

Ocean Robbins



*The Power  
of Partnership*

*Building Healing Bridges  
Across Historic Divides*

*Essays on Deepening the American Dream*  
SPONSORED BY THE FETZER INSTITUTE



THE POWER OF PARTNERSHIP



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*Building Healing Bridges Across  
Historic Divides*



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**Essays on Exploring a Global Dream**

A SERIES SPONSORED BY THE FETZER INSTITUTE

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## THE EXPLORING A GLOBAL DREAM SERIES

In 1999, the Fetzer Institute began the Deepening the American Dream project as an attempt to sow the seeds of a national conversation about the inner life of democracy and about the nature of our society as a community in relationship with the rest of the world. We set out to assemble a diverse group of leading thinkers and authors to explore, in conversation and in writing, the American dream and the spiritual values on which it rests.

During the life of the project, Fetzer has extended this unfolding dialogue in the public domain, in partnership with Jossey-Bass, by publishing and circulating original essays as free pamphlets and by holding public forums. We have been concerned about questions such as “What constitutes the American dream now?” “In what ways does the American dream relate to the global dream?” “In what ways might each inform the other?” and “How might we imagine the essential qualities of the common man and woman—the global citizen—who seeks to live with the authenticity and grace demanded by our times?”

To date, we have given away close to eighty thousand pamphlets to a wide range of leaders in various fields around the country, including members of Congress. In the fall of 2005, Jossey-Bass published the first anthology of these essays, *Deepening the American Dream: Reflections on the Inner Life and Spirit of Democracy*.

In an effort to surface the psychological and spiritual roots at the heart of the critical issues that face the world today, we are extending this inquiry by creating a parallel series focused on exploring a global dream. But what might a global dream look like, and where might we start? In his book *God Has a Dream*, Archbishop Desmond Tutu offers a beginning point as he echoes the words of Martin Luther King Jr.:

God says to you, “I have a dream. Please help Me to realize it. It is a dream of a world whose ugliness and squalor and poverty, its war and hostility, its greed and harsh competitiveness, its alienation and disharmony are changed into their glorious counterparts, when there will

be more laughter, joy, and peace, where there will be justice and goodness and compassion and love and caring and sharing. I have a dream . . . that My children will know that they are members of one family, the human family, God's family, My family.”

In both series, we continue to invite leading thinkers from around the world to bring their gifts to bear on the world we live in, searching for the common resources that might, if held together, repair the isolations and separations that divide us today. We hope that these essays and the spirit on which they are founded will spark your own questions and conversations.

—ROBERT F. LEHMAN  
Chair of the Board  
Fetzer Institute



## GRATITUDES

My gratitude and thanks go to my beloved wife and partner, Michele Robbins, whose love, courage, and wisdom are a shining light in my life. To my parents, Deo and John Robbins, whose unconditional love and courageous example are at once bedrock on which my life is built and air that lifts my wings to fly. And to my children, River and Bodhi Robbins, who remind me every day about what really matters in life and help me not take myself too seriously.

I want to thank Shilpa Jain, Coumba Toure, Malika Sanders, Tad Hargrave, Evon Peter, Jessica Simkovic, Ryan Eliason, and all my other friends and colleagues whose love, patience, and persistence have been so essential to my learning journey. Thank you to Tiffany Brown, Lorin Troderman, and Nga Trinh-Halperin, who have helped me trust by being so trustworthy and whose amazing partnership has helped me let go of old ways of thinking and step into many new phases of my life and work. Thank you to Lynne Twist, Esther Campos, Lillie Allen, Joanna Macy, and all of the other mentors and elders whose life and work have inspired and guided my path. Thank you to all of the thousands of donors and supporters who have given of their time, their talents, and their dollars in service to our shared work. They have shown me the power of generosity, and their honesty and friendship have taught me so much about the power and spirit of real partnership. I am forever blessed.

I wish to thank all of the young leaders who have touched my life. A few of them I have written about here. But all of them live on in the power of my heart, the evolution of my thinking, and the passion that drives my work. Thank you to the ancestors—to all who have lived, breathed, dreamed, and died that we might have the opportunities we do today. And thank you to all future beings, whose infinite trust is now placed in our care and who call us, from some deep and eternal place, to build a world that is worthy of their dreams.



# THE POWER OF PARTNERSHIP



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## BUILDING HEALING BRIDGES ACROSS HISTORIC DIVIDES

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*Ocean Robbins*

A FEW YEARS AGO, I STOOD IN a circle of people from many different walks of life. Our group ranged in age from twenty to seventy and included people from diverse class and racial backgrounds. The leader of our gathering asked for volunteers to make statements that were true about themselves and step into the center. Then she invited anyone else for whom the statement was also true to step in to join them at the center. This activity, called “common ground,” was being used as a tool to explore diversity and commonalities within our group. The statements ranged from lighthearted things (such as “I love to eat”) to more serious ones (such as “I sometimes try to control what I do not understand”). In each case, a mixture of people, of varied colors and ages, seemed to be stepping forward.

Then a Mexican American man stepped forward and said, “I was often hungry as a child.” I watched as every person of color in the room—people of Asian, African, Latino, and indigenous descent—stepped into the circle. Every white person in the room remained standing on the outside.

Soon thereafter, a middle-aged white woman stepped into the circle, saying, “I was often lonely as a child.” To my amazement, every white person in the room stepped into the circle, but not a single person of color.

That moment has stayed with me ever since. What lay behind the seeming inverse relationship between hunger and loneliness? Was it just chance that those in our group whose skin was brown or black had all known physical hunger in childhood while no one who was white had had this experience? And that all the white people in the group had often

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known loneliness as children and none of the people of color? Or is it possible that there was more to what took place in that workshop than coincidence? Did our little exercise touch on larger social and political dynamics at work in our times?

Sometimes material hardships can bring people together. Family, community, and culture become more important when people depend on their support in order to survive. This is not to glorify poverty but rather to recognize that every life circumstance can carry its own challenges and gifts. Sometimes people focus so much on obtaining material wealth and individual success that they lose touch with the critical importance of human relationships.

I'm thirty-five years old, and for more than half my life, I've been convening intentionally diverse groups of young leaders with the goal of building bridges of understanding and partnership across historic divides like race, class, gender, nationality, and religion. I've been drawn to this work because I see how such differences have for centuries been a source of separation and even violence. And because I keep wondering whether we might have some valuable, perhaps even vital gifts to give and receive from people who are different from us.

Most often people congregate or segregate by being around people like themselves. In country clubs and jazz clubs, in churches and raves, in gangs and in Internet chat rooms, most of us, most of the time, are hanging out with people because they have something in common with us. The idea of engaging with people who are different can feel scary and destabilizing. Even with all the talk about the glory of diversity, and even with all the ways that segregation has been shunned to the point of becoming a dirty word, most of us feel safer and more trusting with people like us.

The question is, how do we define "us"? Will we inherit without examination conventional divisions of race, class, gender, and political perspective? Or will we allow our definition of "us" to grow wider? If we long to live into and help create a healthier, safer, and more sustainable world, we are not alone. If we are distressed by the course of things in our world today and feel that something precious is being lost in our times, we are not alone. If we want to be motivated more by the dreams of our children than by the inherited fears of previous eras, if we want not only to survive but to thrive, if we want to make a difference with our lives, we are not alone. We are joined, in fact, by billions. Many of those billions do not look, talk, or think quite the same way that we do, but each could have something to contribute to the dreams we carry.

When I was first invited to write on the theme of "exploring a global dream," I had many questions. Does humanity share a global dream, or

are there more than six billion dreams? Does the whole notion of one global dream smack of colonialism or of some idea on which everyone is somehow supposed to agree? It can be hard enough for my wife and me to agree about mundane matters, let alone the whole human race about some overarching vision. Yet having worked with young changemakers from more than sixty-five countries and of hugely varied backgrounds, my heart has come to understand that there are many dreams, many ways of living, and all are embraced in a common web of destiny.

The dream that I see being woven from the many threads of humanity's aspirations is born of the suffering, prayers, and actions that move through the lives of billions. It is a dream that is beginning to take root as we converge with peers from all over the world in the vital work of our times.

In 2002, I sat with a group of thirty young people from twenty nations. Participants were leaders in work for peace, human rights, economic empowerment, sustainability, and related causes. The idea of the convergence was for us to spend a week together sharing our work, stories, and dreams and building partnerships. Over the first few days of the gathering, participants shared with a great deal of honesty, and I felt that we were building a foundation of friendship. Many of the conversations were personal and profound.

After a few days, during an activity that was designed to examine gender and its impact on our lives, the gathering reached a difficult impasse. Marta, a nineteen-year-old indigenous leader from Mexico, revealed with considerable emotion that she had never been able to forgive her father for his alcoholism or for beating her and that she had twice been raped. Several other women then described similar experiences. The feeling in the room was raw, tender, and vulnerable.

Then twenty-three-year-old Simone from France, the first white woman to speak, stated that she had enjoyed a basically blessed life and described her beloved father in some detail and with almost theatrical gusto. Marta suddenly sprang to her feet. She felt hurt and furious that Simone had it so much easier than she and thought Simone seemed oblivious to how her enthusiastic sharing might be received by women who had endured abusive pasts. Marta accused Simone of being insensitive to the realities of people of color. Simone was shocked and felt hurt, saying that it felt like there wasn't space for her experience and accusing Marta of putting us on a path toward "racializing everything."

All the vulnerability and tenderness in the room seemed to harden into fear, bitterness, and mistrust as Marta screamed that Simone's "mean-spirited comment" had "ruined every bit of love and safe space we spent

this entire week creating. You just destroyed it all. Every bit of good we've done together is gone!"

That's when Coumba, a Senegalese facilitator at this gathering, stepped in. "And maybe," she interjected with quiet intensity, "maybe every bit of love and safe space we've created together this week was necessary so that we could move through this challenging moment together. Maybe we didn't come here just to grow personally or professionally but to do the work, together, that will help humanity move forward in some of its most intractable struggles. Maybe we, together, can do something tonight that will transform the old stories of privilege and oppression and find a new path."

