

# Foreword

by Paul Hawken

**I once gave an interview** to a journalist at *Fortune* magazine, and after he turned off the microphone he told me I was dreaming, that reality was different. I replied that of course I am dreaming, that someone has to dream in America because dreams of a livable future are not coming from politicians, bankers, and the media. It is our right to dream, and it is something we owe our children's children; it is a gift to the future and the future is begging.

It is not for any one group or individual to describe what a nation's dream *should* be for that is ideology. But it is the responsibility of citizens to have a dream that *could* be. A consuming and animating dream is a way of seeing the unknown that is possible, and in the case of *Dream of a Nation*, seeing with eyes wide open, feet on the ground, heart fully operative.

What distinguishes a dream from ideology is that it encompasses all people. It does not divide; it includes. A dream contains the multitudinous facets of human brilliance and caring. In *Dream of a Nation*, we see what is occluded and hidden within America, this vibrant, imaginative, inventive streak in our backbone that has gumption, street smarts and common sense. These qualities did not go away, but have been buried by fear, numbing polemics, pervasive greed and a culture of erosive individualism.

The book arrives at a calamitous point in American history that will no doubt enlarge and grow before we wake up as a nation. The multiple crises of poverty, indebtedness, corruption, climate change, income polarization, obesity, failing schools, abandoned elders, children, veterans and joblessness all have solutions that go beyond the nostrums that are mooted about in Washington DC.

The way to restore the vitality and health of an ecosystem or immune system is to connect more of a system to itself. The way to restore society is to restore the lost and severed connections between people and place, between livelihood and production, between food and farmer, to re-knit the commonwealth. A society is too complex for any one person to understand or dictate. It needs the same interventions that healing a disease requires, which is to create the conditions wherein the organism can heal itself. This book underlines the idea that rather than being adrift in America, our potential and capacity to adapt, grow, and prosper in a fair and just way is alive and in desperate need of forward momentum.

Inspiration is not garnered from the litanies of what may befall us; it resides in humanity's willingness to restore, redress, reform, rebuild, recover, reimagine, and reconsider. The fresh, sensible and ingenious proposals that *Dream of a Nation* puts forth are about creating the conditions that are conducive to life, to quote Janine Benyus, the author of *Biomimicry*. This discussion is not occurring on a national level to the extent it needs to. The exchanges we often hear on the airwaves or read in the popular press are not only boring; they are harmful. It is not just the way we are talking past each other when the microphones are on (and off), it is the abject lack of literacy about the nature of our problems and the sources of the solutions. *Dream of a Nation* includes new and known visionaries who together create the idea, in poet Denise Levertov's words, that "we have only begun to know the power that is in us if we would join our solitudes in the communion of struggle."

*Dream of a Nation* contains some of the most potent and powerful voices in our nation. Fears you may hold about the future of America or Americans can be vanquished here. You can read *Dream* from the middle out, from the back forwards, or from the beginning; it makes no difference. Everywhere there is mettle, ingenuity and heart in clear declarative prose, backed up by facts. This volume may be the equivalent of a tool Gary Snyder once proposed: a Tibetan Army knife with a patented mind opener to pry open the stale consciousness of power. Stale consciousness is within us, too, if we fall prey to despair. This book constitutes a blessing to us all.

*Paul Hawken is an environmentalist, entrepreneur, journalist and author. Starting at age 20, he dedicated his life to sustainability and changing the relationship between business and the environment. His practice has included starting and running ecological businesses, writing and teaching about the impact of commerce on living systems, and consulting with governments and corporations on economic development, industrial ecology and environmental policy. His most recent book is Blessed Unrest. For more on Hawken, visit [www.paulhawken.com](http://www.paulhawken.com)*

