

America's Blessings: How Religion Benefits Everyone, Including Atheists - Rodney Stark

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A few years ago, a debate between atheists and religious believers spilled out from the halls of academia and the pews of America's churches and into the public spotlight. A crop of atheist manifestos led the charge, surmounting and holding the tops of the nonfiction bestseller lists. This offensive brought on an outpouring of religious rebuttals. As both sides exchanged spirited volleys, accusations were leveled; myths, stereotypes, and strawmen arguments were perpetuated; and bitter hostility filled the air. Today many of these misconceptions and myths linger on, along with the generally acrimonious spirit of the debate. In *America's Blessings*, distinguished researcher Rodney Stark seeks to clear the air of this hostility and debunk many of the debates most widely perpetuated misconceptions by drawing from an expansive pool of sociological findings. Looking at the measurable effects of religious faith and practice on American society, Stark rises above the fray and focuses exclusively on facts. His findings may surprise many, atheists and believers alike. Starting with a historical overview, Stark traces America's religious roots from the founding of the country up through the present day, showing that religiosity in America has never been consistent, static, or monolithic. Interestingly, he finds that religious practice is now more prevalent than ever in America, despite any claims to the contrary. From here, Stark devotes whole chapters to unpacking the latest research on how religion affects different facets of modern American life, including crime, family life, sexuality, mental and physical health, sophistication, charity, and overall prosperity. The cumulative effect is that when translated into comparisons with western European nations, the United States comes out on top again and again. Thanks in no small part to America's rich religious culture, the nation has far lower crime rates, much higher levels of charitable giving, better health, stronger marriages, and less suicide, to note only a few of the benefits. In the final chapter, Stark assesses the financial impact of these religious realities. It turns out that belief benefits the American economy and all 300 million citizens, believer and nonbeliever alike by a conservative estimate of \$2.6 trillion a year. Despite the atheist outcry against religion, the remarkable conclusion is clear: all Americans, from the most religious among us to our secular neighbors, really ought to count our

blessings. Author: Stark, Rodney Publisher: Templeton Press Illustration: N Language: ENG Title:
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