

OPENING DOORS
IN A CLOSED SOCIETY



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William F. Winter

Essays on Deepening the American Dream

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PREFACE
DEEPENING THE AMERICAN DREAM

DURING THE PAST SEVERAL DECADES, many observers of our culture have suggested that faith in the American Dream is dying, that a collective vision of hope for the future is fading from view. It has taken a series of national crises—placing us all in direct awareness of our own vulnerability and mortality—to awaken us to the truth that the American Dream is not dying but deepening. Recognition of this truth has never been more essential as we struggle to respond with compassionate strength to the tensions of the modern world.

The Fetzer Institute's project on Deepening the American Dream began in 1999 to explore the relationship between the inner life of spirit and the outer life of service. Through commissioned essays and in dialogue with such writers as Huston Smith, Jacob Needleman, Gerald May, Carolyn Brown, Elaine Pagels, and Parker Palmer, we are learning a great deal about the intrinsic nature of this human relationship. These essays describe some of the ways in which attention to this relationship (in communities and nations as well as individuals) invariably leads to more compassionate and more effective action in the world. In the 1930s, the poet Langston Hughes observed that the origin of a deeper American Dream is not to be found in some distant, abstract idea but very near, in the story of our own lives. His insight rings true to this day:

An ever-living seed,
Its dream
Lies deep in the heart of me.

The deepening we seek can be found in our own hearts, if only we have the courage to read what is written there.

Robert F. Lehman
Chair of the Board
Fetzer Institute

From Hughes, L. "Let America Be America Again." In *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes*. New York: Knopf, 1994. Copyright © 1994 the Estate of Langston Hughes.



OPENING DOORS IN A CLOSED SOCIETY

William F. Winter

ON THE CAMPUS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI, affectionately known to us who are its alumni as Ole Miss, there is a recently erected statue of a man walking through an open door. It is a statue of an African American named James Meredith as he symbolically enters the university.

There was a time not too many years ago when he could not have done that. As a matter of fact, his efforts to do so in the fall of 1962 led to one of the most shameful and tragic episodes in the more-than-century-old existence of that historic institution. When Meredith, a war veteran and native son of Mississippi, sought to enroll at the university, he was thwarted by every legal stratagem that the forces of segregation could devise.

Finally, after many months of battles in the courts, and armed with an order from the U.S. Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals, he showed up to register for admission and was turned away by the governor himself. A few days later, accompanied by a cadre of U.S. marshals, he again sought to enter. A nightlong riot ensued, with two people, one of them a French newspaper reporter, killed by the mob. Some two hundred of the five hundred marshals that had been sent to the campus were injured, several quite seriously. It was miraculous that none of them were killed. Only the timely intervention of the federally mobilized Mississippi National Guard and a larger force of U.S. Army units was able to disperse the rioters and bring a semblance of order to the embattled school. The local Oxford National Guard unit was the first to respond amid the hail of

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the rioters' rocks and bullets. Its commander was a young officer, an Ole Miss alumnus and by coincidence the nephew of the Oxford writer, William Faulkner, a recent recipient of the Nobel Prize for Literature. The officer's arm was broken by a brick thrown by a member of the mob.

The scene the next morning resembled a battlefield, with tear gas canisters; spent shotgun, pistol, and rifle shells; burned automobiles; and other destroyed equipment littering the once placid and beautiful campus. It was finally in this chaotic atmosphere that James Meredith became an enrolled student at Ole Miss. Continuing to be protected by soldiers of the U.S. Army from assault by angry segregationists, he completed his studies and received his diploma the following year.

This ignominious saga that lay like an open wound across the face of the state's oldest and most prestigious public institution of higher learning could well have resulted in its demise. There were certain fanatics and some political leaders who wanted it closed rather than accept a black student. After the initial shock and anger over the tragic event had begun to subside, many of us came to recognize that it was not just the violent rioters who bore responsibility for the tragedy but all of us—state and university officials, proud alumni, confused students, indifferent citizens—who had participated in one way or another in creating a “closed society” that brought us to the infamy of that shameful day. The guilt for it was on all of our hands.

While the issue of slavery was settled on the bloody fields of the Civil War, unfortunately that four-year-long struggle did not put the controversy over race to rest. It would be another century before the last physical battles were fought. It is an ironic and tragic coincidence that the Battle of Antietam in Maryland on September 17, 1862, marked the bloodiest single day in American history, and almost exactly one hundred years later, on September 30, 1962, the battle at Ole Miss resulted in arguably the most tragic day in that university's history.

All of this evokes painful memories for southerners like me, not only out of the recognition of the human lives that had been sacrificed in these ancient and persistent struggles but how, because of those struggles, we have missed and delayed opportunities for the creation of a fairer, more just, and more fulfilling way of life for everyone. As a fifth-generation white Mississippian, I share the burden of that history, as do so many other native southerners. Two of my great-grandfathers were slave owners, and another died fighting as a Confederate soldier. As a small boy, I listened in awe as my paternal grandfather related his experience in the war. I grew up imbued with the glory of the southern cause. All of our white neighbors felt the same way. We had been, willingly or

not, the inheritors of a way of life that had its roots deep in our region's history. It was here that slavery flourished and produced an economic, social, and political order that would not and doubtless could not bring itself to embrace the democratic idealism and guarantees of universal freedom that were expressed in the nation's Declaration of Independence and the Constitution.

I have often found myself asking how we let ourselves become prisoners of this closed society in the first place and why it took so long to break out of it.

The painful answer lies in the system that developed in the grim and desperate years following the South's defeat in the Civil War. It was out of that chaotic time that a de facto system of segregation emerged with the blessing of the United States Supreme Court in its holding in the *Plessey v. Ferguson* case in 1896. The court-sanctioned Jim Crow practices that followed were given a legal status that permitted a totally segregated and largely unequal society to exist. Millions of African Americans were denied the right to vote despite the Fifteenth Amendment, and public facilities and services, including education and transportation, were segregated.

It is difficult for anyone who was not a resident of the Deep South in those days to understand how totally the issue of race dominated almost every aspect of life. Almost every public question and piece of legislation was viewed through the prism of race. It was a system that demanded unquestioning conformity and was enforced by public sentiment so strong as not to permit any public dissent. The argument was that as long as the white South maintained a solid front, there was no force that could cause segregation to end in the South. It was the same no-compromise mind-set that brought on secession and the Civil War. The many years of acceptance by most white southerners of a deeply held belief in the efficacy of this system had left them with an unquestioning conviction that its end would usher in a social and political order wherein they would be the victims. Most of them could not envision a society without restraints on a black underclass.

Politically exploited fear escalated these concerns over the years into the pervasive and unyielding attitudes of the "closed society," as James Silver, a distinguished historian at the University of Mississippi, perceptively characterized it in his nationally acclaimed 1965 book of that title. For that and for his earlier courageous stands, he was ousted from the university. He played a singular role in changing the system, for he was both its definer and its victim.

It was a political and social system that overwhelmed everyone. It defied any objective examination of its moral and economic effects, even

on the white society it purported to protect. That is why no public dissent was tolerated. At its most benign, such dissent would result in social and economic ostracism; at its most extreme, in physical harm. For black people who were inclined to question the system, it could and often did result in punishment of the most brutal and bestial kind. All of us were its prisoners.

Out of the hysteria, which was often deliberately generated by racist organizations, biased media, and demagogic politicians, there developed a massive paranoia that fed on itself. Many otherwise sensible and rational people were caught up in the conformity, some sincerely believing racial segregation to be right and justified, others less committed but nevertheless unwilling to endure the abuse that would come from defying convention.

The effect on intellectual and economic advancement was devastating. Dissenting scholars like James Silver were socially ostracized and physically threatened. Most of the Protestant churches were silent on the issue of race. But many of them were outspoken in defense of segregation and closed their doors to black worshippers. And many conscientious ministers departed for more receptive communities and open churches. Numbers of successful business leaders gave up and moved on.

The inevitable constitutional confrontation came in 1954, when the Supreme Court, in the case of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, overturned the “separate but equal” doctrine set forth in the *Plessey* case a half-century before. The response to the ruling in the South was a stunned silence. No major political figure in the Deep South urged compliance. Even the White House was silent. It was in this leadership vacuum that the forces of massive resistance took charge.

Amid calls for the impeachment of the members of the Supreme Court or at the very least of Chief Justice Earl Warren, the leaders of the resistance began a campaign to intimidate educators and politicians. The White Citizens Council was organized in Mississippi and soon spread to surrounding states, where it became in many places a kind of shadow government. In most instances, the principal members of this organization were not deprived poor whites but a cross section of successful professional and business leaders. Its avowed mission was to prevent the integration of even one school and to ensure that there was no weakening of the system of segregation on any front. A massive network of emotional fear-driven supporters was established to back up this purpose.

Legal battles were waged across the South. All public schools were closed in die-hard counties such as Prince Edward in Virginia. Support for public education diminished in many areas. Mississippi reacted to

the *Brown* decision by repealing through a public referendum its state constitutional requirement for the maintenance of public schools and by rescinding its compulsory school attendance law. The following year, it adopted an interposition resolution, the avowed purpose of which was to declare the Supreme Court decision unenforceable in the state. Other southern states crafted similar defiant responses.

Most of these people were in full agreement with the strategy of uncompromising resistance. But there were a few who saw it as a morally wrong way to go and in any event a hopeless one. Some counseled that we should find a way to accommodate the changes that were surely to come, and for this they were given the most onerous label that anyone in the South could carry: they were called “moderates.” There was very little room in the closed society for them. I was a politician who bore that stigma, and it later cost me dearly in my initial race for governor. Some of my legislative colleagues professed not to understand why I insisted on not joining the White Citizens Council. But as stratagems of the most extreme kind were proposed, I felt that they would result in unfortunate consequences for my state.

Ironically, it was in Little Rock, Arkansas, that the first most serious confrontation took place. Remarkably, the city’s elected school board, with the demonstrated support of a majority of the people in the district, had taken steps within days after the decision to arrange for orderly compliance with the federal mandate. There had been little hue and cry about it.

Into this relatively calm and peaceful setting, over three years after the school board had announced its policy of compliance and just as school was scheduled to open in the fall of 1957, came the heavy hand of Orval Faubus, the then governor of Arkansas. Faubus had never been regarded as a racist. The populist rhetoric that had elevated him to the governorship in 1954 emphasized his support of the underdog. Little Rock was one of the last cities in the Deep South where a showdown over school desegregation was expected to happen. But that was before Faubus, making pronouncements about avoiding violence, actually created an atmosphere that invited violence. His reckless and irresponsible defiance in calling out the Arkansas National Guard to turn away black students resulted in confusion and chaos at Central High for two years or more and set the stage for more hopeless confrontations around the South and in my state of Mississippi in particular.

We saw on national television how the fanatical intensity of the resistance permeated every aspect of life in many communities. James Silver in his book recalled the incidents of violence that were increasingly being used to enforce the closed society. Progressive white political leaders were

silenced or driven from office. One of the South's most respected political leaders, Congressman Brooks Hays of Arkansas, was defeated for reelection the following year by a militant segregationist because of Hays's criticism of Governor Faubus's part in the Little Rock school desegregation confrontation. Other able congressmen, including Carl Elliott in Alabama, Frank Smith in Mississippi, and others across the region, were defeated for reelection by more militant opponents. The lessons were not lost on politicians like George Wallace in Alabama and Ross Barnett in Mississippi. They now vowed never to surrender. In effect, they declared war on the federal government and urged their constituents to stand with them. Barnett was elected governor of Mississippi the next year by embracing Orval Faubus.

On every university campus in my state, the most blatant attacks on freedom of speech were unleashed. No state institution of higher learning was permitted to invite outside speakers to its campus without the approval of a special screening committee that was set up to make sure that no antisegregation ideas would be expressed. No college or high school athletic team was allowed to play against an integrated team, thereby costing them the opportunity to compete in such national events as the NCAA basketball playoffs and most of the football bowl games. In a sports-minded state that took great pride in its athletic accomplishments, this was a particularly difficult sacrifice to make.

Newspaper editors who were courageous enough to editorialize against such abuses were threatened and intimidated by bricks thrown through their windows and their buildings set afire. Boycotts were directed against them, and local businesses were pressured to cease advertising in their pages. Some editors were even compelled to leave the state.

Some twenty black churches in one county alone were bombed or burned. Hundreds of civil rights supporters were arrested for seeking to integrate restaurants, transportation terminals, and houses of worship. Jails were frequently filled with peaceful protesters whose only crime was trying to enter public places in violation of the local segregation practices.

The blatant defiance of the *Brown* decision reached a climax in Mississippi in the riot at Ole Miss in 1962. The following year witnessed the brutal murder of NAACP leader Medgar Evers in the driveway of his home in Jackson. Then came the "long, hot summer" of 1964 in Mississippi, when three young men, two white and one black, were murdered in Neshoba County in a crime that shocked the nation. The passage of the Civil Rights Act by Congress in 1964 followed by the Voting Rights Act a year later marked the critical turning point in the long struggle,

even though several more years of racist rhetoric and intimidation were to be endured. As the blanket of conformity that was the earmark of the closed society gradually started to lift, the public began to accept, although it did not always embrace, the concept of racial integration.

The Voting Rights Act in particular brought to the process a substantial black electorate. In some communities, a dominant black electorate changed the political equation in a very dramatic way. Whereas white politicians had formerly eschewed soliciting the few black voters there were, now they eagerly sought them out, and black candidates for office began to emerge. This represented a dramatic change in the politics of the South.

There was a steady relaxing of the old pressures to conform. No longer did members of either race have to fear for their personal safety and security as they ceased to observe the old segregated lifestyle.

White people belatedly started to acknowledge how much time and energy and resources they had wasted in their blind adherence to a system that had kept both races imprisoned. Now for the first time, they were able to put their misguided fears and inhibitions behind them, and black people ceased to live under a cloud of intimidation. The penalty we had all paid was reflected in retarded economic development, substandard schools, inferior health care, and diminished national respect. Generations of southerners, black and white, had paid a horrendous price.

Years later, after I had become governor of Mississippi, we had a dinner at the governor's mansion in honor of Myrlie Evers Williams, the widow of the assassinated civil rights leader Medgar Evers. I commented to her on the occasion of the dinner that we white people owed her martyred husband as much as black people did, for he had freed us too. We had all, black and white together, been prisoners of the closed society.

Now, almost a half-century removed from those grim events that caused so much travail for our entire society, we find our country being led by an African American president. What can we say about this distance we have traveled as a people? As I watched on television the huge racially diverse crowd in Grant Park in Chicago on election night in November 2008, my thoughts went back to my earlier years, when I could not have imagined such an event taking place in my lifetime.

The memories of the closed society of those years came rushing back. I recalled the visit that in 1948 I made as a young legislator to the campus of a historically black state college and there the distinguished African American president, holder of a Ph.D. degree from a prestigious American university, told me with sadness that he was not able to register to vote in the county where his school was located.

I remembered Medgar Evers and Fannie Lou Hamer and Martin Luther King Jr. and those countless other brave men and women who had put their lives on the line for such a day as this. There were troubling flashbacks of so many other events that denied black citizens the rights that they were clearly entitled to under the Constitution. All of these happenings had been enabled and sanctioned by the closed society that smothered us all.

And as I sadly lamented those lost years and the injustices and injuries they brought to so many, I acknowledged with regret my own past failure to challenge more aggressively the system that caused them.

At the same time, I reveled at the progress that had been made. There was now the monument to James Meredith in the center of the Ole Miss campus, where now some 15 percent of the student body is African Americans, the newly elected president of the student body is black (the third to hold that office), and the president of the alumni association is an African American woman. Approximately one-fourth of the Mississippi legislature now consists of black members, and almost one thousand black officials fill elective offices at the state and local levels, including a congressman and a member of the state supreme court.

A few weeks after President Obama's election, I traveled on a cold day to Washington to witness the inauguration of this unlikely man as the leader of our nation. Having grown up as a segregationist in arguably the most segregated state in America, I could appreciate better than many of the other people in that great crowd the incredible significance of that day.

But in spite of the euphoria and exhilaration, I also knew how far we still had to go. Even though our society in the South can no longer be regarded as closed, it, along with the rest of the country, still has not adequately accepted the changes that are essential to our continued progress as a people. For as long as there are so many people with minds still closed or indifferent to the continuing disparities that exist in our land, we shall not have realized and can never realize the fulfillment of our national destiny. These are not inequities based solely on race; they are disparities also based on gender and class and educational achievement. Perhaps the greatest fault line of all now lies between those who have an adequate education and those who do not.

So long as we have millions of our fellow citizens living below the poverty line in squalid and miserable homes and without jobs and adequate medical care and good schools for their children to attend, who get up every morning to face incredible hardships and have little hope that tomorrow will be any better than today, we still have much work to do.

In other, more difficult times, it has been under the pressure of economic necessity or social compulsion that we have taken actions that have led to a stronger and more vibrant society. We did not give in to the cynics and the naysayers in those previous crises. We brought into play the optimism and vision for the future that have always been our strengths. Now it is time once again to bring those qualities to the fore.

No country so bountifully endowed with the intellectual capacity, natural wealth, and incredible resourcefulness as ours should have any questions about its future. But to realize the promises of that future, we must more fully engage our freedom to explore new relationships and ideas and demonstrate the courage to embrace them. Mistakes will, of course, be made, but no great achievement is ever made without trial and error, pain and suffering.

The process will require experimenting and testing, much as a scientist in the laboratory will weigh one combination of chemicals against another. That may cause an unfortunate explosion sometimes, but it is through this kind of exploration that we eventually find our way. That is what we are now obliged to do in opening the doors of opportunity that still remain at least partly closed for too many. We will be obliged to chart some new courses through the complex labyrinth of politics and public policy.

Closed and selfish individual minds wreak havoc on an entire society and bring that society down from its noble ideals to one unworthy of its own heritage. Our failure to recognize and embrace the opportunities we have inherited and to use those opportunities to enlarge and enrich the world of which we are a part is the cause of much of our present strife and discontent.

I believe that now the testing must begin in terms of how we approach the opening of the doors that still remain closed in our society. Despite all of our progress, the great challenge before us is to find additional ways to break down the suspicion and hostility that seem to accompany human differences, whether of race, color, religion, nationality, language, politics, or culture. Focusing on what people look like, how they dress, how they worship, or how they talk often drives a stake through the heart of civil discourse or friendly relationships. The old stereotypes overwhelm our reason and lock up our minds. None of us is fully immune from these hang-ups. The old mindless fears and prejudices die hard.

Sometimes the only thing we think we know about other people is based on totally distorted—often deliberately distorted—information. There is even an unfortunate tendency on the part of some of us to prefer to accept a negative view of others rather than a favorable one, especially

if the other person is of a different race or culture. This makes it all the more difficult to find the common ground that is essential for our national unity.

Having spent so much of my adult life in the often harsh and uncompromising atmosphere of southern elective politics, which for so long has been driven by the inflammatory issue of race, I have found myself searching for ways to measure how far we have come in diminishing the myriad conflicts that have arisen out of that issue. I am encouraged by the progress I have personally observed among members of both races in my state and my region of the country.

For a while, I have felt that it would be useful to attempt to assess that progress not only in the South but on a national basis as well. I sensed that there is no longer a stark difference between the regions of the country when it comes to attitudes about race.

As I was giving thought to these issues a few years ago, my fellow southerner, Bill Clinton, was elected president of the United States. He and I had served concurrently as governors of our respective states of Arkansas and Mississippi, which share a similar history in terms of race. We had compared notes on a number of occasions, and we both had long felt concerns over our failure to eliminate the remaining barriers to achieving a more united country. He had had as one of his predecessors Orval Faubus; I had had Ross Barnett. We both understood the tragic ramifications of a politically imposed closed society, which we had both fought to end.

Shortly after President Clinton's reelection in 1996, I encouraged him to consider establishing a special advisory committee to attempt to measure the state of race relations in America. He enthusiastically embraced the initiative and quickly put in place a seven-member committee, the Advisory Board on Race. It was chaired by the greatly respected African American historian John Hope Franklin. I had the privilege of also being a member. It was a challenging and eye-opening experience for all of us.

Under Franklin's leadership, we set out on our mission, which involved countless public meetings and individual conversations with people of every conceivable racial background in every area of the country. I personally visited twenty-six states in the course of our work and came to appreciate fully for the first time the fascinating diversity of the citizenry of our country and the potential strength that diversity brought. I found that while the greatest challenge in race relations had historically been that between black and white people, there now had emerged a racial diversity that is much more complex. In terms of demographics, there has been a huge increase in the numbers of Hispanic Americans and Asian

Americans. Indeed, the Hispanic population now exceeds the African American population.

A year and a half of intensive effort by our committee produced conclusions that were both heartening and disturbing. It was obvious that tremendous progress had been made in the advancement of educational and career opportunities, but the economic and educational gap remained unacceptably wide. Far greater social integration was taking place, but there was still too much lack of trust between the races and too much so-called white flight. There was a huge difference in the perception of how far we had come. White people seemed to think that we had come farther than black people did.

Of all the forums we held across the country, it was the one on the campus of my alma mater, the University of Mississippi, that led to some of the most positive and interesting results. On a rainy night, a racially diverse crowd of some eight hundred students, faculty, and citizens from the surrounding area gathered in the historic Fulton Chapel. It was a passionate and candid but civil discussion lasting more than two and a half hours. It was the first time that a meeting like that had been held on that campus, where more than thirty-five years earlier, a tragic riot had taken place over the admission of a black student.

It was obvious that this opportunity for a free and open discussion of race needed to be continued. In the ensuing weeks, with the support of the university's chancellor, Robert Khayat, the framework for a permanent organization was put in place. Now ten years later, that idea has emerged in the form of the Winter Institute for Racial Reconciliation, based at Ole Miss, that is doing extraordinary work in reconciling racial differences in communities across the South. It has demonstrated how the opening of communication between people of different races reveals how much we have in common.

The work of the institute has led to highly satisfying and successful efforts in many communities at building bridges of understanding and trust to replace the suspicion and hostility that had previously existed.

One of the most dramatic results was the creation of a multiracial coalition in Neshoba County, where the three civil rights workers had been murdered in 1964. As a result of the coalition's efforts, one of the murderers was belatedly brought to justice and convicted of his horrific crimes. In the spring of 2009, an African American was elected the mayor of Philadelphia, the county seat of Neshoba County.

The work of the institute continues at an increasingly effective level in communities that for so long were imprisoned behind the walls of the closed society. These encouraging models of racial cooperation that

are being created in Mississippi can serve to instruct other communities across the nation.

On the basis of my participation in the numerous national forums and conversations that the advisory board had conducted over the course of eighteen months, I found a clear consensus around several common concerns. Regardless of where we were—whether in Los Angeles, Chicago, Boston, or Mississippi—there were certain basic propositions that almost everybody could agree on: First, everybody wanted their children to get an adequate education; second, everybody wanted a fair chance to secure a job that would enable them to make a sustainable living; third, everybody wanted to be able to live in a decent house on a safe street; fourth, everybody wanted access to affordable health care; and finally, everybody wanted to be treated with dignity and respect.

I am convinced that a good faith effort to try to bring about the realization of these very reasonable aspirations that all of us share should be our ultimate national commitment. When we make the achievement of those objectives our highest priority, we shall have found the key to our national purpose.

In the pursuit of those aims, our preoccupation with simplistic and irrelevant differences will fade away, and we can begin to accept the reality that we all want pretty much the same things and that we are all members of the same human race.

We cannot forget, though, as we seek to embrace our common humanity, that we must also face the reality that there are forces in this increasingly complex world that threaten to continue to divide us. That means that now that the stakes are higher and the issues are more complicated, it is more vital than ever that we have the informed and responsible participation of more of us in the molding and shaping of public understanding and public opinion in a way that will result in a truly united country. This participation must be motivated not by a quest for private advantage or personal profit but by a genuine recognition that only through a shared vision can we achieve our greatest success. We must build on that vision. We must build on the success that has enhanced the quality of life for most of us.

This effort must be generated by a genuine desire to improve the quality of life for more of our fellow citizens. In recent years, we achieved by almost every measure an enhanced level of opportunity for most of our people. It is obvious that we have made commendable progress. But as far as we have come, we find ourselves confronted with new and different challenges.

In opening long-closed doors, we must recognize how much our society has become a part of a new technological world that has seen incredible

advances in science and mathematics capable of creating machines that outperform the human mind.

No one questions the amazing utility of these developments, as they make many of the daily tasks of living infinitely better. Through these miracles, there is now available on our computer screens an array of information the like of which we have never known before. Much of the world's great literature can be called up with the flick of a button. But access and understanding are two different things. Technical know-how is not the same as wisdom.

Now we are called on to create in this new information age a cultural imperative that will preserve our common humanity in the face of an ever-advancing system of artificial intelligence that has now become a reality. At the same time that we employ this technology to enhance the ability of people to lead more fulfilling and productive lives, we must not let it diminish our "humanness" and commitment to the universal ethical and spiritual values that undergird our civilized existence.

The difference between now and the simpler world in which I grew up is that in the past, many people had limited skills and limited access to knowledge, whereas now we have so many more people with unlimited access to information and who struggle over how to apply that information in a truly meaningful way. Unless we learn how to arrive at wise and thoughtful solutions to the issues that confront us, we shall continue to struggle and to be haunted by fears and doubts about our future in a new and hostile world.

The irony is that even though we have put behind us so much of what had been wrong and have achieved this greatly increased level of material affluence and productivity, rather than automatically producing a better society, we are finding instead a disturbing lack of civil discourse and an increase of partisan rancor. There is a growing gap between the haves and the have-nots and a predisposition to getting while the getting is good. In our self-centered preoccupation with our own private interests, we tend to forget that we are bound together by a social contract that requires us to get along with each other and to look out for each other. We ignore the obligations of that contract at the risk of losing our souls.

This is where all of us must come together and call into play the collective wisdom and inspiration of those wise leaders who have done so much to change our country for the better and who have helped preserve its noblest qualities.

We cannot permit these reservoirs of leadership to be taken over by those with the fattest checkbooks or those concerned solely with their own narrow, selfish agendas. We cannot let greed overwhelm the generous

spirit that has marked our historic progress. That is why all of us must be involved with citizens across our land to mobilize that spirit of community and goodwill that still exists in abundance but so often gets shunted aside by the political hucksters and the fast-buck fortune-seekers.

We must work to develop more public and community leaders with the vision and civic courage that will enable them to confront and deal with difficult public issues, whether on race relations, urban sprawl, education, housing, or health care, before they spiral out of control. We must work to create a climate where our political leaders will be better able to act decisively on difficult and unpopular issues instead of feeling that they must draw ideological lines in the sand or pander to the most selfish and cynical of their constituents or kowtow to the shameless peddlers of influence.

It is a sad commentary on our so-called enlightened society when the inane and preposterous opinions expressed on talk radio, on some television shows, and now on the Internet appear to have more acceptance among much of the body politic than thoughtful voices of reason. So many people work in lonely and isolated situations without the benefit of wise and knowledgeable advisers. We need all the help we can get to protect us from the raw and uncompromising pressures of biased or uninformed public opinion that rob us of our individuality and close our minds. We must do more to make reasonable voices heard. We must support and encourage honest, conscientious public officials to take principled stands even when those stands may pinch our own toes. None of us ought to expect politicians to deliver everything we want.

In the increasingly complex and diverse society in which we live, very few public issues have clear-cut answers. It is the test of the true leader to find a way to accommodate differences in a reasonable and responsible way. Honorable compromise has always been a necessary element in good leadership. Some naive people regard it as a sign of weakness. Actually it may involve great courage. It involves recognizing that most issues have two or more sides. Otherwise we wind up with nothing getting done. That kind of political gridlock is happening too often these days. We must remember that none of us has a totally omniscient and clairvoyant view of the issues that confront us. For most of us, our perceptions and opinions have emanated from our life experiences and the influences of our family, teachers, writers, and public leaders. We must therefore understand how important it is to use that acquired knowledge plus our own common sense to weigh and explore and be open to new and better ideas and ways of doing things. We must not be afraid to examine the bases of our beliefs. Visionary and courageous teachers like

James Silver have helped deliver all of us from a society of closed minds by encouraging this kind of examination.

We obviously do not live in the kind of closed society that I once knew, but I believe that we do live in a society that has too many minds oblivious to the needs of so many of our fellow human beings. The paradox is that after seeing so much positive change that has helped right many of the old wrongs, we find ourselves now facing the situation that a gifted Mississippi writer, David Cohn, once predicted could be our fate: “With heaven in sight,” he said, “we insist on perversely marching into hell.”

Now at a time when we should be looking forward with confidence to the continuation of an era of economic stability and social progress, we find ourselves facing some of the most difficult circumstances that any of us have ever known. How did this happen after we have come so far?

Thomas Wolfe perhaps put it best in his book *You Can't Go Home Again*, written at the advent of the Great Depression in a time not unlike the present. This is what Wolfe wrote:

I believe that we are lost here in America, but I believe we shall be found. . . . I think the true discovery of America is before us. . . . I think the enemy is here before us, too. I think the enemy is single selfishness and compulsive greed. . . . I think he took our people and enslaved them, that he polluted the fountains of our life, took unto himself the rarest treasures of our own possession, took our bread and left us with a crust.

Wolfe has described with perhaps too much poetic license the harsh conditions that now threaten and challenge us. We have let too much of our public decision making be influenced by those concerned mainly with their own narrow agendas. We have let greed overwhelm the generous spirit that has inspired much of our progress in the past. We have let our minds be closed to the concept that we still live under a social contract expressed in the Declaration of Independence, when our forebears pledged to each other “their lives, their fortunes and their sacred honor.”

In the past, it has been through our embrace of the terms of that contract that we have prevailed over the forces of tyranny, conformity, and intolerance that would tear our country apart. We have faced and surmounted the stresses of the Great Depression; the Joe McCarthy-fueled hysteria over communism in the Cold War, and the anguish and uncertainties that have arisen in our time out of the threat of terrorism. These have been and, in the case of terrorism, continue to be tests of our national stability. We must not understate their capacity to generate deceit and unreasoning fear that can overwhelm our collective wisdom

and good sense. They can drive us to renounce or set aside our constitutionally guaranteed rights in a panicked quest for security.

That is why our response to threats from without and from within must be based on our reliance on the strength of an informed and open mind that is capable of deciding what is real and valuable and what is not. Public decisions involving life and death, war and peace, order or chaos must not be made on the basis of impulse, emotion, or a denial of reality.

In facing future threats, whether they be economic ones at home or military and diplomatic ones abroad, we must understand that there are no answers that will be simple and without sacrifice. It is when we rashly underestimate the complexity and perils of those choices that we get into trouble. Too often in the past, we have been unwilling to try to measure in advance the ultimate cost of recklessly embarking on ill-advised and uncharted missions.

Being required to face the harsh realities of the present may be a fortuitous development for us now, since left to a pattern of careless choices, we might well continue on a fatal and self-destructive course. Now, hopefully, we still have time to ask the hard questions so as to improve and refocus our society in ways that before we did not have the resolve and sense of urgency to do. Now we can come together in a better understanding of our peril and with a common commitment to the preservation of our cherished values.

It is in troubled and unsettled times like these that we have the greatest opportunity to achieve constructive change. In times of crisis, we are required to make corrections and improvements in the way we do things. We now have the freedom and the obligation to weigh and discard some of the old worn-out, wasteful, and selfish ways, which have been protected by minds closed to reform.

A fearful or suspicious or selfish people cannot be a free people. We must live in the confidence and reassurance that is the basis of our freedom. We cannot always be sure that we are right, and we cannot be so proud and insecure that we cannot admit that we might be wrong.

We will not be able to do this if we cannot open our minds to the new possibilities that are before us. I believe that two related events of recent months have created a dynamic that is beginning to change our way of thinking and responding. Those events have been, first, the incredible surge of civic and political interest by a young generation that so greatly influenced the last presidential election and, second, the economic crisis that has resulted in large measure from a mind-set that allowed greed and arrogance to overrule the old virtues of thrift and sacrifice and generosity.

I am old enough to remember the Great Depression of the 1930s. Even though I was a small boy in that season of hardship, I can recall with painful clarity what life was like in those years. Seared into my memory is the sight of gaunt, half-starved people, black and white, walking bare-foot down the back roads. There was no public safety net for the first few years of that desperate time. Those grim experiences came about under many of the same conditions as we have recently been facing. A largely out-of-control and unregulated economic structure caused the quest for unlimited wealth to distort, overwhelm, and confuse our values then as they have now. We must now use our energy not in recrimination and regret but in the creation of a fairer, more equitable system than we have known before.

We must remind ourselves of the social contract on which our nation was established. We must embrace that contract if we expect to inspire another generation to accept it. We must see to it that these young citizens have a clear understanding of where we have come from and who we are as a people and how we got to where we are. There is not enough of this kind of teaching and learning going on. Too many of our most able and promising young men and women have only a passing acquaintance with the events and heroes who shaped our history.

The lack of civic learning and an understanding of our historical background can be a fatal flaw in the capacity of these future leaders to lead. Without a knowledge of what has gone before, they may well fall into the trap of repeating the old mistakes and ignoring the lessons that earlier generations paid so dearly to learn.

They must clearly understand that public and civic leadership is never an easy road to travel. There are a lot of stresses and strains these days. It is easy for us to get split up over issues about which many people feel deeply. There are full-time practitioners in politics and in the media and even in some church groups who fan the flames of emotion and discord.

We must not let ourselves succumb to the tendency to demonize those who see things through different eyes, based usually on different life experiences. Sometime we have to walk in someone else's shoes for a while to understand where the person is coming from.

My perspective is that the best way to overcome these stresses is through sharing experiences—working with others and recognizing that we are all in this together and that what we have in common is so much greater than the things that divide us. As we work with other people who may be different from us, the old barriers and old stereotypes begin to fade away.

The greatest threat to our future as a nation does not lie so much in the streets of Baghdad as it does in the streets of our own small towns

and great cities. If we become a country divided by race and class and where the gap between the rich and the poor continues to widen, we shall in the future pay a huge penalty in the declining quality of our lives and the diminished stability of our economic and political system.

A democratic society cannot leave these problems to be solved by blind chance or individual impulse.

All of us must be willing to speak out against bigotry and intolerance and injustice. We must seek to find worth in every person. That is how we pay our dues for the privilege of living in a free society. That is how we can pass on to the next generation a better country than the one we inherited. That is how we open the doors to the fulfillment of the American Dream.

Of all the qualities that I believe are necessary for the sustaining of our free society, the most necessary are optimism and persistence. They must be accompanied, of course, by competence and compassion. The application of those qualities can overcome the cynicism and apathy that have been the downfall of so many societies.

That is a lesson for all of us. We can let the naysayers and cynics destroy our vision and close our minds to the choices we have, or we can work to make our society more productive and livable for everyone. This should be a challenge that more of us should welcome. To feel that one is a participant in building up one's community, especially in times of challenge and hardship, can be the key to a fulfilling life. Instead of fantasizing about glories that never were or might have been, let us concentrate and transmit our energies to the here-and-now and to the what-can-be.

At a time when so many narrowly focused special-interest groups abound, more of us should consider ourselves as lobbyists for the public interest. We need to be involved in creating constituencies for quality education, for adequate health care, for the preservation of a livable environment, and for the formation of more responsive structures of government.

We must bring together diverse constituencies and serve as a bridge between people and groups representing different interests but who have more in common than they may know. We must help communities identify their local strengths and resources. That is primarily a matter of stimulating vision where none has existed of creating, educating, informing, and building community leadership.

Helping to establish models of programs that work, sharing successes, transmitting a spark of know-how—these must be our tasks. All of this calls for a continuing process of self-education and civic education. This must be true education not in sound bites and slogans but in serious understanding of our responsibilities in the preservation and perpetuation of our free society.

In spite of the great strides we have made, many stubborn barriers remain. These are barriers fashioned of poverty and ignorance, of drug abuse, of family structures that are falling apart. These are the problems that tear at the very fabric of civilized society.

In the long and eventful history of our country, individual citizen responsibility has been the mainstay of our stability as a nation. This is the continuing source of our strength.

I have had the privilege of serving in various public offices, including governor of Mississippi. I considered that a high calling, the highest elected position in my state. It was a post of great responsibility. But I have been reminded that it was not the most important political position in our democratic scheme of things. That position is one that is often overlooked. I would remind myself and the rest of us that the most important office in our political system is the office of private citizen. It is this position from which all political power flows. If we neglect the duties of that office, we weaken our democracy and lessen our capacity to sustain good and wise government.

In recent years, we have developed an unfortunate tendency in our country to denounce the very government that we say we want to defend. We have heard candidates for public office assert that government is our enemy and that if we weakened it sufficiently, we would thereby solve most of our political problems. Many citizens have been swept up in this seductive but self-destructive appeal. Now when there is a need for our government to assert its authority to prevent abuses in the marketplace and to provide relief to citizens who through no fault of their own are in dire need, we recognize that there are many critical problems that only our government has the power and resources to solve. We cannot preserve our political system by weakening that government and the faith of the people in it.

In my lifetime, which now spans almost nine decades, I find myself reflecting on how fortunate I have been to have lived through the most exciting, challenging, and possibly most dangerous period in recorded history. After thousands of years of living in relative isolation, we are now living in a world where we can be in instantaneous contact with our fellow human beings in the remotest corners of the earth. There is no place to hide, even if we wanted to, from the realities of our existence together here on this planet.

Having seen over those years the incredible changes in race relations in my native state and region, I am convinced that it is not totally idealistic or unrealistic to believe that we can achieve similar progress in challenging other elements that divide us and diminish our ability to live together in a manner that enriches the lives of all of us.

That does not suggest that any of us must relinquish our long-held cultural, spiritual, or political beliefs, but it must involve a willingness to accord respect to those who hold different ideas or who come from different backgrounds and life experiences. In other words, we must strive to achieve a society where all can feel that they are valued and included. A society or a community built of different and diverse individuals can actually be stronger and more vibrant by virtue of the combining and harmonizing of its different elements. The acceleration and perfecting of that advancement should now be the task for our future.

The time has come for all of us to join together in embracing the full measure of our common existence and the recognition and appreciation of our common humanity.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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. He has been chairman of the Southern Regional Education Board, the Southern Growth Policies Board, the Commission on the Future of the South, the National Civic League, the Kettering Foundation, the Foundation for the Mid South, and the Mississippi Department of Archives and History. He was a member of President Clinton's National Advisory Board on Race. An attorney in the firm of Watkins Ludlam Winter & Stennis in Jackson, he is a graduate of the University of Mississippi School of Law. He was recently awarded the Profile in Courage Award by the John F. Kennedy Library Foundation. He is married to the former Elise Varner, and they have three daughters and five grandchildren.



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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 and 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. The inaugural essay in the series posed an important question: “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 just 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, David Abshire, a former ambassador to NATO and a historian himself, traces the history of commitment and tolerance in an effort to revitalize the respect, listening, and dialogue that constitute civility. “Which . . . 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, Rev. 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 Smith and Kendra Smith. In this far-reaching essay, Huston Smith, a renowned historian of religion, 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 the 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, the legendary historian Howard Zinn explored the nature of being an American today with Mark Nepo through several conversations. This essay gathers the insights of those conversations, edited by both Zinn and Nepo, into a meditation on America, moral progress, and the myths of freedom.

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 that 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, Rev. 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. Harding suggests that America’s most important possibility for the world is not to dominate, threaten, or compete 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 that we might use our power as wisely as possible and in ways that promote the common global good.

Essay #16, Winter 2010: *Opening Doors in a Closed Society*, Gov. William F. Winter. In this essay, former Mississippi governor William Winter reflects on the long journey from the closed society of the South when James Meredith became the first African American student at the University of Mississippi to the election of President Barack Obama. Though progress has been made, Winter points out that there are still forces that threaten to divide us and speaks to the importance of informed and responsible participation of the public in order to fulfill the American Dream for all.

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 give rise to 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 at times of conflict, they have built bridges of friendship and understanding.

Essay #3, Winter 2010: *Milestones for a Spiritual Jihad: Toward an Islam of Grace*, Asra Q. Nomani. In this essay, Asra Nomani, former reporter for the *Wall Street Journal* for fifteen years and author of *Standing Alone: An American Woman’s Struggle for the Soul of Islam*, writes of her personal journey as a Muslim American journalist and single mother. Drawing on her own experience and the teachings of Islam, she calls on the universal values of Islam that carry with it grace, compassion, and love.

Essay #4, forthcoming: *When Vengeance Is Arrested: Forgiveness Beyond Hannah Arendt, Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela*. The author is an associate professor of psychology at the University of Cape Town, South Africa, and senior consultant for the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation in that city.

Essay #5, forthcoming: Title to be determined, John Paul Lederach. John Paul Lederach, widely known for his pioneering work on conflict transformation, is involved in conciliation work in Colombia, the Philippines, Nepal, Tajikistan, and several countries in East and West Africa.

Essay #6, forthcoming: Title to be determined, Hanmin Liu. The author is president and CEO of Wildflowers Institute, a social innovation and application laboratory rooted in ethnic, indigenous, and racial communities.