"But," complained another participant cynically, "if we can't even deal with these issues constructively here, what hope is there for our world?"

"And if we can," replied Coumba, "in spite of all the reasons we could have to never trust each other again, then what possibilities does that open up for our world?"

Marta and Simone both began to weep. It seemed as if there was a cleansing power to this grief, and as the tears washed through Marta and Simone's eyes, I felt that the sorrow was not theirs alone. Indeed, it was a grief that was allowing the softening of ancient fears, mistrusts, and hurts that we all carry.

I was deeply moved by Marta and Simone and by the context in which Coumba helped us all see their interactions. For time and again, in families and organizations, in schools and in the public square, in bedrooms and in the international arena, people are unknowingly hurting one another, offending one another, and re-creating the same old dynamics of violence and misunderstanding that have been plaguing human interactions for millennia. What was unique about this interaction wasn't that there was a misunderstanding. What made it different was that these women talked about it in a supportive context and were able to hear what each other was saying.

The work that Marta and Simone did to stay with the honesty of their experience and to allow the pain of the moment to open their hearts enough to weep together was not for themselves alone. Indeed, every time we challenge old patterns of separation and fear and do the work to begin to build relationships on real ground, we do so on behalf of the evolutionary imperative that now confronts humanity.

We live in a world with profound gaps in access to resources, opportunities, and liberty. Ours is a world with deep divisions along lines like race, class, power, nationality, and religion. Ours is a world where the use



of people and the planet for short-term monetary gain have enabled massive wealth to concentrate in ever-fewer hands, while hunger and malnutrition take the lives of thousands of children daily.

How do we live in the context of those realities? How do they affect us as individuals? Sometimes it is through a deeper inquiry into our own personal and family history that we can begin to see how we are shaped by, and responding to, the larger social and political dynamics within which we live. And sometimes it is through sharing our stories and building connections with people who are different from us that we can begin to understand our own journeys in a new light.

## My Story

Each of my eight great-grandparents were Jews in Eastern Europe who fled persecution. They found refuge in Canada and the United States. Some of them managed to build a life in the “New World”; others were driven crazy by the trauma they had endured. All four of my grandparents grew up with a great deal of terror and struggled to pass on to their children a life of material security.

My dad’s father succeeded—materially—beyond his wildest dreams. He created an ice-cream business that flourished. Known as Baskin-Robbins, famed for its thirty-one flavors, it became the world’s largest ice-cream company. My dad grew up swimming in an ice-cream-cone-shaped swimming pool and eating enormous amounts of ice-cream. My grandfather worked almost around the clock, building the business. My dad hardly knew his father, except at the corporate headquarters, where he was pushed from early childhood to one day join his father in running the hugely successful company. But rather than commit his life to inventing a thirty-second flavor, my dad dedicated his life, publicly and personally, to the growth of compassion and healing in the world. He walked away from the company, and from any access to his family’s ice-cream fortune, and moved with my mom to a tiny island off the coast of British Columbia, Canada, where they built a one-room log cabin, grew most of their own food, and lived on less than \$500 a year.

I was born in that cabin, with few material possessions and a very simple lifestyle. I grew up monetarily poor but feeling rich. I had clean air, clean water, time with my mom and dad, my basic needs met, and beautiful nature all around me. This upbringing grew in me a deep love of nature and the Earth.

Then in the 1980s, when I was ten, my family moved to California, and my dad began working on a book called *Diet for a New America*,

which was one of the first books to show how our food choices affect not just our health and happiness but also the future of life on Earth. His book became a runaway best seller, and he began appearing on most of the major national U.S. talk shows. The media had a lot of fun with my dad's story, calling him the "Rebel Without a Cone." They said he was the ice-cream heir who walked away from a life of sure riches because he wanted to make a difference in the world and tagged him the "Prophet of Nonprofit." His work made him something of a celebrity. Twenty thousand letters a year poured in from enthusiastic readers, and years of speaking in thousands of cities, combined with writing five more books, brought a degree of financial security to our family. Inspired by my dad's example and feeling blessed by tremendous emotional and spiritual support from both my parents, I felt that I wanted to give something to the world and to do something to reach out to my generation.

Recognizing that the planetary biosystem was deteriorating rapidly under the impact of human activities and that my generation seemed too cynical or too distracted to be stepping up in response, at age fifteen, I joined with a friend named Ryan Eliason in starting a project that would later become an organization. Our goal was to help young people make a difference in the world. We organized a national tour, speaking to school assemblies about the environment and what our peers could do to make a difference. Ryan and I found other enthusiastic young people to join us, raised tens of thousands of dollars, and launched YES! (Youth for Environmental Sanity), a nonprofit organization. The response to my dad's work opened many doors for us, as people who were inspired by his books would ask how they could help and he would often encourage them to support YES! or to bring us to their communities. Fueled by this support, tremendous passion, and a lot of hard work, in the first half of the 1990s we were able to reach half a million students in high schools in more than forty U.S. states.

In time, many people would respond to our message with great enthusiasm, but our launch was anything but smooth. At the outset, we were directly confronted with our ignorance about the realities and life experiences of some of the communities we were intending to reach. For example, in February 1990, we delivered our presentation to our first school assembly—at Galileo High School in San Francisco. The school was surrounded by barbed-wire fences, it had metal detectors on the way in, and we were told that students were forbidden to wear blue or red of any kind, as these were "gang colors." We were warned not to wear these colors ourselves, lest we risk appearing to take sides in the gang war. For amplification of our assembly, which was held in the school gymnasium,

we were given a battery-powered megaphone that made normal voices sound nasally at best. Five hundred students poured into the bleachers, and it was only then that it dawned on me that they were all from communities of color—people descended from Asian, African, Latino, Pacific Islander, and other ethnic groups—while I was one of four presenters, all of whom were white.

We began the presentation with a skit that was funny enough, though I don't think most of the students could hear us as we passed the megaphone back and forth to deliver our various lines. Then we began to talk about the melting polar ice caps, the disappearing tropical rain forests, and the need to take action. Our message was greeted with blank stares and an increasingly bored group in which the hum of chatter steadily rose. We talked about eating organic food, recycling, and eating less meat. When we got to the part about eating "lower on the food chain," the students' boredom morphed into outright hostility. "Are you saying we can't eat at McDonald's?" one girl challenged me. "Yes, I am saying that McDonald's is part of a system of food production that is destructive," I answered. "Boo!" shouted a group of vocal students, and a few paper airplanes were thrown at us. From that point, we went through the motions of our planned presentation with only a handful of our audience members even looking at us. The majority talked, argued, teased one another, listened to music, and generally treated the assembly as break time. The bell rang with me in midsentence, and everyone got up and left like lightning had struck, eager to speed out the door of the gym.

Afterward, only a couple of students were kind enough to stick around and talk to us. "That assembly sucked," said one African American girl who looked to be about fifteen years old. "It just wasn't about our lives at all," said another.

I felt dejected and dispirited. And at that moment I knew that I was beginning to get a glimpse of a vast piece of work that lay before me. Not just the work of creating a better and more skillful presentation that would more effectively reach our audiences. More vital, I was beginning to sense the inner work that it would take to come to terms with my own identity. For only then could I truly engage with the realities of others.

As we continued our travels from city to city, experiencing the realities and struggles of many different kinds of communities, we kept broadening our definition of the environment to include people as well as the planet. We diversified our performance troupe, our organization, and our message. And I, too, was challenged very personally to see how privileged I was, in ways I had never before recognized. I began to realize that I was

coming of age as a white, heterosexual male with a U.S. passport and financial sufficiency and with all kinds of opportunities available to me and my work. Even more significantly, I had loving parents who had always helped me believe in myself. Sometimes it is only when we step out of what has always seemed “normal” to us that we can begin to have a fresh perspective on who and what we are. As I engaged with young people from a broad diversity of backgrounds, I was beginning an ever-deepening journey in relationship to my own experience of privilege and the many questions and contradictions the journey brought to light.

Why did I have so many opportunities when billions of people were struggling to feed their families and when tens of millions of American young people were living below the poverty line? In a world with such a vast wealth divide, economic resources give certain people more power, more influence, and more freedom than others. Sweatshop conditions and farmworker treatment are directly linked to lowering the costs of goods, which in a consumerist culture means that violence and exploitation lie somewhere in some form deep within most of the stuff we consume. How did I fit into all that? I didn’t want to be defined by the madness of the times. Surely my life was about giving something to make a difference. But at the same time, we are part of larger systems and institutions and are affected by them in ways we might not intend.

The more I learned about the realities of oppression and injustice, the more confused I felt. I knew that I had love and gifts to share with the world. From the age of ten, my daily prayer had been quoting from Saint Francis: “Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace.” Surely educating my peers about the environment and inspiring them to make a difference with their lives was an embodiment of this prayer. But the road I was on was slowly beginning to teach me that there is a world of difference between being an instrument of peace and being on a crusade to teach the world. I once thought that there must be some universal message that, if everyone heard it, would transform humanity. But over time, I was learning that human needs are as diverse as human experiences and that sometimes it is a greater service to listen than to teach. Over time, I was beginning to listen—and learn.

YES! evolved with the years, and by the end of the 1990s, our focus had shifted from a high school assembly tour to weeklong events we called “Jams” (initially launched as a project of YES! by my dear friend and colleague Tad Hargrave) for groups of thirty diverse young leaders. Our “Jam” participants were founders or leaders in organizations or movements working for thriving, just, and sustainable ways of life for all, and they came from many dozens of nations. I was beginning to have yet

another kind of privilege: a global network of friends and allies that worked, learned, and grew with me. The community of Jam participants and my fellow conveners and facilitators have taught me profound lessons about the real meaning of partnership and about how we can bridge some of the great divides of our times in ways that are healing and life-giving for all of us.

