



How the States Got Their Shapes

By Mark Stein

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Mark Stein is a playwright and screenwriter. His plays have been performed off-Broadway and at theaters throughout the country. His films include *Housesitter*, with Steve Martin and Goldie Hawn. He has taught at American University and Catholic University.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

America's first century was defined by expansion and the negotiation of territories among areas colonized by the French and Spanish, or occupied by natives. The exact location of borders became paramount; playwright and screenwriter Stein amasses the story of each state's border, channeling them into a cohesive whole.

Proceeding through the states alphabetically, Stein takes the innovative step of addressing each border-north, south, east, west-separately. Border stories shine a spotlight on many aspects of American history: the 49th parallel was chosen for the northern borders of Minnesota, North Dakota, and Montana because they ensured England's access to the Great Lakes, vital to their fur trade; in 1846, Washington D.C. residents south of the Potomac successfully petitioned to rejoin Virginia (called both "retrocession" and "a crime") in order to keep out free African-Americans. Aside from tales of violent conquest and political glad-handing, there's early, breathtaking tales of American politicians' favorite sport, gerrymandering (in 1864, Idaho judge Sidney Edgerton single-handedly "derailed" Idaho's proposed boundary, to Montana's benefit, with \$2,000 in gold). American history enthusiasts should be captivated by this fun, informative text.

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Review

"Give me the splendid irregularities any day. God bless the panhandles and notches, the West Virginias and Oklahomas." (Wall Street Journal)

"For anyone who's been confounded by the largest of all jigsaw puzzles, the one that carved out those fifty weirdly formed states, here is the solution. It's history, it's geography, it's comedy, it's indispensable." (ANDRO LINKLATER, author of *The Fabric of America: How Our Borders and Boundaries Shaped the Country and Forged Our National Identity*)

"If you ever wondered why Delaware owns a small portion of the southwest New Jersey coast, the answer is here!" (Library Journal)

"A fascinating and wonderfully entertaining account of an often-overlooked oddity of America's history: how the jigsaw-puzzle layout of the United States emerged. I never thought a book on geography could be funny, but Mark Stein has pulled it off." (Vogue)

About the Author

Mark Stein is a playwright and screenwriter. His plays have been performed off-Broadway and at theaters throughout the country. His films include *Housesitter*, with Steve Martin and Goldie Hawn. He has taught writing and drama at American University and Catholic University and lives in Washington, D.C.

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