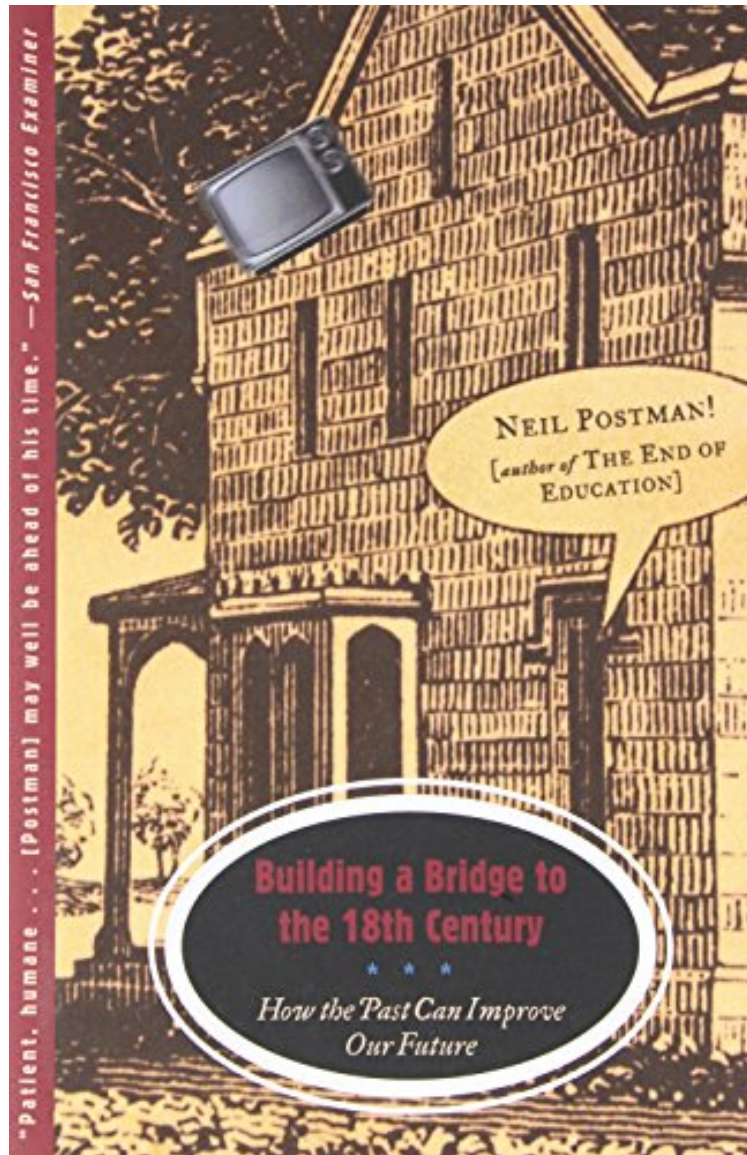


[Pdf free] Building a Bridge to the 18th Century: How the Past Can Improve Our Future

Building a Bridge to the 18th Century: How the Past Can Improve Our Future

Neil Postman

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Neil Postman : **Building a Bridge to the 18th Century: How the Past Can Improve Our Future** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Building a Bridge to the 18th Century: How the Past Can Improve Our Future:

9 of 9 people found the following review helpful. How the past can improve our futureBy Hiram ChanceNeil Postman,

