



# Consumed Nostalgia: Memory in the Age of Fast Capitalism

*Gary Cross*

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Nostalgia isn't what it used to be. For many of us, modern memory is shaped less by a longing for the social customs and practices of the past, or family heirlooms handed down over generations, and more by childhood encounters with ephemeral commercial goods and media moments. This phenomenon has given rise to communities of nostalgia built around narrow age groups whose members remain loyal to the toys, television, and music of their youth and return to the theme parks and pastimes of their upbringing, hoping to reclaim that feeling of childhood wonder or teenage freedom. While the romantic recollection of objects and experiences is not new, consumed nostalgia took definite shape in the 1970s, spurred by an increase in the turnover of consumer goods, the commercialization of childhood, and the skillful marketing of nostalgia. Gary Cross immerses readers in this fascinating and often delightful history, and talks to collectors, car aficionados, and others to unpack the cultural dynamics that turn pop tunes into oldies and childhood toys into valuable commodities. He compares the limited appeal of heritage sites such as Colonial Williamsburg to the perpetually attractive power of a Disney theme park and reveals how consumed nostalgia sometimes interferes with our ability to cope with change. Today nostalgia can be owned, collected, and easily accessed, making it less elusive than in the past, but its commercialization has turned meaning into a commodity, accentuating escape, distorting memory, and complicating some of the positive goals of recollection. By unmasking the fascinating, idiosyncratic character of modern nostalgia, Cross helps us remember the rituals of recall that extend beyond bought things and experiences.

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