

## Question 1: Where are the West's Boundaries?

The answers may be summed up in these ten points:

1. Respondents focused much more on the eastern boundary than the other three. Everyone made a choice, and only about 5 percent were unclear (10/211). Regarding the western boundary, again only 5 percent were unclear, but 22 percent gave no response.

2. Respondents were much more indecisive, or just inattentive, about the northern and southern boundaries. Many probably took the Canadian and Mexican borders for granted. In both cases 5 percent answered



unclearly; and 25 percent simply did not state a northern boundary and 27 percent did not state a southern one. Differences were not great among the three groups (WHA, journalists, WWA).

3. A number of people identified only an eastern boundary, perhaps having mentally exhausted themselves in so doing. And a few who were reluctant to set any geographical boundaries said, well, if you insist, I'd place the eastern one at X or Y, then left it at that.

4. About one out of 6 ( $40/251 = 15.9\%$ ) refused to name any geographical boundaries. Instead, they said the West is a "state of mind," an "idea," "myth," or "mental construct," or something similar. Of the three groups, about one-eighth of the WHA members took this position ( $23/187 = 12.3\%$ ), only one of the editors did so ( $1/25 = 4\%$ ), but nearly half of the western writers ( $16/39 = 41\%$ ). The writers, or many of them, believe the West is myth, and they write about and perpetuate the myth.

Many of them are genre writers and adamantly oppose the whole idea of demythologizing. Many in this group also reject the idea that the West is a contemporary, twentieth-century matter. I can think of other fiction writers who would scarcely agree—Ivan Doig and Tom King, for example, whose material is twentieth-century. But the Western Writers of America largely work with material from, or redolent of, the past. Their livelihood depends on the myths. It's not that they are necessarily more romantic about the West (though some are deeply attached to it) but that they write and sell what is romantic to many readers.

5. Regarding the eastern boundary, geographical responses were as follows. WHA members chose the Mississippi River in 22 percent of the cases, sometimes reluctantly but because that is where many begin the courses they teach. The largest group, 29 percent, picked the north-south line of the Red, Missouri, and Sabine rivers. But combining the 16.5 percent who chose the 98th meridian and the 15 percent who chose the 100th, fully 31 percent locate it at the eastern edge of the Great Plains, often with a verbal bow to Walter Prescott Webb. Only 5 percent chose the Rockies or close by, with 13 percent giving unclear or other responses, from the Atlantic Coast to eastern Idaho.

The editors, all from Colorado to California, opted strongly—46 percent—for the Rockies or the eastern borders of states in the front range of the Rockies (Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, New Mexico), with only 8 percent choosing the Mississippi River.

The writers—the slight majority who gave geographical responses—stuck to the traditional Mississippi River or Missouri River two-thirds of the time (65 percent).

6. Regarding the western boundary, most of the historians and journalists clearly opted for the Pacific Coast, but a minority of about one in six excluded all or parts of California, Oregon, and Washington. The writers were again more traditional; 40 percent of them excluded all or parts of the coastal states, and several refused to include any large cities, or what one called "plastic places" such as Vail, Aspen, and Las Vegas.

The exclusion of the coastal states, coastal strip, or cities, is a minority view but a significant one. Interestingly, most of those who hold it do not live in those areas. People who do live there, quite definitely those who live in Los Angeles, regard themselves as being not only in the West but in the center of the West.

7. As to whether Alaska and Hawaii are western: both appeared on the map circulated with the questionnaire, so it was hard to ignore them. Yet many did. Of the 70 (27.8 percent) who did refer to Alaska, 83 percent think it is indeed part of the West, wherever else they place the western or northern boundaries of the region. Of the 47 (18.7 percent) referring to Hawaii, the split was close—49 percent including it, 51 percent saying it is not western. The divisions on Alaska and Hawaii were nearly the same among all three respondent groups, except that the writers (WWA) were less inclined than the historians (WHA) to include Alaska.

8. Regarding the northern boundary, many took it for granted. The map I provided showed the United States only, so a respondent had to go slightly against the grain to include Canada. But many did. More historians (62) said, "include some parts of it," than said, "stop at the border" (57). The writers split about evenly. The journalists strongly (13 to 1) preferred to use the United States border than to include any part of Canada. Had I circulated a map of North America rather than of the United States, I suspect more would have included Canada. The tilt of the historians may indicate—so their comments often suggest—that, influenced by Webb, James Malin, and perhaps Turner, they think more in terms of environment and physiography than the other groups do, and more in terms of prairie settlement patterns than they think of political boundaries.

9. The southern boundary brought more non-responses than the other three. Many probably take the Rio Grande and the line across the Sonoran desert as a given. Some of the historians, especially those living in Arizona or New Mexico or who specialize in borderlands history, pointed out that the border arbitrarily divides people and geography that are better thought of as a unit. Thus 24 percent of the historians, 26 percent of the writers, and only 8 percent of the editors consider parts of northern Mexico as being in the West.

10. A consensus? Not quite. On the east, about half see the West as beginning at the Mississippi River or Missouri River, the other half at the eastern edge of the Great Plains or in a few cases the Rockies' front range. On the west, most stop at the Pacific Ocean but a sizeable minority say, leave out the coast and its cities. On the north, historians divide, slightly in favor of including western Canada, the rest stopping at the border. On the south, most of those saying anything at all stop at the border, though a goodly minority of historians would include parts of northern Mexico, especially the desert. But, to repeat, fully one-sixth (and nearly half of the writers) refused to identify any geographical boundaries at all, and many others stated them under protest. These people remain convinced that "West" and "frontier" are not that separable, and that process remains more important than present place.