
THE FUTURE OF THE Southern Plains

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CHAPTER TWO

When Corporations Rule the Llano Estacado

*The Glorious Past and Uncertain Future
of the Southern High Plains Family Farm*

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Where Have All the Farmers Gone?

In January of 2001, a typical cold front rolled down the Great Plains. As the continental polar air mass moved from Kansas and Oklahoma into northwestern Texas and eastern New Mexico, it dipped into the Canadian River Valley, then encountered and poured smoothly across an immense, almost frictionless southwestern tableland—the Southern High Plains, also called the Llano Estacado, or Staked Plains. Cold, dense air sliced underneath the warmer air mass of the Llano region, throwing moist air aloft until a “blue norther” appeared. Unfortunately, there was lightning associated with this winter front. Because civilization on the treeless High Plains is formed by largely vertical structures, lightning is a regular hazard. A massive bolt from this norther hit the old Andy and Melba Brown rural home near Jericho in Donley County, Texas. The family farmhouse burned down. With its destruction another family farm tradition slipped away quietly as well.

In the 1950s, the Brown farmhouse had been lively, full of adults, children, and neighbors, all working the land in an earnest manner—a reflection of another time. The Browns had grown up in a vigorous community with neighbors and acquaintances such as D. E. Leathers at Leila Lake. The Leathers, in fact, were local family farmers so quintessential that they were named—to the cheers of Franklin Roosevelt and a nation—the “Typical American Family” in 1940. After Andy died, Melba married Johnnie Leathers. She moved to Clarendon to live with him, leaving the home place still furnished yet uninhabited. The news that the old Brown house had burned down saddened the remaining farmers of Donley County. Some questioned whether the family farm itself, its way of life, was winking out as well. In this instance, though, it was not an unfeeling agribusiness corporation bulldozing an old home for a scrap of cropland; it was Mother Nature herself that terminated the residence and reclaimed the horizontal nature of the plains.

The disappearance of the Brown house and the heritage of family farming it represented are quietly symptomatic of a long-term shift in agriculture on the Southern High Plains. The trend is the movement from diversified, decentralized, small-scale, family-oriented, and reasonably eco-friendly farm enterprises toward monocultural, centralized, large-scale, corporate-oriented, and presumably more eco-destructive agribusiness. The movement to “bigness” in American agriculture is hardly new; the general process has been under way for most of the twentieth century. But powerful farm programs over the last three decades have made the federal government a major partner in the process. In the 1970s Secretary of Agriculture Earl L. Butz admonished farmers to plow “fencerow to fencerow,” a production course that led to a corollary: “Get Big or Get Out.” Today, U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) government programs profoundly shape and influence modern farming. On the one hand they constitute a political economy seeking to “save the family farmer.” On the other hand, almost 70 percent of the payments go to big agribusiness, which further claims the privilege of belonging to “the future.”¹

Yet, the gradual transition from happy, owner-occupied, and traditional family farm to merciless, corporate, and exhaustive farm factory attacks the core of two American ideals: first, it overthrows the historical “yeoman farmer” of Thomas Jefferson and all sentimental populists; and second, it subverts the contemporary environmental or “sustainability” paradigm. The Jeffersonians, of course, lost the demographic argument a century ago; family farmers today are a few percentage

points of American society. As for environmentalists and land ethicists, "Big Ag" is largely the problem for them. Wendell Berry argues passionately in *The Unsettling of America: Culture and Agriculture* that the small resourceful family farm not only sustains rural people but also nourishes their communities, particularly communities that value the (sustainable) heritage of "the past."² Corporate versus family, big versus small, future versus past—all the dialectics of a complex situation are in place. And these dialectics are thoroughly subject to national demographic trends, changing global economies, and dramatic new technologies.

My extended family has lived and worked on the Southern High Plains for over a century now. We are, improbably enough, still in the business of farming. Many of our former neighbors are not. But there are good reasons why we may also go the way of the old Brown house. The "graying" of farm operators, disappearing rural youth, low commodity prices, high operating costs, exorbitant energy prices, the lack of credit to operators, weird weather, and many other factors make the future look uncertain. And we are a family-corporate farm, a transitional hybrid of the old and the new. A half-century of company experience provides no clear answer to the question of whether cooperative corporate management of land is better or worse than sole proprietorship. We respond to large forces beyond our control. Uncertainty is certain. Our reward is risk. One significant step undertaken in 1998 was to convert hundreds of acres of worn cropland into grassland habitat as part of the government's Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). When it pays to grow eco-friendly grass, the company is happy to be conservationist. Indeed, might not corporate conservation, in partnership with federal programs, contribute to significant new paradigms in the decades ahead?

For better or worse, humankind thoroughly domesticated the Southern High Plains in the past century. Perhaps the chief agency in this dramatic environmental change was the familiar, seemingly simple, family farmer. There were lots of them, and they covered most of the Plains. American farmers came late to the Southern High Plains, an elevated grassland region shared between northern Texas and eastern New Mexico. For most of the nineteenth century, the semiarid Llano Estacado was considered unfit for farming.³ But farmers did arrive after 1900, and they were amazingly committed to redirecting photosynthetic activity away from short-grass animal grazing and into new domesticated crops. The regional domestication process happened relatively fast,

roughly from 1875 to 1910 with new animal genetics, and from 1900 to 1930 with new plant genetics. In the latter period, family labor and small investment melded with bigger networks of corporate endeavor. The dramatic result was the transformation by farmers of the Southern High Plains of a former "uninhabitable desert" into a globally significant food production system.

The arrival and settlement of the family farmer also left a vibrant cultural landscape for the region. A century later, much of that original cultural landscape is gone, dilapidated, or hard-pressed, even as the heritage name Llano Estacado comes back in vogue. Local preservationists have done wonders for sure, but most small-town economies are flat. Local talk in coffee shops can now turn from county poverty rates, business closings, bankruptcies, and demographic declines to even more dire events such as global warming, ice-sheet melting, aquifer depletion, and climatic changes that may increase the aridity for the Southern Plains in general. The Llano Estacado, of course, is simply part of an expanding worldwide debate over conservation-exploitation dialectics. On the surface the Llano of the early twenty-first century is more corporate and less family farm, more intensive use and less extensive use, and more private property and less public access. But what deeper conclusions can we draw from a century of family farm civilization on the Llano? And can history, as an agency of seeing the past, tell us anything about the future?

If corporations rule the Llano Estacado, as they dominate or do rule all significant exchange systems, their reign may be with a heavy hand on the regional environment. In David C. Korten's provocative 1995 book, *When Corporations Rule the World*, he describes the baleful influences that big corporations bring to politics, economics, and especially environmental issues. Korten's globalized food-system corporations are hardly saintly. For the Southern High Plains, however, it need not be sinister transnational companies doing the damage. Already industrial farming in the United States has a poor reputation for protecting land and water, much less practicing humane confinement of animals.⁴ Routine feedlot practices in West Texas would be unconscionable in Sweden, India, and perhaps elsewhere. Some modern corporations may well practice "predatory technology" on the Plains, plunder the region's soil or water, and abandon its struggling rural communities whenever convenient to distant owners. Family farmers may do the same at a smaller scale. But theory and moral geography suggest one key advantage

to family farms: namely that *successive* land ownership within kinship circles is sensitive to the long-term use—versus short-term exhaustion—of land, water, plant, and animal resources.

Curiously, after exploring the social problems of the modern family farm, I realized that similar questions had been asked once before—almost a hundred years ago. For all the modern moaning about the demise of the idyllic family farm, it was hard-nosed family farmers themselves who displaced the idyllic ranchers of the nineteenth century. In a frenzy of *farm colonization*, thousands and thousands of mechanized agrarians helped themselves to the topsoil with as much zeal as the hard-pressed ranchers had plundered the grass. Moreover, the family farmer crested to glory on the Southern High Plains at the end of a long-wave agrarian revolution lasting from 1870 to 1900. One historian sees the transformation of the Texas family farm as a key component in the “The Big Change” that restructured the entire state.⁵ Indeed, this period witnessed tremendous change as the state’s farms expanded in size and moved inexorably away from old personal subsistence patterns (Daniel Boone) to new regional surplus production (Boone and Sons, Inc.).

Perhaps a new cycle is under way in the twenty-first century, one preoccupied with “Starlink” corn, chemicals, food-processing industries, world trade, information, robotics, bioengineering, and satellite crop visions. Is it fair for mom-and-pop farms to resent a wave of *corporate colonization* from 1980 to 2010? Perhaps it is more pragmatic to implement another technological cycle—of making a new living from the old land—not as ten thousand dispersed farm families but as a few thousand high-tech food system corporations. Of course not all ranchers went out of business in the agrarian boom of the early 1900s, and not all the remaining small family and “hobby” farmers will be absorbed into corporations either.

The number of significant farm operations on the Llano today, some ten thousand (plus another ten thousand small operations) is in rough alignment with the farm boom of 1910.⁶ But the larger size and the intensive soil-and-water-mining nature of the current ten thousand primary operations, and the predicted triumph of collective management over individual management, threaten to displace the beloved family farm paradigm as the region’s dominant kind of man-land interaction. Already, quaint extensive ranching has become intensive animal feedlots, and extensive dry land has become intensive irrigated acres. The arrival of large-scale pig farming to the Plains, the extraordinary capital

costs for machinery, the invasive and pestiferous species, the reliance on migrant labor pools, and the self-policing regulation policies all amplify modern agriculture’s dissonance from nature. The old dream of independence, where farm families lived self-directed lives close to nature, yields to utter dependency relationships, where farmers produce what a corporate system wants for a typically ruthless commodity price. The fear is that “new market realities” are turning traditional family farmers into low-wage, high-risk, rural worker bees. And in fact, the U.S. Census 2000 shows that western and southern Llano counties have 30 percent of their individuals living below the government’s poverty level.

On the other hand, recent decades have seen an expansive regional development of the Llano Estacado’s health and heritage. Soil and water conservation is widespread, groundwater districts are accepted institutions, no-till farming has taken root, and irrigation technologies are better than ever before. Ground-sensing radar, Geographic Information Systems (GIS), and personal computers are creating new visualizations for the Southern High Plains. Recreational and conservation land use is widespread with Lake Meredith National Recreation Area, Palo Duro Canyon State Park, Alibates Flint Quarries National Monument, Muleshoe National Wildlife Refuge (NWR), Buffalo Lake NWR, and the heritage buffalo herd relocated to Caprock Canyons State Park. Moreover, almost 3.7 million acres of northwest Texas have been placed in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) established by the 1985 Food Security Act. As noted earlier, CRP contracts pay farmers to pull land out of crop production and put it back as grassland for many years. County CRP contracts have proved an enormous boost to local wildlife habitat. Urban hunters in turn often buy CRP or other marginal lands, and then they work diligently to increase habitat and wildlife.

For better or worse, when corporations rule the Llano Estacado they will be guiding and implementing many environmental and regional planning responses. If they prove too recalcitrant in being stewards of the land, they may invite heavy regulatory oversight. Agribusiness corporations may also have both power and funds to implement any “sustainability” compromise with capitalism, that is, a theoretical paradigm shift from exhaustive to sustainable farm economies for the mid-twenty-first century. But where are the Southern High Plains headed today—and is it farm families or agribusiness corporations who are showing the true way? To answer this question it is necessary to examine the historic—if not downright symbiotic—relationship of family farmers and

corporations on the Southern High Plains. From one turn-of-the-century development paradox (2001) we must go back to another (1901).

Triumph of the Granger: Family-Farm Colonization on the Llano Estacado

In a mere three decades, the dominant human force on the Southern High Plains changed from Comanches to Cowmen to "Cornucopians," that is, from remnant American Indian tribes through a stage of manly ranch empires into baby-boom granger communities. Immediately after the historic U.S. Army campaigns of the mid-1870s (today's disavowed "ethnic cleansing"), Texans and their animals burst onto the Southern High Plains grasslands. There were few farmers among the first pioneers because powerful ranch interests soon bought or fenced the best land and governed the regional economy. Corporate ranching was dramatic and substantial, often pitting puny, individual, pioneer interests against the dreaded power of "the syndicates." From the beginning of Anglo settlement, therefore, corporate culture and imperial outlooks conditioned and characterized the Southern High Plains. The geographer Donald Meinig notes in *Imperial Texas* that much of the rangeland of the Llano Estacado "had come under the control of large companies supplied with Eastern and foreign capital, and railroads had replaced the great cattle trails."⁷

Thus, the principal beneficiaries of pioneer settlement were hardly independent, small, "yeoman farmer" types but rather the land companies, the railroads, the foreign syndicates, and the big-capital ranchers like WMD Lee (LX), partners Charles Goodnight and John Adair (JA), and the politically powerful Farwells of Chicago (XIT). Big ranches and corporate land empires not only held sway over the land, hired hands, and courthouses, but they also operated to contain—nicely or not—unwelcome "nesters" and "hoe-men." Charles Goodnight and other big ranchers opportunely claimed that the regional environment was simply too tough for farmers on the Southern High Plains. But the environment, in combination with ruthless market cycles, soon proved entirely daunting for corporate ranching itself. Episodic drought, poor cattle market conditions, national economic depressions, debts, mismanagement, and environmental difficulties all grievously weakened the old boisterous ranching economy after 1886.

