

Horizons for a New America

Introduction

When I published *Visions for a Compassionate America* in 2015, I felt hope, and wanted to convey that hope, about a new world emerging alongside our present crumbling one. My research and first-hand encounter with new movements, ideas, and practices **showed** me the landscape of a world that is like the seed for a new and potent reality. By this I mean that a new reality is growing in the US (and in the world) that has the power to generate lasting social change. It is based on a new paradigm, which is what makes it hard to perceive although it is all around us. It has often been said that for a mind that works like a hammer, all reality is a nail. What does not enter our knowledge perspective does not exist. And since we operate most often and most generally from a political *either/or* perspective, when something of potential comes based on *a both/and* paradigm, it's easy to dismiss it, because for most of us it is hard to even take notice. Most of the time such an event does not make the news because hardly anyone has the eyes to see it. It's as if a different kind of glasses were needed, and most people don't have them.

My work in *Visions for a Compassionate America* was the effort of weaving together the most promising threads of a fabric and to point to the beauty of the fabric itself. It was a work of making the landscape of change perceptible as a coherent whole, rather than as separate, seemingly disconnected parts; of showing the potential more fully not only to those who are outside of it, but also to many who are contributing to it.

New ways of organizing our evolving social reality emerge **as if it were** organically. No one holds **an integrated** great vision of change, then implements the parts. Rather, it's is as if the spirit of the time calls for what is

necessary and eager visionaries respond. Pioneers of all stripes and creeds offer a piece of the puzzle. They themselves may not know the ultimate power and potential of the reality to which they are starting to give shape. They may even experience their efforts like a little drop in the ocean, and fail to connect the dots. So I wanted this new book to celebrate the beauty of a whole larger than the parts, now that it is possible to step back and take a larger look.

In June of 2017 I was at a conference in Boston with the intent of exploring what is sprouting and simmering at the edges of the system, so to speak. I felt my experience would hinge on the work of a few individuals: three, for that matter. It was while sitting at a workshop that I met those three people. And what they said stirred me deeply and motivated me to look at what they do and what they have written. A whole new world opened up and I plunged into new readings and study, conversations, internet explorations and when possible, more and more face-to-face conversations and meetings.

How true that even when we have new lenses we still need to improve them. I was proving the point to myself. Had it not been for these key encounters I would have missed seeing the new reality they live in and point to, even though I was somehow very close to it after publishing my earlier book. Soon after the Boston experience I started working with a group of people exploring what they called "MSN3": multi-sector (government, business, civil society), multi stakeholder, multi scale networks, and the new kind of governance and policy-making they entail.

Part of the task that I took up was a sort of mapping of the new and evolving reality. We had set ourselves the goal of finding approximately forty resilient and innovative networks, feeling that this was an ambitious number; a nagging doubt ran in the back of my mind that we would not find as many. There were stages in my own and in our common search. First a slow progression, then some breakthroughs in what still seemed isolated cases; and finally

the floodgates opening. This is partly due to the fact that the growth of the MSN3 reality is less than ten to fifteen years old, at the most; and many of the best examples are younger than that. Of course, pioneer groups have existed before. But only now is this reality taking off. So it seems we were starting off at the perfect time.

When this stage of the work was reached, the idea of presenting it to the public through a book was a natural outcome for me. It generated a lot of energy and enthusiasm. And one thing became very clear at the same time: this is an evolving reality that eludes a purely analytical frame of mind. I would have to immerse myself in this evolving order of reality to approach it effectively, and offer many examples for what otherwise remain empty concepts. For a reality that escapes our immediate **comprehension**, an image is worth a thousand words; it allows newcomers to the matter to get little glimpses, to bring reality closer, to travel within the pages of a book, to allow little insights to emerge, to extrapolate from one level of reality to another.