

Epics and Sagas of the West: a Selective List

O Pioneers! by Willa Cather

Swedish farmer John Bergson's daughter Alexandra encourages the family members to help keep his dream alive after his death.

A Yellow Raft in Blue Water by Michael Dorris

A powerful novel of three generations of American Indian women, each seeking her own identity while forever cognizant of family responsibilities, loyalty, and love. Rayona, half-Indian half-black daughter of Christine, reacts to feelings of rejection and abandonment by running away, not knowing that her mother had acted in a similar fashion some 15 years before. But family ties draw Rayona home to the Montana reservation as they drew Christine, and as they had drawn Ida many years earlier. As the three recount their lives, often repeating incidents but adding new perspectives, a total picture emerges. — *Library Journal*

Giant by Edna Ferber

Leslie comes from Virginia to marry Bick Benedict and live on his huge ranch, but she never adjusts to the Texas way of life.

The Big Sky by A. B. Guthrie Jr.

This is a story as great as the land that inspired it, sweeping westward from Kentucky, up the Missouri River into Indian Country. Towering above the novel is Guthrie's unforgettable hero, Boone Caudill, a true mountain man driven by a raging hunger for life and a longing for the blue sky and brown earth of the big, wild places. A legend before he turns 20, Boone becomes a powerful White Savage, an untamed life force that only one woman, the beautiful daughter of a Blackfoot chief, would dare to love. It is this magnificent spirit that Guthrie celebrates with his vivid storytelling--the glory of the bigness, the wildness, the freedom and undying dream of the West. — *Mariner Books*

Riders of the Purple Sage by Zane Grey

This is the story of Jane Withersteen, set in the cañon country of southern Utah in 1871. Jane has inherited a valuable ranch from her father and because of this, one of the polygamous Mormon elders covets her as his wife. When she refuses, the Mormons in the community begin to persecute Jane. Rich with western detail, set against the backdrop of the Mormon influx into Utah, with a mysterious "Masked Rider" who rides with a gang of rustlers, *Riders of the Purple Sage* was one of the first novels of the Western genre and had a significant role in popularizing the genre. — *Amazon*

California Gold by John Jakes

Like so many ambitious dreamers, Mack, an indigent Pennsylvanian, arrives in San Francisco in 1887 determined to make his fortune. To his dismay, he finds hardship, violence, bigotry, lawlessness and a city caught in the stranglehold of rapacious Southern Pacific railroad tycoons. Mack meets two bewitching women--rich, emotionally unstable Carla Hellman and dynamic Nellie Ross, a reporter for W. R. Hearst's San Francisco Examiner. After striking oil and becoming an orange grower, Mack prospers, but is left heartbroken when career-oriented Nellie won't marry him. He impulsively weds Carla, with disastrous results, while alienating many influential men by championing liberal causes. — *Publisher's Weekly*



[Sons of Texas](#) by Elmer Kelton

In 1816, the patriarch of the Lewis clan leaves its Tennessee farm to join a group of local adventurers who plan is to capture Texas wild horses and bring them back to sell. Lewis's 16-year-old son Michael sneaks off and joins them. When the party run into a Mexican military patrol at the Louisiana border led by the sadistic Lieutenant Rodriguez, Michael's father is murdered along with much of the party, and Michael is left to die on the prairie, but survives (with a little bit of deus ex machina) and returns home. Five years later, after suffering through a bloody family feud, Michael and a younger brother, Andrew, return to Texas to settle the score and stake out new lives for themselves. Michael eventually finds love, revenge and even future Texas hero Stephen F. Austin. — *Publisher's Weekly*

[Lonesome Dove](#) by Larry McMurtry

The subject of *Lonesome Dove*, cowboys herding cattle on a great trail-drive, seems like the very stuff of that cliched myth, but McMurtry bravely tackles the task of creating meaningful literature out of it. At first the novel seems the kind of anti-mythic, anti-heroic story one might expect: the main protagonists are a drunken and inarticulate pair of former Texas Rangers turned horse rustlers. Yet when the trail begins, the story picks up an energy and a drive that makes heroes of these men. Their mission may be historically insignificant, or pointless--McMurtry is smart enough to address both possibilities--but there is an undoubted valor in their lives. The result is a historically aware, intelligent, romantic novel of the mythic west that won the 1986 Pulitzer Prize for fiction. — *Amazon*

[Texas](#) by James Michener

Michener's combination of mammoth research, history, and fiction exudes all the color, courage, villainy, violence, and independent spirit expected from the Lone Star state. The book's organizing principle is a governor's task force created to study the state. It is composed of stereotypical Texans: oil man, rancher, genteel descendant of Southern aristocracy, Chicano, etc. Their ancestors are Texas every one an adventurer, from a Spanish missionary to Scots-Irish and Germans hungry for land and freedom, to a minister sent to civilize Comanches, to Mexican bandits and Texas Rangers. Interspersed among these sagas are task force meetings in various Texas cities to study local geography and natural history a far more accessible approach than previous Michener tomes that lump them in heavy opening chapters. Purists may object to the overabundance of dramatic incidents, but they make exciting reading. — *Library Journal*

[Angle of Repose](#) by Wallace Stegner

The poetic title is actually a geological term for the slope at which rocks cease to roll and is used here as a symbol of human life. Time is the protagonist and a tragically crippled but talented man, himself past middle age, explores through his grandmother's drawings, letters, and publications her life with her engineer husband in his struggle to use his talents in a time not quite ready for him. It is also an objective yet affectionate look at a long-ago love and failure of love which the protagonist associates with his own love and its tragedy. Stegner's integrity of vision is evident again in his respect for the victories and failures that surround the search for a vision. — *Booklist*

[Sun Going Down](#) by Jack Todd

Three generations of the Paint family struggle through 70 years of hardship and heartache on the Western plains in Todd's ambitious fiction debut. En route from Mississippi to the Dakota Territory at the height of the Civil War, Ebenezer Paint meets and marries twice-widowed Cora, a union that produces two strapping twin boys, Eli and Ezra. Ebenezer vainly chases riches; by 15, the boys are orphans and cowboys—and involved in a risky but profitable bit of horse stealing. Ezra remains a wanderer, while Eli settles down to become a wealthy rancher. The narrative eventually follows Eli's favorite daughter of his six children: Velma, who is brutalized by two of her three husbands, but whose estrangement from Eli causes her the most pain, and takes the story into the Depression era. Vivid and colorful in its depiction of the West's transformation from the frontier to the modern age, this is a hardscrabble tale of proud folks who refuse to forgive mistakes or forget faults. — *Publisher's Weekly*