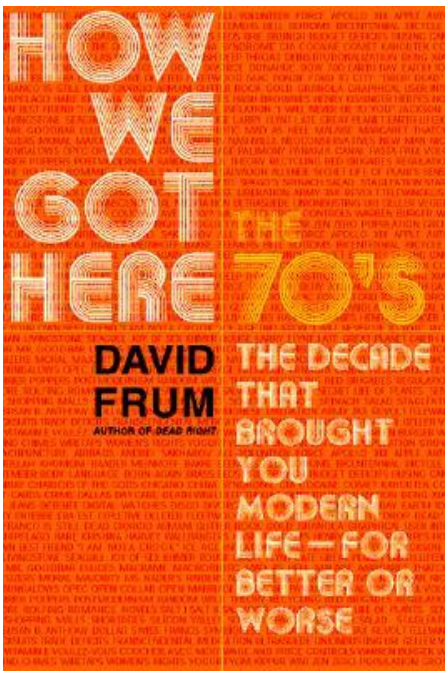

How We Got Here: The 70's: The Decade that Brought You Modern Life (For Better or Worse)

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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.

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

Date	:	Published December 7th 2000 by Basic Books (first published January 19th 2000)
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From Reader Review How We Got Here: The 70's: The Decade that Brought You Modern Life (For Better or Worse) for online ebook

Gabe says

Clearly a product of the pre-millennial era, and the edition I read was the most rife with grammar mistakes I've ever seen in a book, but a great read. It takes a wide-angle look at the (American-centered) 70s and offers thoughtful generalizations rather than minute specifics. Sexual politics, desegregation, the role of children, the rise of divorce and Republicanism, the restructuring of Congress - all are touched on without going into greater detail, and will likely inspire the reader into studying them specifically to get a taste of how the modern era was born.

Marc says

Frum is a legend in his own mind. His mom was the famously flaky Barbara of CBC fame and his views are shaped by the silver spoon wedged between his lips. I have very little use for his inter-generation discontent baiting. It was already becoming cliche to blame all of the ills of America on the self-indulgent baby boomers. My own father said to me, when I impetuously engaged in the same blame-gaming of his generation, "If you are old enough to see the problem, then you are old enough to change it too."

The book is a lively read as long as one doesn't take it as seriously as the author does of himself.

Kim Fay says

The 1970s ... 1 was 4 through 14 during this decade. I remember pretty much every crazy song, fad and TV show from the era. My memories of that time are personal (with the exception of a few major events: long lines at gas stations, Jim Jones, the Iran hostage crisis), and because I was just young enough, I am fascinated to read about how the 1970s fit into a 20th century historical context. I will get my complaint about this book out of the way first - at times the author made conservative statements that broached offensive to me. But these moments were few, and overall, this book is a thoughtful must-read for anyone interested in exploring how the 1970s (and not the 1960s) fed many of the greatest social changes in modern America. For being an overview of the decade, "How We Got Here" is surprisingly in-depth; I learned a lot from it, and it introduced me to a lot of events and issues that I was to research further.

Howard Olsen says

This is NOT a silly pop-culture survey of the '70's, despite what the graphics and blurbs on the cover seem to suggest. Instead, it's an overview of the social and political history of that benighted decade. By Frum's telling, if the 60's were the High Water Mark of Liberalism, then the 70's were Picket's Charge. Frum's 70's are an era when an abyss seemed to open between the elites and ordinary citizens. His histories of Watergate and the Boston busing controversy are especially illuminating in the degree to which electd officials seemed

to go out of their way to alienate voters.

Leslie says

Per Ric

Alex Robinson says

I found the social commentary bits to be very interesting--the rise of feminism and its effect on society, the decline of education in America, etc.--but the political stuff seemed to be a grumpy laundry list of things the Democrats did to destroy the country (at one point he complains about how the Progressives were all into building dams, then complains about how environmentalists won't let America build dams anymore).

Jim Barber says

Pretty good overview of the decade I grew up in. It was a busy, demoralizing decade, but has a special place in my heart. Reading this brought back many memories.

