

Dream of a Nation

Inspiring Ideas for a Better America

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The Story of this Book and Project

Dream of a Nation is more than a book. It is an evolving project that is dedicated to amplifying awareness of social, environmental and economic issues while drawing attention to the solutions. If you purchased a copy of *Dream of a Nation*, we greatly appreciate it and want you to know that it will be used to support:

- Distribution to every member of Congress
- A national tour that reaches individuals throughout the US
- Maintenance of Dreamofanation.org as a dynamic web community
- Curricular resources for teachers and students
- Outreach efforts to engage citizens in sharing their ideas and projects online
- A national Dreaming a Nation contest for young people
- Seed funding to help citizens bring ideas into action
- A documentary film version of the book

... and more!

So aside from deepening your knowledge, you're supporting a movement. Don't forget to visit www.dreamofanation.org for music playlists, action items, resources and to share your dream. And please, tell a friend and spread the word.

Go to www.dreamofanation.org to be a part of a growing community and open a door to a world of more information and inspiration.

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“The world is as beautiful as it ever was.
It is changing, but then it always has been.
This is a good time to change,
and remain beautiful, with it.”

✧ Alice Walker, *pg. 408*

For Ayden and Kyle and all of the young ones

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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



Introduction

“When the story of these times gets written, we want it to say that we did all we could, and it was more than anyone could have imagined.” ➤ Bono

Dream of a Nation as a book and project was born out of faith and frustration. Faith in human ingenuity, common sense and compassion. Frustration with the fact that sometimes we get so bogged down in the fight and the spectacle that there is a collective blindness to our shared purpose and society’s real needs. But thankfully, it is ordinary people doing extraordinary things who are keeping the flame alive and charting a different path for our future. They are students and CEOs, political leaders and hip-hop artists, entrepreneurs and teachers, volunteers and big-thinkers who are rooted in creativity, positivity and hope.

Paul Hawken said, “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.” In a sense, this is what this book explores. When you flip the pages of *Dream of a Nation* they are meant to be both sobering and inspiring. Sobering because we face monumental challenges and don’t have a lot of time or infinite resources. Inspiring because there are people and organizations throughout the land that are dedicated to the virtues of stewardship and fairness, and future generations. The dreams of ordinary citizens and visionaries are what have made and still make this great country of ours. Ultimately, in this shared and ever-evolving society, our greatest strength lies in our ability to work together toward a collective purpose that is grounded in our common humanity.

As one of the most prosperous and free countries on the planet, we have a strong foundation from which to keep the dream alive and growing. At the same time, there are a multitude of compounding challenges that require vital focus, new ways of thinking, bold actions and greater unity in order to solve.

Many of the problems and related solutions that we face are interconnected. As we reprioritize what we spend on the military, for example, it frees up resources for education, health, job creation and building the green economy. As we support local living economies, it prevents the off-shoring

of opportunity and serves to reduce the growing economic divide. As the news media focuses more on constructive journalism and solutions, the spirit of collaboration is bolstered. As citizens are further empowered, communities across the land and democracy are strengthened.

Dream of a Nation reflects a growing movement that is relevant whatever your political persuasion or station in life. The work is full of contributions from visionaries and pioneering organizations that are committed to a common cause and to quickening the pace of change. While it doesn’t cover every important issue and covers some not nearly deep enough, it is a starting place. You won’t read it in a weekend; plan on weeks or months. And remember that the dream lives on in what you do with it.

More than a book, *Dream of a Nation* is an invitation. An invitation to explore issues that affect us all. An invitation to be open to possibility, to be part of the progress and the dream that is always unfolding.

Tyson Miller, *Editor*

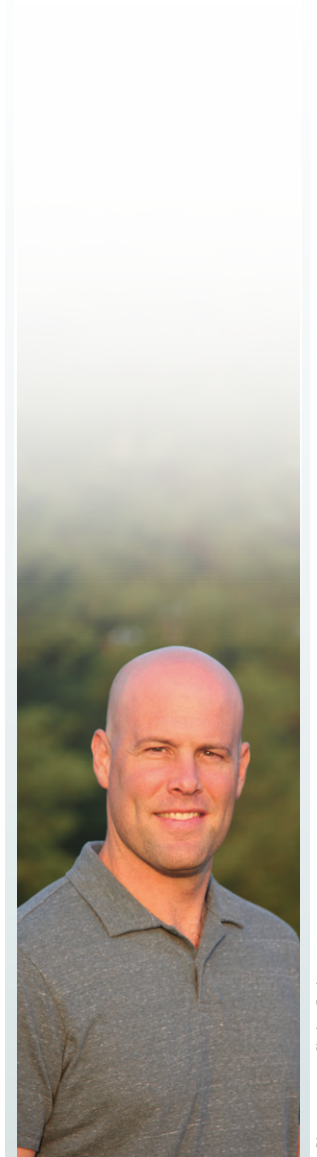


Photo courtesy Shirley Gach

A Dream of Our Country



... Neosha Hampton
Ninth Grade Student
Milwaukee, WI

As a Nation we sometimes stand alone,
But one person can be **strong**.
So if we stand like we are one,
Then we can be a **shield against**
The poverty that calls the names of many,
And the hunger that grabs us by the neck,
The hate that chases love away,
While pride holds courage by the throat
And chokes it till there's no hold.
Painted with emotions
Chained with trivial views
Doesn't mean we cannot be one.
Be one like the molecules that
Run through our bodies
And all meet at an agreeing point.
Like the blood that courses through
Our veins.
The blood that is a velvety red
And supplies us with life.
Be one like the
Stars,
Sun,
Moon
And the Sky.
Be one like
We were made to be.