

[Free pdf] Atheist Awakening: Secular Activism and Community in America

Atheist Awakening: Secular Activism and Community in America

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Richard Cimino, Christopher Smith : Atheist Awakening: Secular Activism and Community in America before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Atheist Awakening: Secular Activism and Community in America:

4 of 6 people found the following review helpful. On Atheist Groups and Organizations - Rituals, Beliefs, Mixed Messages, Struggles, and Mimicking Their Enemies By Clandestine Library For Further Reading This book is the first sociological exploration on organized secularism in America. It had some positive reviews from other researchers of secularity such as Barry Kosmin and Stephen Bullivant so it was worth looking into it. There were a few Great

Awakenings in US history whereby people raised awareness of religious and social consciousness - religious revivals, in other words. Now there is a similar phenomenon but for the nonreligious, especially atheists. This book is a nuanced study on the rituals, communities, and other dimensions of atheist groups (the Awakened) based on more than 10 years of research. Some of the chapters in the book are refined and updated versions of previously published research so they represent the latest findings. For further reading on other studies on atheists see comment #1. Interestingly, the authors noted numerous similarities between atheist groups and evangelicals groups (they cited American Evangelicalism: Embattled and Thriving as a contrast). The following is a list of all the chapters in the book and some of the contents to be found therein. This list is not exhaustive: "The Awakened - shall we call them that? - face many problems in mixed religious-and-secular cultures. The Awakened recognize that many fellow citizens fear or disdain them consider them to be subversive of values cherished by the majority. Some - more often than not evangelicals - debate them and fight them in the name of God. They may well be paying compliments to nonbelievers when they picture atheists as having sufficient force to subvert society. Meanwhile, many believers are amused or bemused when they see how many of the features "organized" atheist culture mimic the religious expressions and communities of believers. Some atheist gatherings look and sound much like gatherings of God-worshipping believers. Their local associations, new and small though they may be, often seek symbols and ceremonies that show the influence of life in religious congregations, denominations, and voluntary associations. This book introduces readers to many of the forms and expressions of those who choose not believe in God, or who could not believe if they tried." (xi) Introduction In the 1990s there were few atheist groups and many were old people, however, as of 2012 there is more even distribution of people in atheist groups and in the 2012 Reason Rally there were over ten thousand atheists present - "What happened between 1992 and 2012? Had hordes of churchgoing Americans thrown off their faiths to embrace a lack of faith with a religious fervor - a third Great Awakening, as our title may suggest? A sober examination of the rate of nonbelievers does not show a dramatic increase of atheists over the past two decades. Not so coincidentally, some growth has occurred of those claiming a disbelief in God, along with a much larger increase of religious nonaffiliation, especially among younger generations (Pew Research center 2012). Yet the percentage does not reflect the swelling atheist presence and activism we have witnessed in the last decade. In this book we argue that there has been an 'awakening' of atheist identity and politics largely among those who were already nonreligious. 'Something' happened in American society in the last three decades that mobilized nonbelievers into action, and we believe that something is the increasing public - often political - presence of religion." "The growth of conservative and often political religion has not only "raised consciousness" of individual atheists but also compelled secularist (our term for atheist and other nonreligious) organizations to retool their strategies to wage both a defensive and offensive battle against ideological and political antagonists. Whereas atheism was once largely an apolitical stance that usually only implied a position of strict separation of church and state, this diffuse movement has been politicized to a similar extent to that of conservative Christians." (3); the majority of atheists self-identify as 'liberal' or 'progressive'; the internet has become a very useful tool for enhancing and creating an atheist identity; many atheists use "atheist" as their primary identity and have borrowed terminology from other minority movements such as the gay rights movement; "At the same time, no community or movement is complete without its rituals, special experiences, and collective emotions serving as the glue that holds them together. In the case, of atheists, capturing the affective quality of nonreligion is a challenge not only because of the aforementioned individualism, but also because atheists by definition reject religion and its building blocks of rituals and spirituality. We found, however, that the matter is not so cut-and-dried; in fact, atheists and various kinds of humanists are clashing among themselves over the need for rites of passage and even something called "secular spirituality"." (6); individualism creates room for dissent; "Atheists have been around as long as religions (Stark and Finke 2000). But only in the last two centuries have nontheists begun to organize for discussion, debate, fellowship, and activism... These early secularists began by questioning orthodox Christian doctrines, but eventually they came to be critical of all forms of religion. Like today, such freethinkers or rationalists were highly individualistic, but they gathered around societies (such as the Infidel Society) and periodicals, which in some cases were modelled after churches (Campbell 1972)." (6); "Essentially, secularists embracing "religious humanism" - defining "religious" in a functional rather than substantive way - can be traced back to Unitarian and Universalist movements that emerged after a segment of churches in the eighteenth century rejected such Christian doctrines. Both of these groups grew increasingly liberal in later periods as they discarded their supernatural elements of Christianity. A segment of Unitarian-Universalism and similar groups that formed in the twentieth century - such as Ethical Culture, the American Humanist Association, and Humanistic Judaism - have held on to a religious identity, claiming tax exemption for their congregations, creating seminaries, and, in some case, ordaining their leaders, as well as holding rites of passage for their members. In contrast, secular humanism, which broke off from religious humanism in the 1970s, challenged the need for any religious baggage (although, again as we discuss in depth in chapter 4, even hard-core atheists are debating the use of ritual). While atheists may make up 3 to 4 percent of the U.S. population (and about 30 percent of the nonaffiliated population), the percentage of such Americans involved in secularist organizations is far smaller (Hout and Fischer 2002; Funk et al. 2012). One recent study found and estimated 3,109 secularist groups of various types (Garcia Blankholm 2013). But as we noted above, the number of active atheists has

