

Introduction

Our cause is noble. It is the cause of mankind!

—GEORGE WASHINGTON

Since you've picked up this book, I'm sure you're interested in solar power. You may already know that America is facing an energy crisis that's as much about the economy as it is about the environment. And you may feel that solar power is a key part of the solution.

But you may wonder about pairing up solar power with patriotism. So, let's talk about that a little.

Why Solar Needs Patriotism

Some people see patriotism as an important part of the American past that they can connect with today. As

Abraham Lincoln said, “I like to see a man proud of the place in which he lives. I like to see a man live so that his place will be proud of him.”

But other people aren’t as comfortable with the idea of patriotism. Indeed, my experience is that many of my friends who are most excited about solar power tend to agree with English writer Dr. Samuel Johnson’s quip that, “Patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel.” Or they may agree with Mark Twain’s satirical definition, “Patriot: the person who can holler the loudest without knowing what he is hollering about.” These friends talk more about saving the earth or fighting climate change to help the world than they talk about solar as a way to make America *itself* stronger.

But it’s my premise that patriotism, a vigorous economy, a healthier planet, and the fight against climate chaos can go together for the benefit of us all.

In our country, patriotism is a powerful way to bring seemingly opposing issues together in a way that Americans with different political opinions can agree on today. One thing that I know we all agree about, whether we’re conservative or progressive or independent, is that we want to make America a better place.

We may disagree on how to move our country forward. But that’s part of what creates good ideas. This book will argue that solar power is one of the best ideas to

improve America that everybody can get behind, no matter who you voted for in the last election.

For me, patriotism is simply about working for what’s best for a person’s own country.

Patriotism doesn’t mean that you agree with the government on all things, whether war or peace. Patriotism also doesn’t mean that trying to help your country means you don’t care about people in other countries—or even other species that share the earth with humans. Patriotism just means that you want to start where you are and where you can make the most difference. “Think globally and act locally” as the bumper sticker says.

Across America and around the world, the most important group to most people outside of their family and local community is their country. Whatever our creed, color or career, it’s our country, after all, whose language we speak, whose money we carry in our pockets, and whose history informs the values by which we live. Throughout our history, many Americans have died for those same values. Wherever you went to school, you probably learned these values as a kid. Historians usually identify several key values that Americans all share and that we have attempted to live our lives by for the last couple centuries and more.

According to *America: The Pocket Guide*, a booklet for use in schools put out by the educational arm of Colonial

Williamsburg, the key American values established after the Revolution come in pairs:

- Law vs Ethics
- Unity vs Diversity
- Common Wealth vs Private Wealth
- Freedom vs Equality

Sometimes we have to choose between these values and pick one side or the other. For example, we will usually decide to follow the law, even if we don't agree with it or if we think that a particular law is unethical.

A rigid mindset reminiscent of monarchies and dictatorships may come down on one side or the other of these values. For example, many Communist governments of the former Soviet Bloc chose to promote common wealth at the expense of private wealth. So, they confiscated land and investments of better off citizens to put the resources into services intended to benefit everybody. Unfortunately, despite good intentions, this didn't work out well. Rigid government never does.

By contrast, in America, a democratic mindset will always try to balance out competing values, for example, finding a way to increase both common wealth and private wealth. This book will argue that solar power is one of the most promising ways to do that, by helping the whole American economy to enjoy clean energy independence

while making individual households more financially secure.

If you decide to become an advocate for rooftop solar power, as this book will invite you to do, then you'll join the effort to change laws affecting solar so that they match up more closely with ethical concerns. For example, it may be the law today in some states that electric utilities can charge solar homeowners extra fees every month just to stay connected to the electric grid. These fees can be so high that they discourage homeowners from getting solar panels installed at all. And that's not in the public interest. That's just crony capitalists—in this case, monopoly electric utilities—using their influence in government to protect their own industry against competition.

If you think this kind of discrimination is not fair, then I hope you'll join the movement to stand up for solar rights and get laws like this changed.

Lessons from the Past for A Solar Future

America has a long history of patriotic heroes whose stories have stood the test of time. Men and women of the past, especially those who fought in the American Revolution, were not perfect people. But they demonstrated vision and courage that can still inspire us even in the cynical age in which we live today.

In addition to looking at the challenges to rooftop solar now and talking about how to overcome those obstacles, this book will also tap into some of the most powerful stories from America's past to guide us as everyday solar advocates now.

I'm a history buff, and if you are too, then you'll get as much energy as I do by remembering how American patriots of the past triumphed against long odds. And if history wasn't your favorite subject in school, don't worry. This book will make stories from the American Revolution easy to follow. Not only will you get pumped up for solar power, but you'll also get a refresher on some basics of history that every American should know. I'm sure this will help you impress your friends and family. And knowing more about the founding of the country will also help you become a more confident citizen.

