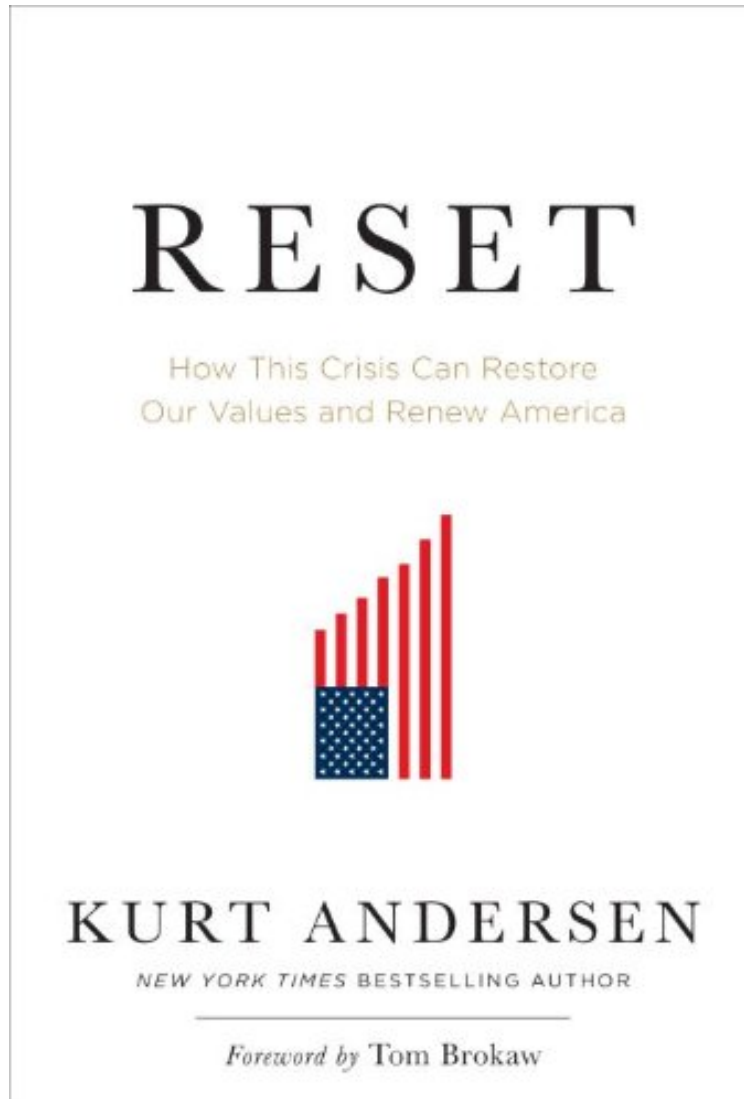


[Free] Reset: How This Crisis Can Restore Our Values and Renew America

Reset: How This Crisis Can Restore Our Values and Renew America

Kurt Andersen

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Kurt Andersen : Reset: How This Crisis Can Restore Our Values and Renew America before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Reset: How This Crisis Can Restore Our Values and Renew America:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Another Fantastic Book!By Worker BeeVery quick read, almost pocket-sized and a neat little book to have in your library. Well-constructed and well-written. I thoroughly enjoy it.8 of 14 people found the following review helpful. So? Where's the 'reset' button?By Theodore A. RushtonAmericans today, in this eloquent but meaningless dirge that is a prime symbol of the problems afflicting this society, are

