

Ralph Nader

Ralph Nader has been called one of America's most effective social critics. He also has been called everything from Muckraker to Consumer Crusader to Public Defender. His documented criticism of government and industry has had widespread effect on public awareness and bureaucratic power. He is the "U.S.'s toughest customer" as Time magazine noted. His inspiration and example have galvanized a whole population of consumer advocates, citizen activists, and public interest lawyers who in turn have established their own organizations throughout the country.

A graduate of Princeton and Harvard Law School, the crusading attorney first made headlines in 1965 with his book *Unsafe at Any Speed*, a scathing indictment that lambasted the auto industry for producing unsafe vehicles. The book led to congressional hearings and a series of automobile safety laws passed in 1966.

Since 1966, Nader has been responsible for: at least eight major federal consumer protection laws such as the motor vehicle safety laws, Safe Drinking Water Act; the launching of federal regulatory agencies such as the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), Environment Protection Agency (EPA), and Consumer Product Safety Administration; the recall of millions of defective motor vehicles; access to government through the Freedom of Information Act of 1974; and for many lives saved.

Nader has built an effective national network of citizen groups that have had a major impact in areas ranging from tax reform to nuclear energy to health and safety programs. The ultimate goal of this movement is to give all citizens more rights and remedies for resolving their grievances and for achieving a better society. As the New York Times said, "What sets Nader apart is that he has moved beyond social criticism to effective political action."

Nader's original research organization is the Washington, D.C.-based Center for Study of Responsive Law. Since 1969, the Center has produced innumerable reports on wide-ranging subjects such as the Interstate Commerce Commission, food safety, pensions, corporate welfare, and government procurement.

Other Nader inspired groups include the Aviation Consumer Action Project, Center for Auto Safety, Clean Water Action Project, Disability Rights Center, Pension Rights Center, Freedom of Information Clearinghouse, and the Congressional Accountability Project.

Nader also helped establish the PIRGs-- Public Interest Research Groups-- the student-funded and controlled organizations which function on college campuses in 23 states. Their impact alone has been tremendous. The groups have published hundreds of ground-breaking reports and guides, lobbied for laws in their state legislatures, and called the media's attention to environmental and energy problems.

The largest of the Nader organizations is Public Citizen, founded in 1971. The groups under the Public Citizen umbrella include Congress Watch, Health Research Group, Critical Mass Energy Project, Global Trade Watch, and the Litigation Group. Public Citizen's nationwide membership has grown to 150,000. The newest of Nader's organizations are Citizen Works and Democracy Rising, both formed in 2001 to recruit and train new activists and increase citizen participation.

In 2000, Nader and his vice-presidential running mate, Winona LaDuke ran on the Green Party ticket and won 2.7% of the national vote, the largest percentage of votes for a progressive ticket since 1924. Nader defied U.S. third-party history by being the first minor party candidate to have support increase rather than wane as the general election approached. Nader announced his candidacy in February 2000 and got on the ballot in 43 states and the District of Columbia; His campaign raised over 8 million dollars, brought ten lawsuits to remove third-party barriers to political participation, started 450 local Green chapters, organized 900 chapters for Nader/LaDuke on campuses, and increased voter turnout in the election. It was, in the words of veteran Washington Post reporter David Broder, "the best campaign." After the election, the Green Party emerged as the fastest growing party in the United States; students from the campaign were instrumental in starting The Campus Greens. Nader's account of the election is set forth in his newest book, *Crashing the Party, Taking on the Corporate Government in an Age of Surrender*.

Today Nader lectures on the growing "imperialism" of multinational corporations and of a dangerous convergence of corporate and government power. With the passage of autocratic trade treaties like the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), this merger of corporate and government interests is escalating. A magazine founded by Nader in 1980, the *Multinational Monitor*, tracks the global intrusion of multinational corporations and their impact on developing nations, labor, and the environment.

Nader's overriding concern and vision is presently focused on empowering citizens to create a responsive government sensitive to citizens' needs. Nader's impact on the American political spectrum is enduring. As former U.S. Senator James Abourezk observed, "For the first time in U.S. history, a movement exists whose sole purpose is to keep large corporations and the government honest."