

# Utah

I would stare at maps of the United States in elementary school, preferring them to my teacher's asides that insomnia was sent from the Devil and that prayer was the surest method to falling asleep. I still think of the

West, where I've never been, with special attention to Utah, an arbitrary compensation sandwiched between more evenly planned territories. A state that suggests through its shape alone a high suicide rate. I imagine a land of hard working Amish knock-offs, tilling the earth with sweated brows for their yearly crop of rock salt. A land of *Real Americans*, according to Sarah Palin, Professor Emeritus of Geography of the University of Alaska. A land of 600-year old universes, eschewing inconvenient history for noblehazy tales of Jesus riding across the salty plains astride a proud velociraptor, as portrayed on kids menu connect-the-dot portraits, to aid the lost tribes of Israel. Peopled by men and women without the common decency of shame for being white. God bless my guilt, and the Memphis city school system, which never failed in reminding me that I came from the city where Dr. King was shot through the head. But that is home, and Utah, with its sandpaper wind, face scraped red and clean, dry from the molded perceptions of race and color, is 1200 miles away.

—Jesse Weaver

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