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HEALING, IMAGINATION, AND NEW MEXICO

STEPHEN D. FOX

"I only want to find whatever of the *great spirit* there is in the Southwest."—Robert Henri, one of the founders of the Santa Fe artists' colony¹

"The air is very pure and dry. It's been so good for the children. They seem much stronger, and they're not as high-strung as they were in the city. Those mountains are soothing. They're permanent. Nothing could ever disturb those mountains—except maybe our bombs!"—Los Alamos physicist, 1940s²

"The Ascended Masters told me years ago that New Mexico was destined to become a therapeutic center, one of the best in the world."—Santa Fe Naturopath Jay Victor Scherer³

THESE QUOTATIONS TOUCH ON THEMES that recur in the statements of New Mexico artists, writers, ethnologists, scientists, and alternative-therapy enthusiasts. Those themes include love of mountains, high-desert terrain, and warm, dry climate; fascination with pre-technological cultures; anxiety over modern civilization's direction; and mystical belief in the Rio Grande valley's "chosenness." These themes are also related to health and to the myth that New Mexico is a therapeutic place to live.⁴ There is a small literature dealing with the health-seekers—those who came to the Southwest to cure respiratory disease, mostly tuberculosis, during the Era of Climatology. Climatology is the belief that climate produces and cures levels of illness, a theory that flourished in the medical community from the 1880s until germ theory eclipsed it around the turn of the century.⁵

The definition of health-seeker should be broadened, however,

to include those searching for emotional, spiritual, and psychic well-being as well as those classified "ill" by their physical symptoms. Before the climatological era began to wane in New Mexico by World War II, there was a movement of ethnicity-seekers in the teens and twenties, which members of the counterculture repeated, with "New Age" rhetoric, in the late sixties and seventies.

A study of health-seeking in New Mexico might emphasize analysis of myth for its own sake or identification of popular belief in a mass-culture context, but a more useful approach demonstrates that a combination of idiosyncratic personal beliefs and networks of shared attitudes created social movements in the twenties and thirties and sixties and seventies. Before those movements are described, however, one must understand the first heavy immigration to New Mexico: the "lungers."

The opportunity to choose New Mexico or other southwestern states as refuge from disease often rested on a coincidence of two factors—epidemics of disease in colder, wetter, crowded areas combined with sudden availability of railroad service into higher, warmer, drier, and less populous states. "Fever and ague" was a constant topic of concern in the humid Mississippi Valley and Missouri frontier settlements in the nineteenth century, and although the term "ague" may have been used for a variety of influenza-related discomforts, ethnohistorian Robert T. Boyd makes a convincing case for identifying "fever and ague" with the malaria-pneumonia complex, the latter being a frequent complication of poorly treated malaria.⁶ More lethal than the fevers and aches, however, was the bloody cough and stifled breath of tuberculosis, the leading killer of the nineteenth century.⁷

Treatment of these diseases was inadequate because medicine continued to be an inexact, developing science. Doctors in the middle and late nineteenth century could "cure" only four or five diseases, usually ones associated with diet, such as ricketts, pellagra, scurvy, or malnutrition.⁸ Moreover, criteria for training and evaluating physicians varied from state to state, and physicians emphasized a wide variety of therapies, from common-sense eating and exercising to cure-all snake oils indirectly related to Indian folk medicines.⁹ The few advances in health in the 1800s were effected more by sanitation engineers and urban statisticians than by phy-

sicians; doctors enjoyed status and respectability not because their cures worked, but because of the public's fervent "wish that their services work."¹⁰ Fervent wishes for health also included religious figures, which is clear from a study of Francis Schlatter, a mysterious man who resembled the popular portraits of Christ and whose faith healing attracted crowds of thousands in Albuquerque and Denver in the 1890s. Contemporary newspaper stories from Socorro and Albuquerque denouncing Schlatter were printed alongside advertisements for miraculous, cure-all patent medicines with no medical foundation.¹¹

The failure of faith also contributed significantly to popular confusion about health. Several notable social and economic changes, including industrialization, migration to urban and isolated areas, and husband-wife role changes, had separated people from traditional religious beliefs. Sects and offshoots of sects strove to reassure people, but Donald Meyer, historian of nineteenth- and twentieth-century religions, argues that there is "no evidence that the late nineteenth-century 'religion of Jesus' was helpful therapeutically."¹² Folk Catholicism of New Mexico, with its Hispanic and Indian traditions of magical healing, helped prepare the way for Schlatter, but it was not the sole source of his theology and healing techniques.¹³ He admitted reading a number of the mind-cure books then popular and could easily have attended public programs on these topics in Denver.¹⁴ Mind-cure, with its influential leaders Mary Baker Eddy and Nona Brooks of Denver, was a bridge from new sects of healing to the secular philosophies of capitalism and corporatism in the early twentieth century. For women, being sick and pursuing "getting well" became a life-style option in the latter 1800s.¹⁵ For most people, however, patent medicines or drier climates were most tempting; a traveler noting the proliferation of odd cures in California before the turn of the century remarked that "the weakening of a general belief in the Great Physician has quickened faith in quacks."¹⁶

