

# America isn't yet, but will be

In 1986, the year of the first Martin Luther King Jr. holiday, I was teaching in a small rural Oregon high school. The students and I had talked quite a lot about “the American Dream,” since that was the title of the first unit in their literature textbook.

I said I thought the dream meant more than economic opportunity—owning your own home, or doing a bit better financially than your parents. It meant trying to live up to our ideals, those words they repeated every time they recited the pledge of allegiance: Liberty and justice for all.

Equality was not so wild a dream, I thought. A few days before I had left for college, Martin Luther King Jr. had spoken from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial: “I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: ‘We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal.’”

My friends and I were growing up and our nation was maturing too, I remember thinking. Ending racism, sexism, even classism — that would be the work of our generation. It seemed natural, inevitable.

I was an American Dreamer, all right. Many of us were, we children of the Sixties.

But even by 1986 not everyone was ready to celebrate the life of Martin Luther King.

Our principal wanted to avoid controversy. “Just mention it briefly,” he instructed faculty. “Don’t change your lesson plans.”

How could I help students understand this holiday? I read them a timeline, the major events of King’s life.

The silence that followed seemed profound, but I couldn’t be sure until the next day, when a boy in the front row raised his hand. “Can we talk about it? Please?”

Why had no one told them this stuff? they wanted to know. Riots in 23 cities after the assassination? It was hard for them to imagine.

What happens to a dream deferred? We turned to Langston Hughes’ poem near the back of our literature book. “Does it dry up / like a raisin in the sun? / Or fester like a sore— / And then run? / Does it stink like rotten meat? / Or crust and sugar over— / like a syrupy sweet?”

Heads were bent over books. “Maybe it just sags / like a heavy load.” Then that last line. “Or does it explode?”

We looked at another Hughes poem, too. “Let America be America again—The land that never has been yet—and yet must be—the land where every man is free.”

That’s the American Dream, I told them. Maybe your generation can make it happen. Now, in 2017, Dreamers are in the

news. The president has rescinded DACA — Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals — and the “DREAM Act” (Development, Education, and Relief for Alien Minors) still hasn’t passed. Will those 800,000 young people be allowed to define and pursue their own American dreams?

When I hear about the Dreamers, I think about another group of Dreamers, the followers of Smohalla. We can read their story in “Drummers and Dreamers” — Native Peoples whose descendants still worship in Northwest longhouses. They were also considered a threat, though their dreams were spiritual and of course they were already here.

I wonder: Are they kindred spirits, these two kinds of Dreamers, both wanting and needing home? But I’ve been reading Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz’s “An Indigenous People’s History of the United States” and despite of the ideals of America’s dreams, I know that settler colonization is an ongoing and painful reality.

Sometimes, with questions like these spinning in my mind late at night when I can’t sleep, I think about my former students. Do they remember that day in our classroom? Did they grow up to believe that Black Lives Matter? Did they vote to Make America Great Again?

“Oh, yes, I say it plain,” wrote Langston Hughes in the poem I showed them. “America never was America to me, And yet I swear this oath—America will be!”

