

This course samples a century of bestselling American novels, starting with the first Western, Owen Wister's 1902 novel, *The Virginian*, and ending in 1996 with Toni Morrison's *Paradise*. In-between we will read an eclectic range of texts—an exotic "desert romance" (E.M. Hull's *The Sheik*), a stream-of-consciousness southern novel inspired by a Billy Holiday song (Lillian Smith's *Strange Fruit*), an updated western with a hired gun hero (Jack Schaefer's *Shane*), the ultimate mafia family saga (Mario Puzo's *The Godfather*), and a science fiction classic (Orson Scott Card's *Speaker for the Dead*).

We'll look at the forces that determine which books become bestsellers and try to understand what bestselling books reveal about American culture. While the books themselves will provide the issues for discussion, in particular, we'll focus on: versions of American law and justice, American ambivalence towards violence, constructions of masculinity and femininity, the place of the family, and the values of the American hero. Required work includes several 3-5 page papers, regular reading journals, and an oral presentation.