The health legend that surrounded New Mexico had roots in the remarks of many early travelers. One account of 1773 claimed that "no diseases have appeared since the settlement of the province by Spaniards, which can be said to be peculiar to the climate and country."¹⁷ Early fur traders and mountain men such as William



Emblems of New Mexico alternative health groups: symbols of wholeness (the circle) and completeness (the equilateral triangle). At top and at 1:00—Southwestern College of Life Sciences; at 4:00, Dr. Scherer's Academy; at bottom, design for the 1983 Holistic Health Conference sponsored by 3HO (Happy, Healthy, Holy), the Sikh yoga group with an ashram in Española.

H. Ashley, co-founder of the Rocky Mountain Fur Company, and Kit Carson of Taos asserted that they never saw fevers or deaths from disease among their men despite the rugged life. Painter George Catlin thought mountain men the healthiest persons he had ever seen. Travelers were often struck by the “large number of persons who live to a great old age . . . , and before they die . . . assume almost the appearance of Egyptian mummies”; and physicians remarked on the fine health of the Indians and Spanish.¹⁸ Against the backdrop of these early reports, businessmen, politicians, and the railroads realized how they could exploit the legend of health.

In 1880, after a decade of floundering, the Denver and Rio Grande Western Railroad entered upon a tremendous campaign of expansion.¹⁹ From 337 miles of three-foot-gauge track south from Denver, the railroad by 1883 totaled 1,685 miles, laid over fabulous gorges and high passes. Millions of hand-hewn ties were bedded in the earth of agricultural and mining areas of southern and western Colorado and northern New Mexico. The adroit advertising of the railroad was handled by its general ticket agents, first F. C. Nims and then the “legendary Major Shadrach Hooper,” both of whom promoted the railroad by “puffing” the country it served. In 1881 Nims published a booklet, the earliest of a multitude of similar publications, and the first word in the title was “health”: *Health, Wealth, and Pleasure in Colorado and New Mexico*.

A combination of boosterism and romantic travel prose, this booklet called the traveler’s attention to “sublime heights” of grand, impressive “mountain-tops, seeming to invade the very heavens.”²⁰ References to Longfellow, Keats, and other Romantic poets are sprinkled throughout. The word “sublime,” as well as the allusions to what Keats would think of the Rockies, are keys to Nims’s participation in two great belief systems regarding the American West in the 1880s. One is that the “sublimity” of the mountains and the lines of sight available to mountain travelers—meaning the awe-inspiring vistas of grandeur and solitude—put complacent urban people in touch with the grandeur of God.²¹ The second belief system involved the pastoral ideal of the Romantic era—a vision of a peaceful Arcady in which “natural” men and women lived close

to a beneficent unprocessed Nature, reveling in their health and pleasure.²²

Practical advice to health-seekers is woven through each chapter, implying that Nims was certain that TB and asthma sufferers were eager consumers of such literature:

The pure, dry air of the plains and the mountains, rarefied by an elevation of from one to two miles above the sea, and often in a high degree electrical, is bracing and exhilarating to the lungs. For asthma it is an almost unfailing specific, as hundreds of persons, confirmed asthmatics before coming to Colorado, but here able to breathe with comfort, and in the enjoyment of health [soon discovered]. . . .²³

One can see the techniques of advertising men exploiting the public's hunger for therapy, peddling a landscape as others peddled patent medicine.

A trio of Colorado doctors—Samuel Fish, Samuel Solly, and Charles Dennison—turned promotional travel rhetoric into scientific dogma by describing respiratory cures in articles they published in medical journals all over the country. These doctors themselves arrived as tubercular or “nervous” invalids and recovered so rapidly that they became ardent promoters of southwest climate as the best-known therapy for tuberculosis, asthma, and hay fever, and hot springs as therapy for rheumatism, eczema, psoriasis, and acne.²⁴ Their proselytizing reached receptive ears in the East; forty-two prominent physicians, twenty-seven of them from New York, founded the American Climatological Association.²⁵ Thus, the weight of scientific testimony was added to the folk legends of the healing power of fresh air, high altitude, and sunshine.

