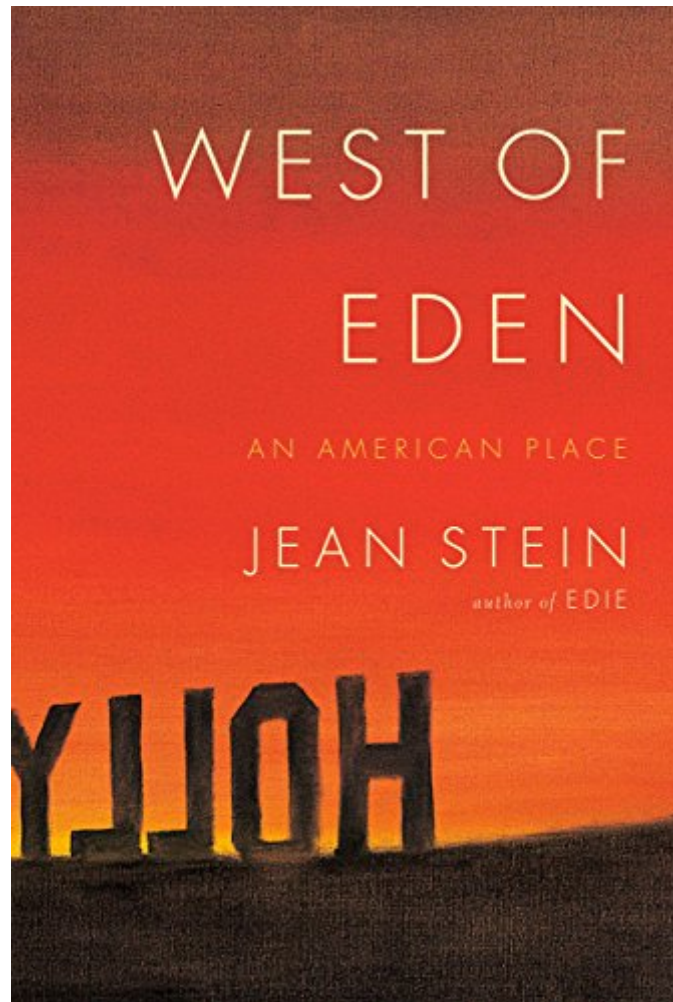


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# West Of Eden



## Synopsis

West of Eden is the definitive story of Hollywood, told, in their own words, by the people on the inside: Lauren Bacall, Arthur Miller, Dennis Hopper, Frank Gehry, Ring Lardner, Joan Didion, Stephen Sondheim – all interviewed by Jean Stein, who grew up in the Forties in a fairytale mansion in the Hollywood Hills. The book takes us from the discovery of oil in the Twenties with the story of the tycoon Edward Doheny (There Will Be Blood) and traces the growth of corruption through the syndicates, the mob, and the movie studios – from the beginnings of the film industry to the end, with News Corp. and Rupert Murdoch (who bought the Stein mansion in 1985). West of Eden is about money, power, fame and terrible secrets: the doomed Hollywood of the late Fifties, early Sixties – the rotten heart of paradise™. Like her last book, the best-selling Edie, this is an oral history told through brilliantly edited interviews. As this is Hollywood, it's a book full of sex, drugs and celebrity glamour; but because it's built from the firsthand accounts of people who were actually there, many of them writers, actors and artists, it's also strangely claustrophobic, seductive, and completely compelling.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

The new oral history by Jean Stein has been a long time in the making. In fact, many of the subjects Stein interviewed are now dead. That only adds to the air of melancholy in this dark chronicle of five Hollywood families whose glamour was exceeded only by their tragedy. From the Dohenies, who were behind the oil boom that made Southern California, to the film mogul Warners, to families less well-known but equally fascinating, Stein reveals a world of opulence and emotional cruelty, with a particular focus on how the children of the powerful struggled with parenting that could be as ruthless as any business practice. Stein structures her interview quotes to great effect, highlighting thematic overlap in a way that makes the book seem more than a collection of the five most dramatic stories she could find. The final chapter, dealing with her own family history, might seem self-indulgent, but in fact her father's history as an entertainment mogul dovetails neatly with the rest of the tapestry she's created. West of Eden is not without minor structural flaws. The chapter on the Dohenies uses quotes from a historian to provide a clearer context for the personal recollections, and the absence of such grounding is noticeable in some of the later chapters, particularly that on the Warners. The Warner chapter muddles itself further by expanding from treatment of Jack Warner's behavior during the blacklist to a discussion of that period more generally, which includes some worthwhile material but doesn't increase our understanding of that period enough to warrant the excursion. Occasionally one suspects that Stein has included a quote from a famous person more for the sake of having her in the contributor list than because she has much of substance to say.

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