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Review of *American Outback: The Oklahoma Panhandle in the Twentieth Century* By Richard Lowitt

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American Outback: The Oklahoma Panhandle in the Twentieth Century. By Richard Lowitt. Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2006. xv + 137 pp. Map, photographs, notes, index. \$21.95.

Richard Lowitt's look at the Oklahoma Panhandle in *American Outback* is one of the first books documenting the area's recent history. Authors usually focus on the cattle operations prior to 1900 or solely on the Dust Bowl era of the 1930s. Ironically, not much is written in Oklahoma history books that specifically focuses on the Panhandle's history, so Lowitt's attention to its contemporary history is rewarding. He includes details about significant subjects such as the Dust Bowl; agricultural, oil and gas development; and the Optima Dam. In referencing farmer and magazine contributor Caroline Henderson, Lowitt recognizes her role in drawing national attention to life during the Dust Bowl.

Unfortunately, Lowitt neglects the most important facet of the Panhandle, its people. While he discusses the events people encountered, he fails to show the strong character and spirit that enabled them to persevere in the face of change. Lowitt scarcely documents the importance of the cattle industry of the early 1900s and its role in paving the way for later developments in farming and the pig industry. Some residents consider the cattle industry of today more durable than the pig industry for its lasting economic benefits to the area. He also mistakenly implies that farming replaced the cattle industry. Although he gives due credit to government aid during the 1930s, he neglects to note that many of the extension agents, research station scientists, and agronomists were residents and cared deeply for the land and their neighbors.

While "American Outback" makes for a catchy title, most residents would take issue with its stereotypical insinuation that the area is desolate, uninhabitable, and uncivilized. Moreover, while many outsiders understandably view the Panhandle as one unit, it should be looked at as three different counties that

offer different experiences and histories. Their topography, too, is not as flat as Lowitt describes. Cimarron County's mesas, Texas County's hills and deep creeks, and Beaver County's sandy hills are evidence that the land varies more than Lowitt shows.

Despite inaccurate and stereotypical attention to some details, Lowitt's book is one of the first to draw attention to the Panhandle's twentieth-century developments and its progress.

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