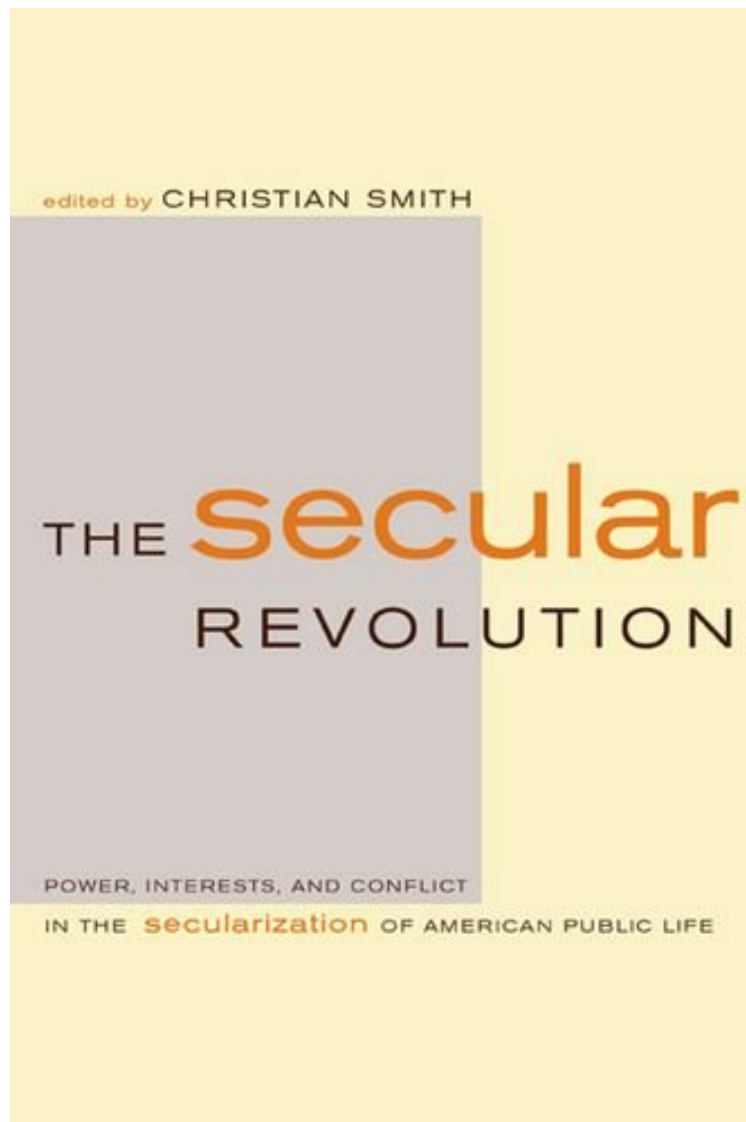


[Download free pdf] The Secular Revolution: Power, Interests, and Conflict in the Secularization of American Public Life

The Secular Revolution: Power, Interests, and Conflict in the Secularization of American Public Life

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From University of California Press : The Secular Revolution: Power, Interests, and Conflict in the Secularization of American Public Life before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Secular Revolution: Power, Interests, and Conflict in the Secularization of American Public Life:

