

## The New Latino Landscape of the Texas Panhandle

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When investigating the depopulation of the Texas Panhandle Plains, the geographical literature has not adequately addressed the impact of in-migrating Latinos. This study examines visually the changes in the cultural landscape caused by the recent migration of Latinos into the Texas Panhandle. Twelve counties out of the region's fifty-four are the focus of the study. The findings of this research revealed five cultural landscape themes created by recent Latino immigrants in the Texas Panhandle: 1) house architecture, colors, and religious shrines (*capillas*); 2) churches and public paintings; 3) cemeteries; 4) business enterprise and advertising; and 5) political signage. *Key Words: cultural landscape, Latinos, Texas Panhandle, migration.*

### Introduction

In 1940, 1.4 million Latinos<sup>1</sup> accounted for only 1 percent of U.S. population (Frazier 2003). Since then, the Latino population has grown exponentially, making Latinos the nation's fastest growing minority group. The 2005 Latino population of 43.5 million was 14.5 percent of the nation's total (U.S. Census Bureau 2006). With their continued prodigious population growth in the U.S., Latinos will shape societal issues significantly (Frazier 2003).

Latino presence in the history, tradition, and culture of Texas has always been strong. Of the state's 23 million people in 2005, 8 million (35%) were Latino. The Texas State Demographer projects that Latinos, mostly of Mexican heritage, will be the largest ethnic group in Texas by 2020 and will comprise the majority of the state's population by 2040 (Texas State Data Center 2007). Although Latino migration into Texas has occurred over many generations, a new wave of Latino in-migrants, mainly from South Texas and Mexico, spread across the Texas Panhandle, particularly since 1980, searching for economic opportunities and replacing departing Anglo residents (U.S. Census Bureau 1983, 1993, 2000, 2006; Haverluk 2004; Estaville, Montalvo, and Brown 2006).

The Texas Panhandle encompasses some 134,700 square kilometers (52,000 square miles), about one-fifth of the state, and is a drought prone land that receives less than 20 inches of annual precipitation. The region lies over a large part of the Ogallala Aquifer, a primary source of water for agriculture and communities that has been seriously depleted by years of "water mining." Op-

portunities for cattle ranching and farming and oil and natural gas discoveries attracted people to the region, but a series of droughts and a decline in oil and natural gas production have since devastated these traditional economic activities (Kraenzel 1955; Blouet and Luebke 1979; White 1994; Nickels and Day 1997).

As the Anglo population trends in the Texas Panhandle mirrored the overall Great Plains depopulation by decreasing from 662,000 (75% of the total population) in 1980 to 609,000 (70%) in 1990 and to 577,000 (63%) in 2000, the Latino population increased from 169,000 (19%) in 1980 to 188,000 (22%) in 1990 and to 267,000 (29%) in 2000. Consequently, over the two decades, Anglo population declined by 85,000 (13%), while Latino population increased by 98,000 (58%), thereby more than offsetting the Anglo decrease. The robust Latino population growth in the 1990s (79,000 people or 43%) was the main contributor to the increase in the total population of the Texas Panhandle in 2000 (U.S. Census, 1980, 1990, 2000). Unlike out-migrating Anglos, Latinos see a landscape of economic opportunity in the Texas Panhandle, and their immigration has thus substantially changed the ethnic proportions of the region's population (U.S. Census Bureau 2007; Estaville, Montalvo, and Brown 2006). Although Latino population has increased considerably in the past quarter century in the Texas Panhandle, few scholars have commented on new Latino landscape influences that are so important to the concept of place making (Arreola 2002). The purpose of this study is to explore how the recent Latino population increases in the Texas Panhandle are reflected visually in its new cultural landscape.