## Even in the Middle East

In 2003, I helped convene and facilitate a World Youth Leadership Jam in India's Himalayan foothills town of Rishikesh. Thirty young leaders from twenty nations, each one actively engaged in efforts to build a better world, gathered on the banks of the Ganges for a week of networking, skills sharing, and community building. Several members of our team and I had spent the better part of a year finding, reaching out to, and selecting participants and coordinating the travel, visas, and airfares for a remarkable bunch of young luminaries. But as we approached the final days leading up to the Jam, we still did not have all the visas. Faten Elwan, a twenty-four-year-old Palestinian journalist who was a producer for ABC News and an on-camera reporter for Bahrain satellite television, was being denied entry to India. The problem was that because she was a Palestinian, diplomatic relations with India had to be coordinated through Israel. But Palestinians were not allowed into Israel. So Faten was not able to get to the Indian consulate to request a visa, and my repeated phone calls, faxes, and letters, including support from a U.S. congressman, had not succeeded in getting Faten receiving any special consideration.

I finally got through to one of the senior staff at the embassy, only three days before the Jam was to start. She told me that our only hope was to get an Israeli to travel to the West Bank to pick up Faten's passport, hand-deliver it to the consulate in Tel Aviv, get the visa, and then return it to Faten. It turns out, we did have an Israeli Jew coming to the Jam. Her name was Sharon, and I knew that she was committed to working for the cause of peace. But I also knew that Israelis were not allowed to travel to the Palestinian territories; in fact, they were forbidden by their own military to make the journey. Nevertheless, not feeling we had any other options, I called Sharon and asked how she would feel about the idea of helping Faten out. To my surprise, she said yes. She called Faten, who been feeling increasingly hopeless, and told her that she was absolutely committed to getting Faten a visa. Sharon also told Faten that if Faten couldn't go, she wasn't going either. Sharon proceeded to devote

almost every remaining waking hour before the meeting to the task. She found an Israeli-Palestinian travel agent to make the journey to the West Bank and back twice and to meet with the Indian consul while she pulled every government-connected string she could, and she ultimately succeeded in delivering Faten her passport, visa inside, with less than an hour to spare. Faten rushed from the West Bank, en route to the airport in Amman, Jordan, with Indian visa in hand mere moments before the Jordanian border closed for the night.

I had been hesitant to ask Sharon to help with Faten's visa. But the process did wonders for the relationship between the two women. Before they had even met, Sharon was working to help Faten cross borders and expand opportunities. I had no idea how much that would mean to both of them.

One afternoon midway through the Jam, several participants and I sat with Faten as she shared her story and her struggles with us.

Faten had been through more than her share of difficulties. To begin with, she lived in the West Bank and had grown up under the Israeli occupation. By the time she was a teenager, she had seen more violence than anyone should ever know. She decided to go into journalism so that she could document what was taking place and tell the world about it. She felt that her people's suffering was most hopeless if it took place in silence, so she wanted to tell the stories.

As a breaking news reporter, it had for years been Faten's job to travel to the scene of violence in the occupied territories. Whenever the tanks rolled in to bulldoze homes or olive groves, she was there. Whenever bombs dropped on homes or Israeli army helicopters gunned down Palestinians, she was on the scene in minutes. She had seen dozens of people—including small children—killed before her eyes. And she wasn't immune from the violence herself. Her family's home had been struck by shrapnel, stray bombs, or missiles several times. And she had been shot twice, microphone in hand, by stray bullets. Most traumatic of all, in the previous year, her boyfriend had been killed.

As I heard Faten's stories, I felt overwhelmed and almost numbed by the enormity of what her people were up against. As a Jewish American, I felt an intense concern about the dynamics in the region. As a human being with a conscience, my heart ached for all that this bright young woman had endured. Yet I had no idea how to deal with Faten's pain when I felt utterly powerless to fix it. After spending an afternoon listening to Faten tell me about her life, I sat down for dinner with Shilpa, a fellow Jam facilitator from India. Tears ran down my cheeks as I told her that I felt helpless to do anything to improve the lot of Faten and her

people and hopeless in the face of their suffering. “Whenever we experience pain,” Shilpa told me, “be it our own or the pain of another, we have a choice. Our heart can get smaller and shrink away, or it can get big enough to hold the pain. In the case of a big pain, it is a big choice. But remember, you don’t have to fix others to love them or to see the strength they carry.”

As I looked to see the strength Faten carried, I felt deep respect. She saw it as her job to tell the story as it was. So she tried hard to practice objectivity—something that had made a deep impression on ABC’s Diane Sawyer when they had worked together and become friends. Whereas Faten felt that much of the journalism coming out of the occupied territories had a propensity for anti-Israeli bias, she always tried to tell the story cleanly. But after seeing so much violence, her heart was breaking. And while she tried to maintain a sense of optimism that somehow, someday, her land would know peace, she was beginning to lose faith. All around her was a sea of bitterness and hatred, with more and more young people being drawn into terrorism as what seemed like the only hope for a desperate and downtrodden people.

Sharon, as a twenty-nine-year-old Israeli woman, had also seen her share of violence. Sharon explained that Israel had been born out of the unimaginable suffering of the Holocaust and that her people had poured into a land that wasn’t exactly theirs yet created a vigorous democracy, a thriving economy, and one of the world’s most powerful militaries in the middle of the desert over the course of barely fifty years. But a cloud hung over her world as she contemplated the immensity of Palestinian suffering and the fact that many Israeli Jews lived in homes from which Palestinians had been driven out decades earlier, forcing those millions of Palestinians to live as destitute refugees in Gaza, Lebanon, or Jordan. And now Palestinian hatred had surged outward, leading to violence and acts of terrorism that fueled enormous fear among the Israeli population. In the previous three years, as the second *intifada* had gained ground, terrorist attacks had become an almost daily occurrence, and some of the most violent had taken place in nightclubs and restaurants that Sharon often frequented. Sharon had personally lost loved ones to terrorist violence, and she lived in constant fear that at any moment she or someone she loved could be murdered in an act of random and senseless mayhem.

Sharon longed to be able to live in peace, to go through the day without the terror of losing her life or the lives of her loved ones to a Palestinian bomb or open gunfire. And she wished she could be free from a sense of guilt that millions of Palestinians were suffering because of an

occupation and economic stranglehold perpetuated by her government and perhaps necessitated if her people were to survive as a nation. She worked for the Israeli-Palestinian Center for Research and Information (IPCRI), a jointly led organization that worked to bring leaders of non-governmental organizations from Palestine and Israel together to discuss the tangible implementation of the “road map to peace,” including shared environmental issues like water, pollution, and resource consumption and also building a culture of peace and nonviolence through dialogue, conflict resolution, and community building. It was hard work; the borders were so often closed that IPCRI had to be based on a Vatican-owned site directly along the border, one of the few places that both Palestinians and Israelis could consistently reach. And while individual friendships could occasionally be built, they always existed against a backdrop of war and mistrust. Even within her own family, Sharon’s job was barely tolerated—indeed, it was seen by many in her community as appeasing the enemy. But Sharon and her team at IPCRI persisted, despite a general climate of hostility and hopelessness.

When Sharon helped Faten get a visa to come to India, it helped build some trust between them. By the end of a week together, with a global community of peers, they would build a lot more. In fact, it turned out that these two women, coming from warring communities and victims of enormous fear and violence, had a great deal in common. They were both feisty young women coming of age in war zones and struggling to keep hope alive in the midst of a sea of violence and retribution. They both longed for peace and yet were surrounded by levels of cynicism and fear that made it hard to know if they would even make it through the day, much less live to see harmony in their lands. They both wanted to talk about dating, about culture, about family. It turned out that they both liked some of the same movies. Within a day, they were inseparable, as if hungering for the friendship and common ground they found in each other.

On our second day, Faten began to tell the whole community of people gathered what it was like for her to live through so much pain. Holding back tears, she told us, “I can’t even hug my own brother, because he could be dead tomorrow, and my way of coping is to have no friends and to not love anyone. But inside, my heart is breaking.” Sharon reached out and held her, and Faten softened into the comfort as tears streamed down her face. A short time later, Sharon told us what it was like for her to cope with the constant fear of terrorism, with the military presence outside every restaurant and shopping mall, and with the death of her beloved friend. Faten now reached out and held Sharon in her grief.



They had both known enormous loss, and now they were supporting each other in the grieving process. By the end of the week, they had become close friends, and their faces seemed profoundly lighter. I felt I could see the truth in the old saying that among friends, sorrow shared is halved and joy shared is doubled.

Sharon commented after the experience, “For me, the Jam was a healing process. I will carry the smiles, the laughter, the songs, and the music through the challenging times that will inevitably come. Each person in the Jam touched my soul in the most profound ways imaginable. . . . And I am most especially grateful to my new friend Faten.”

Shortly after returning to Palestine, Faten wrote to the Jam participants, “Thank you for giving me faith for today and that better tomorrow that might yet be. Deep in my heart tender memories are cherished, that were brought from every one of you, starting from your first laughter and ending with every single tear shed. Thank you for giving birth to this new hope in me, the one that reminded me how to dream again, how to shine again. Hopefully one day all those walls around me will break for good.”

I felt the depth of the bond between Sharon and Faten and the many ways that they had been touched by their time at the Jam. But still I wondered what, if any, impact this week could have on the course of their lives, much less their communities.

Faten resolved to move away from breaking news coverage and to do more in-depth reporting, providing her the opportunity to cover stories of hope as well as tragedy, and to focus more on root cause issues than on headlines and sensational violence. It was also more sustainable for her personally, as she no longer wanted to be on call twenty-four hours a day. Then in 2004, she was hired for a yearlong stint as media coordinator in the office of the Palestinian prime minister. In this capacity, she was in daily contact with the Palestinian political leadership and with the media. She brought her newfound sense of hope to this position and sought to use her position to support the cause of peace in whatever ways she could.

Sharon, meanwhile, left IPCRI to take a job as the personal assistant to the Israeli minister of the interior. Her job had her engage in numerous issues of land use, property rights, and resource consumption that had a direct impact on the people in the Palestinian territories. She and Faten stayed in close contact, visiting each other frequently and providing each other with moral and spiritual support as well as friendship.