Well-off and well-educated health-seekers, following doctors' orders, moved to New Mexico between 1900 and 1920 and built spas, hospitals, sanatoriums, and provided necessary economic support services. Albuquerque and Santa Fe were “made” by the railroad and health-seekers who rode it across Raton Pass. Indeed, all of Albuquerque's modern hospitals were founded in the climatological era, usually as tuberculosis clinics, and close connections between business people and health-seekers are also evident in Alberquerque.

que's early sanatoriums. For example, the Commercial Club, forerunner of the Chamber of Commerce, bought land for the Presbyterian Synod's new sanatorium, and also provided free office space for the editorial offices of the *Herald of the Well Country*.²⁶ Eddy (later named Carlsbad after the German spa), Las Vegas, and Silver City burgeoned with hackers and lungers unconsciously following the trail of Indian and Spanish legends of hot spring healing, although naming a New Mexican hot springs after a German resort shows that civic allegiance was to European, not Native American, healing traditions. W. S. Moore, a one-man Chamber of Commerce attempting to make the nation conscious of its hot springs,²⁷ built an adobe hotel at the bubbling hot springs six miles northwest of Las Vegas. Realizing the commercial potential, the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway bought out Moore and constructed, in Gilded Age extravagance, the mighty Montezuma Hotel. Thirty carloads of bluegrass sod brought in from Kansas carpeted the grounds, on which a herd of tame deer were kept that one could watch from wicker chairs on the verandas of the hotel. The Montezuma's guest registry was filled for a few years with the names of the great, the powerful, and the rich; the hotel was the perfect symbol of the transfer of interest in healing to the upper classes that had for several centuries been part of the culture of Indians, Hispanics, and fur trappers. Another indication of the complex culture arising in New Mexico was the pamphlets circulated by the New Mexico Bureau of Immigration that mixed scientific analyses of the waters with testimonials solicited from tycoons and doctors.

At hot springs resorts, easily accessible by rail, men and women indulged their common quest for therapy. Theodore Roosevelt's name appeared on the guest register more than once at the Montezuma Hotel, and from that Las Vegas area he recruited many of his Rough Riders. Roosevelt was "Captain Burly" in those days, ranging about the East giving his standard speech on the virtues of the strenuous life, regaling eager audiences with tales of his recovery of health on a North Dakota ranch. Heir of Manhattan wealth and a Harvard graduate, Teddy would write in his autobiography of "the free, open air of the ranchman, the pleasantest and healthiest life in America. . . ." ²⁸ Teddy anticipated the twentieth century's interest in the West as a great playground by turning

out a huge stream of articles picturing himself galloping over the plains in a buckskin shirt and leather chaparajos and wearing a big sombrero.

What a contrast the pale ladies made as they congregated at fashionable spas. Illness, for them, tended to become a conversation piece; sometimes dyspepsia seemed to exceed consumption (tuberculosis), which young women were said to counterfeit for its cosmetic effects!²⁹ These stylish convalescents also contrasted sharply with indigenous Hispanics, to whom illness was a dreaded threat to their ability to work. Far from feigning symptoms to buy a holiday at the hot springs, Hispanics feigned *health*, often bolting hospitals when TB symptoms doctors detected did not satisfy Hispanic criteria for serious medical intervention. To Hispanics, "only the well are bearing their parts of the burdens of life."³⁰

Not all of this health-seeking was successful, however. Americans, in general, were naive, and the lack of reliable health care institutions on the frontier encouraged improvisation. In fact, many died on their pilgrimages; estimates claim that up to 60 percent of TB patients died during their first year in "The Well Country,"³¹ and in Los Angeles health-seekers made the area "a mortician's paradise."³² Promoters and doctors were often ignorant of the point beyond which tuberculosis was hopeless. Many suffering from advanced stages of the disease set out on futile journeys, and made it only as far as a shallow, roadside grave.³³

The 1870s to the 1890s closed out in America an era of intellectual amateurism, during which laymen were encouraged to report, compare, and explain their findings. Little wonder that eager deductions led to poor methodology and inaccurate conclusions. If a person got better in the West, was the therapeutic agent the air, the sun, or the altitude; or was it the exhilaration of going on an adventure and seeing new sights; or was it faith in a widely talked-about cure? Patient, inductive reasoning was not yet a feature of the medical profession. While patients and doctors had high expectations for the power of "scientific" healing, most health-seekers coming west knew nothing of the Southwest but threw themselves recklessly on, deluded that moving west would make everything well.³⁴

The story of man and climate is still a complicated and exasper-

ating jigsaw puzzle with key pieces missing.³⁵ Nevertheless, one meets in New Mexico, especially in Albuquerque, numbers of people whose relatives came here on doctor's advice as late as the 1940s, and some continue to come for relief in the relatively clean, dry air from certain allergies and respiratory tract discomforts. Overall, seekers of physical health accounted for one-fifth to one-half of all immigration to the state between 1870 and 1910.³⁶ Most persons did not realize, however, that the combination of altitude, bright sun, and fair skins has resulted in a skin cancer rate twenty-two times the national average.³⁷