Rancher rule lasted for only a few decades. Today the myths of that period probably bring in more money than the actual ranching or pio-

neering ever did. Beginning in 1887 and picking up steam in the 1890s and 1900s, new settlement factors and technologies began to crisscross the Llano Estacado. The thin streams of pioneer folk continued and even increased in the 1890s, but they poured less toward the old ranch, trading post, river, creek, or spring sites in the valleys and canyons. The new population trickles centered on or around corporate town-site promotions, especially the railroad towns connected to the larger world of American capitalism. Truly, the arrival of railroads and machine civilization altered almost everything. People left the towns of Tascosa, Mobeetie, and Estacado behind to follow a new spatial logic, one that privileged and responded to real estate, railroads, promotion, and abstract location over older and stricter environmental constraints, such as easy wood and water.

The dominant new settlements of the domesticated plains, cities like Lubbock, Midland, and Amarillo, are deliberate reflections of this corporate spatial discourse. In a usefully flat and monotonous landscape it is not the scenic place that counts, but the intersection of abstract place with corporate needs. Railroad corporations naturally preferred the cost-effective linearity of the endless plains to the colorful wooded canyons and picturesque springs of the pioneers. Corporate town-site agents, such as R. E. Montgomery of the 1887 Fort Worth and Denver Railroad, deliberately strangled the old existing towns. They did so in order to establish corporate rule along their linear worlds. Pioneers, who often bitterly resented this corporate domination, either moved their towns to the railroad (like Old Clarendon did), or withered away in the economic and demographic shakeouts in the decades ahead. Most moved.

By the late 1890s, only a small number of settlers, some thirty-five thousand or so, had taken up residence on the Staked Plains of Texas and New Mexico. Cattle and sheep were plentiful, but finding more than one human being per square mile was unlikely. The U.S. Census 1900 recorded population densities low enough, really, to continue qualifying the vast region, statistically speaking, as a "frontier classification." Since many of the enumerated citizens were urbanites really, congregating in railroad corridor towns such as Amarillo, Canadian, Clarendon, Panhandle, Midland, or county seat towns such as Lubbock, Plainview, Hereford, and Portales, population was indeed sparse out on the ranges. For much of the hinterland there were only scattered, low-wage, livestock workers—and the odd rich boss or better off ranch family. Ranchers accepted the region's lonesome demography as a better alternative, as

they saw it, to the environmentally destructive, sod-busting, grass-ruining, calf-stealing, timber-cutting, and game-exterminating encroachments of "hoe-men." They were thankful homestead land in Oklahoma diverted many prospective farmers away from the Staked Plains. The region's lingering nineteenth-century reputation as the "Great American Desert" usefully intimidated others.

All that rancher gloom changed to granger glory after 1900. In fact, the Southern High Plains experienced tremendous growth in the first decade of the twentieth century. This was the era of family-farm colonization. A tidal wave of up-to-date farmers arrived to colonize the Plains, many bringing new paradigms of capital investment and agricultural technology. It helped that a period of decent rainfall ensued, probably a reflection of El Niño Southern Oscillation (ENSO). This better "climate" suggested to newcomers that the land was "not really" a semi-arid range or desert. It also helped that much land was in the hands of bottom-line corporate ranches like the XIT, companies with few desires to keep unprofitable land "in the family" from one generation to another. This second and more profound wave of settlement involved the spatial breakup of old, large, low-profit, worn-pastured ranches and their subsequent retailing as new, small, high-profit, farmland acreage to tens of thousands of "land prospectors." The conversion process itself was corporate in nature, that is, managed by large-scale land colonization firms and methodically abetted by railroads, merchants, and media. Having done their work elsewhere, Midwest land companies (Iowa firms in particular) transferred their attention, visions, capital, mass promotions, slick advertising, and huge operations after 1900 to the Southern High Plains.

Farm colonization recast the region's existing identity. It transformed the economic and demographic base for sure, but also it reshaped local culture from politics to religion. Midwestern values and cultural practices arrived with tremendous force into this prior "southern" and "western" landscape. They were implanted deeply. Even today aspects of the region resemble a Midwest outlier or "little Iowa" so to speak. Out-of-state land promoters such as W. P. Soash, C. O. Keiser, Julien Bassett, and C. W. Post were especially experienced in colonization schemes and mass marketing.⁸ Although the early origins of the Llano land boom go back to 1902, the biggest wave of booster-directed settlement poured in after 1905, when entire trainloads of "landseekers" arrived weekly. Tens of thousands of Midwesterners and immigrants

eventually came by rail to inspect the cheap lands. Town bands greeted them at the local depot, and slick boosters used fleets of new automobiles to drive the prospects off in style. Out on the flat plains they contemplated gorgeous demonstration farms, good soils, newfangled irrigation wells, easy credit terms, and futuristic farm operations. Many Midwestern landseekers bought the dream, brought their capital, and settled down. For those with less money or credit, homesteading the Southern High Plains was suddenly popular too. Newly reduced filing fees made the experience easy for the young or restless. Homesteaders with little experience or capital needed only to rely on the current beneficial rains lasting indefinitely.

As the old extensive "sustainable" ranch empires were broken up and transformed into intensive family-farm operations, regional population grew rapidly. Total population of the Panhandle (the upper five



Platted by promoter John H. Gee in 1902, Elida, New Mexico, is a significant colonization town of the Southern High Plains that is located twenty-four miles southwest of Portales. Elida's hotel, bank, hardware store, drugstore, lumberyard, and other businesses made money in good years, like 1908, but they struggled when drought times returned. Most towns died out after a few years, but Elida's strategic location on a railroad enabled it to survive. Edward V. Boddy (Boddy & Sons), Elida, New Mexico, Gelatin silver postcard print, 1908, courtesy the John Miller Morris Collection.

rows of northwest Texas counties, anchored by Amarillo) and the South Plains (the next four rows of Texas counties, centered around Lubbock, that lie below the Panhandle), soared by some 100,000 people—to 134,885 by the 1910 census.⁹ Indeed, during the early 1900s the Texas Panhandle and South Plains was arguably the fastest growing region of a fast-growing state. New railroad construction advanced hither and yon. The New Mexican side of the Southern High Plains had equally impressive growth. In four east-central counties (Quay, Roosevelt, Curry, and Lea) important railroad and town-site promotions appeared, such as Texico, Clovis, Lovington, Portales, Elida, Ragland, Hobbs, Rogers, Lingo, Eunice, and Tatum.

In addition to the better-financed colonization towns, a bewildering archipelago of ad hoc homesteader hamlets sprang into flickering existence after 1905. A homesteader town of the Plains often started when a country store obtained a designation as a post office. Some rose above humble origins and others quickly died. Consider that in Quay County alone, a fresh-faced 1909 homestead family could choose to live near Ard, Allen, Bard City, Canode, Collinsville, Curry, Dodson, Doris, Lockney, Loyd, Mineosa, Norton, Obar, or Rock Island, among others.¹⁰ Few of these post office hamlets survived more than a decade. Today only a few material hints remain of their former existence, perhaps a forsaken rural cemetery or a circa 1908 postcard with a valuable postmark. In the case of the homesteader towns of Doris, Kappus, and Porter, a Quay County postmark collector can add the notation "Only Recorded Example."

This astounding land rush by largely nonsubsistence farmers depended on changing environmental perceptions of the Southern High Plains. After the turn of the century, technology, advertising, and new visual cultures cooperated to dispel the arid and dreadful image associated with the older Llano Estacado. In its place they created the anglicized "Staked Plain"—a young, healthful, inexpensive, and wonderfully fertile region, commonly called the "Promised Land." Prophecies of greatness and Biblical parallels were employed to good effect. Indeed, Christian values and visions were expected to transform a flatland wilderness into a Garden of Eden. By 1908, a Golden Age of farm settlement clearly dawned on the Southern High Plains. This dream of earthly paradise brought not only additional thousands of family farmers, but it also brought mercantile stores, transport facilities, warehouses, machinery, coal consumption, and electricity. And then churches, lodges, schools,

the odd college, and sanitariums quickly appeared. Hardworking newcomers from Iowa, Illinois, Kansas, Indiana, and elsewhere, and intrepid immigrants from abroad all bought the regional dream and labored to bring its "Health, Wealth, and Happiness" vision to life. In the process they laid the foundation for the region's strategic transformation into one of most productive agricultural areas in North America.

A large majority of the one hundred thousand new settlers clustered around colonization towns or railroad extension town sites. Colonization towns were obviously speculative enterprises. Corporate interests created most of them, usually in connection with spur or short-line construction schemes. But an individual might get lucky too. In 1902, John Gee platted Elida, New Mexico, as a surer road to wealth than farming itself. He intended his town to serve the central-place theory needs for projected hundreds, maybe thousands, of new farmers in southwest Roosevelt County. While the masses never quite came or lasted, Elida's strategic location on the railroad has kept it alive to the present day. More than fifty such colonization towns sprang up on the Southern High Plains between 1902 and 1914. An amazing twenty-five of these hopeful towns appeared in an arc of eight counties running across the heart of the Llano.¹¹ Surviving colonization towns for the Llano Estacado included Nazareth (1902), Bovina and Friona (1904), Olton (1908), Crosbyton (1908), Abernathy (1909), Lamesa (1905), Brownfield (1903), and Andrews (1909). Of course many colonization towns, such as Soash, Ellen, Cedric, Virginia City, Montezuma, Spring Lake, and Shafter Lake soon or slowly disappeared. Now only a few old photos suggest their hopes. Those towns that did endure became centers of community life. Streams of colonizers also swelled the existing railroad or county seat communities of Amarillo, Hereford, Canyon, Lubbock, Portales, and elsewhere.

The reality was that corporations, specifically land companies and railroads, made colonization family farming appear both feasible and quite profitable, in good years, on the Southern High Plains. Cattle could walk to market; wheat, milo, and corn could not. Few grangers wanted to haul bulky crops over great distances to reach a distant market. Thus, the interdependence of family farm, land and financing, and railroad transport was absolute: family farm colonizers needed the corporations and vice versa. Their dependency operations were in turn suitably industrialized. Examining hundreds of old photos of the 1900–1914 period, I am struck by the profoundly *industrialized* nature of

family farm colonization. The newcomers were hardly no-account, swidden-corn, illiterate subsistence farmers from the Old South, but rather capitalized, innovative, educated, and progressive American families oriented to the future. This sophisticated agrarian pulse, as researcher Frieda Knobloch argues, reflected a stunning and tremendous colonization process applied to the Great Plains environment as a whole.¹²

Then, as now, vociferous complaints about corporate rule—the “big men” against the “little men”—colored social discourse and labor relations. In 1905, the national press took notice of the dwellers of the Staked Plains, “our great inland grazing plain,” a place where the old talk was said to be “chiefly of the breeding of Hereford and Durham cattle.” In reporter M. G. Cunniff’s popular article of that year, “Texas and the Texans,” he acknowledged that ordinary Texans once had suffered from overweening corporate rule of the land and economy. The



The Weir family is representative of the typical Midwestern farmers who relocated onto the Llano Estacado. The Weirs are shown here posing proudly with their crops and possessions on display. In contrast to the forlorn “soddies” and crude dugouts of a generation earlier, the Weir farm reflected a more capital-intensive and materialistic approach to farm life on the Plains. George N. Wilkie, Gelatin silver postcard print, 1908, courtesy the John Miller Morris Collection.

problem had seemed intractable, really, until the state’s famed railroad commission appeared on the scene in the 1890s. As Cunniff reminded his national audience, local citizens and regional interests used this institution to tame (or so they thought) the dominant corporations of the age. With such a public and regulatory means of balancing individual versus corporate conflict, Cunniff thought a progressive Texas had emerged from stagnancy. Inevitably the state was marching to a “great future.”

