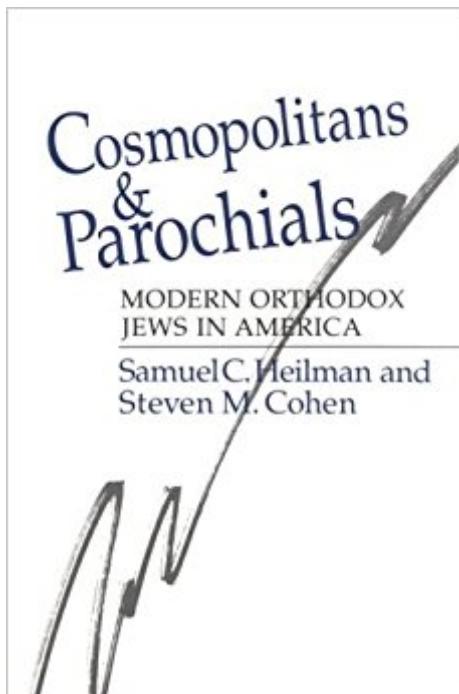


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Cosmopolitans And Parochials: Modern Orthodox Jews In America



Synopsis

Far from simply vanishing in the face of modernity, Orthodox Jews in the United States today are surviving and flourishing. Samuel C. Heilman and Steven M. Cohen, both distinguished scholars of Jewish studies, have joined forces in this pathbreaking book to articulate this vibrancy and to characterize the many faces of Orthodox Jewry in contemporary America. Who are these Orthodox Jews? How have they survived, what do they believe and practice and how do they accommodate the tension between traditional Jewish and modern American values? Drawing on a survey of more than one thousand participants, the authors address these questions and many more. Heilman and Cohen reveal that American Jewish Orthodoxy is not a monolith by distinguishing its three broad varieties: the "traditionalists," the "centrists," and the "nominally" orthodox. To illuminate this full spectrum of orthodoxy the authors focus on the "centrists," taking us through the dimensions of their ritual observances, religious beliefs, community life, and their social, political, and sexual attitudes. Both parochial and cosmopolitan, orthodox and liberal, these Jews are characterized by their dualism, by their successful involvement in both the modern Western world and in traditional Jewish culture. In painting this provocative and fascinating portrait of what Jewish Orthodoxy has become in America today, Heilman and Cohen's study also sheds light on the larger picture of the persistence of religion in the modern world.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This book presents itself as a sociological study of the Modern Orthodox Jewish population in North

America. Included are discussions of this group's religious attitudes and values, its voting patterns, and its orientation towards American society and culture in general. Unfortunately, this book's basic approach to the subject is so fundamentally flawed that you are more likely to be misinformed than to learn anything when you read it. For one thing, the authors took almost half of their statistical data (490 responses out of 1023) from questionnaires answered by members of the Lincoln Square Synagogue in Manhattan's Upper West Side, a truly vibrant congregation with dynamic adult education and outreach programs, but obviously not representative of the rest of Modern Orthodox community in New York, or anywhere else for that matter! But the main problem lies in the categories of religious observance Heilman builds out of thin air, and upon which he bases his arguments. Most of the discussion focuses on a middle group of Modern Orthodox Jews, which Heilman confusingly terms the "centrists," despite the fact that he uses the very same term in other places to refer to the Modern Orthodox population as a whole. To make his middle category, Heilman groups people who are completely religious but still eat cold salad with non-kosher utensils (when visiting friends' homes) together with people who turn on lights on Shabbos. Heilman excludes members of this category from the "traditionalist" right-wing group merely because they will eat cold salad on non-kosher dishes, even though that act is often completely permissible even according to the strictest interpretations of Jewish law!

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