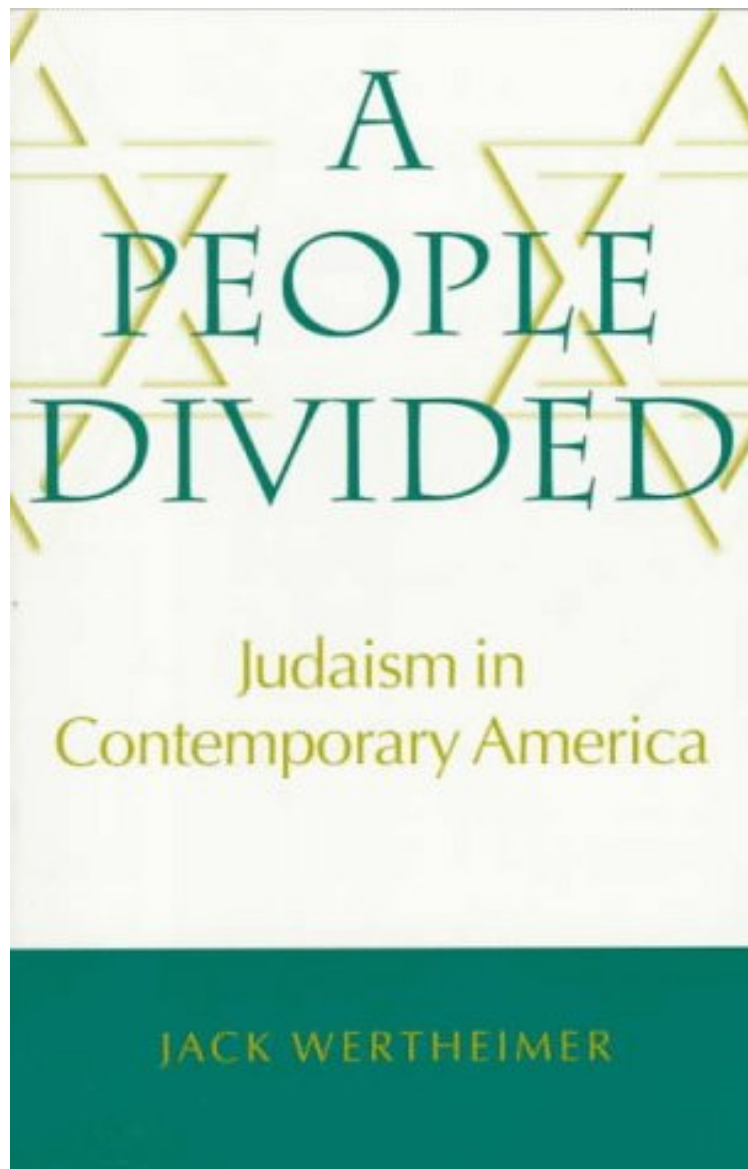


(Free pdf) A People Divided: Judaism in Contemporary America (Brandeis Series in American Jewish History, Culture, and Life)

A People Divided: Judaism in Contemporary America (Brandeis Series in American Jewish History, Culture, and Life)

Jack Wertheimer

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Jack Wertheimer : A People Divided: Judaism in Contemporary America (Brandeis Series in American Jewish History, Culture, and Life) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised A People Divided: Judaism in Contemporary America (Brandeis Series in American Jewish History, Culture,

and Life):