Cunniff recognized in 1905 that tremendous statewide growth, on the Staked Plains and elsewhere, signified a fundamental transformation under way. The nation’s largest commonwealth was moving away from a southern, land-poor, semisubsistence farm system and toward an increasingly sophisticated economy of agribusiness, manufactures, drilling and refining, and industrial production in general. And yet much of this dramatic change, as Cunniff observed for himself, actually belonged to an *increased* expansion of corporate endeavor over the commonwealth. The agents of change that this national reporter saw at work were the cattle kings, big farmers, oil kings, lumber kings, and railroad kings. He saw their dominance, yet he somehow optimistically concluded that “Texas never got out of the grip of the people into the grasp of the corporations.” He was a Pollyanna in this regard.

If an eastern reporter believed that corporations dominated the state but did not rule it, perhaps the same could be said for the desert-conquering and town-building family farmers of 1902–1914: they altered and dominated the Southern High Plains, but they did not completely rule it. They brought forth a Garden of Delights, but beyond the dream lay the capricious rule of climate: sudden drought, scores of abandoned towns, and thousands of disappointed and broke small farmers. Homesteading had proved to be a march of folly for many thousands of small dryland farmers, especially in the more arid western Llano. In New Mexico’s Quay County alone a dozen or more boomer settlements died in the early 1910s, whisked aside casually by the dry winds of an El Niño Southern Oscillation (ENSO) event. The Texas town of Soash in Howard County went under so fast that it took a large and established land company with it. And this terrific regional bust in agriculture occurred well before the disastrous “dirty thirties” of the Depression era.

Sharp business downturns and drought periodically led to large out-migrations. But the central reality of the colonizer epoch was that

corporations and family farmers both hung on and worked together to transform the Southern High Plains. Despite the downturns, within a decade a new agro-industrial empire arose and overshadowed the tired ranches of another age. This new realm featured up-to-date family farms dispersed around linear corridors of steel rails and serviced by centrally placed town hierarchies. Immigration contributed to the ethnic mix as German and Norwegian colonies appeared on the Plains. Farmers adopted increased mechanization, and railroads made money on the coal transported to run the new steam tractors. If resource development was persistent and exhaustive in nature, at least the rates of consumption appeared reasonable.

Many of the newcomers also brought a modernist (if not populist) understanding of "the commons" and the public weal. That is, beyond the usual advent of schools and churches, settlers and farmers also carried important civic and conservation impulses with them. If corporations lured them onto the Southern Plains, it would be up to the colonists, immigrants, and surviving homesteaders to implement any progressive agenda, especially preservation and conservation ideals that they absorbed elsewhere or that enhanced passing the farm to the next generation. Some of their ideas were, of course, simply positive ways of seeing otherwise problematic landscapes. You could not farm a steep canyon, but you might sell a view of it. Indeed, the West has always recognized the value of free-spending curious visitors. Preservation ideals could also help stabilize and diversify an erratic local economy. In this manner, as early as 1907, thoughtful citizens saw connections between sustainable economies and scenic landscapes. When the environment or national economy showed its ugly side, and it soon did both, town dwellers and family farmers alike would need new answers.

The Conservation Response: The Regional Progressives

One summer day in 1879, four years after Charles and Molly Goodnight settled on a remote spur of the eastern Llano Estacado, a pair of touring Englishmen stopped by their JA ranch in Donley County. Nugent Townshend was editor of the English sporting magazine *The Field*; his partner, J. G. Hyde, was a professional photographer. As working tourists, Townshend and Hyde were gathering material about ranching on the Plains. Both men were impressed with the JA's magnificent scale

and expansive landscapes. Townshend's narrative appreciation and Hyde's photographs of the pioneer ranch appeared in their subsequent (and influential) 1880 book, *Our Indian Summer in the Far West*.¹³ Hyde's first photo, "A Lonely Home in Texas (Grande Vista)," featured a rustic but bold JA dwelling set against a scenic backdrop. It was a pleasant image and one that incidentally summarized the sparse demography. The second Hyde photo, however, was of a sadder nature. Titled "Our Only Buffalo! Grande Vista Ranch, Pan Handle, Texas," it showed a single buffalo calf grazing in the middle ground, all that was left from the vast herds of a few years before. Even this pitiful remnant of the keystone species for the Great Plains would not have survived but for the tender heart of Molly Goodnight. Childless herself, Goodnight had rescued the orphan from its cowboy discoverer, and she had urged her husband to let the animal live on the ranch unmolested.

The forlorn and "last" animal in Hyde's 1879 photo was actually far from doomed. For Charles Goodnight took an interest in the fate of the species after the visit of the Englishmen. And over time Goodnight built up a significant preservation herd from this lowly start, a bison herd that brought him national attention and fame after 1900. In retrospect, Townshend and Hyde had done something more than just publicize get-rich corporate ranch investment on the Southern Plains; they had also served as subtle publicists for a conservation of resources. Hyde's photographs may have helped lure foreign syndicates onto the Great Plains, but they also introduced Molly Goodnight's salvation of a buffalo as a worthy ideal for Victorian parlors. For outsiders, a desirable feature of the western heritage was the nostalgic conservation of an older or pre-existing heritage itself.

Research on the early conservation practices of the Southern High Plains is desirable, especially to remind postmodern people that environmentalism is neither new, nor completely antithetical to corporations, nor outside the historic realm of public and private imaginations. Two factors mitigated the worst exploitative practices by family farm colonization: first, a capricious regional environment and climate that soon demanded adaptations; and second, popular notions of safeguarding symbolic or public goods, such as scenic areas, with appropriate attitudes or public stewardship. Taking the first point, corporations cleverly succeeded in attracting family farmers to the Southern High Plains, but keeping them there required something more. The drought of 1907 (and its lingering beyond) obviously altered the simplistic, exaggerated,

booster equation by providing a sudden, sharp need for a *conservation horizon*. Researchers of the Great Plains such as Martyn Bowden, John Allen, Malcolm Lewis, and others often note the human perceptual pendulum swinging between viewing the "Plains as a Desert" and the "Plains as a Garden."¹⁴ Railroad and land companies recognized this perceptual seesaw and they feared dry years when the pendulum swung against their preferred visions. They could, of course, continue to ignore or lie their way through bad years, such as with the older talk of "rain-belts" expanding with the arrival of civilization. But it soon dawned on many companies that conservation and adaptation might actually reduce crop failures. And if the failures could be mitigated, then farmers tended to see a "garden" rather than a "desert." The Santa Fe Railroad system particularly embraced this re-evaluative process. In the company's influential regional journal, *The Earth*, it soon promoted a variety of conservation farming techniques and suitable crops.¹⁵

Dry years, grasshopper plagues, blowouts, and blizzards all encouraged risk reduction and conservation practices for Llano family farmers. Indeed, whether the farmer was originally from humid East Texas or well-watered Iowa, some measure of adaptation simply seemed necessary on the Southern High Plains. An important conservation horizon emerged after 1908, one that served as a perceptual regulator, a choke on poorly suited crops, techniques, and ruinous practices. It was certainly not perfect, but adaptability plus diversification plus technology gave those farmers who wanted to stay a possibility of doing so. The process was greatly helped by a regional genetic revolution, specifically the arrival of new domesticated plants that needed less moisture. German-Russian (Volga German) Mennonite farmers from Kansas, for instance, came to Hartley County to break out and farm an old XIT pasture. They brought with them a secret weapon, a reliable source of success, namely seed stocks of hard red winter wheat, originally from the Anatolian Plateau of Turkey. By 1909, these excellent farmers had some eighty-two thousand acres of red winter wheat in cultivation, now a staple crop for the entire region. Ethnic islands elsewhere on the Plains experimented with other domesticates. A number of important genetic flows came from the semi-arid regions of Africa. Drought-resistant Kaffir and Milo meshed nicely with the climate and suited the needs of ranchers with better bloodlines in livestock. Quantities of these feed grains soon flowed from the Llano. Legend says that the early West Texas cattle feedlot operation began when businessmen saw trains shunting north, carrying off both cattle and feed

grains, to be consumed together elsewhere. Why not combine cattle and feed grains on the Plains themselves?

The question of irrigation is more complicated because we now see the Ogallala Aquifer as seriously depleted rather than the God-given superabundance perceived by the family farmers of 1910–1920. Indeed, as John Opie demonstrates in his modern classic, *Ogallala: Water for a Dry Land*, contemporary society is still trying to identify, create, and truly implement a proper conservation response to decades of groundwater mining. Research on the Ogallala Aquifer is vast, of course, a sign of the shallow-water belt's strategic importance.¹⁶ Unquestionably, the 1910–1920 irrigation wells of the Southern High Plains proved a god-send to the early, few, and well capitalized "industrial" farmers. These big farmers financed and furthered the development of hydraulic technology until eventually even small family farmers could come on board.

Unfortunately, the preconceptions of a limitless supply also provoked boundless waste. Early on, boosters held summer "Water Carnivals," advertised occasions when promotional wells poured tens of millions of gallons on the ground solely for the public's amusement and recreation. At Plainview in Hale County, company wells ran at full throttle to create lavish "false lakes." These artificial lakes demonstrated the "unfailing supply" and also enticed newcomers to think of gentler, wetter climes. Irrigation drilling diffused slowly, because it was expensive, but it spread widely. A regional conservation horizon for the Ogallala Aquifer emerged tentatively in the 1950s and 1960s, a time when thousands of shallow wells sustained family farms on the Llano but then necessarily lowered water tables. For the early 1900s, the value of the aquifer was not its contemplated exhaustion but rather its reliability and "substitutability." It was a perfect replacement for less than adequate rainfall.

In contrast to water, a *land* conservation horizon emerged on the Llano Estacado during 1910–1920. It included crop and economic diversification, genetic adaptability, better plow technology, and longer-term thinking. Railroads such as the Rock Island, Santa Fe, and Fort Worth and Denver promoted these new stratagems and increased the connectivity between family farm, ranch, and industry. Indeed, railroads were the "food system" corporations of their day. Charles Goodnight summarily claimed that prosperity on the Southern High Plains owed much to a simple recipe: farming *plus* stock raising equals long-term success. Some ranchers therefore grew hay and other crops. Many family farmers, like William DeLoach, kept some cattle or pigs. A few farmers



Periodically from 1906 to 1909, the colonization photographer George N. Wilkie, of Oakville, Iowa, arrived to work the land booms of the Llano Estacado. Wilke documented the vigorous settlement process in hundreds of outstanding photographs. Many of his promotional images worked to recast environmental perception of the region from notions of a "Great American Desert" to the idea of a "Promised Land" of refreshing waters and amenity landscapes for happy newcomers. Sulphur Park was a favorite recreational stretch along Tierra Blanca Creek near Hereford, Texas. George N. Wilkie, Gelatin silver postcard print, circa 1908, courtesy the John Miller Morris Collection.

even went large-scale with animal husbandry, as at Hereford, an early precursor to the gigantic feedlot operations of today. In the semiarid lands of the Middle East a tripartite network of exchange systems, called the "ecological trilogy," functioned for centuries among pastoral tribes (sheep/camels), farm villages (crops), and a connected urban center (manufactures and services). By 1920, the Southern High Plains of North America supported its own version of an "ecological trilogy," albeit one predicated more on capital and advanced technology. Nevertheless, a tripartite web of relations and interdependencies on the Llano linked pastoral ranches (cattle/horses), family farms (crops), and high connectivity urban centers. Fez, Morocco, and Lubbock, Texas, have their parallels.

An expanding trilogy led to rapid growth, which soon contributed to a more holistic vision for the region. For growth brought with it not only market desires for profit and homestead, but also assorted settler demands for health cures, recreation, hunting, scenic views, sacred sites, swimming holes, medicinal springs, tuberculosis sanitariums, and so on. Over and over again the promotional literature of the era touted the restorative powers of Plains landscape and climate.¹⁷ Health services, recreation, and stewardship of amenity landscapes (like the lovely, if now forgotten, "Sulphur Park" outside of early 1900s Hereford) further invigorated local development—and even attracted some early tourists! Modernists and progressives at the Chamber of Commerce of Canyon City in Randall County saw one local potential. They energetically set out to convert a nearby chasm into a grand public commons, using distant tax monies of course, whence the origin of a movement to "save" Palo Duro Canyon.

The most important local environmental movement in the early 1900s was the conception, formation, and promotion of a Palo Duro National Park Association. Centered in Canyon, Texas, the association began as early as 1906 to agitate for a national park in the upper Palo Duro Canyon. To his everlasting credit, President Theodore Roosevelt had employed his "bully pulpit" to inspire a nation to rethink its man-land relationships. The very idea of conservation was in the air. Local residents were addicted to frequent canyon excursions in any case. The potential for lucrative tourism was obvious to them. By 1908–1909, park advocates had an important friend in the state capitol. Representative John Hall Stephens of Vernon liked the idea, and he introduced several bills in the contemporaneous legislative session. Stephens's bills were duly stymied by the tightfisted fiefdoms of the legislature. But the concept was popular, and advocates tried again for several more years. It certainly helped that national debates on public versus private stewardships now percolated into concerns with preservation of local scenery, biota, soil and water, public recreation, and the "Plains Commons."