Two American values would have to be transformed before immigrants to New Mexico could said to be at home in the Rio Grande valley *as it was*. Those values involved the land and the indigenous people. The land received from seven to twelve inches of rain annually; it was neither fertile prairie nor green woodland like half of the continent with which Anglos were familiar. The inhabitants—few, poor, and inscrutable—could easily be dispossessed of much of that land but certainly could not be rapidly assimilated, genetically or culturally. Removal and genocide had been features of Anglo policies toward Indians during westward expansion and land-hungry but ignorant settlers did not modify their farming techniques as they passed the “ten-inch” rainfall barrier. Many of the newcomers would gladly have imported—like the trains of blue grass sod to the Montezuma Hotel—landscaping and cultural values, but the trains also brought people discontent with American values. Artists, writers, and anthropologists saw no value in making New Mexico another Missouri, Ohio, or New England. These searchers formed a counter argument to the popular opinion that Indians and Mexicans were inferior throwbacks to a brute, sensual past, arguing instead that not only climate and scenery could help one “escape the fierce struggles and intense mental strains of civilization,” as F. C. Nims wrote,³⁸ but also the holistic philosophies of Indians and the village values of Hispanics. Suffering from inner afflictions that neither doctor nor priest could help,³⁹ these ethnicity-seekers concluded that native New Mexico life-styles and philosophies they encountered would contribute to a widening American search for social adjustment. Many of these newcomers

were women, reflecting Donald Meyer's assertion that getting well was a project that women largely explored after 1870.

One of the most prominent of these women was Mary Hunter Austin, who came to New Mexico having already come to value the California desert and its Indian and Hispanic peoples. Although southwestern land and natives had a restorative influence on Austin, many Americans considered these elements without value. Little knowledge existed about southwest ecology or cultures, and dime novel treatments of Indians often stereotyped them as barbaric warriors. By 1890 the murderous Indian was (along with the deceitful Mexican) a solidly rooted popular image; for example, savage, bitter *Nick of the Woods*, by Robert Montgomery Bird, was a widely read novel portraying ethnic difference as insuperable and the West as dangerous.⁴⁰ Nims's promotional writing for the Rio Grande Railroad spoke of New Mexico Indians as quaint scenery, but—like virgin timber—soon to disappear into the sawmill of civilization.⁴¹ As for the land of the Southwest, east-of-the-Mississippi culture resisted facing honestly a new sort of terrain, even when presented with the geological data of John Wesley Powell's *Report on the Lands of the Arid Region of the United States*.⁴² Americans generally either feared or denied the desert.

Mary Austin was an exception to this generalization, becoming interested in the desert and Indians in the Owens Valley of California before it was destroyed by the Los Angeles water district. Having moved west from Illinois in 1888, Austin struggled to develop an independent mind and writing skills. In 1897 she traded her mother's definition of prayer for one she obtained in conversation with an old Paiute medicine man. Later, she encountered William James during his lecture stop in Oakland and talked with him about the Paiute man's spiritual ideas and the possibility that she, when with old Indian people, could receive "ancestral experience." "What I got out of William James and the Medicine-Man," she wrote, "was a continuing experience of wholeness."⁴³ In 1903 Austin published *Land of Little Rain*, in 1906 *The Flock*, and in 1909 *Lost Borders*, which were evocative tributes to desert beauty, Indian and Hispanic ways, sheep herding, and the liberating and shaping effect of the land on her mind and spirit. After living in artists' circles in Carmel and Europe, she joined Mabel Dodge's

salon in New York in 1913 and four years later followed Dodge to New Mexico. Between Taos and Santa Fe, she met a representative of the Carnegie Foundation who wanted a survey done of Taos County population and culture in advance of a foundation "Americanization" program for Taos.⁴⁴ He got his survey, and Austin found her final home, New Mexico.

The artistic-literary-scientific community into which Austin settled was fed by scenery and ethnicity. Colonies of artists had grown in Taos and Santa Fe since the turn of the century. At first they added Indian models to their paintings as another motif to complement mountains, aspens, adobe, and chile *ristras*, but soon the artists noticed the Indians' art.⁴⁵ Robert Henri, one of the Santa Fe colony's founders and a "teacher with an extraordinary gift for verbal communication," began to talk of envying and wanting to understand mysterious life principles and spiritual sparks implicit in Indian pottery and rugs. As one observer notes, "no other American painter drew into himself such a large, ardently personal group of followers as Robert Henri."⁴⁶ In a similar vein Erna Fergusson wrote that southwestern Indians had no better friends than artists, who recognized that the Indian was "essentially an artist."⁴⁷

Influential visitors to the Mabel Dodge circle during the twenties decided that the Indian was also essentially a theologian or earth spirit. Carl Jung concluded that Taos elders gave him profound insights into psychology and religion in poetic, tearful talks at the Pueblo,⁴⁸ and D. H. Lawrence announced that of all the places he had been, in search of the right psychic environment (including Sardinia, Egypt, India, Australia, and Ceylon), New Mexico had most "liberated" him "from the . . . great era of material and mechanical development."⁴⁹

These intellectuals in New Mexico were not operating in a vacuum, for currents of anti-industrialism and feminism inspired activists in many areas of the country. While disgust with war and with mainstream values had driven many writers and artists to Europe—"The Lost Generation"—New Mexico was almost as remote as Europe and much cheaper to get to. Other dissenters went to California, where more Utopian colonies were founded during the World War I years than during any other period prior to the seventies.⁵⁰ The Harlem Renaissance of black culture and a move-

ment to preserve Appalachian crafts also illustrate the regionalistic fervor and interest in archaically indigenous culture characteristic of this period in the United States.⁵¹