"childish, irresponsible, willfully oblivious, fat and happy." "Oh, Grow up!" is the typically Canadian response to immaturity. Americans respond with an equally significant, "Whatever floats your boat." Canadians advocate greater maturity, Americans blithely accept the irresponsibility that created the present problems. Anderson is competent at assessing the many ills of American society, asserting "What do the naughtiest children do? They scream and cry and exaggerate, like Glenn Beck." The reality is that Beck inspires more listeners every day than this litany of woe will reach in its short lifespan. Is that a problem? America has always been plagued by charlatans who thrive on a brief spell of notoriety and then quietly vanish; it has also been driven by pragmatic entrepreneurs who create new opportunities. Henry Ford, a century ago, figured out how to apply quality to mass production of a new product, and thus changed the world. During the past decade, Jeff Bezos created a new means to sell products based on ink and ground-up trees. It's a nice start. He then figured out how to use an electronic tablet about the size of this book to vastly and instantly expand access to information. This desire for instant information, according to Anderson, is to ". . . fully satisfy the permanent child within each of us -- the impulsive child with zero tolerance for waiting." So, it's childish to use a Kindle? I think not. As a child of the 1930s, I prefer ink on paper. On June 12, my television went silent. I've no cell phone or PDA. I'm learning silver smithing instead of tweeting or texting. But I'm awed by those who easily run circles around me in acquiring information; they will create the future, an always receding goal. The future always devises better ways to deliver the products, services and information that a society deems necessary. It has done so for thousands of years. Excess is always curbed or crushed. Cheap gin was an early Industrial Revolution evil, equivalent to cheap credit of recent years. This book is a Hogarth-like portrayal of the cheap credit tragedy. Anderson assumes society will correct itself, but he offers no ideas. In brief, it's all bun and no beef. The "bun" is first rate and deserves five stars; the "beef" is missing, which is why I gave it one star. If a choice was necessary, I'd prefer an all-beef burger. The problem is obvious, which is why Barack Obama was elected and John McCain didn't have a chance. The solution is elusive, which is why we need books that offer solutions instead of chronic complaints. I of 1 people found the following review helpful. American Renewal By Robin Friedman Written during the depths of the recession in 2009 and just after the inauguration of President Obama, Kurt Andersen's short book, "Reset-- How this Crisis Can Restore Our Values and Renew America", sounded a note of optimism. Anderson, a novelist, radio host, and former editor, tried to show the sources of the difficulty in which the United States found itself and how it could rebound from them and emerge wiser and stronger. I recently had the opportunity to hear Andersen speak and then to read his book. In a brief 70 pages, the book covers a good deal in a sweeping way. Andersen finds that the difficulties in which the United States found itself was due to what he terms a "casino economy" in which Americans adopted a model of gambling and easy money and satisfaction in their economic and personal lives. He attributes this attitude to the Reagan years with 1986 as a pivotal point, but he also looks back to the late 1960s with their emphasis on individuality and doing one's own thing. Then, Andersen takes a historical view. He finds that much of American history can be characterized in terms of the fable of the ant and the grasshopper. Periods of hard work and self-sacrifice by Americans have alternated with periods of hedonism and good times. The Recession signals emphatically the end of a latter such period, Andersen argues, and presents an opportunity for Americans to reflect and take stock on where they have been and where they want to go. In other words, the industrious ant will again come to the fore but with differences from analogous ant-like periods in the past. We have the opportunity to learn from our experiences and mistakes. Andersen offers a brief "seven step program for America" which centers upon recognizing that Americans have been living unduly large for the prior quarter century, identifying the deficiencies of character that has led to this condition, and working to change them. He calls for a revival of the spirit of pragmatism in solving problems as opposed to a spirit of ideological commitment. He finds that in his campaign and in the early days of his presidency that President Obama exemplified a pragmatic spirit. Besides a spirit of moderation and self-reflection, and the realization that Americans should pursue goals in addition to maximizing wealth and instant gratification, Andersen sees opportunities for growth and creativity in the current economy. He celebrates the "amateur spirit" in which new economic realities allow people to move forward and succeed without preoccupations. In one of the finest passages of the book, Andersen writes: "I like paradoxes which is why, even though I'm not particularly religious, Zen Buddhism has always appealed to me. Take the paradoxical state that Buddhists seek to achieve, what they call *sho-shin* or 'beginners mind.' The twentieth-century Japanese Zen master Shunryu Suzuki, who spent the last dozen years of his life in America, wrote that 'in the beginner's mind there are many possibilities, but in the expert's mind there are few.' Which sounds to me very much like the core of Daniel Boorstin's amateur spirit. "The main obstacle to progress is not ignorance,' Boorstin wrote, 'but the illusion of knowledge.' (p.69) Writing in early 2009, Andersen did not anticipate much of the divisiveness that the United States has experienced since then and he may have been overly-optimistic about the end of the current Recession. I don't think these developments undercut the basic value of Andersen's advice. The book is short and sketchy and unconvincing in some of its particulars but worth reading nevertheless. Andersen has read widely, but his book does not identify many of the works which may have influenced his thinking. In its historical approach, I was reminded of Daniel Walker Howe's study of Pre-Civil War America, "What Hath God Wrought." *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (Oxford History of the United States) In its emphasis on pragmatism, I was reminded of Louis Menand's study, "The Metaphysical Club." The

