



## West of 98: Living and Writing the New American West

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What does it mean to be a westerner? With all the mythology that has grown up about the American West, is it even possible to describe "how it was, how it is, here, in the West—just that," in the words of Lynn Stegner? Starting with that challenge, Stegner and Russell Rowland invited several dozen members of the western literary tribe to write about living in the West and being a western writer in particular. *West of 98* gathers sixty-six literary testimonies, in essays and poetry, from a stellar collection of writers who represent every state west of the 98th parallel—a kind of Greek chorus of the most prominent voices in western literature today, who seek to "characterize the West as each of us grew to know it, and, equally important, the West that is still becoming."

In *West of 98*, western writers speak to the ways in which the West imprints itself on the people who live there, as well as how the people of the West create the personality of the region. The writers explore the western landscape—how it has been revered and abused across centuries—and the inescapable limitations its aridity puts on all dreams of conquest and development. They dismantle the boosterism of manifest destiny and the cowboy and mountain man ethos of every-man-for-himself, and show instead how we must create new narratives of cooperation if we are to survive in this spare and beautiful country. The writers seek to define the essence of both actual and metaphoric wilderness as they journey toward a West that might honestly be called home.

A collective declaration not of our independence but of our interdependence with the land and with each other, *West of 98* opens up a whole new panorama of the western experience.

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