

THE PREMIER MAGAZINE OF THE WEST

# COWBOYS & INDIANS

JULY 1999



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OF A HOLLYWOOD  
GOLDEN BOY

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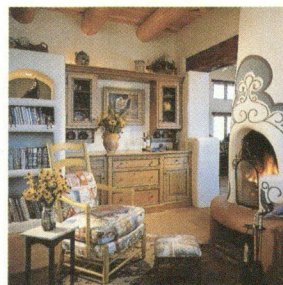
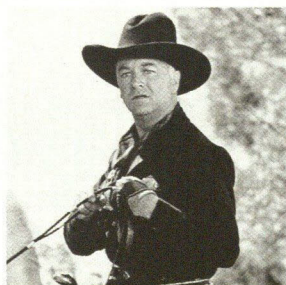
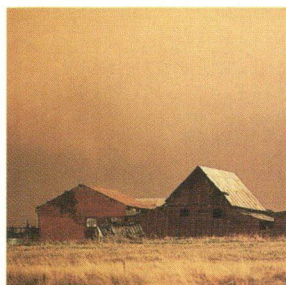


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# Tony Hillerman

**C&I:** With 13 Navajo mysteries and more than 16 million books in print, it's safe to say that you know the West. Where would you send someone to see the real West that Tony Hillerman writes about?

**Hillerman:** I'd send them out to Two Grey Hills to sit on the porch there at the trading post. Just sit there a while and listen and talk to people. It's the same West that I found when I was a little boy in Oklahoma. My Dad ran what you'd call a trading post at a crossroads where two section lines crossed. There was a porch there, and when the WPA wasn't hiring and the crops were laid by, there'd be three or four fellows sitting there telling stories. That's the West.

**C&I:** Where is Two Grey Hills?

**Hillerman:** The Grey Hills are on the east slope of the Chuska Mountains between Gallup and Farmington [New Mexico] off Route 666. Not Route 66.

**C&I:** 6-6-6?

**Hillerman:** Exactly. That's the thing about the West. In the South, you wouldn't have a Route 666. That's the sign of the Anti-Christ. But out in the West, they think it's funny. Ought to turn it over and make it 9-9-9.

**C&I:** A true Westerner always appreciates a good belly laugh.

**Hillerman:** Well, I do. The Navajos are notorious for their sense of humor. In fact there's even been a book written about that, a very scholarly book. But you can't understand much of their humor, though, because a lot of it is based upon puns or mispronouncing the Navajo language.

**C&I:** Simpler ways and a simple life—a hallmark of the West?

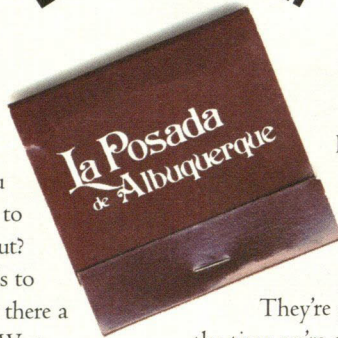
**Hillerman:** We don't have the social stratification that the East has. We really don't. We're beginning to get it, of course, as money pours in, but the privileged class, it never caught on out here.

**C&I:** And no one seems to have fared any worse for it.

**Hillerman:** That's the West. It's unpretentious. We don't have to wear damn neckties—the badge of shame. I've got a couple though.

**C&I:** Gifts?

**Hillerman:** One of them I got when I went to Washington. I represented our public television station at a meeting of the Federal Communications Commission. I had to stop on the way down to buy a necktie.



Everybody was sitting in this huge room around this huge table and I was trying to identify everybody. On the other side of the table were two guys with no neckties. I crossed off Washington and Oregon, the coastal states.