I wish this story had a happy ending, but it doesn't—at least not yet. Hamas got voted into power in Palestine, and Faten had to go back to

journalism. A shakeup in the Israeli parliament led to an end for Sharon's boss's job, and she went on to work for peace and human rights once more from outside the government. Threats of terrorism were reduced, but only by almost completely sealing the border between Israel and the Palestinian territories, causing enormous humanitarian suffering for the Palestinians. The Israeli economy, suffering from a drop in tourism, years of enormous military spending, and the high cost of continued police presence outside every shop and restaurant in the country, entered some tough times. Governance of the Palestinian territories became divided between the Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip and the PLO-controlled West Bank, with enormous violence and suffering as the region teetered for years on and sometimes over the edge of civil war. But Sharon and Faten live and work on, each in her own way touched by their friendship and inspired by the possibility of peace they carry still in their hearts.

"The arc of history is long," the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. told us, "but it bends toward justice." May it be so.

## Learning to Work Together

Whatever our skin color, whatever economic class we inhabit, whatever the country in which we live, the social and political realities of an increasingly interdependent and resource-depleted world are defining realities of our lives. We do not live in a vacuum, and everything we buy, do, or perhaps even think sends out ripples that affect the whole Earth community. Get in a car to drive in the United States, and you're burning gasoline that may have come from the Middle East, emitting carbon dioxide that may contribute to flooding in Bangladesh, and creating pollution that could contribute to the more than \$50 billion in air pollution-related health care costs in the United States annually—all while enjoying a quiet, quick, smooth trip to wherever you want to go. Plant a shade-grown coffee bush in the highlands of Guatemala, and you may be helping to stop soil erosion, create wildlife habitat, generate a sustainable livelihood for the villagers, and contribute to the preservation of ecosystems—all dependent, of course, on the purchase of "fair-trade" shade-grown coffee in markets thousands of miles away. Teach your children to weave and dance the local dances in Rajasthan, India, and you may be contributing little to the nation's economic engine, but you are preserving precious and irreplaceable culture and community and bringing beauty and joy to families.

In such a complex and interconnected world, it is often hard to find our particular niche, our best place to make a difference. Some of us feel that our own survival and perhaps the immediate needs of our family are enough to absorb pretty much all the time and energy we have. Yet one of the realities of our increasingly interconnected world is that we do not live in isolation, and the ripples that flow from our actions are far-reaching. Commerce, ideas, pollution, and even caring flow across borders almost as effortlessly as the air we breathe. Recognizing our part in the web of life is not just a nice idea; it is becoming a necessity.

What's at stake? Our lives, our spiritual fulfillment, and all life on Earth. In a world with nuclear weapons, with a resource consumption overshoot that is placing us on a collision course with systemic environmental collapse, and with increasing numbers of people living in states of desperate poverty, the future cannot be taken for granted. If there are solutions to the vast challenges we face, they will not be found in isolation. How do human beings of conscience engage with these realities in a healthy and meaningful way? How do we build bridges across some of the painful divides that have marred our collective history and challenge the attitudes and assumptions we all carry that keep us apart?

What holds us back? What keeps us stuck in denial and isolation? What keeps us from talking more about what really matters to us or from building real, honest, loving relationships with people who are different from us? What keeps us from speaking our truth even when it's hard? How can we learn to listen to one another with an open heart and an open mind even when what we hear challenges some of the notions and beliefs on which our realities have been structured?

Sometimes we're held back by fear, sometimes by feeling overwhelmed, sometimes by habit. We all have a tendency to distrust what we don't understand. And sometimes we get so caught up in just surviving that the thought of reaching out and building authentic relationships with people different from ourselves can be daunting. Sometimes it feels like all we can manage is just to make it through the day. Some of us are barely able to cope.

Often when I encounter a person with a viewpoint different from my own, my first reaction is fear. Like most human beings, I suspect, I have a tendency to fear what I don't understand, be it a strange noise at night or a belief system that is unfamiliar to me. Sometimes I am afraid that others might harm me, that I could unintentionally offend them, or that they will judge what I say or do. When I interact with people from a place of fear, I become cautious, mistrustful, and distant. I resort to

familiar lines of dialogue that require no risk: canned statements, keeping the conversation in “safe” territory by talking about the weather or other matters that I perceive to be noncontroversial. I seek out areas where there might not be difference and try to build on something we have in common.

At other times, when I meet people who are different from me, my awareness is heightened. I become curious about how the world looks through their eyes: what they love, what they struggle with, and what dreams they carry.

I don't find all differences to be a source of delight or even something that I respect. Some people have ways of thinking and acting that I don't like or that I find morally objectionable. But I believe there is a crucial difference between discernment and prejudice. Good, sound judgment is an asset—a kind of moral compass.

Prejudice, however, is another matter altogether. It is ignorance masquerading as perception. It is when we judge someone or something that we don't really know. Sometimes we judge people because they remind us of others of a similar skin color or appearance. And sometimes we judge people in a positive way, as part of an image we may have of them, that is also disconnected from reality. We can never really know who people are or why they do what they do without taking the time to get to know them.

In my house, we buy our herbs and spices from bulk bins and keep them in specially labeled jars. So if I buy basil, I bring it home in a plastic bag and then transfer it from the bag to the basil jar, which I refill. But recently I bought allspice, which was new to our kitchen. When I got home, I had to smell what was in the bag, contemplate whether it was savory or sweet, and then clean and label a new jar. If I had just tried to pack the new spice in an old jar, it might end up mislabeled, and some time down the road, a culinary creation might turn out very strangely.

Some folks just don't fit into the containers we already have on the shelf. We have to meet new individuals as they are and allow them to be their own ingredient in our lives. They may fit into general categories or areas of relevance, but no two people are the same. If I misjudge people and keep relating to the image I hold of them instead of seeing them as they are, problems can ensue for all concerned.

For example, recently I was one of seven facilitators at a national gathering of young leaders. One of the other facilitators was Kim, the Indo-Caribbean executive director of a nonprofit organization with which I had done some work. Because she and I both had responsibility for directing midsize organizations, with all the related dynamics of

managing staff, raising money, reporting to the board, and seeking to align mission and operations, I assumed that talking about organizational leadership dynamics would be a point of connection and might help us build common ground. So in the first moment of greeting Kim, having hardly even said hello, I asked her how her preparations for her next board meeting were going, how many people were on the board, and how board and staff worked together.

It turns out that Kim was in a sensitive organizational moment, dealing with deep-seated conflicts stemming from working for social change across differences of class, race, gender, and power. Race and class, in particular, played significant roles in the issues she was up against. It did not occur to me that the realities she faced as a woman of color in the leadership of a predominantly white organization might be very different from my own experiences. When Kim tried to answer my questions about her organization's board, far from being light or establishing common ground, it evoked pain, frustration, and hurt feelings. Kim had no clue why I was starting our time together in such vulnerable and painful territory; she felt confused and misperceived. I was trying to connect and was making the assumption that "talking shop" with a fellow director would be a point of bonding. I did not notice the discomfort on her face, which had I been looking would have clearly told me that she was not enjoying the conversation and would rather change the subject.

As we went on to work together in facilitation, I kept finding myself seeing Kim as a self-assured, dynamic leader, because she was the highly successful director of an organization I respected. Yet while I had eighteen years of facilitation experience, this was Kim's first time facilitating a gathering of this kind. I didn't recognize that she needed support, reassurance, and patience to help her thrive in this new form of leadership. So when I pegged her as a confident leader but failed to perceive her sensitivity and vulnerability, I was dealing not with her but with an image. In planning activities, I would rush through the conversation without taking the time to answer her questions or thoughtfully consider her input. I assumed that because she was confident, she would speak her mind if she needed help with something; consequently, I didn't take the time to ask how she was doing, what she needed, or how I could help her flourish. Had I been perceiving her more clearly, I would have taken more care with our interactions.

Based on my behavior, Kim concluded that I didn't respect her very much. So she started to erect a barrier toward me, which I experienced and which led me to think that she didn't like me. I, in turn, pushed her away and was less open to her ideas and feelings. In time, Kim and I were

able to talk about the fears and misunderstandings that had arisen in our interactions. It took many hard conversations for us to move past the barriers we had each erected in response to the misunderstandings that had occurred. I told her that I now recognized that I had not formed a clear and accurate image of her and thanked her for hanging in there with me until we could work through some of the challenging dynamics that had emerged. She explained that she had felt I was judgmental of her and was expecting her to be someone that she was not. She also told me that the opportunity to talk so openly about our interactions and to begin to see each other more clearly was important. As I came to form a clearer image of Kim and her sensitivity, my sense of her strength actually deepened. And thus were born the tender yet real beginnings of a friendship. Now we had the rare and precious opportunity to work together to do something different.

I have found that many of my prejudices toward other people stem from a self-protective desire to not be judged harshly by them. Once I sense that others dislike me or judge me negatively, I am prone to distance myself or separate from them so that their feelings won't get to me. I may maintain superficial niceties on the surface, but I'm not really available for true interaction because I've gone into self-protection mode. Beneath interactions with people around whom I feel afraid or awkward, questions loom: How might this person be judging me? What have I said or done that may have offended them? What do I need to say or do to keep from being hurt or from triggering hostility or disconnection?

In stark contrast, people who I think like me or respect me are automatically on my good side. I tend to regard them as highly intelligent individuals with sound judgment and good instincts about people. Beneath my interactions with them are questions of a different sort: What's great about this person? What's unique about this person? What can I learn from this person?

My friend Lynne Twist likes to say, "What we appreciate, appreciates." If what we focus on is given more strength through the power of our own attention, then interacting with others from a place of fear probably leads to more mistrust. Interacting with people from a place of openness and curiosity could open the doorway for something real and positive.

The first time I met Rachel Bagby, an African American woman who had a short time earlier moved from California to Virginia, we had been making relative small talk. Having recently learned a bit about the different race realities of the southern and northern United States, I was curious how that move had been for her. In many circles, it's impolite to

discuss race, especially upon first meeting someone. Part of me feared that saying anything about race would be offensive by highlighting the fact that she was black and I was white and would start our relationship off on the wrong foot. But somehow I figured that the difference in our skin colors was a reality that hadn't eluded her either. And while a part of me wanted to make her think that I was knowledgeable about the realities of race dynamics in America, I also noted that I was genuinely concerned and interested in her journey. So I took the risk and asked her: What was it like for her as an African American woman to have moved to the South? Did she feel more or less safe? Did she think Virginia would be a good home for her and her family?

