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The Enduring Legacy of Old Southwest Humor (Southern Literary Studies)

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The Old Southwest flourished between 1830 and 1860, but its brand of humor lives on in the writings of Mark Twain, the novels of William Faulkner, the TV series The Beverly Hillbillies, the material of comedian Jeff Foxworthy, and even cyberspace, where nonsoutherners can come up to speed on subjects like hickphonics. The first book on its subject, The Enduring Legacy of Old Southwest Humor engages topics ranging from folklore to feminism to the Internet as it pays tribute to a distinctly American comic style that has continued to reinvent itself.

To begin, the book focuses on frontier southern humor as manifested in works of Faulkner, Erskine Caldwell, Flannery O'Connor, Eudora Welty, Woody Guthrie, Harry Crews, William Price Fox, Fred Chappell, Barry Hannah, Cormac McCarthy, and African American writers Zora Neale Hurston, Ralph Ellison, Alice Walker, Ishmael Reed, and Yusef Komunyakaa. It then explores southwestern humor's legacy in popular culture—including comic strips, comedians, and sitcoms—and on the Internet. Many of the trademark themes of modern and contemporary southern wit appeared in stories that circulated in the antebellum Southwest. Often taking the form of tall tales, those stories have served and continue to serve as rich, reusable material for southern writers and entertainers in the twentieth century.

The Enduring Legacy of Old Southwest Humor is an innovative collaboration that delves into jokes about hunting, drinking, boasting, and gambling as it studies, among other things, the styles of comedians Andy Griffith, Dave Gardner, and Justin Wilson. It gives splendid demonstration that through the centuries southern humor has continued to be a powerful tool for disarming hypocrites and opening up sensitive issues for discussion.

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