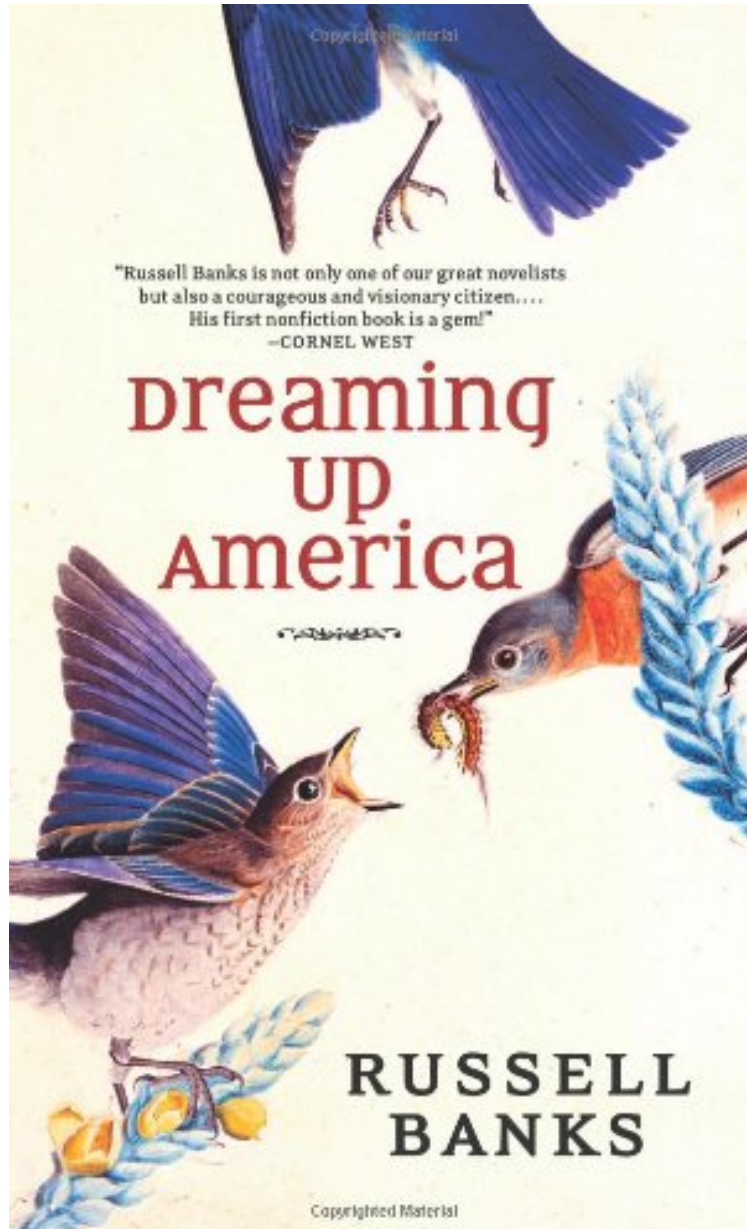


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Dreaming Up America

Russell Banks

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#2307986 in Books Seven Stories Press 2008-06-03 2008-06-03 Original language: English PDF # 1 9.57 x .66 x 5.501, .77 #File Name: 1583228381144 pages Black hardcover, with gilt lettering, White jacket with scenes of birds. 5x10 inches, 127 pages | File size: 54.Mb

