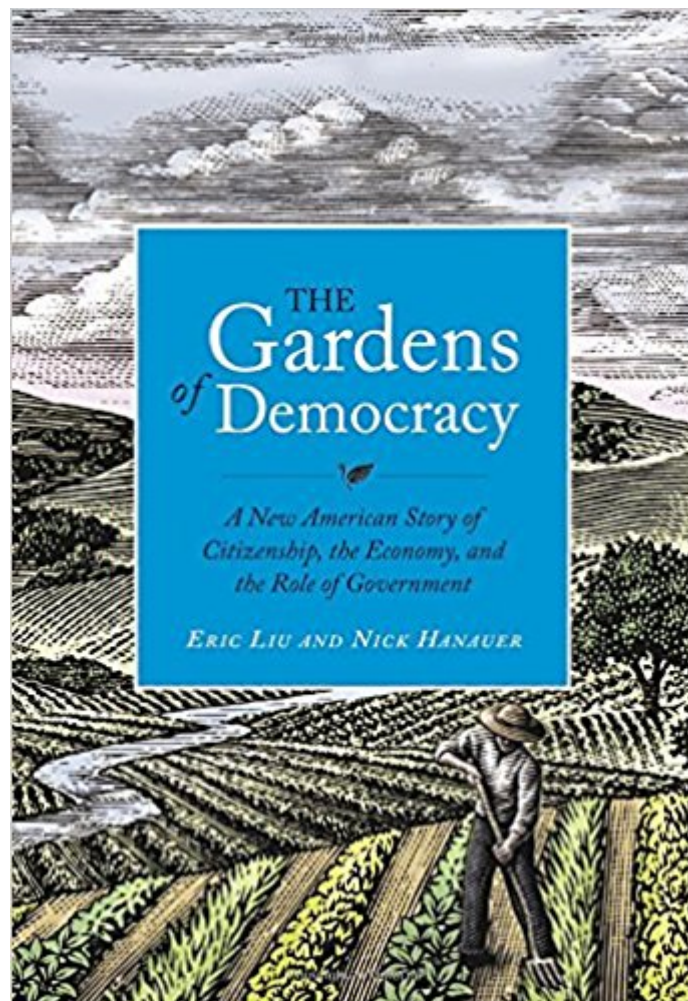




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The Gardens Of Democracy: A New American Story Of Citizenship, The Economy, And The Role Of Government



Synopsis

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau calls *The Gardens of Democracy* one of his favorite books. In a post-election world with widespread political upheaval, a deep wellspring of civic engagement and collective action is beginning to emerge. Modern American life has become marked by divisive conversations about everything from racial and social justice to fighting the ever-widening income gap, environmental conservation, and how we might collaborate as active citizens to heal our democracy. In *The Gardens of Democracy*, Eric Liu and Nick Hanauer outline an argument for why our most basic assumptions about these topics need updating for the 21st century. For those finding their voice for the first time, this book offers a conceptual roadmap for a way forward "for what they are resisting, why they resist, and for the better democracy they want to grow. Liu and Hanauer's ideas are simple but revolutionary: true self-interest is incomplete without tending to the shared best interests of the national community. They illustrate that to model positivity, good citizenship, and ensure liberty and justice for all, we must achieve compromise by reaching across the aisle and putting the power to execute programs back in the hands of individuals, not big government. True freedom does not live in isolation, and we must redefine how we view prosperity in order to move from a dog-eat-dog mentality that perpetuates the top 1 percent to a communal and inclusive movement that illustrates that we're all better off when we're all better off. Timely, inspiring, and highly charged, *The Gardens of Democracy* is a much-needed call to action for citizens to embrace their roles in a democratic society.

