reading.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

In a relentlessly smart book full of colorful anecdotes and deft pop-culture references, author David Frum describes the social convulsions of the 1970s: "We live in a world made new, and made new not by new machines, but by new feelings, new thoughts, new manners, new ways." The 1960s have a reputation as America's turning-point decade, but Frum convincingly argues that the 10 years following mattered more. The 1970s, he writes, "left behind a country that was more dynamic, more competitive, more tolerant; less deferential, less self-confident, less united; more socially equal, less economically equal; more expressive, more risk-averse, more sexual; less literate, less polite, less reticent."

The precise dates of this transformation are not as important as the reasons behind it, however, and the explanation in *How We Got Here* for what happened is both original and compelling. He says America's midcentury confidence was an anomaly. At some point, "the rebellion of an unmilitary people against institutions and laws formed by a century of war and the preparation for war" was inevitable. Rather than pondering why Americans trust their public institutions today less than they did during the Watergate revelations, for instance, Frum turns the question on its head: Why was the trust so high previous to that experience? His narrative describing the dizzy whirl of progress is absorbing, and his warning against both the nostalgic myths of the past and the uncritical acceptance of recent change is wise. *How We Got Here* also has a perfect title: there may not be a better book available on the broad currents of American social life in the second half of the 20th century. --John J. Miller

From Publishers Weekly

In a new twist on the belief of many conservatives that the 1960s was the beginning of the end of a righteous and moral America, Frum, a contributing editor at the *Weekly Standard*, aims "to describe--and to judge" the transformation of American values during the '70s. Surveying politics, legal cases and opinion polls as well as popular culture, he links what he sees as America's loss of faith in government, the rise of "sourness and cynicism" and the culture of licentiousness and divorce, among other social changes, to events in that decade. Frum can be perceptive, as when he notes that Betty Ford's confession of her drug dependencies represented a major breakthrough in the discussion of private problems by public figures or when he considers how the "language of marriage" changed as "husbands and wives" gave way to "spouses" and then "partners." Yet his insights are often undercut by scornful assertions: e.g., that Ford "may have believed she was rendering a public service," but she opened the door to a "let's talk about me!" culture; or that linguistic changes eroded the family. Until his final chapter of overt political analysis--in which he asserts that "it was better when more people showed more loyalty to family and country... talked about themselves less, [and] restrained their sexuality"--Frum writes a popular history, although his disdain for those he does not agree with constantly shows through (e.g., he belittles Jane Fonda and Meryl Streep for daring to call themselves "artists" and suggests that Steve Martin is not funny). Filled with shaky, often unfootnoted facts and a palpable dislike for social change, this attempt at evenhanded social science devolves into a polemic that is likely to infuriate all but the most conservative readers. (Feb.)

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From Library Journal

In his last two books (*Dead Right*; *What's Right*), Toronto native Frum, a prolific conservative polemicist, argued that U.S. society has been corroded by post-JFK liberalism and especially by identity politics. His thesis here is that it is the Seventies, not the Sixties, that went on to define the rest of the 20th century. Like

the work of any number of similarly well-educated left-wing counterparts, Frum's writing is not calculated to attract the "undecided" or convert readers with firmly differing viewpoints. Certainly, for anyone who graduated from high school between 1975 and 1979, his painful evocation of the oil embargo, busing conflicts, and the Tehran hostage crisis will dim whatever nostalgia remains for an America innocent of AIDS or the knowledge that cocaine kills. Unfortunately, Frum spends an inordinate amount of time lampooning Sixties youth. And while only a nitpicker would note such casual errors as calling Barnard sociologist Jonathan Rieder a Yale anthropologist, other readers--the ones who won't actually bother to read it, of course--will object to his version of not-long-ago American racial warfare. On balance, a book that academic and large public libraries will want.

-*Scott H. Silverman, Bryn Mawr Coll. Lib., PA*

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Users Review

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George Carter:

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Warren Ford:

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Andrew Fogarty:

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