

American Dreamers



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著者:Bulkeley, Kelly

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When politicians and pundits refer to the American Dream, they do so to evoke images of national unity, identity, and a better future. But in what ways does this metaphor manifest in the actual dreams of sleeping Americans? In *American Dreamers*, dream researcher Kelly Bulkeley takes the ideology of the American Dream one step further-into the study of sleeping dreams-to explore how the nocturnal side of human existence offers a key to the psychological origins of people's waking beliefs and political passions.

Bulkeley builds on sixteen years of scientific research involving thousands of dream reports to show how the playful fancies of our dreaming imaginations can be interpreted as insightful expressions of our hopes and fears about issues as varied as the environment, religion, family values, and the war in Iraq. Examining in particular detail the dreaming tendencies of conservatives and liberals, the book centers on ten people of different political perspectives-a dreamers' focus group-who kept yearlong sleep and dream journals. The dreaming and waking stories of these "ordinary" Americans (among them a cancer survivor, a lesbian horse rancher, a former Catholic priest, a young waitress engaged to be married, and a soldier preparing for his third tour to Iraq) provide raw psychological material and a window into their deepest beliefs, darkest fears, and most inspiring ideals.

Hyperventilating political pundits have described in lurid detail what conservatives and liberals disagree about, but rarely do they try to explain why they disagree-and that's the real question. At a time of bitter partisan conflict and governmental paralysis, *American Dreamers* calls the country back to its visionary origins, arguing that dreams can serve as a royal road to the creation of new political solutions that integrate the best of conservative and liberal ideals. If we truly want to learn something new about the American Dream in people's lives today, Bulkeley proposes we take a good close look at how well Americans are sleeping and dreaming at night.

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