Despite the 1908–1911 attention and popular support, it would take two more decades before a compromised Palo Duro Park could emerge, a beautiful (if still ridiculously undersized) commons, and a *state* not national park. In the interim, the obvious obstacle to a people's park was that private landowners, essentially large business interests, owned the scenic canyon. To be sure, Texas had retained its public lands during annexation. But because it rather generously transferred virtually all its

interests away (to corporations mostly), the land never had the federal ownership so conducive to park formation in other western states. Any proposed park, large or small, was perforce subject to the hallowed dictates of private property rights. West Texas historian Pete Petersen notes in his history of the state park that "the question of [private] land ownership proved to be a stumbling block."¹⁸ In fact, the question of private property rights versus public stewardship is still a thorny issue for the region, as historian Dan Flores notes elsewhere in this volume.

Two factors combined to resolve the stalled contest between public versus private in favor of the park movement. First, the traumatized and liberalized politics of the 1930s made transfers from private to public domain part of a national recovery. Second, several additional decades of regional aesthetics—art, music, material culture, poetry, and especially photography—had celebrated the canyon, created a romantic vision in the public's eye, and softened the opposition. The major chord, of course, was still the free-enterprise "Promised Land" of the individual farmer, rancher, or town dweller. But now, like J. G. Hyde's photo of an orphan buffalo, a minor chord resonated on the Llano Estacado as aesthetic natures saw a preservationist dream take form as useful public space. As it turned out, the artistic way in seeing (or rather re-seeing) the nature of the Southern High Plains was even good for the economy. But after all, the artists who best saw the Plains thoroughly loved its natural heritage. Their art and artifacts now constitute a significant cultural legacy, a lasting source of human inspiration and regional consciousness. Our new century would do well to study their perspectives.

Perceiving the Plains: The Cultural Creatives

The post-1902 wave of homesteader and colonizer settlement onto the Staked Plains created a remarkable cultural landscape of new towns, farmhouses, and fields. Not all the arrivals were diehard family farmers though. Mixed in with the newcomers were educated, sensitive, bookish, and often talented types—a male and female group conveniently called here the "cultural creatives." Using the abundant natural light of the plains, for example, a largely unsung group of local and regional photographers captured the glory of the colonization process and town settlement. From 1902 to 1915, a score of excellent photographers worked on the Southern High Plains, quietly making magnificent realist pictures of their extraordinary world and time. These photographers

not only documented the economic and demographic boom, but also they laid aesthetic foundations for perceiving the Golden Age of the family farm. A recent work by Paul H. Ray and Sherry R. Anderson divides rural mindsets into "traditionalists," "modernists," and "cultural creatives."¹⁹ Borrowing a leaf from this research, many of the early photographers, teachers, poets, writers, painters, and some eccentric farmers of the Llano Estacado were not only "cultural creatives" but also "closet conservationists."

The sudden arrival of tens of thousands of newcomers vastly stimulated regional photography. Promoters, of course, expected photographers to recast the desert into a garden image. But for many photographers the vision of a garden also made room for the primitive, the natural, the sensual, and the geomorphic—a reflection of the persistent vision of nature-as-paradise in American thought.²⁰ Sam Sherman of Amarillo, Maidens Stennett Lusby of Canyon, George N. Wilkie of Hereford, Norton Baker of Lockney, J. B. Jones of Floydada, E. Brown of Lubbock, J. C. Dallas of Tulia, M. C. Wasson at Post City, George A. Addison of Canadian, R. E. Cochrane of Plainview, Nissley and Byers of Clovis, "Mac" of Shamrock, and Willie Miller of Midland, among dozens of photographers, all labored to capture the aesthetic side of the Staked Plains. They roamed the outdoors with their cameras and tripods. They photographed town and country, plains and canyons, and farm and ranch, all the while taking revelatory pictures of people and place. As their surviving work indicates, photographic perceptions of the scenic, qualitative nature of the Llano Estacado are still useful and valid today. Indeed, their images of nature sites, views, towns, fields, irrigation wells, and country residences are now precious windows into a past way of life, visual documents made during the very recasting of the landscape. And this lively period is where history, technology, and visual culture intersect nicely.

George N. Wilkie, for example, superbly documented family farm colonization on the Southern High Plains. Wilkie was a colonization photographer, a "cultural creative" originally from Oakville, Iowa. When the Iowa land companies came to Texas they brought his outstanding talents with them. From 1906 to 1910, Wilkie not only toured the Southern High Plains, but also shaped new environmental perceptions. Wilkie loved to photograph new towns, young orchards, fall harvests, fine houses, and bustling main streets. He was fond of automobiles, used one extensively for his travels, and often posed prospective colonists and

automobiles together. Wilkie's photography dramatically underscores the role these new machines played in conquering "the friction of space," especially in an immense flatland. Wilkie understood that the automobile reduced, or should we say seduced, the normal perception of time and space, perceptually making the "far" seem "near." Land companies soon employed fleets of automobiles to rush prospective purchasers to distant surveys sold on easy credit. Colonists got the impression they were only a score of minutes from the stores and churches of Hereford, when in fact they were often a considerable distance away from town by slow buggy or wagon. Most dispersed farmers on the 1910s Plains got a Model-T as soon as they could afford one. Since the car made the periphery seem more like the core, a new proximate geography unfolded on the Southern High Plains, one that mitigated the old perception of loneliness imbedded in the flatland.

Wilkie further delighted in photographing the environmental amenities he discovered on the Llano. His images of the High Plains geography—the landscapes, hunting grounds, recreations, and landmarks—show a professional appreciation of beauty and scenery. If Wilkie's camera also focused on the 1906–1910 town prosperity and farm fecundity, it was because his images provided important promotional documents to land agents and town boosters. Both groups wanted to change the prospective settler's hitherto unfavorable environmental image of the Plains. Boosters and photographers alike often collaborated in creating a local *geosophy*, a perceived landscape of desire. Accordingly, many Wilkie photographs reflect the fervent environmental, economic, and social optimism that governed the 1906–1910 tide of farm settlement. Boosters strongly believed in their cultural abilities to refashion otherwise desolate ranchland into an agrarian Garden of Eden. And the camera, grounded in realism, did not "lie," or at least not as easily as the 1890s railroad brochures with idealized woodcuts.

Another talented Llano photographer practicing at the turn of the century was Maidens Stennett Lusby. Born in Lincolnshire, England in 1867, Lusby immigrated to Central Texas when he was twelve. Lusby's first interest in photography is unknown, but he was likely exposed to the work and tent studios of the pioneer photographer, Hamilton Biscoe Hillyer of Austin, Texas. Hillyer was deeply interested in outdoor photography, natural history, and gardening, all interests that eventually pre-occupied Lusby. This sensitive young man moved to the Panhandle frontier of Canyon City in the spring of 1891. Here he set up in business

as a photographer. Lusby was a romantic realist who delighted in documenting the growth and settlement of the Randall County area for two decades. Lusby's photos of agricultural scenes are some of the best in Texas for the time. He constructed a light-filled gallery in Canyon City where he did regular studio work. But he also roamed the landscape to



After moving to Canyon City around 1901, photographer Maidens Stennett Lusby documented the dramatic conversion of ranchland into farms. Creative and deeply interested in natural history, Lusby, an early member and ardent supporter of the Palo Duro National Park Association, photographed local farms, plains, and canyons. A number of his "romantic realist" photos of canyon geomorphology were used to promote preservation ideals and associated goals. Maidens Stennett Lusby, Gelatin silver postcard print, 1907, courtesy the John Miller Morris Collection.

capture the fantastic geomorphology of Palo Duro Canyon, the summer and fall harvests on the High Plains, and the winter trains fighting their way through snowdrifts. With the surge in nearby colonization activity from 1905 to 1910, Lusby soon worked for colonization companies and produced an invaluable photographic survey of the local settlement process.

Naturally he embraced the Palo Duro National Park Association founded in his hometown of Canyon, Texas. In fact, virtually all the association's promotional materials bear reproductions of Lusby photos of Palo Duro Canyon scenes such as "Giants Tower," "Natural Pillars," or "Dreamland Falls." He apparently adored natural history. Known locally as "Mr. Sunshine" for his sunny disposition, Lusby sold out his studio and business around 1913 and retired to a ten-acre farm near Lockney in Floyd County. Here at "Sunshine Gardens" he read books, raised a variety of marketable produce, and allowed local residents to observe the heavens through his telescopes.

In early September of 1916 another cultural creative returned to the Staked Plains. The new instructor at West Texas State Normal School in Canyon, Georgia O'Keeffe, came back to the sky and canyon glories she had known first as an art teacher in Amarillo in 1912. Now, freshly inspired by East Coast aesthetics, she proved extraordinarily sensitive to the primal colors, the elements, the flowers, and especially the sky. O'Keeffe enthused to her friend, Anna Politzer, in a letter dated 11 September 1916:

Tonight I walked into the sunset—to mail some letters—the whole sky—and there is so much of it out here—was just blazing—and grey blue clouds were rioting all through the hotness of it—and the ugly little buildings and windmills looked great against it.²¹

Within a week of worshipping the sky, the curious new art teacher, often dressed in black, was spending considerable time in Palo Duro Canyon, in daylight and darkness. The decade-old preservation movement for a national park had touted the recreational value of the canyon. But in her roaming and pondering, O'Keeffe soon created an artistic rationale, a new way of seeing the canyon that only involved redefining American art! At Canyon, Texas, O'Keeffe was again living west of the 99th meridian, beyond which, as historian Elliott West noted generally, "the perceptual basics—light, mass, space, color—suddenly shifted in ways both obvious and indescribable."²² She knew that by conventional

wisdom the flat plains were a "nothing." She even apologized to her correspondents for seeing so much in this nothingness. But her vision was that the sense of place, the genius loci of the Staked Plains was its inherent "bigness," a perception of nature she reached for in her everyday life through "livingness."

After reading O'Keeffe's letters from that period, one senses a personal environmentalism bordering on deep ecology. Rather misanthropically, she contrasted the bigness of the Plains with the smallness of the people in Canyon, Texas.²³ Nevertheless, borrowing the art critic Robert Hughes's phrase, the "shock of the new" of the Southern High Plains opened new pathways for her between art and imagination. For O'Keeffe, the fences and ugly buildings around Canyon articulated only a small boundary between culture and nature. Her own work would deconstruct this boundary. The linear fences and colonization constructions were mere playthings against a larger cosmic vision of "livingness" with the Plains. The linear and geometric conversions of the landscape were placeless really—a small barrier to large creativity. O'Keeffe's emotionality was keyed to the sublimity and colors of the plains, the crepuscular skies, the earthy canyons, all the astonishing and overwhelming environmental characteristics that she summarily called its "bigness."

The sublime aesthetics of the High Plains caught fire in Georgia O'Keeffe's watercolors of the Texas period.²⁴ Lusby and Wilkie had traveled down similar roads eight years earlier with their photography. There were other regional artists, in particular the estimable Frank Reaugh, who sojourned, photographed, and painted these plains and escarpment canyons. The cultural creatives of the Llano Estacado may have worked for public schools, town clienteles, and slick land companies, but their visions and skills often transcended crasser corporate intentions. Wilkie and Lusby, Reaugh and O'Keeffe all made a little money but empowered a lot of environmental perception. Their visions of the Plains—well known with O'Keeffe, obscure with Wilkie—reflect a fresh *regional consciousness* and creative identity. Their aesthetics of place remain to guide, delight, and inform a new century

The 1900–2000 Transition: The C. B. Morris Family Farm—and Corporation

Of the ten thousand Golden Age family farms of 1900–1914, there are probably only a few thousand or so still in business on the Southern High Plains of today. Each continuous family farm—strictly speaking,

each lucky survival—of the past tumultuous century has a unique and worthy saga. Even half a century of traditional family farming makes a wonderful narrative, as Janet Neugebauer's edited volume, *Plains Farmer: The Diary of William G. DeLoach, 1914–1964*, makes clear.²⁵ But the successive land ownership story best known to me is that of my extended family. From great-grandfather to now, I do know how one family managed to keep farming on the Plains—and the price paid. An abbreviated case study can only be a tiny part, of course, of the whole High Plains farm transition from 1900 to 2000. But perhaps the narrative of one family farm can be mildly metonymic, a little story reflecting some truth of the whole.

