

enhance our-relating-to-reality." With an air of decisiveness, Nozick adds:

Love of this world is coordinate with love of life. Life is our being in this world . . . We want nothing other than to live in a spiral of activities and enhance others' doing so, deepening our own reality as we come into contact and relation with the rest, exploring the dimensions of reality, embodying them in ourselves, creating, responding to the full range of the reality we can discern with the fullest reality we possess, becoming a vehicle for truth, beauty, goodness, and holiness, adding our own characteristic bit to reality's eternal processes.

Faced with sentences as noble as these, it would be churlish of me to dissent from them or in any way to impede their flow. But I have to dissent in one particular: What Nozick takes as ultimacy, I take as mediation. Besides, I am not sure that my best endeavors—or what I deem such—will make me more real, in any sense of the word that I understand. One probably has a better chance of being real, or of becoming real, by not specifying it too insistently as one's aim.

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How British are We?

ALBION'S SEED: Four British Folkways in America. *By David Hackett Fischer. Oxford. 946 pp. \$39.95*

At first glance, one may be tempted to call David Fischer's *Albion's Seed* an oddly reactionary interpretation of American history. Most historians today live by the dogma that change alone, not change and continuity, defines their discipline. Fischer, a professor of history at Brandeis, goes against the grain by taking seriously an idea long thought dead and buried: namely, that our culture is British through and through.

Fischer thus appears the unlikely heir of the 19th-century American historian, Herbert Baxter Adams, who dignified his genteel conservatism by celebrating the English motherland's noble past. Resurrecting Adams's "germ theory" of history while rejecting its racist implications, Fischer revives the premise that our British origins continue to shape American culture today.

Those origins consist of four different cultural strains, established here, as Fischer shows, in four discrete migrations: East Anglicans to New England, 1629-40; south and western English Royalists to Virginia, 1629-1642 (he sets aside James-

town's frail founding); North Midlanders, largely Quakers, to the Delaware Valley, 1675-1715; and British "Borderers" from Scotland, northern England, and Ireland to the Appalachian backlands, 1715-1775.

Each subculture, he argues, had its own distinctive character on both sides of the Atlantic. The Quakers, for example, fostered democracy through both their laws guaranteeing "liberty of conscience" and their plainness of dress and manners; by comparison, the Puritans looked autocratic and rank-conscious. For their part, the borderland "Celts" retained in America their fierce clannish spirit, while their notions of warrior heroism and individual freedom underlay their understanding of the term "liberty."

Indeed, each of the four groups carried over from their particular region of England quite distinct ideals of freedom. By contrast with the Celts of Appalachia, the Puritans of New England perceived liberty in terms of community life—"ordered liberty": The Puritans could thus ruthlessly suppress Quakers and other heretics even while claiming religious freedom for themselves. The Virginians maintained a quite different combination of freedom and intolerance. The slaveholders made liberty almost synonymous with honor—

the right of freemen to rule without being overruled, to take pride in their condition, so unlike the slaves'. How different this was from the Quakers' concept of equitable, "reciprocal liberty," which included their antislavery predilections. Incidentally, none of these four distinct regional notions of freedom meets the modern, secular conception of freedom; in fact, colonial white Americans would have found the modern conception grossly permissive, anarchical, and profane.

Fischer's approach touches on all areas of cultural life. Take games and pastimes, for example. New Englanders, favoring associational activities, created team sports that were to evolve into football and baseball. Virginians, conservative in taste and hierarchy, preferred horse racing and the hunt. True to their faith, Quakers, whose religion was hostile to blood sports and needless gaming, enjoyed the "gentle recreation" of gardening. The Celtic backcountrymen reveled in contact sports—wrestling, boxing, eye-gouging—and the warrior's exigencies, the foot race and tests of firearms. In matters relating to time, Puritans sought to "improve" it in home and community activity; Quakers, to "redeem" it in contemplation and private prayer; Virginians, to "kill" it in wenching, drinking, and gambling; Borderers, to "pass" it in music, yarn-spinning, and cracker-barrel gossip. These and other entertaining aspects of daily life seem trivial only when separated from the larger context that Fischer so carefully constructs.

Fischer's insistence on the non-materialistic character of cultural adaptations constitutes his second historical heresy. He disputes both the Marxists, who explain everything in terms of class, and the conservative positivists, who see capitalism as the prime motivator. By uniting economic and political factors with such ineffable concerns as "learning ways," "gender ways," and "magic ways," Fischer makes folkways rest not on biological instinct—as the 19th-century originator of the term, William Graham Sumner, did—but on habit, conscious thought, and sometimes the "deliberate contrivance of a cultural

elite." (Fischer's "ways" terminology can become tedious: A reader wonders why "food ways" could not simply be called "food.")