In New Mexico, the year 1919 featured the revival, after a lapse of 150 years, of Santa Fe's community fiestas.⁵² Started by the Spanish of the eighteenth century to commemorate Vargas's "peaceful" reconquest of New Mexico in 1692 after the Pueblo Revolt of 1680, the fiesta was reconstituted in 1919 to give one day of celebration to each of the state's ethnic groups—Indian, Spanish, and Anglo. Pueblo tribes brought their ceremonial dances out of their village plazas and into the state capital for the first time. The Santa Clara Eagle Dance had to be repeated to satisfy the throngs. *El Palacio*, since about 1912 a mouthpiece for the ethnological and archaeological communities, began in 1920 to carry on its masthead "Devoted to the Arts and Sciences of Man in the Southwest." *El Palacio* remarked of the fiesta revival that

a real beginning had been made for the preservation of the incomparable Pueblo Indian ceremonies and drama which had been breaking down for years and threatened with extinction. That this will prove a priceless service to the entire Nation is the firm belief of thoughtful, patriotic Americans. . . .⁵³

Attending Pueblo dances was an epiphany for many Anglo writers and artists. Not only did Indian ritual suggest new forms for lifeless American verse and theater, in their view; but it also seemed a key to origins of human cultural patterns. Erna Fergusson analyzed Pueblo dance as "in fact, what all dances were in the early days of the race before . . . religious ritual and the drama had become separate things."⁵⁴

The obdurate cohesion of Pueblo life fascinated those with social awareness and a tendency toward introspection. These observers felt specialization and centralization of urban settlement patterns were weakening community ties and extended families and that men and women of the early twentieth century were struggling to redefine their personal identities and their roles as spouses and citizens without the security of familiar conventions and formalities.⁵⁵ For these newcomers the apparent serenity, dignity, and

communal solidarity of New Mexico's postwar subsistence villages offered invigorating contrast to mainstream modern life.

Mary Austin and her friends addressed themselves to promoting indigenous life-styles, Indian and Hispanic. Anxiety over the rapid decline of folk experience moved Austin to found the Society for the Revival of Spanish Arts and the Indian Arts Fund in the mid-twenties and to enlist Laura S. M. Curtin to compile *Healing Herbs of the Upper Rio Grande*.⁵⁶ Austin also bought the decaying *Sanuario de Chimayo* by raising money for its preservation.⁵⁷ In writing her impressions of New Mexican Spanish folk life for the national Catholic magazine *Commonweal*, Austin evoked an idyllic past: before the Americans came, "everybody played the guitar or violin, everybody composed songs, acted plays or wrote them, all the women were skilled in needlework and every man was an expert horseman."⁵⁸

Ethnologists had preceded artists in their interest in what Indians were thinking and doing, but, unlike the painters, the students of culture had no art to share, and the results of their overtures to Indians were uneven. Frank Hamilton Cushing broke ground with his unprecedented initiation into a Zuñi society, an act that alerted other ethnologists to the extraordinary research opportunities available among New Mexico Indians. These scholars were obsessed with discovering the content of the Indian cultures, assuming that such knowledge would fill gaps in the presumed linear evolution of human culture.⁵⁹ Having found that betraying religious and social secrets to the Spanish usually led to persecution, the Indians were adept at elusive repartee: for example, pioneer investigators J. Walter Fewkes and Alexander Stephen were tantalized and yet baffled as they realized how different Indians were and how little prepared Americans were for the abstract, reticent metaphors Native Americans used.⁶⁰ In discovering the esoteric mysticism of Indians, ethnologists legitimized study of Indians. By the end of the thirties, sufficient ethnographical studies had been carried out to form the foundations of an attitude of respect—even awe—that many young people of the sixties and seventies took for granted.

A particularly complete bridge between Native American art and health was built between 1919 and 1937 by Hosteen Klah, the great Navajo medicine man, and three white friends, Franc and Arthur

Newcomb, and then Mary Cabot Wheelwright.⁶¹ Klah feared that his immense healing knowledge would die with him; he had no successor. In 1919 Mrs. Newcomb suggested Klah weave sand-painting designs into textiles. Following her advice, he and his nieces wove about forty designs, some as large as twelve by twelve feet. Then in 1927 an extraordinary rapport began to bloom between Klah and Wheelwright that resulted in the recording, by Klah and about forty other singers, as Navajo healers are known, of eighteen different Chantways or healing ceremonies, some of which span seven days. Now transferred from 2080 cylinders to modern tape, these recordings, along with 500 sandpainting drawings and fourteen large tapestries, were deposited in a museum overlooking Santa Fe built according to Klah's design. Known for years as the Museum of Navajo Ceremonial Art, this archive of healing materials taught thousands of visitors about a Native American way to health and wholeness.

