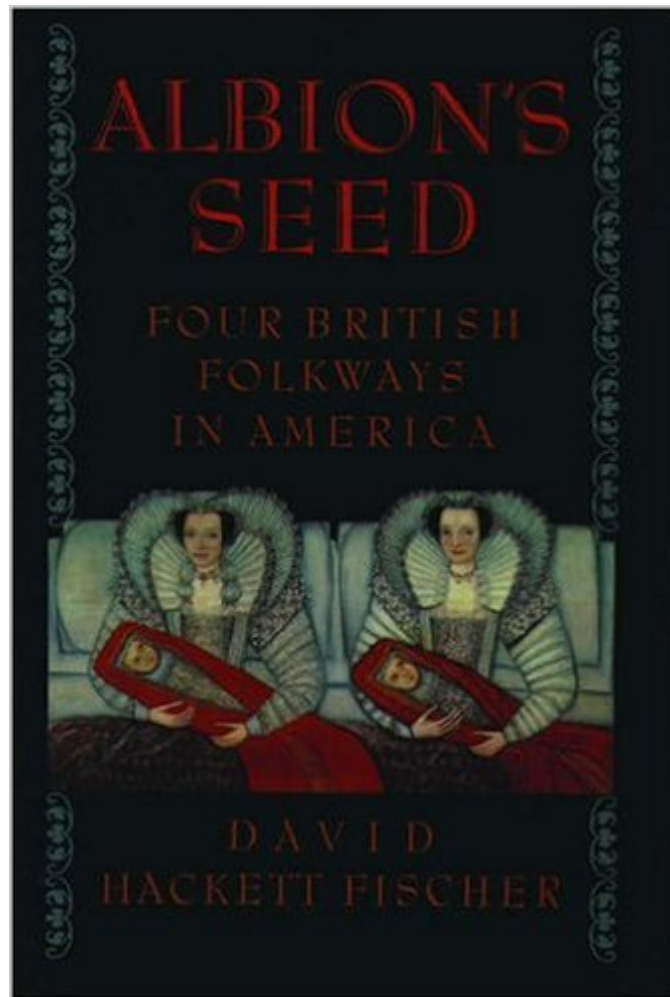


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Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways In America (America: A Cultural History)



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

Albion's Seed by Brandeis University History Professor David Hackett Fischer is the history of the four main regional migrations from Britain to North America in the 17th and 18th centuries.

Professor Fischer examines each of these four migrations in great detail, describing the origin, motivations, religion, timing, and numerous cultural attitudes or folkways for dealing with everyday life, including birth, child rearing, marriage, age, death, order, speech, architecture, dress, food, wealth, and time, to cite only a few. He devotes special attention to the different concepts of liberty and freedom held by each of these four British cultural groups. The first major wave consisted

predominantly of the Puritans from East Anglia who settled in New England between 1629 and 1640, the years immediately preceding the English Civil War in which Oliver Cromwell and the Puritan army defeated and beheaded King Charles I. The second wave consisted of defeated (or soon to be defeated) supporters of the king and the Established (Anglican) Church of England, primarily from the south and west of England, who settled in the Chesapeake Bay regions of Virginia and Maryland between 1642 and 1675. The third wave was the migration of Quakers from the English midlands (and their religious kin from various German sects) who settled in the Delaware Valley (southeast Pennsylvania, west New Jersey, north Delaware) between 1675 and 1715. Finally, the "Scotch-Irish", referring collectively to immigrants from the north of England, lowland Scotland, and Ulster, settled the Appalachian backcountry from Pennsylvania southwest through Virginia, the Carolinas, and into Tennessee and Kentucky from 1717 to 1775.

Freedom's liberty tree is planted in the fertile soil of the many cultural groups who have made our land a "melting pot." In Fischer's brilliant work he traces with fascinating detail the transposition from Britain to the American colonies the folkways that have made each region distinctive. The four folk cultures he delineates are:

1. New England-the Puritans came from the East Anglia region of England. They were pious, hardworking and intoxicated with theology and order.
2. The Middle Colonies-the Quaker influence is profound in this region of Pennsylvania, Delaware and New Jersey. William Penn and the followers of the Quaker founder George Fox were the most liberal minded of the quartet of folk cultures chronicled by Fischer. The Quaker culture was influential in the southwest and midland counties of Britain. Their belief in religious toleration has added much to American democracy.
3. The tidewater and coastal south was settled by southern English natives who were Cavaliers supportive of the Stuart dynasty. This society was hierarchical and based on honor and fueled by chattel slavery.
4. the backcountry region was settled by Englishmen from the northern border region of England, Scotland and Ulster Scotch-Irish. Exemplified by such paragons of this violent and emotional culture were men like Andrew Jackson and James Knox Polk. Composed of Hoosiers and Rednecks, Crackers and doughty pioneers this society believed in individual freedom. The almost 1000 page book is filled with illustrations, population data and election results of Presidential elections which reflect how political choices are reflected in the four major mass migrations made to America by Britishers.

"Albion's Seed" by David Hackett Fischer explains in clear understandable language how four waves of English migration to these shores in the 17th century forever impacted on who and what

we would become as Americans. The "folkways" that they brought with them have, to this day, remained, and traveling through what were once the original 13 colonies, one can still see and hear what our original English forebears brought with them, if you look and listen close enough. In particular, one of the more revealing things about the book is the explanation of the deeper causes of our American Civil War, which we are always taught in history classes was rooted in slavery. Fischer goes beyond the obvious to point out a basic conflict of "folkways" that had begun back on English soil with the English Civil War between the Cavaliers and the Roundheads, who on American soil would become the Southerners and the Yankees. This deeper cause explains why even today echoes of the Civil War remain in the political differences between North and South. This book is a very important reference for anyone interested in any variety of topics, from genealogy to linguistics to history to architecture to urban planning and so much more. Fischer explains how each of these cultures had unique patterns of town planning, marriage, food, death, birth, speech, religion, education and more. Jam packed full of important information, this book belongs in the library of anyone who has an interest in who we are and why we Americans are such a pluralistic nation. I cannot recommend this book enough, and eagerly await other books in this series on the cultural history of America.

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