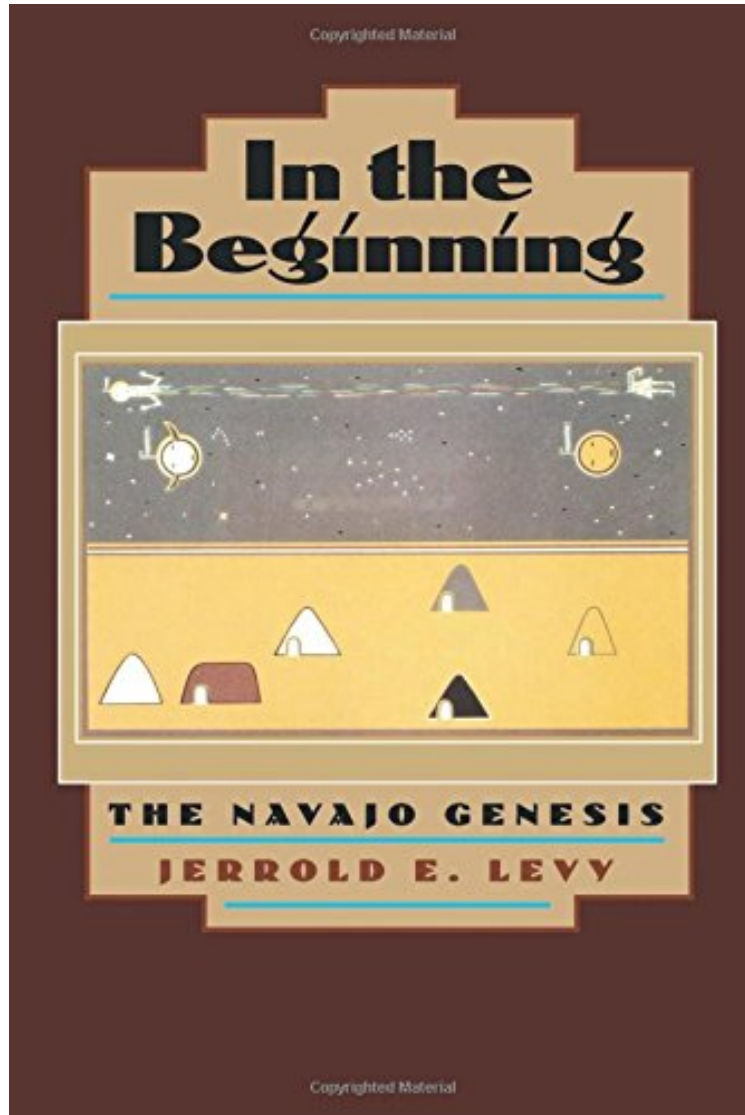


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In the Beginning: The Navajo Genesis

Jerrold E. Levy

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#2259469 in Books 1998-07-30 1998-07-30 Original language: English PDF # 1 8.80 x .69 x 5.901, 1.01 #File Name: 0520212770325 pages | File size: 63.Mb

Jerrold E. Levy : In the Beginning: The Navajo Genesis before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised In the Beginning: The Navajo Genesis:

4 of 6 people found the following review helpful. The Navajo Genesis By Judith M. Gemeinhardt This book attempts to delve into the beginning of creation through Navajo eyes. It explores the myths and legends and attempts to explain the meanings behind them but unfortunately leaves the reader somewhat confused. It attempts to demonstrate a comparative analysis between Navajo religion, Christianity and Judaism. It does show how similar these religions are; the only difference is the Navajo do not have a deity but instead pray to many that represent different problems in life

and for different reasons. What is felt short on was to help the reader to understand just what these myths represent and who they represent in their comparative analysis. I do believe the Navajo elders they spoke to were not in agreement as to the meaning or representation of "Changing Woman", Begocidi" and "Coyote" to name a few. My understanding from the book was that these particular actors represented many things, and the elders said as much but disagreed on the interpretation of the myths. This is what I as a reader in trying to understand "navajo" was confused by. If it can't be explained fully, then how can the reader understand it? This is a culture that needs to be explained and explored in more depth but in "plain English". The author is an academic professional and reviews this subject from an academic standpoint which does not even begin to touch the meaning and understanding of the Navajo religion. However, what this book did do was inspire me to seek out more readings in this area. One book just doesn't do it. 2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Academic yet interesting

By J. Gemeinhardt
Anyone interested in Native American Culture should not read this one first. Read the "Dine History" and "Navaho Symbols of Healing" first. These two books give you a better understanding into the background and history of the Native Americans and their culture. Once you understand "where they are coming from" and understand why they do what they do you will then be able to understand how their everyday life and connection with the Earth is part of their religion. It is their religion. This book explores a comparative analysis between Judaism, Christianity and the Navaho religion/culture. There are some definite similarities. You will see where much of our many religions came from and how they sprang up from "the beginnings". Written in academic style, it is a bit dry but very very interesting and gives you a true understanding of the Native American, cuts through the Myths and Legends and more.

Jerrold E. Levy's masterly analysis of Navajo creation and origin myths shows what other interpretations often overlook: that the Navajo religion is as complete and nuanced an attempt to answer humanity's big questions as the religions brought to North America by Europeans. Looking first at the historical context of the Navajo narratives, Levy points out that Navajo society has never during its known history been either homogeneous or unchanging, and he goes on to identify in the myths persisting traditions that represent differing points of view within the society. The major transformations of the Navajo people, from a northern hunting and gathering society to a farming, then herding, then wage-earning society in the American Southwest, were accompanied by changes not only in social organization but also in religion. Levy sees evidence of internal historical conflicts in the varying versions of the creation myth and their reflection in the origin myths associated with healing rituals. Levy also compares Navajo answers to the perennial questions about the creation of the cosmos and why people are the way they are with the answers provided by Judaism and Christianity. And, without suggesting that they are equivalent, Levy discusses certain parallels between Navajo religious ideas and contemporary scientific cosmology. The possibility that in the future Navajo religion will be as much altered by changing conditions as it has been in the past makes this fascinating account all the more timely.

About the Author
Jerrold E. Levy is Professor Emeritus of Anthropology at the University of Arizona. His earlier books include *Orayvi Revisited: Social Stratification in an "Egalitarian" Society* (1992), and *Drinking Careers: A 25-Year Study of Three Navajo Populations* (with Stephen J. Kunitz, 1994).