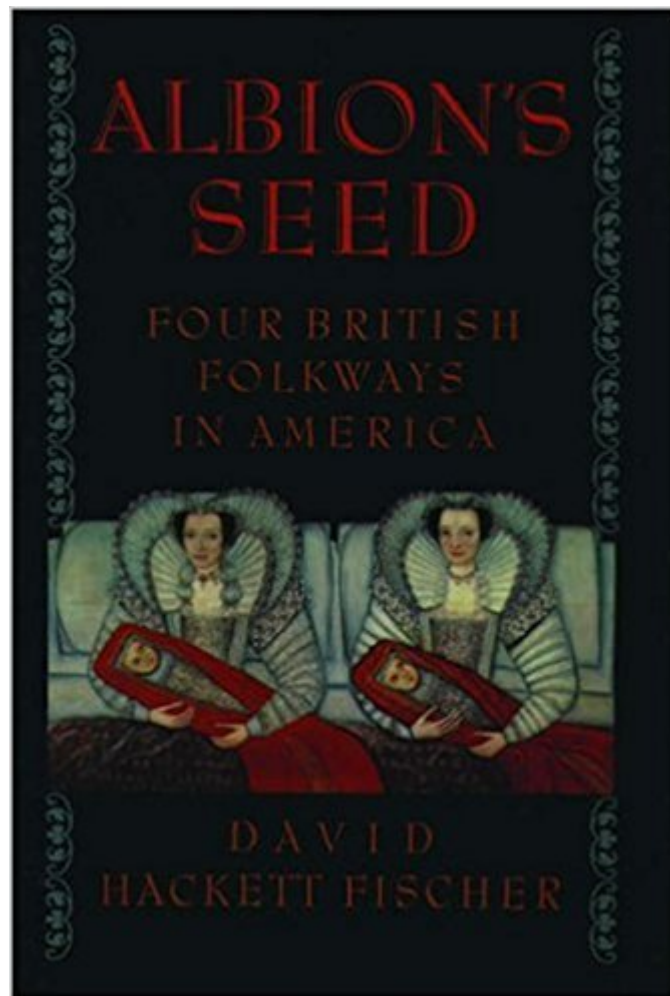


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Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways In America (America: A Cultural History)



Synopsis

This fascinating book is the first volume in a projected cultural history of the United States, from the earliest English settlements to our own time. It is a history of American folkways as they have changed through time, and it argues a thesis about the importance for the United States of having been British in its cultural origins. While most people in the United States today have no British ancestors, they have assimilated regional cultures which were created by British colonists, even while preserving ethnic identities at the same time. In this sense, nearly all Americans are "Albion's Seed," no matter what their ethnicity may be. The concluding section of this remarkable book explores the ways that regional cultures have continued to dominate national politics from 1789 to 1988, and still help to shape attitudes toward education, government, gender, and violence, on which differences between American regions are greater than between European nations.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This cultural history explains the European settlement of the United States as voluntary migrations from four English cultural centers. Families of zealous, literate Puritan yeomen and artisans from urbanized East Anglia established a religious community in Massachusetts (1629-40); royalist cavaliers headed by Sir William Berkeley and young, male indentured servants from the south and west of England built a highly stratified agrarian way of life in Virginia (1640-70); egalitarian Quakers of modest social standing from the North Midlands resettled in the Delaware Valley and promoted a

social pluralism (1675-1715); and, in by far the largest migration (1717-75), poor borderland families of English, Scots, and Irish fled a violent environment to seek a better life in a similarly uncertain American backcountry. These four cultures, reflected in regional patterns of language, architecture, literacy, dress, sport, social structure, religious beliefs, and familial ways, persisted in the American settlements. The final chapter shows the significance of these regional cultures for American history up to the present. Insightful, fresh, interesting, and well-written, this synthesis of traditional and more current historical scholarship provides a model for interpretations of the American character. Subsequent volumes of this promised multivolume work will be eagerly awaited. Highly recommended for the general reader and the scholar.- David Szatmary, Univ. of Washington, Seattle

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"Professor Fischer's careful research and analysis opens a much needed discussion of cultural character and origins in North America. The variety and complexity of historical sources will inform the work of other cultural historians and analysts."--Nadesan Permaul, UC Berkeley

"This is history at a lively pace, peppered with curious details about the origins of families...The author makes a convincing case."--Dolores and Roger Flaherty, Chicago Sun-Times

"A pleasure to read, for it is written with Fischer's characteristic perspicuity. Moreover, the numerous drawings by Jennifer Brody and maps by Andrew Mudryk are a visual treat."--Raymond A. Mohl, Review Essay

"The kind of book one can open to almost any page and immediately become engrossed...[R]eaders will enjoy and benefit from this book...We eagerly await volume two."--Neil R. Stout, Vermont History

"Holds up to readers a mirror in which they can discover in themselves and in their own world the persistence of their heritage...An engrossing work that will whet the appetite for more."--The National Genealogical Society Quarterly

"Ingenious and provocative...Raises matters of cardinal interest."--The Times Literary Supplement