“This is the end of the world as we know it,” Kurt Andersen writes in *Reset*. “But it isn’t the end of the world.” In this smart and refreshingly hopeful book, Andersen—a brilliant analyst and synthesizer of historical and cultural trends, as well as a bestselling novelist and host of public radio’s *Studio 360*—shows us why the current economic crisis is actually a moment of great opportunity to get ourselves and our nation back on track. Historically, America has always shifted between wild, exuberant speculation and steady, sober hard work, as well as back and forth between economic booms and busts, and between right and left politically. This is one of the rare moments when all these cycles shift dramatically and simultaneously—a moment when complacency ends, ossified structures loosen up, and enormous positive change is possible. The shock to the system can enable each of us to rethink certain habits and focus more on the things that make us authentically happy. The present flux can enable us as a society to consolidate the enormous gains of the last several decades in areas such as technology, crime prevention, women’s and civil rights, and the democratization of the planet. We can reap the fruits of a revival of realism and pragmatism at home and abroad. As we enter a new era of post-party-line common sense, we can start to reinvent hopelessly broken systems—in health care, education, climate change, and more—and rediscover some of the old-fashioned American values of which we’ve lost sight. In *Reset*, Andersen explains how we’ve done it before and why we are about to do it again—and better than ever. From the Hardcover edition.

About the Author Kurt Andersen is author of *Heyday* and *Turn of the Century*, and frequently writes for *New York* and *Vanity Fair*. He is host and co-creator of the Peabody Award-winning public radio program *Studio 360*. In 2006, he founded *Very Short List*, an e-mail service for connoisseurs of culture who would never call themselves “connoisseurs.” He was co-founder of *Spy* magazine, and has been a columnist and critic for *The New Yorker* and *Time*. Andersen lives with his wife and daughters in Brooklyn. From the Hardcover edition. Excerpt. copy; Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. Chapter One We Let the Good Times Roll “Let’s be honest: we all saw this coming for a long, long time. In the early 1980s, right around when Ronald Reagan became president and Wall Street’s great modern bull market began, we Americans gave ourselves over to gambling (and winning). We started thinking magically. From 1980 to 2007 the price of the average new American home quadrupled, and almost doubled even after adjusting for inflation. The Dow Jones Industrial Average climbed from 803 in the summer of 1982 to 14,165 in the fall of 2007—a 500 percent increase after inflation. From the beginning of the 1980s through 2007, the share of disposable income that each household spent paying off its mortgage and consumer debt increased by 35 percent. Back in 1982, the average American household saved 11 percent of its disposable income, but the percentage steadily dropped, to less than 1 percent in 2007. Not coincidentally, it was during this same period that state-sanctioned and state-run gambling became ubiquitous in America. Until the late 1980s, only Nevada and New Jersey had casinos, but now twelve states do, and forty-eight of the fifty have some form of legalized betting. It’s as if we decided that Mardi Gras and Christmas are so much fun we ought to make them year-round ways of life. We started living large literally as well as figuratively. From the beginning to the end of the long boom, the size of the average new American house increased by half, even as the average family became smaller. During the two decades ending 2007, the average new American car got 29 percent heavier, 89 percent more powerful, and 2 percent less efficient. Meanwhile, the average American gained about a pound a year, so that an adult of a given age is now at least twenty pounds heavier than someone of the same age during the 1970s. Back in the late 1970s, 15 percent of Americans were obese; more than a third of us are now. We saw what was happening for years, for decades, but we ignored it or shrugged it off, not quite believing that push would really, finally come to shove. The U.S. automobile industry has been in deep trouble for decades. Detroit’s unprofitability this last year has been breathtaking, but long ago as 1980 (the year the federal government first bailed out Chrysler) newspapers were regularly carrying headlines about “record losses” at the car companies. Ever since then, cheap oil and occasional upticks in minivans and pickup trucks and SUVs! Saturn! the PT Cruiser! have prolonged the great denial, sustaining an increasingly desperate wishfulness that the good old days might somehow return. For a decade now, ever since the web really took off, almost every part of the old-media industry—newspapers, magazines, network TV, local TV, records—has been in trouble, with only the rate, speed, and severity of shrinkage in question. But until very recently, most of them were managed as though their businesses wouldn’t, couldn’t, ever really, finally die. But newspapers’ circulations are now evaporating at a stupendously accelerating rate—by 5 and 10 and 20 percent a year—and last year Americans bought fewer than half as many CDs as they did in 2000. We watched the median household income steadily decline since the end of the twentieth century . . . but, but, but our houses and our 401(k)s were ballooning in value, right? Even (and sometimes especially) smart,

