San Francisco Chronicle

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THURSDAY, MAY 27, 1999

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West-Side Stories

Readers rank the 20th century's best nonfiction this side of the Rockies

DAVID KIPEN
Books

The trouble with compiling any best-of list is that the compiler never gets to take part in what makes lists so much fun, i.e., complaining about the omissions afterward. Nonetheless, it's with great pride that The Chronicle hereby surrenders its list of the 100 best nonfiction books of the 20th century written in English about — or by an author from — the Western United States.

The Chronicle Western 100 owes its existence to precisely the kind of griping it may now inspire. One year ago, the editorial board of a major New York publisher disseminated its list of the 100 best novels written in English and published in the 20th century. Critics promptly called the list too old, too white, too male and too representative of the publisher's back-list.

A month ago the same house promulgated a follow-up list of the 100 best *nonfiction* books written in English and published in the 20th century. They took care this time to change their editorial board until it looked more like America. Sure enough, the nonfiction list wound up looking more like America, too — if only America ran westward from New York to the Rockies and then stopped, like a frisky dog at the end of its leash.

The Chronicle Western 100 lets 20th century English-language nonfiction off the leash. It was devised on the nervy assumption that an unscientific, self-selected sampling of interested Western readers could pick just as viable a list as the editorial board of a venerable Manhattan publisher. That faith has since been amply repaid, with Chronicle readers coming out of the woodwork to write, e-mail and buttonhole their smart, opinionated nominations.

The top vote-getter on the Chronicle Western 100 is Mary Austin's "Land of Little Rain," her classic 1903 account of the terrain between Death Valley and the High Sierra — a book Edward Abbey called "a small, tender, old-fashioned and engaging book, a part of the basic literature of American nature writing."

Hard on its heels were Wallace Stegner's "Beyond the Hundredth Meridian," Abbey's "Desert Solitaire" and Ivan Doig's "This House of Sky."

Let no one blame himself for not having read all, or many, or perhaps even any of these books. Blame instead an East Coast literary establishment that tends to get the West wrong only when it isn't ignoring it completely.

Look at the top 10 magnificent writers and reflect that none of them, not one, made New York's nonfiction list. Not Austin, who blazed the trail for a century of writing about the wild. Not Stegner, whose Stanford writing program has nurtured generations of distinguished writers in the West. Not Abbey, whose comic novel "The Monkey Wrench Gang" helped radicalize environmental thinking in America. Not Doig, the Montana-born, Seattle-based master whose impatiently awaited new novel, "Mountain Time," hits bookstores this summer. And not Evan S. Connell either, the San Francisco mailman-turned-novelist whose landmark examination of Custer and the Little Big Horn was not only written in the West but published here as well by the late, much-lamented Northpoint Press.

INSIDE
Complete list of the top 100. **B5**

Connell's "Son of the Morning Star" also has the distinction of getting a vote from the man to whom it's dedicated, the gifted San Francisco writer Curt Gentry. "Helter Skelter," Gentry and Vincent Bugliosi's harrowing book about the Charles Manson murders, missed joining "Son of the Morning Star" on the list by the narrowest of margins.

So did books by Mary McCarthy and Susan Sontag, whose origins in Seattle and the San Fernando Valley, respectively,

▶ **KIPEN:** *Page B5 Col. 1*



Mary Austin



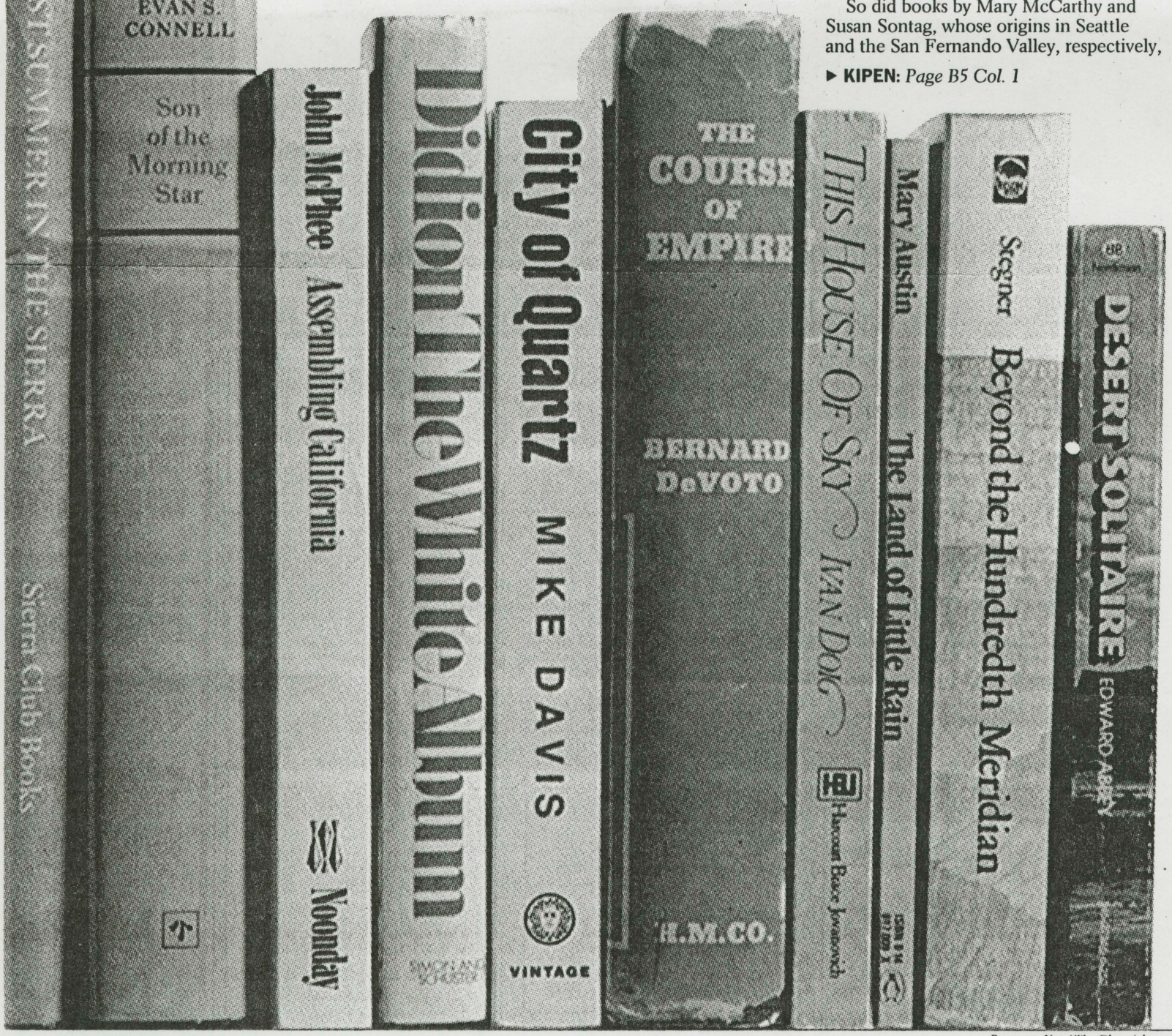
Wallace Stegner



Edward Abbey

The Top 10

1. **"Land of Little Rain"** Mary Austin
2. **"Beyond the Hundredth Meridian"** Wallace Stegner
3. **"Desert Solitaire"** "Edward Abbey
4. **"This House of Sky"** Ivan Doig
5. **"Son of the Morning Star"** Evan S. Connell
6. **Western Trilogy** Bernard DeVoto
7. **"Assembling California"** John McPhee
8. **"My First Summer In the Sierra"** John Muir
9. **"The White Album"** Joan Didion
10. **"City of Quartz"** Mike Davis



RUSSELL YIP / *The Chronicle*

Readers Rank Doig, Didion Works Among Best Nonfiction

▶ **BOOKS**
From Page B1

did not go unremembered. Even Harold Ross, the founding editor of the New Yorker, got a vote via James Thurber's uproarious biography of him, which never quite manages to conceal the quintessential New Yorker's birthplace: Aspen, Colo.

But The Chronicle Western 100 fields too strong a team for us to dwell on its bench, however deep. Better to single out the joy of finding Ursula K. LeGuin's essay collection "Dancing at the Edge of the World" just a few slots below "Ishi in Two Worlds," the story of the last Yahi Indian as written by LeGuin's mother, the Berkeley anthropologist Theodora Kroeber. Or the ghoulish thrill of seeing Joan Didion's "The White Album" on the list cheek by jowl with George Stewart's "Ordeal by Hunger," his superior reconstruction of what befell the Donner Party, which included some of Didion's forebears.

Didion owes her high place on the list in part to the intercession of Cyra McFadden — herself no mean writer of nonfiction, as anyone who's read her memoir "Rain or Shine" can attest. McFadden took time to drop a postcard on behalf of Didion's "White Album" ("still her best book"), Herbert Gold's "Fathers" (not nonfiction and therefore ineligible but "a modern American masterpiece" just the same) and Norman MacLean's "A River Runs Through It" (outpolled by his more frankly nonfictional "Young Men and Fire").

Both MacLean books had votes enough to make the list, as did multiple books by other writers, but a decision was made early on to adopt a one-book-per-author proviso. One hundred sounds like a lot, but it's not, and too many worthy writers came up short as it is, even without having to compete for a spot against five different John Muir titles.

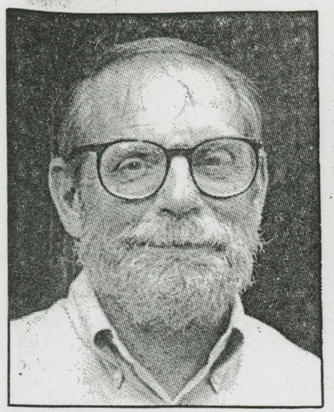
Ties were broken, rules bent and the continent Solomonically divided at the Rockies.

