



Reclaiming America: Nike, Clean Air, and the New National Activism

Randy Shaw

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Have activists taken the bumper-sticker adage "Think Globally, Act Locally" too literally? Randy Shaw argues that they have, with destructive consequences for America. Since the 1970s, activist participation in national struggles has steadily given way to a nearly exclusive focus on local issues. America's political and corporate elite has succeeded in controlling the national agenda, while their adversaries—the citizen activists and organizations who spent decades building federal programs to reflect the country's progressive ideals—increasingly bypass national fights. The result has been not only the dismantling of hard-won federal programs but also the sabotaging of local agendas and community institutions by decisions made in the national arena.

Shaw urges activists and their organizations to implement a "new national activism" by channeling energy from closely knit local groups into broader causes. Such activism enables locally oriented activists to shape America's future and work on national fights without traveling to Washington, D.C., but instead working in their own backyards. Focusing on the David and Goliath struggle between Nike and grassroots activists critical of the company's overseas labor practices, Shaw shows how national activism can rewrite the supposedly ironclad rules of the global economy by ensuring fair wages and decent living standards for workers at home and abroad. Similarly, the recent struggles for stronger clean air standards and new federal budget priorities demonstrate the potential grassroots national activism to overcome the corporate and moneyed interests that increasingly dictate America's future.

Reclaiming America's final section describes how community-based nonprofit organizations, the media, and the Internet are critical resources for building national activism. Shaw declares that community-based groups can and must combine their service work with national grassroots advocacy. He also describes how activists can use public relations to win attention in today's sprawling media environment, and he details the movement-building potential of e-mail. All these resources are essential for activists and their organizations to reclaim America's progressive ideals.



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