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American Mythos: Why Our Best Efforts to Be a Better Nation Fall Short

Robert Wuthnow

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AMERICAN MYTHOS

WHY OUR BEST EFFORTS TO BE
A BETTER NATION FALL SHORT



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Robert Wuthnow : American Mythos: Why Our Best Efforts to Be a Better Nation Fall Short before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised American Mythos: Why Our Best Efforts to Be a Better Nation Fall Short:

0 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Stimulating; highly recommendedBy Richard greenbaumI'd recommend this book to serious students of American society and its likely future. Some of it is rather disturbing.1 of

5 people found the following review helpful. Important BookBy David MontgomerieThis is a very important read for those interested in American culture, American myth, and the construction of American identity. Wuthnow's use of immigrants is so key, because so much of the American mythos is invisible to Americans that simply blindly consume it, having less "formally" learned it.0 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Good points and strong argumentsBy BrittanyI strongly disliked this book.Possibly for the reason of reading for a class.It was long, repetitive, and I didn't like the writing style of Wuthnow.The points are strong and interesting, but the book is boring.

America was built on stories: tales of grateful immigrants arriving at Ellis Island, Horatio Alger-style transformations, self-made men, and the Protestant work ethic. In this new book, renowned sociologist Robert Wuthnow examines these most American of stories--narratives about individualism, immigration, success, religion, and ethnicity--through the eyes of recent immigrants. In doing so, he demonstrates how the "American mythos" has both legitimized American society and prevented it from fully realizing its ideals. This magisterial work is a reflection and meditation on the national consciousness. It details how Americans have traditionally relied on narratives to address what it means to be strong, morally responsible individuals and to explain why some people are more successful than others--in short, to help us make sense of our lives. But it argues that these narratives have done little to help us confront new challenges. We pass laws to end racial discrimination, yet lack the resolve to create a more equitable society. We welcome the idea of pluralism in religion and values, yet we are shaken by the difficulties immigration presents. We champion prosperity for all, but live in a country where families are still homeless. American Mythos aptly documents this disconnect between the stories we tell and the reality we face. Examining how cultural narratives may not, and often do not, reflect the reality of today's society, it challenges readers to become more reflective about what it means to live up to the American ideal.

"In American Mythos, Wuthnow provides an important reminder that amid the din of the culture wars, our storytelling matters; and that America is a story best told from the bottom up."--Robert K. Vischer, *Commonweal*"Stimulating and . . . disturbing because it challenges the reader to confront some unsettling truths about who we are, what we believe, and what we must do if we are truly to become a great nation. . . . Wuthnow concludes with a call for Americans to engage in reflective democracy, thinking deeply about our values, and how we might better live by them. Highly recommended."--Thomas J. Baldino, *Library Journal*"I cannot sufficiently praise and recommend American Mythos. In its supple mining of data and its perspicacity about American culture and institutions, it ranks with Robert Bellah's *Habits of the Heart* and Robert Putnam's *Bowling Alone* as ground-breaking interpretive social science."--John A. Coleman, *America*"Robert Wuthnow carefully examines the narratives that have been instrumental in constructing the cultural identity of the United States....[He] presents a study of the cultural dynamics of American culture that could serve as a model for the studies of other cultures."--Donald J. Dietrich, *European Legacy*"This book contains keen reflections that make it well worth reading. Wuthnow gives a compelling account of the transformation of American society from an era of conformity in the 1950s to an era of good feelings today... American Mythos is a significant contribution, especially to the current debate over immigration."--David Fott, *Perspectives on Politics*"American Mythos provides a very thoughtful and insightful analysis of contemporary American national identity. Wuthnow shows a keen sensitivity . . . that allows him to get to the core of what it means to become American. The lessons learned are enormously illuminating."--Manuel A. Vsquez, *Theology Today* The power of America's deep unspoken culture, tied as it is to our dominant institutions, has never been analyzed more profoundly than in Robert Wuthnow's stunning new book *American Mythos*. Taking a sample of highly successful recent immigrants as his database, he illustrates just how quickly these taken-for-granted assumptions are absorbed. Even more important, he shows us how what at one level seems to be a remarkable success story turns out at another level to be the source of deep and unresolved issues that call that success into question. This book should have a wide readership among scholars and laypeople, and indeed anyone concerned with the future of our deeply troubled society. (Robert N. Bellah, coauthor, *"Habits of the Heart"*)From the Inside Flap"The power of America's deep unspoken culture, tied as it is to our dominant institutions, has never been analyzed more profoundly than in Robert Wuthnow's stunning new book *American Mythos*. Taking a sample of highly successful recent immigrants as his database, he illustrates just how quickly these taken-for-granted assumptions are absorbed. Even more important, he shows us how what at one level seems to be a remarkable success story turns out at another level to be the source of deep and unresolved issues that call that success into question. This book should have a wide readership among scholars and laypeople, and indeed anyone concerned with the future of our deeply troubled society."--Robert N. Bellah, coauthor, *Habits of the Heart*"This is a truly great book. It makes use of Wuthnow's encyclopedic knowledge to point us to the true culprits in our inability to achieve our societal aspirations."--John H. Evans, University of California, San Diego"Thoughtful, lucid and accessibly written. Robert Wuthnow has been one of the sanest, most insightful, and most balanced observers of the American scene in the past two decades, and this book is a perfect example. His approach to culture and society is both respectful and critical, always seeking to transcend passing partisan alignments and to reinforce standards of fundamental civility--the enabling virtue without which sound criticism is unlikely to be heard."--Wilfred

McClay, University of Tennessee, Chattanooga. "Robert Wuthnow is one of the most prolific and thoughtful observers of contemporary American society. In this latest book he raises his sights to encompass much of our history and our culture. What he has to say, especially about the importance of narratives and cultural myths, and about immigrants and religion and ethnicity, merits the attention of all of us who would like America to be a better nation."--Robert Putnam, Harvard University, author of *Bowling Alone*