



Aerial photograph of College Station (left) and Bryan (right), showing Texas A&M in the upper right quadrant this page.

STEVEN A. MOORE

DESCRIPTIONS AND

Who gets to describe a place? In lieu of offering a single poetic or even scientific description of Bryan-College Station, readers may be best served by descriptions from both outsiders and insiders. Like poking road kill with a stick, multiple proddings will best determine if the critter is dead or alive. But an argument for multiple tests of reality is not to suggest that knowledge about a place is cumulative and progressive or even correct. This is not a game of statistical science. Rather, situated knowledge that is rooted in the often mundane and troubled experience of a place is preferable to the seemingly objective, god's-eye view constructed by the modern scientific method.¹

What better way to situate knowledge than to let those on the inside speak for

themselves? But which insiders? These edited interviews were gathered with no particular criteria in mind other than a concern for diversity. If descriptions are powerful tools that allow us to understand a place, redescrptions are doubly embedded in one's world view.² Describing a place documents what is. Redescrbing a place requires speculation about what it might be and confronts those conditions that, from the viewer's perspective, need fixing.

With this distinction in mind, I asked each person interviewed to do three things: (1) Describe yourself; (2) Describe Bryan-College Station; (3) Redescribe Bryan-College Station. The responses provide a remarkably coherent view of how life is seen in these twin cities. Like the name itself, it is a hyphenated construction.



Metropolitan Aerial Surveys

REDESCRIPTIONS FROM THE INSIDE



A View From the Top

Fred Brown

Cite: To begin our conversation, it would be helpful if you would describe who you are and what you do in Bryan-College Station.

FB: I've been the Mazda-BMW dealer here

for 15 years and have been heavily involved in the community. In 1991 I ran for city council in College Station and served on the council for several years before I became involved with Texas A&M. I am now a conservative Republican candidate for the Texas Legislature. My community involvement has flourished, and I love every bit of it. I think that if you're going to do business in the community, you need to give back your time, resources, and efforts to help make a difference.

Cite: That personal history puts you in the perfect position to consider my next question. How would you describe Bryan-College Station? What kind of a place is it?

FB: It's very, very traditional in every

aspect. It's right in the middle of the Bible Belt. It's very conservative. And there's always been a problem between Bryan and College Station: Bryan is an old-time city that's been 140 years in the making, and then all of a sudden College Station sprang up in 1938. So there has been resentment from some of the old Bryanites because of the people who broke away and started their own town. But now, College Station is as big a city as Bryan. Over the years Travis Bryan, Jr., a banker whose great-grandfather founded the city of Bryan, has been quoted in *The Eagle* [the local newspaper] as saying that Bryan and College Station should become one city, and when College Station was small, most College Station citizens agreed. We figured that we didn't need two different police departments, two different fire

departments — all that redundancy. Back then, most Bryanites, however, didn't see it that way. Then just a few years ago we had some hearings in College Station about unification, because it was obvious that the savings would be phenomenal. But those who showed up at the hearings in College Station were the old-time families that had started College Station. Their collective opinion was, "Hey, we're the overdog now. We're doing well; we don't need Bryan with all of its problems, with no zoning, with the tremendous decay in the downtown area. We have an up-and-coming city that is well planned and well organized, good government. Things are happening." As a result, College Station now takes care of its own development interests, and Bryan takes care of itself.

Cite: From your perspective as a community leader, how would you like to redescribe Bryan and College Station? In other words, what would you like to change?

FB: I would like for the two places to become one place. With the savings, we could do projects that need to be done in Bryan and bring both communities up to an equal par.

Cite: Did I detect in your golfing metaphor that the two communities can be characterized now as the haves and the have-nots?

FB: That's correct, but both extremes exist in Bryan. The old money is in Bryan, but College Station has a leg up because it's only 60 years old. When you have a plain sheet of paper to start with, it gives you a hundred-year head start on your competitor next door. You don't have decay that you're ashamed of in older parts of the community.

