

Getting There

AN AMERICAN CULTURAL ODYSSEY

David A. Horowitz

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ride the line of balance and hold on by just a thread
– B. Springsteen

To my life partner Gloria, who knows that a fine
woman deserves a good yard man

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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PRELUDE

what do you do with the sands of time?

– D. W. Poythress/L. Satcher



WOODY ALLEN FAMOUSLY OBSERVED THAT 80 PERCENT OF success is showing up. Yet the real tale lies in getting there.

Getting There: An American Cultural Odyssey traces the personal, professional, and public ventures of a historian, teacher, journalist, musician, and activist over the past half-century. In describing a serendipitous attempt to fashion a creative, socially redemptive, and independent identity, the narrative intersects many of the significant political and cultural moments of a period characterized by extraordinary political and cultural ferment.

The action opens in New York City in 1959 with the abandonment of a middle-class Jewish home life and immersion in the work-study program of Ohio's progressive Antioch College. Several flashbacks provide glimpses of family history, childhood, and growing social awareness. After describing a productive period of study, work, and travel in the United States and abroad, the chronicle proceeds to the adoption of history as a chosen area of inquiry and the rigors and distractions of a graduate school apprenticeship in mid-1960s Minneapolis.

As the story approaches 1968 and a teaching career at Oregon's Portland State College (later University), *Getting There* details the attractions of counterculture values and antiwar radicalism. At the same time, a series of personal and academic influences interact with a faltering economy to arouse a renewed interest in the experience of what populists call "ordinary Americans." Succeeding chapters chronicle the publication of scholarly works placing the 1920s Ku Klux Klan, World War II noninterventionists, Cold War anti-communists, civil rights opponents, and latter-day culture warriors within an insurgent tradition defying "left and right." Meanwhile, a second vocation in journalism leads to explorations of topics rang-

ing from Watergate and the CIA to post-Vietnam stalemate, Middle East politics, and the allures of popular culture.

The populist slant of these endeavors encourages an iconoclastic style of teaching that avoids excessive jargon, incorporates an unconventional approach to cultural diversity, and insists upon the democratic traditions of humane learning. Outside the classroom, stints as a political activist, social critic, and organizer of public forums reinforce the maxim that a cultural historian's work is never done, as do performances as a café pianist and theatrical accompanist as well as efforts to commemorate the literary and artistic heritage of the Pacific Northwest.

Getting There depicts the challenge of blending academic, personal, and public pursuits into a coherent life strategy. It asks whether learning can embrace tools of reason and intellect with intuition, empathy, and a playful appreciation of creative expression and beauty. The narrative further explores prospects for combining rational inquiry with a passion for social justice. Can one play a role in the national conversation, it inquires, while evaluating the value of such contributions? Is it possible, in the end, to move past cynicism and defeatism, restate progressive values, engage succeeding generations, and play a part in healing society's wounds?

Each of the segments of *Getting There* stands as a self-contained unit with little reference to subsequent events. Characters normally take their place within the context of the narrative, not in terms of later accomplishments or misdeeds. Although relatively prominent individuals occasionally play a role in the story, most of the book's characters were not in the public eye. Respecting their privacy, the text often limits itself to their first names. In a few cases, alternate identities appear with quotation marks at first mention. The author sees no value in pillorying others for vulnerabilities he failed to detect when wisdom or foresight might have dictated otherwise.

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