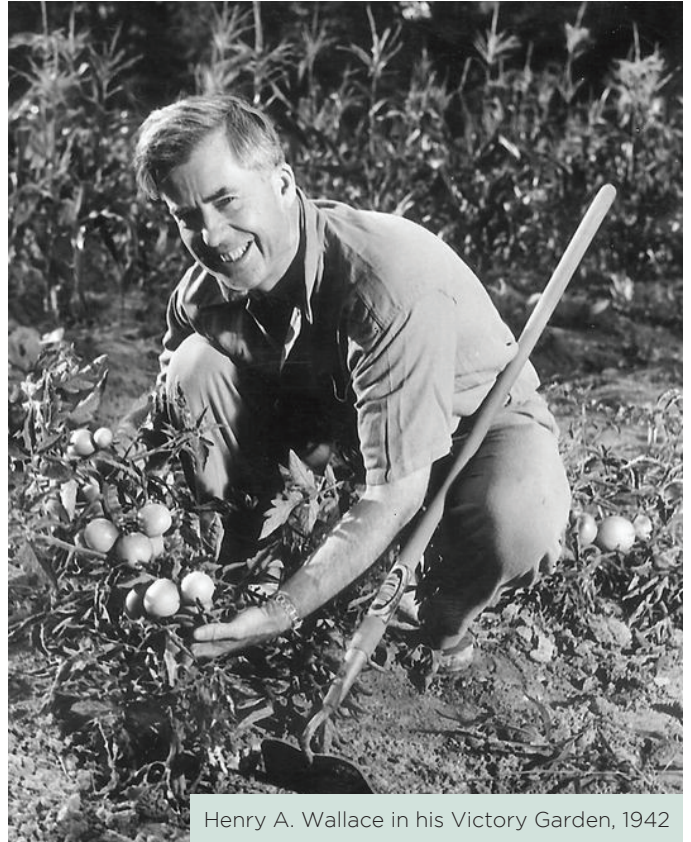


# AMERICAN DREAMER STUDY GUIDE

**Henry A. Wallace** is an important and enduring figure in the history of Iowa and America because of his contributions to the fields of agriculture and politics. After viewing “American Dreamer” and accompanying commentary from expert historians, this study guide is meant to supplement and enhance understanding of this singular man in the story of America.

In addition to the video of “American Dreamer”, we suggest the following supplemental reading:

**American Dreamer: The Life and Times of Henry A. Wallace**  
by John C. Culver and John Hyde.  
Norton, 2000.



Henry A. Wallace in his Victory Garden, 1942

**Q1. In the performance of “American Dreamer,” great focus is put on pivotal moments in Henry A. Wallace’s childhood. What were some of these important moments in young Henry’s life?**

**Q2. Growing up as a very young child on a secluded farm, and then moving to Ames and Iowa State College, who in Henry’s life fostered an early love of and interest in plants?**

In the book *American Dreamer*, Culver and Hyde wrote the following about the corn shows of the early 20th century led by Perry G. Holden that a teenage Henry A. Wallace attended:

*“Holden gave the boy several ears of corn on display and told him to use them for seed. The truth would reveal itself; the finest-looking corn would produce the biggest yield and the worst-looking corn the smallest. Young Henry accepted the challenge on the spot....He had ruined the Corn Professor. His experiment demonstrated beyond question that corn shows and show-ring standards and grand-champion corn auctions were a ridiculous waste of time and money. It was right there in the figures...Some of the best-yielding ears were those Holden had judged to be the poorest. And the ear that Holden had singled out as the most beautiful of all was one of the ten worst in the yield” (28-29).*

**Q3. What does the example of the teenage Henry’s excitement and fearlessness when it came to disproving the Corn Professor and getting to the truth of the matter about corn yield tell us about the kind of man that Henry was?**