Cite: Is College Station both affluent and homogenous?

FB: Yes, because of the university.

Cite: So you would bring the two communities together politically in order to offer Bryan the opportunity and the resources to solve some of its social and infrastructure problems?

FB: Yes.

Cite: What would unification do for College Station?

FB: For people coming into the community from the outside, like I did, Bryan and College Station are one place. Most immigrants simply view Bryan as the decaying, old part of College Station. Even some A&M people understand this. A vice chancellor at A&M once told me that if God was going to give Bryan-College Station an enema, it could be right up Highway 21. That's the old, decaying part of north Bryan. But rather than paying to give Bryan an enema, the university had the Aggie expressway built so that people coming from Austin could bypass Highway 21 through Bryan. It seems that the university and the City of College Station are conspiring to make Bryan invisible rather than trying to solve mutual problems.

Cite: Would it be fair to say that just as business opportunity from Bryan has migrated south to College Station, the concealed social problems of College Station have migrated north to Bryan?

FB: Yes, absolutely. But no matter how the cities are politically divided, when people come to see the George Bush Library, they will experience Bryan-College Station as one city. The economic problems of Bryan will never go away unless there's a cooperative effort on the part of College Station, Bryan, and Texas A&M University to take care of the problems as one community. But it's still a great place to raise a family. Good, good people.

Editor's Note: Mr. Brown was elected to the Texas Legislature in March.



A Professional View

Julius M. Gribou

Cite: Julius, would you please describe who you are and the role you play in the community?

JG: I am the head of the department of architecture at Texas A&M University. My involvement in the planning and design activities of College Station started in the early 1990s, when I was asked to join the city's design review board. I then had the opportunity to serve on the planning and zoning commission. My role on the commission has been to make the values of architecture visible in a dialogue that had previously been dominated by engineers, developers, and attorneys. Now that my six years on the planning and zoning commission are up, I have decided to run for city council.

Cite: That history gives you a special perspective from which to understand the dynamics of Bryan-College Station. How would you describe this place?

JG: I guess the first time I saw College

Station was in 1978. It seemed then like a nice, quiet, dormant community — a bedroom community for faculty. But in 20 years it has grown incredibly, curiously at times. There is a visible difference between College Station and Bryan, and if I didn't know they were two cities, two political entities, I would wonder why things are the way they are. The diversity in Bryan is interesting and exciting, but dangerous if you don't know what you're doing. The lack of diversity in College Station is surprising. College Station has only two little ethnic pockets, whereas Bryan has a range of ethnic neighborhoods, making Bryan a much more diverse community. Unfortunately, the relationship between the two cities is probably more antagonistic than complementary. For example, HOK [Hellmuth, Obata & Kassabaum, which bought out CRSS] has recently completed a comprehensive plan for College Station, but it didn't consider Bryan other than peripherally. HOK's plan was based upon three demographic scenarios: moderate growth, high growth, and very high growth. In this last projection, College Station is seen as having the potential of being almost twice its current size by the year 2020 — 110,000 people in College Station.

Cite: What has caused the division between the two cities?

JG: College Station developed as a support community for Texas A&M. Historically, if you look at who lives where and why, I think you will recognize that economic and real estate interests have contributed most to the tension between the towns.

Cite: If it is only pragmatic to recognize that this bifurcated community is not going to resolve its political and economic differences, how would you want to redescribe the place — what would you make different?

JG: I would like to see this community develop an aesthetic that is not planned by developers, but planned by someone who can envision a civic presence in a single location. Such a concept might balance the future of College Station with the sense of history being redeveloped in Bryan. I think the two communities could build on each of their strengths without competing. The worrisome part is that I don't know how College Station can

develop greater diversity. When I look at new real estate developments, Pebble Creek for example, they are more homogenous than ever before. I mean they're so white.

Cite: Do you think that people in Bryan will be satisfied with the prospect of their city becoming the precinct of history and College Station becoming the precinct of economic development?

