



# Twenty West: The Great Road Across America

*Mac Nelson*

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*Traces the route, history, and geography of US 20, America's longest road.*

"I know US 20, I live on it, grew up near it, commute to work on it, and have run on it most mornings for twenty-five years. It has become the Main Street of my life. I am fond of it, and want to tell its very American story." — from the Introduction

Whether he's on foot, in a car, or even in a canoe, Mac Nelson will delight readers with his rambling, westward depiction of America as seen from the shoulders of its longest road, US Route 20. As the "0" in its route number indicates, US 20 is a coast-to-coast road, crossing twelve states as it meanders 3,300 miles from Boston, Massachusetts, to Newport, Oregon. Nelson, an experienced "shunpiker," travels west along the Great Road, ruminating on history, literature, scenery, geology, politics, wilderness, the Great Plains, and national parks—whatever the most interesting aspects of a particular region seem to be. Beginning with the great writers and founders of religion in the East who lived and wrote on or near US 20, including Anne Bradstreet, Phyllis Wheatley, and Sylvia Plath, then crossing the plains to the forests, mountains, and deserts of the West, Nelson's journey on this beloved road is personal and idiosyncratic, serious and comic. More than a mile-by-mile guidebook, *Twenty West* offers a glimpse of a boyish and very American fascination with the road that will entice the traveler in all of us to take the long way home.

"Nelson manages to pull off the not-so-easy feat of being quirky, erudite and entertaining." — *Chicago Tribune*

"Armchair travelers and devotees of American history are in for a treat." — Ann La Farge, *The Independent*  
"A wonderful read for armchair travelers, and the next best thing to touring the length of US Route 20 in person." — *Midwest Book Review*

"From New York state to Yellowstone National Park, Nelson visits the ridiculous and the sublime ... *Twenty West* shows plenty and according to Nelson, 'There is room for all of us.'" — *ForeWord Magazine*

"This book is a celebration and a cornucopia of American history and culture. Nelson's curious and fertile mind runs in many directions as he delivers fascinating stories about such diverse Americans as Buffalo Bill, Joseph Smith, Satchel Paige, George Pullman, Ronald Reagan, and Rutherford B. Hayes, as well as stunning insights into writers from Henry David Thoreau to Emily Dickinson. After the road trip, this is a book to savor by the fire." — Hedrick Smith, author of *The Russians and Rethinking America*

"The author's subject has innate importance; it is a story that until now has been waiting to be told, and it is to the author's credit that he seized the opportunity." — Warren Roberts, Distinguished Teaching Professor of History, University at Albany, State University of New York

"I like Mac's way of combining interesting travel narrative with a wide, free-ranging knowledge of literature, geography, history, and local color. I can hear his voice throughout, and his clear, unique angle of vision." — Sidner Larson, author of *Captured in the Middle: Tradition and Experience in Contemporary Native American Writing*

“Neslon’s got it right. He’s an American, along for the ride, from sea to shining sea.” — Diana Hume George, author of *The Lonely Other: A Woman Watching America*

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