Tiebreaker discretion also allowed for the placement of Joseph Henry Jackson's "Anybody's Gold" — duly nominated by the readership, *not* the editor — in the inevitably conspicuous No. 100 slot. The Chronicle's book editor from the 1930s through the 1950s, Jackson championed John Steinbeck and other Western writers when the East Coast wouldn't give them the time of day. He reviewed a book every morning in these pages for almost 20 years and, like his opposite number at the Los Angeles Times, Robert Kirsch, read himself into an early grave. To them for their service to Western literature, and to the erudite readers who made this list possible, The Chronicle Western 100 is gratefully dedicated. To those readers who missed their chance to vote, be patient: Nonfiction is only half the story.

David Kipen is The Chronicle's book editor. He can be reached at kipend@sfgate.com.

CHECKING IT TWICE

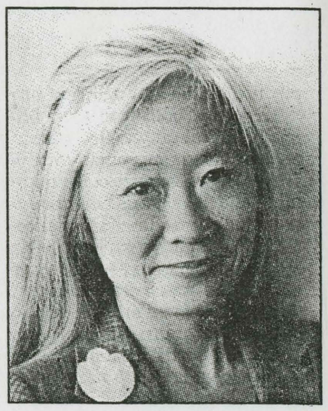
Did we blow it? Send your opinion of The Chronicle Western 100 to Book Review, San Francisco Chronicle, 901 Mission St., San Francisco, Calif. 94103, or weigh in via the Web at *sfgate.com*. Just type "good books" in the keyword box.



John McPhee
His "Assembling California" was No. 7



John Steinbeck
Co-wrote "Sea of Cortez," at No. 28



Maxine Hong Kingston
Her "Woman Warrior" came in No. 42

The Chronicle's Western 100

1. **"Land of Little Rain,"** Mary Austin
2. **"Beyond the Hundredth Meridian,"** Wallace Stegner
3. **"Desert Solitaire,"** Edward Abbey
4. **"This House of Sky,"** Ivan Doig
5. **"Son of the Morning Star,"** Evan S. Connell
6. **The Western Trilogy,** Bernard DeVoto
7. **"Assembling California,"** John McPhee
8. **"My First Summer in the Sierra,"** John Muir
9. **"The White Album,"** Joan Didion
10. **"City of Quartz,"** Mike Davis
11. **"Ordeal by Hunger,"** George Rippey Stewart
12. **"Ishi in Two Worlds,"** Theodora Kroeber
13. **"Americans and the California Dream"** (five volumes), Kevin Starr
14. **"Cadillac Desert,"** Marc Reisner
15. **"A Sand County Almanac,"** Aldo Leopold
16. **"California: The Great Exception,"** Carey McWilliams
17. **"Arctic Dreams,"** Barry Lopez
18. **"Farewell to Manzanar,"** Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston, James D. Houston
19. **"Young Men and Fire,"** Norman MacLean
20. **"Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee,"** Dee Brown
21. **"Bad Land,"** Jonathan Raban
22. **"The World Rushed In: The California Gold Rush Experience,"** J.S. Holliday
23. **"The Art of Eating,"** M.F.K. Fisher
24. **"And the Band Played On,"** Randy Shilts
25. **"The Big Four,"** Oscar Lewis
26. **"The Solace of Open Spaces,"** Gretel Ehrlich
27. **"In the Spirit of Crazy Horse,"** Peter Matthiessen
32. **"Great Plains,"** Ian Frazier
33. **"The Great Plains,"** Walter Prescott Webb
34. **"Land of Giants: The Drive to the Pacific Northwest, 1750-1950,"** David Sievert Lavender
35. **"Crazy Horse: The Strange Man of the Oglalas,"** Mari Sandoz
36. **"City of Nets,"** Otto Friedrich
37. **"Refuge: An Unnatural History of Family and Place,"** Terry Tempest Williams
38. **"The Content of Our Character,"** Shelby Steele
39. **"High Tide in Tucson,"** Barbara Kingsolver
40. **"Winter,"** Rick Bass
41. **"Undaunted Courage,"** Stephen Ambrose
42. **"The Woman Warrior,"** Maxine Hong Kingston
43. **"The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test,"** Tom Wolfe
44. **"I Lost It at the Movies,"** Pauline Kael
45. **"The Devil's Dictionary,"** Ambrose Bierce
46. **"Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas,"** Hunter S. Thompson
47. **"The Book: On the Taboo Against Knowing Who You Are,"** Alan Watts
48. **"The Hunger of Memory,"** Richard Rodriguez
49. **"Caught Inside: A Surfer's Year on the Californi- Coast,"** Daniel Duane
50. **"This Boy's Life,"** Tobias Wolff
51. **"Books in My Baggage,"** Lawrence Clark Powell
2. **"The California Dream,"** anthology ited by Dennis Hale, Jonathan Eisen
53. **"Men to Match My Mountains,"** Irving Stone
54. **"Love and Will,"** Rollo May
55. **"The Language of the Goddess,"** Marija Gimbutas
56. **"The Air-Conditioned Nightmare,"** Henry Miller
57. **"T. Rex and the Crater of Doom,"** Walter Alvarez
58. **"The Way to Rainy Mountain,"** N. Scott Momaday
59. **"The Man Who Walked Through Time,"** Colin Fletcher
60. **"John Barleycorn,"** Jack London
61. **"Strangers From a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans,"** Ronald Takaki
62. **"Dirty Truths: Reflections on Politics, Media, Ideology, Conspiracy, Ethnic Life and Class Power,"** Michael Parenti
63. **"The Executioner's Song,"** Norman Mailer
64. **"The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West,"** Patricia Nelson Limerick
65. **"Living Up the Street: Narrative Recollections,"** Gary Soto
66. **"The Captive Mind,"** Czeslaw Milosz
67. **"California Fault: Searching for the Spirit of a State Along the San Andreas,"** Thurston Clarke
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69. **"The Ohlone Way,"** Malcolm Margolin
70. **"An Autobiography,"** Ansel Adams
71. **"The Great Thirst: Californians and Water, 1770s-1990s,"** Norris Hundley
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73. **"Twentieth Century Pleasures: Prose on Poetry,"** Robert Hass
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97. **"Dashiell Hammett: A Life,"** Diane Johnson
98. **"The Town That Fought to Save Itself,"** Orville Schell
99. **"Hide and Seek,"** Jessamyn West
100. **"Anybody's Gold,"** Joseph Henry

Ivan Doig

Author earns national praise, drawing on Montana past

By Dan Hollow
Tribune city editor

Born: June 27, 1939, in White Sulphur Springs; he lives in Seattle with his wife, Carol.

His wife has called him "the fastest pen in the West" for his work at book-signing events, but don't look for gun-slingin' outlaws in the novels of Ivan Doig.

One of Montana's most highly acclaimed writers, Doig builds his stories around men and women fighting to make a living and hold together family and community in a harsh terrain, often the wind-swept reaches of the Rocky Mountain Front.

"I see it as terribly harmful, the Louis L'Amour/John Wayne myth, going with the strength of your arm or the quickness of your gun," Doig told an interviewer a few years back. "There were a helluva lot more homesteaders than gunfighters."

Doig was only 6 when his mother died. He moved at a young age to Dupuyer, 84 miles northwest of Great Falls, where he was raised by his father and grandmother.

During the summers, Doig got some first-hand experience that would provide gritty color for his future novels. Jobs ranged from herding sheep and bucking hay bales to trucking grain and driving a Cat in farm fields.

Armed with bachelor's and master's degrees in journalism from Northwestern, he got a job as a journalist and married his wife, Carol.

In 1966, the Doigs moved to Seattle, where he worked as a free-lance writer and pursued a doctorate in history at the University of Washington. After earning his Ph.D. in 1969, Doig embarked on a career as a full-time writer.

In his debut novel in 1978, "This House of Sky: Landscapes of a Western Mind," Doig recalls growing up in a sheep ranching family with his father and grandmother. The memoir opens with the death of his mother, Berneta, on the morning of his sixth birthday and ends with the slow suffocation of his father in 1971 from emphysema.

"This House of Sky" was nominated for the National Book Award and won the Pacific Northwest Booksellers Award and the Governor's Writers Day Award.

In literary circles, he is equally admired for his trilogy of Montana novels about Scottish immigrants: "English Creek" in 1984, "Dancing at the Rascal Fair" in 1987 and "Ride with Me, Mariah Montana" in 1990.

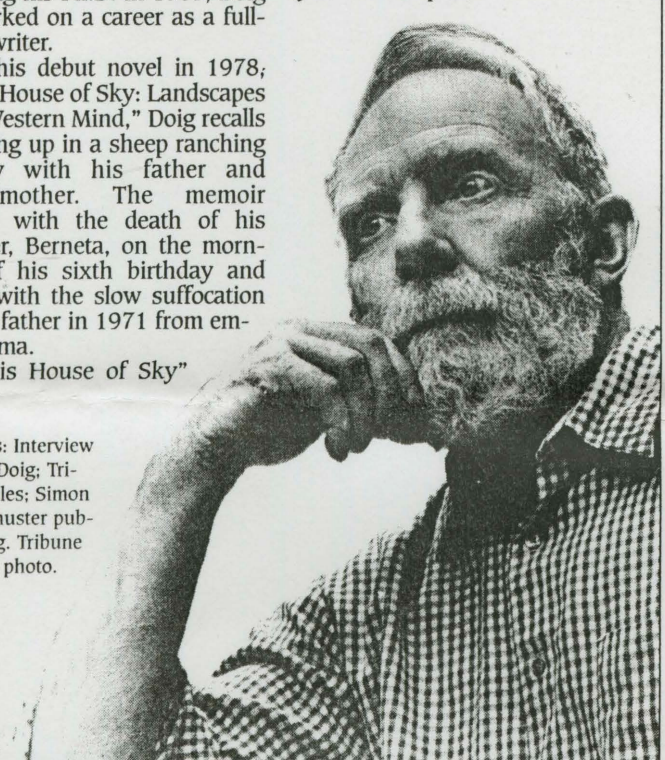
His most recent work, 1999's "Mountain Time," is set in the modern-day West. The characters encounter such events as the Exxon Valdez oil spill in Alaska, the eruption of Mount St. Helens and oil and gas drilling on the Rocky Mountain Front.

