

The Death of the Grown-up

How America's Arrested Development
is Bringing Down Western Civilization

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Diana West sees a US filled with middle-age guys playing air guitar and thinks "No wonder we can't stop Islamic terrorism." She sees Moms Who Mosh and wonders "Is there a single adult left anywhere?" But, the grown-ups are all gone. The disease that killed them was incubated in the sixties to a rock-and-roll score, took hold in the seventies with the help of multiculturalism and left us with a nation of eternal adolescents who can't decide between "good" and "bad", a generation who can't say "no". From the inability to nix a sixteen year-old's request for Marilyn Manson concert tickets to offering adolescents parentally-funded motel rooms on prom night to rationalizing murderous acts of Islamic suicide bombers with platitudes of cultural equivalence, West sees us on a slippery slope that's lead to a time when America has forgotten its place in the world. In *The Death of the Grown-Up* Diana West serves up a provocative critique of our dangerously indecisive world leavened with humor and shot through with insight.

The Death of the Grown-Up: How America's Arrested Development Is Bringing Down Western Civilization Details

Date : Published August 21st 2007 by St. Martin's Press

ISBN : 9780312340483

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Format : Hardcover 256 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, Cultural, Politics, Psychology, Sociology, History



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Nathaniel Wyckoff says

Every so often, you read a book that gives you pause, that challenges you to rethink some prior notions on life, society or the human condition. If you're fortunate, you may discover a work that literally changes your life, a true gem that throws your entire worldview for a loop. "The Death of the Grownup" is one of those books.

In this brilliantly researched study on the place of childhood within the modern American (and, by extension, Western) cultural matrix, Diana West argues that we, as a society, are in serious trouble. Here's why. Over the past seven decades, the norm in the parent-child relationship has shifted from a focus on the child's responsibility toward his parents to an emphasis on the parents' responsibility toward their children. The notion of childhood has thereby evolved (devolved?) significantly since 1940; what was once considered a temporary developmental stage on the road to eventual maturity and adulthood has become an end in itself. The goal of "growing up" has been largely abandoned in favor of a perpetual adolescence. (Remember those Toys 'R' Us ads from the 1980s?) This societal Peter Pan Syndrome has allowed behaviors and social mores once shunned by mainstream society as childish, or even obscene, to gain widespread acceptance; indeed, those formerly immature, fringe behaviors have redefined the mainstream. Examples abound. West enumerates, among other symptoms, the widespread proliferation of rock music and its many variants, the ever-aging segment of the population that plays video games, the childish modes of dress preferred by many adults, the loss of respect for age-old institutions such as marital fidelity, and the continual breakdown of moral restraint exhibited by adults. Before 1941, the word "teenager" was absent from the American lexicon; today, a vast corporate empire exists to cater to teenage wants, whims and "needs." Today's torrent of silly, vapid reading material aimed at teenagers (almost exclusively girls) began in 1944 with the initial publication of "Seventeen" magazine.

One could easily dismiss today's cultural childishness as a harmless development; after all, don't all societies undergo transformations in their literary, artistic and social norms? Perhaps, but for the first time in human history, the children are running the show. Worse, the adults are virtually nowhere to be found; childishness has become the new mainstream. The effects on the individual and the society are insidious. With the loss of adulthood comes a loss of personal identity, an inability to articulate a set of bedrock virtues on which individual and societal vitality can be based. The loss of adulthood also means an inability to make moral distinctions between different societies and cultures. The World War II generation knew nothing of multiculturalism; we were good, the Nazis were evil, and good had to triumph over evil. In contrast, the leaders of today's less mature, more multicultural Western world have failed to articulate a clear moral distinction between the values of the West (human rights, legal equality of men and women, religious tolerance, freedom of rational thought and expression, to name a few) with those of the Islamic fundamentalists who strive to subdue the Western world through violent and cultural jihad (values including slavery, legalized spousal abuse, honor killings, persecution of religious minorities, and amputation as a legal penalty for theft, among others). It's hard to win a war when one can neither identify the enemy nor assert the rightness of his own cause.

West's book should be required reading for anyone who has a stake in the continued existence of American or Western life as we know it. It's a coherent call for help. Will the real adults please stand up?

Carolyn Page says

This was great! I love how Diana West didn't pull politically-correct punches. I was cheering for her through the book. And thinking "Finally, someone else besides me is saying this!" Love love love!

Jean Lott says

An interesting commentary on how as a nation we don't seem to take responsibility or accountability for many of our actions -- from raising children to going to war in Iraq. It really made me think of how differently I would have parented had I had this book years ago. It is truly thought provoking on many levels.

Mike (the Paladin) says

I considered giving this book 5 stars. I do recommend it and know my own read hasn't done it justice. I need to get back to it, as is the case with so many books.

I suppose some will have trouble with this, in my own way I did. I am in or of the Baby Boom generation and "we" (that generation) are called to task somewhat specifically (among others) here. AND I must admit that Ms. West hits the mark more often than not.

While I suppose it can be argued that she is a bit hypersensitive in some of the examples she sights (I don't care or see as a problem so much that a majority of people watching the Cartoon Network at some times are over thirty so much as I'm concerned that they don't keep up on current events in the world). But on the whole this is a book which will point out something that I believe many if not most with an open mind will already have been somewhat cognizant of. There are hard questions here that one needs to have a really open mind to appreciate.

The books assertion that we who are supposed to be adults have now largely abdicated or even refused to see our responsibilities will I think hit home if an honest look is taken here. It has seemed to me for some time that society has in many senses "thrown out the baby with the bathwater". We lack balance we can't find the tipping point so to speak, we often choose what's "easy" instead of what's right. I recommend this book, even though it can be in some ways uncomfortable.