JG: No, that's not going to fly. Economic development needs to occur in both areas. Each town needs to be built around different strengths. I don't think that one could say that Bryan should become a museum, and College Station should become the city of the future. College Station has some historical opportunities, and downtown Bryan is an amazing environment, full of development potential that I would hate to see vanish.



A View From Campus

Douglas Carnutte

Cite: Because I know you are pressed for time, as all graduate students are, I will ask only three short questions. First, could you describe yourself?

DC: I'm a retired high school band director and a career-change student in architecture at Texas A&M.

Cite: How would you describe Bryan-College Station? You've had experience in other states, and a lot of experience in

Texas. What is this place about?

DC: I really like it here. It's so friendly. First, there's the campus and Aggieland. Then, there's College Station at-large, and finally you have Bryan, which is different. It's a lot different. It has an older feel. I know that politically Bryan and College Station don't get along. But that division is, for me, almost meaningless.

Cite: So, how would you redescribe Bryan-College Station? What would you change?

DC: If I were tsar, I would make the area around the campus more urban, more like Ann Arbor, Michigan. Here the student body is spread all over creation because of the scattered housing situation. If it were just a little more urban, a little denser, maybe we could all live closer to campus and walk, bike, or take shuttles to campus.

Cite: Wouldn't making the campus denser, more cloistered, have the effect of making the university less integrated into the community?

DC: Maybe not. I think it would increase pedestrian traffic, and people might get to know fellow students and neighbors because they would see each other every day. For example, I don't have any relationship with anything around campus. I'm on campus, and then I go home. But if I had to walk home, then I would have a relationship with the other places and people around campus. Increased density could actually increase integration between students and what's around the campus. For graduate students, the campus isn't rewarding because we're isolated in our cars. We can't live on campus because there's not enough housing. Only the Corps and a few undergraduates live in campus dorms. You know we have a tremendous school spirit here. But can you imagine what it would be like if we all lived a little closer?



An Emergent View

Vera Miller

Cite: Could you tell our readers something about yourself?

VM: I was born in Bryan, and I've lived here all my life. I went away for a little bit, but I came back. You always come back home. Now I live in College Station. When you're from here, you're raised to say Bryan-College Station. But I guess I'm from College Station now. I have a company that cleans offices and apartments.

Cite: Since you've been here all your life, you know a lot about the place. How would you describe Bryan-College Station?

VM: It's a wonderful place, let me tell you! People are very nice here. The only thing is that we don't use Spanish very much in College Station. You don't need it here. There is not even a Spanish-speaking Catholic church here.

Cite: What about the Hispanic community in Bryan?

VM: In Bryan's Hispanic community, on the west side, there are a lot of people from Mexico. You find that in Bryan more than in College Station. But I don't have to go anywhere near Bryan. I have my grocery stores here. I have my department stores here. I have everything right here at my fingertips. Hispanic people from Bryan come and work at the university. A lot of the girls I know work at the university. In Bryan there's more factory work. I think even the pay scale is different, lower than in College Station. There is more opportunity in College Station, like at the Scott & White Clinic and in all the apartment complexes.

Cite: Your description of Bryan-College Station is very vivid. How would you want to redescribe it? What would you make different?

VM: I wouldn't want to make anything different. I love Bryan-College Station. I love College Station. Except, well, I think we need more entertainment stuff here.

Like a place for concerts. Let's build more entertainment. Let's do more parks like Astroworld or Six Flags. They were going to have a Smashing Pumpkins concert right here at the Speedway that would have been great, but the city stopped it.

Cite: One of the things most people say about Bryan-College Station is that it's a great place to raise kids. Perhaps people think entertainment is a threat to raising kids properly?

VM: Well, those kids grow up, and I'm one of them. I would just like to be able to take my nieces to a water park or to Astroworld without having to pack my bags and drive to San Antonio or Houston. But, bottom line, it's a wonderful place to live.