obviously grown in the last twenty years. Of course, being an "active" atheist is not the same as being an active Christians or Muslim. Many may not attend weekly atheist or humanist meetings, or even belong to national secularist organization. By "active atheist" we mean those who identify with the atheist cause and participate in some form of fellowship and activism, whether virtual or actual. In any event, we will call this new atheist consciousness an "awakening" in that a confluence of cultural, political, and internal secularist group dynamics have come together to create a perfect storm of atheist vitality, similar in many ways to religious vitality (actually we derived the title "Atheist Awakening" during the aforementioned Reason Rally, where one of the speakers compared the gathering to the Great Awakening in American religious history)." (7-8); previous academic works on atheism have not looked from it the stand point of organizations or movements - many previous studies have looked at atheism from polemic, individualistic, societal, historical, psychological angles; "For this book we interviewed fifty-two self-identified atheists, undertook participant observation of eighteen special events and meetings, and conducted online surveys of three hundred and seventeen atheists and humanists connected to local and national secularist organizations. We also conducted textual analysis of 'Free Inquiry', the magazine of the Council for Secular Humanism; the 'American Atheist', the magazine of the American Atheists; and about 150 websites, blogs, and other social media used by secularists of various strains (see appendix for more about our methods). While we cannot claim that our methods are statistically representative of American atheists and humanists, we do believe our research illuminates a significant dimension of the broad secularist movement. Throughout this book we have attempted to reflect the diversity of the broad secular movement in the United States, even if much of our data is drawn from recent research of secular humanism and organized atheism - the two largest and most prominent streams of secularism today." (9); has a synopsis of the bookCh. 1 - Organized Secularism Beyond the 'Humanist Twenty-First Century'"Just as evangelical Protestants up until one hundred years ago held a largely optimistic view of the future and the end times (known as postmillennialism), secular humanists and atheists also expected that a progressive, secular "kingdom" would emerge as societies threw off a primitive theistic mindset and matured into educated adulthood." (17); the centuries old view of the diminishment and replacement of religion with secularism has not panned out and many researchers doubt such a scenario will pan out in the pluralistic society of the US; the religious roots of humanism are found in the Unitarian and Universalist movements and later on some humanists preferred to not use the term 'religion' with their humanism so there were clashes within the American Humanist Association in the late 1970s - the secular humanists were born with the formation of the Council for Secular Humanism in 1980 - "Thus while religious humanists claim that humanism is a nontheistic religion, secular humanists define their movement as a strictly secular philosophy and value system and eschew any religious language. In its three decades, the council has been instrumental in changing the contours of organized secularism in the United States. One way for organizing secularists to form congregations (in some cases holding churchlike services) was largely viewed as a failure in maintaining and expanding the movement. There have also been alternatives such as forming clublike associations in clear disassociation from religious congregations (Campbell 1972)." (19); the Council for Secular Humanism created corollaries to religious associations such as Secular Organization for Sobriety (mimicked Alcoholics Anonymous) and Secular Student Alliance (mimicking campus religious groups); the largest atheist groups today are American Atheists (~4,000 members) and Freedom From Religion Foundation (~19,000 members); atheists are minorities and they tend to be embattled in the same way that Evangelicals are since they reinforce rigid boundaries and both see the "Nones" as opportunities to convert to their fold; "We argue that the actions and interactions of atheist and secular humanist groups and leaders - even among those holding to a strongly secularist view of the future - reveal how they have internalized both their minority status and the failure of progressive secularism to take hold in the United States, which is evident in the three strategies they pursue in their attempts to not only survive but grow in a largely religious society. First, they are competing and positioning themselves to attract "secular seekers", who are similar to spiritual seekers or "questers" in their persistent search for authentic communities of meaning while remaining highly individualistic (Roof 1999). Second, they have borrowed elements from their main antagonists - evangelical Protestants - in defining themselves and rallying others to their cause. Third, they have taken up minority discourse and identity politics in pressing for group rights and equal treatment in society." (22); the "Humanist Manifesto 2000" has less optimism of secularism's future because of the recent upsurges of fundamentalism in other parts of the world, but other still have optimism; "The popularity of the "new atheism," at least in book sales, though not necessarily in converting people to atheism, has sought to revive the conviction that societal secularization is just around the corner. But up until 2008, there was clearly a loss of confidence among secular humanist leaders regarding the victory of secularism, at least in American society." (23-24); many atheists are unclear on the future of religion and secularism; some people decide to self-identify as "secular humanist" rather than "atheist" because the latter term is seen as anti-religious and others get upset with this; many of those interviewed transitioned from religious beliefs to secular humanism; some tensions between secular humanists and religious humanists in the American Humanist Association but secular humanists are more willing to work with some religious people; the Council for Secular Humanism periodicals have some success - "Free Inquiry" has 27,000 subscribers and "Skeptical Inquirer" has 35,000 subscribers but many of the subscribers for one are likely also subscribed to the other; the Council for Secular Humanism, American Atheists, and other organizations