### **Cultural Landscape**

Definitions of the concept of cultural landscape abound. In his classic 1925 dissertation, "Morphology of Landscape," Sauer (1963, 343) created the concept and envisioned an artistic definitional metaphor in which "culture is the agent, the natural area is the medium, and the cultural landscape is the result." For decades after, scholars of the "Berkeley School" searched for the evidence of human impacts on natural environments. Salter (1971, Introduction) characterized a cultural landscape more narrowly: "the artificial landscape man creates, remaking nature to better provide himself with his short-term needs of food, shelter, clothing, and entertainment." Arreola (2002, 63) portrayed a cultural landscape as "the artificially built and modified environment that humans create, remaking nature to suit our needs and wants." The cultural landscape is thus the gestalt of each group of people's thinking and way of living that is uniquely imprinted onto natural milieus around the world.

The study of cultural landscapes in the United States has a large literature. Texas has not been neglected. In 1969, Meinig's groundbreaking monograph,

*Imperial Texas*, painted in broad strokes how the peopling of Texas left sequential cultural imprints on the state and how these communities affected adjacent lands to the west. Jordan, in a series of works throughout his prolific career (1970, 1982, 1984, 2001, for example), was an astute observer of the people of Texas and the landscapes they created. In 2002, Arreola's *Tejano South Texas* captured the essence of the Tejano (Texas-Mexican) homeland—its settlement, landscape impress, social identities, and politics. These scholars and others have examined traditional Latino landscapes in Texas, mainly in South Texas, that include town plazas and their morphologies and buildings, housescaping, and cemeteries.

### Method

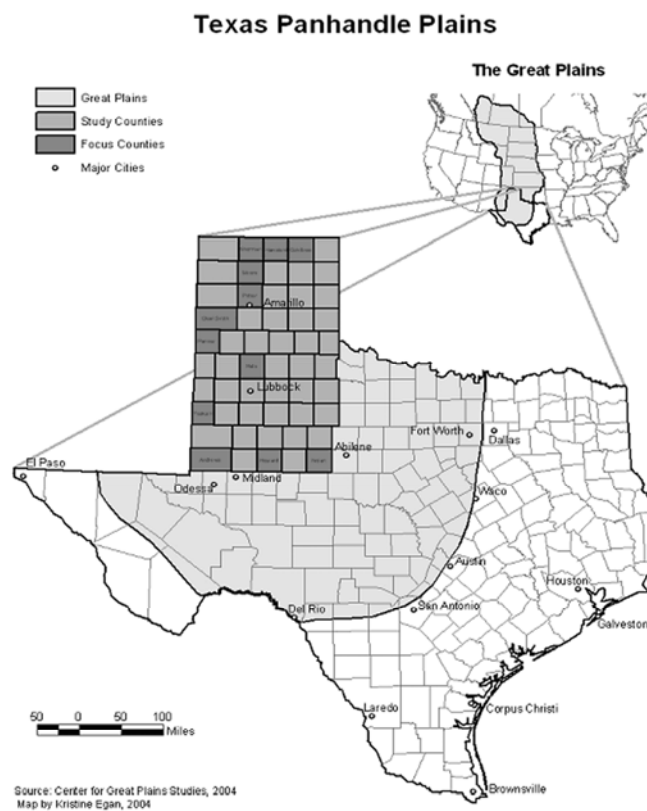
In 2000, Latinos comprised at least 25 percent of the population of each of 35 counties in the 54-county Texas Panhandle. To try to determine how substantial Latino population increases affected the cultural landscape since 1980, we identified as the initial study area the ten counties from the 35 with the largest Latino increase in population for the period of 1980-2000 (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Ten Largest Population Percentage Increases of Latinos in the Texas Panhandle Counties, 1980-2000.

County	Percent Increase in Latino Population	Percent Latino Population in 2000
Moore	27.88	47
Ochiltree	22.43	32
Hansford	19.85	31
Andrews	18.22	40
Yoakum	18.14	46
Deaf Smith	16.74	57
Parmer	16.52	49
Howard	16.44	37
Potter	16.41	28
Sherman	15.96	27

We then divided the Texas Panhandle into quadrants to examine the spatial coverage of the ten focus counties. The results showed that the southeastern quadrant of the Panhandle was not represented, and we therefore added Nolan County (28% Latino). As a final step, we ensured that the two Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs)—Amarillo and Lubbock—were represented, resulting in the addition of Hale County (48% Latino) for the Lubbock MSA.