What's next?

"I'm heading back to when the 1900s got under way for Montana women," Doig said recently. "I'm circling back to catch up with a character who was a schoolgirl in 'Dancing at the Rascal Fair' — Susan Duff, Scotland born, gifted with a silver voice."

He'll bring Duff to womanhood in Helena through World War I and the suffrage movement "to a turning point in her life as the jazz age comes along."

Doig said he plans some research trips to Montana for the novel, which will take a couple years to complete.



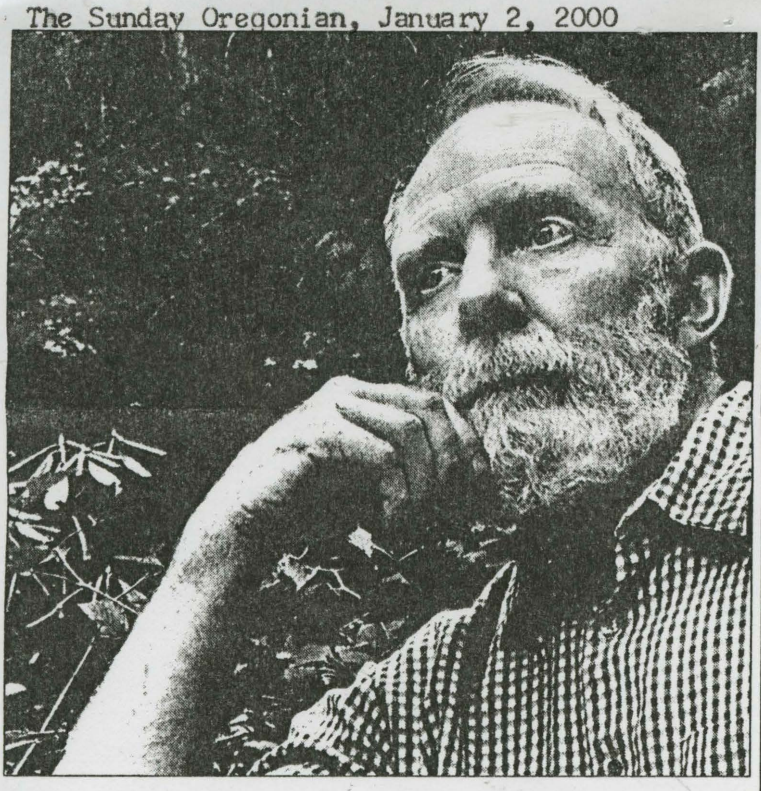
Sources: Interview with Doig; Tribune files; Simon and Schuster publishing. Tribune file photo.

THE TRIBUNE'S

100 Montanans of the 20th Century



The Sunday Oregonian, January 2, 2000



Ivan Doig

10 Claim to fame: A novelist whose fiction and autobiographical writing tell the story of Montana better than most history books.

Notable works: The memoir "This House of Sky" (1978) and the fiction trilogy that consists of "English Creek" (1984), "Dancing at the Rascal Fair" (1987) and "Ride with Me, Mariah Montana" (1990)

Northwest connection: Doig earned a doctorate in history from the University of Washington in 1969 and has lived in Seattle ever since.

Personal bio: Doig, born in 1939 to a sheepherding family who lived on the Montana range, grew up determined to work with his head, not his hands. He earned a full scholarship to Northwestern University, worked on a newspaper in Illinois and for a magazine in Chicago, then headed for Seattle. After earning his Ph.D., he worked as a free-lance magazine writer while his wife, Carol, taught at a community college. Doig soon decided journalism was too limiting a form for the stories he wanted to tell.

Literary notes: Doig's writing combines his meticulous historical research with fictional characters whose lives are emblematic of the periods about which he writes. He has brought his personal heritage to bear in his most powerful works by creating fictional characters who emigrated from Scotland to Montana, much as his own family did — and, in his bid for historical accuracy, he has been particularly attentive to the sound of language, re-creating the burr his ancestors brought across the Atlantic. He has received repeated awards from the Pacific Northwest Booksellers Association and a distinguished achievement award from the Western Literary Association.

More recommended reads: "Bucking the Sun" (1996)

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COLUMNS

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Photo by Kathy Sauber.

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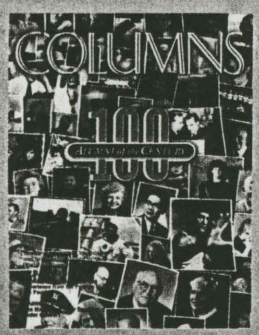


This collection of UW alumni photos includes digital images and archival material.

Photo by Kathy Sauber.



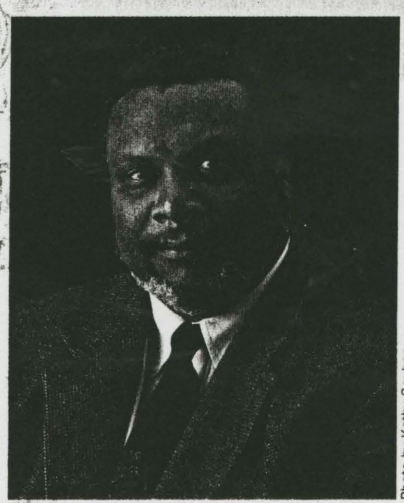


Photo by Kathy Sauber.

Doig, Ivan, '69
His memoir on growing up in Montana, *This House of Sky,* was nominated for a National Book Award. His other works include *Winter Brothers, The Sea Runners, English Creek, Dancing at the Rascal Fair* and his 1999 novel, *Mountain Time.*

Donaldson, Lauren, '31
Fisheries biologist remembered for revolutionary study of salmon and his hatchery-raised fish, including the "Donaldson trout." He also did landmark research on the effects of radiation on aquatic organisms at post-war atomic bomb sites in the Pacific.

The University of Washington currently has more alumni quarterbacks playing in the National Football League than any other U.S. college. The six Huskies are Mark Brunell, Jacksonville; Chris Chandler, Atlanta; Billy Joe Hobert, New Orleans; Brock Huard, Seattle; Damon Huard, Miami; and Warren Moon, Kansas City.

Duffy, Patrick, '71
One of TV's most successful actors and producers, he starred for 12 years as Bobby Ewing on the long-running series *Dallas,* then was actor, producer and director of the sitcom *Step by Step.* In 22 years in show business, he's been out of work three weeks.

Dunbar, Bonnie, '71, '75
One of a handful of astronauts to have made five space flights, Dunbar's missions include the 1995 docking of the space shuttle Atlantis to the Russian space station Mir, the first U.S.-Russian meeting in space in 20 years.

Dwyer, William, '51
This federal judge's 1991 decision to halt logging on Forest Service land to save the spotted owl changed forever the landscape of the Pacific Northwest, and the economies of timber towns. "He told the truth that few in this region want to hear," said a *Seattle Times* editorial.

Egtvedt, Clairmont, '17
President and chairman of the board of Boeing, Egtvedt guided the company to build larger and more complex airplanes, including the "Clipper," the "Stratoliner" and the famous B-17 bomber, the "Flying Fortress."

Ekwueme, Alex, '55, '57
Nigerian statesman who has worked tirelessly on behalf of peace and democracy in his native country. He served as vice president from 1979-1983, then was jailed for six years after a coup. Ran unsuccessfully for president in 1998.

Ellis, James, '48
The quintessential civic leader and a successful attorney, he fathered METRO, which saved Lake Washington and our mass transit system. Also spearheaded efforts that created the Seattle Aquarium, Freeway Park and other major projects. Currently presides over the Mountains-to-Sound Greenway, an environmental corridor along I-90.

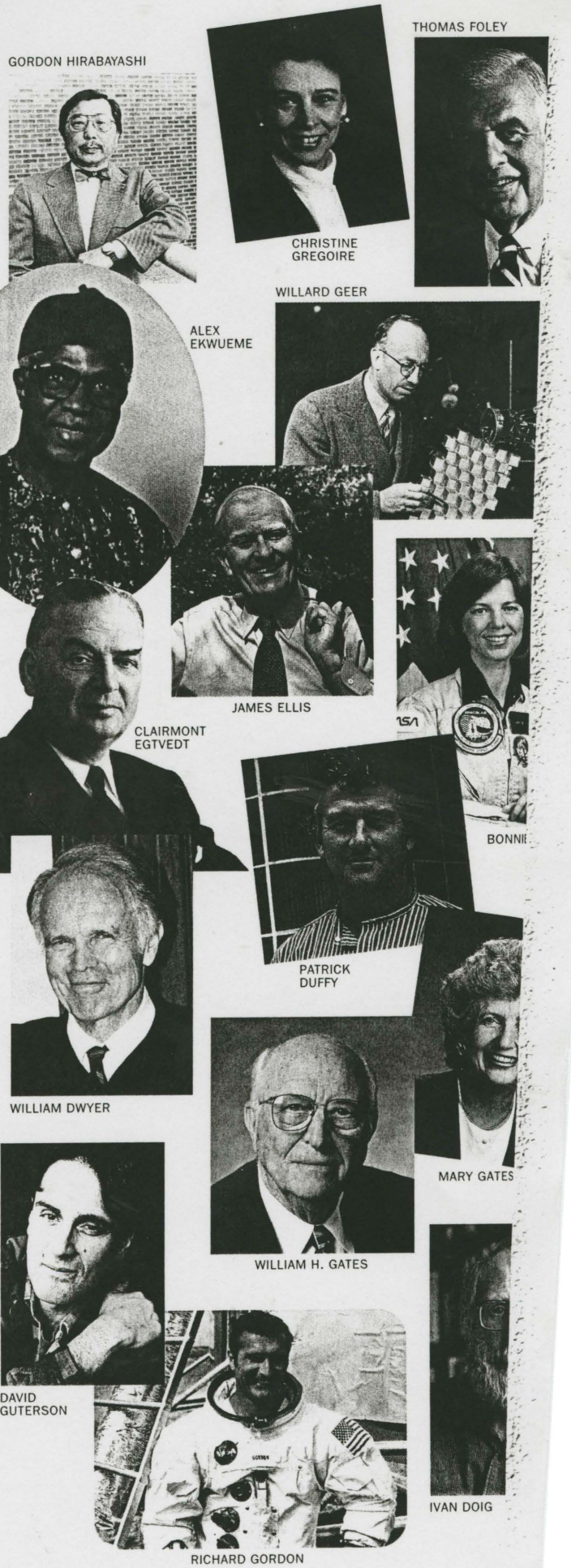
Ellis, John, '52, '53
Like his older brother, Jim, John is a successful attorney who became active in civic affairs. As chairman of the Baseball Club of Seattle, he helped negotiate the deal with baseball that kept the Mariners in Seattle. Also was board chairman of Puget Power.

Evans, Daniel, '48, '49
Nicknamed "Straight Arrow" for his integrity and independence, Evans was elected to the Legislature in 1956 and became governor, at age 39, in 1964. Through his three terms, he championed environmental protection, human services, women's rights and education. Later president of Evergreen State College (1977-83) and a U.S. senator (1983-89), he is now a UW regent.

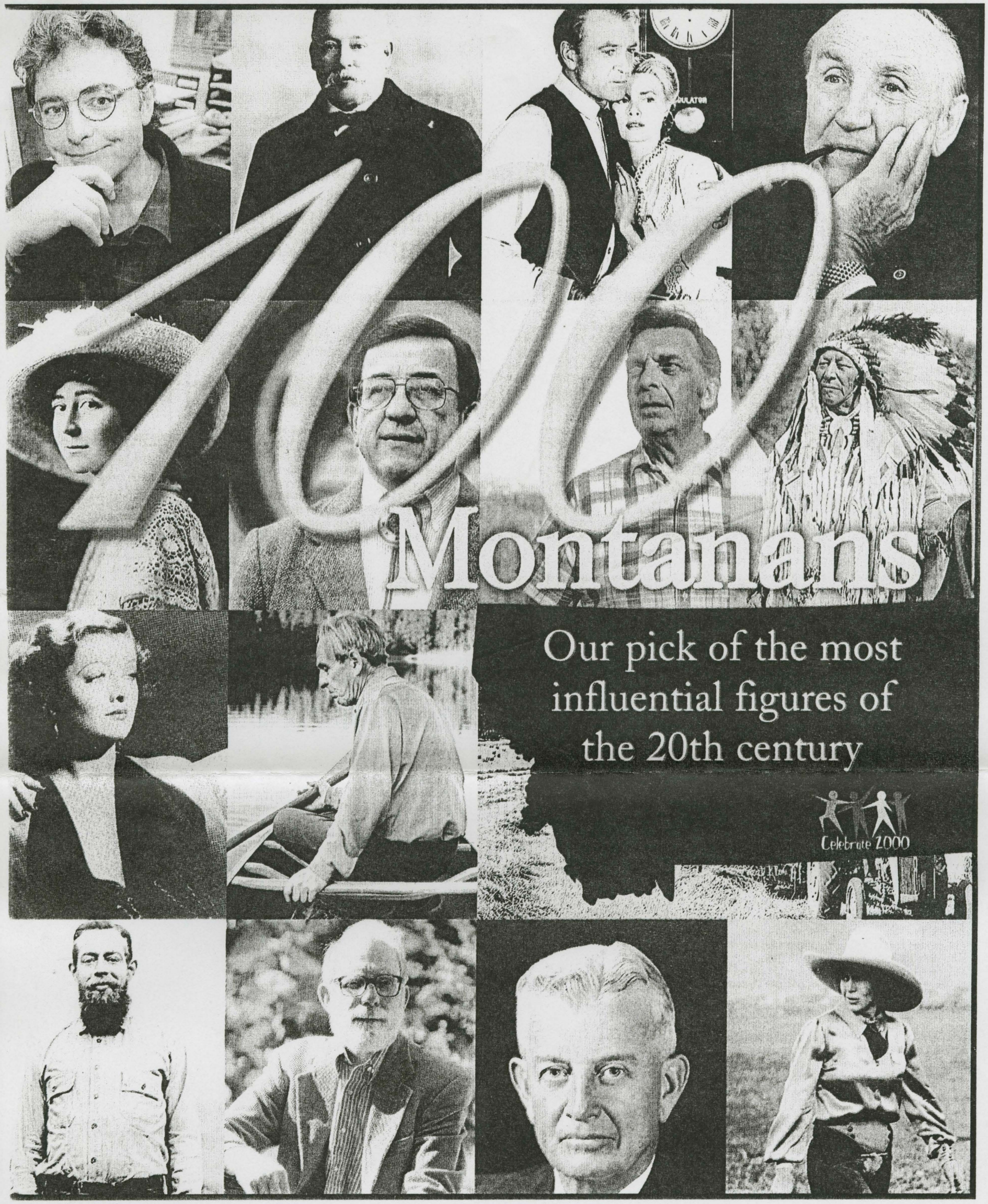
Farmer, Frances, '35
Starred in '30s and '40s films such as *Ebb Tide, Toast of New York* and *Rhythm on the Range.* Later committed to a mental institution, she is the subject of two biographies, a Hollywood film and even a song by the late Kurt Cobain.

Fleming, George, '64
First made news as a Husky running back, but both in the business and political worlds, he opened doors for other African Americans. He spent 22 years in the Legislature, where he battled for civil rights, housing and minority business opportunities. Remains involved in civic activities today.

Foege, William, '61
In 1966, as a medical missionary in Africa, he developed a new technique for vaccinating populations



Missoulian



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luntley

ntinued from Page M44

er and political sandbagging is efforts.
The man who described self as a "classic liberal" had anized labor groups in ntana publicly refuse to ear on the same stage with . College professors and ironmental groups attacked resort's construction plans.
anwhile, Huntley made sident Richard Nixon's orious "enemies list" as ors circulated that Vice sident Spiro Agnew was ssuring the Forest Service to hold a crucial land swap the Sky project needed.
Big Sky opened a year behind edule in March 1974, with a ge, four lifts and a gepodge of other amenities.
ntley died of lung cancer e days before the ceremony. was 62. Two years later, ne USA bought the resort $7 million, barely the cost of ski lifts alone.
Today, Big Sky is a year-nd community in its own nt, and the ski area is one he nation's best.
ntana's tourism industry ught in about $76 million a r when Huntley hatched his am. In 1997, out-of-state tors accounted for $1.56 ion.

Ivan Doig

"Soon after daybreak on my sixth birthday, my mother's breathing wheezed more raggedly than ever, then quieted. And then stopped.

The remembering begins out of that new silence. Through the time since, I reach back along my father's tellings and around the urgings which would have me face about and forget, to feel into these oldest shadows for the first sudden edge of it all.

It starts, early in the mountain summer, far back among the high spilling slopes of the Bridger Range of southwestern Montana. The single sound is hidden water – the south fork of Sixteenmile Creek diving down its willow-masked gulch. The stream flees north through this secret and peopleless land until, under the fir-dark flanks of Hatfield Mountain, a bow of meadow makes the riffled water curl wide to the west. At this interruption, a low rumple of the mountain knolls itself up watchfully, and atop it, like a sentry box over the frontier between the sly creek and the prodding meadow, perches our single-room herding cabin."

– From "This House of Sky"

By GINNY MERRIAM
of the Missoulian

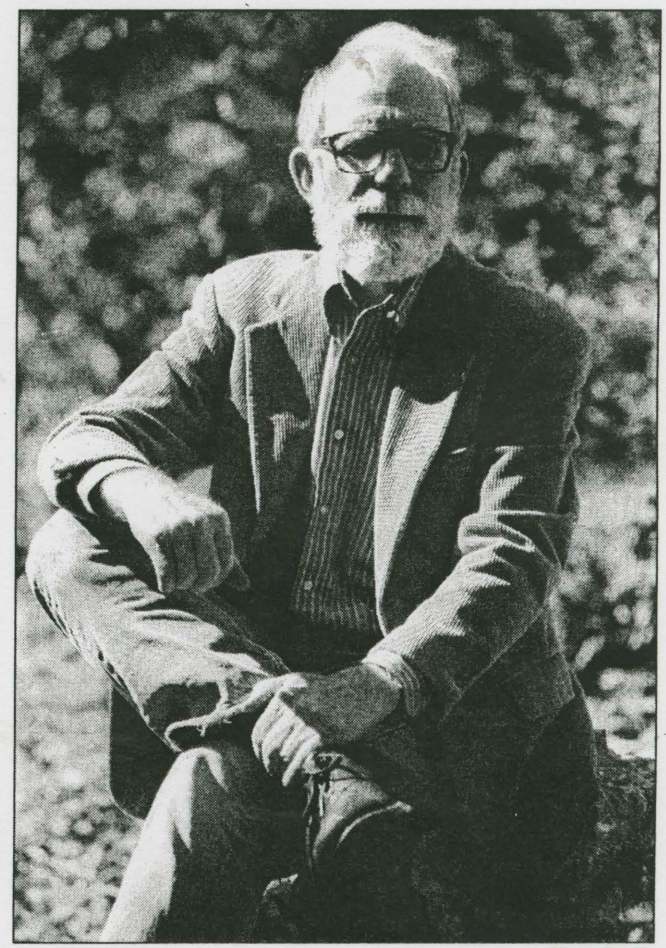
Writer Ivan Doig realized in the late 1960s that he was a relic. Grown up in the shape of the Rocky Mountain Front and the Big Belt Mountains in the 1940s and '50s, the things he knew about were out of step with the rest of the self-questioning, war-protesting country. Doig knew about lambing, herding sheep, trailing sheep, cussing sheep, picking rock from grain fields, driving a power buck rake in haying time and a D-8 Cat pulling a harrow during summer fallowing, digging a well by hand and whitewashing a barn.