Russell Banks : Dreaming Up America before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Dreaming Up America:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Thoughtful, intelligent
By David Fahl
From one of our best writers - I'm grateful to the people who got Russell Banks to talk about our country, its history, its meaning. I doubt he'd have written this book without that impetus. It is clear he has thought deeply about who and what we are, thinking outside the bounds of our usual debates. I wish we'd see this kind of intelligence from any participants in the current debates
14 of 15 people found the following review helpful. Dreaming Up America
By Barney Considine
This is a carefully constructed critique of American culture from the time of Columbus until the present. What we do today and how we think is driven by our background. We are a new country compared to much of the world. The factors that brought our forefathers to the Americas and the ease with which the European invasion expanded across the continent are major factors in who we are today. This book is drawn from interviews conducted in preparation for a documentary produced in France. In part, the intent was to correct images of America that non-Americans draw from popular movies. Banks has edited that material after the documentary has been translated into several languages. The maturity of the ideas in the book shows the refinement of this period of reflection. However, it still comes across at times that Banks is talking to a different audience than his countrymen. Many readers will consider that an enhancement since we too seldom try to look at ourselves as others see us. Early in the book, Banks introduces three factors (he calls them dreams) that he believes have strongly influenced us since colonial times, and are still a strong part of our national motivation. He terms those factors The City of Gold, The City on the Hill, and The Fountain of Youth. I urge readers to keep those factors in mind as they read and reread "Dreaming Up America." Other factors are important as well. Banks considers the Constitution and Declaration of Independence to be inspired documents whose full power hasn't yet been realized in American culture. Banks joins others in seeing racial influences at the root of every aspect of American society. Consider European treatment of the indigenous American people, slavery, and how our view of other people is influenced by whether they look like us or are different. Banks calls America "a country that was invented out of many parts" and thus we think and act differently than more homogeneous populations with longer histories. These various factors are often in opposition to one another. Thus our society is often under tension. At times this is positive; it motivates us to move ahead. Far too often it leads to violence, both within ourselves and our actions toward others. Not every reader will appreciate Banks' perspective. It would be unfortunate if that kept them from closely examining the points that he makes. Most Americans would benefit from reading this book twice through. It doesn't take long to read but the thought and discussions that it fosters endure much longer.
0 of 1 people found the following review helpful.

Interesting, If Not Entirely Convincing
By Anne Mills
This is an interesting analysis of some key elements in the American character: notably, the gap between what Americans believe that America is about, and what actually drives our nation. In examining that gap, the writer breaks out three colonial "American Dreams" - the City on the Hill of the Puritans, the City of Gold of the Conquistadors, and the Fountain of Youth of Ponce de Leon. In his formulation these stand for the religious impulse, the lure of money, and the desire for self reinvention. In the deep divide between religious impulses, which tend to lead us to present national policy as a series of highly moral choices, and the drive for economic control which actually motivates policy, Banks sees a profound American hypocrisy. Some of Banks' conclusions seem to me to go too far, particularly this one. First, I think that Banks overgeneralizes about Americans. The religious patriotism he castigates is certainly held by many, particularly away from the coasts, away from the universities, and away from areas with big non-white populations. But those "away froms" characterize a larger and larger share of the population. Second, I think he undergeneralizes about the tendency to view national policy through the lens of a quasi religious patriotism. Britain didn't conquer an empire to benefit British trade, it did it to spread religion and decency. France did not do the same in order to benefit French bankers, it did so to spread culture. We are not alone. Finally, one of Banks' final broadsides -- against television -- seems even more misplaced now than when it was written. Children don't spend three hours a day watching television, they spend many more hours on line, doing a lot more than passive watching. All in all, this is a thought provoking book, if one which is somewhat limited by its genesis as a talk. That prevents some of the historical referencing I'm sure Mr. Banks could provide, which would reinforce his conclusions.

With America ever under global scrutiny, Russell Banks contemplates the questions of our origins, values, heroes, conflicts, and contradictions. He writes with conversational ease and emotional insight, drawing on contemporary politics, literature, film, and his knowledge of American history.

From School Library Journal
Best-selling novelist Banks's (*Cloudsplitter*; *The Sweet Hereafter*) first work of nonfiction was developed from a television interview with a French documentary producer two years ago, which was translated into French and is now available in English in the United States. Originally directed to a French audience to describe the history of the American people, the content is nonetheless enlightening to Americans, too. The book presents, essentially, an interdisciplinary overview of America from Colonial times to the present and America's development out of spiritual, ethical, and materialistic impulses. Banks's narrative is not always flattering, as he dissects our national myths and exposes the realities, but it may nudge readers to take an introspective look at themselves and our nation. The book is also not comprehensive, but it is a condensed and holistic construct of

American history, eloquently written and highly readable. Banks ends with an implicit warning about our nationalism, which he describes as a destructive force, a fervor and mass hallucination, that can control our thinking. Recommended for all public and academic libraries. Mark Alan Williams, Library of Congress Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. About the Author RUSSELL BANKS is the author of sixteen works of fiction, many of which depict seismic events in US history, such as the fictionalized journey of John Brown in *Cloudsplitter*. His work has been translated into twenty languages and has received numerous international prizes, and two of his novels *The Sweet Hereafter* and *Affliction* have been made into award-winning films. A member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters, founding president of Cities of Refuge North America, and former New York State Author, Banks lives in upstate New York.