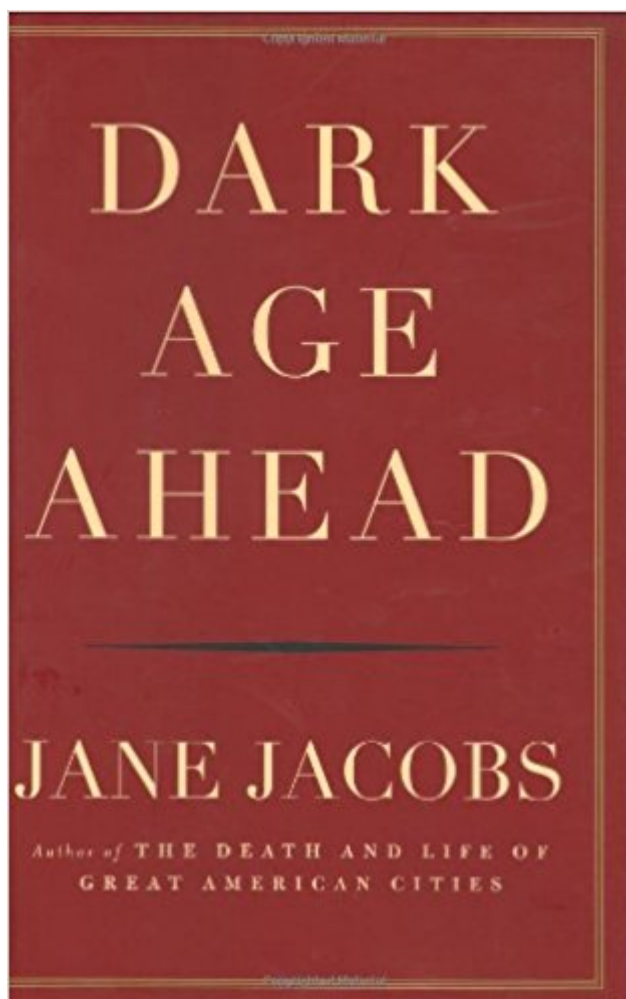


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Dark Age Ahead



Synopsis

A dark age is a culture's dead end. In North America, for example, we live in a virtual graveyard of lost and destroyed aboriginal cultures. In this powerful and provocative book, renowned author Jane Jacobs argues convincingly that we face the coming of our own dark age. Throughout history, there have been many more dark ages than the one that occurred between the fall of the Roman Empire and the dawn of the Renaissance. Ten thousand years ago, our ancestors went from hunter-gatherers to farmers and, along the way, lost almost all memory of what existed before. Now we stand at another monumental crossroads, as agrarianism gives way to a technology-based future. How do we make this shift without losing the culture we hold dear "and without falling behind other nations that successfully master the transition? First we must concede that things are awry. Jacobs identifies five central pillars of our society that show serious signs of decay: community and family; higher education; science and technology; governmental representation; and self-regulation of the learned professions. These are the elements we depend on to stand firm "but Jacobs maintains that they are in the process of becoming irrelevant. If that happens, we will no longer recognize ourselves. The good news is that the downward movement can be reversed. Japan avoided cultural defeat by retaining a strong hold on history and preservation during war, besiegement, and occupation. Ireland nearly lost all native language during the devastations of famine and colonialism, but managed to renew its culture through the steadfast determination of its citizens. Jacobs assures us that the same can happen here "if only we recognize the signs of decline in time. *Dark Age Ahead* is not only the crowning achievement of Jane Jacobs's career, but one of the most important works of our time. It is a warning that, if heeded, could save our very way of life.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The West is living "The Hazard" of an impending "Dark Age", unable to anticipate clearly because of widespread "mass amnesia". The Dark Age is predictable from history, which shows that each major collapse of civilization was followed by a disturbing social transformation. The Dark Age Ahead (the book) agrees in part with Jared Diamond's account that Mesopotamia, for example, fell to ruins because of "environmental ignorance" (p. 15), but that was not the whole story. Part of the story is that there are cultural failings that have signaled the decline of major civilizations in the past, which offer lessons for the present and forecasts for the future. In that connection the book identifies five factors that jeopardize pillars of the culture of the West, where West = North America + Western Europe. The five factors are: (a) the destruction of the traditional family and community; (b) the replacement of education by credentialization; (c) the dominance of technology over science; (d) the overpowering government and its opaque taxation system; and (e) the loss of self-policing attributes of culture. These factors constitute "The Hazard" society is currently facing, and are the subjects of the chapters of the book. The superimposition of the household (economic family unit) over the nuclear family (biological family unit) has condemned many a family to failure. So "while politicians, clergy, creators of advertisement, and other worthies assert stoutly that the family is the foundation of society, the nuclear family, as an institution is currently in grave trouble" (p. 29). By blurring the difference between the nuclear family and other household units the automobile industry has done more harm to the family institution than illegal drugs.

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