do not disclose their actual membership figures easily; the Secular Student Alliance (the group was partly formed to combat postmodernism too) used to be strongly atheist, but now they are a little more open to agnostics and liberal religious people; secularism and evangelicalism have been dancing as protagonist and antagonists in the past and the present; "Marty notes that secularists "flattered the church by imitation," as they ventured into publishing tracts, books, and periodicals for their cause. As noted earlier, the use of congregation-like activities and structures marked a segment of secularist groups (Campbell 1972)." (30); historically evangelicals used the term "secular humanist" in a pejorative way as a criticism of secular culture, but Paul Kurtz appropriated and embraced the term before the religious right began using it; evangelicals sometimes argue that secular humanism is a religion that replaces God with other things due the Supreme Court's definition of humanism as a religion and this has re-opened an intense debate among humanists (religious and secular) on their place and their identities [the opposition (evangelicals), has helped define how people imagine humanism to be as a religious-ish thing]; on parallels with Christian Smith's study on evangelicals - "The way which secular humanists and atheists portray their position in society parallels patterns in Smith's (1998) study of American evangelicals. Smith found that the tensions and unease that evangelicals experience as they interact in the greater American society enhance the vitality of their religious identity. Oppositional relations and interactions between different groups generate and maintain a variety of subcultural identities in a pluralistic society." (33); "Recent survey research suggests that the right-wing politicization of churches in the last two decades alienated a segment of liberal church members, who retreated from institutionalized religion into the ranks of the unchurched and thus added to the pool of potential secularists (Hout and Fischer 2002; Campbell 2013)." (34); "The centuries-old failure to maintain and increase a secularist organizational presence in the United States has been attributed to the secular nature of American government, where religious liberty and the separation of church and state prevented any need for anti-clerical efforts to destroy the power of an oppressive state church, as was the case in Europe." (35); the 2012 Reason Rally actually went beyond mere dissenting from religion, it went into direct and completely unnecessary mockery of other people's beliefs, per Richard Dawkin's suggestion [stuff like this is what many humanists, most of the "Nones", and most Americans do not wish to associate with - there are limits and lines of respect that must be met if atheist wish to be accepted as reasonable and humane people]; recently an attempt at integrating political ideology among atheist groups caused more divisions among them - feminism caused a bitter split with "Atheism+" when the leaders excommunicated or disowned any dissenters; an identity crisis among atheists includes what they should call themselves (Brights?) and various views on if there is even a need for an atheist community; politically atheist parties have had to change their name (e.g. National Atheist Party to Secular Party of America) to try to change the image that being atheist is not un-American; political dilemmas and problems atheists create for themselves; there is evidence indicating "far from being strongest in areas where the religious right is prominent, pro-secular groups may thrive in politically liberal areas where the government already tends to protect the rights of non-religious people from religious encroachment" (51)Ch. 2 - The New Atheism and the Revival of SecularismThe internet as a useful tool among any minorities such as atheists; the New Atheists were at their peak both in book sales and media coverage from January 2006 to March 2008; this chapter reviews the perceptions of secularists in the two most prominent periodicals, "Free Inquiry" and "American Atheist" at the height of the New Atheists and also responses from the online questionnaire; the New Atheist books did not have novel ideas since many of the books pretty much were extended versions of articles found in "Free Inquiry" and also there were tensions created them trying to spread secularism, exposing erroneous beliefs and trying to gain public acceptance all at the same time; criticisms and praise of the New Atheists by secular organizations (apparently some are worried about Sam Harris' "secular spirituality"); in the survey - "Although more than half of the respondents believed that atheists are still discriminated against, few could cite any incidents where they felt such prejudice. One reason is that no external markers or signifiers announce someone as an atheist, making it easier for atheists to avoid any social stigma by keeping their nonbelief to themselves. Another factor is that the prejudice atheists as a social group face in the United States tends to be more of an institutional or structural sort than of an individual or explicitly discriminatory or violent sort - due in some part to the aforementioned point - although there have been cases of more individual and violent incidents, with atheists receiving death threats, getting kicked out of apartments, and losing their jobs." (63); in the electronic media serious atheism is ignored or disregarded, but there have been some successes usually with comedians [a bunch of clowns does seem a bit sad]; in the sample, 40% of the atheists reported using only the internet for their atheist activities, the rest participated in both offline and internet activities; quite a bit of publishing and even some academic publishing has come out; issues with media exposure of atheist and religion on secular groups - feeling acceptance and also exclusion; nonbelievers often feel they are better than believers - embattled yet proud, fearful yet confident; the internet has allowed atheist to get their message out, but the internet also helps get everyone else's message out including dissenters and also many discussions on any given topic becomes blurred by the noise; internal struggles (moderates and extremists) among secular groups are open to be seen by the public more and more through various forms of media; "Our research consistently indicated the centrality of the new atheist books for secularists. Thus, however one may characterize it - or criticize and depreciate the books and their authors - the new atheist phenomenon is still arguably the single most important and influential event shaping contemporary secularity today.