Our Texas Panhandle study area thus developed into 12 focus counties (Figure 1), for which we visited each of their county seats, important central places for the mostly rural region, and nearby towns. We took numerous digital photographs and interviewed 94 residents, (44 Latinos, 25 females and 19 males; 50 Anglos, 32 females and 18 males), throughout 2004 to understand clearly the changing Latino demographics and their affect on the cultural landscape. The people interviewed were from a convenience sample of a cross-section of the region's socioeconomic strata, including government officials, college administrators, and hotel employees to shop owners, restaurant waitresses, students, and construction workers. We thus designed our method to answer the fundamental research question: Has the Texas Panhandle changed to reflect a new Latino landscape impress?



**Figure 1.** The Texas Panhandle Plains and the Panhandle Study Area Counties.

### **The New Latino Landscape in the Texas Panhandle**

Although Spanish explorers were the first Europeans to travel through what is now the Texas Panhandle and they named the region's flat, unchanging Llano Estacado ("Staked Plain"), almost all of the town and county names in the Texas Panhandle are of Anglo origin. Most of towns were established by Anglo settlers in the late 19th and early 20th centuries along railroads that crisscrossed the region to export its bounty of agricultural products, mainly meat and cotton. Towns stretch linearly along railroad tracks and have no traditional Latino town centers with their rectilinear plazas, focal churches, and kioscos (bandstands) (Arreola 2001, 2002; Haverluk 2004). Many Texas Panhandle towns do have barrios, neighborhoods of predominantly Latino residents, almost all of Mexican heritage. From our photographic study and interviews, we discerned five cultural landscape themes in the Texas Panhandle that we explore here: (1) house architecture, colors, and religious shrines (*capillas*); (2) churches and public paintings; (3) cemeteries; (4) business enterprise and advertising; and (5) political signage. Each theme has its own significance in the new Latino landscape of the region.

#### **House Architecture, Colors, Religious Shrines (*Capillas*)**

Mexican influences on Anglo architecture in Texas can be traced to before the Mexican Revolution in 1821 (Connally 1952). In our visits to the 12 focal Texas Panhandle counties, frequent examples of Mexican-style architecture met Arreola's (1988) three principal criteria for a Mexican-American house-scape in South Texas: (1) enclosure of property, conspicuously the front yard, (2) bright exterior house color, (3) and presence of a religious yard shrine or *capilla*.

Via Spanish colonization, such expressions of Moorish architectural characteristics as archways and wrought iron (or other dark metal) adornments are typical Mexican markers found in the Texas Panhandle as they are in other areas of Texas and the Southwest (Arreola 1988; Shipway and Shipway 1967). Many Latino homes in Texas are humble or even impoverished, but some radiate bright exterior colors inherent in the Mexican heritage. Familial tradition or personal preference makes these colorful landscape statements. Some Latino residents say they choose certain colors to ward off evil spirits (Arreola 1988).

Mobile and manufactured homes are ubiquitous throughout the Texas Panhandle (Figure 2). Many Latinos, particularly recent migrants and those living in poverty, rent mobile and manufactured homes; some of which are painted vividly in solid colors, especially red, pink, blue, or green. The Swift and Company meatpacking plant, for example, has a history of attracting Latino

migrants, some with questionable documentation, to work in Cactus, a town with 2,700 people, 96 percent Latinos, located 80 kilometers (50 miles) due north of Amarillo in Sherman County. These Mexican workers, who do the dirty, dangerous meatpacking work and fear deportation, cram into cheap, sub-standard mobile housing (*Dallas Morning News* 2006; Haverluk 2004; U.S. Census Bureau 2000, 2007). As they become more economically stable, notably as they move from farm labor to other better paying jobs (Haverluk 2004), Latinos purchase their own mobile and manufactured homes because they are less expensive than traditional housing. Occasionally, Latino residents encase their mobile homes with bricks and mortar to provide a sense of more permanency.



**Figure 2.** A Latino neighborhood of mostly mobile and manufactured homes in Cactus depicts common Latino house types in the Texas Panhandle.

