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How We Forgot the Cold War: A Historical Journey across America

Jon Wiener

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Hours after the USSR collapsed in 1991, Congress began making plans to establish the official memory of the Cold War. Conservatives dominated the proceedings, spending millions to portray the conflict as a triumph of good over evil and a defeat of totalitarianism equal in significance to World War II. In this provocative book, historian Jon Wiener visits Cold War monuments, museums, and memorials across the United States to find out how the era is being remembered. The author's journey provides a history of the Cold War, one that turns many conventional notions on their heads.

In an engaging travelogue that takes readers to sites such as the life-size recreation of Berlin's "Checkpoint Charlie" at the Reagan Library, the fallout shelter display at the Smithsonian, and exhibits about "Sgt. Elvis," America's most famous Cold War veteran, Wiener discovers that the Cold War isn't being remembered. It's being forgotten. Despite an immense effort, the conservatives' monuments weren't built, their historic sites have few visitors, and many of their museums have now shifted focus to other topics. Proponents of the notion of a heroic "Cold War victory" failed; the public didn't buy the official story. Lively, readable, and well-informed, this book expands current discussions about memory and history, and raises intriguing questions about popular skepticism toward official ideology.

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