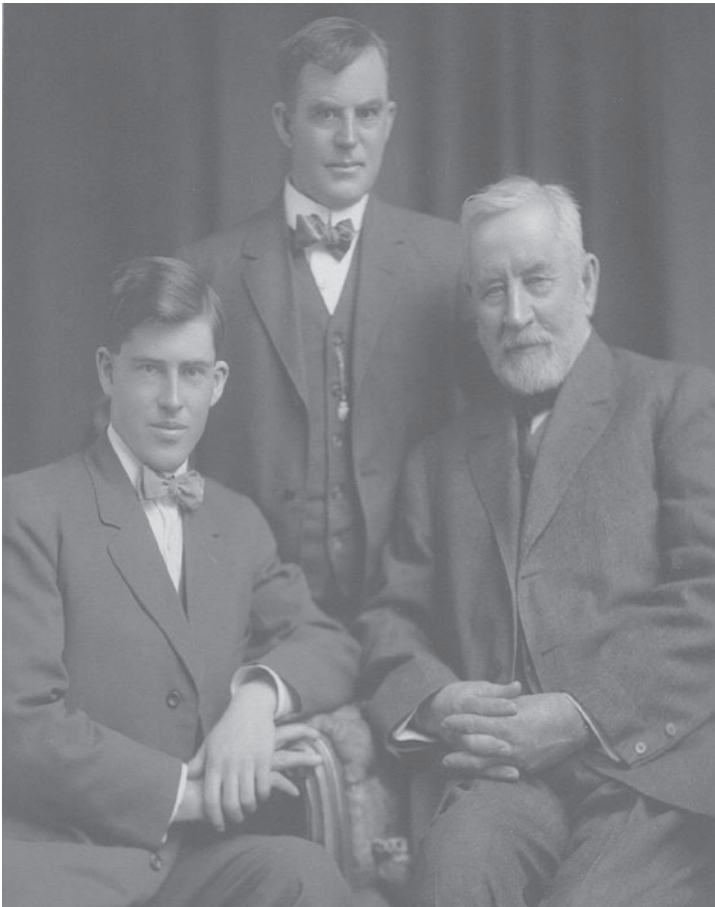
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# AMERICAN DREAMER STUDY GUIDE: page 2



Henry A. Wallace (l) with father Henry C. Wallace and grandfather Henry Wallace, 1914

**Q4. Coming from a family of agricultural journalists and being the son of a U.S. Secretary of Agriculture, does it seem like Henry A. was a natural choice for a career in politics, or was it a role that he seemed to fill with some hesitation?**

In the book *American Dreamer*, Culver and Hyde wrote the following about Henry A.'s entry into the unfamiliar world of Washington politics:

*"Wallace's vast knowledge of his field and his intense sense of mission were certain to make him an unusual figure in Washington. Here was a man unswayed by avarice or personal ambition. Here was a man not given to compromise and niceties. It could be a little scary, really. Said one of his friends, 'Henry would cut off his right hand for the sake of an idea - and yours too for that matter'" (110).*

**Q5. How do you think his background helped him in Washington, and how did his background potentially hinder him?**

In the book *American Dreamer*, Culver and Hyde wrote the following about Henry A.'s first steps as Secretary of Agriculture, the Agricultural Adjustment Act:

*"Within days of taking office, Wallace and his aides had crafted a bill that was to effect the most dramatic change ever made in agricultural policy. President Roosevelt praised it as the most far-reaching bill ever proposed in peacetime....The law gave Wallace powers broader in scope than any cabinet officer had ever enjoyed, and he used them to put an imprint on agricultural policy that would endure for more than half a century" (119).*

**Q6-7. What were the main goals of Wallace's agricultural policy, and was he successful in meeting his objectives? Do you think that Wallace paid more attention to the needs of farmers in the wake of the Depression than previous leadership at the USDA, and if so, why?**

**Q8-9. What ways, if any, have Wallace's policy choices during his tenure as Secretary of Agriculture had lasting effects that are still seen today? What kinds of revolutionary changes did he implement?**



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# AMERICAN DREAMER STUDY GUIDE: page 3

In 1940, Wallace's name was circulated as a potential Vice Presidential nominee. In the performance *American Dreamer*, Wallace reflected on the criticisms that people had of him, including journalist Walter Lippmann's complaint that Wallace didn't know "the shape of the real world."

