



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

Robert Wuthnow

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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.

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