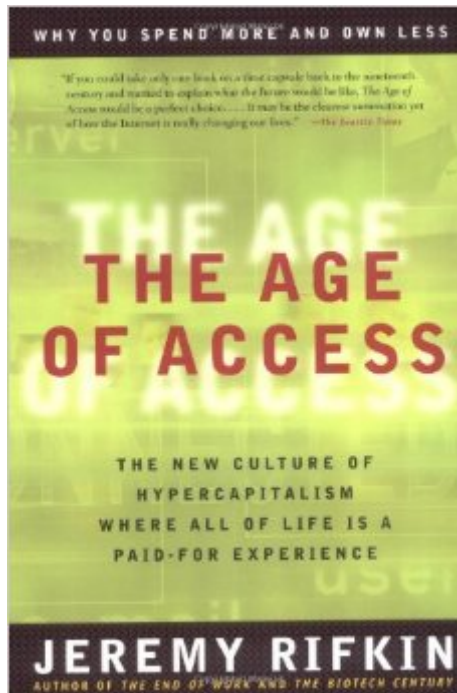


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The Age Of Access: The New Culture Of Hypercapitalism, Where All Of Life Is A Paid-For Experience



Synopsis

Visionary activist and author Jeremy Rifkin exposes the real stakes of the new economy, delivering "the clearest summation yet of how the Internet is really changing our lives" (The Seattle Times). Imagine waking up one day to find that virtually every activity you engage in outside your immediate family has become a "paid-for" experience. It's all part of a fundamental change taking place in the nature of business, contends Jeremy Rifkin. After several hundred years as the dominant organizing paradigm of civilization, the traditional market system is beginning to deconstruct. On the horizon looms the Age of Access, an era radically different from any we have known.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Make no mistake, I think that the Age of Access is an outstanding analysis of modern economy. If you are a young professional and trying to develop a plan for professional development, or if you are a seasoned professional trying to come to terms with the mindset of the young, you should definitely read this book. The biggest intellectual challenge that exists today for professionals is to understand the "new economy." I am always afraid that tidal waves of disruptive changes are right around the corner (or are already here) that could literally destroy my company or my career. Rifkin elaborates on several modern economic paradigms, and his analysis will help you anticipate and prepare for these fantastic changes. I agree with some of the gloomy predictions like the destruction of our "Cultural Landscape." In a very vivid example, Rifkin mentions that there is a Dunkin' Donuts

just a few yards away from the Trevi fountain in Rome. Even as a self described libertarian, I believe this kind of pollution of the "Cultural Landscape" should be stopped. Rifkin's elaboration on the economic value of social trust is right on. Nevertheless his implication that trust is withering away in the US is not convincing. My criticism is that although Rifkin has clearly diagnosed many of societies ills, he falls short of offering an action-based specific resolution. He seems to imply that "a handful of giant transnational life-science companies" represent the evil empire of today, nevertheless he does not say how to undo their influence. Reading between the lines, it seems that Rifkin is implying that government ought to take control of certain things that are now considered private property.

This book is really two books. The first (Part I -- The New Capitalist Frontier) describes the changing ways that businesses are improving the value and cost of providing goods and services, by doing just what is needed and in a more pleasant way. This eliminates a lot of waste and inefficiency. Also, business has usually provided poor service, so competition is shifting into making better, more memorable service the key element. That book is clearly a five star book. Read all of it. The second book (Part II -- Enclosing the Cultural Commons) focuses on concentration of services being provided globally by fewer and fewer players. These global giants try to find the lowest common denominator in order to expand consumption. On the other hand, it all costs money, and most people in the world cannot afford these services. Does this create a loss for all? That's one fundamental question raised here. Unfortunately, the book focuses on the pessimistic side and fails to consider inherent counterbalances. The second fundamental question is whether 'virtual' experiences (whether on-line or in other forms) harms perception to such an extent that creativity and connection are lost at a more basic level. I rated this part of the book at 3 stars because it was an incomplete analysis, and had few recommendations. The author would have been better off writing two books and developing both properly, than in combining both. You can get most of what you need from the second part in the last chapter in the book. Then you can decide if you want to read the rest of that part. Let me address some of the author's concerns in the second part. Skip this part of my review if you are not interested in these issues.

Your life is part of a larger drama. As you grow up you are presented with numerous options as to the character you will play. What attributes should your character have, what personality traits, what reputation, what should your character strive to be? Will you take on different personas at work, in social situations, in simulated environments? The choice is up to you, but your choices are presented by advertisers who seek to steer you in a particular direction and supply you with the

props to act out your character of choice. Once you acquire the physical props needed to reinforce your character (which have limited revenue potential for the companies supplying them), you need to compliment your props with experiences. Maybe you want to play a distinguished individual; one who lives in an exclusive golf community with others of similar status and means. Your character of choice has the newest cars, the latest gadgets, and adheres to the norms of others playing similar roles. You own little if anything and consume most everything as a service - you lease your car, despite "owning your home" you have to pay for all kinds of memberships and fees to keep up the act. You script your social circles and cultural experiences. The majority of your relationships are based on monetary exchange and are pre planned. You are able to purchase cultural experiences based on what market research has determined you want to experience. You are presented with that which others have determined you want to see and will pay the most to experience. Your experiences don't reflect reality, as it exists in nature, but the "reality" which you want to, and think, should exist.

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