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Customer Reviews

Recommended by Justin Trudeau (Quora Q&A, April 2017)"Liu and Hanauer have proposed a powerful new way to think about how society works and there is a lot here for conservatives to work with and debate." --Noah Kristula-Green, The Daily Beast

The Gardens of Democracy provides a refreshing new conceptual approach to understanding our economic and political situation, and it will help us move past the fossilized ideas in today's public debates. --Francis Fukuyama, author of The Origins of Political Order

Society is a garden. Liu and Hanauer's simple metaphor makes the complexities and limits of social policy emerge before your eyes. Statists can't see the interconnections of organic systems. Free marketers can't see that a garden needs some tending. If you're looking for a way forward out of America's dangerous gridlock, read this wonderful book. --Jonathan Haidt, Professor of psychology, University of Virginia and author of The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion

Eric Liu and Nick Hanauer are progressives who always think outside the box, and that's why everyone should pay attention to them. The Gardens of Democracy shakes up our stale debate over government's role in a dynamic society, and in a thoughtful, creative and inventive way. Everyone will find something to disagree with here, and that's the point: getting us out of our comfort zones is an immensely useful democratic undertaking. --E.J. Dionne Jr., author of Why Americans Hate Politics

"I just read a remarkable book by Eric Liu and Nick Hanauer. It is The Gardens of Democracy: A New American Story of Citizenship, the Economy, and the Role of Government. I highly recommend it as a big gust of fresh air to clear out the dense, stale, gases we have all been breathing when it comes to how we talk about politics and citizenship. It is time to break out of the prison of left/right thinking that has made politics so mean spirited in recent years... There is something in this new metaphor for both the left and the right." --Ray Smock, Robert C. Byrd Center for Legislative Studies

"Even if you don't agree with everything the authors propose, you will find 'The Gardens of Democracy' to be spirited and thought provoking." --The Bellingham Herald

"We'd do well to shift our political and economic metaphors from images involving machinery toward more organic ways of thinking. [A] nifty way of rethinking metaphors for what government does." --Wonkette

ERIC LIU is the founder and CEO of Citizen University and executive director of the Aspen Institute Citizenship and American Identity Program. He is the author of several books, including You're

More Powerful than You Think: A Citizen's Guide to Making Change Happen, The True Patriot, and A Chinaman's Chance. Eric served as a White House speechwriter and policy adviser for President Bill Clinton. He is a regular columnist for CNN.com and a correspondent for TheAtlantic.com. NICK HANAUER is a Seattle-based serial entrepreneur, venture capitalist, author and activist with a knack for identifying and building transformative business models. In 2007, he co-authored The True Patriot with Eric Liu and co-founded The True Patriot Network, a non-partisan group committed to furthering patriotic ideals. He also co-founded the Washington State League of Education Voters (LEV), a non-partisan statewide political organization focused on promoting public education, where he serves as co-president.

A number of books have appeared in the past few years that purport to go beyond the old divisions of right vs. left. This is an interesting addition to the mix. It is not clear what right and left mean because the positions they hold change over time and one standard right vs. left position can shift in the next period. I think the effort to deep-six right vs. left is a great idea. I can't stand either Leftists or Rightists---both are non-thing dogmatic ideologies (although changing over time). The idea of the economy as a garden is, of course, a new way to say that there is a role for the planner (the gardener) in making the economy work. It is nice to have a new name for this, and it correctly implies that an unrestrained free market economy must go to the weeds. This is very true. The idea also is in opposition to the mechanistic notions of intervention proposed in the past by the Left (five year plans, price controls, and the like). So I like very much the garden metaphor, which I heard first in a speech by Bill Clinton some years ago. A second important idea is that there is narrow self-interest and real self-interest. Real self-interest is considerably prosocial and altruistic. In my work I drop the word self-interest because it is confusing. If we are happier and healthier by giving to others, then giving is self-interested. But we don't feel calculating and selfish when we give, so the word is confusing. I use the terms self-regarding and other-regarding. A self-regarding motive is one that directly affects one's material well-being (what I earn, what I eat, how I enjoy my recreational time, etc.). Other-regarding motives look beyond myself to other people, the environment, issues of justice, fairness, and basic character virtues, such as honesty and loyalty. The authors' discussion of this is very nicely done. The weakness of this and other books of this genre is that it does not lead to clear policy conclusions. What does it say about financial reform, educational policy, income redistribution, and the other myriad policy choices that we face? Not much, I am afraid.