Before answering, Rachel paused and looked at me with surprise and gratitude. As she thanked me for asking, a tear rolled down her cheek. "It's been hard," she said, "to have neighbors who fly the Confederate flag. And to be the only African American family in the neighborhood." She did not feel altogether safe. But she was breaking new ground and, risky though it was, seeing if she could make a home for her family that would allow them to realize their dreams. She told me she was surprised and grateful for my question. And so it was that our friendship began. Instead of relating to Rachel from a place of fear, judgment, or self-protection, I reached into her world and asked how she was. It is this sort of deeply human, simple kindness that so often eludes me in my efforts to be impressive, to sound smart, to protect myself from the judgments of others, or when my simple busyness blocks my sensitivity to the realities of other people. I am learning that sometimes it is an act of significance to take the time to look at someone with unguarded eyes, to ask a real question, to be present. Sometimes it feels like a risk, but it is one that is worth taking.

I don't want to give the impression that encounters like this are easy or always have positive outcomes. They involve a lot of deep thinking and risks, and sometimes those risks don't turn out very well. But sometimes they do.

## Friendship, Race, and Social Justice

I didn't know it at the time, but the day I met Malika Sanders was a day my life changed. It was 1999, and she was attending a World Youth Leadership Jam that I was cohosting in California. Then twenty-six years old, Malika was an African American woman from Selma, Alabama, who had grown up immersed in the struggle for civil rights. Racism in Selma, the birthplace of the voting rights movement, had not died out

with the 1960s. Malika's own Selma High School, like most other public schools in the state, practiced a kind of "tracking" that grouped certain people into advanced academic classes and steered them toward college and other students into more remedial classes and toward low-paying service sector jobs. At the age of sixteen, Malika had documented that these "tracks" were generally along racial lines, seemingly without regard for academic performance. African American students were not being prepared for college or for professional careers. They were more often being steered toward blue-collar employment.

So Malika organized a school walkout. Hundreds of students participated, shutting down the school for a week, drawing statewide media attention, and eventually getting a law passed that made race-based tracking or "ability grouping" (as it was sometimes euphemistically called) illegal in Alabama's public schools. She went on to direct the 21st Century Youth Leadership Movement (21C), an organization that provides primarily young southern African Americans with training in community organizing, connection to African cultural heritage, self-esteem support, and tools for personal and spiritual development.

When first we met, I embraced Malika with a quick hug. She smiled with a look that expressed warmth and that also told me that being here and talking to me was something of a stretch for her. I was soon to find out why and also to appreciate the depth of the courage it took for her to show up at an event organized largely by white people. As she explained at the Jam, "I grew up in a blatant and openly polarized town in which many European Americans held fast to the 'Old South' where slavery and segregation were seen as a God-ordained way of life. Actually, hate ran through the bodies of many in Selma as smoothly as the blood that filled their veins. This hate was necessary to maintain the beliefs that undergirded the economic, political, and social power structure of the South for centuries."

As I learned about the kind of experiences with which Malika had grown up, I felt a bit intimidated. At that point in my life, I had never spent substantial time with African American people or in the South, and I feared that I could accidentally say or do something that would offend her. With all that she had experienced, how could she not carry some degree of bitterness? And what if it came out at me?

A part of me wanted to avoid Malika, fearing that if we spent enough time together, I would sooner or later make some mistake or say some foolish thing, and she would write me off as another ignorant racist. Yet she had a unique combination of fierce eloquence and friendly politeness that intrigued me—and beyond her personality, I felt a human depth



and power that drew me toward her. I decided to take a risk and reach out with honesty.

Around the third day of the Jam, I asked Malika if we could spend a little time together. She said that sounded fine, even though the look on her face indicated that she had no idea what was in store for her and that she was at least a little bit nervous at the idea. I began our chat by telling her how much I respected her work and how glad I was to have the opportunity to get to know her. And then I admitted that in all honesty, I found myself feeling a bit intimidated. “It’s partly,” I told her, “that you are doing such important work and I have huge respect for you. And it’s partly that I am white, I grew up in a relatively privileged environment, and I am afraid that I could say or do something I don’t mean to, that could offend you.” I told her that I was painfully aware of my own ignorance around race issues and that I found myself being careful and self-conscious for fear that I might mess up. And underneath all that, I wanted to reach out and build a real relationship on solid ground.

Malika’s response surprised me. Rather than being condescending or judgmental, as I might have feared, she responded with warmth. “Your honesty is so refreshing,” she told me. “Where I come from, white folks usually don’t talk about race except to criticize or distance themselves from black folks. I don’t need you to be perfect, but I do appreciate your sincerity. And it lets me wonder,” she continued, “if we might be able to become friends.”

As our conversation continued, it became clear to me that Malika was a deeply thoughtful, principled, and kind young woman. She was coming from a community where a vast divide existed along lines of race and class (the two usually went together). And though she stated that she had never had a close white friend, she was interested in changing that. As she told me, “I grew up believing that any group of people who had endured the dehumanizing effects of slavery, Jim Crow, lynching, rape, and the constant evils perpetrated on us were justified in the hatred of whatever was at the root of that evil. I also saw how hatred could destroy the very body, spirit, and mind of those who held on to its powerful energy. So I realized that it was important to focus my energies on love for all communities, my own as well as those who tried to destroy me, if I was to ever give world peace and justice a chance.”

As we shared more of our stories, our struggles, our families, our work, and our dreams, I could see that Malika and I actually had a great deal in common. We both directed organizations that supported young leaders while trying to live a sane and sustainable life. We were both horrified by the injustices of our world and committed to working for

possibilities, not just against problems. And we both felt that somehow our meeting might have some real significance to our own personal evolution and perhaps also to work that we might yet do together.

My wife, Michele, who was codirecting YES! with me at the time, also felt a bond with Malika. Within six months, Michele and I were on our way to Selma to stay with Malika and to participate in some of her organization's work. The three of us wound up deciding to create together an event that would seek to challenge some of the roots of fear and ignorance that so often feed racism.

So it was that in the summer of 2000, Michele and I worked with Malika and 21C to organize a weeklong summer camp. We brought together fifteen white teens from the North and fifteen African American teens from the South for a week in Selma. Our intent was to build bridges of connection and partnership across historical lines of separation and to shine the light of consciousness and love into the painful area of racism. The challenges before us, however, were larger than I had imagined.

Shortly after our first evening session closed, as the facilitators were meeting to plan the next day, a verbal fight involving a majority of the camp participants erupted in the hall, and we were called in to mediate. I arrived just as a fifteen-year-old white student was screaming at a cluster of African American students that he was not responsible for racism and that racism didn't even exist anymore, while his counterparts shouted back that white people enjoyed the benefits of privilege earned through centuries of slavery and violence and "if there's justice in the afterlife, white people will burn in hell!" I said something about the need to create new patterns of partnership so that there could be healing and forgiveness, and a sixteen-year-old African American girl shot back, "If a woman is being raped over and over, you don't tell her to forgive the rapist. You give her a gun or train her to fight back. If racism was in the past, we could talk about forgiveness. But the simple fact that you think it's over is the whole point. Your people perpetuate it, and our people are dying! You can go live a happy new paradigm in your nice safe suburbs. But me, I'm fighting for my people!"

Four hours later, around three in the morning, half the camp was still gathered in the hallway. Arms were still crossed, and tears were rolling down more than a few cheeks. The conversation was intense, painful, and brutally honest. Malika and I traded a look that said, What the heck are we going to do?

We stumbled our way through that night, and through that week, figuring out step by step how to bring young people together across what I now saw as a very deep chasm. It was very hot, and the air-conditioning

system at the campsite was broken. In the end, ironically enough, it was impromptu water fights that helped break through the tension. Camp participants would go from heated discussions about race, reparations, responsibility, and social justice to chasing each other through the halls squirting each other and squealing with delight anytime they got hit.

Those teens taught me something profound about how to work with these issues. They put out their feelings with a freshness and authenticity that allowed for real contact. They played with passion. They showed us that the issues we face are real and profound—and yet we can still play together.

By the end of the week, participants were repeatedly saying that they had never felt so close to someone of a different race and that they had learned and grown tremendously. I knew good work had taken place, but I was overwhelmed by the immensity of the work that still needed to be done. The African American participants who came from Selma shared some facts with us near the end of the camp. At the time, Selma was a city of twenty thousand people, 70 percent of them black. The black population had an average per capita income of just over \$6,000, and more than 30 percent of the people, almost all of them black, lived below the poverty line. The white population owned the majority of the businesses, lived in all the “nice” neighborhoods, and totally controlled the political landscape. Selma didn’t have any recycling whatsoever, but it did have an overwhelming smell, twenty-four hours a day, emanating from the local paper plant (which also spewed cancer-causing dioxin into the air at illegal levels). It was a city simmering with racial tensions.

After the camp, I went on to learn more. The mayor of Selma, Joe Smitherman, had at that time been in power for thirty-six years. Elected as an outright segregationist, in his second year in office he watched approvingly as police on the Edmund Pettus Bridge beat demonstrators who sought to embark on the 1965 voting rights march. Eventually, the twenty thousand civil rights activists, led by the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., completed the march with national guard support. The march became a profound symbol of the struggles and victories of the civil rights movement and led to the signing of the National Voting Rights Act.

But in Selma itself, birthplace of the voting rights movement, democracy was nowhere to be found. As the years and decades went by, Mayor Smitherman stayed in power through massive voter intimidation and voter fraud. In election after election, violence and the threat of violence kept many black voters away from the polls. In election after election, blacks, many of whom were struggling with dire material poverty, were paid to vote for Joe Smitherman. In two cases, Smitherman actually lost

on election day, only to amass a stunning (and obviously fraudulent but nevertheless binding) victory when the “absentee” vote came in.

