



# Coming of Age in Jewish America: Bar and Bat Mitzvah Reinterpreted

*Patricia Keer Munro*

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The Jewish practice of bar mitzvah dates back to the twelfth century, but this ancient cultural ritual has changed radically since then, evolving with the times and adapting to local conditions. For many Jewish-American families, a child's bar mitzvah or bat mitzvah is both a major social event and a symbolic means of asserting the family's ongoing connection to the core values of Judaism. *Coming of Age in Jewish America* takes an inside look at bar and bat mitzvahs in the twenty-first century, examining how the practices have continued to morph and exploring how they serve as a sometimes shaky bridge between the values of contemporary American culture and Judaic tradition.

Interviewing over 200 individuals involved in bar and bat mitzvah ceremonies, from family members to religious educators to rabbis, Patricia Keer Munro presents a candid portrait of the conflicts that often emerge and the negotiations that ensue. In the course of her study, she charts how this ritual is rife with contradictions; it is a private family event and a public community activity, and for the child, it is both an educational process and a high-stakes performance.

Through detailed observations of Conservative, Orthodox, Reform, and independent congregations in the San Francisco Bay Area, Munro draws intriguing, broad-reaching conclusions about both the current state and likely future of American Judaism. In the process, she shows not only how American Jews have forged a unique set of bar and bat mitzvah practices, but also how these rituals continue to shape a distinctive Jewish-American identity.



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