



America Recycled Discussion Guide

Directors: Noah Hussin, Tim Hussin

Year: 2015

Time: 97 min

You might know this director from:

This is the first feature-length film from this directorial team.

FILM SUMMARY

Brothers Noah and Tim Hussin were provided with a life of comfort. Raised in a suburban setting in Florida where their needs were met and the stores supplied everything their hungry bellies desired, they arrived at the doorstep of adulthood feeling that there was something greater out there than store-bought conveniences and picket fences. Having gone their separate ways living abroad, they reconvened on home ground and agreed to hit the open road to figure out just what was left of the American Dream they had been raised to believe in.

Tim directed the camera at the passing sights as the brothers' bicycle tires tread southern roads, with Noah reflecting, "We aren't the first to do this. We're just chasing the great dream through our own eyes, riding the shoulders of those who paved the asphalt before us." Bicycling 5,000 miles across the Southern states over a period of two years may not be the most common event, but road-tripping across America sure is. And while their actions may not be entirely new, those they meet—the homesteaders, the squatters, the anarchists and artists, the dumpster divers and roadkill eaters—offer a picture of an alternative America that is not often highlighted by the mainstream.

While AMERICA RECYCLED travels across a variety of concepts—including food production, consumption, land development, community and family—it is through the people the brothers encounter that the overriding theme of self-discovery presents itself. The road invites them to tune in to their own inner workings and ideas of how a life is best lived, and challenges their conceptions of the world they grew up in. AMERICA RECYCLED is best summarized by one of the many contemporary Americans the brothers encounter stating, "What's more important than learning to be ourselves?"

FILM THEMES

5,000 miles and two years later, the Hussin brothers discover that the American Dream may not be what they've imagined, yet the pioneering spirit that built their vast nation is still alive and well.

REDEFINING THE AMERICAN DREAM

The pioneering spirit that the US was built upon promises of endless possibility, that with a little work anything could be yours. Yet many Americans find themselves living within a broken-down version of their former stellar nation, etching out a bare-bones existence with the scraps the fast-paced urban dream left behind. With the wholesomeness of small-town America a fading memory, many Americans are breaking from the latest norms and returning to more simple lives, often the countryside. As one man states, "Living rurally does make it easier to slow down and listen to what's going on."

COMMUNITY VS. AUTONOMY

"To realize you're alive is to live with the people around you as opposed to ignoring them," stated a man in New Orleans. Such a simple thought yet not the status quo across much of the U.S., where advancements and inventions have enabled communities to increasingly parse off into separate individuals. While technology may promise near-perfect autonomy, the deeply nurturing aspects of strong community belonging have been overlooked. Many people the Hussin brothers meet are turning to communities, by separating from the mechanical and creating bonds out of the like-minded, and building a chosen family. No matter how much we may yearn for the efficiency of the mechanical, the spirit cries out for human connection.

THE OPEN ROAD

Writers, artists, philosophers, students, and countless others have hit the road at crucial turning points in their lives. As Noah reflects, "The road is the promise that we can climb out of our comfort zone, sever our umbilical cord, and give birth to ourselves." A stretch of pavement offers a rare glimpse of the infinite possibilities, the choices awaiting, the unknown teasing the horizon. Addictive in its pull, the road also transforms the traveler through its indifference, offering "no congratulations, no answers." The road is a place to turn inwards.

THE BEAUTY OF WASTE

In a land where anything can be bought anywhere at any time, waste is a natural and immense byproduct. Things are half-consumed, tossed away, with new things speedily being sucked into the system. In a wildly consumerist society, the cycle of life sings in meek tones, heard only by those who pull themselves away from the promise of the new and reflect upon the possible options in what has been left behind. The communities the Hussin brothers encountered, representing a growing force in the U.S., believe in embracing the natural life cycle, where food can be traced to its source; systems are based on people over profits; and recycling, reusing, and repurposing the old makes for a living, breathing, sustainable America.

"The United States was born on the road."

Noah Hussin

"If we want greater society to change, we need to figure out how to work on ourselves."

MaxZine from Tennessee

"This is my family. They don't have to be my blood."