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Excellent description of the emergence of denominations and various trends ...By Rabbi BethExcellent description of the emergence of denominations and various trends in American Judaism over the last century-plus. This book describes patterns, history, and the many twists and turns of Jewish ritual life, culture, language and more in recent decades. An easy to understand read and very detailed with contextual information that frames the crux of each section. A great addition to my ever-growing library!2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. An outstanding studyBy Shalom FreedmanJack Wertheimer has been for years one of the most thoughtful and concerned writers about the condition of American Jewry. His understanding of the polarization in the community, and the damage done to by assimilation is based on his strong adherence to Jewish religious tradition. The fact however that one diagnoses correctly a certain problem does not mean that one can provide a solution. Wertheimer has at times suggested that instead of worrying about those Jews who show little concern about the tradition, the community direct its resources to strengthening those that do.In any case reading this work will provide a true understanding of the basic sociological identity of the American Jewish community.4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Excellent Discussion of Current State of American JudaismBy A CustomerThough currently JEW V. JEW is receiving all the attention in the press, Jack Wertheimer's A PEOPLE DIVIDED is probably a better account of the state of American Jewry today.While JEW V. JEW imitates midrash in its telling of divisions among American Jews, A PEOPLE DIVIDED gives a more straightforward account and the historical perspective needed to make sense of the battles American Jews are now fighting among themselves. I read this over the summer of 2000, when I was relatively new to Judaism, and it proved an immeasurable help in understanding why the Jewish community is the way it is.The only reason I don't give this book four stars is that Wertheimer occasionally lapses into his own (rather obvious) Conservative bias. Somehow, he seems to believe that the current wars have started because both Orthodoxy and Reform have branched off from the "true Judaism" represented by the Conservative Movement. Wertheimer also could have paid more attention to Reconstructionism, a branch of Judaism that, though it has some similarities to Reform, has its own internal philosophical battles.All in all, though, A PEOPLE DIVIDED is an excellent introduction to its subject matter and a book I highly recommend.

This brilliant analysis of American Judaism in the last half of the 20th century won the 1993-94 National Jewish Book Award for the best book on contemporary Jewry and also was named an Outstanding Book of 1993 by Choice. Jack Wertheimer examines how fundamental changes in American society have affected Jewish religious and communal life, paying special attention to contradictions and schisms that threaten the integrity of American Jewish practices and beliefs. A People Divided remains an essential primer for anyone interested in the ongoing debate about what constitutes Jewishness and who is a Jew.

From Publishers WeeklyAmerican Jewry has become increasingly polarized, asserts Wertheimer. In his estimation, current dynamic programs for religious revival are the creations of a vocal, passionately involved minority, while for the vast majority of American Jews, religion plays a minimal role. In this searching inquiry, the author, a history professor at the Jewish Theological Seminary in Manhattan, looks at various innovations, from the Havurah movement, which has stressed gender equality, prayer services and intimate communal experiences, to Jewish feminism and reconstructivist congregations. Nor are the more established sectors exempt from change. At the same time that Wertheimer (Unwelcome Strangers) finds an eclectic openness to traditional teachings in Reform Judaism, he also notes a shift to the right among the Orthodox and deep splits in a Conservative community. This is a tough-minded corrective to more optimistic recent surveys. Copyright 1993 Reed Business Information, Inc.From Kirkus sA thoughtful but short-sighted study of a precariously splintered American Jewry. Wertheimer (Unwelcome Strangers, 1987) uses his background history professor at the Jewish Theological Seminary (Conservative) to offer more than sociological insights in reading several generations' worth of statistics on American Jewish patterns of religious practice and identification. Nonetheless, with his study anchored in the 40's and 50's--boom years for the Conservative movement--there's a strong tilt toward his own denomination. Wertheimer too often positions the Conservative movement as true ``American Judaism," and, by not drawing the longer shadows of Reform and Orthodox Judaism, he fails to credit the Reform for initiating a Judaism for nonpracticing American Jews. Moreover, instead of wondering whether ``Orthodoxy can be viewed as a coherent and united movement," he should have made the point that traditional Judaism is unchanged since the days of the Pharisees. To survive suburbanization, the Conservatives in 1950 decided to allow driving to synagogue on the Sabbath--forfeiting any fealty to biblical law. Wertheimer doesn't mark this milestone as the philosophical demise of the movement, although, to his credit, he concedes that Conservative Judaism is ``caught in a cross fire...and hard pressed to justify its centrism." He shows the Conservative sun as setting and the inclusiveness of the Reform and Reconstructionists as instrumental in slowing rampant loss from intermarriage and assimilation. But for all of Wertheimer's statistics and trend-watching, the high birth and emigration rates of the Orthodox are ignored. The author is at his strongest when comparing the rises and falls of Jewish to

Christian denominations, and when discussing how the various movements reacted to the sexual revolution, the women's movement, and the era of personal, nontraditional spiritual searching that began in the late 60's. Extensive notes and bibliography add to the value of this study for the student of religion, but it lacks the punchy thesis needed for more popular appeal. -- Copyright 1993, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved. An easy-to-read yet comprehensive guide showing how profound changes in American society have gradually polarized Jewish religious and communal life during the second half of the 20th century. Chicago Tribune