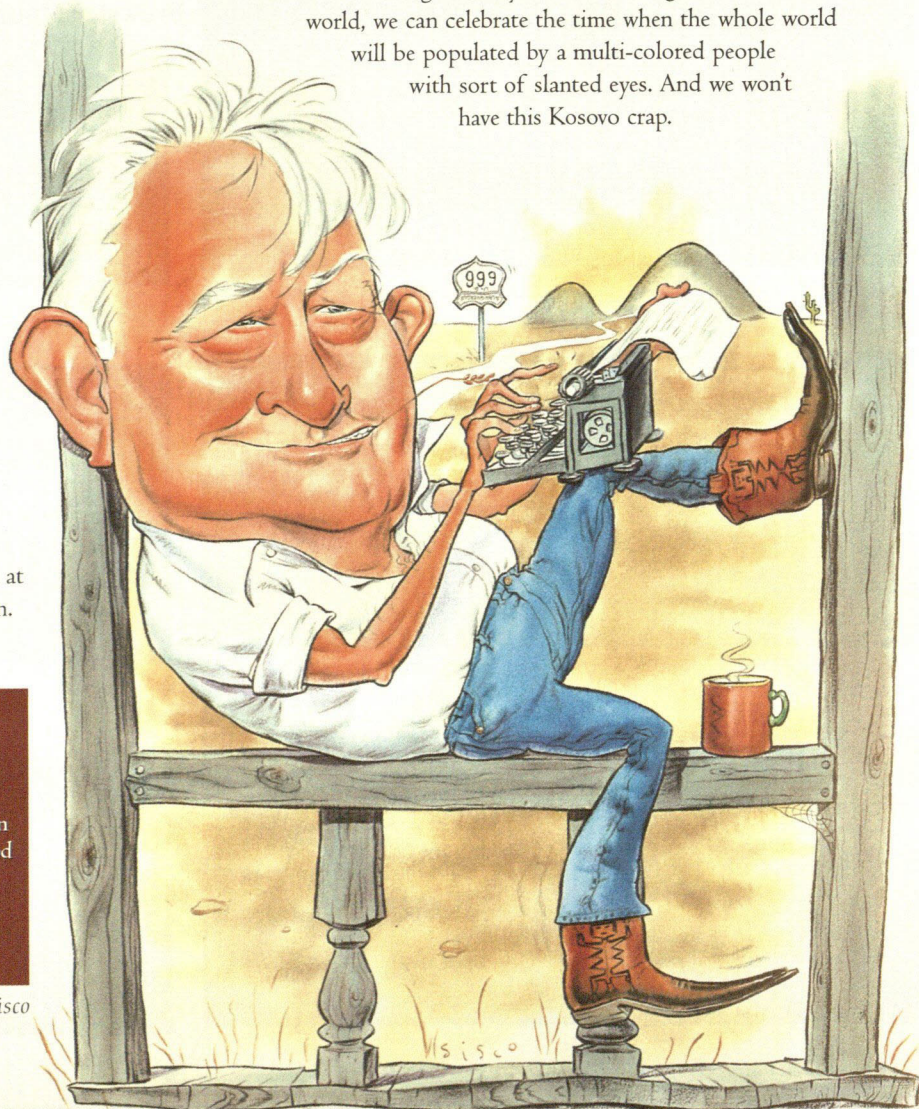
They're pretty urbanized. I crossed off the Dakotas. By the time we're out in the hall drinking coffee I said, "How are things up in Laramie?" and they said, "Well, we're having a hell of a winter."

**C&I:** What about women in the West?

**Hillerman:** The first paper I worked on was the *Borger News-Herald*, which is an awful bad paper even for Texas. It may be better now. I went out to cover a high school football game in Stinnett. They were playing White Deer. After a while I realized that Stinnett was playing a girl at guard. Nobody said a thing about it, and we didn't make anything out of it in the paper. This was 1948. Twenty years before the women's lib movement. She was a big old healthy gal and loved football, and everybody thought it was fine.

**C&I:** I guess the only ones who haven't gotten a fair shake are the Indians.

**Hillerman:** They're getting even a little bit with their gambling casinos. In the long run, if you take the long view of the world, we can celebrate the time when the whole world will be populated by a multi-colored people with sort of slanted eyes. And we won't have this Kosovo crap.



## THE TAB

SETTING: Lobby Bar at La Posada de Albuquerque

DAMAGE FOR THE EVENING: \$46.53

DRINK OF CHOICE: Freshly brewed coffee

TOPIC AVOIDED: Brooks Brothers fall neckwear selection

OBSCURE CULTURAL REFERENCE: Native American blood quantum levels

ITEMS BROKEN: The mystique of the Ivy League

SOAPBOX TOPIC: The Code of the West

STAFF REVIEW: Don't cross this ex-pulling guard

illustration by Sam Sisco