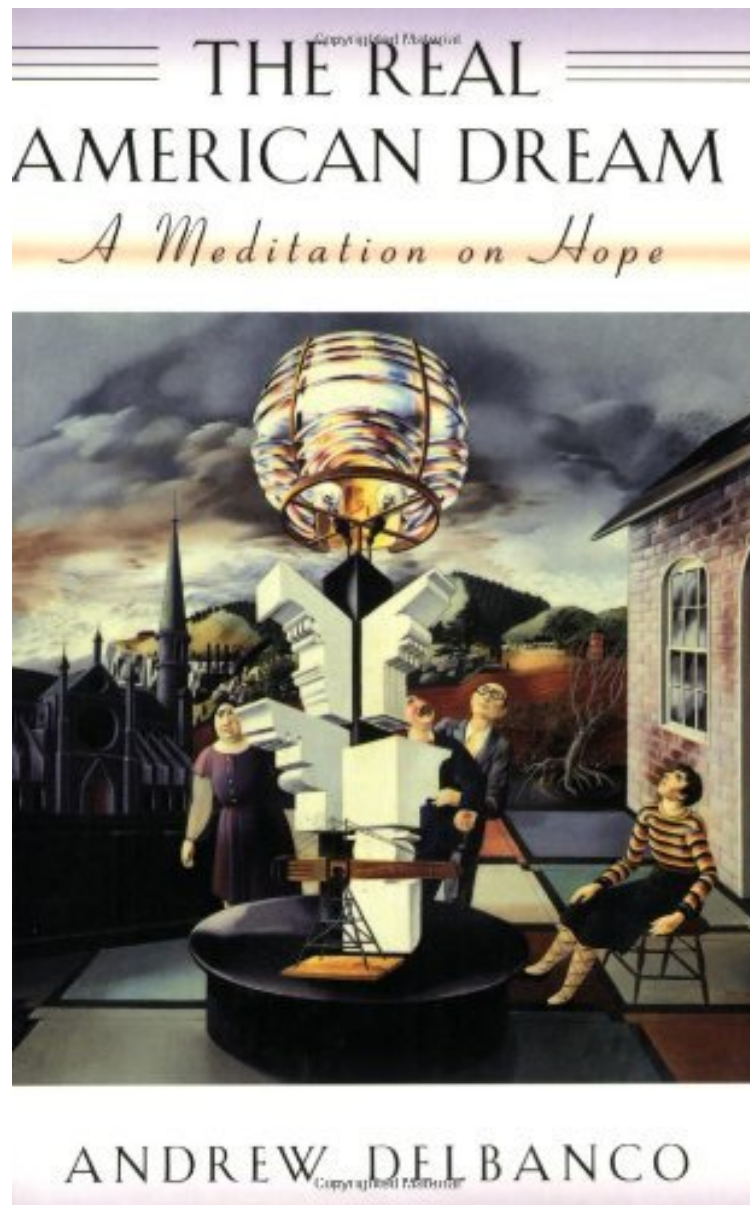


[Free pdf] The Real American Dream: A Meditation on Hope (The William E. Massey Sr. Lectures in the History of American Civilization)

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Von Andrew DELBANCO

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Von Andrew DELBANCO : The Real American Dream: A Meditation on Hope (The William E. Massey Sr. Lectures in the History of American Civilization) 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 (The William E. Massey Sr.

Kurzbeschreibung 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.

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

Pressestimmen Delbanco insightfully contrasts the sustaining force of hope with the melancholy that comes with its absence. A close and passionate reader of American literature, Delbanco believes that contemporary American culture has lost its once vital sense of the transcendent... 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--or doesn't--with their deepest desires and hopes. [Delbanco] insightfully contrasts the sustaining force of hope with the melancholy that comes with its absence. In a tour de force of thoughtful intellectual and cultural history, the author reflects broadly on the history of the American dream. Moving deftly from the Puritans to contemporary America, Delbanco laments the loss of a common culture in our modern commercialized New Age. As a "meditation on hope" he follows Emerson, who wrote: "let us do what we can to rekindle the smouldering nigh quenched fire on the altar." In a "tour de force" of thoughtful intellectual and cultural history, the author reflects broadly on the history of the American dream. Moving deftly from the Puritans to contemporary America, Delbanco laments the loss of a common culture in our modern commercialized New Age. As a "meditation on hope" he follows Emerson, who wrote: "let us do what we can to rekindle the smouldering nigh quenched fire on the altar." One wishes that Delbanco had had more space to develop the nuances he plays like a cellist using vibrato... Delbanco, among the most astute and original scholars of history and literature, wisely and convincingly develops the point made by Tocqueville: 'Faith is the only permanent state of mankind.' By plumbing the faith of our fathers and mothers--its wrinkles and rosy cheeks--we can begin to rededicate ourselves to a new story of transcendence.--Joshua Wolf Shenk

