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Dare to know

Traditional Westerns

A subset that formalized its conventions by the early 1930s, at which time the genre came into its own. Traditional Westerns frequently romanticize the Old West as a place of honor, courage, and adventure, and an age of open options when a man controlled his own destiny. Narratives focus on the virtues of the frontier and the trailblazer's struggle for survival. Stories are characterized by a straightforward style and by iconoclastic people who demonstrate resiliency and vitality, and embody frontier qualities. The stalwart, lonely protagonist might roam the mountain ranges of the West hunting wild game and/or trapping beaver for the Eastern markets. Intrepid characters, both men and women, may play a role in building new communities amid the raw wilderness of the American West, usually facing harsh weather and dangerous circumstances. Others are on a quest for riches, usually in the form of found gold or silver, or engaged in armed conflict with the nomadic Indian bands. Protagonists might be stoic, hardy, capable men who use a gun to right a wrong or make a town safe for law-abiding citizens. Repeatedly in this subset, the lone man must confront and overcome obstacles to achieve justice or redemption. He usually triumphs through sheer force of will, as much as his talents with a six-shooter. Paradoxically, the Western gunfighter cannot co-exist with the civilization he has fought to build and defend. His violent skills and way of life are rejected by the residents of the town made safe for schools and churches, and he must literally or figuratively ride into the sunset.

The Western genre birthed the mythical icon of the American cowboy, a forthright figure who echoed the tenets of the chivalric code. Yet, he remains an everyman who is simply more self-reliant, independent, and free than others. He may embark on a long, often arduous, journey to move a herd of cattle to a railhead. There are often valuable life lessons learned along the way and deep friendships formed, as well as the potential for romance. This idealized version of the actual corporate employee provides a framework for an illustration of shared values of morality and honorable behavior.

Formulated by Owen Wister and others in the early days of the genre, the traditional "code of the West" was a set of principles and practices with no basis in law

or government but instead originated in the social and cultural atmosphere of the West. The code simultaneously embodied communal morality and the importance of personal honor. Rather than focusing on material or social success, the Western hero personified the virtues of accepting responsibility, upholding commitments, keeping one's word, avoiding unworthy actions, and pragmatically handling difficult situations with integrity, skill, and discretion. These are considered the true measure of a man.

Oliver Strange's *The Range Robbers* (1930), Conrad Richter's *The Sea of Grass* (1936), Luke Short's *Gunman's Chance* (1941), Max Brand's *Silvertip* (1941), L. L. Foreman's *Jemez Brand* (1942), A. B. Guthrie, Jr.'s *The Big Sky* (1947) and *The Way West* (1949), Jack Schaefer's *Shane* (1949) and *Monte Walsh* (1963), Tom Lea's *The Wonderful Country* (1952), Louis L'Amour's *Hondo* (1953) and *The Daybreakers* (1960), Wayne D. Overholser's *The Violent Land* (1954), Alan Le May's *The Searchers* (1954), Frederick Manfred's *Lord Grizzly* (1954), Mari Sandoz's *Miss Morissa, Doctor of the Gold Trail* (1955), T. V. Olsen's *Haven of the Hunted* (1956), Charles O. Locke's *The Hell Bent Kid* (1957), Elmer Kelton's *Buffalo Wagons* (1957), Frank O'Rourke's *The Bravados* (1958) and *A Mule for the Marquesa* (1964), Will Henry's *From Where the Sun Now Stands* (1960), Max Evans's *The Rounders* (1960), J. T. Edson's *The Ysabel Kid* (1963), Hal G. Evarts's *The Sundown Kid* (1964), Vardis Fisher's *Mountain Man* (1965), and Lewis B. Patten's *The Red Sabbath* (1968) are influential classic examples.

Common Elements

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| Romanticized view of the West | Opportunity | Character depth |
| Personal freedom | Heroic endeavors | Surviving harsh elements |
| Rugged individualism | Democracy | Wild animals |
| Self-reliance | Equality | Homesteading |
| Courage | Personal integrity and character | Town building |
| Work ethic | Characters with grit | Complexities of human conflict |
| Moral codes | Common sense | |

Modern Literary Examples

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| <i>Aces and Eights</i> (1981) by Loren D. Estleman | <i>Appaloosa</i> (2005) by Robert B. Parker |
| | <i>Bendigo Shafter</i> (1979) by Louis L'Amour |

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| <i>The Big Drift</i> (2015) by Patrick Dearen | <i>The Legend of Caleb York</i> (2015) by Mickey Spillane and Max Allan Collins |
| <i>Carver's Kingdom</i> (1978) by Frederick Nolan | <i>Long Road to Abilene</i> (2016) by Robert Vaughan |
| <i>Cemetery Jones</i> (1985) by William R. Cox | <i>Once a Marshal</i> (1998) by Peter Brandvold |
| <i>Centennial</i> (1974) by James A. Michener | <i>The Outlawed</i> (1970) by Ray Hogan |
| <i>Comstock Lode</i> (1981) by Louis L'Amour | <i>The Overmountain Men</i> (1991) by Cameron Judd |
| <i>The Dawn of Fury</i> (1995) by Ralph Compton | <i>Riders to Cibola</i> (1977) by Norman Zollinger |
| <i>The Doomsday Marshal</i> (1975) by Ray Hogan | <i>Sioux Dawn</i> (1990) by Terry C. Johnston |
| <i>Double the Bounty</i> (2019) by Robert J. Randisi | <i>Stone Hand</i> (1998) by Charles G. West |
| <i>The Glory Trail</i> (1978) by Ray Hogan | <i>Sun River</i> (1989) by Richard S. Wheeler |
| <i>The Goodnight Trail</i> (1992) by Ralph Compton | <i>A Thousand Texas Longhorns</i> (2020) by Johnny D. Boggs |
| <i>Honor Thy Father</i> (2004) by Robert A. Roripaugh | <i>Tomahawk</i> (1983) by Donald Clayton Porter |
| <i>The Horse Creek Incident</i> (2007) by Dusty Richards | <i>To the River's End</i> (2022) by William W. Johnstone and J.A. Johnstone |
| <i>Independence!</i> (1978) by Dana Fuller Ross | <i>Unwanted: Dead or Alive</i> (1996) by Gene Shelton |
| <i>I Rode With Jesse James</i> (1996) by Charles Hackenberry | <i>The Vengeance of Fortuna West</i> (1983) by Ray Hogan |
| <i>A Killing in Kiowa</i> (1972) by Lewis B. Patten | <i>Westward!</i> (1992) by Dana Fuller Ross |
| <i>The Kincaids</i> (1977) by Matt Braun | <i>Widowmaker Jones</i> (2016) by Brett Cogburn |
| <i>The Last Mountain Man</i> (1984) by William W. Johnstone | <i>The Yellowstone</i> (1988) by Winfred Blevins |
| <i>Lawdog</i> (2001) by J. Lee Butts | |