Fischer's third heresy is an eclecticism that defies the artificial barriers among historians. He adopts all forms of legitimate investigation to argue his case—from cliometrics, the favorite muse of the hard-headed, to the humanistic devices of the mushy-minded; he is particularly indebted to cultural and economic anthropology, *La longue durée* and the *histoire totale*—practically the mottoes of the French *Annales* school of historians—have had few intellectual adherents in a nation that has prided itself on its dynamic capacity for change—that is, until David Fischer made himself the American equivalent of an *Annaliste*. In America, the "total history" envisioned by Fernand Braudel has been fragmented into disparate forms of social history. The study of women, blacks, labor, environment, and even forms of sexual preference has lately dominated the academy—with a consequent loss of coherence and any sense of overarching national identity. Fischer seeks a return to the original goal of the French school, an interpretive synthesis.

Finally, as if all this were not heresy enough, Fischer informs us that all those popular regional stereotypes which historians have struggled to discredit bear serious reexamination. In Fischer's hands, Thomas Jefferson's famous and unflattering portrait of the Yankee brethren receives fresh validation. The Yankees' nasal twang (derived from the "Norfolk whine"), their "sadd," muddy-colored apparel, their overboiled cuisine, their joyless, witch-haunted religion as well as their ungracious bluntness and unbridled acquisitiveness all had a historical basis, Fischer persuades us, deriving from Dutch-influenced East Anglia with its small market towns, artisans, and Calvinist merchants.

By reverting to old stereotypes, Fischer disposes of much scholarly misrepresentation. For example, he provocatively insists

that slavery did *not* create the rigidified foundations of southern society. That foundation had been brought over from Wessex, where extreme inequality and scattered rural living had been the rule. American black slavery, Fischer says, "did not create the culture of the tidewater Virginia; that culture created slavery." The first form of coerced labor was indentured servitude, not African slavery, which was a late 17th-century development.

Perhaps the most debatable of all arguments in *Albion's Seed* is its closing section on the persistence of the four regional cultures. Fischer feels compelled to show the impact of the past upon our more recent history, and his examples can be striking. For instance, he finds cultural persistence in the qualities of leadership: Franklin Roosevelt he identifies as a scion of New England rather than of Dutch New York; Virginian George C. Marshall, a reincarnation of Lee; George C. Patton, heir to Andrew Jackson's backcountry culture; and Dwight Eisenhower, "a soldier who hated fighting" as a result of his Moravian-Quaker upbringing. Indeed, in this final section Fischer sheds light on the way in which old regional political divisions endure in such matters as gun control, women's rights, and military spending.

Yet to make British origins primary in America where only 20 percent of us now

acknowledge British descent, where immigrants pour in from Latin America and the Orient, where each ethnic group clamors for its rightful place in the national sun, and where materialist historians dominate the profession, is to beg for instant rebuttal. *Albion's Seed* is one of those rarities in historiography, a book that will raise a salutary firestorm.

However, so comprehensive is Fischer's thesis and so illuminating its evidence that critics will find them no easy matter to refute. *Albion's Seed* transforms our understanding of the nation's cultural heritage, both its good and bad aspects, its liberalism and its conservatism, its tolerance and its intolerance. What others have seen as paradoxes or, more invidiously, as hypocrisies of American life, Fischer sees in terms of social patterns, customs, and traditions. Americans were never innocent, as once was thought, he implies, but share with their European forebears persistent vices as well as virtues. When Fischer completes his projected five volumes of the full range of the American past, he will have altered the historical landscape in a way no previous scholar ever has.

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Art for Life's Sake

MOVING PICTURES. By Anne Hollander. Knopf. 512 pp. \$29.95

THE POWER OF IMAGES: Studies in the History and Theory of Response. By David Freedberg. Univ. of Chicago. 534 pp. \$39.95

This is not a pipe," announces the caption in René Magritte's famous 1928–29 painting of what most certainly *looks* like a pipe. An exercise in painterly wit? To be sure. But the painting is something else: an embodiment and validation of one of the main aesthetic principles of modern-

ism. Indeed, for over a century, both in and out of the academy, artists and critics have taught the educated public to look at pictures not as representations of reality but as compositions of form, line, and color. This "formalist" perspective has served to distance the viewer from the work of art, to discourage moralizing about subject matter, and to promote an attitude of analytical detachment.

The impulse to distinguish "art" from non-art first became particularly strong in the overheated atmosphere of the *fin-de-siècle*. Aesthetic legislators like Bernard