For over a century, extended families have struggled to make a life and a legacy on the Southern High Plains. A. T. Miller, my great-grandfather, arrived in 1887 to an ocean of grassland. As a Texas Ranger, he did his share in taming the new land. Other family members staked claims, plowed sod, tended stores, and built homes on the treeless highland. They tried to keep their dreams through hard labor, Jesus, and too often a nervous banker. Those who acquired land wove family ties deep into the county landscapes that emerged after the railroads. Families bequeathed a dream along with the land to happy heirs: the line of successive family ownership of land would continue unbroken. One simply did not sell “the land.” The land and its idyllic dream flowed through the generations like an enduring Biblical myth. Somewhere in the middle of this land-and-dream is C. B. Morris Company—a family farm for well over half a century converted into a closely held farm corporation for another half century.

For most native Texas families, the old family farm and agrarian dream died decades ago, usually when the rural folks sold out and moved to a nearby city for much better jobs and amenities. Our dream lingers in a northeastern spur of the Staked Plains, on sixteen hundred acres near Clarendon (Donley County), and on one thousand acres of the Rolling Plains north of tiny Thalia (Foard County). After Miller quit the Texas Rangers, he settled near Thalia in the late 1880s, married, bought a section, and transformed himself into a better-off family farmer by the 1910s. He moved to Clarendon to educate his adopted daughter, where she fell in love with another junior college student, Carl Bernard Morris. Carl or “Cap” Morris had grown up as a youth of the 1906–1914 colonization farm boom, principally in the sandy country near Tokio, Texas (1912) in Lynn County. After serving his country in

World War I trenches with the American Expeditionary Force in France, Sergeant Morris returned to Clarendon, married Lena, and went back to farming.

In the 1920s, Cornelia Adair sold to Cap and Lena Morris, my grandparents, some choice land from her JA Ranch in the Clarendon area. Cap Morris was a practitioner of the saying, “If you are tired of working with your back, start using your mind.” By the late 1920s, Morris, like his father-in-law Miller, was moving from backbreaking rural labor toward more supervision and finance. Rather than plowing or hoeing, he managed and coordinated a family-oriented system of farm leases and traditional tenant farming in Donley and Foard counties. On the class-conscious plains of Russia or Ukraine, Morris would have been a *kulak*, or entrepreneurial farmer, reputedly exploiting the labor of poor tenants.

There was no disguising, however, the retrograde economic and social horrors of the 1930s Depression and Dust Bowl. The Golden Age of small farm prosperity crashed on the Plains as badly as stock prices tumbled on Wall Street. Like other women, Lena Morris fed canned fruits to the homeless, converted flour sacks into homemade underwear, and made hook rugs. A large number, though, of farm tenants, friends, and even family members left the Southern High Plains, most forever. The people who stayed were scarred by the experience. Notions of *debt* came to mean different things to different generations of farmers. The Morris farms survived largely because they were big enough, solvent enough, conservative enough, and perhaps because they were located in two counties a hundred miles apart. A crop in one county might just offset a wipeout in the other.

Ironically, about the time Stalin moved to liquidate the kulak class of better-off farmers from the mollisol plains of the USSR, American bankers made a different, more economic decision for their plains. Banks and credit systems slowly squeezed proletarian small farmers and tenants in favor of an emergent, mechanized, and larger landholding class of family farmers such as C. B. Morris. Stalin built his large-scale or *kolkhoz* agriculture system using centralized political pressure. American bankers and creditors built a rationalized larger-scale system with decentralized economic pressure. All things considered, foreclosure notices were an obvious improvement over NKVD machine guns in farm consolidation. And when economic and climate forces reduced family farmers on the Great Plains close to famine (a horrific and man-made

disaster in Stalin's Ukraine), the American political system stepped in with federal aid and the Rural Rehabilitation Program. In a recent study of the period, *Down and Out on the Family Farm*, historian Michael Johnston Grant notes that federal aid eased the pain on the way down, but it did not stop the decline of small farmers in competition with larger-scale agriculture.²⁶

The family also saved the farm by adopting a "new" 1930s mindset: conservation of resources. C. B. Morris himself embraced conservation to an unusual degree. It was, so to speak, a thinking-man's style of farming anyway. Indeed, conservation practices, crop diversification, and improved mechanization—that is, a thorough rationalization of land, capital, and labor—reduced both economic and environmental risk. Morris not only embraced the New Deal with ardor and service, he also embraced the New Deal rural landscape. He refashioned worn farms with conservation terraces, shelterbelts, rural electricity, more eco-friendly techniques and crops, and he entered local politics as a New Deal Democrat. The movement to sustainability paid off—economically and politically. Thus, the decisions of the 1930s in the USSR and in the USA, that is, whether kulaks or proletarians would rule the fertile steppes and plains of the midlatitudes, were fundamentally different and led to vastly different outcomes.

The 1940s and early 1950s were relatively happy times on the Southern High Plains. The weather improved, the land responded to conservation, and wartime and postwar commodity prices were strong. A new prosperity gradually took hold on family farms in most counties. At Ashtola, not far from Goodnight's former ranch home at Goodnight, Texas, Morris again got interested in diversification. He started up a purebred herd of Galloway cattle that he managed in partnership with a son-in-law, Horace A. Green. Farm life not only looked good, additional family members came on board, including two daughters and two son-in-laws: Mae and Duane Naylor became operators in Foard County, displacing the last of the old tenant farmers; and Naomi and Horace Green did the same in Donley County. In good times family flowed into the business, not out of it.

Half of Cap and Lena's children went to the farms, and half ended up in the cities. Having a healthy percentage of family members trained and prepared to work the land has been, without doubt, instrumental in family-farm longevity. Our eventual death as family farmers was also postponed (rather accidentally it now seems) through a fateful legal

decision taken in 1950. Lena and Cap Morris incorporated their mutual and inherited farms into a corporation, the C. B. Morris Company. They distributed stock in such a way as to make minority shareholders of all the eventual heirs. The new legal entity was considered pretty modern at the time; family tradition holds that it was one of the early family-farm corporations in the Panhandle. Despite the underlying corporate legality, things were still run as a large-scale twin family farm. In Donley County, Aunt Oma and Uncle Horace operated a full-blown farm household in the 1950s and 1960s with seven top-notch kids, crops everywhere, cattle, chickens, a huge vegetable garden, wild plum jellies, and the like. In Foard County, Aunt Mae and Uncle Duane raised four smart kids and operated a thousand lovely acres, somehow making a crop year after year in spite of bad weather. Their operations were often critical to the survival of the company.

The mid- and late 1950s, however, were a severe test of the company's need to become "modern" while somehow surviving the "old" droughts, blowouts, bugs, and other environmental challenges. The mid-1950s drought was discouraging to say the least. In Donley County the company turned to the Ogallala Aquifer. In spite of investments in new machinery, both farm operations also used migrant or seasonal labor—the hidden heritage of family farming on the High Plains. Both operations increasingly resorted to anhydrous ammonia, hybrid seeds, cotton strippers, and expensive tractors. Children of the 1950s Llano can thus remember the picking of cotton by migrant hand in one year, and then a banker-financed cotton stripper showing up the next year. Community domino games might remain unchanged from the nineteenth century, but nearby drive-in theaters brought new layers of mass culture to the boondocks. By the 1960s, our irrigation wells pulled harder on the Ogallala Aquifer; it is difficult to imagine the company surviving had they not. As a child, youth, and adult, I found myself chasing cattle, moving irrigation pipe, hoeing, and doing the thousand other verities that went with an urban cousin visiting and sometimes living on a family farm operation.

Lena and Cap Morris both died in the 1960s. Estate taxes and expenses consumed portions of farm income for years. By the early 1970s, though, C. B. Morris Company had evolved into a minor family agribusiness. Despite the adoption of modern machines, technologies, and markets, there was a subversive undercurrent of conservation thinking in the operation. Duane Naylor was a resourceful, even ingenious

operator. He liked to recycle in Foard County, and he experimented frequently with seeds and techniques. Horace Green, who operated the Donley County farms, never forgot the Depression. He kept growing cotton for the periodic market bonanza, but he also got involved with the early organic farm companies, specifically Warner Seed Company and Arrowhead Mills of Hereford. Green had a good run at mixed sustainable-exhaustive agriculture in the 1960s and 1970s. A shrewd and intelligent farmer, he reduced risks through integrated management techniques years before the term was invented. At the time he said his type of farming was neither popular nor especially lucrative but that he would still be there when others were busted and gone.

Everyone's attitude shifted profoundly during the mid-1970s and 1980s. First, grandchildren began to return, some (perhaps ominously) with college degrees in agriculture. New stockholders also reached legal age. Shifting government policies and programs, expensive tractors, center-pivot irrigation, dangerous new pesticides, roaring interest rates, wild and fluctuating commodity prices, high fuel and energy costs, and scores of risks and rewards turned the company toward more intense and competitive land uses. Traditionalists were out and modernists were in. Operators planted high-risk, high-reward crops like irrigated corn. The company pushed sentiment aside and tore down a tenant house merely for the scrap of land it occupied. Stockholders borrowed heavily to buy an adjacent farm with its precious groundwater. One very sad day, in the midst of a bad cattle market too, trucks came and carried away the entire Galloway herd. But thus freed of ruminants, former pastures metamorphosed into new cropland—a laborious conversion process, as I know from a long summer's personal experience. The company completed more irrigation wells and explored the underground water options with test wells. In sum, conservation was less important than rising land prices, selling grain to kulak-less Russians, saving face with bankers, and bringing a new generation of go-go farmers on board. We could only get richer! Land prices would soar even higher!

The late 1980s shakeout was severe of course. Farm woes and suffering radiated across the entire Great Plains. Willie Nelson "Farm Aid" concerts and farm protest movements were both popular entertainment, but they did not dissuade a neighbor or two from suicide. Rural land prices fell dramatically as lawyers, dentists, and doctors took their investment money elsewhere. Globalization and unexpected crop diseases proved a relentless challenge. C. B. Morris survived in Donley County

largely by betting on and getting government "quotas" in peanuts, an important federal subsidy for growing export peanuts. Peanuts migrated onto the Southern High Plains when more traditional peanut country in the East became so infested with nematodes and diseases as to discourage production altogether. The High Plains was "fresh meat," as it were, for susceptible crops that had degraded other Americans soils. Peanuts truthfully cost a fortune to produce. But growers holding the magic government quotas found they usually paid as a cash crop, provided that the company and operators poured quantities of groundwater, fertilizer, and chemicals onto the land. Supposedly, our export peanuts ended up in the stomachs of millions of snack-hungry soccer fans in Europe. Even conservation itself came back in fashion with the downturn. The company quickly embraced no-till farming as one convenient and efficient 1990s panacea.

Like almost all farm operations on the Southern High Plains, the C. B. Morris Co. increasingly viewed the federal government as a capricious and wily-nilly partner in the production process. The worst kind of crop or commodity price failure is, speaking candidly, one that does not have a large government check following behind it in the mail. But to get that or any check usually involves collaborating, if not sharing some of the decision making, with inquisitive federal agencies and bureaucrats. Of course, few self-respecting, red-blooded American farmers (30 percent of the take) and patriotic agribusinesses (70 percent of the take) willingly own up to any role as voracious welfare recipients. Individual farmers and associations such as the Farm Bureau often impugn "welfare" as an urban concept alien to rural values and beliefs. However that may be, and without ever quite approving its moral necessity, the C. B. Morris Co. joined the prevailing preference for risk reduction by participating in USDA farm programs throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Indeed, "government assistance," "price supports," "quotas," and "disaster checks" became a regular component of the corporate budget, perhaps a fifth of revenue.

By the late 1990s, though, C. B. Morris Company had lost key family operators and family members through relocation, accident, and mortality. Land prices in the hinterland of the Plains were dismally low. Local operators, after the tremendous farm bankruptcies of the past, found it hard to obtain financing. When the peanut diseases refused to stay back East, the company turned one large farm over to alfalfa. Too many adjacent farms lay fallow simply for lack of financing and local

operators. In Foard County, as noted, the company placed considerable acreage in the Conservation Reserve Program, spending many thousands of dollars to convert cropland back into grassland habitat in return for annual government checks. Stockholders were also quarreling, sometimes bitterly. Increasingly, it seemed appropriate to dissolve or transform the company in some equitable manner.

C. B. Morris Company has barely, even implausibly, survived half a century of profound change, agrarian dislocations, new stockholders, and gut-wrenching traumas. The company is still in business, neither too big nor too small to go completely broke. At the heart of this survival has been a central (if soulless) reality: corporations can outlive their individual stockholders and/or operators. The willingness of a minority of family members to work the land and a majority of stockholders to help manage the land, both just successfully enough to compete in a brutal, increasingly global market arena, may make some difference. Stockholders, who more often do not live on the land, have to adapt their investment expectations accordingly.

