



Free Time: The Forgotten American Dream

By Benjamin Hunnicutt

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Has the "American Dream" become an unrealistic utopian fantasy, or have we simply forgotten what we are working for? In his topical book, *Free Time*, Benjamin Kline Hunnicutt examines the way that progress, once defined as more of the good things in life as well as more free time to enjoy them, has come to be understood only as economic growth and more work, forevermore. Hunnicutt provides an incisive intellectual, cultural, and political history of the original "American Dream" from the colonial days to the present. Taking his cue from Walt Whitman's "higher progress," he follows the traces of that dream, cataloguing the myriad voices that prepared for and lived in an opening "realm of freedom." *Free Time* reminds Americans of the forgotten, best part of the "American Dream" - that more and more of our lives might be lived freely, with an enriching family life, with more time to enjoy nature, friendship, and the adventures of the mind and of the spirit. Benjamin Kline Hunnicutt is a Professor of Leisure Studies at the University of Iowa. He is also the author of *Kellogg's Six-Hour Day* and *Work Without End: Abandoning Shorter Hours for the Right to Work* (both Temple).

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Free Time: The Forgotten American Dream By Benjamin Hunnicutt Bibliography

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Editorial Review

Review

Choice, July 4, 2014: In his intriguing book, Hunnicutt examines the erosion of the pursuit of what today might be called "quality time." Labor was [once understood] to be only the ends to a means, the ultimate goal being what Hunnicutt calls "Higher Progress." Hunnicutt traces the ways in which various Americans sought to limit the hours people worked. The goal was to leave sufficient time and energy for personal enrichment, first spiritual then secular, ensuring democracy in the process. Americans have forgotten why and what they are working for. Recommended

From the Institute for Policy Studies, "New and Notable" books, July 15, 2013:

In these compelling new pages, Hunnicutt aims at nothing less than "re-presenting" the traditional American dream as "a compelling and inspiring alternative to the current dream of eternal consumption, wealth, and work." Generations ago, Americans . . . understood that . . . the chase after unlimited wealth, . . . would never go hand in hand with the happiness that fulfilling leisure can bring. Hunnicutt believes that, too. So will his readers.

Publisher's Weekly, In this ambitious book Hunnicutt traces the debasement of the "American Dream" from its original intent as a means for personal and community development to its current usage as the pursuit of material wealth. Drawing on a panoply of historical thinkers, he [traces] the progress of the concept. For example, labor activists fought for shorter work days because they wanted people to be free to pursue higher goals, at first understood as religious, but later articulated as secular tasks. He offers a provocative and valuable history of a neglected idea.

From Scott McLemee's review in *Inside Higher Education* Aug 28, 2013. "[The book] deserves wide attention, and would provoke a more meaningful conversation about the past, present, and future than we're likely to have otherwise." Full review at insidehighered.com/views/2013/08/28/review-benjamin-kline-hunnicutt-free-time-forgotten-american-dream

"Benjamin Kline Hunnicutt's new book could hardly be more timely. His central theme--that the American dream once was not confined merely to ever growing levels of abundance--is all the more relevant in an era of climate science denial and anti-environmentalism of various sorts. . . I had a hard time putting *Free Time* down."--John Buell, author of *Politics, Religion, and Culture in an Anxious Age*

From the Author

For nearly forty years I have been struggling to solve what I am convinced is one of the great mysteries of our time. Beginning early in the nineteenth century and continuing for over a hundred years, working hours in America were gradually reduced, cut in half according to most accounts.

No one predicted that this was going to end, much less that now we would be complaining about the frantic pace of our lives. On the contrary, prominent figures such as John Maynard Keynes and George Bernard Shaw regularly predicted that a "Golden Age of Leisure" would arrive well before the twentieth century ended when no one would have to work more than two or three hours a day. As late as the 1960s and 70s, the likes of *Times* Magazine's Henry Luce, CBS's Eric Sevareid, and John Fitzgerald Kennedy were sure that

leisure would soon overtake work as the center of life.

However the century-long shorter work hour process stopped after the Great Depression. Since then we have had little or no decrease in our work - indeed, the work year has expanded over the last few decades. We work about five weeks longer now than we did when John Kennedy was president. Most of us would think a return to a forty hour week would be heaven-sent. Unlike previous generations, we no longer worry about leisure's challenge.

What happened!?

In, *Free Time: The Forgotten American Dream*, (Temple Press; March 2013) I attempt to re-present the traditional American dream of steadily increasing freedom from work, the dream that supported the shorter hour process for over a century. As we began to "solve" what John Maynard Keynes called the "economic problem," a host of Americans, from colonial days to the mid twentieth century, assumed that our time would become more valuable to us than new goods and services we had never needed, or even seen before. Then we would welcome the opportunity to live more of our lives outside the marketplace.

