Miranda

Revue pluridisciplinaire du monde anglophone /
Multidisciplinary peer-reviewed journal on the English-speaking world

11 | 2015

**Expressions of Environment in Euroamerican Culture /
Antique Bodies in Nineteenth Century British
Literature and Culture**

Preserving Home and Revising History: Legacies of the King Ranch of Texas

Nancy S. Cook

Electronic version

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/miranda/6936>

DOI: 10.4000/miranda.6936

ISSN: 2108-6559

Publisher

Université Toulouse - Jean Jaurès

Electronic reference

Nancy S. Cook, "Preserving Home and Revising History: Legacies of the King Ranch of Texas", *Miranda* [Online], 11 | 2015, Online since 20 July 2015, connection on 08 September 2022. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/miranda/6936> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/miranda.6936>

This text was automatically generated on 8 September 2022.

Creative Commons - Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International - CC BY-NC-ND 4.0
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

Preserving Home and Revising History: Legacies of the King Ranch of Texas

Nancy S. Cook

- 1 Founded in 1853 by Captain Richard King, the King Ranch, with 825,000 acres (roughly 334,000 hectares) or 1,289 square miles (3340 square kilometers) endures as one of the largest privately owned ranches in the world. Located in South Texas, near the Gulf of Mexico between Brownsville and Corpus Christi, King Ranch has, for a long time, been the most famous ranch in the world. Developed by King on land in the Wild Horse Desert threaded by Santa Gertudis Creek, the ranch comprises coastal prairies, arid plains, mixed brush lands, and marshes in a generally humid subtropical climate. Hot, humid summers, frequently mild winters, and an annual average precipitation of 25 inches make this country rich habitat for wildlife. Live oaks, mesquite, grass, and cacti cover miles of this mostly low, flat country. Great expanses of ranchland have preserved habitats for migrating birds, for quail, a wide range of mammals, as well as other species. With the development of underground water, it became viable as a cattle kingdom.
- 2 Since the 19th century the ranch has been the locus of powerful myths about cowboy culture and the ranching life, myths that were embodied as lived experience, and later marketed as a key component of the ranch corporation (Ashton and Sneed). The King Ranch has inspired a number of successful books, films, and television shows. Edna Ferber's 1952 novel *Giant*, said to have been modeled after the King Ranch, was adapted for the screen four years later and starred Rock Hudson, Elizabeth Taylor, and James Dean. Family life à la King Ranch also arrived in American living rooms by way of the dynastic Cartwright family of the long-running television series *Bonanza*, the Barkleys of *The Big Valley*, the Cannons of *High Chaparral* and the Ewings of *Dallas*.¹ Dozens of novels, histories, photography books, memoirs, and animal husbandry texts offer complex and conflicting portraits of the ranch itself and its exemplary expression of

power through its more than 160 years of history along the borderlands of the United States and Mexico.²

- 3 The term "ranch" has been used for everything from small parcels to multi-million acre agricultural enterprises, but in this essay, I define "ranch" as an area of land used primarily for raising and grazing livestock. While in the U.S. West, almost any small plot of land might be called a ranch, most small parcels—under 640 acres, or one section of land, cannot support ranching as a business.³ Terminology can be slippery, and my definition would stir debate in my home region. Ranches vary in size depending upon historical moment, climate, and location. In the history of North American ranching, one finds volatility, for livestock grazing practices and profitability change in response to shifts in accepted management practices, weather, economics, national and international policies, trade agreements, and laws. From environmental historians to range scientists, researchers have shown the often disastrous outcomes of the Homestead Act of 1862, which parceled Federal land into 160-acre tracts, dividing a large portion of the U.S. West into small square parcels.⁴ They, too, have demonstrated the equally problematic outcomes of land consolidation, corporate ownership,⁵ and industrial agriculture.
- 4 Since the 18th century in North America, and the 19th century in the United States, environmentally and socially complex communities have grown up around ranches. While they no longer drive western rural economies the way they once did, ranches remain important for several reasons: they still dominate the iconography and mythology of the "outback" American West; for many people, they are home, as well as a threatened homeland; and they serve as a proving ground for controversial theories about land use and conservation in the West.⁶ In contemporary ranching, one sees various efforts to live and work in ways that are environmentally, economically, and socially sustainable. As a survivor, the King Ranch continues to alter its course, and all its enterprises reflect that adaptation—from the Ranch's mission to preserve its wildlife and bird species, to its ongoing efforts in land preservation and sustainability, to its relentless promotion of the iconography and mythology of 19th-century ranching practices. With King Ranch, we can see at least two discourses in conflict: mythic beliefs about ranching that privilege family and place, legacy, authenticity, horses and cattle, versus ranching as a viable, even vibrant business that is corporate, varied, and serves the bottom line. King Ranch provides a useful example, for its growing pains, its contradictions, as well as its environmentally sustainable practices mirror changes occurring on smaller or less famous ranches all over the West. My analysis of King Ranch explores the messiness at the intersection of myth, metaphor and land use, focusing both on the stories about the Ranch and the stories the corporation tells, and thereby revealing the inadequacies of generalizations about such rangeland empires.
- 5 I come to this project after a lifetime of study. I grew up on ranches in California, Montana, and New Mexico. In my non-academic life, I manage a family ranch in south-central Montana. I watched my father spend his adult life "rehabilitating" ranches for a living, starting with my grandparents' ranch in northern California. He improved the land; increased livestock production; built roads, dams, and lakes (not reservoirs); remodeled houses; added airstrips; and then sold that ranch to some rich person in love with the beauty, the investment, and a fantasy of ranching as a "lifestyle." He would then buy another distressed property—an unloved piece of land somewhere else—and we'd move, raise livestock and start the process again. While my father understood the

dollar value of the aesthetics and mythologies of the American West, I remain more interested in the mythologies themselves: What are they exactly? How do they collide? How do they contradict one another? And how do they engage the actualities of ranching?

- 6 Under the rubric of "Place Studies," my study of the King Ranch seeks to complicate single theoretical or sub-disciplinary readings within American Studies. By bringing the tools of cultural geography, environmental, literary, and cultural studies together, along with methods outside the purview of these fields—methods from ranch management and range science—I suggest an alternative direction for American Studies. I'm also interested in using the strategies of literary criticism, with its attention to patterns, repetition, character, and narration to read extra-literary texts and artifacts. The King Ranch has been mythologized, studied, and marketed extensively in its more than 160 years of history, and its representations from numerous points of view offer a wealth of opportunities to examine ranching culture. For King Ranch, what started out as stories about stowaways and cowboys, cattle, and horses morphs into a very different tale of land consolidation, corporate ownership, and industrial agriculture.
- 7 In addition to looking at how old West myths both enable and disable contemporary ranching practices, which require adaptation to changing economies and environments, this essay traces social and cultural adaptations, as well as the ways power affects both the visibility and the definition of "home" as expressed by King Ranch Corporation's enterprises on the King Ranch and in Kingsville, Texas. As a framework, I begin with claims from two scholars working in geography. Edward W. Soja, in *Seeking Spatial Justice*, uses Edward Said's concept of the "struggle over geography"—a struggle that is "not only about soldiers and cannons but also about ideas, about forms, about images and imagining"—to articulate what he calls "consequential geography, a spatial expression that is more than just a background or set of physical attributes to be descriptively mapped" (Soja 1-2). Don Mitchell asks us to consider how power affects access to place and who exercises power within those places:

Starting from the simplest of ideas—that our actions, our lives, our relationships, our struggles must take *place*—requires us to immediately ask about what kinds of places (or spaces) those are, who does and does not have access to them, and who can and cannot exercise power over or within them (and under what conditions). (Mitchell 9)
- 8 With Soja, my interests here emphasize reciprocity—both how social processes shape geographies and how geographies actively affect these social processes and forms. Again, Soja: "everything spatial, at least with regard to the human world, is simultaneously and inherently socialized" (Soja 5-6). Many of our popularly used categories for thinking about place making, about stasis and mobility, especially as they are racialized and classed, remain inadequate to the task Don Mitchell asks us to consider. The changes in ranching practices at King Ranch have affected power relations, affected the work, and the community, while the creation of new enterprises and alterations within old ones has changed both land use and the land itself.
- 9 The struggle within the King Ranch Corporation is complex, and is always a struggle over geography. At issue on the King Ranch are the definitions and ideas of "home" and the memories and traditions that have power over or claims on the official Ranch history. As the privately-held family corporation with professional and non-family

officers adapts to demands from its agribusinesses, its corporate (family) shareholders, and public policies, it runs into conflict with its agricultural base: with the inhabitants of Kingsville, Texas, with ranch employees, family members, and the mythology it continues to promote.