It turned out he also knew about losing a mother, loving a father, admiring a grandmother. And he knew how to write. Once he worked his way to it, he gave us in 1978 "This House of Sky," a memoir of family and landscape that became a classic.

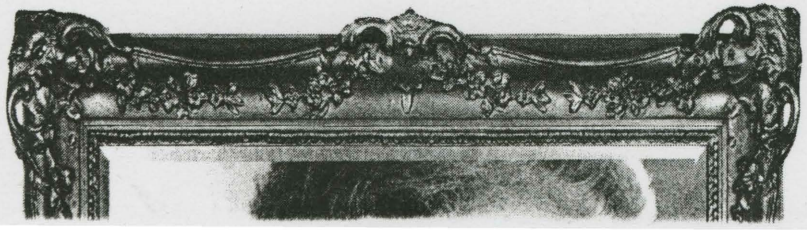
The book was part of a burst of progress toward a new Montana literature, one that told real stories about real Montanans, says Missoula writer and University of Montana professor emeritus William Kittredge. Doig's 1970s voice joined those of Norman Maclean, James Welch and

See **DOIG,** *Page M46*

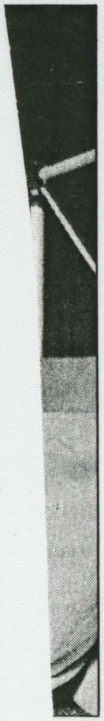
Ivan Doig eschews the label "Montana writer." Though he writes mostly about life in Montana, he says his books are supposed to touch on much broader themes. Clearly, his audience around the world agrees.



Missoulian file



Treasured moments
passed from one



ian file

Doig

Continued from Page M45

others.

"He kind of reaffirmed what everybody had been hoping and thinking – that there would be a real Western literature, not just shoot-'em-ups," Kittredge said recently. "And it happened."

In rural places, Kittredge said, we think the real world is somewhere else – in New York, in Los Angeles, on television. But the real world is here, he said, and it's not "Shane" or the Lone Ranger.

Doig, who has eight books to his credit now, resists the tag "Montana writer." He hopes he's writing into larger country, he said once in an interview, the country of life.

His readers clearly think so. They read about Montana around the world. "This House of Sky" alone, Doig tells us in his introduction to the 15th anniversary edition, has been used in college courses in autobiography, history, biography and literature, has been "anthologized to a fare-thee-well," translated into German, read on National Public Radio, distributed in audiocassette by the thousands and nominated for the National Book Award.

Doig has gone on to write historical novels based on that life on the Rocky Mountain Front, traveling "home" to Montana from his Seattle home to do his Montana research. His fictional McCaskill family has peopled the trilogy "English Creek," "Dancing at the Rascal Fair" and "Ride With Me, Mariah Montana." In his novel "Bucking the Sun," Doig takes on the building of the Fort Peck Dam.

"This House of Sky" has been used in college courses in autobiography, history, biography and literature, has been "anthologized to a fare-thee-well," translated into German, read on National Public Radio, distributed in audiocassette by the thousands and nominated for the National Book Award.

Though mostly a novelist, Doig's meticulous research has added to Montana's historical record – and given him and his wife, Carol, a now-retired mass communications professor in Seattle, many an adventure in Montana. His training as a journalist is the muscle and sinew of how he works, he says. It taught him how to research and how to approach writing as a craft, like woodworking, he says, "right down to the consonants and vowels."

In September, Doig's most recent novel came out, and Missoula readers embraced him again, packing themselves into his reading and book-signing.

But they always come back to "This House of Sky," he says. No matter what novel he's signing, they stop by the stack of "This House of Sky," and ask him to sign another piece of Montana.

San Francisco Chronicle

DATEBOOK

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 11, 1999

TELEVISION B9
THEATER LISTINGS B2
MOVIE LISTINGS B5, B6
COMICS B8



Acute 'Angle' Wins Reader Poll

Wallace Stegner's novel earns top spot in list of 100 best Western works of fiction

DAVID KIPEN
Books

And people thought counting the Ammiano ballots took forever.

Polling began July 29 for The Chronicle Western 100, our list of the best 20th century fiction written in or about – or by an author from – the Western United States. Since then balloting has been declared officially over at least twice, each time followed by still more reader nominations just too shrewd to exclude.

About 600 people scribbled, typed or e-mailed their opinions on the literature of the West. Each author needed several votes just to make the list, and the top vote-getter had nearly 100 partisans.

That man, had he never written so much as a short story, would still loom large in the annals of Western writing for his nonfiction. His book about the first Grand Canyon expedition, "Beyond the Hundredth Meridian," came within a few votes of displacing Mary Austin's "Land of Little Rain" atop the nonfiction Chronicle Western 100, published in May. (The lists will run side by side in this year's Holiday Book Review issue on November 21.)

Although several Wallace Stegner novels and story collections received multiple votes, none drew such impassioned lobbying as his 1971 classic "Angle of Repose." Its twin-track construction, in which a modern historian's research alternates with the frontier struggles of his grandparents a century before, has been much imitated but rarely, if ever, matched.

"Angle of Repose's" lovely title refers to the position in which an object tumbling downward – whether through hillside terrain or through history – comes to rest. Here is where the rest of the topmost 10 found their angles of repose:

Very nearly jumping Stegner's claim was John Steinbeck's "The Grapes of Wrath," which might have won had Steinbeck's other masterpieces not split the vote. Stegner's old Stanford student Ken Kesey is the highest-ranking living author on the list, with "Sometimes a Great Notion" outpolling his better-known "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest" to place third.

"The Call of the Wild," by Oakland's own Jack London, and "The Big Sleep,"

► **BOOKS:** *Page B4 Col. 1*

INSIDE

► Complete list of The Chronicle's best 20th century Western fiction. **B4**

BOOK CLUB NEWS

HOW DID WE DO? Weigh in with your opinion of The Chronicle Western 100 via the Web at *sfgate.com*. Just type "good books" into the "Jump to" box. Also, sound off on any aspect of our latest book club selection, Chang-rae Lee's "A Gesture Life," by typing "book club" in the "Jump to" box. Postal mail is always welcome at Chronicle Book Club, 901 Mission St., San Francisco, CA 94103.

WHAT'S AHEAD:

- **TODAY:** Open discussion of "A Gesture Life" on SF Gate at noon, moderated by Chronicle Book Editor David Kipen and BayTV's "Bookmark" host Barbara Lane.
- **NOVEMBER 18:** Live broadcast of the book club discussion of "A Gesture Life" on BayTV's "Bookmark" at 8 p.m.
- **NOVEMBER 25:** Reader comments on "A Gesture Life" culled from SF Gate and the mailbag.
- **NOVEMBER 28:** Print announcement of our next book.

London, Chandler Make Top Five in Chronicle List

▶ BOOKS
From Page B1

Raymond Chandler's first Philip Marlowe mystery, rounded out the top five. The latter represented the first of many Los Angeles writers, each shown unexpectedly generous treatment by a predominantly Northern California electorate.

More than one in four slots on the list went to the West's female writers. Barbara Kingsolver's "Animal Dreams" and Willa Cather's "Death Comes for the Archbishop" led the way, ranking sixth and seventh. The Cather novel also exemplifies readers' abiding respect for the fiction of New Mexico, which placed more books on the list than any other state but California.

Raymond Chandler and other L.A. writers were shown unexpectedly generous treatment by a predominantly Northern California electorate.

Like the "Grapes of Wrath" and "The Big Sleep," Nathanael West's "The Day of the Locust" (No. 8) dates from that *annus mirabilis* of Western writing, 1939. It paved the way for such subsequent Hollywood novels on the list as F. Scott Fitzgerald's "The Last Tycoon" (No. 43) and Joan Didion's "Play It as It Lays" (No. 23) and will form the basis for "Storylines California's" next literary roundtable at 10 p.m. November 20 on KQED (88.5 FM).

The ninth spot on the list almost set off a range war. As reader Jason Bennert of San Jose rightly asked, "By excluding Texas from the list of 'Western states' . . . are you seriously suggesting that any list of the best 20th century fiction from the western part of the United States would be complete without Cormac McCarthy's 'All the Pretty Horses' or 'Blood Meridian,' not to mention the best works of Larry McMurtry?"

Ouch. On the contrary, we simply suggested that any definition of the West had better start somewhere. The Rockies seemed as good a place as any and a better one than most.

But cartographic tradition stubbornly refuses to admit the Rockies south into Texas, preferring to call them the Guadalupe Mountains from the moment they cross the New Mexico-Texas border. Anyone looking at the earth instead of a map can see that the westernmost ear of Texas sits well west of the Rockies, thus allowing McMurtry ("Lonesome Dove," No. 17) and especially the East Texas-based McCarthy ("Blood Meridian," No. 9) into any sensible definition of the West.

Right in our own backyard, Dashiell Hammett's "The Maltese Falcon" didn't need any gerrymandering to join Chandler, Tony Hillerman ("Coyote Waits," No. 22) and Ross Macdonald ("The Underground Man," No. 28) among the West's best mystery fiction. Other fiction expressly about San Francisco fared well on the list too, including Amy Tan's "The Joy Luck Club" (No. 16), Frank Norris' "McTeague: A Story of San Francisco" (No. 18) and Armistead Maupin's "Tales of the City" (No. 67).

But does any of this mean anything, or is it just another list in a year far too full of them? For those of us engaged in the quixotic project of advocating for the literature of the Western United States, it means at least these few – blessedly unnumbered – things:

■ That some of us have a lot of reading to do before we can even begin to call ourselves well acquainted with the literature of the West.

■ That catching up on such reading will never be easy until more publishers such as UC Press (which has recently brought "Oil!," No. 44; "Fat City," No. 61; and "The Vineyard," No. 79 back into print as part of its California Fiction series) recognize Western writing's enduring value.

■ And that, wherever the West is, 600 readers have done its literature a large and richly deserved favor.

Chronicle Book Editor David Kipen's column runs every Thursday in Datebook. He can be reached at kipend@sfgate.com.

