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*Book Review by Alan J. Avery-Peck,
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CHOICE, February 2004 Subject: Humanities-Religion - American Library Association.

A Book Review of:

Kaplan, Dana Evan. *American Reform Judaism: An Introduction*, Rutgers, 2003. 297p index ISBN 0-8135-3218-3, \$60.00; ISBN 0-8135-3219-1 pbk, \$22.00.

Dana Evan Kaplan analyzes the history, theology, and practices of Reform Judaism in the US from its inception in the mid-1800s to the present. Alongside its readability (not to be confused with lack of detail or depth), the book's strength is Kaplan's determination to question why, in historical context, the movement took the directions it did and, more importantly, to reflect on the impact each development had on Reform's current and future viability. Kaplan thus breaks out of the mold of writings produced by uncritical insiders about the modern Jewish movements. Benefiting from an insider's knowledge, scholar and Reform rabbi Kaplan sees that Reform's greatest selling point in the marketplace of American religion--its insistence on the autonomy of the individual practitioner--creates a crisis in identity that threatens the movement's future. Can Judaism be defined as anything anyone wants it to be, yet continue to shape a religious and cultural identity that is both meaningful and authentically Jewish? Probing this question, Kaplan illuminates both the specific issue of evolving Jewish self-definition in America and the general question of the meaning and significance of religious identity in the modern world. Summing Up: Recommended. General readers; lower-level undergraduates through faculty.