

THE REAL AMERICANS



WRITTEN AND PERFORMED BY DAN HOYLE • DEVELOPED WITH AND DIRECTED BY CHARLIE VARON



The Guide

A Theatergoer's Resource

Edited by Collin Lawson & Ryan Mooney for the Education & Community Programs department at Portland Center Stage

The Real Americans

by Dan Hoyle

"I am America, I'm angry, and open-minded, and violent, but in the end, I'm full of hope."

—Dan Hoyle

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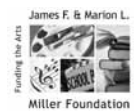
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Introduction: Who Is Dan Hoyle?

A glance into the background of the artist behind *The Real Americans*

photography
Dan Hoyle

Born in San Francisco, Dan Hoyle is the son of acclaimed performer Geoff Hoyle. He has worked as an actor, journalist and playwright in San Francisco. Hoyle's work as a columnist during the 2008 election gained notoriety on both Slate.com and in the San Francisco Gate. The *New York Times* comments that "Mr. Hoyle is both a first-rate actor and journalist" and his work has been compared favorably to Anna Deveare-Smith, John Leguizamo and Sarah Jones.

His third solo show *Tings Dey Happen*, directed by Charlie Varon, premiered at The Marsh in San Francisco and won the 2007 Will Glickman Award for Best New Play before running five months Off-Broadway in New York at The Culture Project, where it was nominated for a Lucille Lortel Award for Outstanding Solo Show. *Tings Dey Happen* was based on Hoyle's experiences as a Fulbright Scholar living in the Niger Delta of Nigeria studying oil politics. In October 2009, Hoyle returned to Nigeria to perform the show in five Nigerian cities, sponsored by the U.S. State Department. This tour was filmed by a documentary crew who hope to make it into a program for PBS.

Hoyle's most recent solo show *The Real Americans* enjoyed a ten month sold-out run at The Marsh in San Francisco, as well as sold-out audiences at Joe's Pub in New York, The Painted Bride in Philadelphia, The Lensic in Santa Fe, NM, and Berkeley Repertory Theater. This year it will play Cleveland Playhouse and Portland Center Stage. It was dubbed "Best Solo Show" by *SF Weekly*, a Top Ten play by the *San Francisco Chronicle*, and has been nominated for a Bay Area Theater Critics Circle award for outstanding solo show. 🏆



Hoyle started his work in theatre as a solo performer; his first shows *Circumnavigator* and *Florida 2004: The Big Bummer* had extended runs in SF before touring colleges around the country. Hoyle has been commissioned by The Aurora Theatre Company and has served as an artist-in-residence teacher at San Francisco's School of the Arts. His essays have been featured in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, SportsIllustrated.com, Salon and *Mother Jones*. He also performs with his father, actor and comedian Geoff Hoyle, and holds a double degree in Performance Studies and History from Northwestern University.

Dan Hoyle on America

Excerpts from Dan Hoyle's journal as he traveled through America

Three moons have come and gone since I left San Francisco to find out what makes America's heartland tick. It is fall now, I'm homeward bound, and this series must end. There are many more stories to tell, but they must wait for my play in the spring. Until then, here's a taste of what I've seen and what I've learned.

- After escaping the neon vortex of patriotism that is Branson, Mo., I sought out the hippie commune my parents once lived on, back in the 1970s, and found that it has returned to its rural America regular: It is now a shooting range.

- In Memphis, I walked the line between poverty and power with Rarecus Bonds, Beale Street's most famous street performer. We strolled through the rough Claeborn housing project, where gang leaders and slushy salesmen alike paid their respects. Then, at the stop sign on Pontotoc Avenue, I witnessed Bonds transform from hometown legend to Beale Street Flipper: He hitched up his pants, discarded his cigarette and sharpened up his natural Memphis slur: "Nowadays talkin' is more important than flippin'". "Bonds has gone from back-flippin' for

potato chips when he was 6 years old to chief executive of an entertainment company that has played NBA stadiums and corporate conventions.