Many of our respondents, for example, noted the powerful and important influence the books and authors had on both their atheist identity and activism." (79)Ch. 3 - Atheism Unbound - Moving toward the Center, Speaking from the MarginsThe world's largest community of atheists is found a website called Reddit with 2 million members; "Of course, secularists, like most everyone else, often seek out books, information, and similarly minded people to confirm rather than challenge their beliefs and ideals (Nickerson 1998; Kunda 1999; Oswald and Grosjan 2004) - behavior that the internet potentially exacerbates with the ability to close down comments and police sites in ways that are counterproductive to serious debates and discussions. This in effect creates an in-group for a particular strand of thought or philosophy." (87); historically atheism had little coverage in the media and later on scandals were usually the reason for reporting on them such as the organization American Atheists under O'Hair going through a denominational split; there is some ambivalence among atheists on the media's coverage of them; internet usage and drama among atheists; the internet as a very powerful tool for expressing one's beliefs; Sam Harris and Christopher Hitchens have argued that atheist communities don't need to exist; the internet reduces the impact of organized secularism because secular organizations are no longer the only venue available to express one's beliefs; the internet may strengthen bonds or forge new ones too for secular groups; young people are more tech savvy; "Research has found that "seculars" (those not affiliated with a religion) are significantly less likely than church members to belonging to other organizations, to volunteer, or to contribute to charity, thus lacking the social capital generated by the religiously affiliated." (114); seculars make more use of the internet in seeking information though than "religious traditionalists"; offline atheist activism has grown quite a bit in the last decade but politically almost no politician has any ties with atheist groups as the consequences would be too severe; there are lots of seculars already and can make some changes politically, but it depends on them if they care enough to make a move;Ch. 4 - Ritualizing and Commemorating the Secular"This secular yet mystical homily that one of the authors witnessed on a summer Sunday afternoon at Tobacco Road, a "bikini bar" in midtown Manhattan, was part of the first leg of the American tour of the Sunday Assemblies, a movement of atheist "churches" that Jones and fellow stand up comedian Pippa Evans had started in London in early 2013, drawing a crowd of up to six hundred. Already fifteen Sunday Assemblies were planned to be lunched in the United States by September 2013. Although it is difficult to know when some atheists are being serious and not engaging in irreverent satire, Jones and company actually do model their assemblies after churches - at least churches that sing Beatles and Fleetwood mac songs rather than hymn and venerate community more than God. Just like in a church, there were testimonies (about "coming out as an atheist"; it was gay pride Sunday in New York, so the theme of coming out was played up at the event), an offering, and even a moment of silence where participants could "talk with themselves" about how lucky they were to be atheists. Rites of passage, including funerals, weddings, and baby naming ceremonies, will also be held in these assemblies. Jones may call himself an "atheist missionary", but he is not a very polemical one; he even seeks cooperation and advice from established churches. While he has faced some criticism from secularists for downplaying science and reason, Jones said that he cofounded the Sunday Assemblies to reach those atheists' "not being reached by other atheist groups... Most atheists may value the intellectual and cerebral approach to things; the only problem is that most people don't." Only a few months later, the Sunday Assembly experienced its first schism. The New York City Atheists had taken part of the assembly from the beginning, but they gradually began to have misgivings about the soft-sell approach of the Assembly and Jones. Jones started discouraging the use of the term "atheist" and the gatherings seemed too churchlike to many atheists. Eventually the NYC atheists formed the Godless Revival as an alternative to the Sunday Assembly, which itself moved from meeting in a bar to the New York Society for Ethical Culture." (118-119); "Although a large segment of secularists eschew the need for rituals, claiming that they have left such rudiments of religion behind, we argue that rituals play a particularly important role in organized humanist and atheist circles. We found that various kinds of secular rituals and other symbolic forms, such as commemorations, can play different functions; they may generate solidarity between atheists or play a legitimizing role for secularity in a wider society." (120); the "new new atheism" is an attempt at going back to the religious roots of humanism; religious humanism was strongly embraced in the past by the American Humanist Association, Ethical Culture, and Unitarian Universalists; Paul Kurtz stressed the point about making a positive identity instead of focusing on debunking people and also emphasized the need for rituals and an appeal to emotional and aesthetic as well as intellectual domains; Greg Epstein, an atheist chaplain, is known for envisioning weddings, funerals, baby naming ceremonies, observing secular holidays, and for his labors in religious rituals for the secular; some tensions between secular humanists and religious humanists and how some are accommodating to make "secular celebrant" programs; when asked about of atheists should focus on debunking religious or making a positive identity for themselves, most of the respondents said they preferred to keep the anti-religious edge and almost half said that rituals need more attention in their organizations (only 26% disagreed with that statement); almost 62% of secular humanists said they would be open to rituals in their groups; over 32% said rituals should be a regular part of their meetings; when asked about "secular spirituality", 23% refused to answer; research indicates that 30%-40% of members of secularist groups use spirituality or are willing to believe in an impersonal force connecting all life; numerous other secular spiritual rituals and the paranoia some groups have in using the term "spirituality" even though they describe things in a religious/spiritual fashion while trying to avoid religion; "Aside