"Washington Post "Andrew Delbanco is one of America's most acute and perceptive cultural critics... [This is] a beautifully written book.--Richard Rorty "New York Times Book "A fascinating, eminently accessible series of culture-forming 'stories' that focus on the pitched battle between the force of melancholy and that of hope. In the stories, Delbanco ruminates on American culture from the Puritans to the present. What binds the seemingly disparate stories of serious-minded ministers, secular politicians, and modern materialistic Americans is the struggle to find meaning in a world that often appears to be entirely random and spiritually incomplete.--Sanford Pinsker "Philadelphia Inquirer "Self, Delbanco points out, will surely prove an empty, unsatisfying, and ultimately self-defeating object of worship. Unless we recover some sense of a common good, he suspects, we may be headed for moral collapse--or worse yet, the rise of some nefarious ideology or movement. Delbanco does not believe that the apocalyptic 'rough beast' of despotism is right around the corner--or inevitable. But he offers his jeremiad as a timely warning and a reminder of things that matter.--Merle Rubin "Christian Science Monitor "This represents as fine a synthesis as can be found on hope and the longing for something more in the collective American soul.--Sandra Collins "Library Journal

"Delbanco's lecture-based essay is engaging and very timely.--Ray Olsen "Booklist "We're in what Andrew Delbanco has identified as the third phase of the history of hope in America--or, rather, the history of hope's disintegration...Americans, Delbanco says, have lost any sense of a common destiny. We have nothing larger than ourselves to worship...Unlike William Bennett and his ilk, Delbanco hasn't written a prescription for spiritual renewal. He simply charts the path to our current post-modern holding pattern: waiting for the next big idea, hoping for the return of hope. He might not have the answer for us, but his voice provides a quiet comfort in the empty darkness.--Becky Ohlsen"Willamette Week" (09/06/2000)According to Andrew Delbanco, today's consumerism exists to assuage our spiritual emptiness...Lurking behind our credit-card debt is the suspicion that our shopping sprees equate to nothing more than fidgeting while we wait to die. In [his] conclusion, Delbanco...[directs] to our attention the elemental human need to believe in something larger than the insular self, and identifies the solutions that filled this need in the past. These solutions are thoughtfully presented as guidance for us now.--Kassie Rose"Columbus Dispatch" (08/10/2000)An acute social critic surveys the soul of a country that believes first in God, then in nation (exemplified in the secular ambitions of Lincoln and Whitman), and finally in the narcissistic self, which has created a 'post-modern melancholy' in today's culture.--Scott Veale"New York Times Book " (01/07/2001)God, Nation, and Self: through these, writes Delbanco in these essays (so brief, yet so pertinent), the citizens of the U.S. have given their lives meaning to ward off melancholy, that 'logical belief in a hopeless future.' Puritan Calvinism seems benign next to consumerist Calvinism. That's Calvinism as in Calvin Klein, where the free individual--the U.S.'s great gift to the world--is 'marooned in a perpetual present, playing alone with its baubles, ' and the 'ache for meaning goes unrelieved.' But Delbanco's wit is itself the measure of the land of the free.--Vera Rule"The Guardian" (11/11/2000)It must be terribly satisfying to hear Andrew Delbanco speak. The Real American Dream, a series of lectures he gave at Harvard in 1998, is filled with impressive oratory. He manages sermons and political speeches with facility, invoking great voices from our nation's history to contemplate the present state of the American Dream. Buttressing these far-reaching speeches with the quieter arts of poetry and prose, Delbanco builds a broad yet detailed 'history of hope' in the United States...Lucid empathy permeates Delbanco's chapters, and earns the book's subtitle, A Meditation on Hope.--Doug Elder "Boston Book "The 'fundamental question' for the American mind, Andrew Delbanco says in The Real American Dream, 'has always been how to find release from this feeling of living without propulsion and without aim'; what he has written is a short but deeply literate history of this quest, one by turns witty and affecting.--Andrew Stark "Times Literary Supplement "A critical premise of this remarkable book about creating hope in an absurd world is Delbanco's definition of culture. He refers to it as a sustaining narrative that provides stories and symbols 'by which Americans have tried to save themselves from the melancholy that threatens all reflective beings.' With this in mind, he then identifies and ponders our historical devotion to God, nation and self, trends that have come into fashion at different times in American history...The Real American Dream is a concise, provocative narrative essay.--Kassie Rose "Columbus Dispatch "