Throughout his stay in office, Smitherman ruled a Selma that was governed of, by, and for the white population. He fought bitterly against virtually every piece of civil rights legislation he could. In 1990, he told *Time* magazine that Selma’s first black superintendent of schools was “just an overpaid nigger from New Orleans.” In 2000, he said Selma should not have a black mayor because “blacks cannot run cities. They don’t know how to stay inside a budget.”

As I heard the stories of racism and political fraud in Selma, I found myself in a state of disbelief. I knew this stuff had gone on decades ago, but was it really still taking place in the United States in the twenty-first century? As I talked to more and more people about what I was learning, I noticed an alarming pattern. Most black people I talked to, including folks in places like California, Oklahoma, and New York (not to mention Alabama, Mississippi, and Georgia) seemed not the least bit surprised. Most white people shared my astonishment; only a few others, especially those who had spent significant time in the South or in an inner-city community, did not.

It began to occur to me that I lived in a context far closer to apartheid than I had ever imagined. It was certainly not as overt or as bloody as in South Africa in the 1980s, but it was a social context in which political and economic power were profoundly divided along lines of race. And sometimes even the law was bent to maintain a status quo that saw in the year 2000 an average net wealth of \$88,000 for white Americans and closer to \$6,000 for black or brown Americans. It was a context in which the same crime could receive massive sentencing disparities along lines of race and in which African American males were statistically more likely to spend time in jail than in college. It was also a context in which those of us who are white could go on about our lives, barely noticing the presence of racism and discrimination, unless someone or something brought it into our consciousness.

Selma sure brought it into mine.

September 12, 2000, was to be election day in Selma. As the day approached, Mayor Smitherman’s campaign began to follow its usual course of action. There were bomb threats, other forms of voter intimidation, absentee ballots cast by people who were deceased, and bribes. Staff members for the amply funded Smitherman campaign went from door to door in the black neighborhoods, telling families that they might not want to vote on election day because it “could get violent out there, and we’d hate to see anything happen to you.” Though they were scared,

there were some people in Selma who were sick and tired of it. They'd had enough. They knew what they had to do to get Smitherman out of office: generate a massive voter turnout in the black community. So the "Joe Gotta Go" campaign was born, with 21C playing a major role in mobilizing the vote.

On August 28, with the election just a couple of weeks away, two "Joe Gotta Go" organizers had their cars set on fire right in front of their office. Frightened and feeling the racial tensions rising toward a boiling point, they contacted organizations across the country to ask for help. Malika reached out to me to ask for YES!'s support. She made it clear that Selma was profoundly divided along racial lines and that not since 1965 had the black people of Selma had white people standing and working with them. She said that a white presence joining their campaign would make it clear that this was not just an issue of race but rather an issue of human rights and democracy and could help change the dynamic in the community. I had been deeply moved by all that I had learned about and from the people of Selma. And while I didn't know if we could make a difference, I knew it was important to support Malika. Unfortunately, my wife and I couldn't travel because her pregnancy with twins had become high risk. But thankfully, three white YES! staff members volunteered, and we flew them from California to Selma to help organize and support the volunteer efforts and get out the vote.

Brahm Ahmadi, Jessica Simkovic, and Levana Saxon worked shoulder to shoulder with more than one hundred volunteers who poured in from colleges and civil rights organizations throughout the South. Together, they all worked night and day on the effort. They went door to door in black neighborhoods, promising that they and other monitors would be at the polling places to ensure public safety. They helped organize street demonstrations, and on election day, they went from house to house throughout the city, offering rides to anyone who had not yet visited a polling place that day.

An enormous effort was mounted on both sides. Smitherman and his allies tried everything they could think of to swing the election. Much of what they did was illegal, so much so that Justice Department officials who monitored the activities in Selma described the city's handling of the election as rampant with election fraud.

But thanks to the efforts of many, the September 12, 2000, election saw an African American voter turnout rate of nearly 90 percent. Inspired, Malika wrote afterward: "YES! was part of an effort that produced what was probably the highest voter turnout (anywhere) in the last decade—triple the national average at the time. For the first time in my

life, I saw people coming from pool halls, juke joints, crack houses, mansions, offices, and everywhere to the polls.”

How did it turn out? Joe Smitherman suffered a resounding defeat. The victor was James Perkins, a forty-seven-year-old African American. Selma, the key battleground of the voting rights movement, had thirty-five years later at last taken a major step toward democracy. Finally admitting defeat late on the night of the election, on CNN, Smitherman bitterly said that his opponent won in part by bringing in “people from California.” When I saw this man, who had become to so many a symbol of bigotry and discrimination, blaming Californians for a part of his defeat, I couldn’t keep from smiling. I knew very well the Californians to whom he was referring.

That night, at 11:00 P.M., Selma had its first traffic jam ever, with thousands of people pouring into the streets to sing, dance, hug, laugh, and cry together. One of the YES! volunteers said it was “like the Berlin Wall had come down. I have never seen such glorious joy radiating from a crowd in my life.” Aside from our three volunteers, the people celebrating in the streets were almost 100 percent black. But the presence of white people seemed, at some symbolic level, to be of real significance to the black people of Selma, some of whom commented that it was “unbelievable” to see white folks standing with them in the struggle.

Now many years later, I consider Malika one of my dear friends. When our twins were born prematurely, Malika came to help us make it through some of the long sleepless nights that inevitably awaited us. My wife, Michele, was a bridesmaid at Malika’s wedding and has flown to Selma to stay with her and help out around the births of two of her children. Malika has also guided YES! through some significant organizational challenges, helping us deepen our commitment to racial diversity on our board, and organizing and facilitating numerous programs with us. My wife and I have also been there to support Malika’s work along the way, including raising funds to enable 21C to host Hurricane Katrina evacuees in 2005.

Looking back over the years of our friendship, I see that a pivotal moment was the day Malika and her community asked for help. For her, it was critical that we responded. For both of us, it was the experience of taking risks and working together that built trust. So even though I can sometimes say ignorant things or do things that reveal a lack of awareness regarding race dynamics, we can talk about what happens. I don’t need to “walk on eggshells,” and if I mess up in some way, Malika helps me learn.

A deep bond of love has opened between us—a bond that is inclusive of, yet in some ways also transcendent of, race. I am so grateful that I had the courage, back in 1999, to reach out to Malika and share my fears as well as my desire to connect beyond them. I am so grateful she was willing to take me on as one of her first white friends.

My friendship with Malika has shown me that the vital work of our times doesn't take place only in the public arena of politics or the spotlight of the media. It takes place also in the examination of our values, beliefs, and actions. It takes place in how we challenge prejudice and how we interact with the other people in our lives and in our world. And it takes place every time we move from caring to action, taking a stand with our lives on behalf of our values.

We all inherit a legacy that includes the love and the pain, the prayers and the prejudices of countless generations before us. We grow out of soil that has been at one time or another soaked in blood and tilled by slave labor, as well as tended by loving hands. The work to build on the blessings and gifts of our ancestral history, while challenging and transforming the bigotry, fear, and disconnection that we also inherit, is at once collective and deeply personal.

## What About Class?

Just as we must learn to work across racial divides, we also must face the ways we are divided by class and opportunity and learn how to bridge these gaps. The United States has 5 percent of the world's population and consumes about 25 percent of the world's natural resources. And within the United States, the top 1 percent of the population controls more than 40 percent of the nation's financial wealth. Meanwhile, more than forty million Americans are living below the government-established poverty line, and a billion people around the world live on less than \$1 a day. For those who live the lives behind these statistics, there is often a sense of anger and despair. For those who are well off, hearing these kinds of statistics tends to elicit feelings of guilt and pity. But wherever we are in the class spectrum, there is no escaping the reality that we live in a world with a vast divide in monetary wealth. In fact, it often seems that we take vast gaps in resource distribution and pervasive systemic injustices as givens.

Conventional notions of charity tell us that those who have enough should give something to those who don't. Donors may do something that helps lives yet frequently do nothing to change the dynamics that have perpetuated poverty. The recipients then receive the support,

sometimes at the cost of their own self-respect. Charitable giving can be good, of course, but is there something about the whole concept of charity that can sometimes reinforce the divisions between people? Can the current practice dramatically alter the course of our world? If not, then what will it take?

Perhaps something is called for in our lives and our times that reaches far beyond giving a little back or writing the best funding proposals to pull in scarce resources. Maybe something is called for that demands our dollars, our love, our muscle, our creativity, and our spirit. We can give our unique gifts, learn something new, and live knowing that who we are and what we do matter. We can take some risks, possibly get bruised a few times along the way, and make a difference in the world and the lives of people we love. Some people call this solidarity.

Solidarity may move resources, but it also works on a level far deeper than monetary transactions or things people do together. Solidarity is born of knowing that we are all connected, and any notion that “we” should help “them” or that “we” are dependent on “them” is a product of limited thinking. Rather, we choose to serve one another because we know that to serve others is also to serve ourselves. What harms anyone harms everyone. No one is truly free until everyone is free.

As an Aboriginal activists’ group in Queensland, Australia, put it, “If you’ve come because you want to help me, you’re wasting your time. If you’ve come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.”

Fundamental to the work of solidarity is the belief that injustice hurts all of us and that building a world that works for everybody will take all of us. This, of course, is easier said than done. Years of prejudice, ignorance, and hurt often prevent us from completely hearing one another and relating as human beings and allies. Building real relationships across the class divide can be scary, but it is profoundly important.

When, in 2003, I cohosted and cofacilitated a weeklong international gathering of young leaders in India, one of my jobs was to decide where people would sleep and who would be roommates. I ended up placing two women together mainly because they both spoke Spanish. But I also had a feeling that there might be some interesting connections between them even though they came from very different class backgrounds.

Mayerly Sanchez, now nineteen, had been the founder (at age twelve) of the Children’s Peace Movement of Colombia. Mayerly was called into action at such a young age following the murder of her best friend, who died in an act of senseless violence in the midst of Colombia’s brutal, many-decades-long civil war. The Children’s Peace Movement was led by



and for kids, and it set out to mobilize children to speak out for peace. In the 1990s, the movement collected more than two million signatures from Colombian children on a petition saying that peace should be the first priority of the country. This led to a ballot initiative that generated more than fifteen million votes—more than any presidential candidate in Colombian history. For this and much other good work, Mayerly and a small group of her peers had as a group been nominated three times for the Nobel Peace Prize.

Mayerly came from a background of intense material poverty, and her family lived in Bogotá's largest slum. So for her to travel to India to spend a week with a group of thirty young people from twenty nations was totally unprecedented.

Mayerly's roommate at the Jam she attended was a France-based philanthropist named Felicia. Felicia directed a foundation that focused on encouraging social entrepreneurship. She helped young changemakers with bright ideas get them off the ground through the investment of initial seed capital, as well as coaching and training to help them succeed.

Mayerly and Felicia got along pretty well and seemed to be good friends within a day or two of sharing a room together. Then on the Jam's third day, Felicia approached me privately with a serious topic. She had asked Mayerly what gifts she planned to bring home from India to give to her family. Mayerly had replied, somewhat ashamed, that she had no money with which to buy gifts. No postcards, no shawls, no little elephant statues—nothing. Felicia wanted to give Mayerly some money that she could use to fill this gap—even \$20 would go a long way in India. But she was afraid that to give it to Mayerly directly would create a sense of class divide between them. "We are just becoming friends," Felicia told me, "and the last thing I want is for her to start seeing me as rich in a way that means she no longer trusts me." Felicia was asking me if I might be the deliverer of an "anonymous" gift.

I said I could do that, but I also thought that this might be an opportunity for a conversation that could be healing for both of them. What would it take for the movement of some amount of money to bring them closer together? I asked Felicia if she could imagine talking with Mayerly directly about her fears and about her intentions in wanting to support Mayerly in having something tangible to bring home. Felicia noted that she had been objectified around money more than once in her life and that as the director of a foundation with substantial financial resources, people often saw her as a potential money source in a way that could feel deeply dehumanizing. She had grown to like Mayerly too much to be willing to let that happen.

“But maybe,” I told her, “something else is possible here. Maybe you know each other well enough and care for each other enough that you don’t have to fall down that slippery slope.”

It seemed like a lot of discussion over \$20, but ultimately I knew it wasn’t about the money. It was about the capacity of two people from very different socioeconomic backgrounds to be able to be real together, to be friends, and to build trust by taking risks.

Mayerly and Felicia did end up talking, and Felicia did give Mayerly some support for gifts to bring home. The generous act meant a lot to Mayerly, and the honesty and friendship meant far more. The two of them spoke candidly about class; about their journeys, hopes, and fears; and about the real meaning of friendship.

As the week unfolded, Mayerly revealed that she had been on the edge of burning out. With little material and emotional support, she had been giving her heart and soul—and every waking hour—to the Children’s Peace Movement since she was a girl. She felt that she always had to stay strong and never had the space to cry, to share her fears and struggles as well as her faith. Now, with a global community of friends and peers, she was able to drop her guard, and in the process she was recognizing how deeply she needed to learn to care for herself if she was to sustain herself in service to the children. She needed to learn about pacing and balance, to eat better food, and to sleep at least five hours per night (some might argue that she needed more than that, but apparently five hours was a big enough stretch for her at the time).

Then Mayerly told us that she had almost not come to the Jam because her family had been saving money for a decade in hopes of accumulating the \$5,000 they would need to buy a house. Although she was on full scholarship, meaning that the event cost her no money, she could not help but think that the cost of flying her around the world and putting on such an event for her was almost enough for a house. It had seemed rather wasteful to her. “But,” she said tearfully, “now I see that this experience is worth more to me than five houses. Because I can always earn money for a house, and lots of people earn money for houses, but only this experience is giving me the strength and support I need to sustain my service to the children and the community. And that is really why I am alive.”

I appreciated her enthusiasm, but I also worried for her. How fair was it for someone to give so much to her community and to the world but be struggling so mightily just to make ends meet? So I asked Felicia if she was interested in contributing something to support Mayerly’s family. Perhaps we could even both send something after the Jam. Felicia agreed.

Two weeks after Mayerly returned to Colombia, her father, who was the primary income generator for this family of five, died in a car accident. Mayerly was devastated, and she reached out to the Jam community for support. A flood of e-mails, phone calls, and messages of love flowed in, giving her some bit of consolation in a deeply trying time. I kept thinking about the financial impact of the loss of Mayerly's father and how little extra the family had. I wondered how they would make it through. Felicia and I pooled some money and wired it to Mayerly. It turned out to be enough to pay for the costs of her father's burial, to cover the family's living expenses for a few months, and to enable them to buy their own home, which they did.

Felicia said it felt so good to be able to give from the heart, knowing that a foundation of friendship was strong and the support would be taken as an expression of love. I felt the same way—that it was a natural expression of the love and connection that was there. Mayerly was extraordinarily moved, feeling that in perhaps her darkest hour, a network of friends was showing up for her in many different ways. The fact that that support included money, and in fact enough money for her family to finally buy their own home, was particularly overwhelming to her. And so a time of extraordinary and devastating loss also contained something precious and beautiful: the support of a global community.

Thanks to our gift, Mayerly was able to continue her work, and in time she was able to find an organization that would compensate her for her work, enabling her to support her family while doing what she loved. The Children's Peace Movement carried on. In fact, only a month after Mayerly's father passed away, the international press covered a story about a group of eight hundred Colombian rebels coming out of the jungles to the nation's capital, Bogotá, and laying down their arms in the town square. They made a major statement that while they had given many long years to their struggle for revolution, the children of the nation needed peace. So they were laying down their arms on behalf of the children.

## The Journey of Reconnection

One of my dearest friends is Coumba Touré of Senegal. She is the West African director of Ashoka and founded a printing press for children's books. At a key moment in a gathering of young leaders, I heard her say something that strikes me as deeply true: "All violence begins with disconnection. At the moment we disconnect ourselves from one another, it's all gradients of violence—from not listening to people fully to speaking

ill of them to spitting on them to torturing them to killing them. So the process of reconnection is among the most vital acts of healing that any of us can undertake.”

In these painful and beautiful times, there may be nothing more important than the journey from isolation to connection. For as we find the power of our diverse communities, and as we come to know ourselves more deeply in relationship to our unique gifts and needs, we not only become more whole but also take steps toward giving our essential gifts in this world. We begin to learn how we can unleash all that we have, and all that we are, on behalf of all that we love.

What do we have to gain from crossing the divides and building healing relationships? From bringing our hearts and our work to bear on behalf of life? How might real partnership show up in our lives, in our relationships, and in our world? And what can we learn from others who have walked this road ahead of us, and who may, just possibly, have already begun to blaze a trail toward another kind of future?

I've been blessed to see levels of courage, resiliency, love, and partnership that give me hope for our world. I've seen people willing to engage in the honest, healing, loving conversations that enable real trust to be built across historic divides. I've seen love manifest in action and seen that sometimes, despite all the pain and all the reasons we could find to give up hope in one another, people do have the capacity to forgive. I've seen that sometimes, unlikely allies discover how very much they have in common and how much more they can do together. I've seen that partnership can be messy and painful and can challenge us deeply. And it may be one of the most pivotal forces on which the future of a profoundly divided yet increasingly interconnected world may depend.

## THE AUTHOR

In 1981, Ocean Robbins organized a peace rally at his elementary school. He was just seven years old. He ran his first marathon shortly after moving to California at the age of ten. His entrepreneurial talents began to emerge at the same time, when he was the baker, salesman, and accountant for “Ocean’s Natural Bakery.”

At fourteen and fifteen, Robbins facilitated the environmental portion of two international youth summits in Moscow and another in Washington, D.C. He met with the wife of Soviet Union president Mikhail Gorbachev and numerous ambassadors and U.S. senators to discuss environmental concerns. His articles began to be published in national magazines.

At fifteen, Robbins cofounded the Creating Our Future environmental speaking tour, on which he and three other participants spoke in person to more than thirty thousand students, addressed two thousand people at the United Nations, and opened for the Jerry Garcia band in San Francisco. In 1990, at sixteen, Robbins founded YES!, an organization devoted to “connecting, inspiring, and collaborating with young changemakers,” and has been the organization’s director ever since. YES! has reached more than 620,000 people in more than twelve hundred school assembly and conference presentations. YES! has also organized and facilitated more than one hundred weeklong gatherings for young leaders from more than sixty-five nations, has published seven youth action guides, and has led hundreds of daylong workshops. Robbins has spent nearly two decades as the primary fundraiser and administrator for this nonprofit organization. He has personally facilitated gatherings of young leaders in Jordan, Singapore, Costa Rica, Russia, Finland, Canada, the Netherlands, India, Peru, and the United States.

Robbins is coauthor (with Sol Solomon) of *Choices for Our Future: A Generation Rising for Life on Earth* and speaks widely, spreading a message of hope and inspiration to conferences, companies, and organizations. Robbins has been interviewed on more than seventy local and national radio and TV programs and in another fifty newspapers and magazines. He has served on the board of directors for Friends of the Earth, Creating Our Future, EarthSave International, and the Omni Center and is

a founding member of the Turning Tide Coalition, cofounder of the Leveraging Privilege for Social Change program, and founding coconvener of the Leverage Alliance. He is a graduate of Joanna Macy's facilitation intensive and a certified facilitator of Essential Peacemaking: Women and Men. Robbins's ongoing efforts on behalf of a better world have been honored by many organizations, including the Giraffe Project (for people who "stick their necks out for what they believe"), the National Alliance for Animals (Compassionate Youth Award), *E/The Environmental Magazine* (Kid Heroes Hall of Fame), and EarthSave (Volunteer of the Year Award). *Utne Reader* recognized him as one of thirty "young visionaries" under age thirty, and both *Time* and *Audubon* magazines cited him as one of the heroes of the new millennium. He is a 2008 recipient of the Freedom's Flame Award and of the national Jefferson Award for Outstanding Public Service by an Individual 35 Years or Younger.