**Q10. Why do you think Wallace drew so much criticism, particularly from people who were well established in Washington politics?**

In the book *American Dreamer*, Culver and Hyde wrote the following on Henry A. Wallace's new role as Vice President:

*"Only six months after taking office, Wallace had become the most powerful vice president in the nation's history. No vice president had ever wielded such administrative authority, much less a policy voice of consequence" (261).*

**Q11-12. What specific roles did FDR entrust Wallace to take on as Vice President? Why do you think FDR was willing to give his vice president unprecedented powers within government and the freedom to share his political beliefs so clearly?**



A banner welcomes VP-elect Wallace to the Mexican presidential inauguration, 1940

**Q13. In 1944 Wallace was replaced as the vice presidential nominee at the Democratic National Convention. Did Wallace consider this process to be fair and democratic, or did he believe there were other factors at play?**

**Q14. Why would powerful leaders in the Democratic Party want Wallace off the ticket?**



Delivering speech at the Democratic Convention, 1944



Chatting with reporters prior to the convention, 1944



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# AMERICAN DREAMER STUDY GUIDE: page 4

Q15-16. How would you characterize Wallace's 1948 campaign as the Progressive Party candidate for president? What set this campaign apart from other campaigns?

Q17. Despite the campaign's presidential loss, do you see any connections between what Wallace campaigned for and presidential campaigns today?



Speaking to a crowd during 1948 presidential campaign



Caring for his flock at Farvue Farm, 1962

Q18. If you were going to describe Henry A. Wallace to someone who was unfamiliar with him in just a few sentences, what would you tell them and why?

Q19. Thinking back on Henry A. Wallace's life, do you think the moniker "American Dreamer" is an appropriate name for him?

## SPECIAL THANKS TO:

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# HENRY A. WALLACE TIMELINE

- 1888 Born near Orient in Adair County, Iowa.
- 1894 Became friends with George Washington Carver, a student at Iowa State College.
- 1905 Attended a short course on corn at Iowa State. Began to test the theory that aesthetics has nothing to do with yield in corn.
- 1906 Enrolled at Iowa State College in Ames, Iowa.
- 1910 Graduated from Iowa State with a degree in agriculture. Joined Wallaces' Farmer as a full-time writer and editor.
- 1912 Toured the East Coast, visiting the USDA and then traveled to Europe.
- 1914 Married Ilo Browne. Established a corn and dairy farm near Johnston, Iowa. Continued to experiment with the development of a hybrid corn seed.
- 1917 Developed a formula for establishing a corn-hog ratio to determine profitability.
- 1919 Developed one of the first hybrid seed corn varieties.
- 1920 Established Iowa Corn Yield Test. Published book, Agricultural Prices.
- 1921 Became editor in chief of Wallaces' Farmer when father Henry C. Wallace became U.S. Secretary of Agriculture.
- 1923 Signed the first commercial contract for hybrid seed corn, "Copper Cross", with George Kurtzweil of Altoona, Iowa.
- 1926 Formed the Hi-Bred Corn Company.
- 1933 Appointed U.S. Secretary of Agriculture by Franklin D. Roosevelt. Agricultural Adjustment Act passed. Federal Surplus Relief Corporation was established. Farm Credit Administration was established.
- 1934 Federal Farm Mortgage Act passed. Rural rehabilitation program initiated by the Federal Emergency Relief Administration.
- 1935 Federal assistance for school lunch programs provided. Soil Conservation Service (SCS) established. Name of the Hi-Bred Corn Company changed to Pioneer Hi-Bred.
- 1936 Supreme Court invalidated the first Agricultural Adjustment Act. Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act approved. Rural Electrification Act passed. President Roosevelt established committees on farm tenancy and crop insurance.
- 1938 The Second Agricultural Adjustment Act passed. Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act passed.
- 1941-44 Served as FDR's Vice President during World War II.
- 1945-46 Served as U.S. Secretary of Commerce for Roosevelt and President Harry S. Truman.
- 1948 Ran for the presidency on the Progressive Party ticket. Retired to farm in New York state. Continued work on the breeding of corn, chickens, and strawberries.
- 1965 Died of ALS (amyotrophic lateral sclerosis) on November 18, 1965, in Danbury, Connecticut.