

TEXAS: A STATE OF MIND AND MEDIA

by

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Texas appears to be a media-made mental map whose phenomenon is a unique combination of geographical place and image created and perpetuated in large part by American media, which cherish the superlative (bigger is better); the self-fulfilling prophecy (unlimited optimism); packaging and promotion (style and surface more than substance); and the romantic, anti-urban legend and myth of unrestricted freedom in a highly restrictive, complex society. This set of symbols and icons is a product exported to the country as a popular culture, and internally used to unify a diverse state.

The difficulty of analyzing Texas was stated by novelist John Steinbeck in his own "search for America" in his Travels with Charley.¹ "Texas is a state of mind," he wrote, "but I think it is more than that. It is a mystique closely approximating a religion." The state invites generalities which "usually end up as paradox" as there is no physical or geographical unity in Texas. He elaborated even further:

Its unity lies in the mind. And this is not only in Texans. The word Texas becomes a symbol to everyone in the world. There's no question that this Texas-of-the mind fable is often synthetic, sometimes untruthful, and frequently romantic, but that in no way diminishes its strength as a symbol.²

If Texas is a mental symbol, then a logical way to observe it would be to analyze the content of media since their symbolic representations filter and construct social reality and perpetuate the myths and legends and imaginary, collective beliefs of a group. Media are also tied to the spiritual and non-material and to notions of popular culture.³ If the idea of Texas is dependent on media, one might look at the rather standard media forms: books, newspapers, magazines, photographs, art and other print forms; radio, television, phonographs, film, movies, and other electronic devices; advertising and public relations techniques, tools and styles; and popular culture, including fashion, food, politics, sports, and life-style.

As for books about Texas, Rice University sociologist Chandler Davidson has said "The manufacture of the Texas Myth is an ancient but still thriving enterprise . . . Such books come out every few years, sometimes in clumps of two or three, like cabbage in an ill-planted garden . . . The Texana market, like that for hemorrhoid cures or chinch bug killer, is known for its dependability."⁴ The latest writer to tackle Texas, James Michener, notes that there are more books about Texas than any other state except perhaps California, and that Texas is a "bibliographic gold mine" and "almost an ideal literary subject and will be for generations to come."⁵ Davidson summarizes the content of such books "whose essence is to serve up as truth variations of this myth":

The basic story is as simple as the plot of a western movie. Out of the barren Southwest, a heroic breed of Anglo-Saxon settlers carved out a wilderness empire, conquering barbarous Indian tribes and liberating unproductive land from a feudal Mexican peasantry. Planters colonized the eastern counties, ranchers and cowboys the western ones. By confronting an inhospitable climate and even more inhospitable savages, the pioneers developed a self-sustaining hardiness, leathery conservative instincts, and a materialistic cunning.⁶

Both Texas writers and writers outside the state have shared in perpetuating the myth. Before the state developed its own literary tradition, images of the state were somewhat dependent on outsiders from the rest of the U.S. and Europe--explorers, immigrants, missionaries, naturalists, prospectors, investors, bankers, and other travelers who often wrote optimistic accounts of Texas as the place for a better life. On foot, horseback, or in schooners at first, and then in trains and autos, they wrote letters, diaries, journals, memoirs, guides, travelogues, handbooks, and drew maps and atlases, scenes and sketches of the state's landmarks, soil, minerals, climate, government and its people. The tone of such media was to boost the advantages of living in the new and big country. The idea was to settle, colonize, hunt, invest, and exploit the resources, or to escape and dream in its fresh air. "G.T.T."--Gone to Texas--became a part of Manifest Destiny, whether for six days, weeks, or months, or whether to Texas or through it on the way to some place else.⁷

The mental image presented to prospective state visitors and residents was positive, even utopian, and the railroads sponsored both publications and journalists telling them of the state "where hopes are realized" and which "offers a man a man's share of prosperity, your opportunity is here, the time is now."⁸ Fairs and exhibitions in the land of promise were local media used to lure outsiders. Booklets and fact sheets were distributed "for the millions who are going, and the millions more who ought to go to Texas" to seek their fortunes.⁹

