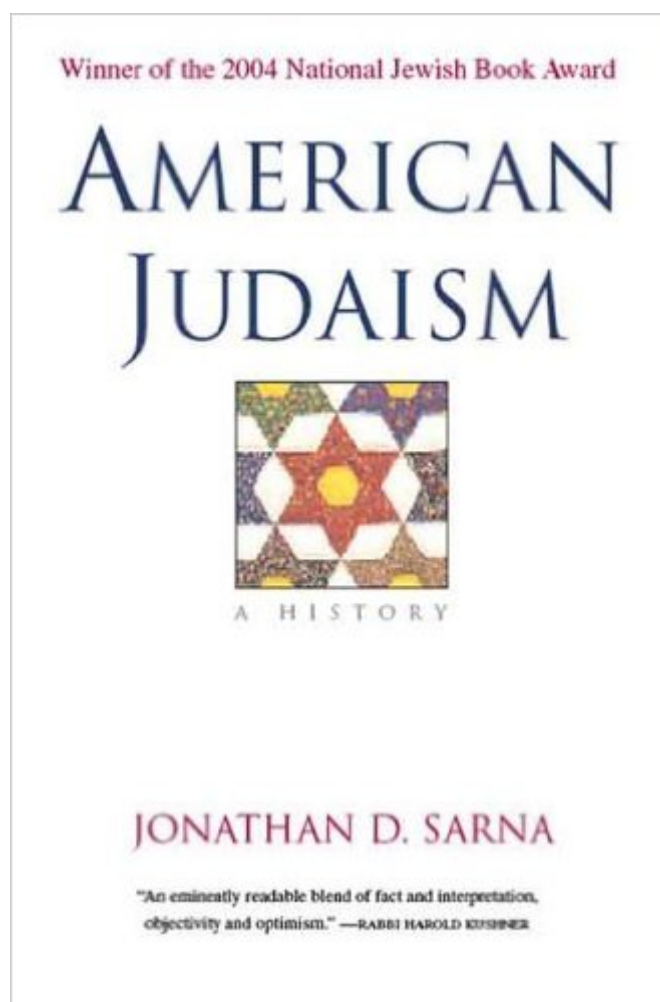


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American Judaism: A History



Synopsis

This magisterial work chronicles the 350-year history of the Jewish religion in America. Tracing American Judaism from its origins in the colonial era through the present day, Jonathan Sarna explores the ways in which Judaism adapted in this new context. How did American culture—predominantly Protestant and overwhelmingly capitalist—affect Jewish religion and culture? And how did American Jews shape their own communities and faith in the new world? Jonathan Sarna, a preeminent scholar of American Judaism, tells the story of individuals struggling to remain Jewish while also becoming American. He offers a dynamic and timely history of assimilation and revitalization, of faith lost and faith regained. The first comprehensive history of American Judaism in over fifty years, this book is both a celebration of 350 years of Jewish life in America and essential reading for anyone interested in American religion and life.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

If those who try to predict the fate of American Jewry can be divided into pessimists and optimists, count Jonathan Sarna emphatically among the optimists. In this succinctly written and cogently argued history of American Judaism, the Brandeis University historian makes a strong case that Jews on these shores have a promising future as well as a storied past. This book is particularly appealing because Sarna, unlike many academics, has a clear prose style that occasionally even displays a bit of flair. "Since the demand for first-rate rabbis greatly outstripped the supply, the marketplace soon restored substantial power to the rabbinate," he writes, discussing America in the 1840s. Or: "East European Jews looked to Reform Jews: sometimes they quietly emulated them,

sometimes they explicitly rejected them, but never could they totally ignore them."Sarna's book is not a full account of all aspects of American Jewish history. That would be well nigh impossible in only 375 pages. Rather, it is a history of the Jewish religion in America-what American Jews have believed about God and about their traditions, which religious rituals they have practiced (or stayed away from), and how they have organized themselves religiously. There has been much discussion in the past decades about the "disappearing American Jew," the decline in religious observance in an ever-modernizing community, and the rapid onset of "assimilation," a term that Sarna generally shuns in this book as "virtually meaningless." Sarna reminds us that the predictors of gloom and doom have been predicting gloom and doom for generations and that the community has somehow survived the predictions.

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