- In the rural ghettos of Mississippi, I was at once entertained and threatened as winos scatted their wisdom and nonsense and red-eyed bad men limped by as slowly as possible, the longer to throw me their most fearsome mug.
- In Louisiana, I met the French-speaking Pointe-au-Chien Indians. They've been washed over and under by storms and floods for years - "we only leave for the big ones" - but still cling to the crumbling fingers of mud and sand that is the bayou.
- In Alabama, I traded views, admired automatic weapons and drank charcoalized moonshine - "good sipping whiskey" - with a diatribe-spewing racist.
- In Georgia, a dotty old man, cued by my "different" hat, asked if I was selling pot. I wasn't, so he went back to spitting tobacco and shooting the birds that tried to nest under his roof.
- In the white churches of eastern Kentucky, tambourines clattered, feet stomped and voices quivered powerful enough to shake pains from the miner men and evil spirits from the hollers.
- In Detroit, I spent an afternoon with dope dealers in the notorious East Jefferson neighborhood. The city has lost so many people that even the demand for dope is way down. Longtime hustlers, who at the height of the crack epidemic in the 1980s wore \$1,000 suits and \$100 hairdos, have turned to selling scrap metal to make ends meet.
- In northern Wisconsin, I vibrated for several hours under the might of 450 horsepower engines at the "Super Bowl" of off-road racing.
- Twice I was roused by police while sleeping in the back of my van. On the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, I shouted, "Peace, brother, peace!" at the flashlight peering in before realizing it was a policeman and not the gang of attackers I'd been dreaming about. He was very cordial and didn't notice my pee jar in the step well, and soon I was interviewing him, the first predawn interview of my life.



I've learned a few things. Pretty much any cold beer tastes good, except Milwaukee's Best Ice; you've got to drink half a tall boy before it starts tasting all right. The coziest motel rooms are often the cheapest. There are many reasons people fly the Confederate flag: Some do it to tick off uptight middle-class people, some because they love the "hick humor" of Larry the Cable Guy and some because there's a wild party going on in their trailer, and you should come over and check it out.

We Americans are good at getting things done, helping strangers and partying. But we are not generally really big on studying up on politics or world affairs. But as a free American, it's our right not to know, and not to feel bad about it. Heck, it's even patriotic. Because most of those people preaching about world events and history always seem to be blaming America for everything anyway.

Oh, there I go. I've been out long enough that it gets harder and harder to capture the truth just by reporting. It's getting time to start writing that play. Recently, when I went on a Wal-Mart clothes-shopping spree, I found out that the caption of this year's most popular T-shirt, "Faded Glory 2008," is a brand name of a clothing company. The Wal-Mart special of the year may yet prove the year's most prophetic slogan, and a darn good title for a play about this country. ■

Who are the Real Americans?

A list of characters

photography
Owen Carey

RON – Wisconsin football dad
DAN – Our protagonist from San Francisco
DAVE – Dan’s cynical hipster friend
PETE – Dan’s eco-conscious hipster friend
EMILY – Dan’s saucy hipster friend
MARLENE – Dan’s endearing hipster friend
JIM – Proud Texan patriarch
JONATHAN – Jim’s military grandson
STEVE – Jim’s son
JANE – Ever-forgiving Texan matriarch
MIKEY – Sour Alabaman paraplegic
JESSICA – Mikey’s doting fiancé
DEARMY – Black mid-30s out of Mississippi Delta
JACK – Wizened mechanic from Kentucky
JAMIE – Gregarious trucker
originally from San Francisco
PRESIDENT OBAMA – Not a Muslim
BERNIE – Gun show vendor
RAMON – Dominican New Yorker



The Great Debate: Real vs. Unreal Americans

An article seeking to define what a real American is in light of the 2008 election

by Bernd
Debusmann

WASHINGTON (Reuters) – What is a real American? As opposed to an unreal American, a fake American, an un-American American or an anti-American American.

photography
Dan Hoyle

The answer is in the eye of the beholder and his or her political orientation. The question, and variations of it, has been asked in several periods



of U.S. history and has bubbled up again, one of a number of odd sideshows, in the closing stages of the campaign for the presidential election on Nov. 4.

