

(Free read ebook) Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth

Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth

Henry Nash Smith

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Henry Nash Smith : Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth:

The spell that the West has always exercised on the American people had its most intense impact on American literature and thought during the nineteenth century. Smith shows, with vast comprehension, the influence of the nineteenth-century West in all its variety and strength, in special relation to social, economic, cultural, and political forces. He traces the myths and symbols of the Westward movement such as the general notion of a Westward-moving Course of Empire, the Wild Western hero, the virtuous yeoman-farmer--in such varied nineteenth-century writings as Leaves of Grass, the great corpus of Dime Novels, and most notably, Frederick Jackson Turner's The Frontier in American History. Moreover, he synthesizes the imaginative expression of Western myths and symbols in literature with their role in contemporary politics, economics, and society, embodied in such forms as the idea of Manifest Destiny, the conflict in the American mind between idealizations of primitivism on the one hand and of progress and civilization on the other, the Homestead Act of 1862, and public-land policy after the Civil War. The myths of the American West that found their expression in nineteenth-century words and deeds remain a part of every American's heritage, and Smith, with his insight into their power and significance, makes possible a critical appreciation of that heritage.

A very illuminating study in the history of ideas. Its principal theme is the rise and decline of the conception of the West as an agrarian utopia the myth of the 'garden of the world' that implanted itself so deeply in the imagination of nineteenth-century America. Professor Smith brings to his study an unusual adeptness in the integration of material from different fields, and, what is more important, an admirable feeling for shadings and distinctions, for the complexly organic relationship between empiric fact and what human emotion and imagination would make of it...'Virgin Land' achieves a kind of clarification of its subject that makes it, one feels, a landmark in the interpretation of the West. (Nation)This brilliant interpretative analysis will make a permanent contribution to a better understanding of the role of the West in American history. (Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences)To read 'Virgin Land' is to experience a deep intellectual excitement. (Christian Science Monitor)Mr. Smith's book is a work of solid scholarship on a facet of our history that has not always been assessed at its proper importance. Here...is the story of all our yesterdays. (Washington Post)