Most permanent housing for both Anglos and Latinos in the Texas Panhandle is the conventional wood-framed house. However, houses constructed of relatively cheap cast concrete blocks with stucco exteriors are another distinctive house type that exhibits a traditional Mexican appearance (Figure 3). These sturdy concrete houses provide good insulation in an area that has hot summers and cold winters and is infamous for its high winds. More prosperous Latinos may add wrought iron fence rails and arched entryways characteristic of Mexican-style architecture (Shipway and Shipway 1967; Arreola 1988). A 1988 survey of a San Antonio neighborhood with 75 percent of its

residents being Mexican Americans had fencing around the front of two-thirds of its homes (Arreola 1988). The permanent Latino homes in the Texas Panhandle follow this trend. Affluent Anglos demonstrate a proclivity to build houses with "borderland" architecture, including expensive tile shingles, artistic archways, and wrought-iron exterior embellishments.



**Figure 3.** A concrete block-stucco house demonstrates a Mexican-style housescape.

As they are in South Texas (Arreola 2002), religious yard shrines or *capillas* have become prominent features in the front yards of many Latino housescapes in the Texas Panhandle (Figure 4). These icons to conservative Roman Catholic beliefs can serve as a symbol of piety, home protection, or as a response for answered prayers during a time of need (Arreola 1988, 2002; Matovina and Riebe-Estrella 2002; Toor 1973; Nolan 1973; Turner 1982).

### **Churches and Public Paintings**

At the turn of the 21st century, nearly 78 percent of Latinos were Roman Catholic and 14 percent were members of Protestant denominations in the U.S. (Garcia 2003). Latinos in Texas strongly follow these national trends, and new



**Figure 4.** A *capilla* of the Virgin Mary in the front of a fenced home emphasizes the Latino family's profound religious piety.

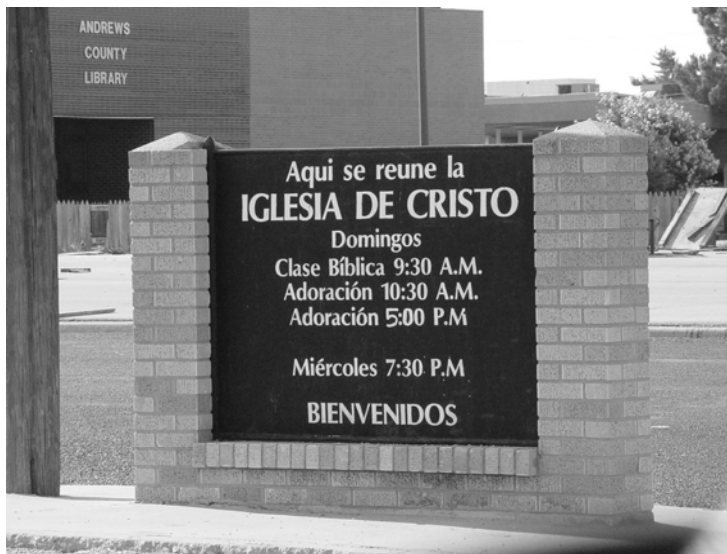
Roman Catholic churches dot the Texas Panhandle landscape. For instance, a few miles outside Andrews, a county seat of more than 9,000 people located 48 kilometers (30 miles) northwest of Midland, in the middle of extensive cotton fields is the St. Isidore Mission, which occupies a recently constructed, prefabricated metal building and serves its newly arrived Latino farm laborers (Figure 5). La Iglesia de Cristo, or the Church of Christ, in Figure 6 illustrates that Protestant denominations use the Spanish language to proselytize immigrating Latinos.

As they do in South Texas (Arreola 2002), religious murals, paintings of historical personages, and Spanish names adorn walls and buildings in the Panhandle Latino barrios. Latinos show their acute spirituality in the form of murals that many times display various symbols of Roman Catholicism. Figure 7 shows a mural in a Lubbock Latino barrio painted on a side of a building depicting Jesus Christ surrounded by a heart and doves as symbols of love and peace with the caption "Mi Pazoy Doy" or "My peace I give."