Are real Americans a minority in this richly diverse country of 300 million? You might well come to that conclusion if you believe the definitions publicly provided by several Republicans, including Sarah Palin, the vice presidential candidate, and conservative radio and TV talk show hosts.

“We believe that the best of America is in these small towns that we get to visit and these wonderful little pockets of what I call the real America, being here with all of you hard-working, very patriotic, very pro-America areas of this great nation,” Palin told a campaign rally in North Carolina in mid-October.

John McCain, the Republican candidate, has also sung the praise of small town (real) America. “Western Pennsylvania ... is the most patriotic, most God-loving part of America,” he said at a rally there.

A belief in God, judging from speeches by both McCain and his Democratic opponent, Barack Obama, is an essential part of American-ness.

Robin Hayes, a Republican congressman from North Carolina, provided details on Americans who do not qualify as real. “Liberals hate real Americans that work, and accomplish, and achieve, and believe in God.” Both Palin and Hayes later “clarified” their remarks to say they had not actually meant to suggest the existence of pro- and anti-American parts of the country. Nevertheless, their words prompted a vivid debate in cyberspace and on talk radio.

REAL AMERICANS AND EUROPE

It quickly went beyond geography and into political beliefs. “Is it possible to be a real American and to be a socialist?” radio talk show host Chris Plante asked his listeners in the Washington area. “Can you still

be a real American if you believe that the regimes that govern in Western Europe are a better way forward than the system that we have here?” Callers reassured him that no, that was not possible.

How much influence conservative talk radio has will be apparent on election day. The Rush Limbaugh Show alone claims 12 million daily listeners and other conservative talking heads, such as Sean Hannity, also pull in huge audiences. But listening to them, it is difficult not to come to the conclusion that they are preaching to the converted and their shows function as big echo chambers.

As the real vs unreal Americans debate unfolded over a few days – teacup storms have been relatively short in this election – another Republican member of Congress, Michelle Bachmann of Minnesota, poured fuel on the argument. She suggested in a television interview that the U.S. media should “take a great look at the views of the people in Congress and find out if they are pro-America or anti-America.”



That conjured up the ghost of Republican Sen. Joseph McCarthy, who was helped in his hunt for hidden communists in the 1950s by a congressional investigative body called the House Un-American Activities Committee.

Sorting the populace into good people and not-so-good (or downright bad and dangerous) people is nothing new in an election campaign – the not-so-good people are always those of the other party. Seen in historical context, today’s good vs bad rankings are tame, as are negative advertisements.

When John Quincy Adams ran for re-election in 1828, for example, he called his opponent Andrew Jackson a cannibal and a murderer and he had unkind words for Jackson’s followers. The charge didn’t help. Adams lost.

In the 2008 campaign, attempts to portray one set of Americans (those living in rural areas and small towns) as more American than their big-city compatriots run counter to demographics. Nostalgia for a country that no longer exists?

According to the 2000 census – the counts are taken every 10 years – America’s big cities and their suburbs are home to 192 million people. That compares with just under 60 million in rural areas overall and 30 million in towns of fewer than 50,000 people.

A community of 50,000 people is large in comparison with Wasilla, the Alaskan town that had 5,000 people when Sarah Palin became its mayor in 1996. It has since grown to close to 10,000 – still small enough to fit the latest definition of real America. 🏡

Oct 29, 2008



The Federlist Papers

It has been frequently remarked, that it seems to have been reserved to the people of this country, by their conduct and example, to decide the important question, whether societies of men are really capable or not, of establishing good government from reflection and choice, or whether they are forever destined to depend, for their political constitutions, on accident and force.

Alexander Hamilton



Three Misconceptions of American Identity

A scholarly break-up of American identity into three conceptions:

Liberalism, Republicanism and Ethnocultural Americanism

by Rogers M.
Smith

photography
Dan Hoyle
& Owen Carey

While an oversimplification, it is useful to organize the debates over American citizenship laws from the founding until at least the Progressive Era largely in terms of three related but distinct notions of American identity, drawn from the intertwined but analytically distinguishable persuasions or ideologies I have mentioned: liberalism, republicanism, and ethnocultural Americanism (which, at its extreme, is nativism). To be sure, these three civic conceptions have almost always appeared in combinations, they have many historical variants, and other notions have also been present at times.