7 of 8 people found the following review helpful. How Enlightenment thinking came to dominate AmericaBy D. R. SmedraThe days of the "Moral Majority" (evangelical Protestant ethos) as a major social-political force in America seem to have come and gone. Today, there is widespread concern over America's slide into radical secularism and the political rise of socialism/communism on the Left, libertarianism on the Right, and the struggle of these two broad movements for power and control. Given the Judeo-Christian roots of Western civilization and particularly America, how did this radical change/collapse/revolution come about?Two main theories of social-political dynamics are locked in debate at the academic level: 1) modernization (older/established view), and 2) revolution (newer/challenger view). This book (project) is a compilation of ten, separate-but-related essays which argue in favor of the later (#2), "...that the historical secularization of the institutions of American public life was not a natural, inevitable, and abstract by-product of modernization; rather it was the outcome of a struggle between contending groups with conflicting interests seeking to control social knowledge and institutions."I find that adherents to modernization theory (#1) are often at a loss at identifying casual "direct links between the [secular] Enlightenment thinkers and those who live in this modernized world." This book provides substantial evidence of those "direct links" and the book's thesis is overall superior in explanatory power of both sociological events and history. If you're curious as to why NATURALISM as a worldview (in all its facets: monism, materialism, physicalism, scientism, Darwinian evolution, antisupernaturalism, atheism/agnosticism, and secular humanism) has become the reigning philosophical viewpoint in America, reading this book is well worth your time!0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Four StarsBy StephenInteresting take on the argument of religion being the adversary of secularism.6 of 6 people found the following review helpful. Complicating the old storyBy CustomerThis is an important sociological work that complicates the standard account of secularization as a natural or inevitable process. It brings into relief the importance of power and agency by focusing on the role of elites across several distinct fields: science, politics, psychology, sociology, law, education, medicine, and journalism. Each of these case studies provide convincing historical evidence for the active (though not necessarily conspiratorial) role of elites in bringing about a cultural shift that many of us today assume to have been inexorable. It thus bosters Randall Collins' argument that secularization is a "process of conflict" and not simply a zeitgeist.Readers should note that the level of analysis in the conceptualization of secularization isn't belief or religiosity, but religious authority (following Dobbeleare and Chaves). It is in this sense that their constructionist account of the consequences of elite action can justifiably make claims about secularization as an intentional outcome, analogous to toppling a regime. It also sheds light on the role of agency and conflict in the process of institutionalization (in the sense of how social structures acquire a taken-for-granted status). But certainly a bigger story on unintended consequences needs to be examined--particularly on the consequences of professionalization in general (including in religious institutions). Among the essays I found most interesting were Garrouette's and Evans' studies on the historical transitions in American science and medicine respectively, which are relevant to contemporary science-vs-religion debates.

Sociologists, historians, and other social observers have long considered the secularization of American public life over the past hundred and thirty years to be an inevitable and natural outcome of modernization. This groundbreaking work rejects this view and fundamentally rethinks the historical and theoretical causes of the secularization of American public life between 1870 and 1930. Christian Smith and his team of contributors boldly argue that the declining authority of religion was not the by-product of modernization, but rather the intentional achievement of cultural and intellectual elites, including scientists, academics, and literary intellectuals, seeking to gain control of social institutions and increase their own cultural authority. Writing with vigor and a broad intellectual grasp, the contributors examine power struggles and ideological shifts in various social sectors where the public authority of religion has diminished, in particular education, science, law, and journalism. Together the essays depict a cultural and institutional revolution that is best understood in terms of individual agency, conflicts of interest, resource mobilization, and struggles for authority. Engaging both sociological and historical literature, *The Secular Revolution* offers a new theoretical framework and original empirical research that will inform our understanding of American society from the nineteenth to the twenty-first centuries. The ramifications of its provocative and cogent thesis will be felt throughout sociology, religious studies, and our general thinking about society for years to come.

"Smith provides the reader with a powerful new framework for assessing the secularization of American public life, including a wealth of new insights and historical evidence on religion in American institutions. For those interested in religion's changing role in the public arena, this is essential reading, certain to have tremendous impact."From the Inside Flap"Smith provides the reader with a powerful new framework for assessing the secularization of American public life, including a wealth of new insights and historical evidence on religion in American institutions. For those interested in religion's changing role in the public arena, this is essential reading, certain to have tremendous impact."Roger Finke, Professor of Sociology and Religious Studies at Penn State and coauthor of *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion*"Finally a much welcome sociological study of secularization that eschews assumptions of inevitability in favor of flesh-and-blood institutional histories, from the fields of education, journalism,

and law to science, medicine, and even religion itself." Ronald L. Numbers, Hildale and William Coleman Professor of the History of Science and Medicine, University of Wisconsin-Madison, and author of *The Creationists*" Secularization has long been talked about as if it were the inevitable product of vast impersonal forces operating above our heads. In this fascinating collection, the authors descend from the stratosphere to investigate the power struggles that actually brought about secularization in education, law, and journalism. A wonderful, arresting book that gives secularization a human face." Nicholas Wolterstorff, author of *John Locke and the Ethics of Belief*" This book is sure to evoke debate, agreement, contention, and future research by historians, sociologists, political scientists, and scholars of American religion." Rhys H. Williams, editor, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*