proudly rational; people engaged in magical thinking, acting as if the miraculous power of the Internet and its "new economy" would somehow, miraculously, make everything copacetic again. We all clapped our hands and believed in fairies. We gorged on free lunches. The popular culture tried to warn us. For twenty years now, we have had Homer Simpson's spot-on caricature of the quintessential American—childish, irresponsible, willfully oblivious, fat and happy. And more recently, there was Wall-E, with all of humanity reduced to Homerized refugees from a despoiled earth. There was also a profusion of darker speculations, fictional and otherwise, concerning our decline and fall—some fact based, some entirely fictional, but all expressions of a shared and growing sense that our recklessness and complacency were sending us over the falls. There were news stories warning of a real estate bubble back in 2005, years before the bubble burst. Every season saw some new comparison of the United States to the late Roman Empire by authors of every ideological stripe. There were also the Left Behind novels, Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*, end-of-the-world feature films (*The Day After Tomorrow*, *28 Days*, *I Am Legend*) and documentaries (*An Inconvenient Truth*), and a rise of hysterical chatter about the cosmic meltdown scheduled by the ancient Mayans for 2012. Even in opinion polls taken last year, before the crash, between 70 and 85 percent of Americans were saying they thought the country was "on the wrong track." We knew, in our heart of hearts, that something had to give. Especially those of us of a certain age. Remember when each decade, not long after it finished, assumed a distinct character? We all knew and know what "the '50s" mean, and they definitively ended with the Pill, JFK's assassination, and the Beatles. Then "the '60s" ended when countercultural utopians abandoned their fantasies and everyone else got tired of being perpetually alarmed and hectored. And "the '70s" ended when stimulants overtook depressants as Americans' substances of choice, and AIDS appeared. Yet in all salient respects, "the '80s"—as defined by Reagan's reshaping of the political economy, the enthralling introduction of PCs, and the vertiginous rise of the stock market—simply never ended. It's as if the Roaring Twenties, instead of crashing to halt in 1929, had lasted all the way until 1945, uninterrupted by a depression or world war. Despite the recession of 1990 . . . and the popped bubble in technology stocks in 2000 . . . and then another recession . . . and the terrorist attacks in 2001 . . . despite all of it, the 1980s spirit endured, like an awesome winning streak in Las Vegas or a multigenerational rave that went on and on and on. Then the Soviet Union collapsed: yes! American-style capitalism triumphed and spread: hooray! So what if every year since the turn of the twenty-first century the U.S. economy was growing much more slowly than the global economy? Then (Chinese-made) stuff we were all buying at Walmart and Costco and HM stayed supercheap—as did money itself, which our new best friends, the Chinese, obligingly supplied to us by the low-interest-rate trillion. The fresh technological miracles and wonders just kept on coming, reinforcing our sense that progress was on the march and magic was in the air. Even 9/11 and our resulting Iraqi debacle, after a while, came to seem like mere bumps in the road. Deep down we had an inkling at least that the spiral of over-leverage and overspending and the prices of stocks and houses bubbling ever higher were unsustainable, just as everyone figured that the unprecedented performances of baseball players like Barry Bonds and Roger Clemens couldn't be kosher, but . . . no one wanted to be a buzz kill. From 1982 until 2008, we partied like it was 1999. From the Hardcover edition.

From AudioFile
The malaises of today's life--exacerbated by the current financial crisis and recession--are the subject of this brief essay by novelist and radio host Kurt Andersen. Pointing out what went wrong, and how we can press the "reset" button to reboot our ideals and politics, Andersen mildly rants against greed and infantilism, and gives suggestions for improving ourselves and our world by rising from the ashes of the recently burst bubbles. Andersen reads his own book in a conversational tone, much as he does on his radio shows, lending an intimate nature to this book. Unlike many author-narrated books, *RESET* blends words and voice perfectly, with ideal pacing and tone, to make this a very enjoyable read. K.M. copy; AudioFile 2009, Portland, Maine