Like thousands of family-farm descendants, the majority of CBM stockholders have made their way to the urban canyons and suburban escarpments of modern Texas. In schools and skyscrapers distant from the Plains, stockholders attempt to keep alive a collective vision—not the old collective called a family farm, but a new collective called the family farm corporation. For better or worse, we have been stuck for half a century with the corporation. Now perhaps it is our myth. Or rather no one has figured out a reasonable way to un-incorporate the family farm, at least without owing enough capital gains on the land as to surrender altogether. And that reality, as sensible as it might be, would bring a larger dream to an end: “Never sell the land.” Closely held family farm corporations may put up with more trouble and lower economic returns than nonrelated urban stockholders would ever consider advisable. For this reason *family-owned* corporate agribusiness *may* have a better chance of surviving the odds of the next century.

At a recent meeting, confronted with difficult tax, operational, and capital-investment problems, I wondered how much longer most family members would want to stay in the business. Call farming on the Llano Estacado for what it is now: full-time, high-stakes, heavy-chemical, rural-casino gambling, where “break-the-bank” attitudes usually work in reverse. The fun disappeared years ago, and now the business must work to keep its management, progression, and footing. As a resident

family “grass-lovin’” (not many trees available to hug) environmentalist, I recall adding an impractical or idealistic component to some business decisions. Yet, after many centuries of documented farming in the blood, it seems very doubtful that C. B. Morris in its present form will make it beyond another decade or two. High operating costs and low commodity prices equal a persistent financial squeeze. Without farm programs, crop insurance, and disaster payments, company solvency would be questionable. And the corporation has the best kind of land in Texas, “paid for.”

The experience of C. B. Morris Co. does indicate the general utility of corporate structures in transferring a family farm operation from one generation to the next. That is, the corporate model has kept the extended family connected to the land, whether its members live on it or not, or whether the connection was wanted or not. And our experience indicates that conservation has not only a place but also a historic heritage. One family farm, in business for over a century, has seen economic expansions followed by environmental and market contractions, counterbalanced by significant conservation shifts, followed by exhaustive expansions, more crashes, and new conservation strategies. A pendulum of sustainable-exhaustive relations, with more machines and decreasing numbers of people, seems to be the pattern.

The traditionalist family farm nevertheless lingers as one of the enduring mythologies of the Southern High Plains. Family farmers talk resolutely about “keeping land in the family,” both as a projection of the myth and an acknowledgment of its hold on them personally. Despite most other rational considerations, the notion of selling the family farm, even a stockholder interest in a corporate-style farm, can remain one of the hardest, least impulsive decisions to make. Family operations work fervently to perpetuate their presence on the plains, but too often they do so within a context of troublesome economies, global competition, spouses working off-farm, declines in rural health care, and an aging demographic profile. An overall defiant attitude may prove helpful. Thankfully, any streak of defiance will not extend to the 2002 Farm Program coming out of Washington, D.C. This huge, farm-state inspired program promises more addictive farm welfare than ever. It will certainly prove a cornucopia for large agribusiness, already adept at getting most of the largesse even as their politicians declare honorable intentions to “save the family farm.” Directly or indirectly though, a generous farm program benefits almost everyone not actually living in a city.

For the C. B. Morris Co. itself, the extension of the family farm myth from a fourth to a fifth generation is much less certain, much more problematic. Our collective future in farming the plains even looks bleak when almost all the current stockholders live off-farm. Perhaps it is just as well. Old corrals, outbuildings, tumbled-down former tenant houses, and remnant shade groves still signify much CBM property. These relicts of yore remind us that many, many families left the farms long before we will have to go. The divide between urban and rural is sharp and cuts cleanly between the generations.

The Llano Farmers of Today

In terms of agricultural sustainable development, the family farm may persist as the best local on-site choice, despite its many serious defects and apparent obsolescence.

—JOHN OPIE, *Ogallala: Water for a Dry Land*

The U.S. Department of Agriculture gathers considerable information on the contemporary land use and farm economy of the Southern High Plains. Indeed, the National Agricultural Statistics System (NASS) now provides a comprehensive set of Internet webtools to explore farm operations by crop, county, and state.²⁷ For analytical purposes the author used a NASS interactive mapping tool to study a simplified Southern High Plains consisting of four eastern New Mexico counties and twenty-five northwestern Texas counties. After days of playing with the tools and data, I found my vision of modern agriculture in the region resembled the earlier 1910 period of corporate-family endeavor. Both the past and current turns-of-the-century show significant mechanization, ethnic change, intensive production, high capital costs, corporate connectivity (once to nation, now to globe), risk-reduction conservation strategies, and public access and interaction with amenity landscapes.

Based on preliminary study, recent data suggest that the Llano bioregion embraces a mixed sustainability-exhaustive paradigm, primarily by interweaving crop production with cattle production. Charles Goodnight's 1900s stricture that the High Plains was meant for mixed use—for crops *and* cattle—appears to be born out by 1999 NASS data. Family and corporate crop production is, of course, tremendously important to the regional economy. Today the Llano Estacado, hypothetically organized as a new state, would rank about fourteenth among

all states in gross agricultural receipts, an income of over \$5 billion. However, as the 1998–99 satellite visions of the Llano suggest, the region is still extraordinarily sensitive to drought.

The northern Llano Estacado remains a notable “Cow Commons.” An archipelago of feedlot and livestock operations stretches across the northern tier of counties. Family farms are still locally active (and in full production in many of these counties), but the market value of cattle actually exceeds crop revenues. Deaf Smith County, for example, has 669,000 cattle and calves, a reflection of the powerful feedlot industry. Castro County has 289,000 cattle and calves. Contrary to my initial thoughts, the northern Llano is embracing considerable more livestock revenues than irrigated crop income, perhaps a reflection of market demand for beef and declining water tables. It may be instructive, in fact, to plot the expansion of the cattle industry against the slow decline of groundwater-based agriculture.²⁸ Amarillo provides global connectivity for this Cow Commons with its huge meatpacking plants, food manufacturing, and shipping outlets. At night, of course, the very air of Amarillo smells, sometimes profoundly. There are well over a million cattle pooping off to the city's southwest. A century ago it was slumbering homesteader hamlets off in the distance, not gigantic twenty-four-hour feedlots.

In the late 1980s, professors Frank and Deborah Popper noted the steady demographic declines afflicting most counties of the Great Plains. Large sections of the Plains were wasting away, aging, and declining as communities. The Poppers went beyond identifying the spatial and social concerns by postulating a possible solution: the gradual reconstitution of depopulated grasslands into a comprehensive, dynamic, restocked, and sustainable “Buffalo Commons.” At the time, the Poppers' concept was misconstrued widely and treated scornfully at the local level (and still is apparently). The passing of a dozen years or more has done little to redeem the idea for current residents. If anything the Buffalo Commons solution seems even more anachronistic to them, bearing no trace of reality.

Yet, almost unnoticed in a similar interval was the vast, significant, and largely micromanaged patchwork of conservation set-asides appearing in the county-level CRP lands. Some seventeen thousand contracts between northwest Texas farmers and the USDA converted millions of acres of cropland to long periods of permanent, mostly native vegetation. CRP lands are a terribly fractured and privatized version of the

pristine Buffalo Commons. But as a compromise they offer something to most of the stakeholders: wildlife gets a break after all, the farmer gets to stay on the land, and taxpayer outlays for set-asides may be less expensive than price supports on typical overproduction. As for the depopulation afflicting many counties, out-migration is not a recent event. As noted earlier, scores of towns and many thousands of migrants were busted as colonization schemes collided with nature's harsher realities after 1907.

On the whole, the size of the modern family farm also increased between 1990 and 2000, indicating that the incremental trend toward "bigness" continues. On the Llano itself, a concentration of full-time farm operations appears in the middle and southern portions of the mesaland. Especially in this middle subregion, sometimes called the Southern Plains, percentages of county agricultural revenue run quite high for crops (not cattle). The high percentages may even reflect an informal family farm "homeland" or center of activity on the Southern High Plains. Such a homeland roughly centers on metropolitan Lubbock, with Crosby, Lynn, Hale, and adjacent counties drawing as much as 70 percent to 96 percent of their agricultural market revenue from farm crops.

Regional data for the 1990s do suggest a mild decline in the number of farm operations per county, perhaps due to bankruptcies, deaths, or sellouts of operations. Many counties declined by several or more percentage points in the number of primary farm operations. Farm numbers tend to show declines in full-time farms in the north and west, but small increases in the east and south. Farm numbers declined least around the Lubbock homeland core, but declines further out from the core were likely, especially in all four New Mexico counties (Quay, Curry, Roosevelt, and Lea). There is the possibility that modern agribusiness is shifting crop production from north to south, perhaps similar to the 1900–1912 colonization shock wave. A few counties, primarily in the South Llano, registered nice gains, suggesting an expanding irrigation economy there. The same data also suggest that farm size has increased in the Llano Estacado's twenty-nine counties.

While the region has about the same overall number of aggressive farm operations as it did in 1910, there have been profound changes in the costs and capitalizations required. An average homesteader in the last century might start a farming life on the Staked Plains with \$500 in debt and investment. Currently, the average agricultural capitalization

for a High Plains operation is around \$700,000 plus \$100,000 or more in equipment. The overall disparity in capitalization between large agricultural corporations and smaller operations is significant. Many (if not a large majority) of small family farmers have at least one spouse holding a town, public, or industrial job. A second, even third income is part of modern family farming. Off-farm income arrives throughout the year, is fairly reliable, and clearly works as a diversification strategy to piece together one family income. In contrast, larger farm corporations usually have substantial assets, find better financing, are quick to exploit technology, and are usually better suited to manage the intense capital risks of agriculture. Time and scale generally favor the larger companies in acquiring dominance over significant resource allocations. In a recent instance corporate predator T. Boone Pickens and fellow stockholders acquired vast water rights in the Panhandle. Caught between commodity price squeezes and higher expenses for fuel, supplies, and equipment, the remaining family farmers face a difficult future. Corporate farmers themselves, as smart as they undoubtedly are, are hardly immune to bankruptcy. They too face tremendous challenges in the coming century.

The central problem for the first decades of the twenty-first-century Southern High Plains is to manage a "soft-landing" transition from an *exhaustive* resource paradigm to a mixed *exhaustive-sustainability* resource paradigm. While there are plenty of alternative crops and models, land ethics, and nonprofit suggestions, no one seems to have solved the basic economic and demographic problems, particularly those associated with negative population growth. Answers may include grassroots conservation movements, community support associations (CSAs), heritage tourism, rural development, new technology, global connectivity, and, as I argue, new visual culture. Such a paradigm should include a dialectical resolution of two opposing environmental perceptions: first, a reigning imperial vision of agribusiness, where nature is conquered and commodified; and second, an Arcadian dream of a redeemed, bioregional "commons" landscape (as with the Poppers' Buffalo Commons).

Sustainability on the Southern High Plains will prove difficult. A recent United Nations University series ("Critical Zones in Global Environmental Change") focused on some of the world's most threatened environments—Borneo and the Malay Peninsula, Amazonia, the Basin of Mexico, and the Ordos Plateau of China. For the sixth volume of these "Critical Environmental Regions" books, the series editors released Elizabeth Brooks and Jacque "Jody" Emel's study of the Llano

Estacado. Brooks and Emel's assessment of sustainability for the Llano Estacado begins "by questioning what is to be sustained on the Llano. Was it the resource, the community, or the ecosystem?, we asked. In the end, what would sustainability mean for the Llano Estacado? Sustaining the resource would entail preserving key economic sectors, which would then serve to sustain the region's role in global markets for cotton and cattle. Sustaining the community would imply preserving a way of life and an agricultural production regime. Sustaining the ecosystem is no longer an option."²⁹ If sustainability itself is multifaceted and slippery, the challenge grows when considering some of the current applications of capitalism: predatory corporate practices (à la pig farms or groundwater exports), the spread of contract farming, generous tax abatement policies to attract corporate investment or wind farms, conservative institutional regimes, and high capitalization costs. It is likely that the Llano bioregion will continue the mixed cattle-grain economy, embrace bio-engineering, show a fresh interest in farm robotics and mechanization, and witness gigantic applications (and perhaps some accidents) of transgenic crops. Nevertheless, these scientist visions of private corporate land use can and should be modified with large-scale, public-stewardship land allocations. Specifically the region needs new parks, wilderness areas, and heritage centers, including, as I envision it, a projected Southern High Plains Family Farm Heritage Center, a child-friendly, living-farm, interactive learning center that would leaven the otherwise ranch-crazy way of seeing the past.