- 10 The King Ranch, or more critically, the King Ranch Corporation, works assiduously to maintain "King Ranch" as a brand that represents the iconic American West. I plan to destabilize that image, to look at the contradictions, effacements, and consequences of such diligent branding of a place and a corporation. The King Ranch website, comprehensive, sophisticated, yet unilluminating, affords a view of the assiduous branding of an iconic ranch.⁷ Its depictions of ranch history, traditional, and contemporary land practices both perform and express its power over the ecology of the place, representations of that place, and the people who live there.
- 11 As a privately held corporation, the King Ranch has a very small public footprint outside what the corporation discloses on its website. One can find the names of a few executives, but corporate net worth, income, profits, a roster of the board of directors, or an accounting of dividends paid to family members elude public scrutiny. King Ranch controls its archives and works actively to suppress the dissemination of information that it considers not in the corporation's best interests. While corporate headquarters are now in Houston, Kingsville remains very much a company town, where the Corporation owns the newspaper and has close ties to Texas A& M University. Unlike most city booster organizations in the U.S., the Kingsville Chamber of Commerce keeps mum on business statistics for this town, and their website indicates they supply such information only on request.⁸ Since 1886, the principal family name of King Ranch heirs has been Kleberg—Robert Justus Kleberg (1853-1932) was Captain Richard King's legal adviser, became ranch manager after King's death in 1885, and in 1886, he married King's youngest daughter, Alice Gertrudis King. In south Texas, the name Kleberg is nearly as ubiquitous as King—the county, a hospital, schools, institutes, banks, and donor rolls bear that name. In Kleberg County, Texas, in Kingsville, and on the King Ranch, one rarely hears anything that deviates from the corporate line or policy. Although the King and Kleberg families' histories are intricately bound up with King Ranch and everything associated with it, the last family member to manage the ranch, Stephen "Tio" Kleberg, was forced to resign his position in April 1998.⁹
- 12 While an exemplar of the corporatization and industrialization of agriculture, the ranch promotes "green" land management practices. Visitors to the website learn that in the early 20th century, King heirs lobbied for hunting regulations, worked to restore wildlife species, and by 1945 King Ranch hired a full-time wildlife biologist, the first privately owned ranch to do so. Praised by Aldo Leopold, a founder of the modern environmental ethics movement and wildlife management in the U.S., and named a "Globally Important Bird Area" by the American Bird Conservancy, in many ways the King Ranch demonstrates cutting-edge green stewardship (king-ranch.com/stewardship-education). And yet, while plugging their environmentalist *bonafides*, the Ranch publicity machine conjures the mythology of the "birthplace of American ranching," evoking an era known for its insensitivity to the natural environment. The website highlights their early entry into "vertically integrated" enterprises, as it also works to show that diversification has been a hallmark of the Ranch since its origins. They present various non-ranch enterprises, such as turf, pecan, and orange juice

production, as a natural consequence of King Ranch history rather than a diversion from the cattle operation, essential in the iconography of ranching (king-ranch.com/operations).

- 13 The highly-designed and comprehensive King Ranch website mobilizes the vast and disparate enterprises of King Ranch Corporation in the service of a grand narrative that both insists upon and celebrates an unbroken line between old West and new. The site offers many threads under large categories such as: "The Legacy," "Operations," "Saddle Shop," "Stewardship and Education," "Texas Turf," and "Visit" (king-ranch.com). The quotations that follow come from the King Ranch website.
- 14 In "The Legacy," a sepia-toned photograph of the stern founder Richard King greets viewers while the text relates his rags-to-riches story. King, an eleven-year-old boy, indentured to and "practically enslaved" by a Manhattan jeweler, stowed away on a ship heading south, then worked his way up to be a steamboat captain—the website thus builds the mythology for this quintessential American entrepreneur. Established in 1853, with the purchase of a 15,500 dollar Mexican land grant known as Rincon de Santa Gertrudis, the King Ranch grew and prospered through King's hard work and innovation. The corporation fulfills King's own version of Manifest Destiny, for as the website insists: "King Ranch continues to foster a culture of uncompromising quality, stewardship, and authenticity—a true testament to Captain King's commitment and integrity" (king-ranch.com/legacy).
- 15 As a civilizer right out of Frederick Jackson Turner's 1893 frontier thesis, Richard King, along with his wife Henrietta, created "an oasis of gentility and warm hospitality in the very midst of an otherwise wild and often hostile country." The website narration carefully builds the legend. In 1854, in search of cattle to buy, King found a drought-stricken Mexican hamlet, moved them to his ranch and employed them:

The townspeople were in such dire straits that they sold all of their cattle to him in an attempt to survive the drought. A short distance out of town, slowly driving the cattle north toward Texas, Captain King realized that, in solving an immediate problem for the people of Cruillas, he had simultaneously removed their long-term means of livelihood. He turned his horse back toward the town and made its people a proposition. He would provide them with food, shelter and income if they would move and come to work on his ranch. The townspeople conferred and many of them agreed to move north with Captain King.

Already expert stockmen and horsemen, these resilient denizens of the rugged Mexican range became known as Los Kineños—King's people. They and many generations of their heirs would go on to weave a large portion of the historical tapestry of King Ranch. The expert Kineño cowboys now occupy a justifiably legendary place in the annals of the taming of the vast American West. The mystique of the Kineños is alive and well, and descendants of the original Cruillas residents still live and work on the ranch today – providing a vital link with the past and giving the ranch a key aspect of its unique atmosphere. (king-ranch.com/the legacy)
- 16 The website's language perpetuates the paternalism of Captain King. Here the Kineños offer exoticism and evidence of a harmonious bond across class and culture, an important element of the legacy. But the website also exposes traditions with more troubling implications. For example, "Captain King, ever the innovator, did a new thing on the land he was taming. He borrowed from two time-honored models—both the southern plantation and the Mexican *hacienda* systems to synthesize a hybrid approach to ranching on his burgeoning holdings" (king-ranch.com/legacy). And at various

locations the website conflates paternalism, dynasty, and husbandry as it displays photos of the founding fathers: human (Richard King), equine (Wimpy), and bovine (a Santa Gertrudis bull, not named in the photo).

