

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

---

Great Plains Quarterly

Great Plains Studies, Center for

---

Summer 1984

## Review of *Western Oklahoma: A Photographic Essay* Photographs by Daisy Decazes, introduction and text by William S. Banowsky

John E. Carter

*Nebraska State Historical Society*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly>



Part of the [Other International and Area Studies Commons](#)

---

Carter, John E., "Review of *Western Oklahoma: A Photographic Essay* Photographs by Daisy Decazes, introduction and text by William S. Banowsky" (1984). *Great Plains Quarterly*. 1773.

<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly/1773>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Great Plains Studies, Center for at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Great Plains Quarterly by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

five photographs by Daisy Decazes, a Sorbonne-trained photographer, and a brief introduction by William S. Banowsky, past president of the University of Oklahoma. The work begins with Banowsky's introduction, a simplistic time line of human evolution in Oklahoma, beginning with the Native American people's life and attempt to hold the land, followed by the onslaught of rugged pioneers, and culminating in the development of the energy industry. "A new breed of hero strides the land," Banowsky proudly states, "the deep gas driller in the Anadarko Basin."

Decazes's photographs follow, in a convoluted fashion, the patterns set down in the introduction. Pastoral landscapes and romantic rural scenes compose the first two-thirds of the photographic selections. These are followed by an explosion of rodeo, pow-wow, and horse-racing images that segue gracelessly into photographs of the labors and rewards of agriculture. Finally, the book climaxes with a combination of military images and colossal other-worldly photographs of oil and gas production.

I am troubled, to no small extent, by the implication that large energy concerns are but the next step in the glorious growth of the state. Perhaps it is true. But in a book "made possible by a generous contribution from GHK Gas Company" one must question the perspective held by author and photographer. The essayist certainly has the right to a personal point of view, but other problems also plague the book. The unevenness in the quality of the photographs, and technical problems such as out-of-register color separations, bespeak a haste to produce rather than a concern for visual eloquence. Some of Decazes's images are powerful and touching: for example, a photograph of a hunter, gun in hand, dragging the bleeding corpse of a coyote off into a foggy mist. It is a disquieting image, but quite beautiful. While the book does not abound with them, a fair number of images are evocative, delightful, and beautiful. Unfortunately the producers of the work trampled even the good photographs with trite captions.

On the whole there is little to recommend

*Western Oklahoma: A Photographic Essay.*  
Photographs by Daisy Decazes, introduction  
and text by William S. Banowsky. Norman:  
University of Oklahoma Press, 1982. Photo-  
graphs, 156 pp. \$30.00.

Over the last several decades the photographic essay has gained more respect and understanding among serious students of culture. *Western Oklahoma: A Photographic Essay* falls abysmally short of the powerful potential of this medium. The work consists of seventy-

the book. It feels as though it were produced by the public relations office of an oil company, says little of worth, and sadly abuses the few good photographs it contains. Surely there is more to western Oklahoma.

JOHN E. CARTER  
Nebraska State Historical Society  
Lincoln, Nebraska