Promises and projections became prophecy. Much of the myth in the post-Civil War period and into the peak of the Oil Era became reality. Many images and symbols also had to be produced, and Texas writers developed to create them, although many were torn between boosterism and criticism, and between local and national themes and locales. While the state was known for many years mainly for writers like J. Frank Dobie and Walter Prescott Webb, recent years produced nationally-known authors like Larry McMurtry, Larry King, and Dan Jenkins, and a growing list of others known mostly within the state. Nevertheless, "In a state known for its triumphs in cattle ranching, oil exploration, football and self-promotion, literature deserves more recognition than it has received," in the opinion of Don Graham, associate professor of English at the University of Texas.¹⁰

The kind of literature and its images of the state are openly debated these days. A Dallas novelist, Marshall Terry, believes Texas writers may be as guilty as anyone in perpetuating outdated images of the romantic frontier myth. He says they need to move away from the Western cliché characters and stereotypes and "confront the urban realities" in a state with a fragile environment and land that is not endless.¹¹ He and others have criticized the penalty Texans pay for the misconceptions and expectations outsiders have projected onto the state. That myth and mystique was critically explored by Jane Kramer, who "left New York with a myth in my mind" and found that agribusiness in the Panhandle had dissolved the movie version of "The Last Cowboy."¹²

Perhaps in the future, the far reaches of the mind in Texas science fiction writers may provide new images, although "There is no question that at first glance Texas seems an extremely unlikely location to breed literary brilliance of the visionary bent." That notion is hope with caution, because Texas "is a state that begins every day re-mythologizing itself again, molding its ever more corrupt, cynical, insensitive and financially obsessed present into a 'logical' continuation and consequence of its wildly exaggerated, macho-mono-mythic, almost religiously worshipped past."¹³

Texas has always been "good copy" for newspapers. Its growth and expansion and interwoven superlatives have attracted journalists from both inside and outside the state. From the post-Civil War days to the more recent growth of the Sun Belt, the press has "sold" the symbols of Texas boosterism to optimistic Americans.¹⁴ In 1871, New York Tribune editor Horace Greeley was persuaded to go to Texas by "capitalists who were wisely and nobly investing their money in large sums to open up Texas to the world and bring her into free and untrammelled intercourse with the North . . ."¹⁵ He corresponded back to his newspaper, as he told the Texas State Agricultural Fair at Houston, May 21, 1871, that man's "increased power over nature is the general measure of his progress from the lowest barbarism up to that perfect mental and moral stature which is symbolized by Copernicus, Galileo, Shakespeare, Milton and Newton." "The savage," Greeley said, "builds no monuments--leaves but scanty proof that he ever existed save his bones."¹⁶

While Greeley predicted "every thirsty, arid plain will have its bounteous well" and urged streams be "utilized to moisten adjacent fields" he also warned that "It is not too soon to begin to plant forests in the more naked and arid portions of Texas . . ."¹⁷ He also noted some bad roads, bad weather, and bad food, but he saw Texas as a "Land of Promise" and asked "Why should not this State be the home of ten millions of the human family early in the next century."¹⁸

Once Greeley got out of the state, he wrote from New Orleans that although the state had "gigantic possibilities" it relied too easily on soil and cattle which has "blinded her people to many shortcomings" which he wrote of "at the risk of giving offense." Greeley said Texas had small, crude houses needing glass panes, needed 20,000 more school teachers, and

50,000 instructed cooks, less meat, bread, coffee, hog and hominy, and less money spent on liquor and tobacco. Of what must have been early chicken fried steak, he wrote: "It is a grief to see beef that might be broiled into tender and juicy steaks fried or stewed into such repulsive, indigestible messes"19

Journalists visiting Texas more than 100 years later are chaperoned by media relations specialists at the Texas Tourist Development Agency which generates positive stories about the state to dispel the notion that Texas is "cactus, cowboys and dust."²⁰ Inside the state, the newspapers often spread the myth that the "can do" state is the "economic flagship" and "crown jewel" of the United States,²¹ with its large cities as a "gateway to the world." Stories tell Texans that foreigners "dream" of coming to the state;²² that Japanese children imagine what Dallas is like;²³ that "Britons (are) Awed by Texas' Size";²⁴ that political conventions can find a positive economic climate;²⁵ and that visitors can see "typical" Texas with "cowboys, cattle, wide open spaces and oil wells."²⁶

