



The Western: Parables of the American Dream

By Jeffrey Wallmann, Richard S. Wheeler

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No element of America's historical heritage has inspired more myth and legend than the expansion Westward—an epic of immense proportion. And for two hundred years, millions of Americans have thrilled to western stories larger than life and stronger than history, identifying themselves with stalwart pioneers, laconic loners quick on the draw, widows defying rapacious cattle barons, outlaws battling corrupt star-toters, homesteaders defending themselves against Indians, and Indians defending themselves against prejudiced settlers and contemptuous soldiers. Indeed, because the western is central to popular American culture, it is arguably the cradle of American art and literature—containing some of the best and much of the worst fiction ever written—and all of it a fascinating mirror of American life and society. In this regard, *The Western: Parables of the American Dream* is the first comprehensive historical survey of the western in all of its various manifestations, from the earliest Indian captivity narratives and pioneer biographies to the most contemporary western novels, films, and television series. But more, this entertaining and highly readable text also contrasts the fictional and the real West. Well-conceived and focused, Wallmann's sweep through the western is a careful, incisive, and blessedly non-theoretical examination of the implications of the western from the beginning to the present, taking the reader deep into the heart of the subject and offering original and perceptive theories of how the western reflects the evolution of America. No other book on westerns has succeeded so eloquently in capturing facts and ideas, comment and analysis, on the role of westerns in influencing—and being influenced by—the historical and cultural forces that determine belief, identity, and status in America. *The Western* is a significant and major contribution to American Studies, and will surely become a standard work to be reckoned with by scholars of Western American literature.

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