

The Last Western: Deadwood and the End of American Empire



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Perhaps the most sophisticated and complex of shows in Hbo's recent history, Deadwood has surprisingly little coverage in our current scholarship. Grounding contemporary anxieties about race and class, domesticity and American exceptionalism in its nineteenth-century setting, Deadwood revises our understanding of a formative period for the American nation through a re-examination of one of the main genres through which this national story has been transmitted: the Western. With contributions from scholars in American studies, literature, and film and television studies, The Last Western situates Deadwood in the context of both its nineteenth-century setting and its twenty-first-century audience. Together, these essays argue for the series as a provocative meditation on both the state and historical formation of U.S. empire, examining its treatment of sovereign power and political legitimacy, capital accumulation and dispossession, racial and gender identities, and social and family structures, while attending to the series' peculiar and evocative aesthetic forms. What emerges from this collection is the impressive range of Deadwood's often contradictory engagement with both nineteenth and twenty-first century America.

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