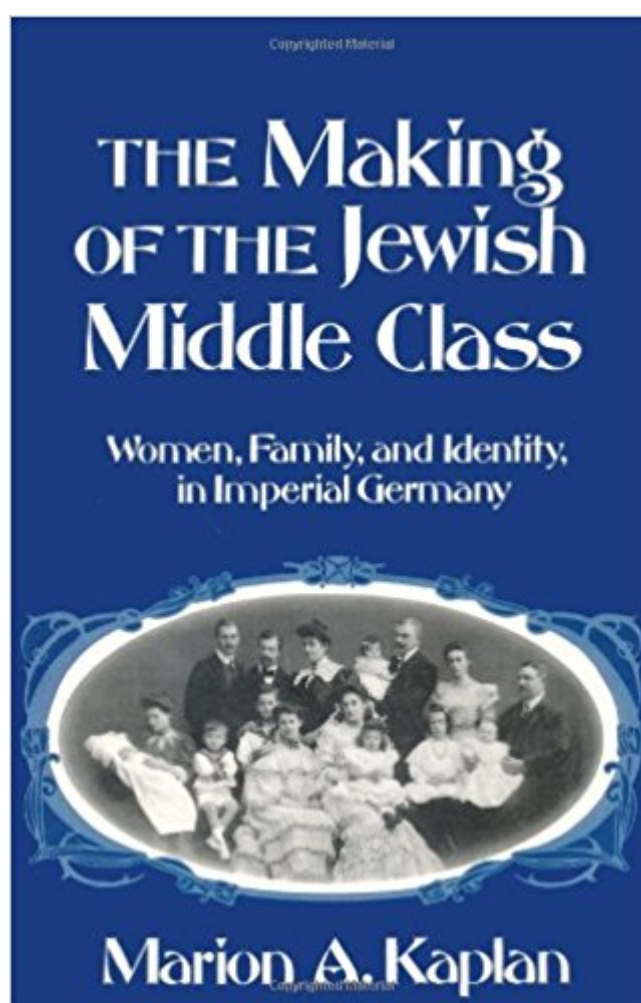


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# The Making Of The Jewish Middle Class: Women, Family, And Identity In Imperial Germany (Studies In Jewish History)



## Synopsis

A social history of Jewish women in Imperial Germany, this study synthesizes German, women's, and Jewish history. The book explores the private--familial and religious--lives of the German-Jewish bourgeoisie and the public roles of Jewish women in the university, paid employment and social service. It analyzes the changing roles of Jewish women as members of an economically mobile, but socially spurned minority. The author emphasizes the crucial role women played in creating the Jewish middle class, as well as their dual role within the Jewish family and community as powerful agents of class formation and acculturation and determined upholders of tradition.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"A fascinating reconceptualization of German-Jewish history which is both fact-filled and scholarly as well as eminently readable."--Lilith  
"This exciting new social history of Jewish women in Wilhelmine Germany constitutes a pathbreaking contribution...Kaplan's highly original study...significantly deepens our understanding of Jewish history, women's history, and German history...Dramatically reshapes the way we understand the German-Jewish past."--American Historical Review  
"In her earlier work on German Jewish woman, Marion Kaplan ventured to attack tricky, emotion-laden subjects without the usual preconceptions and with impeccable scholarship. Now, in broadening her canvas, she once again sheds far more light than heat, and her readers

have good reason to be grateful."--Peter Gay, Yale University"Exceptional achievement...Careful and imaginative use of sources...Her extraordinary range of sources includes memoirs, cookbooks, newspapers, novels, oral interviews, as well as economic and sociological statistics....Especially impressive is the author's keen insight into the complex and often contradictory ways in which class, gender, and ethnicity intersected in the lives of German-Jewish women."--Report of the Biennial Book Prize Committee"Kaplan's richly detailed *The Making of the Jewish Middle Class* eloquently explores the multiple and contradictory intersections of women's, Jewish, and German history in the Imperial era...Marvelous book."--*Journal of Women's History*"In this superb book, Marion Kaplan argues convincingly that the making of a German Jewish middle class in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century took place at home as much as it did at work, in private as much as in public; it was the work of women and men."--*German Politics and Society*"Kaplan brings together important material from the fields of German history, women's history and Jewish history. Using sources which range from demographic and occupational statistics to organizational records and newsletters to prescriptive literature and personal memoirs, Kaplan charts a fascinating process of class building and identity construction among German Jewish bourgeois culture."--*Labor History*

*The Making of the Jewish Middle Class* eloquently explores the multiple and contradictory intersections of women's Jewish, and German history in the Imperial era.

This book tracks the culture, experiences and attitudes of bourgeois German Jewish women of the German Empire, from its inception in 1871 to its fall. It was assigned to me as required reading for my German history class in Fall 2013, and I must admit, I embarked on the journey of reading it with great trepidation. At first it seemed like a dry topic and just another boring history book, with little relevance to my own life. But as I sat down (the night before, no less) to read it, I quickly saw that this was a well-researched, very readable look at three subsets of German life around the turn of the century. The book describes in vivid detail the attempts made by German Jewish women to assimilate into German culture during this time. It discusses the quandary that these people had in maintaining their identity while also attempting to become fully "German." It was primarily through their efforts to become "more bourgeois" and more entrenched in German middle class culture that they hoped to become assimilated. They voluntarily shelved their public rituals and retreated into the home, were mindful of anti-Semitic stereotypes and worked diligently to discourage stereotypical tendencies in their children. Interestingly, it appears as though Kaplan has managed to show that more than anything else gender imposed more limits on the prospects of these women more than

their religion or their class. While men were expected to be the breadwinners of the family and be in the public eye, it was up to women to exercise dominion in the home. Even the most fortunate women, some of which employed maids, worked tirelessly to cultivate a quaint and tidy home, as this was very important in securing a positive public image for their husbands. These women were tasked with raising good German bourgeois children, and they exercised complete control over most aspects of family life. Perhaps counterintuitively, many women helped their husbands run businesses and did have some responsibility for their family's financial success. The stories Kaplan tells are very good social history, and highlight not only prejudice against Jews, but also the discrimination faced by women in their quest for admittance to German universities. It possesses extraordinary value in light of what happened during the Holocaust. But more than that, it is an excellent description of German middle class life in the 19th century, written through the eyes of those who were given the responsibility of raising responsible, virtuous German citizens. This is scholarship in every sense of the word, and a prime example of history as it should be written.

This is a richly rewarding, unforgettable book that will fascinate not only students of Jewish or German history, but anyone interested in modern history in general. Of the book's many virtues, the one I appreciate most is the justice it does to the extraordinary role of German-Jewish women in the development of social welfare and women's rights organizations in pre-1933 Germany. After I read this treasure, I reflected on another book I read entitled *Great Jewish Women*; unforgivably it profiled Goldie Hawn and Ann Landers but had nary a mention of truly towering figures like Alice Salomon, the founder of modern social work in Germany, and "Soup Kitchen Lina" Morgenstern, whose herculean, selfless and pioneering efforts on behalf of veterans, children and women were all the more admirable given the anti-Semitism of the times. Kaplan's book provides a sorely needed perspective on what really astonishing achievements are all about.

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