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John P. McWilliams Jr

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This is the first thorough account of the many attempts during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to fashion a distinctly American epic literature from a wide range of potentially heroic New World subjects. McWilliams considers the cultural, political and literary implications of adapting Enlightenment news of republican progress to a genre that had traditionally celebrated the greatness of warriors. He shows how and why the epic in America had to be transformed from imitative narrative poetry into the new genres of prose history (Irving, Prescott, Parkman), fictional romance (Cooper, Melville), and free verse (Whitman).

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