"A splendid work of historical scholarship. . . . based on an original conception of cultural history which I find extremely usable. Eminently readable."--Omer Hadziselimovic, Earlham College [SEE REVIEW CARD FOR ACCENTS ON LAST NAME]"[A] sprightly analysis....This is history at a lively pace, peppered with curious details about the origins of familiar words and practices....The author makes a convincing case for his claim that `in a cultural sense most Americans are Albion's seed.'"--Chicago Sun-Times

"One of the most interesting, important, and ambitious books about American cultural and social origins ever written....A richly rewarding book, and one of great significance....It blends the best of new and old scholarship in lucid language designed to attract laymen and students alike. Very simply, Albion's Seed is a splendid achievement."--Michael Kammen, New York Newsday

"David Hackett Fischer's book could

not be much bigger or more ambitious. It is the first in a series of volumes that he hopes will eventually constitute a cultural history of the United States....This book starts his series with a bang--a big bang....Remarkable....A revisionist blockbuster."--Gordon Wood, *The New Republic*"Beautifully produced, this work should popularize the discoveries of a generation of scholars in the new social history. Anyone interested in these four cultures of the Anglo-American colonists will find here population data, family life, community mores, and archetypical individuals, portrayed in a clear and often lively text, thoughtfully analyzed illustrations, and wonderful maps."--Stephen Saunders Webb, *Washington Post Book World*

This is a classic. Hard to understand what's going on in American culture - the differences between New England, the South, Appalachia, etc - without the depth and background provided.

This is a enjoyable and informative read that aids the reader in thinking about sociocultural norms in the U.S. I've found it very helpful in providing background on the culture and practices of various family lines that I've been researching. It's also more entertaining than I expected. For anyone wondering why there are so many political and social divides in this country, taking a step back to the folkways of four major British settlement vectors can yield tremendous insights into why we are who we are today.

Very thick. I know it is great, but it sits on my bookshelf while I read "Born Fighting." This book is known to Scots-Irish and other people of British descent as the "gold standard" of the impact of British peoples on American culture.

Good book. The history of our eastern seaboard being populated by our english-speaking ancestors: There were four groups. The Anglican Pilgrims in Mass Bay, the VA tidewater folks, the Penn Quakers and the back country "Borderers." The northern border people included "my people," the Scots-Irish, and I focused on those chapters. They are the ones who mostly settled in the back country (a buffer between the Indians and the more gentle Americans). A good history book and quite readable.

This is required reading for any nonprofessional that wants to talk seriously about American history. It is incredibly long in terms of page volume but will keep you interested the entire time with constant "aha!" moments that show how the people from the British isles that settled this continent hundreds

of years ago still shape its destiny in the present day. Why do New Englanders get a reputation as preening moralists? Why are backwoods Appalachia and the Deep South the most fertile recruiting ground for soldiers? Why bother with African slavery in the first place? This book provides clues. I especially like the sections where the author explores "Freedom Ways" of the four groups covered. It is a gentle reminder just how unique cultures can be to consider that their interpretations of something as seemingly self-explanatory as freedom could be so different.

David Hackett Fisher's *Albion's Seed* is an enlightening and fascinating book. The reason it had such a powerful impact on me is because I was expecting a history book and it's not - it's an anthropology book. It is a study of nature - human nature as it arose in England and settled in America 400 years ago. At its core *Albion's Seed* accepts the conservative belief that what people ARE is more important to history than what people DO. It is surprising to see this book coming from a sociology professor at Brandeis University - a place generally racially hostile to indigenous European peoples such as the English. *Albion's Seed* is about the English settlers of America in the 1600s and 1700s. And it contains not a trace of hostility or condescension towards them. In the case of the Quakers of the Delaware Valley it is openly admiring - so much so that Fisher almost loses his academic detachment. In addition to the Quakers who emigrated from the North Midlands fleeing persecution, it studies the Puritan Congregationalists who settled New England from East England seeking to create a perfect society; the royalist elites from the South of England who left because of population pressure and formed Virginian society; and the war-like, clan-like families from the English/Scottish border fleeing famine and persecution who settled the American backcountries. Fisher brilliantly and deeply describes the varied folkways of these people and (especially in the case of the English/Scotch border folk) how those ways arose from the history of their homeland. In America they were free from the pressures of England - but they brought their nature and culture with them and carved out unique, successful, and cultured societies in the new world. This book is deeply researched and thoroughly footnoted. It is both scholarly and easy to read. I highly recommend it to anyone who believes that history changes - but people do not.

A classic, incredibly researched work. Great book as expanded/comprehensive follow up to "American Nations: A History of the Eleven Rival Regional Cultures of North America" with maps, comparative charts, footnotes, discussions of US Presidents' heritages. Few (but obvious) author opinions. Far better than the above mentioned best selling book. Interesting read. I now have a better knowledge and understanding of the REAL colonial history of the US that is often skimmed

over in the public schools. I'm proud to say that most of our US Presidents have come from the rowdy Scots-Irish heritage! Yay!

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