from explicit rituals, it could be argued that secularist gatherings and events function as rituals as well in that they serve to symbolize unity and strength to both themselves and the outside world. This could be seen at the 2012 Reason Rally in Washington, DC, that we described in Chapter 1." (131); "Almost every secular humanist and atheist meetings we attended began with a session devoted to poking fun at the foibles of religious groups and people, or with a performance of music satirizing religious themes. In her study of British secular humanists, Susan Budd (1977:266) found that the condemnation of religion in these groups can "act as a protective ideology, since it becomes a defining characteristic of the movement and a method of uniting otherwise dissent opinions." (132); the French Revolution was an early attempt at making secular equivalents of religious activities; various holidays for atheists especially Darwin Day (Darwin is pretty much a patron saint for many atheists); "Moreover, in terms of activism, secularists are not using science to pursue the truth per se; they are using the authority or cultural power of science to press their claims. In this respect, the issue of whether atheism can rightly claim a prominent place in the progress of scientific achievement historically, or whether atheists presently have a correct view or understanding of Darwin's legacy is inconsequential. More consequential, in terms of politics, is whether such scientific discourse and narrative can be a strong resource for a more mainstream, popular mobilization in the United States." (140); Alain de Botton has asked to downplay science and for atheists to use religion, Sam Harris has done something similar for his gig with meditation; clearly atheists are interested in more than reason or science and seek aesthetics and rituals; ... (Rest of summary continued in comment 1) 0 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Five Stars By ChristopherGreat! :) 0 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Lot's of Arcane Detail I didn't find interesting By J.IngleSlow reading and tedious. After a few chapters, I gave up on it.