- 17 From the beginning, cattle ranching was only one of King's many enterprises. As the website notes, "[t]he Civil War years found the resourceful Captain King thriving in his steamboat business by running the Union blockade, but his long-term vision was for the new ranch he was building" (king-ranch.com/legacy). "The Legacy" section continues with a page "After the War," here labeled "The War Between the States," cementing Confederate affiliations. Although diversified from the beginning, with sheep and goats, in addition to cattle and horses, the iconography of ranching in popular culture demands an emphasis on cattle and horses, so the sheep and goats have been eradicated from the texts and images on the King Ranch website—and the King Ranch no longer raises sheep or goats. The "Legacy" section includes a page on the famous "Running W" brand that appeared in the 1860s. It offers a series of explanations for possible origins of the brand, while coyly building myths rather than relaying facts:
Some have said that it represents one of the ranch's many diamondback rattlesnakes or the Santa Gertrudis Creek, while others are sure it signifies the sweeping horns of a Texas Longhorn bull. The Running W could also be interpreted as a section of a continuing wave pattern—signifying the uniting of the past with the present and suggesting continuity into the future. (king-ranch.com/legacy)
- 18 The "Running W" page supports the shopping section of the website, for King Ranch manufactures and licenses an array of products featuring the famous "Running W" brand. Each aspect of King Ranch history served up on the website promotes a King Ranch enterprise that viewers can directly or indirectly consume.
- 19 Following the "Running W" section, the King Ranch Museum page shows where tourists can go to "get a taste of the mythic past of King Ranch" and features pictures of displays including the custom 1949 Buick hunting car, "El Kineño" (king-ranch.com/legacy). The custom Buick as historical treasure makes a case, however implicitly, for the enduring cachet of products the tourist can buy, such as the King Ranch edition Ford F-150 truck, with the Running W brand signaling its King Ranch connection. In this case, the branding effort, equating King Ranch with the prestige of a custom automobile, serves as a rebranding, offering up a mass-produced Ford as a link to such status.
- 20 A page on "Horses" follows and features the 1946 Triple Crown winner "Assault." The page continues the rhetoric of legacy, offering lineages for the great thoroughbreds owned and bred by King Ranch. But this commitment to husbandry and the articulation of bloodlines can require awkward disclosures. Assault's legacy, according to this page, did not include progeny. Alas, he was a dud as a stud. (king-ranch.com/legacy). In many places on the website, the language builds on a coherent theme of virility, fecundity, hybridity, and hard work that paid off handsomely with accolades and financial success. Vital to this image were several innovative and successful breeding programs initiated by King. He refined the wild mustang—and the legacy was Wimpy, the first champion American Quarter Horse. King refined the longhorn, his heirs experimented with cattle breeding, and the ranch developed two new cattle breeds: the Santa Gertrudis and the Santa Cruz (king-ranch.com/operations).
- 21 In the King legacy, the theme of cross-fertilization is not confined to the animal kingdom. It also appears as cross-cultural: the villagers of Cruillas, Tamaulipas,

northern Mexico, pack up and move to King Ranch, and the legacy includes seven generations of Kineños. It manifests as cross-generational: a smart lawyer married into the King family and thus the legacy comprises four generations of Klebergs running King Ranch. However, amid all this continuity, one finds dead ends, lacunae, and non-sequiturs. The progressive arc of these King Ranch myths produces them, but it cannot account for them. It turns out the actual history is more complicated than the myth allows.

- 22 Often such inconsistencies result from two myths set on a collision course, as when the website takes up agriculture. One line of argument proposes that King Ranch is now and has always been profitable as an agricultural endeavor. This conflicts with reality. While the Ranch has been managed since its beginning as a capitalist enterprise, and as such, boasts about its "vertically integrated cattle enterprise," for example, it has also experienced financial setbacks because of economic depressions, estate taxes, extended droughts, imprudent expansion, and so on. But the myth of continuous profitability conflicts not only with history—for decades the "successful" agricultural enterprise benefitted from significant royalties from oil and gas drilling—but also, it contradicts the myth of environmental stewardship publicized in nearly every section of the King Ranch website.
- 23 King Ranch, for the most part, is in the commodities business. As such, it is a price taker, subject to the practices and demands of larger corporate, industrial, and economic forces, which rarely support innovation. The Ranch operates cattle feed lots; they are "the largest producer of orange juice in the U.S.;" one of the major sod producers; and they grow sugar cane, sweet corn, green beans, lettuce, milo, and cotton on their farms (king-ranch.com/operations). The Ranch also owns one of the biggest pecan processors and distributors in the world. And while the website touts the "best management practices," used by these enterprises, they are by no means fully "green" enterprises. The ranches use pesticides, but "judiciously." Agricultural and environmental scientists might argue that their choices of crops alone signal unsustainable practices. Even their newest cattle breed, the Santa Cruz, represents what many health and environmental advocates consider non-sustainable meat production, for it has been genetically selected for high marbling and fat content.¹⁰ King Ranch has embraced many cutting-edge land management practices, but the evidence lies buried in academic papers and trade journals. The website avoids specialist terminology, technical descriptions, and text-heavy pages, so none of these innovative practices merits specific mention. While the site repeatedly asserts the sustainable practices at King Ranch (and there are many on the Ranch), viewers see no concrete evidence of these practices.
- 24 In the discussion of King Ranch wildlife management on the website two seemingly incompatible discourses collide: hunting and wildlife preservation. While the text on the wildlife page praises the Ranch's longstanding commitment to wildlife—prominently posting a 1947 endorsement from conservationist Aldo Leopold—current wildlife specialists spend much of their time coordinating one of the Ranch's most financially successful enterprises: hunting. Photographs in the wildlife stewardship section bear a striking resemblance to the photos in the hunting section. Viewers might not discover this readily, for "Hunting" page appears under "Operations" tab while the "Wildlife" page appears under the tab "Stewardship and Education" (king-ranch.com/stewardship-education and king-ranch.com/operations). The text on the "Wildlife"

page boasts of species diversity and animal health, while the "Hunting" page offers price lists for trophy deer based on a Boone and Crockett score.¹¹ A trophy buck costs a hefty 25,000 dollars (king-ranch.com/operations/hunting/pricing-info-booking-status). Wildlife, then, occupies two positions: part natural legacy, part commodity. Although good wildlife management often includes animal culling, and hunting provides one method of doing so, the website offers no explanation of the relationship between hunting on the ranch and its wildlife management. The "Wildlife" page mentions hunting three times: the site notes voluntary hunting regulations for the ranch as early as 1912; one page mentions that in 1925 "400,000 acres of King Ranch was closed to hunting to allow deer and turkey populations to rebuild" (though there is no accompanying explanation of why these populations were so decimated); and finally, at the end of the Wildlife Manager's brief biography, we learn that he also guides hunting trips (king-ranch.com/stewardship-education/wildlife).

- 25 "Brush Management" is another heading under the tab "Stewardship and Education." Brush management was made visible both inside the U.S. and internationally by President George W. Bush, who claimed that "cutting brush" on his Crawford, Texas, ranch was one of his favorite activities. On the ranch, Bush posed for photos and, mimicking Tom Sawyer's talents with a fence and paint, occasionally asked journalists to pitch in. For Bush, this strenuous physical activity helped cement his status as a man of action, a man who wasn't afraid to take on hard tasks, and it allowed him to perform publicly his role as a western rancher and "cowboy President" (Rein). One wonders if "W" had volunteered to cut brush on the 825,000-acre King Ranch instead of his 1,600-acre Crawford Ranch, then he might have expressed enough machismo to avoid invading Iraq.
- 26 On the "Brush Management" page, contradictions and evasions abound. A part of ranch work since 1900, in this area of the Ranch website, brush management represents stewardship, and it is that. But it also provides a corrective to historical practices on King Ranch. What caused the encroachment of invasive plant species on historic grasslands that require such diligent restoration work? According to the site, "frequent and extended droughts" (blame nature), the cessation of fire, and "lack of grazing deferment," which is a new way of saying overgrazing. On the website, this legacy conveniently dates back to 1900, with the beginning of brush whacking and avoids going back to the 1850s, for to do so might force an acknowledgement of overgrazing by the founding father.
- 27 According to second-generation King Ranch boss, Robert Kleberg, Sr., this overzealous weed whacking done by hand (by cheap "little Mexican" day labor until the 1940s), might have continued unabated—albeit with continued technological innovation, such as the root plow in the photograph on the "Brush Management" page (Monday and Colley, 38). In the 1970s, however, Stephen "Tio" Kleberg realized that the brush was good wildlife habitat, and hunting was a profitable enterprise, so currently roughly thirty-five percent of each pasture remains brush. This last example suggests that because of human manipulation and land use practices, the spaces of King Ranch have changed over time, and those changes have a complex history, but that this history has little part in the myth-making business that is so much part of King Ranch.
- 28 Some years ago, in conjunction with Texas A& M in Kingsville, King Ranch developed a graduate program in Ranch Management, promoting much of the cutting-edge work in management practice, range and animal science. King Ranch—along with a large ranch

in New Mexico owned by Ted Turner, a Florida operation owned by the Mormon Church, and the historic Padlock Ranch in Wyoming—acts as a "host ranch" for fieldwork.¹² But, as the list of available courses shows, "cutting edge" doesn't necessarily mean "green." Students select from courses in business, wildlife management, animal science, and agribusiness. There is a course, for example, titled "Biopolitics and Public Relations," but there are no courses in sustainability—routinely taught in environmental science programs throughout the US. They have recently added, on an *ad hoc* basis, a systems theory lecture, but no course. They offer an annual lecture on "Human Resource Management," but provide none of the intensive sessions on human relationships found in programs such as those offered by Ranch Management Consultants. The website features the King Ranch Institute of Ranch Management as a cornerstone of King Ranch's "environmental stewardship," but it offers no detailed information to substantiate its claims (king-ranch.com/stewardship-education). And without evidence of its considerable and often innovative efforts, it represents ranching as an endeavor belonging to the past and tradition rather than a vibrant and viable business in the 21st century.

- 29 In the twenty-first century, mythmaking has become perhaps the most important enterprise in the ranching business. The mythmaking enterprise may be the most crucial work, for without myths about rags to riches, Western grit, Western rugged individualism, Western invincibility—ranchers would certainly be subject to unfavorable legislation addressing agricultural practices, inheritance, taxation, environmental mitigation, property rights, and other land use issues. While as a rule, ranchers do not disclose the size of their holdings, as suggested by the best-selling book *Never Ask a Man the Size of His Spread*, superlatives have become a necessary part of the King Ranch myth and message. The website insists on enumerating the details of acreage; counting enormous quantities of cattle, horses, birds, or deer; aggrandizing the daily life of family members; and measuring nearly everything. While the King Ranch has been notorious in its attempts to protect the privacy of family shareholders, corporate workings, holdings, and earnings, and for its efforts to limit access to archives and information, both the website and some of its newer enterprises work in the opposite direction. The superlatives have helped sell registered cattle and the registered American Quarter Horses, and are a cornerstone of the hunting enterprise, with its high prices for trophy deer. Essential to the tourism enterprise, superlatives sell. This isn't a new strategy for large estates needing to bring in some cash. One thinks of the great houses and estates in the United Kingdom, Chatsworth among them, that offer house tours to raise money.
- 30 Hyperbole brings in dollars—"the first" to do this, "the largest" of that, "the most" or "the best" of its kind—and King Ranch furniture, leather goods, visitor ticket sales, and marketing arrangements with the Ford Motor Company all work superlatives for profit. Ford advertisements featuring King Ranch and the Kineños reflect a "best of the Old West" mentality when used to unveil new models of the special edition "King Ranch" vehicles at trade shows. The King Ranch "Running W" brand and mythology puts tens of thousands of King Ranch Ford F150s trucks and Explorer SUVs on American roads every day (ford.com).
- 31 In Ford truck ads, Kineños model authenticity and provide a link between a glorious ranching past and an eight-cylinder future. So how do the demands made by such mythologies affect the people? How did these politics play out among the owners and

workers of the King Ranch? Among the things notably missing from the elaborate King Ranch website are the last sixty years of family life on the Ranch, including the stories of both King heirs, the Kineños, and other ranch workers; the sounds of Spanish, the language of ranch work for over 160 years; images of life beyond the handling of livestock; images of the Kineños' and other ranch housing; or images of the cemetery.

- 32 The King Ranch Corporation, King family members, the Kineños, each and all make claims on the King Ranch narrative. I want to return here to the Kineños, mentioned earlier as part of Richard King's legendary founding of the ranch. King Ranch was built upon, and for more than 160 years, dependent upon the labor of Mexicans and Tejanos¹³, called "Kineños," and operated, according to one Kineño, "like a medieval village" (Griest). As we saw earlier, the King Ranch website encourages such a characterization when it claims that Richard King "borrowed from two time-honored models—both the southern plantation and the Mexican *hacienda* systems to synthesize a hybrid approach to ranching on his burgeoning holdings" (king-ranch.com/legacy). But, like much of the website's text, this assertion mischaracterizes and simplifies the owner-worker relationships on King Ranch. As historian Ana Carolina Castillo Crimm points out:

The patriarchal relationship between King and his Kineños . . . derived as much from the Spanish patriarchal *latifundio* as from the paternalism of the southern plantation. . . . A *latifundio* was an hacienda of immense size, most often found in the drier climates of Northern Mexico. . . . [T]he Kineños . . . were privileged and protected laborers, immune to depressions and layoffs, and, although there was a company store, they never faced the evils of debt-peonage. (xvi-xix)¹⁴

- 33 For all injustices common descriptions of this system imply, the end of this "patron" system was very difficult for those whose families have lived on the Ranch for generations. In some ways, the legacies and traditions hyped by the corporation expose the changes that have occurred over time. The mythology asserts itself most strenuously at the points where change has been radical or sudden. In the 1980s, as the first non-family corporate officers demanded that the Ranch reduce its staff significantly, forcing the often-abrupt departure of life-long employees, it continued to extol the "special relationship" of the Kineños to King Ranch.
- 34 The King Ranch, as a case study, offers a way to look at how different people become placed, how they think about home, and the ways people have to think about their identity. The Kineños, by and large, identify King Ranch as home. For many Kineño families, five, six, and seven generations have lived and worked on the Ranch, and intermarried, creating a cohesive community with its own traditions, social life, and memories. In the 1980s, the King Ranch Corporation began implementing a series of policy changes that, by 2000, effectively disrupted much of that tradition. Until then, King Ranch had been known for its uncommon version of the patron system, one far more hospitable to and respectful of its worker families than most. By the late twentieth century, altered corporate policy required that lifelong workers choose between remaining in family housing on the Ranch for life or receiving retirement benefits, including money, but forfeiting on-ranch housing. This change in King Ranch corporate policy—where each enterprise had to make its own way—also responded to a clarification from the U.S. Internal Revenue Service about non-monetary compensation as taxable income to Kineños and King heirs alike.
- 35 This shift has been extraordinarily disruptive for the Kineños in many ways. What had been their home—a stable place for workers and their ancestors for more than 160

years—no longer was a given, and was, in fact, negotiable. This change, resulting in a threatened home place, alters Kineño identity in important ways. In American popular culture as well as in public policy, we tend to think of manual laborers, such as Latino workers, as a lower class that is socially static but geographically mobile. No matter how long their tenure in a single community, Latino, Chicano, and Tejano workers are often imagined to be migrant, and as recent laws, such as the one in Arizona, indicate, always already "undocumented." These representations render mobility itself as a raced and classed characteristic, with extraordinary mobility reserved for the top (globe-trotting elites, such as family stockholders of King Ranch) and bottom (homeless migrant workers) of the class hierarchy. In the West, Anglos have often deployed long-term tenure in a place as a marker of status, and from that status, certain rights are presumed to follow. Many a reactionary and exclusionary conversation in the rural West begins with a claim that goes something like this: "My family has ranched this land for four generations, and . . ."

- 36 Nevada rancher Cliven Bundy made international news in 2014 because he instigated an armed resistance to efforts by the Bureau of Land Management to confiscate his cattle. Bundy, who made extensive use of public lands to graze his cattle for years, refused to pay grazing fees to the federal government. One journalist summarized the story this way:

Bundy claims that since his ranch operation, run by his family for more than 100 years, was grazing cattle before the BLM existed, his fees should be paid to the state, not Washington. More than 1,000 supporters, including armed militia members, joined Bundy at his ranch in a standoff with federal agents. ("Cliven Bundy Says")

- 37 The latest foot soldier in the so-called "Sagebrush Rebellion" that began decades earlier in the western United States, Bundy gained extensive news coverage and support from right-wing politicians and media in the United States and forced the U.S. government to stand down. The controversy became more complicated, when on camera, Mr. Bundy espoused his racist views about "the Negro" and "the Mexican." In a television interview with Sean Hannity, one of Bundy's supporters began his comments by claiming that certain rights arose from his family's long association with the land:

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: My family and the community has run these hills and enjoyed these hills for generations. Never once in the history of this nation have those mountains ever been restricted from us. And yet this week, they were. ("Cliven Bundy on Harry Reid")

- 38 In these instances, authenticity in the rural West seems to follow "naturally" from length of tenure, but this qualification, of necessity, excludes Native Americans. The myths that link stability with authenticity and with power persist in the rural West, but the more common story is one of displacement. Take, for example, people making Sunday visits, by permission of the current owner, to formerly owned ranches, homesteads, cabins, and cemeteries. These people, often made landless before or during the Great Depression, struggle to negotiate emotional attachment and historical affiliation with place on the one hand, and changing ownership and private property rights on the other. In the rural West, detailed examinations of local maps and phonebooks reveal a history of displacement and repeated reshuffling of private land. Large ranches that refer to units by a previous owner's name or the homestead named on the map index families exiled to surrounding towns. Their names persist, but few

still own the land of their predecessors. And throughout the West, the reshuffling rarely acknowledges first occupants even through Native place names abound.

- 39 The King Ranch website replays and twists concepts of authenticity rising from length of tenure to the land in interesting ways. Although some Kineños lived on what became the King Ranch during the era of Mexican land grants, their story is suppressed in favor of the legend wherein Richard King hires and moves an entire Mexican village and their livestock in 1854. Rather than refer to these ranch workers as Tejanos, which emphasizes their deep roots in northern Mexico or south Texas, the relocation myth situates these workers as immigrants, along with Mr. King, an immigrant of Irish heritage from New York City. Paralleling King and the Mexicans as immigrants places them on equal footing, and any suggestion of land appropriation (even when legally purchased) on the part of King is neatly averted.
- 40 Nearly all the treatments of Kineños emphasize their skills as vaqueros, the expert horsemen and livestock handlers out of the Spanish tradition. In fact, the number of horsemen who work livestock has steadily declined since the 1970s, and many Kineños toiled in other areas of the ranch and business, working in the household, offices, off-ranch stores, as well as other enterprises. The website emphasizes the Kineños long tenancy on King Ranch, their loyalty, and the paternalism with which King heirs treat them. But the story is more complicated. The name "Kineño" moves in two directions at once: "King's men," implying the medieval-village relationship of master to servant, but the term also ties Tejanos of many generations to a location, the King Ranch, asserting a claim to the place that is more powerful in some ways than corporate shares. Each of the four generations of King heirs who managed the ranch spoke Spanish, the language of working ranches in south Texas. Tejano culture and Anglo culture blended under such circumstances, and all ranch residents engaged within that blended culture.
- 41 What in the West we might call "stickers," the Kineños represent a commitment to place at least as old, and in some cases older than that of the King family's 1853 settlement of King Ranch. In opposition to the mythologies about "itchy" feet and constant relocation featured in quintessential American examples from Daniel Boone to Wallace Stegner's characters in *Big Rock Candy Mountain* and *Angle of Repose*, both Kineños and a fair number of King heirs have stayed put, rooted in one place. Unlike many American stories that depict repeated relocation throughout the last half of the 19th century, and nearly all of the 20th century, the Kineños never had land to lose. And in contrast to many other places where workers lived at the sufferance of the landowner, Kineños, with their traditions and multi-generational commitment to the King Ranch, have been integral both to the success of the ranch *and* to its mythology.
- 42 The King and Kleberg heirs have understood this shared legacy for more than 160 years. One story, passed along in the Kleberg family, goes something like this. During the long reign of Robert Justus Kleberg, Jr., a woman visitor approached an old man who was puttering around near the headquarters. She opened a conversation by asking him if he worked there; he acknowledged that he did. "Then you work for my friend Bob Kleberg!" "No, señora," the man answered. "I work for King Ranch. Mr. Kleberg, he work for King Ranch too" (Cypher, 38).
- 43 For several generations, King family heirs have moved around the world, leaving their traditions and their strong sense of identification with the place to a handful of Klebergs, who have a deep commitment to ranching, and to the Kineños. Interviewed

for an article in *Texas Monthly*, Janell Kleberg underscores an important distinction between attachment and ownership:

"What you have to understand if you work for this family," she says, "is that none of this is yours — not the land, not the houses, not the horses that you grow to love. That's hard to remember. And it's hard to teach your children. Like us, they tend to think it's theirs. It's not. Everything belongs to the ranch, and the ranch belongs to the family. Keeping the family and the ranch together is more important than any of us." (Broyles)

44 But unlike the Kleberg family, the Kineños hold no shares in the privately held King Ranch Corporation. They cannot reserve rooms in the "Big House," which now serves as an exclusive hotel where family members must book and pay for accommodations. They cannot lease their homes from the corporation once they retire or their employment is terminated. And so in the 21st century, they find themselves removed from both job and their home when they are fired, quit, or reach retirement. In blogs, videos, and websites, one can find complex responses to the relocation of the Kineños.

45 While the King Ranch version of the patron system had problems, which have been suggested obliquely in some of the published narratives and oral histories of Kineño life, the corporatization of ranch policies and practices disrupted traditions on a ranch that markets tradition vigorously.¹⁵ On-ranch populations of employees and their families fell from about 1,200 in the 1950s to approximately 300 in 2007, of whom about 45 are cowboys, down from about 400 (Gwynne, 124). I have no access to current on-ranch residency numbers, but the total number of employees on the corporation payroll as of last year was 376, making the ranch the fourth largest employer in Kingsville (Kingsville Economic Development Council).

