

*American Dreamers: What Dreams Tell Us about the Political Psychology of Conservatives, Liberals, and Everyone Else*, by Kelly Bulkeley. Beacon Press, 2008. Hb. 217 pp., \$23.95. ISBN-13: 9780807077344.

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In this intriguing study, Bulkeley argues that people's sleep and dream experiences provide accurate insights into the psychological underpinnings of their political beliefs and attitudes. He examines the dream journals of ten Americans from different backgrounds and geographical regions who volunteered to participate in a year-long study of their sleep and dream lives. He complements this in-depth focus on a few case studies with broader survey results concerning the sleep and dream experiences of 700 demographically representative Americans. Bulkeley maintains that this combination of qualitative and quantitative methods reveals the unconscious dynamics behind the political ideals and partisan conflicts in the present Day United States.

According to Bulkeley, there are no categorical differences between the sleeping and dreaming experiences of conservatives and liberals, but conservatives (especially conservative males) reported sleeping more soundly, whereas liberals (especially liberal females) had more troubled sleep as well as a more active and agitated dream life, with the greatest number and variety of dreams. Liberals experience more dreams with unusual, distorted, and fantastic elements compared to conservatives, whose dreams were more likely to portray typical characters, settings, and activities. In Bulkeley's view, these differences in sleep patterns reflect the relationship between the two dominant ideologies in early twenty-first century America: "The one is pleased with current power arrangements and disinclined to wonder about alternative perspectives, the other is frightened by and angry at the status quo and desperate to find new possibilities" (29). In general liberals reported a wider sphere of dream experience, with a greater range of imagined possibility, than did the conservatives.

Of particular interest to readers of *Implicit Religion* will likely be Bulkeley's discussion of the connections between people's dreams, their religious and spiritual beliefs, and their political views. He states that, although most people in modern Western societies have relatively few explicitly religious dreams, the ones they do have give an accurate picture of the dreamer's

feelings and concerns about religion in waking life (70). Bulkeley's poll indicates that the differences in sleep and dream patterns between political conservatives and political liberals apply to the dream lives of *religious* conservatives and liberals as well: regular church attendees have fewer sleep difficulties and sleep longer than those who never attend religious services, and non-religious people report more of every type of dream, especially sexual dreams. People's sleep and dream patterns highlight the close tie between their religious and political viewpoints. For Bulkeley, this dream link between people's religious and political ideas and attitudes supports the findings of the majority of opinion polls that show a correlation between the most intense religious worshippers and the most loyal supporters of President Bush, and the corresponding connection between non-religious people and anti-Bush sentiment.

The correlations between American religious views and their effect on reported dreaming patterns raises a central question for Bulkeley as a student of the history of dreams and religion. He observes that the American experience runs counter to the cross-cultural history of dreams wherein dreams have appeared from the earliest historical records as a universal feature of religion.

Religious traditions throughout the world have considered dreams as a portal to the divine or the sacred. While Bulkeley does not investigate the specific American theological views that have contributed to this departure from the almost universal connection between dreams and religion, he suggests that American religion overall has had a constricting rather than an expanding effect on people's dreaming. We are left to wonder why American religion has not generally encouraged dreams, and why the biggest dreamers in the United States today tend to be those people least attached to a conventional religious group.

Bulkeley attempts to relate his study of American dreamers to the metaphor of "the American Dream," which expresses ideals that have shaped and continue to shape American national identity. He lists these ideals as freedom, equal opportunity, ingenuity, creativity, and the hope for a better life in the future (6). Bulkeley's study tries to show how the collective ideals of American politics, religion, and popular culture are related to the themes and patterns of Americans' night-time dreams. His research offers considerable evidence that people's dreams do reflect their deepest political and religious hopes and values, regardless of whether they consider themselves conservative, liberal, or somewhere in between. Bulkeley believes that his broad approach to this material confirms and extends the

views of Freud and Jung that dream content is closely connected to a person's most important waking-life concerns and preoccupations.

Overall, Bulkeley's study contributes to our growing understanding of the relationship between religion, politics, and dreaming. His thorough exploration of specific cases brings to light how much people's identity, values, and world-view shape both their political and religious views. Although Bulkeley locates himself on the leftward side of the political spectrum, he demonstrates considerable empathy with the ideals embodied in both the conservative and liberal perspectives. He wisely reminds us that no one is purely conservative or liberal, and that everyone's personality includes aspects of both tendencies. While Bulkeley does not bring the concept of implicit religion directly into his analysis of American dreamers, he does go to great lengths to show how dream metaphors represent and help shape the dreamer's identity, values, and world-view, those key psychological structures of implicit religion.