LIBERALISM

Liberalism is properly identified with the emancipating aspirations of the Enlightenment and its concerns for universal human rights, religious toleration, the promotion of commerce and the sciences, and rejection of the theocratic and martial medieval ethos. It found expression in the political agenda of the lower gentry and middle classes in England and America, who fought from the seventeenth century on against restrictive medieval economic and political prerogatives and against repressive religious and intellectual

orthodoxies. Its classic exposition remains the moderate Whig theorizing of John Locke, if we consider his writings as a whole, and if we recognize him as a publicist shaping literate opinion as well as a philosophic system-builder. The distinctive feature of this moderate liberal persuasion is its insistence that the state must permit private as well as public pursuits of individual happiness, and must therefore be limited to enforcing personal rights and promoting external goods thought to benefit all. Viewing men as naturally “free, equal and independent,” Locke says they create governments via social compacts only “for the mutual preservation of their

Lives, Liberties and Estates.” In the course of their movement toward Revolution, Americans shifted from assertions of their legal rights as Englishmen to reliance on these Lockean notions of consensual



government and natural rights. The culmination of this process, the Declaration of Independence, holds that all men are created equal and that governments are created to secure inalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. These liberal ideals have one inestimable value: they can be employed to claim basic rights universally, for every human being, black or white, female or male, alien or citizen.

REPUBLICANISM

Just as colonial Americans came to stress liberal human rights over English legal rights, they also came to reject monarchy in favor of popular republics. For many seventeenth- and eighteenth-century revolutionaries in England and America, whose pseudonyms evoked Roman republican heroes such as Cato, Cicero, and Publius, republicanism represented not only a form of government but a special type of civic life. J. G. A. Pocock’s much-debated but influential lineage for Atlantic republicanism connects it backwards to Machiavelli and Aristotle and ahead to Rousseau and America’s Jeffersonian and Jacksonian traditions. Many recent American critics of liberalism have identified such “civic republicanism” as an alternative, communitarian American tradition they wish to restore. In contrast to Locke’s focus on liberty as freedom from state interference with individual private pursuits, the distinctive element common to the diverse strains of republican thought is an emphasis on achieving institutions and practices that make collective self-governance in pursuit of a common good possible for the community as a whole. For many, republicanism was but an extension of liberal commitments to personal freedom. Even so, republican notions are capable, at least, of supporting quite non-liberal conceptions of citizenship and civic life. Two aspects of republican thought on how free popular government



could be sustained had special importance for America's citizenship laws: the insistence that a successful republic had to be characterized by considerable social

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The US Constitution

Article 1, sec. 2

The actual Enumeration shall be made within three years after the first meeting of the Congress of the United States, and within every subsequent term of ten years, in such manner as they shall by law direct. The number of Representatives shall not exceed one for every thirty thousand, but each state shall have at least one Representative; and until such enumeration shall be made, the state of New Hampshire shall be entitled to choose three, Massachusetts eight, Rhode Island and Providence Plantations one, Connecticut five, New York six, New Jersey four, Pennsylvania eight, Delaware one, Maryland six, Virginia ten, North Carolina five, South Carolina five, and Georgia three.

”

had a distinctive character, born of their freedom-loving Anglo-Saxon ancestors and heightened by the favorable conditions of the new world. This character

homogeneity, and the related claim that a viable republic must have a relatively small body of citizens, bound to other peoples, if at all, via a loose confederation or imperial domination. The demand for homogeneity could be used to defend numerous ethnocentric impulses, including citizenship laws that discriminated on the basis of race, sex, religion, and national origins. The second requirement helped generate and maintain America's commitment to federalism, to state and local autonomy—a commitment often used to justify national acquiescence in local inequalities. The cause of republicanism provided a more obvious promise of meaningful, morally worthwhile, and closely knit political communities in America. The themes of patriotism and civic virtue that were almost entirely absent from Locke's liberalism were made central in the republican conception of citizenship and community. Such patriotic sentiments have always resonated powerfully in the psyches of many Americans.

