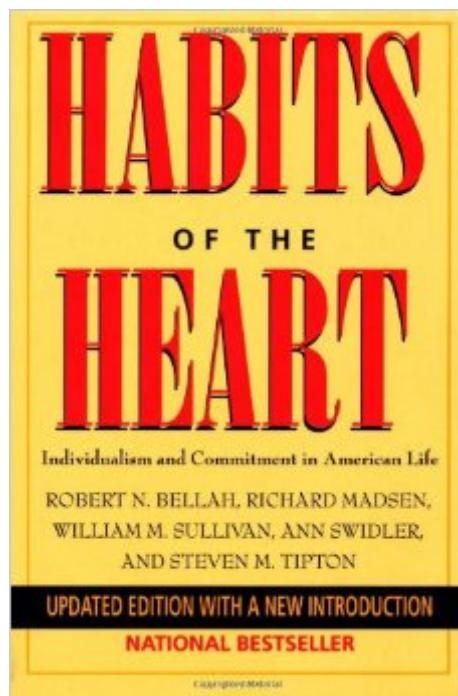


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Habits Of The Heart: Individualism And Commitment In American Life



Synopsis

Meanwhile, the authors' antidote to the American sickness—a quest for democratic community that draws on our diverse civic and religious traditions—has contributed to a vigorous scholarly and popular debate. Attention has been focused on forms of social organization, be it civil society, democratic communitarianism, or associative democracy, that can humanize the market and the administrative state. In their new Introduction the authors relate the argument of their book both to the current realities of American society and to the growing debate about the country's future. With this new edition one of the most influential books of recent times takes on a new immediacy.

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Customer Reviews

HABITS OF THE HEART is a tour de force whose insights into America are as relevant today as they were nearly twenty years ago when the book was published. It was hailed at that time as an instant classic of sociology, and compared to such influential works as MIDDLETOWN and THE LONELY CROWD. If anything, its insights are even more pertinent now. The subtitle "Individualism and Commitment in American Life" is the main trope guiding the book, a bipolar perspective that neatly describes the American inability to reconcile the "utilitarian individualism" of Hobbes' "war of all against all" as exemplified in the liberal economic philosophy that grew up with America, with the "expressive individualism" of Whitman and Emerson which developed as a reaction to (in Henry James' words), the "grope of wealth." The final chapter which elucidates "Six American Visions of the Public Good" describing them as three pairs of conflicting visions: "The Establishment versus Populism," "Neocapitalism versus Welfare Liberalism" and "The Administered Society versus

Economic Democracy" is the best example of this dualist view of America, but as Bellah and his fellow authors describe it, these competing visions often hold as many similarities as differences. Specifically, from the latter 19th century until the depression both The Establishment and Populists recognized there was and needed to be a moral component in American public life. The Establishment side was represented Andrew Carnegie's "Gospel of Wealth," while on the Populist side were economic socialists such as Eugene Debs. The mores of the that time, de Toqueville's "habits of the heart," were still moralistic, still partaking of the ideal of the legacy of Jefferson's freeholding citizen even capitalism shook America off its foundations.

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