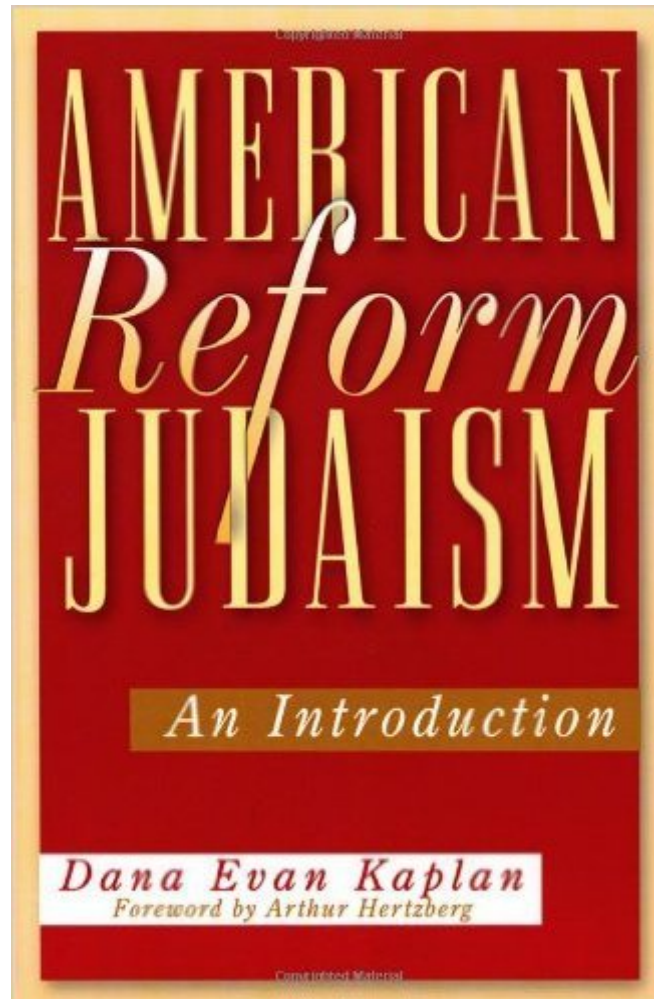


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American Reform Judaism: An Introduction



Synopsis

The only comprehensive and up-to-date look at Reform Judaism, this book analyzes the forces currently challenging the Reform movement, now the largest Jewish denomination in the United States. To distinguish itself from Orthodox and Conservative Judaism, the Reform movement tries to be an egalitarian, open, and innovative version of the faith true to the spirit of the tradition but nonetheless fully compatible with modern secular life. Promoting itself in this way, Reform Judaism has been tremendously successful in recruiting a variety of people—intermarried families, feminists, gays and lesbians, and interracial families among others—who resist more traditional forms of worship. As an unintended result of this success, the movement now struggles with an identity crisis brought on by its liberal theology, which teaches that each Jew is free to practice Judaism more or less as he or she pleases. In the absence of the authority that comes from a theology based on a commanding, all-powerful God, can Reform Judaism continue to thrive? Can it be broadly inclusive and still be uniquely and authentically Jewish? Taking this question as his point of departure, Dana Evan Kaplan provides a broad overview of the American Reform movement and its history, theology, and politics. He then takes a hard look at the challenges the movement faces as it attempts to reinvent itself in the new millennium. In so doing, Kaplan gives the reader a sense of where Reform Judaism has come from, where it stands on the major issues, and where it may be going. Addressing the issues that have confronted the movement—including the ordination of women, acceptance of homosexuality, the problem of assimilation, the question of rabbinic officiation at intermarriages, the struggle for acceptance in Israel, and Jewish education and others—Kaplan sheds light on the connection between Reform ideology and cultural realities. He unflinchingly, yet optimistically, assesses the movement's future and cautions that stormy weather may be ahead.

Book Information

File Size: 2398 KB

Print Length: 320 pages

Publisher: Rutgers University Press (April 29, 2003)

Publication Date: April 29, 2003

Sold by: Digital Services LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B000SBYUNY

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Not Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Enhanced Typesetting: Not Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #1,444,007 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #45

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Customer Reviews

described in the editorial reviews, which means it is a pretty good read for someone who is not very knowledgeable but is probably less useful for readers more familiar with Reform. One thing that I liked: Kaplan's willingness to note that some of the Reform movement's current problems are identical to those that Reform rabbis were complaining about as early as the 1880s; evidently, there is something about liberal religion that leads to a large but apathetic membership. One thing that I wish Kaplan had put in: more primary source material - perhaps in the form of an appendix with the text of the Reform platforms, etc. that Kaplan writes about.

Dana Kaplan has written a phenomenal and unique book that opens up the world of American Reform Judaism. This book is the only one of its kind, and is great resource for Reform Jews and those who might be converting to and interested in learning about Judaism. We are all in debt to Professor Kaplan.

Informative and educational. the book covers the subject of Reform Judaism in America in richness of detail. a very relevant reading for anyone interested in learning about the accomplishments of the Jewish Civilization implanted in its most fertile soil ever. Rabbi Jacques Cukierkorn Kansas City, MO

Rabbi Kaplan has written a very interesting, thoughtful sociological overview of post-World War II American Judaism. He has interwoven an analysis of well-known historical figures with Jews of the specific time periods, creating a very realistic and thought-provoking account of American Judaism. I would highly recommend this book!

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