ETHNOCULTURAL AMERICANISM

It is more controversial to argue that “Americanism”—the identification of American nationality with a particular ethnocultural identity—grew in the nineteenth century into a full-fledged civic “ideology” that sometimes rivaled the other two; but recent scholarship supports that conclusion. From the revolutionary era on, many American leaders deliberately promoted the popular notion that Americans



made them the last hope to preserve human freedom once the English had become corrupt—and it also set them above blacks and truly Native Americans, and later Mexicans, Chinese, Filipinos, and others who were labeled unfit for self-government. In the Jacksonian years, the scientific racialism of the “American school of ethnography” and the cultural nationalism of the European romantics gave these ideas intellectual credibility. They were subsequently reinforced by the racist anthropology, history, and Social Darwinist sociology and political science influential in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Publicists, professors and politicians worked these ideas into a general “political ideology” of “American racial Anglo-Saxonism,” to which they gave different twists as their purposes dictated. Despite those variations, by the late Jacksonian era a core set of ideas defining ethnocultural Americanism was well established in American scholarship and political rhetoric, which would repeatedly come to the fore in suitable political circumstances. As Reginald Horsman observes, it had become “unusual by the late 1840s to profess a belief in innate human equality and to challenge the idea that a superior race was about to shape the fates of other races for the future good of the world. To assert this meant challenging not only popular opinion, but also the opinion of most American intellectuals.” While the theoretical elaborations came later, from the outset of the nation many Americans chiefly identified membership in their political community not with freedom for personal liberal callings or republican self-governance per se, but with a whole array of particular cultural origins and customs—with northern European, if not English, ancestry; with Christianity, especially dissenting Protestantism, and its message for the world; with the white race; with patriarchal familial

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leadership and female domesticity; and with all the economic and social arrangements that came to be seen as the true, traditional “American way of life.”

As unmixed “ideal types,” these three conceptions of American identity are obviously in tension. For a pure liberal, the republican and ethnocultural conceptions are too repressive of human variety, liberty, and privacy. For a pure republican, the liberal conception licenses selfish egoism, while Americanists are patriotic enough, but may not emphasize political service

enough. The ethnocultural Americanist believes that only his conception really captures who he is in the truest, most primordial sense. While he may cherish liberal ideals and republican institutions because they are American, he will not allow them to shield “un-American” tendencies that endanger the communal order he takes as definitive of his very identity. ■

adapted from the essay “The ‘American Creed’ and American Identity: The Limits of Liberal Citizenship in the United States” by Rogers M. Smith, 1988

Autobiographies Build Sense of American Community

An essay highlighting the important role of personal stories in creating American identity—
as illustrated by the many autobiographies presented in *The Real Americans*

by Amy A.
Kass

photography
Owen Carey

The study of selected American lives through autobiography is an apt place to answer such inquiries as, Who are we as Americans? or; What does it mean to be American? Such self-told life stories can help us understand and appreciate international diversity yet, at the same time, combat the dangers of separatism and fracture. They can contribute to a responsible pluralism in which we can acknowledge and value all enriching group differences without forsaking respect for human beings as individuals. Many an American autobiographer, especially concerned to convey how he or she achieved self-esteem, self-fulfillment, and self-definition while living in our midst, looks closely

at his or her own particular beginnings but also moves beyond them. Thus, each leads us to appreciate better the concern to attain individual distinction—both to be distinctive and to make a difference. Each invites us to think about just what individuality really means, why it is important, and what might be necessary to assure its survival. Thoughtfully approached, such autobiographical narratives give all of us special access to understanding what it means to be American and, hence, to understanding our own American lives. Studying American autobiographies provides, then, an American remedy for the problems of identity that face us as American citizens. Let me briefly elaborate on why and how.