Corporations may rule the twenty-first-century Southern High Plains, much as they did in the early twentieth century, but the nature of their current colonization process requires careful thought. New colonization is globalized, genetic, intensive, climate changing, and arguably polluting or exhaustive. As noted, an important part of balancing the 1900s transition was to make room for other modernist needs, such as recreation, sport, community, and art. The 2000s transition also has needs for preserved environmental systems, some of which will likely involve a continually refined conservation movement. This movement, which already exists in parts, needs to emerge from the overlapping, consensual desires of national nonprofit organizations (Nature Conservancy and Sierra Club), Texas state agencies, local movements and heritage centers, and of course from the farm corporations themselves. Indeed, the Arcadian dreams of environmentalists may find sustainable outlets in new parks and variable applications of heritage tourism. In

Donley County, a few savvy local ranchers have learned ways to fatten up, not whiteface cattle, but German, British, and Japanese tourists. Buddy Holly's memory is an ongoing business in Lubbock. Heritage tourism, ranch and farm centers, Internet sites, and eco-friendly state parks may well prove more creative and more widespread in the next century. Cultural trends and environmental perceptions will shape these new spatial outlets, such as "living" farm and ranch interpretive centers, urban-rural monitoring programs, species recovery efforts, and ongoing space-based analysis of land use and climate trends.

If technology looks bright, the dismal science of agrarian economics is hard to see in the looking-glass future. Globalization and class warfare models (big versus small) may accelerate changes already under way. If the trends continually reduce successive family ownership in favor of cut-and-run outside corporations, at least one known and respected pathway to sustainability will prove difficult. Class war arguments are rarely popular with the wealthy rural power elites, who sometimes dominate county fiefdoms. But the polemics of labor versus capital are balancing, insightful, and part of the history of the Llano. Fulminating against dominant corporations is an old western tradition. The useful mediators of future land use dialectics are likely to be urban populations. Midland, Lubbock, Plainview, Portales, and Amarillo maintain a modest measure of urban growth, even if a large proportion is at the expense of diminishing nearby small-farm communities. These oasis cities still nourish romantic horizons for the hinterland. Many of their residents would prefer more sensitive land ethics, even if not exactly volunteering to pay for them. The urban-rural dialogue is nevertheless crucial for the future, because big city voters may make decisions on which elements to sustain in the country: a declining resource, or an older way of life, or a vanishing ecosystem? Even tentative regional planning for the components of a Southern High Plains sustainability paradigm is urgent. Urban funding and political goodwill will be required in the long process.

What is new today is the substantially altered ethnic component in the revived conquest of the Plains. Although the U.S. Census 2000 is still being released, the demographic prominence of Hispanic residents on the Llano is already dramatic. Many counties already or will soon have a majority of residents of Hispanic descent. Clearly ethnic labor is a major factor in the growth of corporate rule on the Southern High Plains. Hispanic in-migration to corporate employers in the meatpacking

industry is well known. Some levels of chain-migration between Mexico and the Llano have been spatially significant. Agricultural historian Gary Nall notes that residents from one Zacatecas village have been gradually exchanging old farm labor in Mexico for new farm labor on the Southern High Plains.³⁰ And in the 1990s, there were other immigrant experiences as well. Catholic Refugee Services in Amarillo assisted Balkan immigrants. Asian migrants were attracted to corporate employment in the food processing industries. Panhandle corporations now attract distant sources of labor, increasing the human and cultural diversity of the region. Farm corporations will likely continue to offer economic opportunities to global or hemispheric migrants.

The future decline of the past family farm may bring a tear to the eye of the sentimentalist, myself included, but the contextual reality of agriculture on the Southern High Plains has been (1902) and will be (2002) corporate. Nor is it the first time corporations have ruled the lands, waters, plants, and animals of the Southern High Plains. The central focus for conservation impulses is likely to be the new relationships between inanimate corporate beings and the very animate if stressed landscapes serving them. Rhetoric about individual "private property" is often zealous, even if the land is increasingly directed by a class of legal *übermenschen* known as closely held corporations. This conversion of family farms into bottom-line, integrated, scaleable, agribusiness enterprises thus poses unique challenges for the conservation/preservation movement. Transgenic crops, bioengineering, satellite surveillance, and robotic pesticide sprayers will constitute a further and massive transformation of the Southern High Plains. It is likely that a projected twenty-first-century bioengineered shock wave will have to mesh with a new conservation impulse in the next few decades, particularly since the climate may be getting worse instead of better, as once desired and claimed.

Arguably the Llano Estacado of 2000–2010 may have important similarities to the Llano of 1900–1910. Both periods reflect immense technological change and transregional connectivity. The role—or rule—of corporations is of paramount influence, and the same approximate number of overall farm operations, some ten thousand to twenty thousand, is at work. Land ownership currently is very "traditionalist" in nature, with private property being taken perhaps more seriously (in an age of liability) than in 1900. The missing ingredient, perhaps, is a politically popular new conservation impulse, one concomitant with the vision of public stewardship, leisure, heritage, and size to match the

Arcadian visions of 1906–1916 or the New Deal of 1930s. Too many residents regard "environmentalism" as a sour, ugly, elitist, distant, collectivist (if not downright Bolshevik) concept for the trammeling of their endowed, individual, anti-statist "rights."

The Future of the Past

The time is ripe then for a resurgent postmodern conservation impulse, one centered as before in "modernist" economies, but grounded in sustainable relations and celebrated in the expressive arts by writers, musicians, indeed all cultural creatives. History, a way of seeing what no longer exists, has a part to play in the imaginative process. Much of the new impulse already exists, either in formal, embryonic, or private fashions. Admittedly, the ugly realities of massive groundwater withdrawals, soil contamination, chemical pollution, pig farming, and so on might constitute a current "corporate desert" perception of the landscape, at least for many environmentalists and land ethicists. Nevertheless, the Llano Estacado has a future, and it might as well be a "Garden" one—once again. Looking to the future, with close attention to the past, I see the outlines of a new twenty-first-century perceptual "Garden" for the Southern High Plains. That the vision and image can swing to the positive is known. Although the cultural parameters of the swing have yet to be fully envisioned, much less politically embraced, still a few reflections may be in order.

New Parks for the Llano Estacado

A key element in a projected twenty-first-century conservation movement includes the expansion and addition of new public parks. The Alibates Flint National Monument, for example, is a regional money-maker. The tourists come and come. The existing five thousand acres of Palo Duro Canyon State Park near Canyon is also very popular, but it is a spatial will-o'-the-wisp in many respects. The park is simply too tiny, certainly by the bragging rights usually associated with the state, and it is now overcrowded in summers. The addition and preservation of additional components of the sixty-five-mile-long canyon system is entirely desirable. As Dan Flores explains elsewhere in this volume, it once came close to being a big National Park, and could do so again.

The Natural Heritage Program of the Texas State General Land Office has assessed many remaining natural areas of Texas. Historic

places and portions of the Llano, such as Las Lenguas or Blanco Canyon or Rocky Dell, and special lands that are already rich in habitat, endangered species, and species diversity, may all lend themselves to new parks, wilderness areas, and wildlife refuges. Indeed, the remnants of the old prairie and grassland biome may harbor significant genetic resources for the future. While species recovery efforts can and do work with private landowners, there is no substitute for much larger habitats with fewer "edge" effects.

Conservation of Farm Community Heritage

As noted above, the Southern High Plains has an implanted preservation and heritage movement. The 1990s witnessed numerous instances of preserving and capitalizing upon the regional and western heritage of the plains. From mom-and-pop downtown stores to generous state funding for local courthouse restoration (a reverse flow of funding from urban to rural cultural investment), the preservation movement is solidly established and justly celebrated. County heritage museums, Main Street revitalization, antique stores, private collectors of farm equipment and tractors, Ebay vendors in small rural towns, and the retailing of western life experiences in general are now part of small-town economies. Substantial numbers of Japanese and German tourists ride horses, eat steaks around campfires, and contemplate the western skies. The Llano, as a land of time, has an enormous capacity to absorb further heritage tourism.

Moreover, the old family farming way of life may itself be of interest to the future. Where can one go to see a functioning colonization or New Deal landscape on the plains? How did our ancestors plant cotton or make wild plum jelly? At Las Cruces, the New Mexico Farm and Ranch Heritage Museum offers an immersion experience to a prior way of regional life. Other architectural and heritage centers on the Llano are certainly a possibility. The traditionalist family-farm "homeland" around Lubbock lends itself to this heritage opportunity, as I suggested earlier.

Post-Postmodern "Cultural Creatives"

If Lusby and Wilkie, Reaugh and O'Keeffe, were the "cultural creatives" of the Southern High Plains landscape in 1910s, who are the ones of today? The happy answer is that there are many artistic types on the plains of today, some with paying jobs. In the regional cities the arts

movement is lively and broad-based. The residents of Lubbock often strike this observer as being more personally involved and keenly interested in art than the jaded consumers of Dallas. It happens that some locals turn to art and carry it away with them. Buddy Holly moved to New York, while Joe Ely, Jimmy Dale Gilmore, and Butch Hancock moved to Central Texas after starting the musical trio the "Flatlanders" around a kitchen table in Lubbock. But other Lubbock musicians, Amarillo artists, and Midland writers stayed put. They continue to define cultural horizons appreciative of regional future and past. Imagineers like novelist Elmer Kelton, poet Andy Wilkinson, historian Dan Flores, photographer Wyman Meinzer, writer Patrick Dearen, the inimitable Stanley Marsh III, and many others romance the land in ways the earlier artists would have appreciated and approved.

Spiritual visions of a postmodern congregation of rural people concerned with "livingness" on the High Plains already exist. One highly intelligent agency in the spiritualization process is Father Darryl Birkenfeld's energetic Promised Land Network, a rural outreach ministry of the Catholic diocese of Amarillo. In publications, conferences, symposia, and activities, the Promised Land Network nurtures the earlier Arcadian dreams of farm families. Indeed, it promotes regional creativity to enhance spiritual and sustainable ends. Strengthening and encouraging the creative regionalism of the Llano can only benefit all concerned.

Conservation of Ethnic Landscapes

The dominant commemorative influences of the Southern High Plains arose in the twentieth century. Excepting the Coronado expedition, commemoration centered on the late 1800s Anglo-Saxon arrivals, especially the usual suspects for a state historical marker such as Texas Rangers, pioneer ranchers, military heroes, and epic trailblazers. If the early Anglos got their due along the roads of the twentieth century, then Hispanics likely will see their visions and places honored in the twenty-first century. Beginning in the 1930s, and a major factor in politics today, county percentages of Hispanic population have climbed steadily for seven decades. In looking at the region, geographer Terrence Haverluk finds the Hispanic communities "new" in their orientation and settlement type.³¹ But he also notes these Hispanic demographics (approaching 50 percent for some towns) are correlated with higher

than expected rates of Spanish language retention. The result in his view is an emergent "High Plains Hispanic Homeland," a hybrid cultural realm, really, that embraces assimilation on the one hand for economic mobility, but on the other hand retains much ethnic identity and often speaks Spanish in the home. Noting strong cultural ties to the Tex-Mex borderland, the historic source of in-migration, Haverluk observes that locals call the South Plains (around Lubbock) "the little [Rio Grande] valley of the north." The importance of agriculture in the regional economy necessarily involves a large number of these Hispanics in farming, farm labor, food service, and food processing.

Shifting regional demographics, whereby a former minority becomes equivalent or even a majority locally, raise important questions. Does the Llano need to re-imagine its past with an eye to the new ethnic future? Already other regions, especially San Antonio, have experimented with framing the issues and debates in "contested history." For the Southern High Plains the possibilities of "hidden heritage" are quite interesting. After all, a modern, initially agrarian, and culturally Tex-Mex migration stream has come from "the Valley" (lower Rio Grande River) to a land that already has a Spanish cultural heritage. But this prior heritage is a different one in many ways, from a different source region (sixteenth-through nineteenth-century New Mexico), and one largely interpreted or ignored by a different ethnic group (twentieth-century Anglos). The older Hispanic heritage of the Llano Estacado lingers in places, including *comanchero* outposts, historic springs, cemeteries, and old *placita* sites. But most historic sites are currently on private property. Some important sites are virtually off-limits, even to researchers. A number of historic places (Rocky Dell) and pre-Anglo personages (Pedro Vial) are neither acknowledged by markers or even a goal of regional planning. Redefining and conserving the lost 1700s or forgotten ethnic heritage sites of the 1800s Llano may provide multiple benefits for a new century, including Hispanic appreciation and tourism from other parts of the state.