longtime professor and eventual chair of the department of culture and communication at New York University, sadly died in 2003 at the age of 72. *Building a Bridge* is his final book, and it deals with the same universal themes found in his earlier 20-odd works: language, reason, education, childhood, and the idea of progress. Despairing over post-modernists who claim words don't stand for anything real, he makes a case for reading and writing. Indeed, he feels if we don't come up with a meaningful narrative for our world, we're toast. It is no accident, Postman is a huge fan of the two Thomases: Thomas Jefferson and Thomas Paine, particularly Paine. Note: Thomas Paine wrote *Common Sense* and *The Crisis*. *Common Sense* sold as many as 600,000 copies, which would be equivalent to a run of 60 million copies in the United States today. During the 18th century we were sowing the seeds for the end of monarchy and, eventually, slavery. Dr. Postman states that "men of the mind" in those heady days thought knowledge should be useful. Such Renaissance Men were known as philosophes, i.e. philosophers using their minds for great and just social causes. Now consider the modern era, and the so-called information revolution. The pervasive imagery of video and computer media work often to undercut the logical, serial narrative form of print. Reading, books in particular, requires active intellect, constantly evaluating statements, considering context, weighing consistencies, etc. Too often we succumb to the easier means of getting information... from perceptual streams of video images and sounds, serving to reinforce the perceptual-emotional method of awareness: "see something, have an immediate, often extreme emotion one way or the other." For example, a large number of Americans see footage of the World Trade Center towers falling and have an immediate animosity toward Arab men. Alternative explanations to the official story, no matter how logically unassailable, are simply blocked from consideration. A society relying on emotions bred from controlled media images is Orwellian... and doomed. Dr. Postman also has insightful observations on the loss of childhood to technology. He doesn't "rail against the machine," so much as ask questions of the necessity of every shiny new thunderpig widget that comes along: "What is the problem to which the supersonic jet is the solution?" -- pg.43.... For my complete review of this book and for other book and movie reviews, please visit my site [...] Brian Wright Copyright 2007 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Very worthwhile and timely as it will be for many years to come. By John A. Leraas Postman is not unknown to me. This is the third book of his I have read and delivered again. By discussing the ideas of the 18th century thinking about regarding various topics his builds a bridge from that time to ours. History is not dead. This was the century that really gave birth to our constitution, to our ideas about progress and, it turns out, about childhood. A basic tenant is that men and women need a narrative to live by, that the narrative of America came from the 18th century, that the narrative is endangered and that it should be revived. The discussions are far from obsolete and very applicable to our lives. Being a senior citizen, I studied the constitution in high school. My sons did not so I home schooled them on that subject as I considered it of high importance. I also appreciated his feelings toward computers as I share them. This is a very worthwhile book and is well recommended. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. For *The Preacher Man*, *Humanists*, *Cultural Marxists*, *Feminists*, and *The Children*. This is what we lost... By XDe This Book Has it All! I can hear Postman repeating himself on these pages, and within pages of his other books, though at the same time, no two books are alike, and no two books are devoid of their own unique content, and further more, what is repeated should be repeated so as to drive what he is trying to communicate into our brains. And in doing so, Postman lives forever. If anyone has grown up feeling like everything is just a bit on the artificial side, ever felt that maybe much of what you know is a lie, or have you ever felt that everyone is crazy and that America has fallen from grace? This book explores that and I believe holds the answers, along with his other works such as *The End of Education* and *Technopoly*. And if not that, then they serve as a great narrative and a great appendix through which to conduct your own research.

In *Building a Bridge to the 18th Century*, acclaimed cultural critic Neil Postman offers a cure for the hysteria and hazy values of the postmodern world. Postman shows us how to reclaim that balance between mind and machine in a dazzling celebration of the accomplishments of the Enlightenment--from Jefferson's representative democracy to Locke's deductive reasoning to Rousseau's demand that the care and edification of children be considered an investment in our collective future. Here, too, is the bold assertion that Truth is invulnerable to fashion or the passing of time. Provocative and brilliantly argued, *Building a Bridge to the 18th Century* illuminates a navigable path through the Information Age--a byway whose signposts, it turns out, were there all along.