Autobiography was, in fact, the first peculiarly American literary form. As one scholar has noted, before Benjamin Franklin’s *Autobiography*, there was no American literature, only English colonial literature. From the beginning, autobiography was, and continues to be, a most, if not the most, popular genre of American writing. Autobiographies have been written by men and women from every part of our country, from every line of work, and from every ethnic, religious, and racial background. It has become not only a genre with classics of its own, but an American industry. Autobiography thus reflects and embodies the spirit of American enterprise, and



it does so, one suspects, largely because it resonates with one of our deepest and most democratic chords.

In writing an autobiography, a person tacitly asserts his or her radical independence and self-sufficiency. Literally, the autobiographer becomes his or her own author, defining who and what he or she is. Autobiography, as a form, thus exemplifies what

Tocqueville called the “philosophical approach of the Americans,” who “treat tradition as valuable for information only” and who “seek by themselves and in themselves for the only reason for things.” Through autobiography any “nobody” can become and important “somebody,” at the very least the hero of a literary work.

Because so many of these self-told stories are stories of success and accomplishment through struggle, perseverance, and self-discipline, reading them can often be inspiring. Because they are written by people from every racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, and religious group, they can encourage a healthy spirit of pluralism and mutual respect. And because they show how “nobodies” become somebodies, they can speak to almost anybody, often engendering hope and even self-respect in their individual readers. 🍷

excerpted from the essay “Who am I?: Autobiography and American Identity” by Amy A. Kass, 1995

Capitalism Compote: A Recipe

“Dude, capitalism won, alright and it’s a good thing. No capitalism, no compote.”

—David, *The Real Americans*

Celebrate the dominance of the dollar with this classy dessert, courtesy a consumerist culture of extravagance and excess! Made with apples for that taste of nostalgic Americana, Capitalism Compote is best enjoyed with a Cuban cigar lit with a hundred dollar bill

INGREDIENTS

- 2 cups water
- 1/3 cup sugar
- 1/2 vanilla bean, split in half
- 1 tablespoon Calvados
- 1/2 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1/8 teaspoon ground cloves
- 1/8 teaspoon ground nutmeg
- Pinch salt
- 8 large Golden Delicious apples, peeled, cored, & cubed

DIRECTIONS

In a large saucepan, combine the water, sugar, vanilla bean and seeds, Calvados, cinnamon, cloves, nutmeg, and salt and bring to a boil. Boil gently until the sugar is dissolved and the mixture thickens slightly, about 5 minutes. Add the apples and return to a boil. Lower the heat and simmer, stirring occasionally, until the apples are very tender and the mixture thickens, about 20 minutes.

Remove from the heat and remove the vanilla bean pods. Let cool to room temperature before serving. (The mixture will thicken as it cools.) Serve as an accompaniment to breakfast items, such as toast, French toast, waffles, pancakes, or as a topping for ice cream or pound cakes. 🍷

adapted from Emeril Lagasse’s Apple Compote recipe



Further Reading

***Angels in America* by Tony Kushner** – This Pulitzer prize winning two-part play is an artful exploration of the multiplicity of American identity during the Reagan era

***A People's History of the United States* by Howard Zinn** – A revolutionary account of American history through the eyes of common people

***America (The Book)* by Jon Stewart** – A humorous, award-winning, and controversial dive into the history of American politics

***The Partly Cloudy Patriot* by Sarah Vowell** – A collection of essays reflecting on American history and issues. Sarah Vowell is a contributing editor to the radio program “This American Life”

Discussion Questions

What does being American mean to you?

What defines someone as a member of a country? Consider citizenship, cultural values, political views, race, and family history. What role do these factors play in defining American identity?

Why do you think this play is called the “real” Americans?

Why is defining what it means to be American such a hard a question to answer?

Which character did you identify with the most in *The Real Americans*? Which did you feel the most distance from?

Group Activities

1. Think again about what being American means to you. Then, in small groups, share your thoughts. Discuss the differences and the similarities between everyone’s conceptions of American identity. Is it possible to have a single definition of what a “real” American is?
2. Review Amy Kass’s article on autobiography and American identity. Then, in small groups, take turns presenting a short autobiography. See what details about yourself become prevalent when you take just five minutes to share your autobiography. After everyone has gone, discuss what sorts of details jumped out at you in people’s autobiographies.