THE CHRONICLE'S WESTERN 100 LIST OF 20TH CENTURY FICTION

1. **"Angle of Repose,"** by Wallace Stegner
2. **"The Grapes of Wrath,"** by John Steinbeck
3. **"Sometimes a Great Notion,"** by Ken Kesey
4. **"The Call of the Wild,"** by Jack London
5. **"The Big Sleep,"** by Raymond Chandler
6. **"Animal Dreams,"** by Barbara Kingsolver
7. **"Death Comes for the Archbishop,"** by Willa Cather
8. **"The Day of the Locust,"** by Nathanael West
9. **"Blood Meridian,"** by Cormac McCarthy
10. **"The Maltese Falcon,"** by Dashiell Hammett
11. **"The Ox-Bow Incident,"** by Walter Van Tilburg Clark
12. **"English Creek,"** by Ivan Doig
13. **"Even Cowgirls Get the Blues,"** by Tom Robbins
14. **"Snow Falling on Cedars,"** by David Guterson
15. **"On the Road,"** by Jack Kerouac
16. **"The Joy Luck Club,"** by Amy Tan
17. **"Lonesome Dove,"** by Larry McMurtry
18. **"McTeague,"** by Frank Norris
19. **"My Name Is Aram,"** by William Saroyan
20. **"A River Runs Through It,"** by Norman Maclean
21. **"The Left Hand of Darkness,"** by Ursula K. Le Guin
22. **"Coyote Waits,"** by Tony Hillerman
23. **"Play It as It Lays,"** by Joan Didion
24. **"The Monkey Wrench Gang,"** by Edward Abbey
25. **"Vineland,"** by Thomas Pynchon
26. **"Earth Abides,"** by George K. Stewart
27. **"Crooked Little Heart,"** by Anne Lamott
28. **"The Underground Man,"** by Ross Macdonald



Wallace Stegner

29. **"Where I'm Calling From,"** by Raymond Carver
30. **"Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book,"** by Maxine Hong Kingston
31. **"L.A. Confidential,"** by James Ellroy
32. **"The House of the Spirits,"** by Isabel Allende
33. **"Women in Their Beds,"** by Gina Berriault
34. **"Rumors of Peace,"** by Ella Lefland
35. **"The River Why,"** by David James Duncan
36. **"Riders of the Purple Sage,"** by Zane Grey
37. **"Shane,"** by Jack Schaefer
38. **"Stones for Ibarra,"** by Harriet Doerr
39. **"The Big Sky,"** by A.B. Guthrie
40. **"Trout Fishing in America,"** by Richard Brautigan
41. **"The House Made of Dawn,"** by N. Scott Momaday
42. **"The Milagro Beanfield War,"** by John Nichols
43. **"The Last Tycoon,"** by F. Scott Fitzgerald
44. **"Oil!,"** by Upton Sinclair
45. **"Mariette in Ecstasy,"** by Ron Hansen
46. **"The Virginian,"** by Owen Wister
47. **"A Yellow Raft in Blue Water,"** by Michael Dorris
48. **"Ceremony,"** by Leslie Marmon Silko
49. **"Hawaii,"** by James Michener
50. **"The Postman Always Rings Twice,"** by James M. Cain
51. **"Mrs. Bridge,"** by Evan S. Connell
52. **"The Golden Gate,"** by Vikram Seth
53. **"Stones From the River,"** by Ursula Hegi
54. **"Tell Me a Riddle,"** by Tillie Olsen
55. **"Rabbit Boss,"** by Thomas Sanchez
56. **"Bless Me, Ultima,"** by Rudolfo A. Anaya
57. **"The Man in the High Castle,"** by Philip K. Dick
58. **"Laughing Boy,"** by Oliver Lafarge
59. **"The Corpus of Joe Bailey,"** by Oakley Hall
60. **"Rose,"** by Martin Cruz Smith
61. **"Fat City,"** by Leonard Gardner
62. **"Montana 1948,"** by Larry Watson
63. **"Yellow Back Radio Broke-Down,"** by Ishmael Reed
64. **"Tattoo the Wicked Cross,"** by Floyd Salas
65. **"The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman,"** by Ernest J. Gaines
66. **"Lying Low,"** by Diane Johnson
67. **"Tales of the City,"** by Armistead Maupin
68. **"Superior Women,"** by Alice Adams
69. **"Field of Vision,"** by Wright Morris
70. **"Nobody's Angel,"** by Thomas McGuane
71. **"Little Big Man,"** by Thomas Berger
72. **"Budding Prospects,"** by T.C. Boyle
73. **"The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven,"** by Sherman Alexie



John Steinbeck

74. **"Angel Fire,"** by Ron Franscell
75. **"Cowboys Are My Weakness,"** by Pam Houston
76. **"Love Medicine,"** by Louise Erdrich
77. **"Hondo,"** by Louis L'Amour
78. **"Fools Crow,"** by James Welch
79. **"The Vineyard,"** by Idwal Jones
80. **"Fathers,"** by Herb Gold
81. **"The Loved One,"** by Evelyn Waugh
82. **"Paso Por Aqui,"** by Eugene Manlove Rhodes
83. **"Mistress of Spices,"** by Chitra Divakaruni
84. **"Close Range,"** by L. Annie Proulx
85. **"The Color Purple,"** by Alice Walker
86. **"Rock Springs,"** by Richard Ford
87. **"A Distant Trumpet,"** by Paul Horgan
88. **"Tapping the Source,"** by Kem Nunn
89. **"Ask the Dust,"** by John Fante
90. **"Fup,"** by Jim Dodge
91. **"Friendly Persuasion,"** by Jessamyn West
92. **"The Splendid Idle Forties,"** by Gertrude Atherton
93. **"The Carmen Miranda Memorial Flagpole,"** by Gerald Rosen
94. **"Dune,"** by Frank Herbert
95. **"The Palace Thief,"** by Ethan Canin
96. **"Confessions of Madame Psyche: Memoirs and Letters of Mei-Li Murrow,"** by Dorothy Bryant
97. **"Making History,"** by Carolyn See
98. **"The Living,"** by Annie Dillard
99. **"After Many a Summer Dies the Swan,"** by Aldous Huxley
100. **"Johnny Got His Gun,"** by Dalton Trumbo



Ken Kesey

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Writers of the century

Denise Levertov

Claim to fame: Prize-winning poet known for protesting U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War and for her commitment to other causes of social justice.
Notable works: "The Sorrow Dance" (1967), "The Freeing of the Dust" (1976), "Candles in Babylon" (1982)
Northwest connection: Moved to Seattle in 1989.
Personal bio: Levertov, born in England in 1923, was the daughter of a Russian Jew who had converted and become an Anglican priest. She was educated at home and as a girl aspired to be a dancer. But even in her teens she began to change course, and she had her first book of poetry published when she was in her early 20s. Marriage to an American writer brought her to this country in 1948, and she became a citizen in 1955. In the process, Levertov fell under the influence of the poet William Carlos Williams and became a poet with a thoroughly American sensibility. During a long career as a teacher, translator and editor, she earned her greatest distinction as a poet and writer, blazing a trail for others by using her medium for political protest — against the Vietnam War, the United States' support of right-wing military governments in Central America and the Gulf War, among other things. She died from lymphoma in Seattle in 1997.
Literary notes: Levertov's Catholicism and commitment to peace and social justice fueled much of her work, which is notable for its meditative quality and inquiry into the nature of spiritual insight. Some of her later poems reflect her time spent in the Pacific Northwest landscape.
More recommended reads: "Sands of the Well" (1996), "This Great Unknowing: Last Poems" (1999), "New & Selected Essays" (1992)



H.L. Davis

Claim to fame: Oregon's only Pulitzer Prize winner for fiction.
Notable work: "Honey in the Horn" (1935)
Northwest connection: Born and raised in Oregon.
Personal bio: Davis was born in the Cascades foothills northeast of Roseburg in 1894 or '96 (reports vary). He spent his early years in the towns and settlements along the Umpqua River, then moved on to Antelope and The Dalles, where he graduated from high school. He lived there and worked at various jobs — as a cowboy, typesetter and surveyor, among other things — before receiving his first recognition as a writer for his poetry. Avoiding a role in the Northwest literary community, Davis was more influenced by Eastern writers of his day, including the critic H.L. Mencken, who may have encouraged him to switch to prose writing. In 1932 Davis left on a Guggenheim Fellowship for Mexico, never to return. There, he wrote "Honey in the Horn," his prize-winning novel of the West, which won a Pulitzer in 1936. He died in San Antonio in 1960.
Literary notes: "Honey in the Horn" could be called the "The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn" of the Northwest, a work of fiction about homesteading in Oregon in the early 20th century. It has a large cast of restless characters — a cast so large that some critics panned the book for lacking a clear plot when it was first published — and through them Davis showed what it was like to work at such traditional turn-of-the-century occupations as logging, farming and trading horses while yearning for a better life.
More recommended reads: Although he wrote several other novels, "Honey in the Horn" is the classic.



