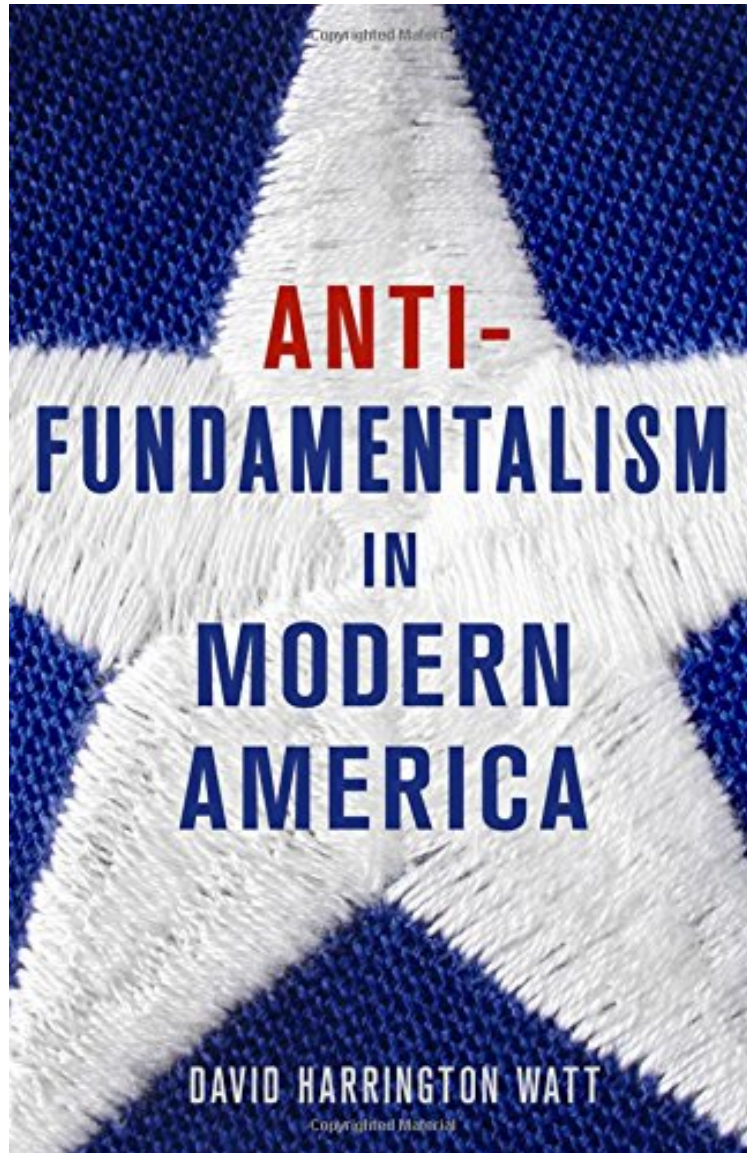


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Antifundamentalism in Modern America

David Harrington Watt

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reading for students and scholars of American religious history.

David Harrington Watt's *Antifundamentalism in Modern America* gives us a pathbreaking account of the role that the fear of fundamentalism has played and continues to play in American culture. Fundamentalism has never been a neutral category of analysis, and Watt scrutinizes the various political purposes that the concept has been made to serve. In 1920, the conservative Baptist writer Curtis Lee Laws coined the word "fundamentalists." Watt examines the antifundamentalist polemics of Harry Emerson Fosdick, Talcott Parsons, Stanley Kramer, and Richard Hofstadter, which convinced many Americans that religious fundamentalists were almost by definition backward, intolerant, and anti-intellectual and that fundamentalism was a dangerous form of religion that had no legitimate place in the modern world. For almost fifty years, the concept of fundamentalism was linked almost exclusively to Protestant Christians. The overthrow of the Shah of Iran and the establishment of an Islamic republic led to a more elastic understanding of the nature of fundamentalism. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Americans became accustomed to using fundamentalism as a way of talking about Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Sikhs, and Buddhists, as well as Christians. Many Americans came to see Protestant fundamentalism as an expression of a larger phenomenon that was wreaking havoc all over the world. *Antifundamentalism in Modern America* is the first book to provide an overview of the way that the fear of fundamentalism has shaped U.S. culture, and it will lead readers to rethink their understanding of what fundamentalism is and what it does.

"*Antifundamentalism in Modern America* is an important book. David Harrington Watt shows that the term 'fundamentalism' has been used far more to critique and control than to analyze. He argues that its application to several varieties of conservative Protestants, Muslims, and others suffers grievously from lack of first-hand knowledge of the groups described, judgment masked by purportedly neutral language, and a blithe disregard for historical understanding." Mark A. Noll, Francis A. McAnaney Professor of History, University of Notre Dame, author of *Protestantism: A Very Short Introduction* "A work of both intellect and emotion, *Antifundamentalism in Modern America* transcends traditional scholarship. It is a timely and provocative book that deserves wide readership. David Harrington Watt questions taken-for-granted assumptions about fundamentalism, probing to understand the meaning, uses, and political work that surround this familiar term. His intention is not just to retrieve fundamentalism's original meaning, but also to explore how and why it came to characterize so much more than its initial denotation of a specific strand of American Protestantism. Watt stakes out the word's journey through academia, sermons, newspapers, and popular culture, explaining its early and ongoing attraction for secular and religious polemicists. He also shows why from the 1970s on, 'fundamentalist' became a convenient label for religious others who roiled the burgeoning secular and capitalist global world order." Diane Winston, University of Southern California, author of *Red-Hot and Righteous: The Urban Religion of the Salvation Army* "*Antifundamentalism in Modern America* is an excellent work of twentieth-century American intellectual history. In playing the role of the skeptic with panache, David Harrington Watt offers a remarkably incisive critique of fundamentalism as a malign discourse. He effectively highlights the intellectual vagrancy with which 'fundamentalism' has been deployed since the category was first used to describe conservative American Protestants in the 1920s. Watt develops his critique out of a deep historical familiarity with the Protestant polemics that shaped the initial dichotomy between fundamentalists and modernists, and he writes with an appealingly terse edge that keeps the stakes of his project in consistently crisp focus. Both the bluntness and the wry humor of his style are compelling." Leigh Eric Schmidt, Edward C. Mallinckrodt Distinguished University Professor in the Humanities, Washington University in St. Louis, author of *Village Atheists: How America's Unbelievers Made Their Way in a Godly Nation* "David Harrington Watt's expertly researched and refreshingly straightforward book is an essential contribution both to public and policy debates about religion in the twenty-first century and to the study of the history of comparative religion." Courtney Bender, author of *The New Metaphysicals* About the Author David Harrington Watt is Professor of History at Temple University. He is the author of *Bible-Carrying Christians: Conservative Protestants and Social Power* and *A Transforming Faith: Explorations of Twentieth-Century American Evangelicalism* and coeditor of *Fundamentalism: Perspectives on a Contested History*.