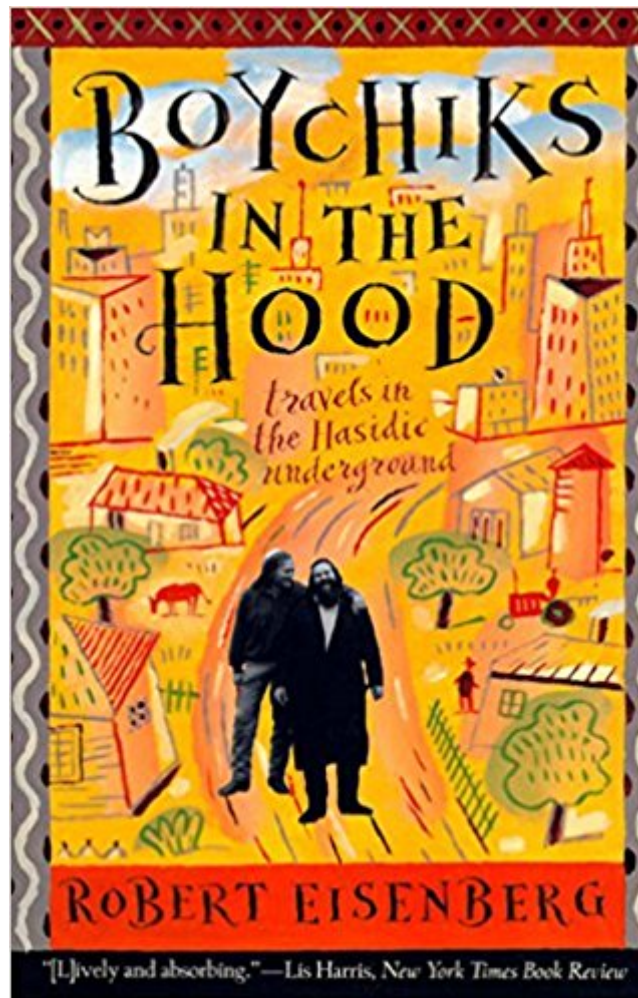


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# Boychiks In The Hood: Travels In The Hasidic Underground





## Synopsis

Boychiks in the Hood is your passport to the Hasidic "underworld" -- a destination far different from popular expectations. Join Robert Eisenberg as he hangs out with an ex-Deadhead in Antwerp, makes a pilgrimage to the grave of the revered Rebbie Nachman in the Ukraine, munches mini-bagels with Rollerblading kosher butchers in Minnesota, discovers the last remaining religious Jews in Poland, talks sex with a karate-champion-turned-rabbi in Israel, and more. Simultaneously respectful and hilarious, Boychiks in the Hood is a surprising and unforgettable journey through the world's flourishing Hasidic communities that reveals this vibrant tradition as never before.

## Book Information

Paperback: 256 pages

Publisher: HarperOne; Reprint edition (September 13, 1996)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0062512234

ISBN-13: 978-0062512239

Product Dimensions: 5.3 x 0.6 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 stars 37 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #1,024,756 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #106 in [Books > Religion & Spirituality > Judaism > Hasidism](#) #746 in [Books > Religion & Spirituality > Judaism > Jewish Life](#) #1587 in [Books > Health, Fitness & Dieting > Sexual Health > General](#)

## Customer Reviews

A ponytailed secular Jew who grew up learning Yiddish, the lingua franca of the orthodox, modernity-resisting Jewish sect known as Hasidim, Eisenberg has produced an engaging, if not always deep, mosaic of Hasidic life around the world. In Williamsburg and Boro Park, Brooklyn, home of the Satmars and the Belzers, he sees deeply rooted communities, finding himself welcomed and quizzed when he shows up at synagogues. In Los Angeles, the Lubavitchers have helped transform a Jewish community of '60s rejects that "carries the brand of Los Angeles on its back with the stark simplicity of a concentration camp tattoo." He visits tiny communities in Ukraine and Poland and describes how the small town of Postville, Iowa, has been changed by the advent of a Hasidic meat-packing plant. In lively Antwerp, the author observes signs of the vigorous prewar European Jewish community and, in one of his many quirky encounters, finds himself discussing Meir Kahane while listening to Frank Zappa. Indeed, given the Hasids' devotion, resiliency and high



birth rate, the author expects them to play a vital role in the American Jewish future. Copyright 1995 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Eisenberg, a secularist educated at Columbia and Harvard, is a descendant of a Hasidic family. He thereby gains easy access to the various Hasidic circles by use of a key passport: his ability to speak Yiddish, the lingua franca of many Hasids. The author estimates that there are 650,000 Hasids in the world, but he predicts that because of their high birth rate and devotion to their cause their influence will grow by leaps and bounds. His book, lighthearted but insightful, resembles a travelog in some respects and recounts his encounters with various Hasidic personalities and sects. Along the way, Eisenberg shows that Hasidism is not an undivided monolith of thought and opinion. Indeed, it is composed of many sects that proudly emphasize their differences with other Hasidic groups. The work also shows that Hasids are not as cut off from the secular world as imagined. This book makes a nice complement to Samuel Beilman's more scholarly *Defenders of the Faith* (LJ 2/1/92). Recommended for larger libraries. ?Paul Kaplan, Lake Villa Dist. Lib., Ill. Copyright 1995 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