Then we could begin to make some real progress, developing our potential to live together peacefully and agreeably, spending more of our time and energy forming healthy families, neighborhoods, and cities, increasing our knowledge and appreciation of nature, history, and other peoples, freely investigating and delighting in the mysteries of the human spirit, exploring our beliefs and values together, finding common grounds for agreement and conviviality, practicing our faiths, expanding our awareness of God, wondering in Creation--a more complete (but far from exhaustive) catalog of such free activities envisioned over the course of our nation's history is one of the burdens of my book.

Claiming a vantage point as democracy's poet that opened to him "Democratic Vistas," Whitman recorded scenes of an imagined American future in which all would be free to celebrate and sing. Monsignor John Ryan envisioned "higher progress" as increasing opportunities beyond necessary work and the marketplace to "know the best that is to be known, and to love the best that is to be loved." Struggling to save the Jewish Sabbath in America, Abba Hillel Silver wrote that the Sabbath was "much more than mere relaxation from labor. It is a sign and symbol of man's higher destiny." The Sabbath provided a model for "higher progress" because it represented the importance of time for tradition, family, spiritual exercise and for developing our free, humane interests.

New voices joined in during the twentieth century, swelling in a magnificent chorus, singing the praises and possibilities of "higher progress." Bubbling up from the ranks of workers and their organizations, the chorus was taken up by educators such as Dorothy Canfield Fisher, best selling-author and president of the Adult Education Association, and Robert Hutchins, legendary president of the University of Chicago, who urged teachers and administrators to retool their schools to teach people "the worthy use of leisure." Conservative business people such as the celebrated cereal maker W. K. Kellogg took the initiative, instituting a six-hour workday in their factories in the 1920s and 1930s. Walter Gifford, president of AT&T from 1925 to 1948, reported that "industry . . . has gained a new and astonishing vision." The final, best achievement of business and the free market need not be perpetual economic growth, eternal creation new work to do, and everlasting consumerism, but "a new type of civilization," in which "how to make a living becomes less important than how to live."

Radicals and socialists such as Helen and Scott Nearing, Norman O. Brown, and Herbert Marcuse saw increasing leisure as a form of bloodless, democratic revolution, and progressively shorter hours as the practical way for Americans to free themselves from the tyranny of corporations. They predicted that with abundant leisure and public education, ordinary citizens would begin to understand that perpetual work and everlasting scarcity were the creatures of capitalism and corporations rather than laws of nature. Increasing free time might translate into the political power necessary to counterbalance the building tyranny of concentrated wealth.

Naturalists and environmentalists such as Aldo Leopold and Sigurd Olson argued that an economy that produced more leisure instead of ever more consumption was the last, best hope for the preservation of the natural world. Parks, wilderness preserves, and national forests held open the possibility that humans could

learn and nurture an alternative, leisure-relationship with nature, based on wonder and celebration rather than exploitation and development.

Poets such as Vachel Lindsay; playwrights and theater builders such as Percy MacKaye, Paul Green, and E. C. Mabie; painters such as Grant Wood and Thomas Hart Benton; architects such as Frank Lloyd Wright and Ernest Flagg; musicians such as Shin'ichi Suzuki; chefs such as Julia Child; and craftsmen such as Elbert Hubbard envisioned a world in which citizens wrote their own poetry, staged their own local dramas, performed pageants, played and sang their own music together as naturally as they spoke their mother tongue, cooked gourmet meals for each other, and helped design, build, and decorate their own homes in their free time.

Understanding our lives as the subjects of our own community-based literature, drama, sports, fine arts, and quotidian discourse, we moderns had the potential to transfigure the commonplace, elevating everydayness with the do-it-yourself creations of democratic artist and artisan. "Higher progress's" free, creative endeavors would join people in vigorous, free civic engagement, creating communities held together by tolerance, conviviality, and perhaps even affection.

By the middle of the last century, the original American dream seemed to be coming to life. The days were arriving when Americans children devoted more and more of their lives to what John Ryan foresaw as opportunities to "know the best that is to be known, and to love the best that is to be loved." The day of democratic community and culture was dawning. Real progress was just beginning.

What happened indeed? The plot thickens. Not only has the seemingly inexorable process of work reduction ceased, we have lost sight of what was once the better, more humane hope for progress. As Jacques Ellul noted, we are no longer able even to imagine life without work and The Economy its center. Having reached, and probably passed what I understand is the word limit Amazon allows, I will leave these mysteries hanging. Please have a look at the book, *Free Time: The Forgotten American Dream*, for what I argue are the solutions to these two mysteries.

Benjamin Hunnicutt

From the Inside Flap

Additional reviews and comments:

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Reuters: ". . . a fascinating new book." **Edward Hadas**, Feb. 27, 2013.

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"I reckon this book is a must-read. It is the EP Thompson of the American 'Labor' movement. [He] shows how a shorter working day and week was its central focus till wrecked by Roosevelt's 'full-time, full employment' movement." **Ian Bone**, the "most dangerous man in Britain," publisher of the *Bristolian*. DECEMBER 9, 2013

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Higher Education Today: "*Free Time* deserves laurels. . ." **Scott McLemee** August 28, 2013. For the full review, Go To insidehighered.com/views/2013/08/28/review-benjamin-kline-hunnicutt-free-time-forgotten-american-dream

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The Idler (London): "I have found every word of this book inexpressibly thrilling, as I had formerly caricatured America as a country of go-ahead work-obsessed Puritans. This shows the other America, the America of Thomas Jefferson, Samuel Hopkins, Walt Whitman and Thoreau, where the aristocratic ideal of a leisure-filled life would be available to all thanks to machines. It is a dream that we need to revitalize today." **Tom Hodgkinson**, December, 2013.

