

Introduction

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Dreams have proven to be valuable therapeutic aids in promoting the psychological healing and growth of individuals. Dreams have also helped scientific researchers learn new things about the structure and development of the human mind. But does the study of dreams have anything to contribute to a better understanding of *society*? As we approach the end of the twentieth century, modern Western society is suffering from a variety of troubles, conflicts, and crises. Can dreams be of any use in addressing social problems like violent crime, sexual abuse, ethnic and racial conflict, environmental degradation, and the worsening lives of underprivileged children? Can dreams provide any insights into the deeper causes of the ills that afflict our society, and offer any possible cures for those ills?

The most common answer to these questions is that studying dreams helps society by helping certain individuals learn more about themselves; the growth and maturation of these individuals then ripples through society, promoting the welfare of all. This answer is legitimate, but inadequate. It smacks too much of psychological Reaganomics, of trickle-down social reform. Is this really the best answer we can give?

No, it is not. The essays collected in *Among All These Dreamers* argue that there are a number of specific ways in which the study of dreams can be of direct, practical help in the process of creating and sustaining a more humane, more fully integrated society.

The first set of essays illustrates how dreams offer a valuable resource in practical efforts toward the resolution of particular social troubles. The second set suggests ways in which dreams can help us

understand and relate better to “others,” to people of different cultures, races, and genders. The third set looks at the potential of dreams to renew and revitalize the spiritual lives of people residing in a world torn by the forces of scientific rationality on one side and religious fundamentalism on the other. The last set of essays offers the study of dreams as a means of analyzing the complex interplay of social realities and individual dreams.

Together, the twelve essays remind us that we truly live “among all these dreamers”—that *all* people in our society, regardless of their class, their race, their wealth, their education, or their political power, are humans who dream. This book suggests that our dreams can be powerful agents not only in the healing of individuals, but in the transformation of communities as well.