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By Philip Connors



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The West is vital to the myth of America. It is where radical individualism and beautiful landscapes merge in a sort of earthly paradise. Or so we've been led to believe by cinematic and literary mythmakers. There is, however, a counter-narrative put forth by writers such as Joan Didion and Mike Davis, who argue that the myths of the West met their end on California's golden shores some time ago, in ecological catastrophe and social anomie. Between these visions lies another West where contradictions abound. No other part of the country is as undeveloped; yet no other part of the country contains urban areas that are growing as quickly, where there are struggles over the West's most precious commodity, water; over how to manage and maintain wilderness; over the pace and character of the sprawl that threatens to turn Denver and Phoenix into inland LA's. Amid these struggles, individuals still try to create a place for themselves that allows for a connection to the landscape and a connection to some form of community. The New West Reader explores the conflicts and contractions that make up the contemporary West with writing by Larry McMurtry, Sherman Alexie, Edward Abbey, and others.



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