Features often reinforce both old and new images and stereotypes on "true Texans," "Texas style," "Texas size," "Texas class," "World class," and variations on class. (In Austin in 1983, the lieutenant governor, William Hobby of the Houston Post newspaper family, said Texas should strive to be a "first class state." The city's newspaper in 1898, reported "This city was visited by a first class snow") Newspaper readers both inside and outside the state are treated to accounts of armadillo races, chili cook-offs, turkey trots, and contests for eating jalopenos, spitting watermelon seeds, and throwing cow chips in the midst of Texas state flags and Texas Rangers.

Press accounts of planned image-making for visitors is sometimes marred by un-planned reactions and receptions. For example, press focus was directed to a British rock singer who urinated on the Alamo;²⁸ and a Michigan mayor visiting a suburban Fort Worth festival became:

. . . the victim of a Texas-style hotel-room brawl that had all the Lone Star ingredients: a case of liquor, two towel-clad women, a bubbling Jacuzzi, and a 6-foot-5 former professional football player who now is a co-owner of the 'world's largest nightclub' . . . Billy Bob Barnett.²⁹

Magazines have captured and released an arsenal of images of Texas through the years. Ten examples illustrate the persistence of Texas themes on the national level: From November 1873 to April 1874, Scribner's described "Glimpæ of Texas"; Harper's in October 1879 took readers "Through Texas"; Fortune's issue of December 1939 was devoted to the state; J. Frank Dobie wrote in Nature magazine in 1930 about "The Texan Part of Texas"; Texas, "From longhorns to a horn of plenty" appeared in Town and Country in January 1940; Dobie and others wrote of Texas in Holiday in October, November, and December 1948; the idea of "Texas, Near and Far Out" appeared in Venture, June-July 1967; The Atlantic issue of March 1975 was devoted to Texas "dreams, truths, legends, heroes, rascals,

oil, power, money, land, cities, remembering, leaving, returning, staying, . . ."; Newsweek's cover story of December 12, 1977, was on "Texas-The Superstate," and told readers that "After decades of insecure braggadocio, tall tales and youth excesses, that state of the Union and state of mind called Texas has turned into an economic superstate and a cultural comer", the ultimate boosterism in these images appeared as Town and Country's September 1979 issue reinforced the ultimate national superlative on "Texas--A State We Can't Do Without."

Within the state, the public-sponsored Texas Highways and Texas Parks and Wildlife have long boosted the state's images, and in 1973 Texas Monthly was created to capture the state's civic identity with boosterism and superlatives.³⁰ Even more are contained in a newer state magazine started in 1981 called Ultra for socially-elite Texans who make at least \$100,000 a year. It celebrates "the special quality of Texas panache" with features about "fashion, beauty, style, design, sport, travel, fine food, literature, art, architecture, places and people."³¹ It insists that Texas is an independent country, different from other states:

We in the Lone Star principality are devastating, and we know it. Is there another state in the Union that so fascinates the rest of the country? . . . the rest of the world? If you're somewhere else, and you're from Texas, you're 'on' every minute. You have immediate celebrity status.

We who live in this sensational principality have as much curiosity about our home as do the unfortunates 'outside'. Who and what makes Texas tick is a question we never tire of asking ourselves. Why has Texas been called a state of mind?