Mike Horne says

I read this in preparation for my AP grading (on Nixon). Wow, 70's was a bad trip!! That is about all I can remember from this book. But I seem to recall liking it.

Michelle Llewellyn says

Recommended by author of the popular LDS historical fiction series *Children of the Promise* and *Hearts of the Children*, Dean Hughes included this book in one of his reading lists. Being a fan of his work, I took his word for it and read it myself. Having already read other non-fiction books about when the distrust of the government began, the dissolving of family, marriage and how feminisim all had their start in the 70's, well, it was not surprising to find all of those facts repeated here. I was born in 1974 and now that I'm in my thirties, a gen-Xer, I'm currently on a quest to learn more about how so many of society's problems oringinated in the 60's and 70's and the price we're all paying for it today in the 21st century.
Perhaps that's why I found myself weeping uncontrollably at 3am. There are some intense and profane facts Frum includes here about the evils of pornography and homosexuality pretty much taking over the world. I didn't really enjoy reading this book and would recommend caution to everyone who wants to learn more about this decade...just don't stay up too late reading it.

Jennifer says

Interesting to read this more than 10 years after it was published. Some of the current social commentary become very out of dated. It opened my eyes to a lot of issues that I didn't connect to the 70's.

Parenthetical Grin says

I disagree with Frum, on nearly every point (the exception being his discussion of the implications of confessional culture). But the writing style and the content make it a very enjoyable read, and it offers good insights into rightist political imaginaries.

Don Incognito says

This is a popular history of the 1970s, with the thesis that the 1970s sociocultural changes are responsible for today's modern attitudes and social conditions.

Part I concerns a widespread collapse of trust in many institutions, especially government and civil authorities. Frum believes the collapse started with Vietnam, was intensified by Watergate, and branched out from distrust of the federal government into a distrust of civil government and civil authorities. A web of petty corruption scandals appeared on all levels, from the presidency to various civil officials; and the police were no longer believed competent or honest.

Part II: At midcentury and before, Americans had a fairly strong devotion to duty. But around 1970, the ethic of responsibility fell apart, and was replaced by a very brazen ethic of self-centeredness.
This allowed such things as an explosion in no-fault divorces, and many blatant expressions of self-centeredness in advertising and pop culture--such as a bestseller on self-centeredness titled "Looking Out For Number One" and commercials with taglines like "This I do for me." Because the worst effect of the new self-centeredness was in marriage, the old linear progression of flirting to courtship to marriage disappeared, and was replaced by a paradigm of individuals going through "a series of relationships," which is often the case today. Frum says that between about the 1920s and 50s, attitudes toward love and marriage were highly unromantic and stoic: love was expected to feel bad, and marriage to be unpleasant, but the thought was that if you endured marriage in good faith, it might not be so bad. Leaving your spouse and especially your children without a good material excuse was socially unacceptable. Post-1970s attitudes find it ridiculous at best and shameful at worst to stay in an unhappy or unsatisfying marriage or relationship.
Individualism also eliminated the universal willingness to serve in the military; this is probably the main reason, other than the defeat in Vietnam, why military morale was so low in the 70s. Other manifestations were an unusual strong fear of children, which showed up in several popular movies and television shows, and people's suddenly becoming eager to talk at length--about themselves (in opposition to the previous American tradition of being a relatively quiet people) , which institutionalized itself in the appearance and popularity of television programs, in various genres, that depicted, discussed, and showed a fascination with individuals' misbehavior or psychological problems, no matter how bizarre or disgusting, and often sympathized with them. Example: Phil Donahue.

