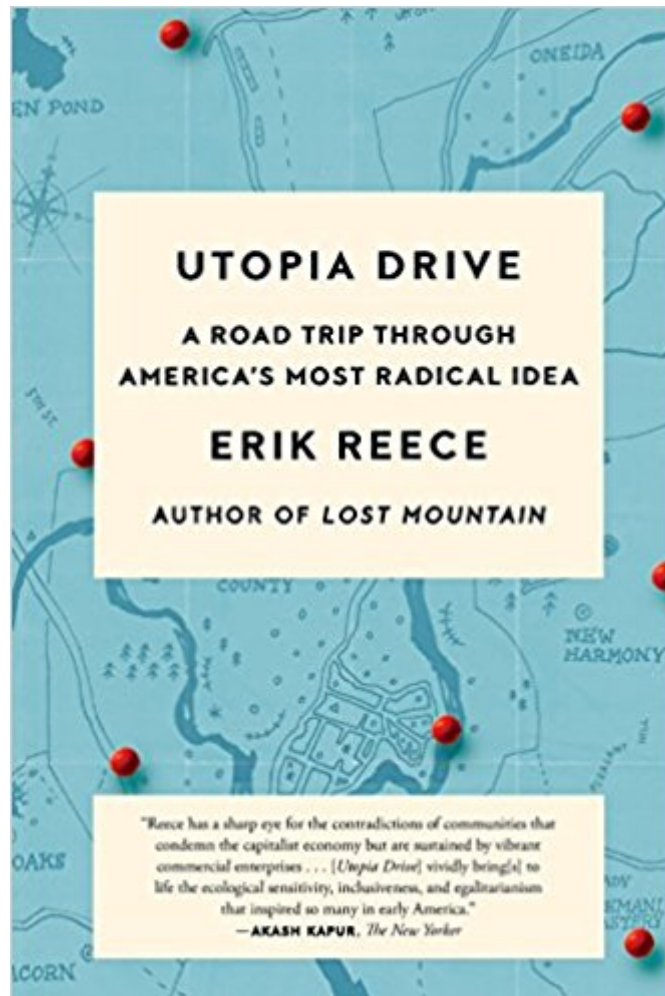




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Utopia Drive: A Road Trip Through America's Most Radical Idea



Synopsis

For Erik Reece, life, at last, was good: he was newly married, gainfully employed, living in a creekside cabin in his beloved Kentucky woods. It sounded, as he describes it, "like a country song with a happy ending." And yet he was still haunted by a sense that the world--or, more specifically, his country--could be better. He couldn't ignore his conviction that, in fact, the good ol' USA was in the midst of great social, environmental, and political crises--that for the first time in our history, we were being swept into a future that had no future. Where did we--here, in the land of Jeffersonian optimism and better tomorrows--go wrong? Rather than despair, Reece turned to those who had dared to imagine radically different futures for America. What followed was a giant road trip and research adventure through the sites of America's utopian communities, both historical and contemporary, known and unknown, successful and catastrophic. What he uncovered was not just a series of lost histories and broken visionaries but also a continuing and vital but hidden idealistic tradition in American intellectual history. *Utopia Drive* is an important and definitive reconstruction of that tradition. It is also, perhaps, a new framework to help us find a genuinely sustainable way forward." â | an engaging exploration -- and example -- of the fruitful tunnel-visions of dreamers turned doers." - Publishers Weekly

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"Recommended for readers interested in travel writing, environmentalism, and U.S. history."

---Library Journal --This text refers to the Audio CD edition.

Erik Reece is the author of *Lost Mountain: A Year in the Vanishing Wilderness*; *Radical Strip Mining and the Devastation of Appalachia*; and *An American Gospel: On Family, History, and the Kingdom of God*. He has also written for Harper's Magazine, The Nation, and Orion Magazine. He is currently the writer in residence at the University of Kentucky in Lexington, where he teaches environmental journalism, writing, and literature.

An interesting on the ground survey of Utopian communities past and present in the US. The author has a partisan view, at times disarmingly naive, of the various ideologies and "monetary systems" that drove the various communes, but in a certain way it adds to the interest in reading about the various Utopias. A more clinical and technical review of the ideologies would have been much less entertaining. In addition, the enthusiasm of the author helps understand why people would join these movements and why after a while they might leave them. The author's sympathy for the utopian ideologies does not prevent him from being critical of the at times small mindedness of the communes leadership.

Anyone interested in thinking about the problems and opportunities of democracy as a political system will find this book both entertaining and instructive. It is a well-written combination of both history and evaluation. Thinking about "the commons", non-growth based economic systems, and what intentional communities may teach us about the practical aspects of democracy is a good starting place, despite the inevitable problems of "scaling up" systems based on "small is beautiful".

Erik's every stop on this odyssey opened vistas into a unique utopian community essence. Reese gets you there!

We've all taken solitary walks to think through difficult questions, sometimes pausing to consult friends or mentors for advice. Utopia Drive is University of Kentucky writer-in-residence Erik Reece's version of that walk in search of the cure for America's income inequality, social strife and environmental degradation. Given Reece's style - a fan of burgers and baseball who, when offered a free drink, opts for a double martini - and the scope of his quest, his natural method of travel is a pickup truck outfitted with a boxful of CDs. Reece roams from New Harmony, Indiana to the Berkshire Mountains in Massachusetts to discover what the successes and failures of historic and current utopian communities can teach about how society can become more fair and

sustainable. Many scholarly books have been written about the Shakers, Robert Owen's New Harmony, the Oneida community and other utopian ventures, but this approach differs in that it is neither a strict economic case study nor a deep sociological analysis. Rather, it's an ongoing train of thought about democracy, human rights, stewardship of the earth and how religion and the nuclear family affect the success of communities. This book could have been drudgery, but the eccentricities and foibles of places he visits, such as the contemporary, highly disciplined Twin Oaks community in Virginia and its spinoff, the free-wheeling Acorn community, keep the narrative interesting. The Shakers, for example, were led by Mother Ann Lee, who settled the tension between family and community by banning sex, while the Oneida community, led by John Humphrey Noyes, attempted to resolve the same issue by encouraging sex among all members of the community. Along the way, Reece broadens the definition of utopian communities by including thinkers such as Henry David Thoreau, shadow-box artist Joseph Cornell and anarchist Josiah Warren, who attempted to substitute work credits for federal currency and, to a limited extent, made it work. If you are an anti-bank green pacifist, you'll find a lot to embrace in Reece's frequent diatribes about corporate greed, environmental destruction and the anti-egalitarian actions of the political system. If you're not, Reece will give you something to think about, whether you like it or not.

excellent history, well told. authors reflections are always interesting and often humorous. major drawback for book of this type: no index. how can that be in 2016?

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