We know that the United States couldn't exist without Texas, but that Texas could exist perfectly comfortably without the rest of the U.S. We've got everything a country could need--or want--in abundance. We have every kind of terrain. We're a microcosm of the geography of the world. Texas scenery and customs vary from region to region, but we're together, too. We've got a recognizable national identity. And now we have our own national magazine: ULTRA. We have elegance, we have style, we have class--we have champagne taste on a champagne budget.³²

Besides magazines and newspapers, other print media have been used to extol the symbols of Texas. These include calendars, prints,³³ drawings, and paintings.³⁴ Images of Texas often combine the co-existence of rural and urban themes mixing cowboys, cattle drives, oil wells with the Gulf Coast, Dust Bowl, East Texas Piney Woods, and Rio Grande canyons.³⁵ Some artists are anxious to update and keep images fresh, while nostalgically preserving the unique past remembered, thus "rusty reminders" of abandoned wagons, tractors, horses, small towns, and outhouses for "progress, folks, progress."³⁶ Because of its vast space, the Texas images of sky and weather³⁷ remain a permanent variable from hurricanes to dust

storms, and "Volatile, grandiose, and unruly tornadoes are as much a part of Texas as rattlesnakes and scorpions."³⁸

Other images in print include those of cartoons;³⁹ picture post cards, which record changes from pastoral to industrial conditions;⁴⁰ poetry;⁴¹ and photography,⁴² which is a major means for symbolic representation of the urban milieu and changing landscape.⁴³ In addition, there are books about Texas superlatives: the best, biggest, busiest, coldest, costliest, deepest, driest, earliest, fastest, fewest, first, greatest, highest, hottest, largest, least, lightest, longest, lowest, most, narrowest, oddest, oldest, onliest, rarest, shortest, smallest, tallest, warmest, wettest, widest, worst, and youngest. The subjects covered include: animals, plants and minerals, physiography and geography, human interest, business and industry, education, religion, arts and science, transportation and communication, history, structures, sports and entertainment.⁴⁴ Also, for nearly 40 years a book has been published on Texas brags and boasts. "This book about a State that is synonymous with space is dedicated to that great out yonder where the yellow Texae moon is!"⁴⁵

While print images have dominated the mental picture of Texas, the arrival of radio in the 1920s extended the sounds of the state far beyond its borders. Much of the early radio music, and even that in recent years, has had a strong Texas tone--especially in country and western tastes from Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys to Willie Nelson, Waylon Jennings, Marty Robbins, Larry Gatlin, Mac Davis, and Kenny Rogers. They contributed to the "Southernization of America,"⁴⁶ as listeners were led to "Luckenbach, Texas" and "A Texas State of Mind," just to name two songs among many written about the state. It also has been projected in the sounds of rock-n-roll by Buddy Holly, in blues by Janis Joplin, and in the stirring notes of "The Yellow Rose of Texas," "Deep in the Heart of Texas," and "The Eyes of Texas."

Texas images of sound and vision were merged by Hollywood movies beginning in the early 1900s, with "more films made about Texas than any other state."⁴⁷ These range from numerous early ones on the Alamo to "Red River," "Four for Texas," and "Giant," to those in the Sixties like "State Fair," "Hud," "Bonnie and Clyde," and "The Last Picture Show." In the Seventies along came "The Sugarland Express," "The Texas Chainsaw Massacre," "Semi-Tough," and "Urban Cowboy." A thorough study of Cowboys and Cadillacs: Cinematic Images of the Lone Star State has been done by Don Graham at the University of Texas in a book by that name published by Texas Monthly Press.⁴⁸

Graham and others are concerned about the continuing stereotype of Texas in movies, and Hollywood's exploitation of the state's Western mystique despite the fact, as Graham points out, that "The frontier exists only symbolically."⁴⁹ Others have pointed out that "The portrait of the Texans (has) always been made by others, from typecast actors to visiting reporters, sentimentally or cynically--but always superficially."⁵⁰ Many images of the state in the last 150 years have been created by "Persons coming to Texas (who)

usually brought their amenities ready-made from somewhere else."⁵¹

Movie-makers continue to come, and have made Texas itself a major "film set" with 54 motion pictures and television projects being shot in the state in the last three years.⁵² The Texas Film Commission has encouraged such film-makers who are drawn by the variety of locations, the availability of crew and talent, and the Texas mystique.⁵³ Visitors from California expect to find future John Waynes and Gary Coopers, and cities like Austin, which has its own "Third Coast Studios" and a Third Coast magazine, expects to become the "new Sunbelt Rollywood."⁵⁴