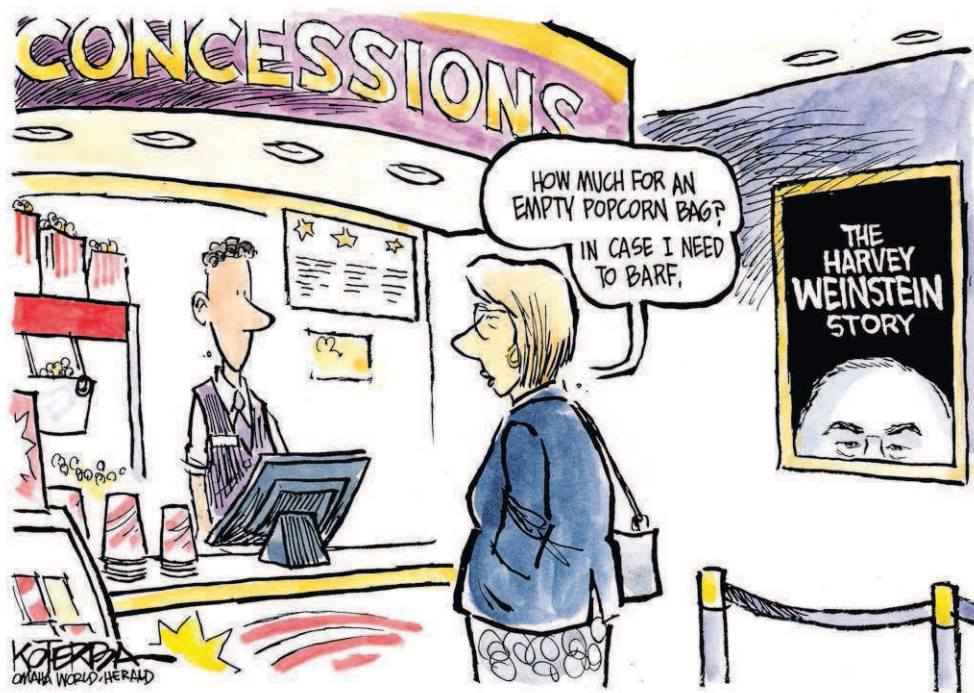


## BETTE HUSTED FROM HERE TO ANYWHERE

I find it hard, in these dark days, to hang on to such optimism. Maybe it’s the teacher who needs to return to the lessons of that classroom moment.

Bette Husted is a writer and a student of T’ai Chi and the natural world. She lives in Pendleton.

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## Quick takes

### Stanfield still stinks

I was in Stanfield today, visiting my parents, and I couldn’t believe the stench. What was once a welcoming smell of mint fields or freshly harvested hay (that I refer to as “the smell of my childhood”) is replaced by the smell of rot. Why so close to a residential community? Why not out in the middle of nowhere?

— Linda Thompson

Shut it down. I am so sick of gagging in my own back yard. It has been like this all summer.

— Chloe Harding

Every time I go out there they have done something new to help. They are at least trying.

— Justin Heller

Horrible smell! Definitely not a welcoming odor to have in your hometown.

— Brian Faro

### Last season at BMCC pool?

Grateful for another season for the swim team and their families. I hope the community figures out a permanent solution to this. It would be a shame for the swim athletes to not be able to swim as a school sport any longer.

— Becky Cecil

Too bad Hermiston planners couldn’t understand that we should have built an indoor pool, instead of one can use only two months a year.

— Tina Dreher

There seems to be a pattern in this town of deferring maintenance until the infrastructure becomes unusable, and then wanting a bailout bond or just shutting something down. They did it with the grade schools, streets and the fire station. It is happening with the Vert. Now the BMCC pool.

— Mike Navratil

### Crazy Mike’s video closes

Sorry you have to close but there will be more like you with people demanding higher and higher wages.

— Jim Garrou

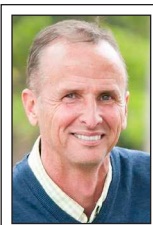
Yeah, for sure higher minimum wage killed a video store’s business. Couldn’t have been Netflix, Hulu and the million other streaming services.

— Nicholas Lee

One of the great lessons of the Twitter age is that much can be summed up in just a few words. Here are some of this week’s takes. Tweet yours @Tim\_Trainer or email editor@eastoregonian.com, and keep them to 140 characters.

## Dear restaurant: Please tell me the story of my grass

After a tour of his ranch, Lon Reukauf sat restlessly at the front of a banquet room in Terry, Montana, waiting for the panel discussion to start. He was surrounded by experts from the Montana Stockgrowers Association and the World Wildlife Fund. The groups had combined to give Lon an environmental stewardship award and then invited a bunch of us here to see why.



JOHN CLAYTON  
Comment

Lon knew that most eyes in the room were on him, and — like most ranchers I know — the attention made him uncomfortable. He’s not a public speaker, doesn’t seek the spotlight and prefers to spend most of his time surrounded by cows, with their heads down and grazing.

“Sitting here in front of 50 strangers, I’m certainly out of my comfort zone,” he said. So he concentrated on what he knew best. He spoke about grass.

It’s the native grasses, in a healthy variety, that make for the best beef, he said. The soil does better by them too, he added, as do other species, especially the grassland birds that have been declining in population. Western wheatgrass, blue grama grass, green needle and the needle-and-thread grasses growing on his ranch offer a better spectrum of nutrients than exotic species such as crested wheatgrass, which was widely planted during the 1930s as a way to fight erosion.