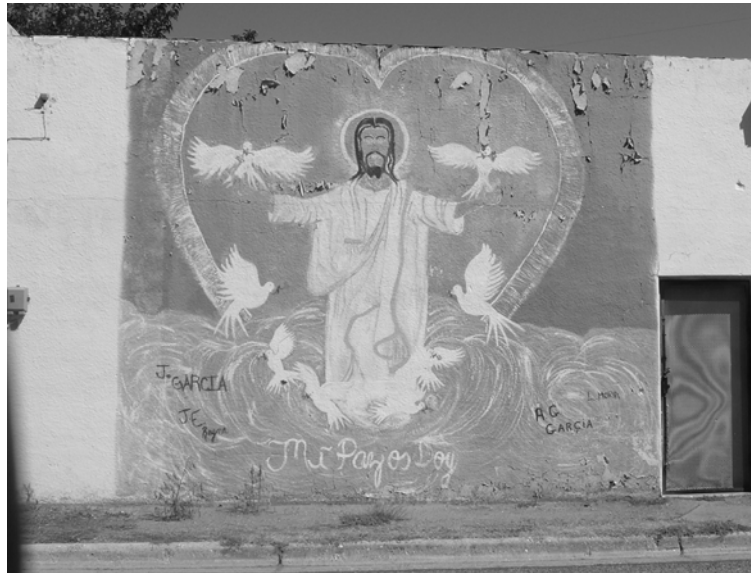




**Figure 5.** The new St. Isidore Mission is located in the midst of cotton fields near Andrews.



**Figure 6.** The Spanish-language sign, *La Iglesia de Cristo*, or the Church of Christ, in Andrews welcomes Latinos to join its Protestant congregation.



**Figure 7.** A building mural of Jesus Christ with the caption “*Mi Pazos Doy*” or “My peace I give” is a reminder of Latino religious symbols in a Lubbock barrio.

### Cemeteries

Geographers have long been interested in the information they can glean from cemeteries. Cemeteries are landscape reflections of the people who settle an area and the cultural attributes they leave behind. A cemetery can answer important questions about a community: (1) who are buried here, including gender, age, and likely ethnicity via surnames, (2) when they were born and died, (3) the cultural characteristics of each gravesite, (4) the spatial arrangement of gravesites within cemeteries, and (5) the cultural predominance in certain periods. Examination of a robust sample of cemeteries in a large area can provide a view of regional cultural influences (Francaviglia 1971; Samuels 1979; Jordan 1982).

Latino cemeteries in the Texas Panhandle fit into four categories (1) Anglo only, (2) spatially segregated Anglo-Latino, including distinct separating markers (empty spaces, roads, or fences, for examples), (3) more integrated Anglo-Latino, and (4) Latino only. In a predominantly Anglo cemetery in Andrews, the burial plot for the Gonzales family with its small statue of Jesus Christ captures the sincere devotion to Roman Catholicism (Figure 8). Figure 9, a bright pink gravesite in a predominantly Latino cemetery located along side a railroad



**Figure 8.** Burial plot of the Gonzales family displays deep religious devotion.



**Figure 9.** A bright pink gravestone of a Latino family in Farwell features a depiction of Jesus Christ.

track in Farwell (a town of 1,300 residents located midway between Lubbock and Amarillo on the New Mexico border), highlights the importance of religious shrines and bright colors to many of Latino families.

Figure 10 is a gravesite of Maria and Manuel Gallegos that dates back to his 1977 burial in a poor Latino barrio cemetery in Sweetwater, a town of more than 10,000 inhabitants located 64 kilometers (40 miles) west of Abilene in Nolan County. Unfortunately, the grave remains unfinished after the passage of thirty years, thereby underscoring the financial burden to Latino families, most of which have low-wage earners, to be able to pay for modern-day burials.



**Figure 10.** The unfinished gravesite of Maria and Manuel Gallegos is located in a small Latino cemetery in Sweetwater.

### **Business Enterprise and Advertising**

The fundamental reason that Latinos migrate to the Texas Panhandle is economic opportunity (Estaville, Montalvo, and Brown 2006). Latino workers in the Texas Panhandle varied geographically in their occupations but generally were workers in meatpacking and feedlot operations, in the oil and gas industry, and in restaurants, and as general laborers and truck drivers. In 2000, most Latinos worked in low-paying jobs (U.S. Census Bureau 2000, 2000-06) that were mainly at the bottom of the occupational ladder—jobs that many

Anglos refused to continue to do. In the 1990s, many Anglos therefore moved, especially from the rural areas of the Texas Panhandle, in search of more rewarding occupations in nearby cities or in large metropolitan areas elsewhere in Texas, principally the Dallas-Ft. Worth metro. In contrast, Latinos moved into the region in search of better jobs in comparison with those they had in South Texas or Mexico, if they had jobs at all. Our fieldwork corroborated these generalizations.

Nevertheless, burgeoning Latino entrepreneurship, notably for later, more educated Latino generations, can be clearly seen in the Texas Panhandle, albeit encompassing a small fraction of Latino workers (Haverluk 2004). From ubiquitous Mexican food restaurants (Figure 11) and automobile repair shops (Figure 12) to convenience stores (Figure 13), construction companies (Figure 14), trucking proprietorships, real estate brokers, clothing stores, barbershops, appliance repair, pawn and curio shops, sprinkler services, ice cream stands and carts, and bail bonds firms, mostly small, family operated ventures that exhibit various degrees of success, Latinos have grounded themselves in the economy of their local communities. Although most Latino owners named their businesses after their family names or Mexican places to appeal to Latino immigrants, some insightful Latino business owners try to attract Anglo customers as well by using the word "American" in their signage.



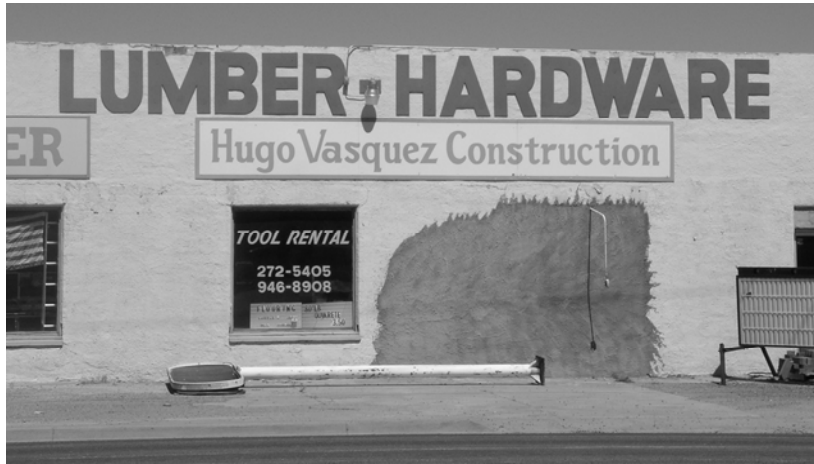
**Figure 11.** The Casa Morales restaurant in Sweetwater tries to draw both Latino and Anglo diners.



**Figure 12.** Hernandez Auto Shop in Spearman, a town of some 3,000 residents located about 130 kilometers (80 miles) northeast of Amarillo in Hansford County, is one of numerous Latino auto repair shops in the Texas Panhandle.



**Figure 13.** El Jacalito in Cactus markets goods targeted to Latino workers, sells inexpensive Mexican food and specialty items, and provides pay telephones to call home.



**Figure 14.** Hugo Vasquez Construction Company in Muleshoe, a town of 4,600 residents located 105 kilometers (65 miles) northwest of Lubbock, builds and remodels houses.

Bilingual advertising for business enterprises is widespread in the Texas Panhandle. Advertisements in the Spanish language only are becoming more commonplace in the landscape as the Latino population grows and becomes more influential in certain places. Figure 15 shows, for example, a Spanish language advertisement in Cactus for one- and two-bedroom apartments for rent. Cactus, with the Swift meatpacking plant, has a high housing turnover rate as new Latino migrants replace those who have found less demanding or better paying jobs elsewhere (Haverluk 2004). Indeed, as Latino families become more affluent, retailers target them and their newfound incomes, for instance, the billboard in Figure 16 calls on Latinas specifically to shop at the new Dunlap's, "the center of shopping in Amarillo." Such advertisements and billboards spread across the Texas Panhandle landscape simply highlight the increasing importance of Latino consumers to local and regional economies.

