



American Dream, American Nightmare: Fiction since 1960

Kathryn Hume

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In this celebration of contemporary American fiction, Kathryn Hume explores how estrangement from America has shaped the fiction of a literary generation, which she calls the Generation of the Lost Dream. In breaking down the divisions among standard categories of race, religion, ethnicity, and gender, Hume identifies shared core concerns, values, and techniques among seemingly disparate and unconnected writers including T. Coraghessan Boyle, Ralph Ellison, Russell Banks, Gloria Naylor, Tim O'Brien, Maxine Hong Kingston, Walker Percy, N. Scott Momaday, John Updike, Toni Morrison, William Kennedy, Julia Alvarez, Thomas Pynchon, Leslie Marmon Silko, and Don DeLillo. Hume explores fictional treatments of the slippage in the immigrant experience between America's promise and its reality. She exposes the political link between contemporary stories of lost innocence and liberalism's inadequacies. She also invites us to look at the literary challenge to scientific materialism in various searches for a spiritual dimension in life. The expansive future promised by the American Dream has been replaced, Hume finds, by a sense of tarnished morality and a melancholy loss of faith in America's exceptionalism. "American Dream, American Nightmare" examines the differing critiques of America embedded in nearly a hundred novels and points to the source for recovery that appeals to many of the authors.

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