Surveys over the last twenty years have seen an ever-growing number of Americans disclaim religious affiliations and instead check the "none" box. In the first sociological exploration of organized secularism in America, Richard Cimino and Christopher Smith show how one segment of these "nones" have created a new, cohesive atheist identity through activism and the creation of communities. According to Cimino and Smith, the new upsurge of atheists is a reaction to the revival of religious fervor in American politics since 1980. Feeling overlooked and underrepresented in the public sphere, atheists have employed a wide variety of strategies-some evangelical, some based on identity politics-to defend and assert themselves against their ideological opponents. These strategies include building and maintaining communities, despite the absence of the kinds of shared rituals, texts, and laws that help to sustain organized religions. Drawing on in-depth interviews with self-identified atheist, secularist, and humanist leaders and activists, as well as extensive observations and analysis of secular gatherings and media, Cimino and Smith illustrate how atheists organize and align themselves toward common goals, and how media-particularly web-based media-have proven invaluable in connecting atheists to one another and in creating a powerful virtual community. Cimino and Smith suggest that secularists rely not only on the Internet for community-building, but on their own new forms of ritual. This groundbreaking study will be essential reading for anyone seeking to understand the growing atheist movement in America.

"Atheist Awakening provides an intriguing take on the look and practices of secularists in the United States by highlighting one of the most aggressively debated issues within the humanist/atheist movement: community...[T]he book makes an important contribution to studies on humanism, atheism, and secularism in the United States."--The Journal of Religion "Atheist Awakening provides a thorough analysis for stimulating growth in secular organizations and mobilizing online and offline grassroots activism in the 21st century. I applaud Cimino and Smith for articulating what others have not-that understanding contemporary secularism cannot be done independent of America's unique religious culture...the book is an excellent read and makes a significant contribution to several bodies of sociological literature, including nonreligious studies, religion, deviance, culture, and social movements."--Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion "This book fills an important gap in the literature by examining atheism/secularism as a social movement. Although the focus is on the last three decades, the authors provide ample historical context so often missing from sociological analysis. Two themes that recut throughout the book are the interdependence between the atheist and evangelical Christian movements in America and the tension within atheist movement between those who seek to accommodate and those who seek to confront. By exploring how these themes manifest themselves in various stages of the movement, the authors illuminate both continuity and change from the past...This is careful scholarship..."--Journal of Church and State "Like many of my colleagues, I have long been impressed - and influenced - by Cimino and Smith's pioneering research on contemporary American unbelief. But Atheist Awakening goes beyond even what I might have hoped for. This meticulous, innovative, and engaging book is essential for understanding the New Atheism within its wider social, cultural, and political contexts."--Stephen Bullivant, Senior Lecturer in Theology and Ethics, St Mary's University, Twickenham "Scholars are just beginning to explore secularist, humanist, atheist, and free thought activism as a coherent social movement. At the forefront of that research are Richard Cimino and Christopher Smith. In Atheist Awakening, Cimino and Smith continue their previous work with new qualitative and quantitative data to provide a nuanced picture of this nascent social movement. Scholars interested

in studying this movement should familiarize themselves with Cimino and Smith's influential body of work." --Ryan Cragun, Associate Professor of Sociology, University of Tampa "This insightful and comprehensive study of how secularists are attempting to form a collective identity and build community in contemporary America is a fine piece of sociology. The authors show a real understanding of the political dilemmas and possibilities this new demographic faces. They also provide a valuable analysis of the ways the new media environment is driving this social phenomenon." --Barry A. Kosmin, Research Professor, Public Policy Law Program, Trinity College, Hartford, Connecticut "This is an insightful exploration of the nature of secular communities in the 21st century... Highly recommended." --CHOICE "This book fills an important gap in the literature by examining atheism/secularism as a social movement." -- Journal of Church and State

About the Author Richard Cimino is founding editor of Religion Watch, a monthly publication reporting on trends and research in contemporary religion. He currently teaches sociology at the University of Richmond in Virginia and is the author of several books on religion, including *The Most Scientific Religion*, *Trusting the Spirit*, and co-author of *Shopping for Faith*. Christopher Smith is an independent researcher. His areas of interest include secularism and social theory. He holds an M.A. in Sociology from the New School for Social Research.