



American Beliefs: What Keeps a Big Country and a Diverse People United

By John Harmon McElroy

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Why do so many different people with widely dissimilar ideas and customs get along as Americans? In *American Beliefs*, John McElroy identifies and explains those essential ideas that promote the unity of a vast nation and a diversified people?because they have been shared and acted upon by generations of Americans. Tracing these beliefs historically from their origins in the earliest experiences of the American colonists, Mr. McElroy shows how they became continuing convictions that together form a pattern distinct from those of other peoples. Work, he argues, shaped the primary beliefs of Americans, for the task of the early settlers was first of all to survive in a new wilderness. He then goes on to discuss beliefs that grew from the experiences of immigrants, from life on the frontier, and from the ideas that Americans developed about religion and morality, politics, human nature, and the workings of society. It is not birthplace or skin color that makes a person an American, Mr. McElroy observes, but a common behavior based upon principles of freedom and equality, individuality and responsibility, improvement and practicality. *American Beliefs* is a book greatly needed, a powerful antidote to decades of historical and political writings that have concentrated on the differences among Americans.

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Bibliography

- Rank: #2044567 in Books
- Brand: Brand: Ivan R. Dee
- Published on: 2000-08-15
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.02" h x .78" w x 5.97" l, .90 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 256 pages

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

It is axiomatic in some quarters that, while traditional nations such as France are bonded by blood and language, the U.S. is founded on ideas and beliefs. In chapters devoted to frontier beliefs, immigrant beliefs, religious and moral beliefs, social beliefs, political beliefs and others, University of Arizona English professor McElroy sets out to delineate the beliefs that define the American nation. Noting that beliefs are not necessarily consciously held but that they do exist in a culture, he gives brief, serviceable historical summaries of how American beliefs took root and evolved. Among those beliefs are: "everyone must work"; "improvement is possible"; "each person is responsible for his own well being"; "America is a chosen country"; "achievement determines social rank"; "the least government possible is the best"; human beings will abuse power when they have it." Sometimes, McElroy comes close to peddling a triumphalist history of the spread of European ideas in a savage land. But he generally, if dutifully, notes that it took some time for a majority to extend the most cherished of American beliefs (in liberty and equality) to all of society (slavery, he writes, was a "perversion of American beliefs"). In the end, however, his laundry list of American beliefs is an exercise more in cataloguing than analysis. Illustrations not seen by PW.
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From Kirkus Reviews

In the tradition of William Bennett comes this well-written, argument-provoking compendium of American virtues. McElroy, a professor of English at the University of Arizona, spent the late 1960s teaching courses in American studies at the University of Salamanca in Spain, where, he writes, "I had to think seriously and systematically for the first time in my life about what we mean when we refer to culture, why different cultures have formed, and how the culture of the United States differs from other cultures in the Americas and Europe." His book takes a sometimes lecture-like, but certainly accessible air as he examines these matters in turn, beginning with the sensible observation that "a historical culture can be formally defined as a unique set of extremely simple beliefs," such as, in the case of the prewar Japanese, the notion that the emperor was a god or, in the case of revolutionary-era Americans, that all men are created equal. The simplicity of those beliefs, McElroy writes, means that it's easy to transmit them from one generation to another and to assimilate them. McElroy's catalog of what those beliefs are, exactly, comes from sources from Poor Richard's Almanack on down, and they are largely unobjectionable: "Manual work is respectable." "Freedom of movement is needed for success." "Helping others helps yourself." "Every individual's success improves society." McElroy, an evident conservative, has no truck with Karl Marx's formulation that the dominant ideas in a society are those of the ruling class; in his view, which will likely be dismissed by those of leftward leanings, these ideas are what makes Americans American. He closes with a lament against "the simultaneous weakening of so many American beliefs" in the face of what he calls "uncompromising ideologies" meaning, one supposes, liberalism and its kin. Call it, well, a book of rules for nonradicals. (maps) -- Copyright ©1999, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.

Review

Powerful...a persuasive analysis. (Emory Elliott, Center for Ideas and Society, University of California)

John McElroy thoroughly expounds with subtlety and depth a point of capital importance. (John Silber, Boston University)

Impressive. (Joseph Epstein *Times Literary Supplement*)

A magnificent and timely book. (Charles Moskos, Northwestern University)

An exceptionally interesting and rewarding book about what makes Americans what they are. (Jonathan Yardley *The Review of Higher Education*)

Users Review

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Johnny Cervantes:

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Lorenzo Brown:

Precisely why? Because this *American Beliefs: What Keeps a Big Country and a Diverse People United* is an unordinary book that the inside of the reserve waiting for you to snap it but latter it will jolt you with the secret that inside. Reading this book alongside it was fantastic author who else write the book in such wonderful way makes the content interior easier to understand, entertaining means but still convey the meaning totally. So , it is good for you because of not hesitating having this any more or you going to regret it. This unique book will give you a lot of advantages than the other book have such as help improving your proficiency and your critical thinking way. So , still want to hesitate having that book? If I have been you I will go to the e-book store hurriedly.

Andrew Spivey:

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William Hayes:

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