A View From Bryan

Emilio López

Cite: Tell me a bit about yourself, and how you came to run the West 25th Street Cleaners.

EL: This business belongs to my dad, and I'm just managing it for him. I was raised here in Bryan until I was about seven. Then we lived in California until I was 13, but we moved on back to Bryan to get away from that. My dad started this business, and we've been here for 25 years. My dad is originally from here. My mom's from Mexico, but this is the hometown. This is the base. This is a family business.

Cite: That gives you some insight into Bryan-College Station. How would you describe it? What kind of a town is it?

EL: If you live here in Bryan, you'll come back to Bryan. I don't know why, but

everybody does. Everybody moves away, but they always wind up back here. It's right in the middle of everything. College Station is here, and we've got the university. As far as the kids growing up, there's a chance of them going to college nearby. Saves a lot of money. I've got my daughter going to Texas A&M. Why move to Austin? As far as Bryan goes, it's nice. The downtown is being remodeled. We're getting all these buildings renovated, so in about another ten years there will be another look in the town.

Cite: So you think things are looking up for Bryan?

EL: Oh, yes! There's going to be a big fire station on the west side of town, so apparently they're going to fix up all this — put money into it. There is crime, but not any big crimes. I think the crime

comes from the younger generation, the kids that are 15 or 14. I don't think they care. To them, it's just living day by day. There's no respect from these kids anymore. They get away with everything. If they do something, they go to juvie, stay three months, and then they're back out on the street. There's really no punishment.

Cite: It's a perplexing situation. On one hand, things are looking up for the community because of possible reinvestment in the downtown, but on the other hand. . .

EL: . . . the parents work, and the kids buy drugs.

Cite: Is College Station a different community from Bryan?

EL: Well, Bryan is a community. Over there, it's the school deal. It's two different towns. College Station's always been good. They've got their ups and downs too. But this is my little town. You've got mostly families here. Over there, you got apartments, duplexes, the mall, and the chains. If you do business in Bryan, you're not a chain; you're an independent businessman. You put your money into it, and if you don't make it, you fold. As far as the chains go, they don't lose; they just write it off. I can't compete with those franchises. They charge 89 cents to clean a shirt. I have to stick to \$1.10 to make ends meet.

Cite: If that's how you describe Bryan-College Station, how would you like to redescribe it? What would you like to change?

EL: I don't know. I can't say that I want Bryan to change at all. You don't want it to change too, too much, because if you start growing, everything starts going up and small businesses start dropping. I'd like it to stay its same old self. Decorate it maybe, but keep it the same.

Cite: That's a nice way to put it.

EL: You put on a suit, but you're still the same person. It doesn't change you. It just brings you out a little bit more.



A View From the Country

Jack Sullins

Cite: Jack, could you describe yourself and Big Sky Farm?

JS: My wife and I moved here about 14 years ago, bought a piece of land off of the Johnson Ranch, and started a horse operation. We're about 20 miles outside of College Station. She trains dressage and jumping horses, and I ride young horses that haven't been ridden before. Things are going pretty good right now.

Cite: You've lived all over Texas, and you've been around the world a bit. How would you describe Bryan-College Station?

JS: It strikes me as a busy place. There seems to be a lot going on. We buy our feed there, and we do all our shopping there. I wish we could do more shopping in downtown Bryan, because they've got so many old buildings that aren't being used, and it's sad to see all that go to waste. It looks to me like they could use those old buildings instead of building

more stuff on the outskirts of town. I don't know why they would let that part of downtown die like that. Bryan's got one good hardware store, which I like to go in, and I really like the Bryan Library. But when I speak of Bryan, I say old Bryan. College Station is new. I think of College Station as being a 19- or 20-year-old man, and I think of old Bryan as a 70- or 80-year-old man. Of course, now that I'm getting old myself, I lean toward the old. In old Bryan you've got the older generation, what I call solid. Sometimes I wonder about the young situation over here, whether they're going to be solid. There's a degree of competition between the two towns, between the young and

the old. But I don't think competition ought to get to the point where one business is trying to put another out. I think everybody should have a decent living and shouldn't cut the price of things to force others out. I don't like that kind of competition. Downtown Bryan is also getting hurt by the mall out there. It undermines the downtown area.