The arrival of television may have made the Texas image more intimate and more immediate and involved people more than the earlier media of print, sound, and film. Texas stereotypes in dress and speech appeared in Western TV series and old re-run films in the 1950s, and the ads with the Marlboro Man on his horse. As television changed in the Sixties and into the Seventies, Texas images adapted. Series like "Texas," "Matt Houston," and the more popular "Dallas" projected an up-dated, urban era. Pro football's imagery of machismo, action, and violence suited both TV and the Texas mystique as the state's borders were extended through "America's Team"--the Dallas Cowboys--as sports and TV became a kind of national religion.⁵⁵

New media images of Texas which recycle old Western stereotypes to fit new values allow the general, popular public to experience the old frontier and Texas state-of-mind much like the original settlers who had "GTT" (Gone to Texas). "Small wonder that the Sunbelt flourishes and Dallas leads the ratings,"⁵⁶ and that the Dallas Cowboys are shown on TV more than any other team. The production and consumption of Texas images has in some ways become a popular culture using the techniques of advertising and public relations. It involves politics, personalities, fashion, food, and style, which are manufactured and marketed to create the "Texas state of mind."

Selling Texas is not new. Ads to attract visitors and investors were used as far back as 1928. The Texas Tourist Development Agency is currently placing ads in New York and Los Angeles newspapers "trying to convey that Texas is far more than the stereotype" of "a John Wyane movie set--cactus, cattle and cowboys."⁵⁷ (Some call it "de-Texification.") The packaged set of icons called Texas is a type of advertisement which can be compared (as in TV commercials) with "Brand X." Novelist Michener used such a comparison when he said that "State X":

has no border with Mexico, no minority problem, no international implications, no oil, and no cattle industry. State X is losing population, losing seats in Congress, has no distinctive costume, no heavy mythology . . . State X was never a nation and was not involved in the Civil War.⁵⁸

The proper and popular cultural composite for Texas and Texans to match such an advertisement often calls upon Texas

"style," "chic," "size," and "class" to create the prototype or model of the "True Texan" to hold or express those qualities. This "choreography" may include speech, gestures, habits, or appearance which may range from Texas women representing "The Cover Girl State";⁵⁹ the comic Texas on picture post cards;⁶⁰ the Texas joke or humor on national television;⁶¹ or the blend of person with place as with "Sam Houston's Texas"⁶² or "LBJ Country."⁶³

Such a media search for the universal Texas "character" is made easier with the many Texas figures on the national scene: the late LBJ's height and voice, John Connally's jowl and hair; Bum Phillips' cowboy hat, and Earl Campbell of the "Houston Oilers"; and boxer Tex Cobb. The advertisements are not without problems in packaging.

For example, Texas state bumper stickers and license plates for "Native Texans" would not have applied to Sam Houston, Davey Crockett or Sam Houston (all born elsewhere). Houston native Howard Hughes was buried in Houston, but the courts are undecided on whether he legally belongs to California, Nevada or Texas--a substantive issue far beyond image. National TV journalists and native Texans like Dan Rather, Bob Shieft, and Hughes Rudd, have modified their regional accents, and Walter Cronkite is only an "adopted" Texan, while a recent Miss America (born in Texas) had her nose remodeled and competed as Miss California.

White House politician James Baker is described as "not a Texan of the old school" and "wears boots under his suit pants on Saturdays, but the only other cowboy leather on him is invisible, worn on his character. He is deceptively tough, even ruthless."⁶⁴ As for George Bush, now a Houston resident, "only a fool would have predicted" 13 years ago that he would restore Texas to national politics "as Lyndon Johnson was retreating to the Pedernales at the head of a long line of Lone Star license plates." Bush did not "cast a big shadow" in Texas, and furthermore, as the media myth-making continues:

He didn't seem right for Texas, with his small bones, thin features, and clothes that fit. Bush was a yankee transplant from Connecticut, an Ivy Leaguer, and even worse, he was the quintessential gray flannel man, with a small, reedy voice like Dick Cavett's that was always saying nonfolksy things. Not even a Madison Avenue magician could put George Bush convincingly on a horse.⁶⁵

