



Judaism in America (Columbia Contemporary American Religion Series)

Marc Lee Raphael

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Jews have been a religious and cultural presence in America since the colonial era, and the community of Jews in the United States today—some six million people—continues to make a significant contribution to the American religious landscape. Emphasizing developments in American Judaism in the last quarter century among active participants in Jewish worship, this book provides both a look back into the 350-year history of Judaic life and a well-crafted portrait of a multifaceted tradition today. Combining extensive research into synagogue archival records and secondary sources as well as interviews and observations of worship services at more than a hundred Jewish congregations across the country, Raphael's study distinguishes itself as both a history of the Judaic tradition and a witness to the vitality and variety of contemporary American Judaic life. Beginning with a chapter on beliefs, festivals, and life-cycle events, both traditional and non-traditional, and an explanation of the enormous variation in practice, Raphael then explores Jewish history in America, from the arrival of the first Jews to the present, highlighting the emergence and development of the four branches: Orthodox, Conservative, Reconstructionist, and Reform. After documenting the considerable variety among the branches, the book addresses issues of some controversy, notably spirituality, conversion, homosexuality, Jewish education, synagogue architecture, and the relationship to Israel. Raphael turns next to a discussion of eight American Jews whose thoughts and/or activities made a huge impact on American Judaism. The final chapter focuses on the return to tradition in every branch of Judaism and examines prospects for the future.

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