The Navajo view illness as a result of upset harmony; they recognize germs and physical malfunctions, but believe that the root cause is always spiritual imbalance. Ceremonies are intended to restore proper relations between human and nonhuman, mind and body.⁶² It is difficult to gauge the impact of this display of spirituality and holism on Anglo visitors, for the myriad of ritual materials confronting the visitor contrasts sharply with scientific healing and Protestantism, the one calling for a few chemical therapies and the other for a modest range of ritual and moral absolutes.

A window open to many Anglos, though, was the mental and psychosomatic facet of Indian healing. Throughout and after the years climatology was in vogue, America had a love affair with "mind cure." This movement and its successor, New Thought, popularized the idea that one could think oneself into illness and back into health again. Leaders like Mary Baker Eddy and Nona Brooks widely spread the idea of "positive thinking"—they influenced Andrew Carnegie, Norman Vincent Peale, and Fulton Sheen. By thinking the thoughts of God, one could harmonize with the divine.⁶³ As Donald Meyer has noted in *The Positive Thinkers*, a philosophic basis for Anglo-Indian rapprochement was formulated: Americans in the twentieth century could not decide whether to call the doctor or the minister, and Mary Baker Eddy soothed many

by saying with startling simplicity that life is One.⁶⁴ Indians seemed to share that idea, for their medicine person was priest as well as physician.

Indeed, a complex mixture of social criticism, romantic generalization, true insight and personal projection characterized the period of ethnicity-seekers. Were *all* Indians really artists? Few Anglos knew the answer, and their actions proved they knew little about what tribal or village life was like. For example, many young Indian painters that Dorothy Dunn recruited for her Studio program at Santa Fe in the early thirties became alcoholics, unable to resolve the tensions of trying to remain both tribal people and idiosyncratic painters.⁶⁵ Thus, in reaching out to each other, Indians and immigrants satisfied some emotional needs but created others.

For three decades following the twenties America was gripped by such moods of national emergency that preoccupations with subsistence and economic recovery eclipsed quests for personal adjustment. Depression in the thirties, World War II in the forties, and the Cold War atmosphere that extended through the fifties left a mood of continuing crisis upon the country that demanded conformity to common goals. Toward the end of the fifties, however, pressures toward conformity began to buckle under protest from several sources: political dissidents opposing McCarthyism, "beatniks" resisting suburban homogeneity, and baby-boom youngsters demanding autonomy to shape their own youth culture. These currents of protest would swell and lead to the counterculture of the sixties and seventies.

Remarkable parallels exist between Bohemians of the twenties and advocates of the counterculture of the sixties. Disenchantment with dominant culture and the search for alternative visions and experiences characterized factions of both eras. The Bohemians were disillusioned by the political floundering that followed World War I, the "War to end all wars"; hippies, drop-outs, and students became enraged at the Vietnam war that mushroomed from a few advisors to nightly-news "body counts" purporting to describe the "progress" of the undeclared war. Since television covered both an Asian war and America's own civil rights violence, the youth culture developed particularly intense ideological disagreements with "the Establishment." Many young people called for a renewal that would

transcend what they saw as the joyless and repressive legacy of the Atomic Age and the Cold War of the fifties. As Morris Dickstein asked, "How did the [sixties] contrive so unique a mixture of twenties bohemianism and thirties politics?"⁶⁶

A fundamental yearning of young people in the late sixties was, as it had been for Mable Dodge and her friends, for a sense of peaceful community. By the 1960s, use of birth control pills had further shaken traditional family values, and civil rights violence had seared the image of peaceful urban neighborhoods. On the other hand, the ideology of wholeness became diffused over a wider population; not just artists and committed radicals, but millions of mostly young, college-educated people expressed desires to "start over." For these new seekers, New Mexico's image as home of artists' colonies and diverse cultures, combined with beautiful country, once again seemed a haven from modern tensions.

Although the importance of emotional health and wholeness was implicit in most branches of the counterculture—from antiwar to environmentalism to civil rights—a distinct branch of alternative therapies began blooming in ever wilder profusion. The litany most repeated by followers of this branch emphasized "natural" and "holistic" therapies and direct, personal, spiritual experience.⁶⁷ The numbers of people who were centering their lives around aspects of health seemed to verify Philip Rieff's prediction that a new personality paradigm based on therapy seeking would replace nineteenth-century spiritualism—except that the counterculture favored a spiritualism of a different focus.⁶⁸

Astrology was one of the elements that colored the eclectic metaphysics of many advocates of alternative therapy. Sometime in the latter 1900s—nobody can say exactly when—the earth is presumed to come under the influence of the sign of Pisces. Since Jesus was associated with the fish, and since one of the primary characteristics of the counterculture is a nearly uncritical openness to new combinations of information, the change to the "Age of Aquarius" symbolized for some a portent as charged as the Second Coming for Christians. Promoters of new products, services, and therapies began using the term "New Age" to link their goods with the idea of personal and collective transformation. "New Age" has also been used to refer to any of a cluster of developments since

the mid-sixties; including appropriate technology (especially solar energy), geodesic construction principles, and the New Religions that grew rapidly in the seventies.⁶⁹ Alternative therapists in New Mexico always include solar energy and Indians in their pantheons, but the various new religious and quasi-religious therapies are even clearer guides to understanding advocates of the New Age.