Debate over the marketing of the "real" professional Texan may know no end. A recent book by a Corpus Christi editor titled Real Texans Don't Drink Scotch With Their Doctor Pepper suggests that "Real Texans never worry about being a real Texan because they never thought about it." The notion of Texas and Texans as unique probably appeals to many in an age when regional differences fade in a homogenized society. As media and urbanization blur state boundaries, few states retain as sharp a distinction as Texas with its own national anthems, its own national beer, and its power to sub-divide into several states.⁶⁶

As its images spill over other states, and as new residents pour across its borders, two forces seem to be at work, often contradictory: (1) Internal efforts to acculturate newcomers to become professional Texans; and (2) External attempts to propagate the Texas mystique and myth. Inside the state, "Part of being a Texan is hating Yankees . . . (as) . . . this history of reluctant tolerance may be giving way to ugly resentment as Texans come to grips with America's migration to the Sun Belt."⁶⁷ Northerners are blamed for urban problems,⁶⁸ and classes for new residents teach them the "Texperience" and "naturalize" them into understanding and accepting Texas foods, dress, manners, and its heritage, mystique, sounds, scenes, and politics. Newspapers run features on "how to talk Texan," and magazines devote attention on "how to be Texan."⁶⁹ Publicity is given to testimonials by newcomers who are "converted" and "born again" into the Texas way of life like religious zealots who become sufficiently loyal and "believe" so as to be "saved" from ridicule. Although much of the banter is humorous, that tends to intimidate debate and fosters acceptance by visiting "customers" welcomed to consume in another country, where "passports" are sold as satire.

Groups of "Damn Yankees" clubs, organized by outside Northeasterners, meet to learn how to eat Tex-Mex, jalopenos, and chili; how to swagger, brag, endure the heat and how to recognize state symbols. Newspapers publish guides,⁷⁰ and report that eventually non-Texans adapt to the state.⁷¹ In terms of mental maps, research indicates Texans have a keen sense of "perception space" relative to other states.⁷² A recent Governor, Mark White (with a tone used against Texas in times past), said of Alaska, now the largest state, "I don't know why anyone would want to go to that cold barren place." Again, what can appear as humor can conceal cultural codes.

Texas also exports its superlative identity to the outside via its dependence on media centers like Hollywood and Manhattan, while building its own "Third Coast." Whether insecurely other-directed or in awe of national publicity, or seeking success as symbol manipulators in New York and Los Angeles, Texas journalists seem to have a love-hate relationship with those outposts. Like "Midnight Cowboys," Texans seem both lured and repulsed as they share their boots and beer in the Lone Star Cafe or in the Texas "colonies" in LA--which they say they often resent for being plastic, polluted, fast-paced by the rat-race, and from which they flee to return home to a slower, more laid-back sense of place. Dallas columnist Molly Ivins returned to her "wonderfully awful" Texas after serving journalistic time in New York, Minneapolis, and Denver. Gary Cartwright got as far as New Mexico, but nostalgically returned home.⁷³

But the lure of "The Big Apple" and the Eastern Establishment is appealing to Texas image-makers and journalistic myth-makers: Willie Morris, a Mississippian momentarily "adopted" as a Texan, tried his hand editing Harper's; William Broyles of Texas Monthly was called to New York to "blast Newsweek out of second place" behind Time magazine; Texas journalists got Esquire to create the "Urban Cowboy" in Houston; Playboy and Broadway made a small town

Texas house of prostitution into "The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas" to the delight of many Texans seeking the national media limelight; and lately, New York's favor is sought by Texas actors staging backwoods, right-wing hicks in "Greater Tuna."⁷⁴ And several years ago, an Austin city councilman, anxious to get Eastern media to award a local football player the Heisman Trophy from the Downtown New York Athletic Club, said "Sometimes the people in New York get affected by the industrial smog, and they need to be reminded of what's happening down here in Texas."⁷⁵

