

Albuquerque, New Mexico

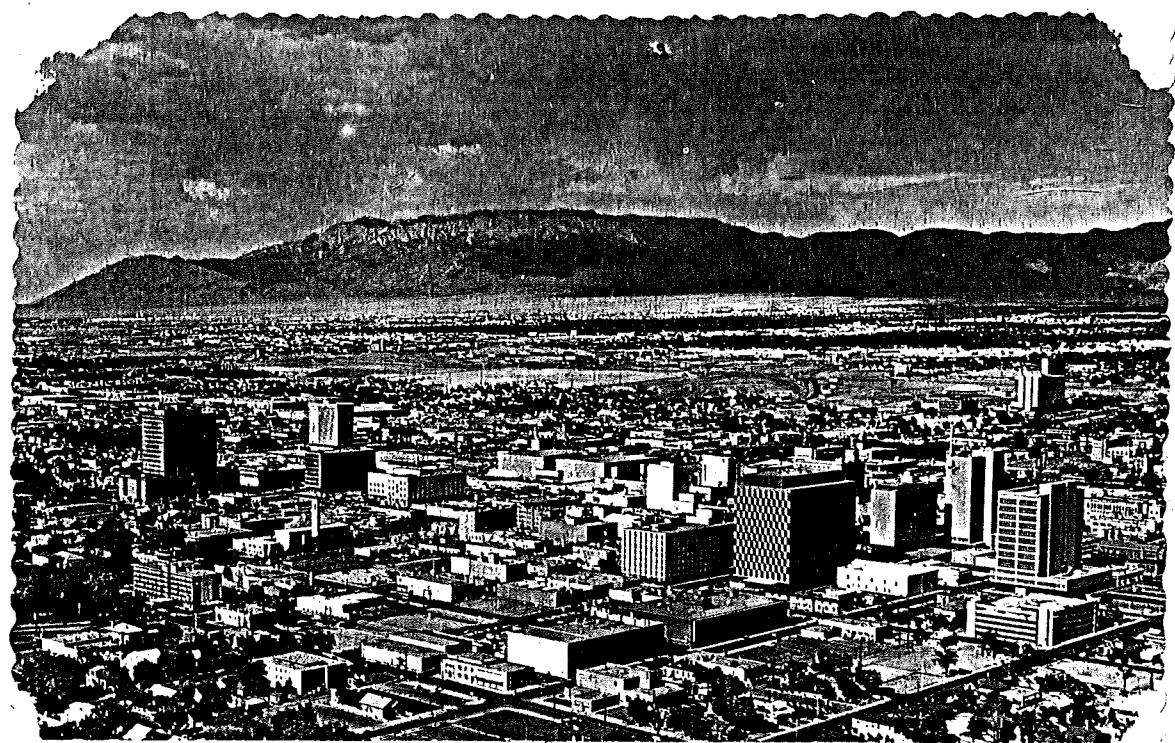
"Have a nice day in Albuquerque, or wherever
your final destination takes you."--- Hostess on
Airwest.

It is easy in a city like Albuquerque to pick
out three stages of physical development. There is
the Old City, of movie lot size and picturesqueness,
built around a small central square and church. One
sees this pattern over and over again in the Southwest:
in Santa Fe, Taos, Old Mesilla, for example. Then, there
is the larger city of the late 1800's, with its downtown
business area now, alas, suffering from the common trouble
of having been rendered obsolete by the automobile.
Then there is the post-World War II city of suburban

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expansion. Today Albuquerque consists of a grid of major thoroughfares, each one bearing a shopping strip miles in length, each one the commercial bones supporting the nearby housing. The city is a perfectly flat oasis whose growth has now reached the foothills of the Sandia Mountains to the northeast. "That's where the manipulators are building and the doctors are buying," said my informant.

To compensate for this drab modernity, I should point out that the Spanish-Pueblo architecture which abounds in the Southwest is one of the most generally pleasing and satisfying in the whole country. One feels that it has integrity and appropriateness to the surroundings that is matched only by New England colonial. The 18th-century versions of it that one sees in Old Santa Fe are absolutely stunning. Recent versions such as the University of New Mexico or the State House are sufficiently satisfying to offset the inevitable tendency toward contemporary Ugly. It is true, of course, that Spanish-Pueblo is seen in filling stations, hamburger stands, drive-in-liquor stores, and motels to the point where you begin to think it is illegal to build outside the style; nonetheless, the average quality is high indeed.



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Albuquerque is the ballooning and hang-gliding center of the country. The flat valley, the nearby precipitous Sandia Cliffs and felicitous currents make it so. Joey, passing through Albuquerque quite casually, was invited to go up in a balloon, and took a trip. I asked him whether he was fed a basket lunch and champagne like Phileas Fogg (David Niven) in "80 Days Around the World" and he told me that he thought the operators (two University students) had enough to do minding the ropes and the drift without worrying about gourmet problems.

The Rio Grande passes just to the west of the city and provides an irrigated strip of farm land that is visible from the plane. Growing up with the full, but not so lengthy rivers of the Northeast, the Merrimac, the Connecticut /the Hudson, the Rio Grande, with the promise of grandeur embodied in its name, came as a disappointment to me. I remember it as narrow, muddy, and desecrated. Perhaps I saw it at the wrong season. I know that Albuquerque is laced with concrete spillways to carry off the water of flash flooding, so that in these moments of surplus water, the Rio Grande must achieve a certain nobility.

People in New Mexico are split into three cate-

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gories: the Hispanos, the Indios, and the Anglos. The general workings of this taxonomy are clear enough, but it can make for some strange classifications. An Oriental student studying at the University would be classed as an Anglo. The word 'Anglo' becomes a catch-all and some authorities break it down further into Texans, Mormons, and Anglos.

On the streets of Albuquerque one sees more Indians than in any American city of its size. One soon learns that there are various tribes; Pueblo, Navaho, Zuni, Ute, Hopi, Apache, and tries not to lump them together. The University of New Mexico has made a special effort to attract Indian students to higher education. I wandered down the hallway of the mathematics building one morning and eavesdropped on a class of young Indian girls being taught the Inca system of numbers by a young Anglo lady. I never found out why. The faculty members I consulted could not enlighten me.