Part III concerns Americans' new anti-Rationalism in the seventies. There was a sudden dislike for technology, standardization, central planning, and rationalism. This was a reaction against the strong

acceptance of those things by government and the public which peaked in the 1950s. People turned against because it was seen as simply having gone too far; Frum implies they saw it as complicit in the Vietnam War atrocities--specifically, the use of the defoliant Agent Orange.
The new anti-rationalism manifested itself in a new popularity for pre-modern architecture, esp. brick buildings, and a backlash against modernist architecture; a growth in environmentalism; a removal of "pretentious" home decor styles, all the way down to removing wallboard and carpet; a preference for food that was not mass produced, and wearing rough "close to the earth" clothing styles. The only popular technology was stereo equipment. There were also, among other thingd:
-A dumbing-down of educational standards nationwide
-Health and fitnesses crazes; first widespread anti-smoking laws and hatred of smoking.
-An unusual vulnerability to cults, crackpot theories and dubious self-improvement schemes.
-Christian revival in the late 70s, but only in evangelical churches; churches emphasized forgiveness over conduct; and services were more emotional. Ever since then, the character of evangelical Protestantism has been now different in two main ways. People before 1970 went to church as a social duty as much as for spiritual nourishment, and it was the mainline Protestant churches that they went to. And, as Frum says, these churches preached an ethic of conduct--in other words, they primarily urged members to avoid sin. The popular Protestant churches since the 1970s are all evangelical, emphasizing forgiveness over conduct; their services are more emotional; and, according to Frum, they treat their members as "audiences to a performance" rather than "witnesses to an event."

IV: Desire: This part concerns new self-centered trends in individual health, fitness and especially sexuality. Manifestations:
-Porn magazines sold more copies than ever before, and new titles started up.
-Various fitness crazes, especially jogging.
-Interest in natural foods; huge rise in consumption of wine and Perrier.
-A national obsession with safety, leading to many new safety regulations, especially motorcycle and bike helmet laws, and antismoking laws.

VI: Regeneration: Discusses the lowest points of the slide, and concludes that both laissez-faire capitalism and socialism have been rejected, and the American public now expects some sort of middle ground. During this time, there was as much anger over high taxes, and rising cynicism and class envy among the lower classes, as concern over inflation.

Other Interesting Discernments:

-According to Frum, midcentury American culture was "materially egalitarian but intellectually hierarchical," meaning that there was not as huge an economic gap between the wealthy and everyone else, but we recognized that some ideas can be superior to others, and popular culture at least tried to respect high standards of sophistication. But since the 1970s, these attitudes have flipped to their exact opposite. We are intellectually egalitarian and materially hierarchical. Middle-class people aren't usually offended by Bill Gates's wealth, but our culture treats all ideas as equal and would find it bigoted to do otherwise.

Industry: American industry started to have a serious problem with quality around the 1970s; it was turning out junk. In a survey, both workers and consumers largely said they are or would be embarrassed buying the products they made. But for some reason, industry responded not by raising quality, but by offering more unneeded features,luxuries and gimmicks. This resulted in what Frum calls "a vast tsunami of shlock" in the 1970s; eight-track players and tapes were part of that.

The cynicism of the 1970s spawned several new trends in popular entertainment, many of which are

institutions now. One is investigative reporting with a strong and deliberate tendency to smear people who had done nothing wrong with false accusations.
Another new trend was talk shows that made no attempt whatsoever to give the interviewee any sort of respect. Another was the comedy of Steve Martin as a deliberate expression of the new cynicism. Martin's material was, according to Frum, made deliberately unfunny, in order to mock the idea that any comedian's material could be funny.

Frum believes that the new individualism was so strong as to form a deliberate and strident religion of the self. The obsessions with health and fitness were so strong that you could be harangued by a grocery store checker if you bought food products they disapproved of, and especially if you smoked. This was the decade in which antismoking laws and social ostracism for smokers suddenly took off, and Frum believes it was because to consciously do something as toxic as smoking constituted blasphemy against the "new religion of the self."

America's industrial revolution, economic growth, and consumer prosperity have all been financed on credit far more than the same things were in Great Britain, and almost all the wealthiest people in American history, including Andrew Carnegie and John D. Rockefeller, used credit freely. Also, Frum claims the growth in credit borrowing is responsible for the growth in business success since the eighties, but also blames credit borrowing for "the often low character of American commercial morality." All of these are possible because American bankruptcy laws are some of the most lenient in the world.