I admit that I bought the book because the title suggested an almost rap-music reality behind the scenes of a New York Hasidic community. Yes, the title is plenty pop-culture, and it probably was part of a marketing plan. *BOYCHIKS IN THE HOOD* is a far better book than I had expected or hoped for, and the razzle-dazzle title does not at all suggest the complexity of a back-breaking world tour the mostly secular Eisenberg made, in a labor of love, to find and explore Orthodox, Satmar, Lubavitch, Hasidic communities thriving all over the world. As a non-Jew I perhaps know more about Judaism than some, but I have picked up both specifics and general ideas that have vitalized and deepened my respect for the Jewish world. In New York of course I have see "glatt" kosher restaurants, but here I learned that this step "up" from regular kosher means that the lungs of killed animals can show no flaws at all, while animals killed plain kosher can have slight sores---as long as the sores do not allow the passage of air. This kind of detail---and perhaps I pick one that may seem slightly sensational, and for that I apologize, for it is not presented that way by Eisenberg---suggests the level of detail, thought, discrimination, judgement, rule, and inevitable debate that runs through every inch of the Hasidic thought. Eleven nice chapters on the communities in Brooklyn, Minnesota, Ukraine, Israel, Poland, New Jersey, the Catskills, Belgium, and even a dynamite town in Iowa, etc. Full of surprises and wit (the wit sometimes diminished by Eisenberg's rather heavy handed sense of metaphor verging into pop-journalistic zing). But Eisenberg writes well, engagingly and



informatively. I've picked up fifty Yiddish words which, discreetly, I'll be dropping at cocktail parties as I finger my rosary. A powerfully readable book about a people's resilience, savvy, spirituality, and about the curious seduction of their unique kind of life.

I am amazed by the glow this book spreads over me. While reading this book, I feel like I have spent an afternoon with my favorite Bubbe. My concern going into this is that the author would write this story from a secular point of view - harsh and judgemental. But this story is told with such gentleness and love that I feel drawn deeper and deeper into it. I really appreciate that Mr. Eisenberg wants to understand his subject rather than tear their values down or dismiss them all together. Living in Manhattan and living in such close proximity to the Hasidim and yet not understanding their ways, I am excited to finally get a glimpse into a world I have only been able to witness from the most superficial level.

This book is great-& so easy to read, like the great Studs Turkle.-I hope Mr. Eisenberg is at his typewriter now, creating another book. Wonderful job.

Whether you're one of the "goyim", like me, or even if you're an "average modern Jew", I'm sure a great many of us (especially anyone from, or who frequents, NYC, Upstate NY, Toronto or Montreal) wonder what beliefs & lifestyles truly lie behind the mysterious long-curved sidelocks, beards, black hats & long coats when we encounter Hasidic Jews. Well, "Boychiks in the Hood" is your "Hasidic 101 Guide" to satisfy your curiosity. Written by Robert Eisenberg, a secular Jew who became driven to have that same curiosity satisfied after discovering that Hasidim are a part of his own family's history, this book is both very entertaining & very informative, delving deeply into a subculture very few of us are educated about. I was riveted to each page as I followed Eisenberg on his journey throughout North America & Europe to discover his Hasidic roots, & was fascinated by the great diversity inherent to this niche within Judaism that those on the outside might wrongly presuppose is monolithic (this book is where I first discovered the existence of ANTI-Zionist/ANTI-Israel Ultra-Orthodox Jews, revealing a phenomenon that is shocking to most non-Hasidic individuals). While you enroll in this abbreviated course on Hasidic studies I highly recommend you also pick up a DVD copy of the wonderful 1981 film, "The Chosen", starring Maximilian Schell, Rod Steiger, Robby Benson & Barry Miller, taking place in Brooklyn in the mid-1940s, which reveals the stark contrast between a modern Jewish professor who is an aggressive Zionist pioneer & a revered Hasidic rabbi who is a vehement Anti-Zionist, & how this chasm that separates them radically



affects the friendship of their two sons.

I grew up as a casual, reform Jew in Brooklyn 58 years ago. The last 22 years, I have lived in Colorado. In the Midwood section of Brooklyn, I would see, what seemed like a march of the Hasidic Jews and their families to the Temple on Friday night. In watching the men adorned in their black suits, it seemed like they were having the deepest type of conversations with their children, that always impressed me. While I saw many Hasidic Jews, ate at some of their restaurants and been among but never conversing with them, they were a great mystery to me. If there is anything to take away from "Robert Eisenberg's" marvelous, easy to read book about his travels among the Hasidic communities around the world, is how incredibly easy it was for Mr. Eisenberg, pony tail and all, to get into these communities, which I used to believe were very insular and secretive. I couldn't be more wrong. Time and time again, the another Hasidic community would open their homes and their hearts to Mr. Eisenberg, as it seemed that with 24 hours, he was being served dinner at a Rabbi's home. The other part was the diversity within the Hasidic community, where many did not grow up living the Hasidic Jewish lifestyle, but came from all sorts of lives before. Some were fans of the Greatful Dead (Deadheads), etc. Great book that breaks down barriers that all of seem to make between people, whose dress and customs, only make them "appear", different from others, but in reality, we are reminded that we are all part of the human community and should throw away are stereotypes. Jon

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