A principal figure in the New Mexico alternative therapy field has been Jay Victor Scherer, the Santa Fe naturopath-massage therapist. Scherer grew up in the mountains of Idaho with a mother who espoused Rudolph Steiner's Anthroposophy and vegetarianism.⁷⁰ After army service, he came to New Mexico in 1939, hoping the climate would heal a problem with his lungs. He worked as a therapist at Carrie Tingley Crippled Children's Hospital in Truth or Consequences and, reactivated by the army when the war broke out, at Los Alamos Scientific Laboratory. In 1953 Scherer opened a school of massage therapy and naturopathy in Santa Fe. His practice attracted many clients from the Hispanic community, and over the years Scherer has treated so many politicians and bureaucrats that he takes credit for New Mexico having few laws restricting alternative therapies. "They won't bother us because I've helped so many of 'em," he says. While California, Arizona, Texas, and most other states have had acrimonious legislative debate over legitimizing massage as therapy,⁷¹ New Mexico has had little such controversy.

Students and associates of Scherer's have started two schools of their own, one in Santa Fe and one in Albuquerque, making sparsely populated New Mexico the only state with three schools approved by the American Massage and Therapy Association.⁷² Scherer estimates his graduates, during the past thirty years, at about fifteen hundred. Charles Brown, the present co-owner of The New Mexico School of Natural Therapeutics, the school in Albuquerque founded by one of Scherer's students, estimates that several hundred students have graduated there and that daily ten to fifteen letters inquiring about the school come from around the U.S. and Europe. Students and graduates of these six-month, one-thousand-hour curricula are typically from twenty to forty years of age, sophisticated, and well educated.⁷³

Many of these therapists credit New Mexico's openness toward



Dr. Jay Victor Scherer, who began his studies of metaphysics and health in the early 1920s. Scherer's thirty years of teaching and his contacts with Indian, Hispanic, and Anglo clients have made him the dean of alternative healing in New Mexico. Courtesy of author.

unconventional therapy to Hispanic and Indian attitudes concerning healing. The Hispanic tradition of folk healing places great emphasis on herbs, massage, and diet.⁷⁴ Drawing from lay people who “know a little about herbs” as well as from highly revered curanderos and medicos, male and female, Hispanics show respect for curing by manipulating the muscles and spine, by relaxed, reassuring talk, and by combinations of herbs, gathered in the mountains and arroyos or grown in gardens. These traditional preferences lead Hispanics, especially those recently from rural or village backgrounds, to be more inclined to consult the “marginal practitioner”—the medica, the massage therapist, chiropractor, or naturopath—before consulting as a last resort the standard medical doctor.⁷⁵ Although no published study has investigated the degree of Hispanic acculturation to scientific medicine, there are indications that their traditional values are sufficiently strong to foster behavior that baffles Anglos on the staffs of urban hospitals.⁷⁶ An old New Mexican grandmother, asked how she could believe in the old ways and the new, moved her hands like two animals running neck and neck and said, “Los dos corren juntos” (the two run together).⁷⁷

New Age healers also profess admiration for Indian healing, especially its holistic aspects, psychosomatic understanding, and elaborate aesthetic sense. Native American healing is inseparable from religion, however, and Indians rarely reveal details of their methods of healing to ethnographers. The Pueblos have a particularly consistent sanction against those of their tribes who reveal details to outsiders. The supernatural in general and witchcraft in particular are important sources of illness in traditional Indian theory and a topic not only scary to contemplate but one that Christians and western medicine often belittle. New Age esteem for Indian medicine is very selective; as anthropologist John Bodine observed Taos Bohemians, he concluded that they accepted those Spanish village values that soothed their personal mental needs.⁷⁸

Many practitioners of New Age therapy subscribe to a current myth that transcendent, mystical forces in the Rio Grande valley facilitate healing and that healers and therapists are being drawn here “by the droves.” Few details are available about the nature

