



AMERICAN DREAMERS

In the pages of history the United States of America is exceptional. Many have tried to pinpoint the secret of its success. To find the spirit of America—to know what makes it tick, what makes it unique—one must look into the past—in the ambitions of its first citizens, the events of its formation, and the dreams of its greatest leaders.

While other nations formed haphazardly or almost accidentally, America was the first nation founded on an idea—and not just any idea, the monumental idea that all men are created equal. The nation became a Grand Experiment conducted by honorable leaders who loved liberty more than life. However, it was not a nation without its struggles. Throughout the centuries, this experimental nation faced conflicts, which tested the principles upon which it was founded. At many points it was not clear whether or not a nation built for the people and by the people

could long endure. Yet it did endure, against all odds, and continues to this day.

As you study America's past, you will encounter something called "The American Dream," and unless you understand this dream, you will fail to grasp America's greatness. Why did men, women, and children travel great distances, suffer great hardships, and even offer up their lives to create and preserve this dream? The answer is simple: To exercise and ensure the rights that we now enjoy. Through studying their journeys and reading their words, you will hear your own hopes echoed in theirs. Like you they desired the opportunity to live life free, to build their lives, and fulfill their potential.

To dream, to hope are two things that are uniquely American. According to James Truslow Adams, the historian who first coined the phrase "The American Dream," our country would not have made a unique contribution to history if it had not been for the American Dream. In his book *The Epic of America*, Adams stated that this "dream of a land in which life should be richer and fuller for every man" with "opportunity for each [person] according to ability" was a gift to all mankind. The idea that every man and woman could "be recognized by others for what they are" regardless of their position in society not only revolutionized *our* country, but the whole world. Adams ended with a warning that we should never become weary or mistrustful of this unique Dream of ours, but embrace it wholeheartedly.

The American Dream is still around today. For some it means financial security and professional success. For others it means equality and religious freedom. The genius of the American Dream is that it is both universal and personal—every American should have one, but no two need be alike.

All that America was is still alive—and will only remain so as long as its citizens

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remember the spirit of its greatness. As you read the words in this book, written by men and women long dead, do not forget that many of them achieved goals that others said were impossible. Then think of your own dreams. Where will your life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness take you? Do not squander the opportunity you have been given. Dare to dream.