



Radical Sects of Revolutionary New England

Stephen A. Marini

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During the late eighteenth century, radical religious sects in the backwoods of New England created a mass movement in dissent, which broke the grip of a monolithic religious culture and helped lay the foundation for a new style of diversity in religion and ultimately in politics. In this comparative study of the Shakers, Universalists, and Freewill Baptists, Stephen Marini analyzes beliefs, leadership, social structures, and rituals in order to decipher their appeal and explain the larger effects. These three sects arose during the American Revolution in response to a complex crisis of religious revival, frontier migration, and political changes. By 1815 they represented one-fourth of rural New England's churches. Their rejection of basic Calvinist beliefs and practices such as predestination and original sin presented the first large-scale popular challenge to the dominant religious norms in New England. As America's earliest indigenous religions they created alternative theologies, politics, and liturgies which expressed a new emphasis on free will, equality, and community. Utilizing the concepts and techniques of social history, anthropology, and sociology, Marini's work traces the development of these new religious cultures as an integral element of Revolutionary New England.

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