

Humanities \ Religion

Kaplan, Dana Evan. **Contemporary American Judaism: transformation and renewal.** [Columbia](#), 2009. 446p bibl index afp; ISBN [9780231137287](#), \$34.50. Reviewed in 2009 Nov CHOICE.

Kaplan (Siegal College of Jewish Studies), following the path of Nathan Glazer's *American Judaism* (2nd ed., rev., 1989), maps out what he sees as the most important changes that have occurred in recent decades in the American Jewish landscape. While approaching matters from a sociological angle, he openly states that this "is not a work of original research, nor is it an attempt to argue a boldly innovative thesis." Kaplan provides a historical overview of several recent developments in American Judaism (e.g., feminism's impact on the spectrum of Jewish movements, the growth of Chabad and its contribution to the renewed interest in mysticism, rising tensions over issues of intermarriage, patrilineal descent, and conversion), while illuminating the contributions of certain key figures. Moreover, he writes in a balanced, accessible, often entertaining fashion. However, his wish to remain nonjudgmental results in a loosely organized book that leaves readers with a bewildering array of possibilities and little sense of which trends the Jewish community might wish to reinforce and which might be hurtful to the prospects of reinvigorating Jewish life in the US. These drawbacks aside, Kaplan's book is an excellent starting point for anyone seeking to understand the current state of American Judaism. **Summing Up:** Recommended. Upper-level undergraduates and above; general readers. -- *J. S. Kaminsky, Smith College*

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