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052181667X - Marriage, Violence, and the Nation in the American Literary West

William R. Handley

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MARRIAGE, VIOLENCE, AND THE NATION IN THE AMERICAN LITERARY WEST

In *Marriage, Violence, and the Nation in the American Literary West*, William R. Handley examines literary interpretations of the western American past. Handley argues that although recent scholarship provides a narrative of western history that counters the optimistic story of frontier individualism by focusing on the victims of conquest, twentieth-century American fiction tells a different story of intra-ethnic violence, surrounding marriages and families. He examines works of historiography, as well as writing by Zane Grey, Willa Cather, Wallace Stegner, and Joan Didion among others, to argue that these works highlight white Americans' anxiety about what happens to American "character" when domestic enemies such as Indians and Mormon polygamists, against whom the nation had defined itself in the nineteenth century, no longer threaten its homes. Handley explains that once its enemies are gone, imperialism brings violence home in retrospective narratives that allegorize national pasts and futures through intimate relationships.

WILLIAM R. HANDLEY is Assistant Professor of English at the University of Southern California. His articles have appeared in *Arizona Quarterly*, *Contemporary Literature*, and *Twentieth Century Literature*.

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For my parents

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