

## Naval War College Review

---

Volume 61  
Number 2 *Spring*

Article 18

---

2008

# The Death of the Grown-Up: How America's Arrested Development Is Bringing Down Western Civilization

Jeffrey H. Norwitz

Diana West

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review>

---

### Recommended Citation

Norwitz, Jeffrey H. and West, Diana (2008) "The Death of the Grown-Up: How America's Arrested Development Is Bringing Down Western Civilization," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 61 : No. 2 , Article 18.  
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol61/iss2/18>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu](mailto:repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu).

Third, although his basic premise is that the Palestinians were conducting “political warfare,” he only briefly discusses the concept and does not apply all the elements of his definition to the intifada. Schleifer asserts that the term, invented by the British to replace “propaganda,” encompasses a broader range of strategies, everything from nonviolent propaganda and civil disobedience to violent terrorism and insurgency. He claims that the primary commonality of these strategies (to replace or complement conventional warfare) is sufficient for a theoretical analysis of the intifada. But he excludes violent action (terrorism and insurgency, as practiced primarily by Islamic Jihad and Hezbollah) from his analysis of how the Palestinians conducted political warfare. Examining only a few categories of political warfare appears to undermine his theory.

In sum, Schleifer has written an interesting study of how the PLO and its partners used a variety of nonviolent persuasive tactics to achieve a significant short-term political goal. Future study should define “political warfare” more precisely and examine how and why this term substantively differs from civil disobedience, nonviolent conflict, low-intensity conflict, propaganda, and psychological operations, and whether it offers a significant new perspective.

ROBERT L. PERRY  
*Naval War College*



West, Diana. *The Death of the Grown-Up: How America's Arrested Development Is Bringing Down Western Civilization*. New York: St. Martin's, 2007. 256pp. \$23.95

“Stop, before you hurt yourself! Why? Because I said so”—a common diktat from a caring parent to child, about setting limits on behavior. The historical role of grown-ups has been to nurture, protect, and teach fledglings about self-destructive behavior. So how, then, is raising children the unifying theme of a book about the decline of Western civilization?

The answer, as Diana West argues convincingly, is a direct correlation between decades of moribund moral norms, owing to vanishing societal maturity, and America's inability to grasp the seriousness of emerging global dangers. Like a child that keeps playing, unwilling to obey the call for bedtime, America is simply not paying attention to a world of growing challenges. Worse yet, the author contends, there are no adults around to take away the toys.

Of course West, an esteemed syndicated columnist and writer, is not the first to observe the decline of adult influence or the erosion of individual responsibility, nor is she original in excoriating society and lamenting the erosion of the nuclear family. Nonetheless, West's meticulous assemblage of tangible evidence, superb research, insightful analysis, and application of theory to national security issues make this book extraordinary.

According to West, the gradual “death of the grown-up” began not with the revolutionary 1960s but rather directly following World War II. Business visionaries saw the exploding generation of youth as future consumers with unparalleled financial potential. Throughout the 1950s the magic of the anti-adult was personified, according to West, by the likes of music's Elvis Presley, fiction's Holden Caulfield, and

Hollywood's James Dean. Fed by post-war consumerism and entertainment focused so exclusively on adolescents, adult influence rapidly declined. West quips that by 1960, "American culture was no longer being driven by the adult behind the wheel; it was being taken for a ride by the kids in the back seat."

Indeed, West offers a point of view echoed by other thinkers of "second thoughts" that the entire antiwar movement of the 1960s was driven less by concern about American foreign aggression than by mere self-interest in avoiding military service. Evidence the 1970 campus violence that forced this reviewer to carry an Army Reserve Officer Training Corps uniform in a paper bag. One year later, the draft lottery quelled most opposition from college-aged adolescents who, like children, no longer "had to do" what they did not like. The consequences of national immaturity became clear when a "Huey" helicopter lifted off from a besieged Saigon rooftop in 1975. By then, however, Americans had been distracted by *Jaws* and dancing to "You Sexy Thing." In 1977, Jimmy Carter made good on his campaign promise to grant draft-dodgers amnesty, revealing that adult responsibility was dead in the White House as well.

Remaining ignorant as they aimed to understand "the other," Americans lost their sense of themselves. It therefore follows as no surprise, according to West, that when faced with terrorism on a global scale, America declared war on a tactic instead of the people and culture who used it. West believes that our biggest handicap is "a perilous lack of cultural confidence . . . our renunciation of cultural paternity [which is] a

natural consequence of believing in our own illegitimacy."

A snapshot of popular news headlines suggests West is correct. Frightened of and ignorant about Islam, Americans—63 percent of whom, *National Geographic* says, cannot find Iraq on a world map—are like kids with no one to advise them. So they blissfully amuse themselves with self-absorbing distractions, such as Hollywood drama, reality television, and who gets voted off the island. Meanwhile, modern-day religious fascists plot their destruction.

This book is intense, no-nonsense, challenging, and clearly written with passion reflecting parentlike frustration. Readers—most of whom, like the author herself, are products of post-World War II parents—may become uneasy, as I did, when West's rapier finger pushes a personal button. However, this book is a must, since eventually violent extremism will force America to shake off decades of immature behavior and grow up. As West aptly concludes, "A civilization that forever dodges maturity will never live to a ripe old age."

JEFFREY H. NORWITZ  
*Naval War College*



Vogel, Stephen. *The Pentagon, a History: The Untold Story of the Wartime Race to Build the Pentagon, and to Restore It Sixty Years Later*. New York: Random House, 2007. 626pp. \$32.95

This title accurately describes Stephen Vogel's book, but it does not do his engrossing story justice. Vogel, a veteran military reporter for the *Washington Post*, has written the biography of a building, complete with its conception, formative years, aging, and even crisis