### Political Signage

Latino political activities in the Texas Panhandle, like those of other newly arrived migrants in other places in the U.S., lag behind the growth in their population. Undocumented immigrants cannot participate in voting for Latino political leaders, and it takes years for Latinos to gain citizenship and voting rights in the U.S. However, once a critical mass develops of Latinos who can vote, participate in political activities, form organizations, such as the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, and have leaders and issues that they want to support,



**Figure 15.** Prominently displayed in Cactus, a town that has a high turnover of Latino workers, is a banner advertising in Spanish for “Apartments for rent – one and two bedrooms.”

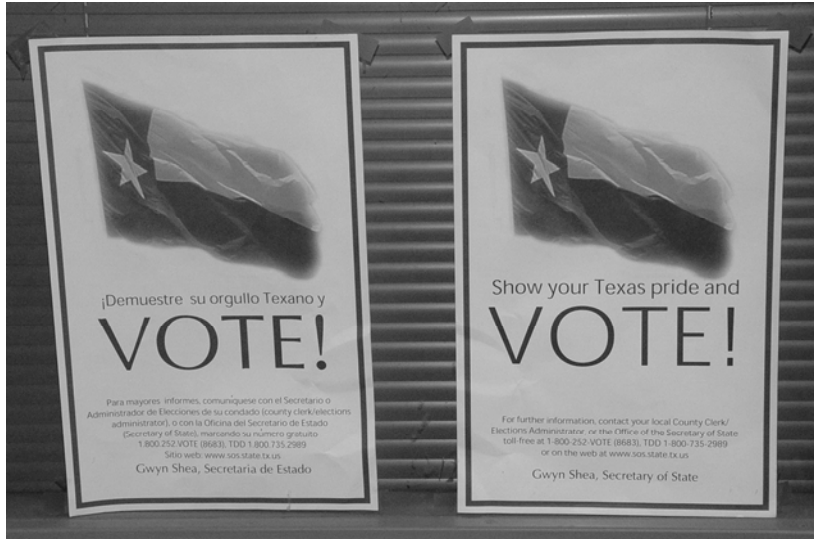


**Figure 16.** A billboard in Spanish with a Latina face tries to attract newly affluent Latino families, especially women, to a shopping mall in Amarillo.





**Figure 17.** A political campaign sign in Lubbock for a Latino candidate running for county commissioner exemplifies burgeoning Latino political awareness.



**Figure 18.** Bilingual voting flyers encourage people to vote in Sweetwater.

these political processes begin at the local levels (Haverluk 2004). Of the twelve focus counties in this study, only eight had county judges (commissioners) or county seat municipal councilors who had Latino surnames in 2004. Deaf Smith County (57% Latino) had the highest percentages of Latino county judges (20%) and county seat municipal councilors (33%), yet significantly less than the county's Latino population proportion (Texas Online 2004-07). The Texas Panhandle cultural landscape during local election campaigns in recent years has seen increasingly more political signage with the names of Latino candidates (Figure 17). Moreover, Texas distributes bilingual signage to encourage voter turnouts.

### Conclusion

A new Latino landscape is clearly emerging in the Texas Panhandle. As the Latino population proportions continue to multiply, it is not inconceivable to see, in Arreola's words, a new "tierra tejana," which not only receives migrants from South Texas but becomes a remarkable augmentation of the historic Tejano homeland. The continued rise of the Latino culture, particularly its incorporation of the Spanish language into daily life and its impending political power, will deepen its signature on the cultural landscape of the Texas Panhandle.

### Note

1. Although the U.S. Census uses the term Hispanics, in the past couple of decades many Hispanics have self-ascribed to the term Latinos. The terms Latinos and Hispanics are interchangeable.

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