NEW YORK TIMES BEST SELLERS

NONFICTION

1. **TUESDAYS WITH MORRIE, Mitch Albom,** *Doubleday, $19.95*
2. **THE GREATEST GENERATION, Tom Brokaw,** *Random House, $24.95*
3. **THE GREATEST GENERATION SPEAKS: LETTERS AND REFLECTIONS, Tom Brokaw,** *Random House, $19.95*
4. **HAVE A NICE DAY!, Mick Foley,** *ReganBooks/HarperCollins, $25*
5. **LIFE: OUR CENTURY IN PICTURES, edited by Richard B. Stolley and Tony Chiu,** *Bulfinch/Little, Brown, $60*
6. **'TIS, Frank McCourt,** *Scribner, $26*
7. **AND THE CROWD GOES WILD, Joe Garner,** *Sourcebooks, $49.95*
8. **ESPN SPORTSCENTURY, edited by Michael MacCambridge,** *ESPN/Hyperion, $40*
9. **THE CENTURY, Peter Jennings and Todd Brewster,** *Doubleday, $60*
10. **WHEN PRIDE STILL MATTERED, David Maraniss,** *Simon & Schuster, $26*

FICTION

1. **HARRY POTTER AND THE CHAMBER OF SECRETS, J.K. Rowling,** *Levine/Scholastic, $17.95*
2. **HARRY POTTER AND THE PRISONER OF AZKABAN, J.K. Rowling,** *Levine/Scholastic, $19.95*
3. **HARRY POTTER AND THE SORCERER'S STONE, J.K. Rowling,** *Levine/Scholastic, $16.95*
4. **TIMELINE, Michael Crichton,** *Knopf, $26.95*
5. **ATLANTIS FOUND, Clive Cussler,** *Putnam, $26.95*
6. **HEARTS IN ATLANTIS, Stephen King,** *Scribner, $28*
7. **IRRESISTIBLE FORCES, Danielle Steel,** *Delacorte, $26.95*
8. **A WALK TO REMEMBER, Nicholas Sparks,** *Warner, $19.95*
9. **SAVING FAITH, David Baldacci,** *Warner, $26.95*
10. **MONSTER, Jonathan Kellerman,** *Random House, $25.95*

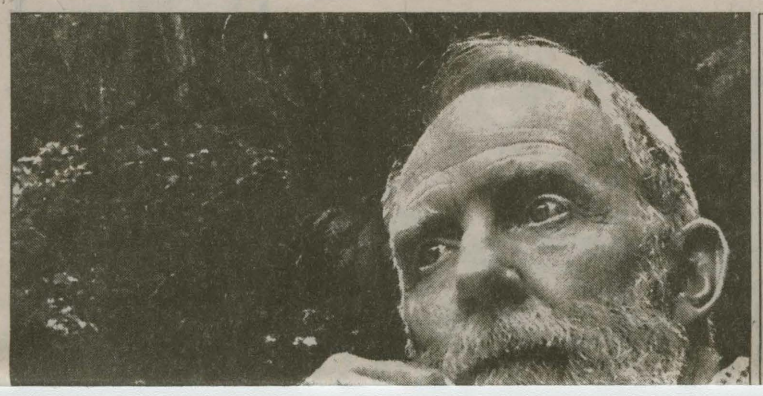
PAPERBACK BEST SELLERS

NONFICTION

1. **ANGELA'S ASHES, Frank McCourt,** *Touchstone/S&S, $14*
2. **OUR DUMB CENTURY, edited by Scott Dikkers,** *Three Rivers, $15*
3. **A WALK IN THE WOODS, Bill Bryson,** *Broadway $13*
4. **THE SEAT OF THE SOUL, Gary Zukav,** *Fireside/S&S, $12*
5. **THE PERFECT STORM, Sebastian Junger,** *HarperPaperbacks, $6.99*
6. **BLIND MAN'S BLUFF, Sherry Sontag and Christopher Drew with Annette Lawrence Drew,** *HarperPaperbacks, $7.99*
7. **THE PROFESSOR AND THE MADMAN, Simon Winchester,** *HarperPerennial, $13*
8. **GUNS, GERMS, AND STEEL, Jared Diamond,** *Norton, $14.95*
9. **A CHILD CALLED "IT", Dave Pelzer,** *Health Communications, $9.95*
10. **THE LOST BOY, Dave Pelzer,** *Health Communications, $10.95*

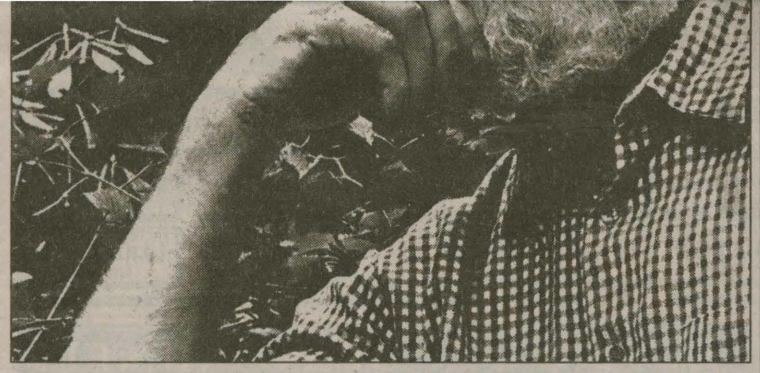
FICTION

1. **HARRY POTTER AND THE SORCERER'S STONE, J.K. Rowling,** *Scholastic, $5.99*
2. **THE GREEN MILE, by Stephen King,** *Pocket, $7.99*
3. **SOUTHERN CROSS, Patricia Cornwell,** *Berkley, $7.99*
4. **SEIZE THE NIGHT, Dean Koontz,** *Bantam, $7.99*
5. **JEWELS OF THE SUN, Nora Roberts,** *Jove, $7.50*
6. **VINEGAR HILL, A. Manette Ansay,** *Avon, $13*
7. **A MAP OF THE WORLD, Jane Hamilton,** *Anchor, $12.95*
8. **TOM CLANCY'S POWER PLAYS: SHADOW WATCH, created by Tom Clancy and Martin Greenberg,** *Berkley, $7.99*
9. **MIRROR IMAGE, Danielle Steel,** *Dell, $7.99*
10. **POKEMON: NOS. 1-4, Tracey West,** *Scholastic,$4.50 each*









Ivan Doig

10 **Claim to fame:** A novelist whose fiction and autobiographical writing tell the story of Montana better than most history books.

Notable works: The memoir "This House of Sky" (1978) and the fiction trilogy that consists of "English Creek" (1984), "Dancing at the Rascal Fair" (1987) and "Ride with Me, Mariah Montana" (1990)

Northwest connection: Doig earned a doctorate in history from the University of Washington in 1969 and has lived in Seattle ever since.

Personal bio: Doig, born in 1939 to a sheepherding family who lived on the Montana range, grew up determined to work with his head, not his hands. He earned a full scholarship to Northwestern University, worked on a newspaper in Illinois and for a magazine in Chicago, then headed for Seattle. After earning his Ph.D., he worked as a free-lance magazine writer while his wife, Carol, taught at a community college. Doig soon decided journalism was too limiting a form for the stories he wanted to tell.

Literary notes: Doig's writing combines his meticulous historical research with fictional characters whose lives are emblematic of the periods about which he writes. He has brought his personal heritage to bear in his most powerful works by creating fictional characters who emigrated from Scotland to Montana, much as his own family did — and, in his bid for historical accuracy, he has been particularly attentive to the sound of language, re-creating the burr his ancestors brought across the Atlantic. He has received repeated awards from the Pacific Northwest Booksellers Association and a distinguished achievement award from the Western Literary Association.

More recommended reads: "Bucking the Sun" (1996)



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NORTHWEST FILM CENTER PORTLAND ART MUSEUM PRESENTS

REEL MUSIC 2000

JAN. 7 - FEB. 13

Our annual winter celebration of music on film offers a compendium of delights for music afficianados of all persuasions. From vintage jazz, blues and swing to alternative rock and techno, from traditional Jewish music to contemporary gospel, from opera to classical to silent film, we hope to get your new year off to a tuneful start. Enjoy.

JANUARY 7 FRI 7PM

OPENING NIGHT **SWEET AND LOWDOWN** DIRECTOR: WOODY ALLEN US 1999

Jazz has long been one of Woody Allen's obsessions, and it provides the basis for his witty new film that takes its title from Gershwin's classic song. Combining feature film narrative with a ZELIG-like faux documentary style, the story traces the life of the fictional Emmet Ray (Sean Penn), the world's second-greatest jazz guitarist, but probably first-place megalomaniac. (95 mins.)

SPECIAL THANKS TO SONY PICTURES CLASSICS.

JANUARY 7 FRI 9:15PM

INSTRUMENT DIRECTOR: JEM COHEN US 1999

Far from a traditional documentary, this collaboration between filmmaker Jem Cohen and Fugazi is a musical scrapbook of the decade since the militant cult-guitar band's inception in 1987. (115 mins.)

CO-SPONSORED BY KBOO COMMUNITY RADIO.

JANUARY 8 9 SAT 2PM, SUN 4:30PM

VISITING ARTIST **SOMEWHERE OVER THE RAINBOW: HAROLD ARLEN** DIRECTOR: DON MCGLYNN US 1999

Best known for his music for THE WIZARD OF OZ, Arlen also composed such classics as "Blues in the Night," "Stormy Weather," "It's Only a Paper Moon," "One For My Baby," "That Old Black Magic," and dozens of other gems. Drawing on a wealth of home movies, interviews and vintage performances by Judy Garland, Lena Horn, Frank Sinatra, Bing Crosby, Barbara Streisand, Cab Calloway, Tony Bennett and Mel Torme, the range of Arlen's creative accomplishments come wonderfully to life. (80 mins.)

DIRECTOR DON MCGLYNN IN ATTENDANCE.

JANUARY 8 11 SAT 4PM, TUE 7PM

THE SILENCE OF THE ANGELS DIRECTOR: OLIVIER MILLE FRANCE 1999

With images and sounds of breathtaking clarity, Mille's film is at once a musical, architectural and spiritual expedition through the Byzantine world. From the mountains of the Balkans to the dark ghettoes of Aleppo, from the high plains of Ethiopia to the solitude of the Egyptian desert, to the ice-locked churches of the far North of Russia, the chants of Orthodox Christians echo as if in call and response across continents, cultures and centuries. (92 mins.)

JANUARY 8 9 11 12 15 SAT 7PM, SUN 2&7PM, TUE 9PM, WED 7PM, SAT 4:30PM

VISITING ARTIST **LOUIS PRIMA: THE WILDEST** DIRECTOR: DON MCGLYNN US 1999

If you need to recharge your batteries after New Years, tune in to Don McGlynn's exuberant new film on Louis Prima, Keely Smith and the lounge culture they ruled. A patron saint of the cocktail nation, and such recent films as BIG NIGHT and SWINGERS, Prima's trajectory from New Orleans trumpeter/singer in the 30s, to 52nd Street and Hollywood hep-cat in the 40s, to Rat Pack God in the 50s came via his witty fusion of Italian, novelty, jazz, swing, rock and pop sensibilities. (90 mins.)