of this "magnetism," and requests for estimates more exact than "droves" are rarely answered. One person estimated that the number of serious master healers in Taos in 1981-82 would soon reach 100.⁷⁹ In another area, Los Alamos workers have sensed a mystic significance in the juxtaposition of their work with the Indian ruins at Puye and Bandelier Monument.⁸⁰ Dr. Scherer, as a member of the "I Am" Christian sect, stresses the possibility of guidance from ascended spirits. Another contributor to this myth is Neva Dell Hunter, D.D., who founded the Quimby Center, a religious-educational-therapeutic group, in Alamogordo in 1966. Hunter said that Dr. Ralph Gordon, a spirit guide of hers who identified himself as the spirit of P. P. Quimby, a mind-cure pioneer of the nineteenth century, told her to move from Detroit to be near White Sands, a "healing and preserving energy center."⁸¹ A recent dissertation on Hunter and the group at Quimby points out that they can be understood as modern-day forms of shamanism. Under the directorship of Dr. Robert Waterman, who assumed leadership after Hunter died in 1978, the group at Quimby attracted many out-of-state students, became a college, and moved to Santa Fe in 1981.⁸² Eclectic and exotic and built around Hunter's 14,000-volume metaphysical library and the healing technique of "aura balancing," Quimby and its students are understandable as one of the religious renewal movements of the seventies adapting to a New Mexico milieu. The continued success of such an institution—now called the Southwestern College of Life Sciences and granting master's degrees—is an illustration of Santa Fe's national prominence as a mecca of the New Age.

A full list of unconventional therapies being practiced or taught in New Mexico, regardless of the reasons their advocates give for coming to New Mexico, suggests that such activity is endemic here. A renowned acupuncturist, Sensei Nakazono, operates a school and practice in Santa Fe. Herbologist Michael Moore, author of the popular pamphlet *Los Remedios de la Gente* and a former California composer, is proprietor of successful herbal remedy businesses in Santa Fe, Albuquerque, and Austin, Texas, and has joined the faculty of the newest alternative therapy school in New Mexico, the Institute of Traditional Medicine. This institute, with about one hundred students drawn mostly from other states, teaches massage,

Ayurveda (the traditional medicine of India), Chinese medicine, and nutrition. Moreover, the 1981 edition of the New Mexico *New Age Directory* listed practitioners in Breath Therapy, Inversion Therapy, Rebirthing, Radiesthesiology, Orthobionomics, Iridology, Chromo-Syntonics, Nutrionics, Applied Divine Light, Psychic Detective, Akashic Reader, and numerous massage therapists.⁸³ The Albuquerque Freedom University has offered quarterly during the late seventies an average of 150 free-access, no-credit courses, and usually about 25 to 40 percent of these classes involve varied approaches to healing. That is a much higher percentage than in such schools nationwide, according to the national clearinghouse of Freedom or alternative, community-based adult schools.⁸⁴ Suzanne Vilmaine, an Albuquerque woman who has organized festivals in the healing arts for women in Los Angeles, Los Alamos, Santa Fe, and Albuquerque, thinks that women's interest in health-related topics is similar in all four cities. She reports hearing that people in the four cities and in Phoenix say that strong psychic energies had attracted them.⁸⁵

On a number of levels, then, health seeking continues in the West. As numerous as practitioners of alternative therapy are, recent signs indicate that migration from the eastern half of the country has already begun to foul the new nest they came to find. Albuquerque allergists report that the planting of ornamental trees by newcomers dissatisfied with the native ecosystem has generated a formidable asthma problem for the city, once the capital of "The Well Country."⁸⁶

NOTES

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2. Daniel Land, "A Reporter in New Mexico: Los Alamos," *New Yorker* 24 (17 April 1948): 76.

3. Interview with Jay Victor Scherer, 17 March 1982.

4. By "myth" I do not mean "the untrue," but, as in Max Lerner's definition, "an imaginative idea which—whatever its truth—induces men [and women] to feel and to act" (*America as a Civilization* [New York: Simon and Schuster, 1957] p. 24).

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7. "Living with TB," an interview with former lunger Dr. Wilhelm Rosenblatt of the New Mexico Chronic Disease Control Bureau, *Albuquerque Journal*, 9 March 1982.
8. Ferenc M. Szasz, "Francis Schlatter: The Healer of the Southwest," NMHR 54 (April 1979): 97.
9. Virgil Vogel, *American Indian Medicine* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1970), pp. 137-40.
10. Donald Meyer, *The Positive Thinkers: Religion as Pop Psychology from Mary Baker Eddy to Oral Roberts* (1965; rev. ed., New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), p. 65.
11. Szasz, "Francis Schlatter," p. 99.
12. Meyer, *Positive Thinkers*, p. 65.
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14. Szasz, "Francis Schlatter," pp. 99-100.
15. Meyer, *Positive Thinkers*: for women and mind-cure, see chapter 3; for infiltration of these ideas into capitalism and mainline denominations, see his entire intricately interlocked argument.
16. Horace A. Vachell, *Life and Sport on the Pacific Slope* (London: n.p., 1900), pp. 65-66, quoted in Baur, *Health-Seekers*, p. 49.
17. Frederick Webb Hodge, ed., "A Virginian in New Mexico in 1773-74," NMHR 4 (July 1929): 249.
18. Jones, *Health-Seekers*, pp. 48, 50-51; W. W. H. Davis, *El Gringo: New Mexico and Her People* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1857), p. 295, quoted in Jones, *Health-Seekers*, p. 87.
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20. Nims, *Health, Wealth and Pleasure*, p. 15.

21. Barbara Novak, *Nature and Culture: American Landscape and Painting, 1825–1875* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 151.
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