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The Poetics of Sovereignty in American Literature, 1885-1910 (Cambridge Studies in American Literature and Culture)

Andrew Hebard

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During the Progressive Era, the United States regularly suspended its own laws to regulate racialized populations. Judges and administrators relied on the rhetoric of sovereignty to justify such legal practices, while in American popular culture, sovereignty helped authors coin tropes that have become synonymous with American exceptionalism today. In this book, Andrew Hebard challenges the notion of sovereignty as a 'state of exception' in American jurisprudence and literature at the turn of the twentieth century. Hebard explores how literary trends such as romance and realism helped conventionalize, and thereby sanction, the federal government's use of sovereignty in a range of foreign and domestic policy matters, including the regulation of overseas colonies, immigration, Native American lands, and extra-legal violence in the American South. Weaving historiography with close readings of Mark Twain, the Western, and other hallmarks of Progressive Era literature, Hebard's study offers a new cultural context for understanding the legal history of race relations in the United States.

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