

Barbarians at the Gates of the Public Library

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How Postmodern
Consumer Capitalism
Threatens Democracy,
Civil Education and
the Public Good

Ed D'Angelo

Preface by
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Barbarians at the Gates of the Public Library is a philosophical and historical analysis of how the rise of consumerism has led to the decline of the original mission of public libraries to sustain and promote democracy through civic education. Through a reading of historical figures such as Plato, Helvetius, Rousseau, and John Stuart Mill, the book shows how democracy and even capitalism were originally believed to depend upon the moral and political education that public libraries (and other institutions of rational public discourse) could provide. But as capitalism developed in the 20th century it evolved into a postmodern consumerism that replaced democracy with consumerism and education with entertainment. Public libraries have mistakenly tried to remain relevant by shadowing the rise of consumerism, but have instead contributed to the rise of a new barbarism and the decline of democracy.

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