Richie says

I give this book three stars not because it is good (it is not), but because I am a fan of the book-length jeremiad. My copy is thoroughly stained with red ink, margin notes like "seriously?" or "oh please" or "WRONG!," and dog-ears on pages with particularly hilarious quotes: "That all-too-recurrent late twentieth century moment in which a disgraced public figure tearfully informs us that God has forgiven him occurred far less often in the more bracing moral clime of half a century ago" (p.155) or "In 1937, Walt Disney had his Snow White pray to an unmistakably Christian God. The religion in Pocahontas and The Lion King is, however, strictly pagan." (p.165).

This book is a howler!

Cole says

I have been thinking about the seventies for a while now, in particular the early 70s. It seems there was a shift during that time from a society that was on a very particular path and adhered to a very strict set of social norms to one where that path and those norms no longer existed. so I was excited to hear that there was a book that described exactly what the forces that caused that change and described it as it happened. David Frum's book, *How we got here*, argues that the seventies, and not the sixties, were the period of time that has the largest influence on Americans' lives as they moved into the new millennium (the book was published in 2000). He describes the decline in marriage, religion, traditional gender roles, law, respect for legitimate authority, families, education, and morality and has the statistics to back it up, but besides the title,

there is no real thesis to the book. The idea that the 70s were the decade to look to instead of the 60s doesn't really enrich our understanding of the time period, and Frum doesn't really describe why these changes took place other than to say that it was the work "individual autonomy." Where that autonomy came from is not clear at all. The book presents a lot of data and clever anecdotes in an easy to digest format, but overall there isn't a whole lot of substance to it. Even worse, Frum leaves out what I thought to be an important point - deindustrialization - which isn't mentioned a single time and only hinted at once at the very end of the book. Not only are there (at least what I think to be) glaring omissions, the book is littered with snide comments and judgments he makes regarding trends through the decade. Most of them just sound like a laundry list of conservative complaints, but a few seemed reasonable and a few were even amusing:

On american's environmental "superstitions": "The dietary and clothing restrictions that environmentalists place on themselves; the secular mass performed every day over the recycling bins with cans, bottles, newsprint and compost each carefully placed within its holy container and left by the curb to await resurrection - what else is this but religion?"

On our newfound willingness to shame smokers (despite the numerous public health benefits, not mentioned by Frum): "The Americans of the 1970s had no more tolerance than their Victorian predecessors for pleasures they deemed dangerous. They might tolerate -even applaud- fornication, gluttony, gambling and dandyism. But smokers were knowingly poisoning themselves. They were consciously violating the commandment to care for their bodies. They were something worse than dissidents. They were heretics whose every puff blasphemed against the new religion of the self."

On upper middle class purchasing patterns: "Since the 1970s, the upper middle of the market has hankered for costly versions of things everyone has: leather-upholstered trucks; $200 hiking boots; gigantic digital television sets with stereophonic speakers; coffee brewed from fine beans; white-truffle pizza. Once the upper middle aspired to look like the very rich, only on a more modest scale. Since the 1970s, it has aspired to look like everybody else - only much more lavishly. Of all the absurdities in the history of the law of Unintended Consequences, this must be the grossest. The upheaval of the 1960s aimed-insofar as they had an aim at all-at democratizing social life. Every time a boss gets his own coffee instead of asking his secretary for it, or a professor chats chummily with a student... the egalitarian spirit of those heady days wins a small retrospective victory. the great rebellion against stuffiness and snobbery was supposed to have finished off the absurd middle class infatuation with the demarcations of status, the gradations and striations that supposedly distinguished them from the common herd..The bum's rush to the relentless pursuit of *gentility*. Yet. Barely a decade later here was [Calvin Klein], reinventing gentility for the New Age." Is this _really_ the grossest of all the absurdities in the history of the law of Unintended Consequences? Seems like more of a complaint by someone of wealth pitying the underclasses.

Overall I found How we got here to be entertaining, but not much more. It gave me much better insight into the conservative point of view and a cultural and political history of the decade, but overall isn't worth reading as a serious work of history.