Some of that mutual admiration between the Big City and the Big State is indicated by such examples as Dallas-Fort Worth officials bragging that their new airport was to be larger than Manhattan Island; and the New York Times being impressed by a Houstonian brought to New York to manage its convention center, the "largest public assembly hall in the Western Hemisphere and possibly the world."⁷⁶ The Times was apparently in awe of Jerry Lowrey, who had "deliverability" in Houston where he ran the civic center, the "largest underground parking facility in the United States," and who hands out large, red apples which play "New York, New York," when wound, and who distributes huge match books with the inscribed covers saying "Strike it BIG in New York." The New York-Texas reciprocity is indicated by the Times story, reprinted of course, in the Houston Chronicle:

Throwing out hyperbole and superlatives as though they were spitballs and he were in third grade, talking in italics and twang, (Jerry) Lowrey speaks about the Convention Center in a way that only a Texan would dare and only New York would appreciate.⁷⁷

Some 40,000 Texans, many of them journalists and media types, have moved to New York, where they are considered a transplanted and exiled "ethnic" group, which helps New York media manufacture and perpetuate the Texas "state of mind."⁷⁸ Their own newspaper the New York Texan is explained by its publisher, Janet Scudder:

New York Texan is about us--Texans in New York and what we are doing. And that's a lot. Just look around--Texans hold the reins of major international corporations, lead the nation's political organizations, direct publication of the city's top newspapers and magazines, build, heal bodies, mend minds, write, sing, act, paint, model, talk--do we ever talk--but especially on radio and television, design and otherwise run the show. Would the country fall apart if all the city's Texans were suddenly removed from their posts? Well, maybe not. But New York might.⁷⁹

While trying to capture the symbol manufacturing centers, Texans are trying to establish themselves as a media center, but in the meantime remain impressed by the Northeastern intellectual and artistic "imports," the political ties with the Boston-Austin axis, and the willingness of journalists like Michener to come down and tell them who they are.

Michener confessed that he would "become" a Texan through "total immersion," but is "painfully aware that only a person born in Texas ought to tackle this assignment."⁸⁰ (A Texas state representative, born in Illinois, and ineligible for the special "Native Texan" license plates he advocates, says that "There is a certain euphoria that the people who are born in Texas are raised with.")⁸¹

As U.S. media centers decentralize from the Northeast towards the Sunbelt,⁸² there may be less need for Texas to rely on "born-again" outside writers to interpret Texas culture. Some in Texas hope to "change bibliographic geography" from "dominance by the East and West Coasts."⁸³ One book publisher in Texas who laments that "over 60 percent of the books published in America are still published within a hundred-mile radius of the Empire State Building," notes that Texas writers are beginning to stay home and in publishing, "what New York has been to the 20th century, Texas may become to the 21st century."⁸⁴

Meanwhile, Texas journalists often write about state secession,⁸⁵ and some Texans resent looking to the East "for a reaffirmation of their own creative values" described by outside writers like Michener. As one Texan put it, "We are being invaded . . . We fought so hard to be free from Mexico yet meekly accept the chains that bind us to the Northeast."⁸⁶ The "invading press" from the Northeast has long been resented by Dallas media people, especially after publicity on the Kennedy assassination, with one editor complaining that "until recently Texas was often viewed as an uncharted wasteland where reporters' typewriters swung as loosely as the guns of a fast draw cowboy."⁸⁷ When the Washington Post indicated Lubbock was a pistol-packing city after John Hinckley had bought guns there, local officials demanded and got a correction saying the city was "orderly and law-abiding."⁸⁸

Defending the Texas image can be a full-time job, as image-makers must face image-breakers, and no person or state can be universally loved. Native Texan journalist Molly Ivins says "I have long maintained that Texans are not easy to love: we are, like anchovies, an acquired taste." While living in Colorado briefly, she found residents hated Texans and resented being invaded by people they found to be loud, vulgar, obnoxious, rich, and "tacky."⁸⁹ A national survey of states as recent as 10 years ago, rated Texas as one of the worst states in which to live, despite its image of wealth and progress. That ranking found the state with more Cadillacs and Lincolns than most states, with more people than library books, and with poor health services, high numbers of poor, and low ratings in culture and civic affairs.⁹⁰

If Texas is to deal with such problems on the new frontier of urbanization, it may have to abandon (or at least modify) the myth of unlimited resources, as oil, land, water, and the Anglo-Saxon tradition disappear, and poverty, pollution, and new Dust Bowls approach. Although a few now question the Texas mystique, popular media still spread and protect it as electronic media accelerate what print started. Many stereotypes remain as conditions change yet the superlatives reign. No wonder paradox continues with myths

and symbols not based on truth and the powerful religion of boosterism un-exposed to reason or doubt and dependent more on faith than on fact.