Tyra from Terlingua, Texas

FURTHER DISCUSSIONS:

1. How would you describe the film's main message? What was the primary lesson the brothers learned from their travels?
2. Discuss your thoughts on dumpster diving and eating roadkill. Have you ever done either? Are you a second-hand shopper, or do you prefer buying and owning primarily new items?
3. Reflect upon the food you have eaten today. What percentage of it comes from a local source (grown, made, produced) that you can identify? Do you feel we are too reliant on factory production for our sustenance?
4. What aspects of homesteading—if any—appeal to you? What could you gain from living off the land around you? Do you think you would have the energy/interest/willpower to sustain yourself for one year in a homesteading community?
5. Are you happier in the city or countryside? Do you feel people can reach a "natural" state of happiness living in an urban setting, or are we designed to live out in nature? With all the industrial and technological advancements of our time, are we altering our internal mechanics as well?
6. Have you ever taken to the open road in the form of a long road trip or period of extensive travel? If so, discuss that experience and any memorable lessons you learned or experiences you had. If not, do you feel you would benefit from hitting the road, or are you just fine where you are?
7. Are there any ways in which you feel trapped by your current existence? If so, would getting closer to the things you need to survive help you feel less trapped?
8. What experience do you have of contemporary society and culture? Do you think the "good old days" are behind us? Or are you optimistic about our current times?
9. Was bicycling the best means of transportation for the brothers' journey? How did the way in which they moved around impact upon their experiences? Would it have been a different expedition if they had walked/driven/taken a train/flown?
10. Discuss the notion of community. What constitutes your community? Do you believe that you can "choose your own family"? And are those bonds as strong, or stronger, than blood? Are we as humans still as dependent on one another as we were 100 years ago, despite technological advancements?

NOTES:

FILM FACTS:

- AMERICA RECYCLED premiered at the American Documentary Film Festival in Palm Springs, California, in 2015, where it won the Best American Feature Documentary.
- When they began contemplating their cross-country journey, the Hussin brothers figured bicycling would be the means of transport most in tune with their ideals. Rather than purchasing bikes, they made them at the reCyclery in Asheville, North Carolina, where cycling enthusiasts repair and create bicycles and donate them to the public.
- Tim and Noah Hussin raised just over \$3,000 on Kickstarter when they first set out on their journey across the American South in 2010. Just prior to their filming, Tim had been in Potosi, Bolivia, working on a shoot for “National Geographic,” while Noah had been living in Berlin, Germany, where he had been studying as a Fulbright scholar. After the film, both settled in Oakland, California.
- Roadkill was standard fare along the brothers’ travels, and they feasted on bear, deer, rabbit, bird, squirrel, and coyote. When in Texas, they made a stew out of coyote and served it at a potluck dinner on Christmas Eve, where they became known as the Coyote Brothers.
- The term “the American dream” was first used by American historian James Truslow Adams in his 1931 book “The Epic of America.”
- Terlingua, Texas, was a bustling town of 2,000 in the early 1900s, with four mining companies extracting mercury to be used in weapon-making. As of 2010, the population stood at 58.
- According to a 2014 U.N. report, around 30% of all food produced globally is wasted on an annual basis, which translates to every 1 in 4 calories being created never getting consumed. In addition, industrialized countries waste 222 million tons of food per year, nearly as much as sub-Saharan Africa produces, and in the U.S. 40 percent of the food supply is tossed away, around 20 pounds of food per person per month.
- The Hussin brothers began their travels in Asheville, North Carolina. Hit hard by the Great Depression of the 1930s, Asheville was in a state of decline into the 1980s. Recently the town has received numerous accolades, including being coined “Most Romantic Place in USA and Canada,” “The hippie capital of the South,” and one of the “10 Most Beautiful Places in America.”
- According to the U.S. Census, the American South refers to 16 states: Florida, Georgia, Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, West Virginia, Delaware, Alabama, Kentucky, Mississippi, Tennessee, Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, and Texas. The Hussin brothers were born and raised in Florida.
- The average long-distance bicyclist can ride around 60 miles (100km) per day.

WAYS TO INFLUENCE

1. **Share** this film. Give others the chance to learn from its story.
2. **Volunteer** at community bike shop in your town or city. One great example is [The reCyclery](#), “an educational bike shop” in Asheville, North Carolina, that encourages people to learn the trade of bike repair while promoting sustainability along the way.
3. **Make** sustainable choices at home. Were you inspired by the intentional communities and off-grid living featured in the film? [Fellowship for Intentional Community](#) and [Off-grid](#) are both great places to learn more about living life with sustainability in mind.
4. **Stop** food waste. Around \$165 billion in food is thrown away annually in the U.S. alone. Expert dumpster diver Rob Greenfield offers his tips at robgreenfield.tv/dumpsterdiving/

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They are controversial, divisive, fascinating, unexpected, and surprising. They can be thrillers, dramas, comedies, romance, tear-jerkers, and horror films.

Documentaries provide the perfect topic for meaningful conversations. If you want to talk about the things that matter with people that matter then pick a film, invite your friends, and watch & discuss together. It's as easy as that.

Influence Film Club – We are the conversation after the film.