Patrick says

This book was downright bizarre.

(1) It seemed to be more about Diana West than anything else.

(2) When she wasn't going on about herself she seemed to spend a good chunk of the last part of the book going on about the "War on Terror," with no reference to arrested development or very much related at all to America.

(3) She did sprinkle the text with a few statistics, mostly in the first half, that I guess you could say relate to the text's title, but with no narrative flow and no real interest in trying to create one.

Well, at least we can say she's a gal with no self-esteem issues, I guess. And if you want to wade through the muddle of muck there's a few tidbits here and there....hermetically sealed off from the rest of the book.

I'm almost thinking she wanted to write another book entirely, but was somehow talked into this one. Almost worth reading as an exercise in weird narrative.

And if this is a sample of what is going to be coming from the next generation of "conservative" writers, Jesus, or maybe James Burnham, wept.

Randy Turner says

Fantastic book which painfully describes the deleterious effects of lacking adult leadership. Written in 2006, I can only imagine how the author would feel about the situation today. I have been conducting my own study of virtues recently and Ms. West's insights have hardened my resolve to lead a more virtuous life (in the classical sense) but also to teach my sons the importance of virtue.

Great book. Highly recommended.

Cara M says

I picked this book up solely based on the title, which poses an idea that I generally suspect to be true - there is a lack of maturation required in modern societies. But West goes on to make this point in rather racist, homophobic, sexist, and xenophobic ways, that pretty much invalidate her argument as she is often wrong or misinformed of history and fact. Her disregard of objective truth is appalling to the point of being comical.

Tom says

If you think that there is no harm in adults cavorting around like children, reading this book will disavow you of that notion. Sit down, read, and GROW UP. Start acting like an adult. Civilization's continued survival depends on it according to the author's convincing thesis in this book.

Melinda says

I admit here that I also did not completely read this book. I skimmed it. As in my reading of "The Dumbest Generation", I found this book a "preaching to the choir" type book. Useful really only to those who already hold the idea, but not persuasive enough to convert someone who perhaps didn't think there is any arrested development in America.

The information superhighway and the internet, email, and various types of technology were supposed to make people better decision makers because they would have better information from which to make their decisions and easier access to others in making those decisions... but that has not happened. Instead we see people drowning in information and unable to sift through what is true and what is entertainment and hype. This book attempts to answer the "why is this happening?", similar to "The Dumbest Generation".

Again, the question that I find more compelling is "how do we change things?". If the problem is as the author states, then how do we move forward?

Anita Dalton says

I said in another review a few months ago that in the last decade, I have only encountered one book so bad that I had to stop reading it. I jinxed myself, because I then found *The Death of the Grown-Up* and encountered so many logical fallacies and uncited assertions that by page 20 I could not go on. The horror is, despite the fact that I knew I was going to disagree with the book's main premise – that multiculturalism is destroying America – I still wanted to read this book after purchasing it. I like reading ideas contrary to mine. But I disagreed with the premise even more when I later understood that the author uses the term "multiculturalism" to mean "cultural relativism." I think the technical term for all the problems in this book is "hot mess."

I read in good faith so it may seem like dirty pool that I am reviewing a book I could not finish. So be it. I'll take my lumps, if any come. But since I read in good faith, I expect people to write in good faith. When they don't write in good faith, creating a book to bolster their pre-existing arguments instead of researching, thinking, and at least doing the most minimal due diligence to create a coherent thought, I get to take off my gloves as a polite reviewer. This is not going to be a polite review. My spouse refers to this form of writing as "killing gnats with a machine gun." He may be right but I'm loading my critical gun right now. You can read the whole review [here](#).

Linda says

An absolute must read for every American. This book is about personal responsibility and the weakness of political correctness; the demise of values in the U.S. Read this and you may no longer tolerate the intolerant. A truly great book that will increase in it's impact as it proves itself true.

Frank Roberts says

Sometimes you read a book and find that it pulls together many disparate thoughts that have been percolating in your brain. This was such a book for me. In addition, I am still deeply considering the book's message and its worrisome implications.

Katy says

In this well documented and provocative book, Diana West has taken a very hard hitting look at the immaturity of our culture: parents who want to be friends with their kids, parents who are afraid of their kids, parents who enable all manner of abusive behaviors in their kids - why? because they themselves have never grown-up. Moreover she shows how this leads to a childish wishful world view, a view that pretends, that refuses to see the hard realities that challenge the Western world today. An amazing read.

Mom Coulongue says

My-oh-my, what an eye-opener this volume was.

I might Not believe the text if it wasn't so thoroughly backed up by research of the author and supported by quoted viewpoints.

Americans certainly have much to learn about the historical and present-day Islam and its tenets plus how it relates to Western thought and governments.

We tend to be so far bent over backwards to avoid intolerance, offense, and exclusion, we are missing the dangers of tolerance, inclusion and the fear exhibited by our behavior to those who are intimidating, namely, the Muslim adherents to Islam, its laws, its intolerance,anti-semetism, suppression of women, and forceful use of retoric and riots to get their own way.

Jennifer says

This book starts at the rise of the teenager in the 50's and then progresses to the riots of the 60's and eventually the way parents are 'friends' of their children instead of standing their ground about morals and appropriate behavior and what children are exposed to. I really liked how she reviewed history and brought perspective in how my grandparents were raised verses how I was raised. It was a bit of a wake up call for adults to act like one and sometimes we have to take a stand in what we believe and what is right.

Recommend--
