



# Nature Cures: The History of Alternative Medicine in America

*James C. Whorton*

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From reflexology and rolfing to shiatsu and dream work, we are confronted today by a welter of alternative medical therapies. But as James Whorton shows in *Nature Cures*, the recent explosion in alternative medicine actually reflects two centuries of competition and conflict between mainstream medicine and numerous unorthodox systems.

This is the first comprehensive history of alternative medicine in America, examining the major systems that have emerged from 1800 to the present. Writing with wit and with fairness to all sides, Whorton offers a fascinating look at alternative health systems such as homeopathy, water cures, Mesmerism, Christian Science, osteopathy, chiropractic, naturopathy, and acupuncture. He highlights the birth and growth of each system (including European roots where appropriate) and vividly describes both the theories and the therapies developed within each system, including such dubious practices as hour-long walks barefoot in snow or Samuel Thompson's "puking and steaming" regimen. In particular, Whorton illuminates the philosophy of "natural healing" that has been espoused by alternative practitioners throughout history and the distinctive interpretations of "nature cure" developed by the different systems. Though he doesn't hesitate to point out the failings of these systems, he also shows that some "cult medicines" have eventually won recognition from practitioners of mainstream medicine.

Throughout, Whorton writes with a light touch and quotes from contemporary humorists such as Mark Twain. His book is an engaging and authoritative history that highlights the course of alternative medicine in the U.S., providing valuable background to the wide range of therapies available today.

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