

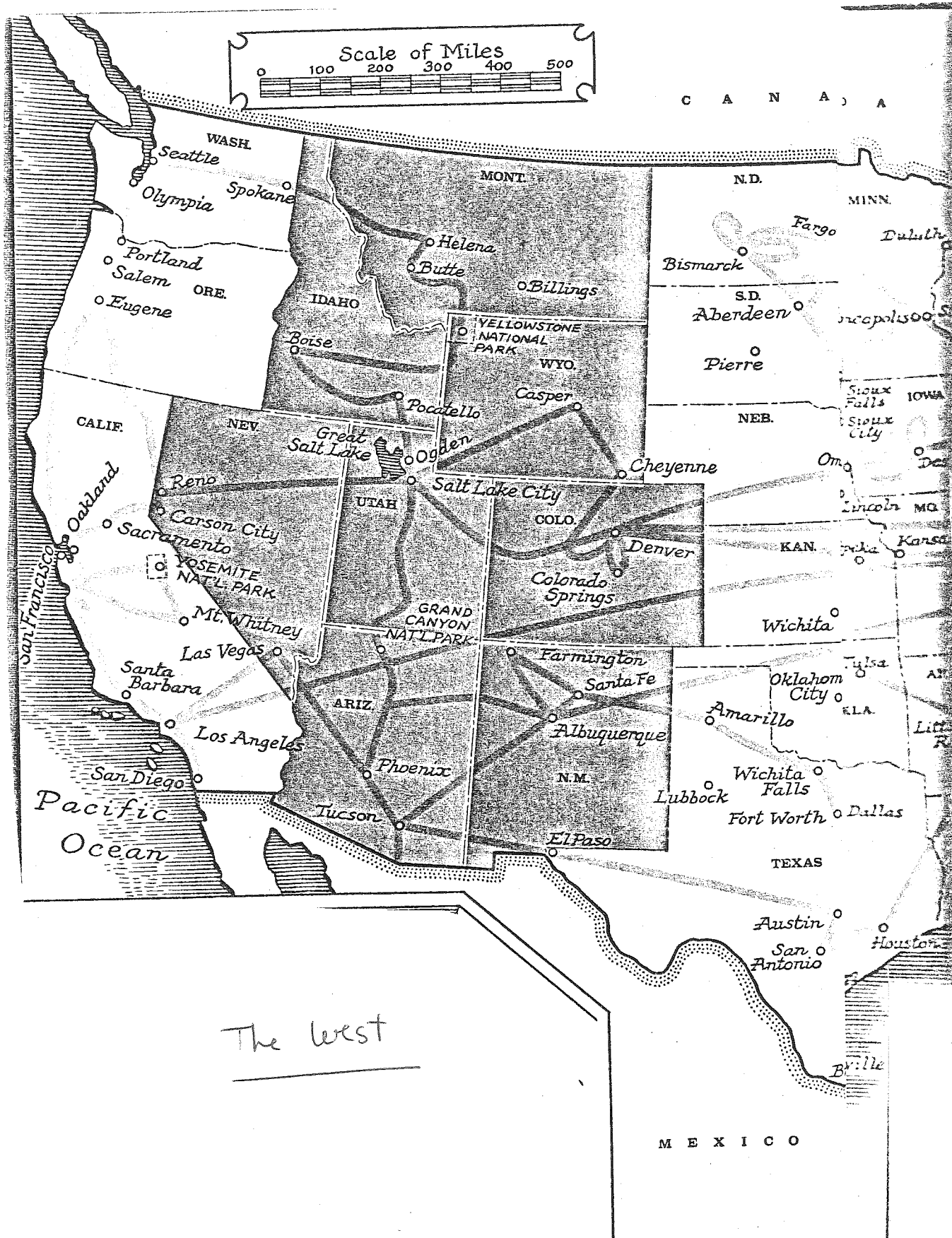
Introduction: The Region Defined

The portion of the United States that comes within view of this book is comprised of the States of Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, Utah, Colorado, Nevada, Arizona, and New Mexico. The residents call it "The Intermountain West" so as not to confuse it, God forbid, with the Western Plains to the east or with the Far West of the Pacific Coast. I shall call it simply The West.

This region contains 860,000 square miles or thirty percent of the area of the forty eight contiguous states. According to the Census of 1970, it contained only four percent of the population, a figure which has probably increased slightly. It is a region of high plateaus, high mountains, wide valleys, mesas, buttes, canyons, washes; a region of forests and deserts of sagebrush and cactus. The tumbleweed blows across the superhighways. It is a region of wet rivers and dry rivers and rivers under litigation; of frequent and violent changes in the weather.

The West is loaded with coal and oil and geothermal sources. It is full of geological fault lines, and your friendly real estate dealer will be glad to show you where they are drawn. The flats immediately to the west of Salt Lake City will lead you to a belief in the existence of an infinite geometrical plane, if you have not already acquired this faith from the Books of Euclid. The exposed strata that once were horizontal and now sit upright begging for young climbers will lead you to a belief in the infinitude of time.

There are portions of Colorado that look like the Swiss Alps and their snug little towns. There are urban portions of Utah and New Mexico that remind one of the Near East, say Haifa. The weather



The West

in Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming is bitter cold. Arizona and New Mexico are subtropical and palm trees flourish. The Continental Divide bisects The West from northwest to southeast, the rivers to the east of The Divide emptying, eventually, into the Atlantic, while those to the west empty into the Pacific.

There is an indigenous Indian population. All the rest are immigrants, or the descendants of immigrants who came there, for the most part, since 1840.

For years, I, a hard-bitten Easterner, a native of Massachusetts and a resident of Rhode Island, knew only as much of The West as the movies told me. Eventually, opportunities for travel opened up. I visited it and saw it through a wider lens than provided by the Westerns. These visits included a number of short vacations and a two month summer stay. When I was invited to spend six months lecturing at the University of Utah in Salt Lake City, I decided to make this city a pied ^a terre from which I would venture forth on exploratory forays and in this way fill in my knowledge. The book is written from the point of view of this stay in Salt Lake, but actually some of the experiences described date from previous trips.

This book is not a Baedeker. The reader who would like to know what accommodations are available at the Grand Canyon must look elsewhere. Nor is this book an introduction to the sociological and economic prospects of The West, composed largely, as Dr. Johnson's "A Tour of the Hebrides" was reputed to have been, in my mind before ever I took one step beyond the 98th meridian. More to my liking would be a book in which Landscape is treated as a framework on which to hang philosophical and moralistic speculations of the most cosmic and impenetrable kind. The book is... well, it is what it is; and if any of these ingredients are present, then the best of luck to them.