Most of all, this book will give you both the inspiration and the information you need to become an effective champion for solar power.

If you just want to help your friends and family follow your example and go solar themselves, you'll get advice on how to clearly explain the benefits that you get from solar in a way that they'll find compelling. Then, you'll get guidance on referring potential solar buyers to the installer who put up your solar system or another reputable solar installer.

If you want to help educate people and build support for rooftop solar, in this book you'll find a clear story about how solar can help America. You'll also find answers to the most common questions that people have about solar power along with a list of books that can help you learn more.

And if you're ready to take your work for solar to the next level, to support local, state, and federal laws that can help solar to spread, then you'll want to read the book's chapter on advocacy and lobbying. It's not as hard as you may think to influence public officials!

You may have ideas about lobbying already. For example, you may think that lobbying is a way that moneyed special interests bend government to support private profit. Or that lobbying only succeeds when done by high paid political operatives who wear Gucci loafers to work at plush offices on K Street in Washington, DC.

If this is your idea of lobbying, then you may be in for a surprise. Most of the people who visit elected officials are actually ordinary citizens representing their own concerns as volunteers. I know this from my own experience as a citizen who has lobbied for solar power in Washington, DC and in my state capital. I also know that citizen lobbying works from my other experience as an elected official, elected twice as a member of the city council of Staunton, Virginia, where I've lived for the last ten years.

Finally, I know that lobbying by ordinary citizens works because successful activists and experts who've studied government say that it's so. This book will quote some of those activists and experts to tell you how to do lobbying as a citizen most effectively.

Should you step up to the challenge to join your fellow Americans as a citizen lobbyist for solar power, this book will refer you to established groups that can help you get started. Or, if you prefer to do it yourself, you'll find tools to help you handle the whole process of advocacy and lobbying from crafting your simple pro-solar talking points to creating effective handouts to scheduling meetings with elected officials and following up with them afterwards.

Whatever level of commitment you're ready to make to helping spread solar in America, as a solar homeowner (or simply an apartment-dwelling solar friend), you're the exact right person at the exact right time to speak for solar today. With the environmental and economic challenges around energy that the world faces today, America needs you as a solar champion now more than ever.

You don't have to be an elected official yourself to help pass laws that promote solar power and repeal laws that block solar. Nor do you have to be a great leader in war, business, or sports to help make history in America today. Rooftop solar could make the difference for future generations. In this century, will America fall behind other nations that are going solar faster? Or will we continue to

lead the world on innovation and prosperity for decades or even centuries to come?

You don't have to be at the head of an army to help win victory in this historic cause. You just have to show up and speak up.

As Robert Kennedy said, "Few will have the greatness to bend history itself; but each of us can work to change a small portion of events, and in the total of all those acts will be written the history of this generation."



FROM THE REVOLUTION: “THE CAUSE OF MANKIND”

The quote from George Washington that opened this introduction comes from 1779, during the darkest days of the American Revolution. At that time, neither Washington nor anyone else could be sure that a set of backwoods colonies could throw off the greatest power on earth, the mighty British Empire, and establish a new kind of country, one dedicated to the value that everybody deserves a chance to succeed.

The American Revolution was partially a group of people looking out for their own interests, Americans who wanted to make their own decisions without interference from a king across the Atlantic. But the revolution was also something else, something bigger. It was a group of people trying to solve one of the world’s oldest and biggest problems, namely, how to create a country where people of all kinds would have the best chance to live as they themselves choose.

America’s cause did indeed turn out to be the cause of mankind. The vast majority of nations on earth today are not ruled by kings but instead by presidents and legislatures elected by their people. And those were all inspired by the work of the original American revolutionaries, from Washington and Jefferson to Adams and Hamilton.

Fast forward to the 21st century, and the world may not be perfectly democratic. But overall, the last two and a half centuries since the American Revolution have seen steady progress towards government by and for the people of every nation. At the same time, the nations of the world face a new problem. It’s a problem as daunting as the challenge faced by Washington and the other founders of the United States. That problem is how to run modern civilization without dirty energy. And the solution is solar power.

Believe it or not, the amount of solar energy that hits the Earth in one hour could supply all the world’s electricity needs for a whole year. Given that supplies of fossil fuels are limited and that using fossil fuels endangers our future, the cause of solar power is the cause of all mankind.

As the leading nation in the world, and its leading user of fossil fuels, if we can solve the problem of energy in America, then we can help the whole world to move forward to a clean energy future.

So, indeed, the cause of solar powering America is noble. It is also the cause of mankind everywhere.