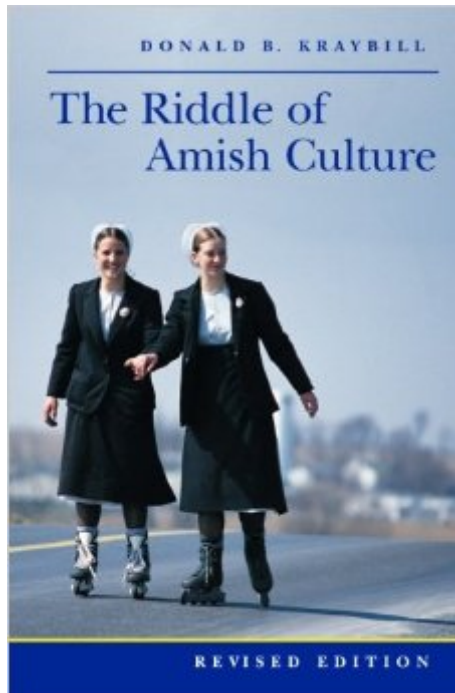


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The Riddle Of Amish Culture (Center Books In Anabaptist Studies)



Synopsis

Since its publication in 1989, *The Riddle of Amish Culture* has become recognized as a classic work on one of America's most distinctive religious communities. But many changes have occurred within Amish society over the past decade, from westward migrations and a greater familiarity with technology to the dramatic shift away from farming into small business which is transforming Amish culture. For this revised edition, Donald B. Kraybill has taken these recent changes into account, incorporating new demographic research and new interviews he has conducted among the Amish. In addition, he includes a new chapter describing Amish recreation and social gatherings, and he applies the concept of "social capital" to his sensitive and penetrating interpretation of how the Amish have preserved their social networks and the solidarity of their community.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Have you ever wondered what happened to the Anabaptists? Or why the Mennonites and Amish have similar customs? Or why an Old Order Amish kitchen might have a gas-powered refrigerator but not an electric one? It's easy to distinguish the Amish farms in our area: no electrical lines running to the house; no T.V. antenna; and there are usually draft horses hitched to a piece of farm equipment or ambling through a pasture. One of my questions--how did the Amish emigrate to the middle of Michigan in the latter half of the twentieth century without driving a truck or car--was answered almost immediately by this lively, interesting book: it's okay to ride in an

internal-combustion vehicle if a non-Amish ('English' they call us) is driving."The Riddle of Amish Culture" isn't merely a thousand-and-one-facts-about-the-Amish guide. It is a sociological expedition into the heart of this religious order's faith and practices. The author also delves into the history of the Anabaptists and their descendants in faith, the Mennonites and most especially the Amish. He tells of a vigorous, albeit reclusive culture, and could almost be accused of serving as this religion's apologist if it weren't for his balanced treatment of Amish educational practices. This was the most disturbing part of the book for me, as the Old Order Amish do not educate their children past eighth grade. Nor are Amish teachers educated beyond eighth grade, and no science is taught to the children---none at all, much less Copernican astronomy or the theory of evolution. Amish children who stay within the church never become physicians, lawyers, or other lengthily-educated professionals. Luckily, the Amish have no qualms about hiring these skills from those of us the author refers to as 'Moderns.

I couldn't have found a better book to introduce me to the Amish in America. Professor Kraybill's book is detailed, well organized, insightful, and well written. He illuminates Amish customs, beliefs, culture, and the ways the group has changed over the years. He answers the question, despite their peculiarity and restrictions on individual freedom, why have the Amish survived and thrived in modern times? High birthrates and low attrition have caused the Amish population to grow exponentially in the last century. Their venture into business, work ethic, and ability to adapt modern technology without compromising their values have enabled them to thrive financially. Most Amish are better off financially than moderns because they have a low cost of living, lots of help from friends and neighbors, and equity in the form of land passed down to them. Modern people have to deal with student debt, keeping up with consumer trends, maintaining an adequate wardrobe, high transportation and housing costs, high healthcare costs, etc. etc. Professor Kraybill emphasizes the benefits of Amish culture but also thoughtfully addresses the criticisms of Amish culture. Even though Amish culture seems complicated with many rules and restrictions and confusing compromises, a few defining values guide their lifestyle. The first is the value of community over individualism. In Amish society, individual needs are subsumed to those of the community. The pursuit of personal achievements, higher education, artistic expression, and freedom of dress, occupation, and gender roles are curtailed in Amish society.

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