.com The problem with the world today, says Neil Postman, is that we've become so caught up in hurtling towards the future that we've lost our societal "narrative," a humane cultural tradition that creates "a sense of purpose and continuity"--in other words, something to believe in. "In order to have an agreeable encounter with the twenty-first century," he asserts, "we will have to take into it some good ideas. And in order to do that, we need to look back to take stock of the good ideas available to us." He finds rich source material in the Enlightenment, the salad days for philosophers such as Goethe, Voltaire, Diderot, Paine, and Jefferson, "the beginnings of much that is worthwhile about the modern world." Yet *Building a Bridge to the Eighteenth Century* is a call for cultural progress, not regression: "I am not suggesting that we become the eighteenth century," Postman notes, "only that we use it for what it is worth and all it is worth." Chief among the values Postman cites is the development of the intellect; it plays a part in many of his

recommendations, from the cultivation of a healthy skepticism towards overhyped technology to sweeping educational reforms that include replacing grammar instruction with logic and rhetoric and introducing courses on comparative religion and the history of science. He also lashes out at postmodernists who start with the premise that language "is a major factor in producing our perceptions, judgments, knowledge, and institutions" and conclude that language is therefore tenuously connected to reality at best. Enlightenment thinkers knew that language molded perception, he notes, but they also believed that "it is possible to use language to say things about the world that are true" and "to communicate ideas to oneself and to others." Postman is excessively curmudgeonly at times, as in his reference to philosopher Jean Baudrillard as "a Frenchman, of all things," or his remarks on the ancient Athenians: "I know they are the classic example of Dead White Males, but we should probably listen to them anyway." But for anybody with a stake in the culture wars, or who wants to apply the lessons of philosophy to the modern world, *Building a Bridge to the Eighteenth Century* will make for provocative reading. From *Publishers Weekly* "I am not suggesting that we become the eighteenth century, only that we use it for what it is worth and for all it is worth," Postman (*Amusing Ourselves to Death; Technopoly*) argues in this penetrating, extended essay. Though other periods are rich with learning and wisdom, Postman believes the 18th-century Enlightenment is uniquely valuable and relevant to today's world. It gave us the rationalist notion of human progress expressed and supported by science and technology and the romantic critique, with its idea of inward progress and its suspicion of the machine. It gave us discursive narrative prose as the prototypical model of thought, along with more subtle, less hysterical critiques of language than postmodernists offer today. It gave us floods of new information, yet ridiculed information as an end in itself, urging a healthy respect for context and purpose. It gave us the idea of childhood as a distinct life stage linked to education and nurturance, illuminated by two contrasting visions: Locke's blank slate to be written on and Rousseau's plant to be cultivated. And it gave us representative democracy. All these were expressions of a world in which the dominant media, unlike today, was the printed word. As that environment fades, the complex tensions Postman illuminates are replaced by shallow sloganeering by those who present themselves as the embodiment of novelty and daring. Postman forcefully argues that we can use the complex legacy of the past to resist being swept into a shiny, simpleminded new dark age. (Oct.) Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc. From *Library Journal* In this wide-ranging call to action, Postman, author of such impassioned books as *The Disappearance of Childhood* and *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, offers us the chance to ground our discussions of the 21st century in the historical and philosophical bedrock of the 18th. Postman is certainly no victim of technolust--he has no e-mail, no PC, and writes his manuscripts in longhand. Those Luddite tendencies notwithstanding, Postman says he is not against technology but wants it viewed as merely a tool. He cautions that, in the words of Thoreau, "our inventions are but improved means to an unimproved end." The philosophers and scientists whose works and thoughts he invokes include Goethe, Voltaire, Rousseau, Kant, Smith, Paine, Franklin, and Jefferson. These worthies focused much attention on the technological developments of their times and all the resulting philosophical, social, political, and spiritual ripples. None of these thinkers "could possibly have embraced... the idea that technological innovation is synonymous with moral social and psychic progress." Yet today, too many e-mail postings and boardroom discussions--corporate, school, and library alike--begin with that certainty. Postman asks and tries to answer the core questions: "What is progress? How does it happen? How is it corrupted? What is the relationship between technological and moral progress?" And at center: "What is the problem to which technology is the solution?" Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc.