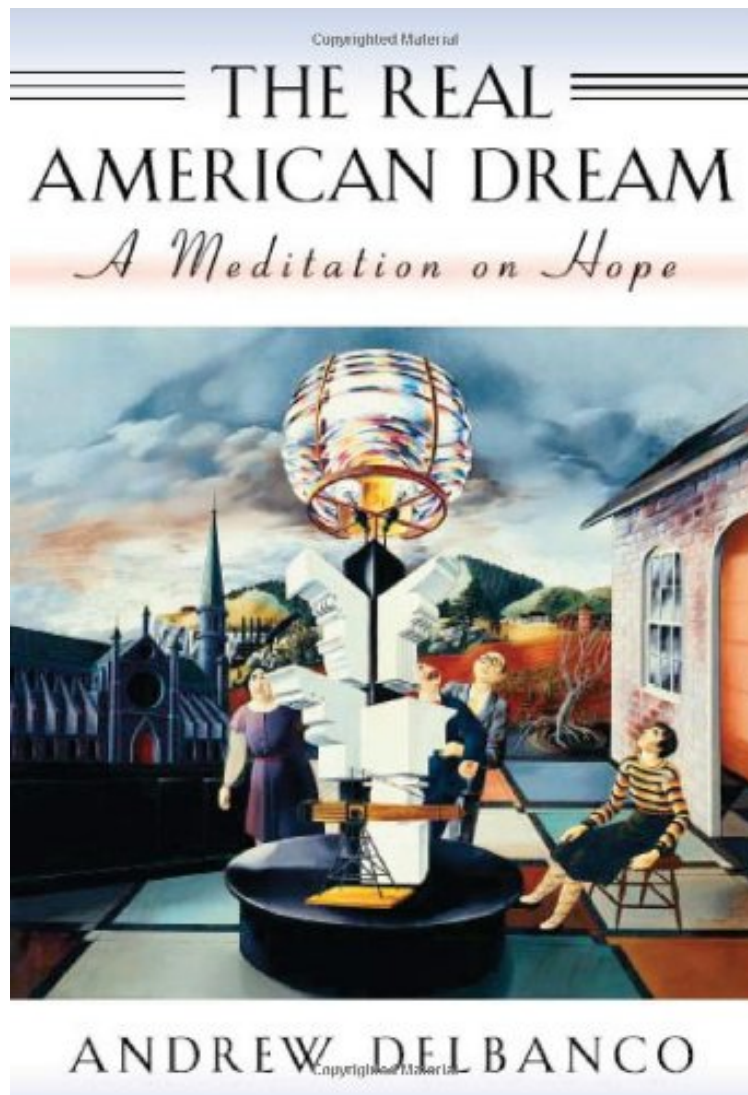


(Library ebook) The Real American Dream: A Meditation on Hope (William E. Massey, Sr. Lectures in the History of American C)

## The Real American Dream: A Meditation on Hope (William E. Massey, Sr. Lectures in the History of American C)

Andrew Delbanco

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**Andrew Delbanco : The Real American Dream: A Meditation on Hope (William E. Massey, Sr. Lectures in the History of American C)** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Real American Dream: A Meditation on Hope (William E. Massey, Sr. Lectures in the History of American C):

8 of 8 people found the following review helpful. Tim Keller's Go To BookBy David George MooreI recently

interviewed Tim Keller. During that interview, I asked this question: Moore: I have read four of your books (The Reason for God, Counterfeit God, Every Good Endeavor, and Walking with God Through Pain and Suffering). Though they are very different books, I noticed that all four cite Andrew Delbanco's, *The Real American Dream: a Meditation on Hope*. Why is that book so formative to your thinking? Keller: It is a terrific analysis of contemporary American culture, put into the context of American history. Delbanco says that American cultural history has had three phases each one centering on one high priority. He lists them: God. Nation. Self. I don't think you can improve on the simplicity and penetration of that analysis. I don't think his book is necessarily more formative than any other book to my thinking, but it is so broadly applicable to psychology, vocation, politics, sexuality, religion, or whatever. That's why it's hard not to cite it, no matter what the subject. Now that I have finished Delbanco's book, I concur wholeheartedly.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Time for Every Thinking Person to Reread this Book  
By Bob Swidler  
I loved this book when I read it in 1999 after reading Richard Rorty's review on it in the NYT Book Review. It affected me so greatly that I carried it around with me when travelling as a kind of reminder of the meaninglessness of making self-gratification the centerpiece of my existence. Then I read it again recently (post-election) and realized that it is even more relevant today than when it was written. The focus on the "self" in America today is even more pronounced than it was then. Delbanco's idea that something was coming - some sort of justice that would stop separating those with hope from those without - has shrunk into the background as individuals and even US society as a whole focus on their narrow self-interests. As people and institutions realize that the focus on the self is not making them any happier, that "all this getting and spending amounts to nothing more than fidgeting while we wait for death", as Delbanco quotes de Tocqueville as saying in his brilliant 1835 treatise called "Democracy in America", they develop a form of melancholy that only a new focus on helping others and contributing to the greater good can relieve. Although Delbanco's book is anything but Dystopian, as it is subtitled "A Meditation on Hope" and, indeed, offers an uplifting message that something is coming to relieve the unrelenting focus on self-aggrandizement that terrorizes American society today, it is remarkably prescient in describing the third era since America's founding (following God and Nation) as its most meaningless and explaining why something more meaningful must replace it if America is to retain its place in the world as the country most envied and admired. Please start reading this beautifully written tome again to remind yourselves why our current state of affairs cannot continue as "the incomplete joys of this world will never satisfy the human heart."

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Wisdom In A Nutshell  
By John A. Van Devender  
I rec'd this book as a Christmas gift... it was a joy to read it. The life of a Professor of Humanities must have at least moments of sheer pleasure. This book is exactly what it says it is: a meditation on hope. In essence it evokes the image of a thoughtful man, sitting in his back yard or on a porch, puffing on his pipe and contemplating the state of things... or, as I used to say when engaged in a similar occupation, thinking "big thoughts." It would indeed be delightful to have such an activity inherent in one's life's work and therefore, being a Professor of Humanities would fill that bill. Delbanco's scope is an overview of American history since its inception as a distinct people. His focus is on the distinctive quality or focus that one can assign to the three phases that he sees in that history. His lens is on the cultural distinctions, or prevailing sentiments, that characterize each of those three phases. It is a very productive meditation and one that I personally find very appealing. I don't think I will ever speak of American history again apart from the categories he establishes: the "God" phase, the "Nation" phase and the "Self" phase. It's an over-simplification of course... but it works at a lot of levels and his observations are very well established. As he says in his prologue, Delbanco understands hope as being inextricably grounded in the "story" that human beings organize out of the "inchoate sensations" of their common experience. The truth of this "story" is not really the point, it's the necessity of it. Apart from "story", as Delbanco develops in his closing section, life flattens and the longing for transcendence generates some pretty unwholesome reactions. This last section is his best and no serious thought about the challenges posed by our culture should be undertaken without at least interacting with its contents. It's a quick read... it's well written... and it provides lots of references to other works that would be very productive for expanded study for those just beginning their thinking on the subject.

Since we discovered that, in Tocqueville's words, "the incomplete joys of this world will never satisfy the heart," how have we Americans made do? In *The Real American Dream* one of the nation's premier literary scholars searches out the symbols and stories by which Americans have reached for something beyond worldly desire. A spiritual history ranging from the first English settlements to the present day, the book is also a lively, deeply learned meditation on hope. Andrew Delbanco tells of the stringent God of Protestant Christianity, who exerted immense force over the language, institutions, and customs of the culture for nearly 200 years. He describes the falling away of this God and the rise of the idea of a sacred nation-state. And, finally, he speaks of our own moment, when symbols of nationalism are in decline, leaving us with nothing to satisfy the longing for transcendence once sustained by God and nation. From the Christian story that expressed the earliest Puritan yearnings to New Age spirituality, apocalyptic environmentalism, and the multicultural search for ancestral roots that divert our own, *The Real American Dream* evokes the tidal rhythm of American history. It shows how Americans have organized their days and ordered their lives--and ultimately created a culture--to make sense of the pain, desire, pleasure, and fear that are the stuff of human

experience. In a time of cultural crisis, when the old stories seem to be faltering, this book offers a lesson in the painstaking remaking of the American dream.

.com The Real American Dream: A Meditation on Hope is a jewel of a book by Andrew Delbanco. It distills the spiritual history of the United States into three short chapters: "God," "Nation," and "Self." Delbanco writes that the history of hope in America is a history "of diminution." In Puritan New England, "the self expanded toward (and was sometimes overwhelmed by) the vastness of God." Between the rise of Constitutional Democracy and the post-World War II Great Society, citizens' hopes "remained implicated in a national ideal lesser than God but larger and more enduring than any individual citizen." And today, Delbanco believes, "hope has narrowed to the vanishing point of the self alone." But *The Real American Dream* is still cautiously optimistic in its final analysis of our self-centered society. "[T]he sense of fairness and decency for which the American people are regularly complimented by their politicians is actually real and abiding. Against all odds, the live issues of our day are still sometimes debated with dignity." --Michael Joseph Gross  
From Publishers Weekly  
A close and passionate reader of American literature, Delbanco (*The Death of Satan*, etc.) believes that contemporary American culture has lost its once vital sense of the transcendent. This book is, with very little alteration, a transcript of Delbanco's William E. Massey Lectures in the History of American Civilization, which he delivered at Harvard in 1998. "We live in an age of unprecedented wealth," he writes, "but in the realm of narrative and symbol, we are deprived." In three sections "God," "Nation" and "Self" Delbanco sketches a broad history of American narrative and symbolic meaning, the nexus of ideas and stories "by which Americans have tried to save themselves from the melancholy that threatens all reflective beings." According to this scheme, from Puritan times through the early 19th century, the dominant idea was God. Sometime around the Civil War, the idea of the nation became the transcendent value. The third part of the book becomes a lament as Delbanco posits that, since roughly the 1960s, "hope has narrowed to the vanishing point of the self alone." Delbanco acknowledges that his conceit presents a "too neat division of American history into two phases of coherent belief followed by a third phase of incoherent and nervous waiting." But his profoundly insightful readings of William Bradford, Walt Whitman, Abraham Lincoln and other American writers, stretching from early colonial times to the present, should succeed in prodding readers to think deeply about how the idea of the nation intersects with their deepest desires and hopes. (Sept.) Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc.  
From Library Journal  
Tapping into that unique American angst so perceptively captured by de Tocqueville more than a century ago, Delbanco (humanities, Columbia Univ.) here finds that any history of hope in America "must make room at its center for this dogged companion of hope: the lurking suspicion that all our getting and spending amounts to nothing more than fidgeting while we wait for death." Drawing from U.S. history, he charts this Hegelian swing between optimistic energy and melancholy chaos, characterized most dramatically by the Puritans, Lincoln, Whitman, and Emerson. Yet amidst that melancholy there remains a hope focused on our "unshakeable craving for transcendence." Thus, says Delbanco, to be truly American is to live a life of hope, contributing some transcendent good beyond ourselves; otherwise, we condemn ourselves to a lifetime of despair. For the historically literate, this represents as fine a synthesis as can be found on hope and the longing for something more in the collective American soul. Recommended for public and academic American history and religion collections. ASandra Collins, Univ. of Pittsburgh Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc.