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Review of Land of Bright Promise: Advertising the Texas Panhandle and South Plains 1870-1917

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Francis, Douglas, "Review of Land of Bright Promise: Advertising the Texas Panhandle and South Plains 1870-1917" (1991). *Great Plains Quarterly*. 566.

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Land of Bright Promise: Advertising the Texas Panhandle and South Plains 1870-1917. By Jan Blodgett. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1988. Illustrations, appendices, notes, bibliography, index. 153 pp. \$15.95.

Land of Bright Promise is an account of the promotion propaganda of the Panhandle-South Plains area of Texas, one of the last areas of the American West to be settled. For decades, the region was seen as a desert area, part of the "Great American Desert," which from the early nineteenth century was believed to extend from the Gulf of Mexico north into British territory and eastward from the Mississippi River to the Rocky Mountains. It was also imagined as part of the "Wild West" with hostile Indians and desperados. Thus it took an extra effort on the part of promoters in the region to sell the area to potential settlers.

Jan Blodgett has unearthed extensive archival and newspaper material on the region to present the attitudes and efforts of the promoters in the period 1870 to 1920, the period of extensive settlement in the region. It is the availability of this primary material—some of it from quite obscure sources—that is the real strength of this little book.

The weaknesses are in the approach. Blodgett's main contention is that the various promoters in the region—the boosters, the ranchers, land agents, railroads, and settlers (there is a chapter on each of these groups)—worked together in a collaborative effort to promote the region. Yet her material does not support this thesis. She cites as many examples of conflict of interest as cooperative efforts among the promoters. In her chapter on the ranchers, for example, she notes example after example of strife between these ranchers and farmers. She also gets side-tracked into providing a context for understanding this promotional literature, failing instead to cite sufficient examples from the rich sources themselves. In the chapter on the railroads, she talks at length about the beginnings of railroads in the area, yet regrettably gives her reader too little evidence of the hy-

perbole in promoting the region. Finally she notes in a number of places how the promotional effort of the boosters and promoters in the Panhandle and South Plains area differed from those of the Nebraska-Kansas region, yet she never describes promotion in the latter region nor discusses why such differences occurred.

Land of Promise deals with a good topic and shows much promise in the wealth of the material upon which it is based. I personally would have preferred to have seen more of that primary material cited. Much of it would speak for itself on the imagery of this distinct, fascinating region—the last vestige of settlement in the Great American Plains.

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