Robbins lives in the mountains of Santa Cruz, California, with his beloved wife, Michele, and their identical twin boys, River and Bodhi, born in 2001. They live one hundred yards from Robbins's parents, Deo and John Robbins (the elder Robbins is the author of the international best seller *Diet for a New America* and founder of EarthSave).

For more information about Robbins's life and work, go to <http://www.oceanrobbins.com>. Additional information about YES! can be found at <http://www.yesworld.org>.

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ANTHOLOGY ON  
DEEPENING THE AMERICAN DREAM

Deepening the American Dream:  
Reflections on the Inner Life  
and Spirit of Democracy  
Edited by Mark Nepo

A collection of reflections on the spiritual meaning of being American in today's world from some of our most respected thinkers: Gerald May, Jacob Needleman, Elaine Pagels, Robert Inchausti, Parker Palmer, and others. The book explores the inner life of democracy, the way citizens are formed, and considers the spiritual aspects of the American dream—life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

This thought-provoking volume of essays challenges us to ponder the American Dream and discuss the spiritual values that can help transform the country. The interplay between history, spirituality, and current events is what makes this volume such a soul-stirring experience. It is indeed hopeful and salutary that this cultural document puts so much emphasis on spiritual values as being crucial to the health and enduring value of democracy in the twenty-first century.

—*Spirituality & Health magazine*

*Deepening the American Dream* communicates a determined and magnanimous solidarity to a fragmented age of confusion and escalating resentments. The collection is . . . a gesture of peace and goodwill that summons us to come together. It's a powerfully uplifting book that shines light in the direction of incarnate hope. That rare happening of people actually talking to each other. I highly recommend it.

—David Dark, *The Christian Century*

ESSAYS ON DEEPENING THE AMERICAN DREAM

*Essay #1, Winter 2003*

**Two Dreams of America**

Jacob Needleman

As the inaugural essay in the series, the question is put: “Then, what of the American dream? Is it a vision or an illusion? Do we need to deepen this dream or awaken from it? Can anyone doubt the importance of this question? In one form or another, it is a question that has been gathering strength for decades, and it now stands squarely in the path not only of every American, but, such is the planetary influence of America, of every man and woman in the world. What really is America? What does America mean?”

*Essay #2, Spring 2003*

**From Cruelty to Compassion:  
The Crucible of Personal Transformation**

Gerald G. May

This essay is a compelling journey to the perennial bottom of who we are, at our best and our worst, and how to use that knowledge to live together from a place of spirit and compassion.

*Essay #3, Fall 2003*

**Footprints of the Soul:  
Uniting Spirit with Action in the World**

Carolyn T. Brown

This essay speaks deeply about the gifts and frictions that exist between our authentic self and the society we live in and grow in, and how returning to the well of spirit keeps forming who we are in the world.

*Essay #4, Winter 2004*

**Created Equal:  
Exclusion and Inclusion in the American Dream**

Elaine H. Pagels

In this essay the renowned religious historian Elaine Pagels provides a convincing exploration of the ways we have interpreted equality as expressed in the Declaration of Independence. More than ever, she says, we need to ask, who is included in the American dream? What do we make of this dream in a waking reality? How shall we take this vision to



shape our sense of who we are—as a people, a nation, a community? She calls us to deepen our understanding of the American dream and commit ourselves to extending it to all people worldwide who would share in its promises, blessings, and responsibilities.

*Essay #5, Spring 2004*  
**Breaking the Cultural Trance:  
Insight and Vision in America**  
Robert Inchausti

This essay is a convincing look at how we see and, just as important, how living in America has impaired our deepest seeing, and how education is the sacred medicine entrusted in each generation with restoring that deeper sight that lets us know that we are each other.

*Essay #6, Fall 2004*  
**The Grace and Power of Civility:  
Commitment and Tolerance  
in the American Experience**  
David M. Abshire

In a time when our country is more polarized than ever, the former Ambassador to NATO, a historian himself, traces the history of commitment and tolerance in an effort to revitalize the respect, listening, and dialogue that constitute civility. “Which, then, is the true America?” he asks, “The America of division or the America of unity? The America of endless public and partisan warfare or the America of cooperation, civility, and common purpose? The America of many or the America of one?”

*Essay #7, Winter 2005*  
**Opening the Dream:  
Beyond the Limits of Otherness**  
Reverend Charles Gibbs

This essay explores America’s relationship with the rest of the world. As executive director of The United Religions Initiative, Rev. Gibbs proposes that “The future of America cannot be separated from the future of the rest of the world. There are no longer chasms deep enough or walls high enough to protect us or to protect others from us. So what do we do? We might begin by seeing ourselves as citizens of Earth and children of the abiding Mystery at the heart of all that is.”

*Essay #8, Spring 2005*  
**The Politics of the Broken-Hearted:  
On Holding the Tensions of Democracy**  
Parker J. Palmer

With his usual penetrating insight, Parker Palmer speaks to the conflicts and contradictions of twenty-first-century life that are breaking the American heart and threatening to compromise our democratic values.

*Essay #9, Winter 2006*  
**The Almost-Chosen People**  
Huston and Kendra Smith

In this far-reaching essay, renowned historian of religion, Huston Smith, and his wife, the scholar Kendra Smith, trace the American sense of liberty as a spiritual concept that has both inspired us and eluded us through a checkered history in which we have trampled many in the name of the very equality and freedom we hold so sacred. They trace the erosion of the American Dream in the twentieth century and look toward our inevitable membership in the global family of nations that is forming in the world today.

*Essay #10, Spring 2006*  
**Prophetic Religion in a Democratic Society**  
Robert N. Bellah

Steering between what distinguished sociologist of religion Robert Bellah calls “Enlightenment fundamentalists” on the one hand and religious fundamentalists on the other, this essay argues against both the common secularist view that religion should be excluded from public life and the dogmatic view that would exclude all secular and religious views except one. Instead it proposes a more moderate, nuanced, and robust role for faith and religion in the common life of America and Americans.

*Essay #11, Fall 2006*  
**The Common Cradle of Concern**  
Howard Zinn

In the winter of 2004, during several conversations with Mark Nepo, the legendary historian Howard Zinn explored the nature of being an American today. This essay gathers the siftings of those conversations

put together and edited by both Zinn and Nepo into a meditation on America, moral progress, and the myths of freedom called “The Common Cradle of Concern.”

*Essay #12, Spring 2007*

## **The American Dream and the Economic Myth**

**Betty Sue Flowers**

This provocative essay examines the limitations and deeper opportunities of the economic myth which governs our society today. It asks how we might articulate a common good through which we might treat each other as citizens and not just consumers. We are challenged to imagine ourselves anew: “We can’t hold up a myth of community and wait for it to take hold. We have to work within our own myth, however impoverished it seems to us. To deepen the American Dream is to engage the imagination—to create better stories of who we are and who we might become.”

*Essay #13, Fall 2007*

## **The Truth Can Set Us Free:**

### **Toward a Politics of Grace and Healing**

**Reverend W. Douglas Tanner, Jr.**

The founder of the Faith and Politics Institute traces his own journey; from growing up in the South to his own formation as a spiritual leader to his commitment to supporting the inner life of those called to govern our country.

*Essay #14, Winter 2008*

## **Is America Possible? A Letter to My Young Companions on the Journey of Hope**

**Vincent Harding**

This elder of the Civil Rights Movement suggests that the dream is never finished but endlessly unfolding. He suggests that America’s most important possibility for the world is not to dominate, threaten, or compete with, but to help each other in a search for common ground. He suggests that when we simply attempt to replicate our free-market materialism, we miss our most vital connections. From this, he opens the possibility that a new conversation may begin—one that might initiate a deeper journey concerning the possibilities of human community across all geographical lines.

*Essay #15, Winter 2009*  
**Maturing the American Dream:  
Archetypal American Narratives Meet  
the Twenty-First Century**  
Carol Pearson

This essay is written out of concern about the great challenges facing the United States and the world today. Its purpose is to identify the strengths that can help us tap into what is best about us, and guard against our weaknesses, so we can use our power as wisely as possible and in ways that promote the common global good. To do this will take the maturing of the American dream.

*Forthcoming*  
**Opening Doors in a Closed Society**  
Governor William F. Winter

Governor William F. Winter served as governor of Mississippi from 1980 to 1984. He has been a longtime advocate for public education, racial reconciliation, and historic preservation.

ESSAYS ON EXPLORING A GLOBAL DREAM

*Essay #1, Spring 2006*  
**Bridges Not Barriers:  
The American Dream and the Global Community**  
Abdul Aziz Said

As the inaugural essay in the global series, this leading peace studies educator and scholar examines both the American Dream and the emerging global community with insight into the complex state of international relations, while envisioning a shift in world values that might birth a common world based on the spiritual conception of love and cooperation.

*Essay #2, Summer 2009*  
**The Power of Partnership:  
Building Healing Bridges Across Historic Divides**  
Ocean Robbins

The founder and director of YES! “Helping Visionary Young Leaders Build a Better World” and coauthor of *Choices for Our Future: A Generation Rising for Life on Earth* writes of his experiences in meeting and working

with people from diverse backgrounds and countries and how, even in times of conflict, they have built bridges of friendship and understanding.

*Forthcoming*  
**Topic to be decided**  
Asra Nomani

Asra Nomani, a former reporter for the *Wall Street Journal* for fifteen years, is the author of *Standing Alone: An American Woman's Struggle for the Soul of Islam*.

*Forthcoming*  
**When Vengeance Is Arrested:  
Forgiveness Beyond Hannah Arendt**  
Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela

Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela is associate professor of psychology at the University of Cape Town, and senior consultant for the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation in Cape Town.

*Forthcoming*  
**Topic to be decided**  
John Paul Lederach

John Paul Lederach is widely known for his pioneering work on conflict transformation. He is involved in conciliation work in Colombia, the Philippines, Nepal, and Tajikistan, as well as countries in East and West Africa.

*Forthcoming*  
**Topic to be decided**  
Hanmin Liu

Hanmin Liu is president and CEO of Wildflowers Institute, a social innovation and application lab rooted in ethnic, indigenous, and racial communities.

