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The New Western: Critical Essays on the Genre Since 9/11

Scott F. Stoddart

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American moviegoers have long turned to the Hollywood Western for reassurance in times of crisis. During the genre's heyday, the films of John Ford, Howard Hawks and Henry Hathaway reflected a grand patriotism that resonated with audiences at the end of World War II. The tried-and-true Western was questioned by Ford and George Stevens during the Cold War, and in the 1960s directors like Sam Peckinpah and George Roy Hill retooled the genre as a commentary on American ethics during the Vietnam War.
Between the mid-1970s and early 1990s, the Western faded from view--until the Gulf War, when Kevin Costner's *Dances with Wolves* (1990) and Clint Eastwood's *Unforgiven* (1992) brought it back, with moral complexities. Since 9/11, the Western has seen a resurgence, blending its patriotic narrative with criticism of America's place in the global community. Exploring such films as *True Grit* (2010) and *Brokeback Mountain* (2005), along with television series like *Deadwood* and *Firefly*, this collection of new essays explores how the Western today captures the dichotomy of our times and remains important to the American psyche.

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