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American Historical Review :

" . . . thought-provoking and insightful. Hunnicutt's analysis is wide-ranging and thorough. . . [He] carefully explores the debates about leisure and work and the government's expanding role to challenge what he

characterizes as the typical assumption among historians and economists "that perpetual economic growth and the expansion of the government to produce new jobs are normative ... [and that] there are no reasonable, moral, or historical alternatives." [He] attempt to "shift the historical understanding of American radicalism from the traditional focus on the radical's desire to change governmental forms ... to a focus on what [Hunnicuttt argues] is more typical of American worker radicalism, contained by *progressively* shorter work hours." . . . readers will be impressed by the depth and breadth of his analysis as [He] moves seamlessly between the words and deeds of public intellectuals, educators, and politicians to workers and labor leaders. Working class and (especially) labor historians, who often narrowly understand identity at the point of production, will surely benefit from [his] analysis and the questions he asks, but scholars from a wide variety of fields and disciplines will also find this study useful and timely. . .

Hunnicuttt's work will prove valuable for scholars and students alike. The passion with which these men and women struggled in support of this America dream is evident (as is Hunnicutt's), and readers will undoubtedly understand that enthusiasm as they work their way through the more-than-two-hundred years of debate Hunnicutt has brought to life."

Randy D. McBee, December, 2013

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Powells Daily Dose: November 25, 2013 " . . . provides some clarity regarding the sharing of work by telling the story of US workers' fight to reduce their hours of toil....More significantly, however, Hunnicutt makes clear that the century long fight for more free time, from twelve-hour shifts to ten, and from ten to eight and less, was a vital aspect of original American Dream."

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Counterpunch:" Benjamin Hunnicutt in *Free Time: The Forgotten American Dream* provides some clarity regarding the sharing of work by telling the story of US workers' fight to reduce their hours of toil . . . More significantly, however, Hunnicutt makes clear that the century-long fight for more free time, from twelve-hour shifts to ten, and from ten to eight and less, was a vital aspect of original American Dream. . . The remarkable fact uncovered by Hunnicutt was that those exhausted workers had the very same vision as [Walt Whitman and other middle class visionaries]." **Bernard Marszalek**, October 17, 2013

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The Independent: " . . . a fantastic new book about the American labour movement." **Tom Hodgkinson**, Sunday 3 November 2013

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Clinton Whitten:

The book *Free Time: The Forgotten American Dream* make you feel enjoy for your spare time. You need to use to make your capable considerably more increase. Book can being your best friend when you getting anxiety or having big problem using your subject. If you can make looking at a book *Free Time: The Forgotten American Dream* being your habit, you can get far more advantages, like add your own personal capable, increase your knowledge about a number of or all subjects. You could know everything if you like open up and read a book *Free Time: The Forgotten American Dream*. Kinds of book are several. It means that, science publication or encyclopedia or other people. So , how do you think about this guide?

Theresa Adams:

Reading can called brain hangout, why? Because if you find yourself reading a book mainly book entitled Free Time: The Forgotten American Dream your brain will drift away trough every dimension, wandering in every single aspect that maybe unfamiliar for but surely can become your mind friends. Imaging every single word written in a publication then become one contact form conclusion and explanation in which maybe you never get previous to. The Free Time: The Forgotten American Dream giving you an additional experience more than blown away the mind but also giving you useful info for your better life on this era. So now let us teach you the relaxing pattern is your body and mind will be pleased when you are finished studying it, like winning a. Do you want to try this extraordinary shelling out spare time activity?

Karen Horton:

The book untitled Free Time: The Forgotten American Dream contain a lot of information on that. The writer explains your girlfriend idea with easy method. The language is very clear to see all the people, so do not necessarily worry, you can easy to read that. The book was written by famous author. The author provides you in the new time of literary works. You can easily read this book because you can read on your smart phone, or product, so you can read the book with anywhere and anytime. If you want to buy the e-book, you can wide open their official web-site in addition to order it. Have a nice examine.

Debra McGregor:

In this period globalization it is important to someone to acquire information. The information will make professionals understand the condition of the world. The healthiness of the world makes the information simpler to share. You can find a lot of referrals to get information example: internet, magazine, book, and soon. You can view that now, a lot of publisher in which print many kinds of book. Often the book that recommended to your account is Free Time: The Forgotten American Dream this book consist a lot of the information in the condition of this world now. This particular book was represented how does the world has grown up. The dialect styles that writer use to explain it is easy to understand. The actual writer made some exploration when he makes this book. That is why this book suitable all of you.

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