Like a chef showing off the qualities of marble in a steak, Lon could compare the characteristics of various grasses, noting, for example, how they differ in the timing of their period of fastest growth, which

helps to show how they contribute to the quality of the final product.

He could talk about which conditions make the grasses thrive and which leave them vulnerable to invaders.

He seemed particularly pleased that the World Wildlife Fund had endorsed well managed cattle grazing,

because for decades some environmentalists have clashed with ranchers over public-land grazing. At this get-together, though, all agreed that good grazing can promote good grass.

As he talked about grass, Lon relaxed. The spotlight was no longer shining on him but rather through him — onto the complex systems that he spends his life observing and nudging.

“The grasses and other plants are the foundation of everything we do,” he said. The cattle were just harvesters, and he was just trying, in one corner of Montana, to make that process a little more productive. He didn’t seem to care much for the word sustainability, but his humble view of that large process certainly brought the concept to my mind.

Indeed, his talk reminded me of those menu listings: What’s on your plate is part of a larger process here. Let’s push the credit upstream.

But why did I have to go to a ranch to

learn about the role of grass in this process? When it comes to imparting a message of sustainability, isn’t it better for a menu to say that a certain steak is nurtured by, say, western wheatgrass than by the individual

rancher who manages that grass? And likewise for vegetarians, that these particular lentils are nurtured by soil tillage, phosphorus levels, and — at the risk of completely turning the menu into a dictionary — *Rhizobium microsymbionts*?

Such a strategy would also keep the spotlight off a bunch of agriculturalists who would rather people knew about their struggles than recognized their names.

After Lon and some others talked, they asked for feedback, and a chef on our tour summarized how the day had changed his thinking. “We tend to focus on the animal,” he said, referring to his buying process and the qualities he tries to convey to diners, “but I’m learning that it goes back much farther and deeper.”

That was what I had learned as well, and what I wouldn’t mind learning from the menus of farm-to-table restaurants.

John Clayton is a contributor to *Writers on the Range*, the opinion service of *High Country News*. He is a writer in Montana whose new book is *Wonderlandscape: Yellowstone National Park and the Evolution of an American Cultural Icon*.

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— Lon Reukauf, Rancher

## Trump must support rural voters who elected him

By DAN JOYCE, DON HODGE AND LARRY WILSON  
Malheur County

Watching the national news networks, it’s still fairly easy to see why so many political elites were caught off guard by the election results last year.

The topics that seem to grab and hold the attention of national leaders are chronically disconnected from the kitchen-table issues facing middle-class families outside of a few major cities.

In contrast, President Trump nurtured his relationship with rural communities and vowed to unleash the economic productivity of America’s great agricultural heart. He was rewarded. Pundits in Washington called it the “revenge of the rural voter.”

Leaders from both parties should take note, especially in states like Oregon, where so many of our communities rely on and benefit from ranches, farms, biofuel plants, and forestry operations.

According to the Department of Agriculture, U.S. farm income has fallen for three straight years. The latest forecast, released in August, shows that 2017 might finally mark a turning point, with incomes beginning to tick back up.

But progress is far from certain, and we need leaders who will keep Congress and the White House focused on opening new markets for U.S. farm goods, lifting needless government restrictions, and promoting investment in rural economic growth.

And we need to protect proven policies, like the 12-year old renewable fuel standard, which ensures that U.S. farmers can compete at the gas pump, offering homegrown biofuels made from agricultural feedstocks in states like Oregon.

Competition from American-made biofuels not only provides a vital market for surplus grain, it reduces emissions, and it protects drivers from efforts by Russia and others to jack up the cost of gasoline. The biofuel industry alone supports about 16,000 Oregon jobs.

As one might expect, special interests are working hard to undermine the RFS.

We’re thankful for Oregon champions like Congressman Greg Walden that work hard to represent us and that we can count on to push back and ensure that rural America continues to benefit from new growth opportunities.

Judge Dan Joyce, Commissioner Don Hodge and Commissioner Larry Wilson represent Malheur County.

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