Can Texans retain the romantic "Lana Turner" and "Moses" mythology that the world is out there waiting to discover them in the drug store or bullrushes? If one is destined by genetics and birth to be unique, does that mean a state and its people need only be reinforced and never challenged? Can Texas perpetuate the illusion of independence and autonomy while being dependent on Washington money, military bases, and Mississippi water? Can it maintain its own identity, while seeking outside media to peddle its message?

It has been said that "everybody could use a dose of Texas" to give them self-confidence, but boosterism can be an addictive drug, which masquerades problems and insecurities. It too often depends on blind faith rather than reason, with propaganda and exaggeration substituted for thinking. It is cheerleading rather than criticism, and the only sin is that of cynicism. Images become ends in themselves, often with style and surface instead of substance, with glitter and gloss mistaken as virtues, with quantity, not quality, as the test of value.

More and more means more and more, and that means force and the power necessary to reach ends and goals with little debate about them or the values implicit in them. In boosterism, debate often comes after the problems, after exploitation and piracy of human and natural resources. The legend that anyone can do anything breeds a permissive fiction, with authoritarianism lurking behind it. The fantasy that all can be "Number One" and that no one need fail, can make mediocrity pose as excellence. The limited models of John Wayne, Miss America and the All American can lead to caricature rather than character. Efforts to make reality match myth may cause any means to be justified as power based on ignorance and arrogance require distortion and exaggeration, and the brags become accepted lies. The ultimate fancy is to masquerade as the opposite of what is, thus more paradox and problems on Fantasy Island.

As with America, the will and state of mind have been a powerful glue for Texas and Texans needing symbols to unify their diversity and to mediate their "Texperience." But hope can be dope. By the year 2020, Dallas Morning News writer Si Dunn envisions a future-shock of rubble and poverty for those "Trapped in Texas" in the "land of the big myth," which "had even believed its own boosteristic propaganda that it could grow forever, bigger than life." He quotes Texas ecologist Pete Gunter, who hits media because "the word you really can't say on television in Texas is 'anti-growth.' Anti-growth. There. I've just said a discouraging word, and the skies will be cloudy all day."

Will the cloudless optimism continue from local and national media figures selling unlimited sunshine for Texas? A skeptical Austin humorist Cactus Pryor, who admits he is an "incurable Texans--chauvinistic, proud and frequently blind," shares his satirical radio comments in his book Inside Texas,

for which "adopted" Texan, and ex-TV anchorman, Walter Cronkite wrote the foreward. Cronkite says Pryor has "a rich vein to mine" since "Texas is bigger than life," and as America's most-trusted figure, Cronkite says maybe "the old Texas is not really disappearing." Although it may be "bulldozed and paved," he predicts, "there is no way to bury beneath mass-produced modernity the irrepressible uniqueness of Texas or Texans."

The Texas "testimonial" of the Texas "convert" continues: The inventor of the popular military strategy game ("Texas Revolution--The Glorious War for Independence and Great Runaway Scrape") Dan Mings, insists that "Texas is the Third Coast, the new California. The most exciting area in the world." James Naibitt's best-seller Megatrends heaps praise on Texas cities. Dallas rates highly with European television.

Will media and the Texas state-of-mind outlast the state and society itself? Consider the science fiction scenario in a media room with back issues of Texas Monthly, old Willie Nelson records, and huge posters of John Wayne at the Alamo. Texan Miss America Phyllis George tastes chili while introducing re-runs of Hud, Giant, and Urban Cowboy, and touchdown tapes of the Dallas Cowboys. Then, Texan Dan Rather and convert Cronkite conjecture at Mission Control in Houston on the last earthly space ship escaping the first modern ghost state with no one left to watch the instant replay on TV or hear Walter say "And that's the way it was."

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