ForeWord Reviews

Twenty West
Mac Nelson
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Long before asphalt and cars and road trips became the stuff of Hollywood movies and popular songs, road trips of sorts shaped America. Think Lewis and Clark's expedition, Huckleberry Finn's travels, or Harriet Tubman's heroic efforts via the Underground Railroad. In *Twenty West* , Mac Nelson, Distinguished Teaching English Professor at State University of New York, Fredonia, and author of *God and Wilderness on the Great Road*, tells us in this part travelogue/part memoir/part history lesson why US-20 deserves the title "home."

Nelson is in good company as numerous legendary Americans once called the highway home. It was on US-20 that he watched Satchel Paige play ball at Chicago's Wrigley Field as a child. Reclusive celebrated poet Emily Dickinson penned her poems at the family home, "The Homestead," in Amherst, fifty miles from the great road's beginnings in Boston. Stretching some 3,300 miles, from Boston to Newport, Oregon, US-20 stops a mere one mile from the Pacific Ocean. Historically, its east-to-west direction fits as explorers tended to go west. Even Henry David Thoreau once said, "Eastward I go only by force; westward I go free." Go westward Nelson does. From New York state to Yellowstone National Park, Nelson visits the ridiculous and the sublime, from battle sites to Mount Rushmore to Carhenge, "a classic, unique, absurd American parody of Stonehenge…"

Not all of America's historical events on or near the great road are of the celebratory variety. Nelson, not one for shying away from controversial subjects, recounts societal injustices weighing in on the newly developing nation's "Manifest Destiny" mentality and the mass internment of Japanese-Americans in crowded camps during WWII. The author also protests the ongoing Crazy Horse monument project in South Dakota.

Norman Rockwell, quoted in *Twenty West*, said, "I showed the America I knew and observed to others who might not have noticed." *Twenty West* shows plenty and according to Nelson, "There is room for all of us." A ten-minute CD shows a close up of the author's friendly face and serves as an introduction to the book.

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