



Cultural Amnesia: America's Future and the Crisis of Memory

Stephen Bertman

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According to Bertman, just as an individual needs memories to maintain a sense of personal identity, so does a nation need them in order to survive. Like Alzheimer victims, however, today's Americans are rapidly losing a consciousness of history, and with it, a sense of national identity and direction.

Sixty percent of adult Americans don't know the name of the president who ordered the dropping of the first atomic bomb, 42% of college seniors can't place the Civil War in the right half-century, and 24% think Columbus discovered America in the 1500s. Meanwhile, more American teenagers can name the Three Stooges than the three branches of the federal government.

Applying the metaphor of Alzheimer's disease to our national state of mind, Bertman offers a chilling prognosis for our country's future unless radical steps for recovery are taken. He offers psychological insights into the nature of memory with perspectives on the meaning and future of democracy. With compelling evidence, the book demonstrates that cultural amnesia, like Alzheimer's disease, is an insidiously progressive and debilitating illness that is eating away at America's soul. Rather than superficially blaming memory loss on a failed educational system, Bertman looks beyond the classroom to the larger social forces that conspire to alienate Americans from their past: a materialistic creed that celebrates transience and disposability, and an electronic faith that worships the present to the exclusion of all other dimensions of time.

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