

- # TOWARD A POLITICS OF BEAUTY

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A BACKPACKERS' THEORY OF LIFE



When I was young, my father, who would have turned 100 today, introduced me to backpacking. As a backpacker, I experienced healthy activity, good fellowship, nature's blessings, freedom, time... etc.

Backpacking taught me that you need basics but not too much—if you lack food, shelter, water, you become miserable.

All important to wellbeing, but above all, I experienced beauty. I'll come back to that.

We need to find the point of enough, balance.

Modern societies have not learned the lessons of backpacking—our backpack is full, and we are falling backwards.

CHALLENGING CONSUMERISM



As a young man, I was persuaded by critiques of the Gross National Product— Bobby Kennedy in 1968, Limits to Growth in 1972. etc.

By 1991, I was aware of what we were sacrificing for our consumer lifestyle— especially, time.

I produced the films RUNNING OUT OF TIME and AFFLUENZA and started TAKE BACK YOUR TIME to address this.

I was invited to speak on time use to GNH conferences in Canada and Brazil and to work with the government of Bhutan.

MEASURING HAPPINESS AND WELLBEING

THE HAPPINESS ALLIANCE

www.happycounts.org



I co-founded the Happiness Alliance in 2010 with Laura Musikanki. It is still going strong.

Our survey measures dimensions of wellbeing and happiness contained in Bhutan's domains of GNH.

They include Time Balance; health, economic security; education; access to culture; social connection; work; governance; environment and psychological health.

We've used our survey with hundreds of communities and 100,000 people have taken it.

But in recent years, I've come to believe there is a missing dimension in GNH and in our wellbeing metrics.

BEAUTY—THE MISSING DIMENSION



Dostoevski, Solzhenitsyn, Doug Tompkins, etc. say BEAUTY WILL SAVE THE WORLD

Phil Ochs-- “In such an ugly time, the true protest is beauty.”

Is beauty purely subjective—I don’t think so. Students suggest it is an evolutionary universal—associated with biophilia, the enhancement of life. Ugliness by contrast is threatening—a strip mine, an oil spill, garbage, etc. are felt subconsciously as wounds to our bodies

All cultures appreciate natural beauty and graceful design, but for some reason we avoid talking about it.

I founded AND BEAUTY FOR ALL
www.andbeautyforall.org

SURPRISING STUDIES

Studies show beauty's connection to wellbeing and happiness—SOUL OF THE COMMUNITY:

- Gallup/Knight Foundation—26 cities.
- 10 domains, including safety, schools, traffic, economics, etc.
- Top 3 were the same in every city:
 - 1. social offerings
 - 2. openness
 - 3. beauty and access to nature, parks and green space

University of South Carolina urban wellbeing study, etc.. 7 cities, beauty most important for happiness



WHY BEAUTY?



Beauty is not a distraction from justice, but makes us more just, generous, tolerant—philosopher Elaine Scarry

Beauty reduces polarization.

Beauty slows us down to watch and reduces stress.

Beauty attracts us to healthy pursuits—nature etc.

Beautiful surroundings are an antidote to consumerism.

BEAUTY AND SUSTAINABILITY



Beauty supports sustainability---Hermann Knoflacher and Vienna

Beauty, the form of environmental restoration, can help fight climate change.

Environmentalists were moved to their concerns by the beauty of nature—John Muir, etc.

Older beautiful cities attract visitors and improve happiness. They provide novelty, interest. They elevate the arts.

Modern utilitarian cities are are often emotionally cold. Studies find such architecture enervates us, reduces our energy and sense of wellbeing.

THE POLITICS OF BEAUTY



My new film—**STEWART UDALL AND THE POLITICS OF BEAUTY**. Seen here with Lady Bird Johnson

He was perhaps the most important public servant in the history of environmental protection.

He was a believer in simple living and a critic of consumerism.

Udall spoke of the “Economics of beauty.” “The Gross National Product has become the Holy Grail.”

He was active in saving natural areas for future generations.

He was an advocate of the arts, music, literature...

But he also advocated creating cities that are “cathedrals for human living.”

Biden’s new AMERICA THE BEAUTIFUL campaign builds on Udall’s work.

