



Why America Failed: The Roots of Imperial Decline

By Morris Berman

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***Why America Failed* shows how, from its birth as a nation of "hustlers" to its collapse as an empire, the tools of the country's expansion proved to be the instruments of its demise**

Why America Failed is the third and most engaging volume of Morris Berman's trilogy on the decline of the American empire. In *The Twilight of American Culture*, Berman examined the internal factors of that decline, showing that they were identical to those of Rome in its late-empire phase. In *Dark Ages America*, he explored the external factors—e.g., the fact that both empires were ultimately attacked from the outside—and the relationship between the events of 9/11 and the history of U.S. foreign policy.

- In his most ambitious work to date, Berman looks at the "why" of it all
- Probes America's commitment to economic liberalism and free enterprise stretching back to the late sixteenth century, and shows how this ideology, along with that of technological progress, rendered any alternative marginal to American history
- Maintains, more than anything else, that this one-sided vision of the country's purpose finally did our nation in

Why America Failed is a controversial work, one that will shock, anger, and transform its readers. The book is a stimulating and provocative explanation of how we managed to wind up in our current situation: economically weak, politically passe, socially divided, and culturally adrift. It is a tour de force, a powerful conclusion to Berman's study of American imperial decline.

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Editorial Review

From the Inside Flap

During the final century of the Roman Empire, it was common for emperors to deny that their civilization was in decline. Only with the perspective of history can we see that the emperors were wrong, that the empire was failing, and that the Roman people were unwilling or unable to change their way of life before it was too late. The same, says Morris Berman, is true of twenty-first century America. The nation and its empire are in decline and nothing can be done to reverse their course. How did this come to be?

In *Why America Failed*, Berman examines the development of American culture from the earliest colonies to the present, shows that the seeds of the nation's "hustler" culture were sown from the very beginning, and reveals how the very tools that enabled the country's expansion have become the instruments of its demise.

At the center of Berman's argument is his assertion that hustling, materialism, and the pursuit of personal gain without regard for its effects on others have been powerful forces in American culture since the Pilgrims landed. He shows that even before the American Revolution, naked self-interest had replaced the common good as the primary social value in the colonies and that the creative power and destructive force of this idea gained irresistible momentum in the decades following the ratification of the Constitution. As invention proliferated and industry expanded, railroads, steamships, and telegraph wires quickened the frenetic pace of progress—or, as Berman calls it, the illusion of progress. An explosion of manufacturing whetted the nation's ravenous appetite for goods of all kinds and gave the hustling life its purpose—to acquire as many objects as possible prior to death.

The reign of Wall Street and the 2008 financial meltdown are certainly the most visible examples today of the negative consequences of the pursuit of affluence. Berman, however, sees the manipulations of Goldman Sachs and others not as some kind of aberration, but as the logical endpoint of the hustler culture. The fact that Goldman and its ilk continue to thrive in the wake of the disaster they wrought simply proves that it is already too late: America is incapable of changing direction.

Many readers will take exception to much of *Why America Failed*—beginning, perhaps, with its title. But many more will read this provocative and insightful book and join Berman in making a long, hard reassessment of the nation, its goals, and its future.

From the Back Cover

Praise for

Why America Failed

"Morris Berman is one of our most prescient and important social and cultural critics. He marries a laser-like intelligence with a deep moral core. His writing is as lucid and crisp as it is insightful. His newest book, *Why America Failed*, rips open the dark and dying carcass of empire. His analysis is sobering and often depressing. But the truth at this stage in the game is depressing, very depressing. Those who refuse to face this truth because it is unpleasant, because it does not inspire happy thoughts or offer false hope, are in flight from the real. The collective retreat into self-delusion has transformed huge swaths of the American populace into a

peculiar species of adult-children who live in a Peter Pan world of make believe where reality is never permitted to be an impediment to desire. It is too bad Berman, who sees and writes about all this with a stunning clarity, lives in Mexico. It gets lonely up here."

—Chris Hedges, author of *Death of the Liberal Class* and *Empire of Illusion*

"Morris Berman's masterpiece is a brutally honest, wonderfully crafted, exceptionally well-documented treatise on how America was spawned, several hundred years ago, to devour its offspring—financially, socially, and technologically. *Why America Failed* shines a harsh, unavoidable light upon the cunning business mindset at the core of America's creation, expansion, and devolution. Berman describes with stunning clarity how and why the 'hustler' mentality, upon which our country was predicated, eviscerated alternative moral or social doctrines, and thus incorporated the seeds of our self-destruction from its very inception. This book is as uncomfortable to read as it is impossible to miss."

—Nomi Prins, author of *It Takes a Pillage and Other People's Money*

"Morris Berman noticed that it's not morning in America anymore. His message may wake up the millions who are oversleeping while the late-day storm clouds gather over this land."

—James Howard Kunstler, author of *The Long Emergency*

"As the decline of America's empire becomes both starker and gradually evident, nothing is more important than accessible analyses of the causes of that decline. Far too few such works exist because of the taboos against writing them. All the more welcome then is Morris Berman's clear, bluntly but cogently written work. Sensitive to the contradictions of U.S. history and how they are now playing themselves out in a changed world, this book will challenge and provoke in all the best senses of those words. Genuinely important to read and to think about."

—Richard D. Wolff, Emeritus Professor of Economics, University of Massachusetts Amherst

About the Author

Distinguished cultural historian and social critic Morris Berman has spent many years exploring the corrosion of American society and the decline of the American empire. He is the author of the critically acclaimed works *The Twilight of American Culture*, a *New York Times* Book Review "Notable Book," and *Dark Ages America*.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Jackie Gonzalez:

As people who live in the modern era should be change about what going on or data even knowledge to make them keep up with the era that is always change and move ahead. Some of you maybe will update themselves by looking at books. It is a good choice for you personally but the problems coming to an individual is you don't know which you should start with. This *Why America Failed: The Roots of Imperial Decline* is our recommendation to make you keep up with the world. Why, because this book serves what you want and need in this era.

Anne Bonk:

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Henry Howell:

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Paul Avila:

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