With the Alibates flint quarries as paragon, more awareness could also be done for American Indian cultural heritage sites. A few archeologists study the Antelope Creek pueblos in the Canadian Valley, but the public sees little. Yet, one thing the Llano has over many other regions is its sheer duration of cultural time, going back 11,200 B.P. to the Clovis people. The promotion and conservation of the Paleolithic heritage has paid dividends at Clovis, New Mexico, and the Lubbock Lake site, but

other areas and sites await proper discovery, exploration, or due celebration. Finding and conserving the paleo-landscapes will be a suitable challenge for the future.

The Politics of Conservation

Conserving the land and waters, whether by family or corporate farms, will involve frequent and intense political elements. Private property is a strict given for many rural and urban people, even if they do not own much land themselves. And the vast majority of the Llano Estacado is private property. Public stewardship of land is certainly not unknown, but it is less ardently embraced perhaps than in other regions (many with generous amounts of federal funding or land). The Nature Conservancy has an enviable record of working with private landowners for the public good. The expansion of their work and interests to the Southern High Plains is long overdue.

The late Judge L. Bunton's historic ruling on groundwater flows may also reflect a new level or expansion of public stewardship, and not just on the surface. Indeed "public goods" may lie below the surface of the Llano. After initial resistance, groundwater districts are now part of the reality for much of the Plains. The pattern of fierce landowner resistance followed by slow grudging acceptance of new "green" paradigms will likely continue. This pattern implies that public opinion, media, elections, and, most important, local political leadership will all be instrumental in establishing a regulatory form of conservation, one with embedded sustainability features. Lastly, the benefits from intelligent political largesse or "pork" can ultimately catalyze development, much as Lyndon Johnson transformed the Hill Country with dams, roads, and electricity.

Green Acres: One Conclusion

While this cold vision of the Llano Estacado suggests that postindustrial farming will likely displace both traditional family and "nature" farming, it does not mean that the family farmer will disappear either quickly or completely. Many family farmers are quite resilient and adaptable to change. They will acquire robotic sprayers and ATVs, use GIS and the Internet, and plant transgenic crops. Or they may go organic for different economics and market niche share. Other family farmers are well capitalized (if not already incorporated for liability and estate planning

purposes). Nevertheless many traditional family farmers, like the Bedouin cultures I visited in the 1970s Negev desert, may find their old way of life preserved in future heritage museums far more than on the ground.

"Nature" farming itself has a powerful rationale, one that promises sustainability. It also has a moral geography and humanistic vision that should be encouraged to condition corporate behavior, regulate its pollution, and reduce the excesses and worse practices. Much as British farmers have rethought the wildlife corridor values of traditional hedgerows, High Plains farmers may embrace their "wasteful" playas. And nature farming has two powerful if unseen allies: climate (once drought, now global warming) and declining water tables. The measure of the mitigation will depend heavily on regional planning responses and future public policy formulations. While genetically modified crops largely take hold on the Great Plains, some 4 percent of corn acreage may be planted and marketed as identity-preserved crops, that is, old-fashioned gene pools focused on consumers' "green" expectations.

The transition of the Southern High Plains from a god-fearing, sod-busting, surplus-producing civilization of family farms in 1910 to a more impersonal, globalized, vertically integrated, corporate agribusiness in 2010 still holds a central dilemma: how to balance regional growth and technological development with stochastic and challenging environmental constraints. There were no easy answers in the past. The exhaustion of groundwater and a warming climate may make answers in the future more difficult. The promise of an information revolution and a vastly new bioengineered landscape, however, will predispose cornucopians to look on the sunny side of "food systems."

One answer is obvious: when corporations rule the Llano Estacado they will need a conservation movement—no less in the warming future than in the stubborn past. The general economic, social, and environmental health of the Southern High Plains may depend on a redefined conservation horizon. This sustainable development movement may resemble, in fact, the "natural capitalism" practices in use by progressive large corporations, in which waste is penalized and minimized, and resource productivity is enhanced and maximized. The economics of "natural capitalism" for the family farmer may involve (whether Japan or the High Plains) no-till cultivation, government welfare, and off-farm spousal income.

Almost a century ago the reporter M. G. Cuniff heard Texans declare that their elected, powerful Railroad Commission had done a fine job of reigning in the corporations:

"It is just as easy to manage the corporations as to have the corporations manage you," say the legislators from the rice fields and the cotton fields, the "piney woods" and the *llano estacado* . . . If other states could have a consciousness as proud and alert as that of Texas—that the commonwealth is bigger than the corporations—half our national problems would disappear.³²

It is unlikely that the voters will show such spunk again, but depleted groundwater, operating costs, invasive species, and droughts may make "natural capitalists" out of the surviving corporate colonizers of a bioengineered Southern High Plains. If for no other reason than the tides of public opinion, other corporations will show a friendly face to the environment. The cultural creatives, of course, have known all along that conserving the Llano and preserving its heritage are good for the mind and body.

Notes

1. An important early survey of agribusiness dominance and large-scale institutional biases is Ingolf Vogeler, *The Myth of the Family Farm: Agribusiness Dominance of U.S. Agriculture* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1981). Vogeler discusses oligopolies, small-town dependencies, supporting myths, biased federal programs, farm protest movements, contract farming, and tax-loss farming. Vogeler's remarks on the 1970s challenges to family farming are still pertinent.

2. Wendell Berry, *The Unsettling of America: Culture and Agriculture* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1986).

3. For regional history and origins of the name, see John Miller Morris, *El Llano Estacado: Exploration and Imagination on the High Plains of Texas and New Mexico, 1536–1860* (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 1997), 162–66.

4. For "shocking truths" about agribusiness and animal abuse, see C. David Coats, *Old MacDonald's Factory Farm* (New York: Continuum, 1989).

5. See the important last chapter, "The Big Change," and farm data appendices in John Stricklin Spratt, *The Road to Spindletop: Economic Change in Texas, 1875–1901* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1955), 276–302.

6. Patricia Nelson Limerick and Charles Scoggin note that Colorado's 1990–2000 census growth rate is “almost exactly the same growth rate” as the 1890–1900 census in “Testing the Limits of the Western Dream,” *New York Times*, 18 February 2001, A16.
7. Donald W. Meinig, *Imperial Texas: An Interpretive Essay in Cultural Geography* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1969), 70.
8. A good summary of the regional promotion process is Jan Blodgett, *Land of Bright Promise, Advertising the Texas Panhandle and South Plains, 1870–1917* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1988). The best case study is Charles Dudley Eaves and C. A. Hutchinson, *Post City, Texas: C. W. Post's Colonizing Activities in West Texas* (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 1952).
9. See, David B. Gracy, II, “A Preliminary Survey of Land Colonization in the Panhandle–Plains of Texas,” *The Museum Journal* 11 (1969): 51–79.
10. See Robert Julyan, *The Place Names of New Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996).
11. Castro County (1 colonization town), Parmer Co. (3 towns), Hale Co. (4 towns), Bailey Co. (6 towns), Crosby Co. (4 towns), Lamb Co. (3 towns), Lubbock Co. (3 towns), Hockley Co. (1 town).
12. Frieda Knobloch, *The Culture of Wilderness: Agriculture as Colonization in the American West* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999).
13. S. Nugent Townshend and J. G. Hyde, *Our Indian Summer in the Far West: An Autumn Tour of 15,000 Miles in Kansas, Texas, New Mexico, Colorado, and the Indian Territory* (London: Charles Whittingham, 1880). Sixty-two albumen photographs illustrate this rare volume dedicated to the Anglo-Irish capitalist John Adair.
14. Martyn J. Bowden, “The Perception of the Western Interior of the United States, 1800–1870: A Problem in Historical Geography,” *Proceedings of the Association of American Geographers* 1 (1969): 16–21; John L. Allen, “Exploration and the Creation of Geographical Images of the Great Plains: Comments on the Role of Subjectivity,” in *Images of the Plains: The Role of Human Nature in Settlement*, ed. B. Blouet and M. P. Lawson (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1975): 3–12; and G. Malcolm Lewis, “Rhetoric of the Western Interior: Modes of Environmental Description in American Promotional Literature of the Nineteenth Century,” in *The Iconography of Landscape*, ed. Denis Cosgrove and Stephen Daniels (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988): 179–93.
15. For an excellent discussion on changing environmental perceptions in railroad advertising, see “The Railroads,” chap. 3 in Blodgett, *Land of Bright Promise*, 26–42.
16. See the extensive bibliographic notes in John Opie, *Ogallala: Water for a Dry Land* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000). Two regional classic studies include Donald E. Green, *Land of the Underground Rain, Irrigation on*

- the Texas High Plains, 1910–1970* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1973), and Charles Bowden, *Killing the Hidden Waters* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1977).
17. A typical 1906 land promotion brochure for Canyon, Texas, assured Iowa and Indiana homeseekers that the climate was “always pure and conducive to good health.” Keiser Brothers and Phillips, “The Texas Panhandle” (Washington, Iowa: Needham Printery, 1906), 3.
18. Peter L. Petersen, “A Park for the Panhandle: The Acquisition and Development of Palo Duro State Park,” in *The Story of Palo Duro Canyon*, ed. Duane F. Guy (Canyon, Tex.: Panhandle-Plains Historical Society, 1978), 157.
19. Paul H. Ray and Sherry Ruth Anderson, *The Cultural Creatives: How 50 Million People Are Changing the World* (New York: Harmony Books, 2000).
20. Robert Mugerauer, *Interpreting Environments, Tradition, Deconstruction, Hermeneutics* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), 57–115.
21. Jack Cowart and Juan Hamilton, Letters selected by Sarah Greenough, Georgia O’Keeffe, *Art and Letters* (Boston: National Gallery of Art with Bulfinch Press, 1987), 156–57.
22. Elliott West, *The Contested Plains: Indians, Goldseekers, and the Rush to Colorado* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998), 159.
23. See Roxana Robinson, *Georgia O’Keeffe, A Life* (New York: Harper and Row, 1989), 157–59, 171–72.
24. An excellent catalogue and portrait of O’Keeffe on the High Plains is Sharyn R. Udall, *O’Keeffe and Texas* (San Antonio: Marion Koogler McNay Art Museum, 1998).
25. Janet Neugebauer, ed., *Plains Farmer: The Diary of William G. De Loach, 1914–1964* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1991).
26. Michael Johnston Grant, *Down and out on the Family Farm; Rural Rehabilitation in the Great Plains, 1929–1945* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002).
27. Visit USDA website www.usda.gov/nass/aggraphs/cropmap.htm and related NASS websites and interactive mapping tools. Extensive and up-to-date USDA data collections exist on the Web.
28. Emel and Roberts note an extensive arc of groundwater declines exceeding one hundred feet. Jacque Emel and Rebecca Roberts, “Institutional Form and Its Effect on Environmental Change: The Case of Groundwater in the Southern High Plains,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 85: 4 (December 1995): 671.
29. Elizabeth Brooks and Jaque Emel, with Brad Jokisch and Paul Robbins, *The Llano Estacado of the U.S. Southern High Plains: Environmental Transformation and the Prospect for Sustainability* (New York: United Nations University Press, 2000), 139.
30. Garry L. Nall, “A Century of Industrial Agriculture in the Panhandle,”

presentation, Texas State Historical Association, 104th Annual Meeting, Austin, Texas, 2 March 2000. The author is greatly indebted to Dr. Nall for his informed discussion of corporate agriculture on the High Plains of Texas.

31. Terrence Haverluk, "Hispanic Community Types and Assimilation," *The Professional Geographer* 50: 4 (November 1998): 465-80.

32. M. G. Conniff, "Texas and the Texans," *Farm and Ranch* (1905): 7267-288. This quote appears on 7267.

CHAPTER THREE

Droughts of the Past, Implications for the Future?

CONNIE WOODHOUSE

Elliott West's essay in this volume paints a picture of the Southern Plains as a region that, although spare and sparsely populated, has historically been rich with reserves of energy in the form of grasslands and bison. John Miller Morris's chapter chronicles the evolution of the region's agricultural development over the last century. Both essays make clear that climate has shaped the character of Southern Plains life and that drought has been one of the most influential characteristics of this climate. The Great Plains as a whole experiences a semiarid climate because it lies in the rain shadow of the Rocky Mountains. Moisture coming from the Pacific Ocean is largely blocked by the mountains, so most precipitation comes from the Gulf of Mexico in the form of spring and summer thunderstorms.¹ Across the Great Plains, annual rainfall tends to grade from wettest in the east to driest in the west, while temperatures range from warm in the south to cool in the north, making the Southern Plains the hottest, driest part of the Great Plains.² Consequently, it is not surprising that droughts are a common feature of the region.

Drought and the winds and blowing sands that accompany drought have played a crucial role in shaping the landscapes of the Southern Plains over the course of tens of thousands of years. They have also