46 What happens when one's home, a place continuously occupied by one's family and ancestors for several generations, lies behind a locked gate that guards the property of a large private corporation? In the United States, most people live in housing that belongs to someone else, but commonly the discussion about the politics of landlords and tenants considers only urban places. In the rural West, the conversation continues to be dominated by the Cliven Bundy conversation, one that celebrates one kind of extra-legal inhabitation, while other kinds, such as that by "illegal aliens," are condemned. When Stephen "Tio" Kleberg, the last family member to manage the Ranch, was forced to resign by the Board of Directors on April 23, 1998, a flurry of newspaper and magazine articles followed. The Kingsville newspaper, owned by King Ranch Corporation, covered the story in a cursory fashion as if copying a press release, but Kleberg and his wife gave interviews to Mary Lee Grant, a reporter from the nearby Corpus Christi *Caller-Times*. Of Kleberg, the reporter writes:

He says that he won't be working cattle or participating in roundups — the work he loved most. "That's not my place anymore," he said. "I could, as a shareholder and a board member. But it's kind of a love-hate relationship. I love the people, but if I work here, who would I be helping?" ...Kleberg said he thinks that stockholders have enough feeling for the King Ranch in South Texas not to sell it off anytime soon, but that he isn't sure how long the piece of land he has devoted his life to will remain intact. (Grant, "A Corporate End")

47 Others weren't so sure. Another article quotes Bruce Cheeseman, archivist for the King Ranch:

I have this terrible feeling in my stomach and heart and head, that it has all been diminished. It's another investment, it's another return; vis á vis Tio Kleberg—he's expendable. He is one of the most honest men I have ever known. He is a straight

shooter. In this complicated world, honesty can get you in trouble. (Grant, "Clash" *Livestock Weekly*)¹⁶

- 48 Kleberg told the reporter one son was in college "back east" and the other was about to go to Brazil to head up the ranch's cattle operations there. He was very sad, however, that his children could not look forward to the possibility of succeeding him.

"No, it's over," he said, his voice suddenly brusque.

"It's the end of an era. History will say how it turned out."

The reporter ends the piece about Tio Kleberg by discussing how vital he was to day-to-day ranch operations and ranch history.

The King Ranch without the Klebergs will be hard to imagine, said Trevino, the Kineño. "It will be very strange to be on a roundup to look behind us and to look in front of us and our friend is not there." (Grant, "A Corporate End")

- 49 In a separate story in the same issue, Janell Kleberg, Tio's wife, describes the dramatic impact that the corporatization of the ranch had on the community at large:

"This corporate mentality that has taken over the ranch is like the Black Plague in Europe," she said. "It is destroying our whole culture. It has destroyed 100 years of evolution of a very special type of community. Once it's gone, it can't be replaced." Since her husband was asked to resign by King Ranch President Jack Hunt on April 23, [1998] she feels she is no longer a part of the world to which she has devoted so much of her life and work. "I feel cut off," she said. "There is no place in this community for people who don't work."

- 50 Given Tio's success, she did not understand why corporate officers wanted to get rid of him—Janelle Kleberg:

We have been treated vengefully and cruelly," she said. "We actually thought we were going to have to move out of our house by June 1. Tio was given no retirement. We have operated in a world of honor, a world where a man's handshake counted. Maybe we have been sheltered (Grant, "We Went through the Days").

- 51 The Internal Revenue Service ruled earlier that several King Ranch policies violated U.S. tax policies, and so King family scion Tio Kleberg had to lease his family home from the corporation while he managed the Ranch. When Kleberg was no longer employed at the Ranch, the corporation allowed him to extend the lease on his home for several years, but not indefinitely. Tio and Janell Kleberg continue to live in Kingsville and have an address that might be on the King Ranch, but county records show no privately-owned home of theirs on the tax rolls (locatefamily.com, klebergcad.org).

- 52 In one newspaper interview, a 65-year old Kineño, the great-granddaughter of an original Kineño and the widow of a Kineño cowboy, in "colony" housing, feared for the future under non-family corporate CEO Jack Hunt: "He doesn't understand what it is like to love this land that our ancestors have worked on. I feel like what Hunt is trying to do is erase history." For many retiring Kineños, a move off the Ranch not only dislocates them from their home, but also it represents a social and economic dislocation—in housing, standard of living, community, and status. One Kineño feared that corporate changes would force her to "live apart from the graves of her ancestors" (Grant, "Cowboys at Crossroads"). Janell Kleberg voiced some of the issues involving the end of the patron system:

I couldn't bear to see the people I had worked with for 28 years crying. The people say, 'If they hurt Tio like they did, what will they do to us?' " she said. "And I don't know how to answer. Our lives have been so intertwined with these people," she said. "If someone is in the hospital or sick or injured, we felt responsible. Since Tio has been fired, people are coming to the house and saying 'What should we do?'

One woman said that her daughter is on a heart monitor. She asked me if she should look for another job, if she should move into town. I don't know what to tell people. (Grant, "We Went through the Days")

- 53 Janell Kleberg responded several years later by creating a coffee-table book of her photographs showing traditional King Ranch life in south Texas, Brazil, Argentina and Australia. Published in 2003, *Waiting for Daylight* features Kleberg's thirty years of photographs while working cattle from horseback.

- 54 As opposed to the Kineños' sense of their heritage, most of the King and Kleberg heirs of the fourth through sixth generations have not had anything to do with ranching or Kingsville. Family members on the King Ranch Board of Directors scrambled, as one family board member puts it, to "think of ways to engage them with the idea of what the ranch is and what it does" (Gwynne, 196). Although the corporation moved its headquarters to Houston in 1989, the annual board meeting continues to be held at the Ranch, along with a series of summer programs designed to engage the heirs enough in ranch life for them to want to keep it. The King Ranch images used so prominently on the website and in the Ford Motor Company marketing promote a ranch vision that can keep the heirs devoted to the mythology, and thereby dedicated to the ranch itself. Apparently, the corporation needs to keep family members interested in the Ranch while keeping them away from active management of the ranch. Beginning in the 1970s, the board of directors has liquidated underperforming assets such as the Kentucky thoroughbred farm and the ranches in Spain, Morocco, Venezuela, Argentina, Australia, and Brazil, while it has distributed larger dividends to the shareholders (family members) so that there will be less temptation to sell the Ranch as just one more underperforming asset. For the sake of the Kingsville community, for the Kineños and their families, and for the ecosystem, one hopes that the family stockholders of King Ranch buy the mythology on the website. For King Ranch to survive, it must instill a connection to the place deeper than a dividend check. It must be more to them than just marketable real estate.¹⁷ As Tio Kleberg put it in 1998, the year he was fired:

It's possible you'll see the next generations sell off hundreds of thousands of acres of the old family property so they can bring some better dividends for that year," Tio says. "I know it happens in other families all the time. I just never thought it would happen to this one. (Hollandsworth, 8)

- 55 Ironically, Tio Kleberg, with his handlebar mustache, his Western attire, his nonsense statements, and his interests in hunting and cutting horses, remains the icon of the ranching tradition of King Ranch, as myriad photos suggest.¹⁸ But keeping King Ranch alive by promoting it as a set of myths risks turning it into a museum. As Janell Kleberg put it, while describing a neighboring ranch founded, too, in the 1850s:

It was so sad to see it like it is now, like a museum. There were no cowboys. It was so quiet. But I could almost hear the cowboys. I hope there never comes a time when the King Ranch is like that. Because what this ranch is all about is the life that's associated with it. It's like Tio told the employees after he was fired. 'Without the people, it's just another piece of dirt.' (Grant, "We Went Through the Days")

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Ashton, John and Edgar P. Sneed, "KING RANCH," *Handbook of Texas Online*. Texas State Historical Association, 15 June 2010. Web. 4 Sept. 2014.

Benavides, Adán Jr., "TEJANO," *Handbook of Texas Online*. Texas State Historical Association, 15 June 2010. Web. 4 Sept. 2014.

The Big Valley. ABC. 1965-69. Television.

Bonanza. NBC. 1959-73. Television.

"Boone and Crockett Club." *Boone-crockett.org*. Boone and Crockett Club, 2014. Web. 15 March 2014.

Broyles, William. "The Last Empire." *Texas Monthly*. Texas Monthly, Oct. 1980. Web. 15 March 2014.

Cavazos, Bobby. *The Cowboy from the Wild Horse Desert: A Story of the King Ranch*. n.p: Larksdale, 1999. Print.

Cavazos, Lauro. *A Kineño Remembers: From the King Ranch to the White House*. College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 2006. Print.

"Cliven Bundy on Harry Reid." *Foxnews.com*. Fox News, 15 April 2014. Web. 26 April 2014.

"Cliven Bundy Says Slavery Better for Blacks." *wnd.com*. New York Times, 24 April 2014. Web. 26 April 2014.

Colley, Betty Bailey and Jane Clements MONDAY, with Beto MALDONADO. *The Master Showmen of King Ranch: The Story of Beto and Librado Maldonado*. Austin: U of Texas P, 2009. Print.

---. *Tales of the Wild Horse Desert*. Austin: U of Texas P, 2001. Print.

Crimm, A. Carolina Castillo. Introduction. *Voices from the Wild Horse Desert: the Vaquero Families of the King and Kenedy Ranches*. By Jane Clements Monday and Betty Bailey Colley. Austin: U of Texas P, n1997. xv-xxxvii. Print.

Cross, Kim. "The Grass-fed vs. Grain-fed Beef Debate." *CNN.com*. 29 March 2011. Web. 4 Sept. 2014.

Cypher, John. *Bob Kleberg and the King Ranch: A Worldwide Sea of Grass*. Austin: U of Texas P, 1995. Print.

Dallas. CBS. 1978-91. TNT. 2012-. Television.

Ferber, Edna. *Giant*. NY: Doubleday, 1952. Print.

Ford.com. Ford Motor Company, 2014. Web. 15 March 2014.

Giant. Dir. George Stevens. Warner Bros, 1956. Film.

Graham, Don. *Kings of Texas: The 150-Year Saga of an American Ranching Empire*. Hoboken, N.J: Wiley, 2003. Print.

Grant, Mary Lee. Grant, Mary Lee. "A Corporate End to a Cowboy Era." *Corpus Christi Caller- Times*. Corpus Christi Caller-Times. 16 Aug. 1998. Web. 15 March 2014.

---. "Clash With Corporate Culture Ended Heir's King Ranch Reign." *Livestock Weekly*. AP. 3 Sept. 1998. Web. 15 March 2014.

- . "Cowboys at the Crossroads." *Corpus Christi Caller-Times*. Corpus Christi Caller-Times. 6 Sept. 1998. Web. 15 March 2014.
- . "We Went Through the Days With Our Hearts Breaking." *Corpus Christi Caller-Times*. Corpus Christi Caller-Times. 16 Aug. 1998. Web. 15 March 2014.
- Griest, Stephanie Elizondo. "The King Ranch, Just Another Slice of Corporate American Pie?". *UStrek.org*. World Trek for Service and Education, 2000. Web. 15 March 2014.
- Gwynne, S.C. "The Next Frontier." *Texas Monthly* Aug. 2007: 110-125, 178-181, 193-196. Print.
- High Chaparral*. NBC. 1967-71. Television.
- Hollandsworth, Skip. "When We Were Kings." *Texas Monthly* Aug. 1998. Web. 14 March 2014.
- "Kingsville Chamber of Commerce." *Kingsville.org*. Kingsville, Texas Chamber of Commerce, 2013. Web. 15 March 2014.
- "Kingsville Economic Development Council." *Kingsvilleedc.org*. Kingsville Economic Development Council, 2013. Web. 15 March 2014.
- "Kleberg." *Locatefamily.com*. n.d. Web. 15 March 2014.
- "Kleberg." *Klebergcad.org*. Kleberg County Appraisal District, n.d. web. 15 March 2014.
- Kleberg, Janell. *Waiting for Daylight: King Ranch: Images From The Past*. Ketchum, ID: Stoecklein Publishing, 2003. Print.
- Lea, Tom. *The King Ranch*. Boston: Little, Brown and Co, 1957. Print.
- "Legacy." *King-ranch.com*. King Ranch. n.d. Web. 15 March 2014.
- Limerick, Patricia Nelson. *Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West*. NY: Norton, 1987. Print.
- Mitchell, Don. Interview. *What Makes Justice Spatial? What Makes Spaces Just? Three Interviews on the Concept of Spatial Justice*. Special issue of *Critical Planning* 14 (2007): 7-15. Web. 15 March 2014.
- Monday, Jane Clements and Betty Bailey Colley. *Voices from the Wild Horse Desert: the Vaquero Families of the King and Kenedy Ranches*. Austin: U of Texas P, 1997. Print.
- Montana, Gladiola. *Never Ask a Man the Size of His Spread: A Cowgirl's Guide to Life*. (1993). Layton, UT: Gibbs Smith, 2009. Print.
- "Operations." *King-ranch.com*. King Ranch. n.d. Web. 15 March 2014.
- Rein, Lisa. "Down on the Ranch, President Wages War on the Underbrush." *Washington Post*. Washington Post, 31 Dec. 2005. Web. 15 March 2014.
- Robinson, Jo. *Eatwild.com*. Jo Robinson, 14 March 2014. Web. 15 March 2014.
- . *Pasture Perfect: How You Can Benefit from Choosing Meat, Eggs, and Dairy Products from Grass-Fed Animals*. Vashon, WA: Vashon Island P, 2004. Print.
- . *Why Grassfed Is Best!: The Surprising Benefits of Grassfed Meats, Eggs, and Dairy Products*. Vashon, WA: Vashon Island P, 2000. Print.
- "Saddle Shop." *King-ranch.com*. King Ranch. n.d. Web. 15 March 2014.
- Smith, Henry Nash. *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth*. (1959). Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1970. Print.

Soja, Edward. *Seeking Spatial Justice*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2010. Print.

Stegner, Wallace. *Angle of Repose*. (1971). NY: Penguin Classics, 2000. Print.

---. *Big Rock Candy Mountain*. (1943). NY: Penguin, 1991. Print.

"Stewardship and Education." *King-ranch.com*. King Ranch. n.d. Web. 15 March 2014.

The Stockman Grass Farmer. 1947-. Print.

"Texas Turf." *King-ranch.com*. King Ranch. n.d. Web. 15 March 2014.

Turner, Frederic Jackson. "The Significance of the Frontier in American History." *Rereading Frederick Jackson Turner: The Significance of the Frontier in American History, and Other Essays*. Ed. John Mack Faragher. NY: Holt, 1994.

"Visit." *King-ranch.com*. King Ranch. n.d. Web. 15 March 2014.

Worster, Donald. *Under Western Skies: Nature and History in the American West*. Oxford, UK and NY: Oxford UP, 1992. Print.

NOTES

1. These shows were some of the most popular in television history. *Bonanza* aired on NBC from 1959 to 1973 ; *The Big Valley* on ABC from 1965-1969 ; *High Chaparral* on NBC from 1967-1971 ; and *Dallas* aired on CBS from 1978 to 1991, followed by a later version on TNT beginning in 2012.
2. King Ranch has inspired an extensive bibliography of books and articles. Among those consulted, but not quoted here, Tom Lea's two volume book, *The King Ranch*, published in 1957 with the cooperation of the Kleburg family, and Don Graham's *Kings of Texas : The 150-Year Saga of an American Ranching Empire*, published in 2004, are among the most notable.
3. Following the U.S. Public Land Survey System, a section of land equals 1 square mile, or about 640 acres (260 hectares).
4. For discussions of the effects of the Homestead Acts on the U.S. West, see Henry Nash Smith's *Virgin Land : The American West as Symbol and Myth*, Patricia Nelson Limerick's *Legacy of Conquest : The Unbroken Past of the American West*, and Donald Worster's *Under Western Skies : Nature and History in the American West*, among others.
5. Corporate ownership can take many forms in contemporary US ranching businesses. Many smaller family-run operations have incorporated as a means to protect the owners from personal liability, to garner more favorable tax policies, and for estate planning.
6. In the U.S. West controversies about ranching, including ranching on public lands, abound. Some environmentalists seek to eliminate domestic cattle as a contributor to greenhouse gases, some seek to restore large swaths of the western prairie to buffalo range, and still others object to what they consider government subsidies for livestock grazing on public land.
7. I have examined the King Ranch website (www.king-ranch.com) multiple times per year since 2010 and the text and images have changed over time. My analysis has been based on these multiple visits. The text and images I refer to here may not be available to the reader. I have screen shots from some of my visits and can make those available to interested readers.
8. The Kingsville Chamber of Commerce website used to indicate that information would be supplied upon request. In September 2014, even that information has disappeared. One must find (there is no link from the Chamber of Commerce site) the Kingsville Economic Development Council website to find even a single statistic about employment numbers for King Ranch.
9. As this was an unprecedented move—Stephen "Tio" Kleberg had managed the ranching operation for over 20 years and a King heir had always managed the Ranch—Kleberg's forced

resignation made national news. Several articles cited later detail this important personnel change.

10. The debate about grain finished versus grass finished beef continues in both health and environmental advocate circles. For a taste test that includes background on the debates, see the Kim Cross article "The Grass-fed vs. Grain-fed Beef Debate." Jo Robinson has published books, including *Why Grassfed Is Best* and *Pasture Perfect*, along with posts on her website www.eatwild.com. For technical discussions from a grazer's perspective, see numerous articles in *The Stockman Grass Farmer*.

11. A Boone and Crockett score remains the official means of evaluation for trophy big game in North America, some 125 years after the club's founding by the President Theodore Roosevelt and George Bird Grinnell. For details, see the Boone and Crockett Club website.

12. The fieldwork ranches offer four very different ecosystems and indicate that the educators involved understand that *where* one ranches is a crucial component of *how* one ranches. A disagreement over the peculiarities of cattle raising in south Texas led, in part, to the termination of Tio Kleberg as Ranch Manager in 1998.

13. According to "The Handbook of Texas," published by the Texas Historical Society, the "term *Tejano* . . . denotes a Texan of Mexican descent.. Increasingly, *Tejano*, as a term denoting regional identity, referred to Mexican Texans of the 19th and 20th centuries and to the Hispanic Texans of the Spanish era" (Adán Benavides, Jr., "TEJANO").

14. Castillo Crimm examines the labor situation in 1850s Texas in some detail. For descriptions of *rancho*, *hacienda*, and *latifundio* enterprises, see her Introduction to *Voices from the Wild Horse Desert: The Vaquero Families of the King and Kenedy Ranches*.

15. For accounts of Kineño life, see *The Cowboy From the Wild Horse Desert: A Story of the King Ranch*, by Bobby Cavazos ; *A Kineño Remembers: From the King Ranch to the White House*, by Lauro F. Cavazos ; *The Master Showmen of King Ranch: The Story of Beto and Librado Maldonado*, by Betty Bailey Colley and Jane Clements Monday with Beto Maldonado ; *Tales of the Wild Horse Desert*, by Colley and Monday ; and *Voices from the Wild Horse Desert: The Vaquero Families of the King and Kenedy Ranches*, also by Colley and Monday. Three of the five books acknowledge the cooperation of King Ranch archives and/or King/Kleberg heirs, so they by no means represent strong dissenting views about King Ranch and its treatment of Kineños. The vestiges of the *latifundio* system could not survive the IRS and US labor laws. The apprentice system violated child labor laws and the IRS considered every benefit, from beef rations to ranch-paid medical care a form of compensation, and therefore taxable as income.

16. Curiously, the Grant pieces in the *Caller-Times* and *Livestock Weekly*, while nearly identical, contain different excerpts from the interview with Cheeseman. The quotation here, critical of corporate management, was excluded from the more local Corpus Christi paper.

17. Regardless of its use as an agribusiness, King Ranch, as a series of large tracts in south Texas, remains crucial habitat for a number of wildlife species. If the heirs sell out, that irreplaceable habitat will be in jeopardy.

18. A web search for images of Stephen "Tio" Kleberg yields dozens of photos of Kleberg hunting, riding, attending charity events, and professional meetings affiliated with ranching culture. No other living member of the King/Kleberg families has as many photos in circulation as Tio Kleberg. After his uncle, "Mr. Bob," he is the face of King Ranch in the late 20th century, and continues to be long after his employment was terminated.

ABSTRACTS

Founded in 1853, the King Ranch, with 825,000 acres (1289 square miles), remains one of the largest ranches in the United States. Dozens of novels, histories, coffee-table photo essays, memoirs, and animal husbandry texts take the King Ranch as their subject, offering complex and conflicting portraits of this exemplary expression of white power through more than 150 years of U.S. and borderlands history. This essay places the varied discourses about the King Ranch into conversation--the social, economic, representational, and environmental heritages of this ranch kingdom along with the King Ranch's official histories and website. This analysis of the King Ranch and the stories about it reveals the inadequacies of generalizations about such rangeland empires, as it considers the messiness of the intersection of myth, metaphor, and actual land use. By bringing the tools of cultural geography, environmental, literary, and cultural studies together, along with methods usually outside the purview of the field, such as ranch management and range science, all under the rubric of "Place Studies," the essay shows what an alternative direction in American Studies might look like.

Fondé en 1853, le King Ranch couvre 333 865 hectares et reste l'un des plus grands ranchs des Etats Unis. Des centaines de romans, d'histoires, de recueils de photographies, de mémoires et d'ouvrages traitant de la gestion des animaux prennent le ranch comme sujet et offrent des évocations complexes et contradictoires de cette manifestation exemplaire de la puissance des blancs à travers 150 ans d'histoire américaine et de relations frontalières. Cet article met les différents discours suscités par le ranch en dialogue en croisant les traditions sociale, économique, représentative et environnementale de cette ferme-royaume avec les histoires officielles et le site internet du ranch. Cette analyse du King Ranch et de la littérature qui lui est associée met en lumière les insuffisances des généralisations que suscitent ces empires agricoles en faisant apparaître les incohérences que révèle l'intersection entre mythe, métaphores et réalité de l'exploitation. En s'appuyant sur les outils de la géographie culturelle, des études environnementales, littéraires et culturelles en association avec des méthodes habituellement étrangères à ces champs d'investigation telles que la gestion des ranchs et la science de la prairie, regroupées sous l'étiquette « Etudes des Lieux », cet article indique une orientation nouvelle qui pourrait s'ouvrir dans le domaine des Études Américaines.

INDEX

Mots-clés: Agroéconomie, Kineno, King ranch, mythologie, Etudes de Lieux, élevage bovin

Keywords: Agribusiness, Kineño, King Ranch, mythmaking, Place Studies, ranching, Texas.

AUTHORS

NANCY S. COOK

Associate Professor of English
University of Montana