



# The Synagogue in America: A Short History

*Marc Lee Raphael*

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In 1789, when George Washington was elected the first president of the United States, laymen from all six Jewish congregations in the new nation sent him congratulatory letters. He replied to all six. Thus, after more than a century of Jewish life in colonial America the small communities of Jews present at the birth of the nation proudly announced their religious institutions to the country and were recognized by its new leader. By this time, the synagogue had become the most significant institution of American Jewish life, a dominance that was not challenged until the twentieth century, when other institutions such as Jewish community centers or Jewish philanthropic organizations claimed to be the hearts of their Jewish communities.

Concise yet comprehensive, *The Synagogue in America* is the first history of this all-important structure, illuminating its changing role within the American Jewish community over the course of three centuries. From Atlanta and Des Moines to Los Angeles and New Orleans, Marc Lee Raphael moves beyond the New York metropolitan area to examine Orthodox, Reform, Conservative, and Reconstructionist synagogue life everywhere. Using the records of approximately 125 Jewish congregations, he traces the emergence of the synagogue in the United States from its first instances in the colonial period, when each of the half dozen initial Jewish communities had just one synagogue each, to its proliferation as the nation and the American Jewish community grew and diversified.

Encompassing architecture, forms of worship, rabbinic life, fundraising, creative liturgies, and feminism, *The Synagogue in America* is the go-to history for understanding the synagogue's significance in American Jewish life.

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