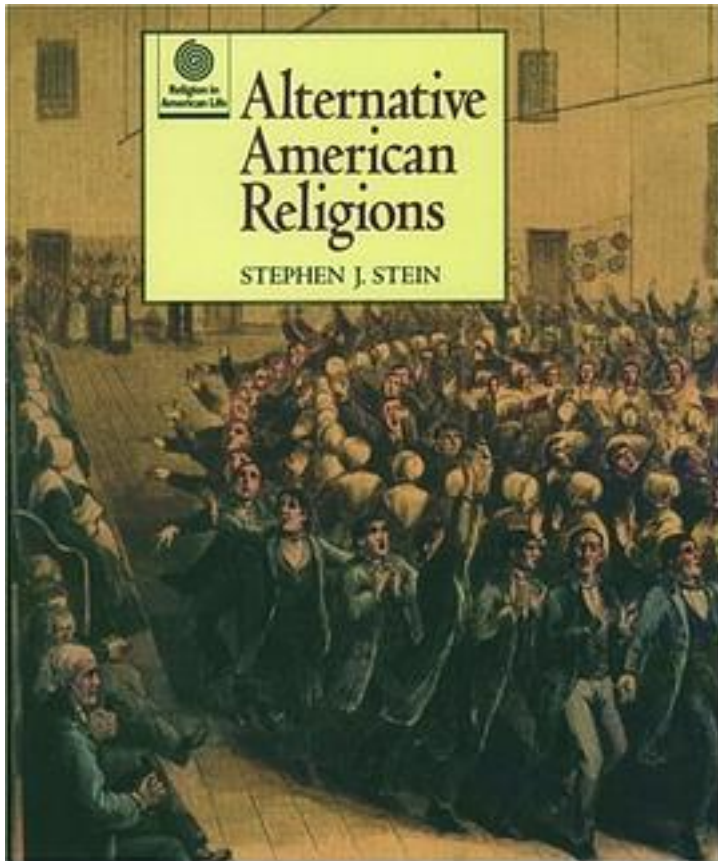


Alternative American Religions



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Through their role in the development of the First Amendment and their exercise of the freedoms it grants, alternative religious groups have had a profound influence on American history. As Stephen J. Stein points out in this vivid overview, the history of alternative religion--from colonial Puritans to late-20th-century Branch Davidians--runs parallel to that of dissent in America. Committed to fairness of representation, Stein

describes the evolution and structure of alternative religious movements from both sides: the critics and the religious dissenters themselves. He investigates obscure groups such as the 19th-century Vermont Pilgrims, who wore bearskins and refused to bathe or cut their hair, alongside better-known alternative believers, including colonial America's largest outsider faith, the Quakers; 17th- and 18th-century Mennonites, Amish, and Shakers; and the Christian Scientists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Black Muslims, and Scientologists of today. The book also covers the milestones in the history of alternative American religions, from the infamous Salem witch trials and mass suicide/murder at Jonestown to the positive ways in which these religions have affected racial relations and the empowerment of women. Religion in American Life explores the evolution, character, and dynamics of organized religion in America from 1500 to the present day. Written by distinguished religious historians, these books weave together the varying stories that compose the religious fabric of the United States, from Puritanism to alternative religious practices. Primary source material coupled with handsome illustrations and lucid text make these books essential in any exploration of America's diverse nature. Each book includes a chronology, suggestions for further reading, and index.

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