[Udall Sampler 12min.mov \(vimeo.com\)](#)

HOZHO—AN INCLUSIVE CONCEPT



Udall persuaded Lady Bird Johnson to start her Beautification Campaign

But his larger goal was a transformation of Values

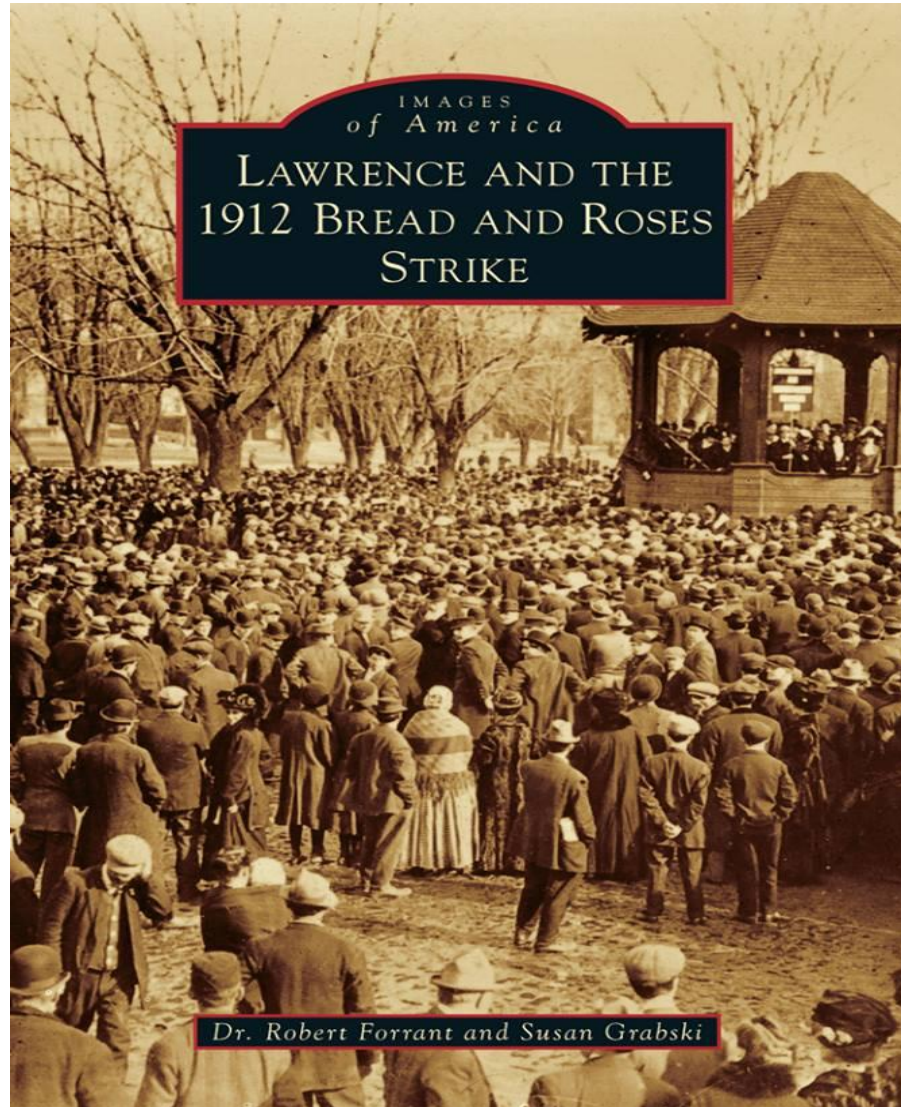
The Navajo concept of HOZHO—walking in beauty—most exemplifies his thinking.

It includes beauty, harmony, right livelihoods, care for others and the Earth, balance, time, gratitude, respect.

You cannot be rushed or greedy and find *hozho*.

Painting is by the Navajo artist Shonto Begay.

WATERING THE ROSES



Bread and Roses—a tension in human history.
Muir—Everyone needs beauty as well as bread. His experiences with the street urchins of San Francisco

Oppenheim—“small art and love and beauty their drudging spirits knew...”

[\(358\) Bread and Roses - YouTube](#)

The Lawrence Textile Strike and Bread and Roses

Yevgeny Yevtushenko—“Who will save beauty?”

It’s up to us and to both value and measure it.

THANK YOU!

I think we need much more research about beauty and wellbeing and about how to include beauty in our wellbeing metrics.

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