DIRECTOR DON MCGLYNN IN ATTENDANCE JANUARY 8 & 9.

JANUARY 8 SAT 9:30PM

DRIVER 23 DIRECTOR: ROLF BELGIUM US 1998

Compared to everything from SPINAL TAP to THE KING OF COMEDY to DON QUIXOTE, DRIVER 23 is the hilarious profile of Dan Cleveland of Minneapolis—would-be heavy metal rockstar by night and a delivery driver by day. Belgium's film documents the hapless Cleveland's efforts to become a rock deity while his life is barely held together by Prozac and duct tape. (72 mins.)







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Readers Rank Doig, Didion Works Among Best Nonfiction

▶ BOOKS
From Page B1

did not go unremembered. Even Harold Ross, the founding editor of the New Yorker, got a vote via James Thurber's uproarious biography of him, which never quite manages to conceal the quintessential New Yorker's birthplace: Aspen, Colo.

But The Chronicle Western 100 fields too strong a team for us to dwell on its bench, however deep. Better to single out the joy of finding Ursula K. LeGuin's essay collection "Dancing at the Edge of the World" just a few slots below "Ishi in Two Worlds," the story of the last Yahi Indian as written by LeGuin's mother, the Berkeley anthropologist Theodora Kroeber. Or the ghoulish thrill of seeing Joan Didion's "The White Album" on the list cheek by jowl with George Stewart's "Ordeal by Hunger," his superior reconstruction of what befell the Donner Party, which included some of Didion's forebears.

Didion owes her high place on the list in part to the intercession of Cyra McFadden – herself no mean writer of nonfiction, as anyone who's read her memoir "Rain or Shine" can attest. McFadden took time to drop a postcard on behalf of Didion's "White Album" ("still her best book"), Herbert Gold's "Fathers" (not nonfiction and therefore ineligible but "a modern American masterpiece" just the same) and Norman MacLean's "A River Runs Through It" (outpolled by his more frankly nonfictional "Young Men and Fire").

Both MacLean books had votes enough to make the list, as did multiple books by other writers, but a decision was made early on to adopt a one-book-per-author proviso. One hundred sounds like a lot, but it's not, and too many worthy writers came up short as it is, even without having to compete for a spot against five different John Muir titles.

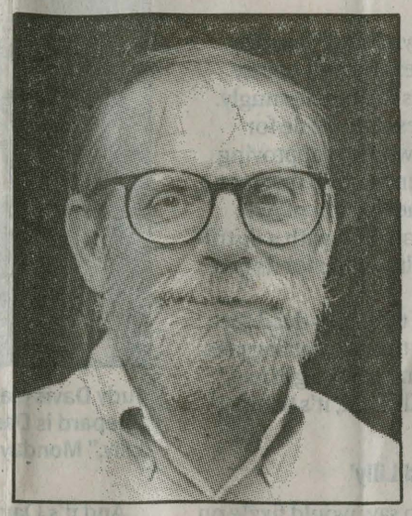
Ties were broken, rules bent and the continent Solomonically divided at the Rockies.

Tiebreaker discretion also allowed for the placement of Joseph Henry Jackson's "Anybody's Gold" – duly nominated by the readership, *not* the editor – in the inevitably conspicuous No. 100 slot. The Chronicle's book editor from the 1930s through the 1950s, Jackson championed John Steinbeck and other Western writers when the East Coast wouldn't give them the time of day. He reviewed a book every morning in these pages for almost 20 years and, like his opposite number at the Los Angeles Times, Robert Kirsch, read himself into an early grave. To them for their service to Western literature, and to the erudite readers who made this list possible, The Chronicle Western 100 is gratefully dedicated. To those readers who missed their chance to vote, be patient: Nonfiction is only half the story.

David Kipen is The Chronicle's book editor. He can be reached at kipend@sfgate.com.

CHECKING IT TWICE

Did we blow it? Send your opinion of The Chronicle Western 100 to Book Review, San Francisco Chronicle, 901 Mission St., San Francisco, Calif. 94103, or weigh in via the Web at *sfgate.com*. Just type "good books" in the keyword box.



John McPhee
His "Assembling California" was No. 7



John Steinbeck
Co-wrote "Sea of Cortez," at No. 28



Maxine Hong Kingston
Her "Woman Warrior" came in No. 42

The Chronicle's Western 100

1. **"Land of Little Rain,"** Mary Austin
2. **"Beyond the Hundredth Meridian,"** Wallace Stegner
3. **"Desert Solitaire,"** Edward Abbey
4. **"This House of Sky,"** Ivan Doig
5. **"Son of the Morning Star,"** Evan S. Connell
6. **The Western Trilogy,** Bernard DeVoto
7. **"Assembling California,"** John McPhee
8. **"My First Summer in the Sierra,"** John Muir
9. **"The White Album,"** Joan Didion
10. **"City of Quartz,"** Mike Davis
11. **"Ordeal by Hunger,"** George Rippey Stewart
12. **"Ishi in Two Worlds,"** Theodora Kroeber
13. **"Americans and the California Dream"** (five volumes), Kevin Starr
14. **"Cadillac Desert,"** Marc Reisner
15. **"A Sand County Almanac,"** Aldo Leopold
16. **"California: The Great Exception,"** Carey McWilliams
17. **"Arctic Dreams,"** Barry Lopez
18. **"Farewell to Manzanar,"** Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston, James D. Houston
19. **"Young Men and Fire,"** Norman MacLean
20. **"Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee,"** Dee Brown
21. **"Bad Land,"** Jonathan Raban
22. **"The World Rushed In: The California Gold Rush Experience,"** J.S. Holliday
23. **"The Art of Eating,"** M.F.K. Fisher
24. **"And the Band Played On,"** Randy Shilts
25. **"The Big Four,"** Oscar Lewis
26. **"The Solace of Open Spaces,"** Gretel Ehrlich
27. **"In the Spirit of Crazy Horse,"** Peter Matthiessen
28. **"Sea of Cortez: A Leisurely Journal of Travel and Research,"** John Steinbeck, Edward F. Ricketts
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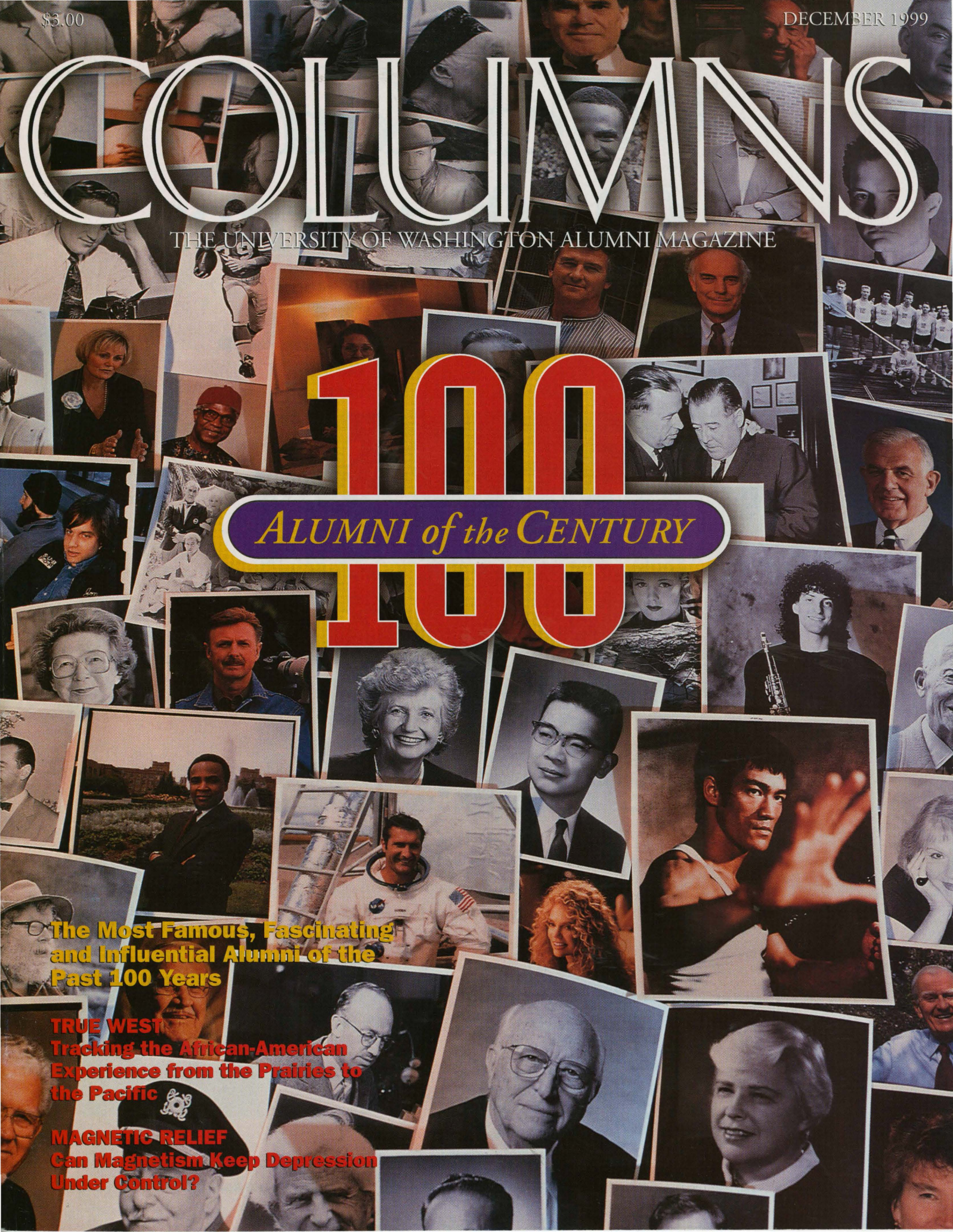

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