Cite: If that's of concern, how would you like to redescribe Bryan-College Station? How would you like it to change?

JS: It would be interesting to see it come

together as one unit. I think in order for that to work, there'd have to be one or two individuals come in and lead the others. I would also like to see things slow down a little bit. Over there on Texas Avenue, everybody is whipping up and down the road going real fast. Where are they going? Pick out one of those fast cars and follow it. See where it goes. It doesn't go anywhere. Whoever it was sped down there, stopped and bought a Coke. There was no reason to be charging off down that road. The house wasn't on fire. He was just going down there to buy a soda pop. We could just slow down, get the soda pop, and enjoy it that much more. That's just the way I think.

A Summary View

It is striking that all six of these interviews describe Bryan-College Station as a single community that has been internally divided by its troubled political economy. Without prompting, everyone observed that the political division between Bryan and College Station is at least wasteful, at most destructive. Three of those interviewed explicitly chose to redescribe the cities as a single political entity.

The artificial spatial division of this community is an example of the late-modern phenomenon known as "uneven development."³ By creating an exclusive spatial zone — one that, like College Station, is more attractive to flexible capital — entrenched real estate interests serve themselves at the expense of community. Not only does exclusionary space stimulate investment in the new zone, it causes disinvestment in the old zone. For example, virtually all of Bryan's car dealerships that were established in Bryan have now relocated to College Station. The new commercial space created along the Route 6 bypass has attracted capital by focusing traffic flow along the frontage property controlled by a few investors, while the old dealership locations in Bryan now lie vacant, bringing no tax revenue to the city. The pattern of investment and disinvestment may maximize cash flow, but it also damages those who prefer the continuity and propinquity of a sustained community. One result of such spatial politics is that members of the community who are closer to the bottom of the economic hierarchy (principally minority groups who depend upon each other for economic survival) have become spatially, as well as economically, marginalized.

This harsh interpretation ignores another element common to four of the six descriptions of Bryan-College Station. These four people — three of whom have reason to complain about local spatial politics — stated that Bryan-College Station is a "wonderful place." The two Hispanic people interviewed, who might have been expected to redescribe the community in the most radical way, chose instead the status quo. They were reluctant to have their hometown(s) change at all. Some might dismiss this conservatism on the part of minority citizens as an example of cultural hegemony — a form of domination so pervasive that repressive cultural conditions appear natural, even to those who are most discriminated against. But when Vera Miller said, "It's a

wonderful place, let me tell you!" I believed her.

Bryan and College Station are not, of course, the only twin cities in the United States. Those who wish to redescribe Bryan-College Station as a single political entity might look at Champaign-Urbana (the home of the University of Illinois) for strategies that may help to inform the current situation. The perspectives of the six citizens interviewed here suggest that the unique economic and cultural conditions of Bryan and College Station have fostered a division of wealth, labor, and geography that is something less than democratic. The Greek ideal of the polis depends upon the existence of a single space, or forum, where public discourse can take place. If the citizens of a single community lack access to any portion of the discourse that affects their interests, democracy fails. In this view, democracy is a spatial concept, and the artificial subdivision of political space within a community can only subvert the democratic process.

The people who live in the twin cities think Bryan-College Station is a "wonderful place to live," democratic or not. As Fred Brown commented, these are "good, good people" — but notice he had to say "good" twice. ■

1. Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledge: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," in *Technology and the Politics of Knowledge*, Andrew Feenberg and Alastair Hannay, eds. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), pp. 175-94.

2. Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 89.

3. David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1990), pp. 293-97.