This is a great little book that explains what democratic government should be like today and serves

as a blueprint for progressive politics in the 21st century. Grounded on the emerging discipline of complex adaptive systems, it presents the prevailing conception of society, driven by values such as efficiency, predictiveness, independence, and competitiveness as machine-thinking, and the emerging, progressive one as garden-thinking, which, in contrast, favors effectiveness, adaptiveness, interdependence, and cooperation. In a garden everything is connected, there is no one in control, and yet to influence a good outcome the gardener needs to tend it properly, removing weeds, adding fertilizer, watering the plants, and by doing all these things the plants themselves work their wonder. Likewise, in a well run society, conditions are set in place to create wealth and mutually beneficial behavior. The conservative view of economics, particularly the libertarian one, takes a serious beating since, in the authors' view, it is based on the incorrect underlying belief that "Markets are always efficient. The market is always right and self-correcting". But actually what happens when leaving the market to itself is that inequality is introduced and because of network effects it becomes self-reinforcing. Liu and Hanauer counter that markets are effective only if they are well constructed, and like gardens, they must be tended, and among the main things that need attention is distribution of wealth, stating that recirculation of wealth is as important to an economy as recirculation of blood is to the economy. That does not mean, however, that they advocate for the kind of top-down, big government solutions that many liberals favor. Instead, they called for an approach they refer to as "big what, small how", in which government sets big goals, provides some incentives to accomplish them, and lets the people figure out how to work towards them. This is a fairly modest 165 page work by two Seattle based thought leaders. I would call it a pamphlet in a good sense, so it only goes so far. Among the limitations I see is that it is too US centric and assumes the US exists on its own. In a world where money can easily move across borders, it's not easy to implement a redistributive tax system like the one they advocate. Case in point France, where a recent increase in the top marginal rate to 75% has led to mass defection of millionaires to Russia and other countries. It also doesn't consider the disruptive impact digital technology is having and how it reinforces inequality even more. Also, its vision is too secular, it doesn't consider the role religion can play both for and against the vision they advocate. That being said, this book articulates quite well the change in paradigm of society from a machine to a clock, and parallels the move towards agile development and lean management in the fields of technology and business, where top-down control, predictiveness and optimization is let go in favor of bottom-up change, adaptability and agility. As a middle manager I found a lot of inspiration in seeing my role as that of a garden tender, removing obstacles and setting conditions for things to happen on their own and people to

grow and develop professionally while letting go of tight control and micromanagement, and I am sure that, if anything, it can help others see their relationship to others in a new light.

The book posits and elaborates two important meta-ideas: 1) trickle-down economics has been tried and failed. Instead, prosperity for all results from a 'middle-out' economy, i.e., from policies designed to prosper the middle class -- since they are a much-more-potent source of consumer spending than are the rich, and 2) traditional economics (and much public discourse) thinks of the economy as an efficient machine, when it is more appropriate and beneficial to view it instead as a garden. Many helpful corollaries flow from this distinction -- which, for the most part, are noted by the authors but not discussed substantively. So far, so good. But the book also has two serious limitations: 1) it has a naive view of how deep the pull toward selfishness (evil) is in the human heart (consider Solzhenitsyn, "... the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being"). Instead, the authors seemingly believe that a well-argued explanation of why selflessness works better for everyone in the long run will prove a sufficient antidote to human selfishness and 2) a view that the wisdom of selflessness instead of selfishness is effectively a newly-discovered truth based on a variety of recent scientific advances. In actual fact, the world's major religions have all taught the foundational wisdom of 'Love your neighbor' for millennia.

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