The Baca Ranch:
Aspects of Tragic Exploitation and Features of Triumphant Preservation

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Melody Lipke is a lifelong San Luis Valley resident who enjoys music, writing, history, and mountain adventures in her free time. The topic of the Baca Ranch and Colorado water rights has long been a fascination of Melody’s, and she finds herself deeply motivated to inspire others to explore the enchantments of the San Luis Valley in Colorado.

“The magnificent setting in southern Colorado lends itself to open-ended dreams on a grand scale…The magic place is called the Baca.”

- The Sunday Camera
Boulder, August 2, 1981

A vibrantly rich history, twisted with the ferocity of grasping for land ownership and undercut with the tragedy of nearly lost water: this is part of the story of the Baca Ranch. The Baca is settled on the edge of the San Luis Valley, contains the 750-foot tall sparkling waves of the Great Sand Dunes National Park, holds Navajo sacred lands, and remains one of the most ecologically important areas in the Nation.

This story is wrought with tragedies: legislation thwarting Hispano-Mexican Americans, a near forfeiture of the Southwestern paradise and their patrimony, and a brutal fight between conservation and consumerism. Yet radiating through is the brilliant triumph of resilient San Luis Valley people who have preserved a cherished culture and a valuable ecosystem.

The Baca Ranch: Just the Beginning
A tract of land measuring 496,447 acres in New Mexico is the reason why the Baca Ranch exists. In 1823, Luis Maria Cabeza de Baca and his nineteen sons were awarded a grant by the Mexican government in what is now known as Las Vegas, New Mexico. The Mexican government utilized land grants at this time to promote settlement and development. In the years following, land was also awarded to twenty-eight other individuals, or so they claimed. After the United States officially took over in 1848, these twenty-eight others asserted claim to the land. Under the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848), the U.S. government began to dispute these claims. Yet, in the Treaty, which settled the Mexican American War, the U.S. promised to honor all land grants. The conflict was complex and fervent, so a unique solution was applied: the New Mexico land was swapped for five other land parcels, which were bestowed to the Baca heir.

Four of these properties were in New Mexico, but one was located in Colorado, a 1,000 acre plot in the San Luis Valley. The Baca family did not truly put roots down on this piece of land, and consequently, the property was passed between many owners and managers.

Despite its many owners and convoluted history, the San Luis Valley parcel, which came to be known as the Baca Ranch, is the only one of five that remained intact. This is partially due to a deep treasure below the ground. Water. Underneath the Ranch lies an unconfined and a confined aquifer. This resource of the earth has sustained the economy, influenced society, and shaped culture. Water is the most esteemed treasure of the San Luis Valley, aside from its people. The Baca Ranch is a reflection of Colorado history: mining, ranching, railroads, farming, tourism, development, and exploitation, all affecting its abundant ecosystems and fashioning a vibrant history.

Exploitation of the Baca Ranch in Ownership
The complex exchange of land ownership eventually led to decades of tragic exploitation for capital gain. The Baca Ranch was purchased, used, and sold many times before its ecological or
cultural value were properly considered. Not long after the Baca Ranch was awarded to the Baca heirs, they deeded it to their lawyer, John S. Watts, to cover mounting legal fees. He in turn relinquished the land to Territorial Governor William Gilpin in 1862 for thirty cents per acre.\(^8\) The grant was then sold to investors, real estate speculators, the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad. It was leased to cattle ranchers, and eventually bought by developers who wanted to use the resources for capital gain.\(^9\) The Baca Grant was not valued for its ecological importance or cultural history, rather it was bought and sold for real estate profit.

**Ranching History**

Cattle ranching on the Baca Ranch attained enormous success. It ultimately achieved triumph due to careful practices that preserved the ecosystem of the land. Major Alfred M. Collins, a major stockholder of the San Luis Valley Land and Cattle Company, spearheaded the cattle success, and developed double pasture practices that kept the plant life intact by not overusing the land. Until the 1870s, the Baca Ranch had been leased to cattle ranchers to run their cattle, but the industry lacked direction. George Adams, a pioneer cattleman, was the first to develop the land for cattle ranching. Some of his improvements included 141 miles of fencing—the first extensive application of barbed wire in the San Luis Valley. He also improved the natural irrigation and built structures such as sheds and corrals. Aside from the 110 miles of irrigation canals and ditches, Adams dug many artesian wells on the property.\(^10\) Just as the improvements raised the property value, Adams’ purebred Hereford cattle and hardy interbred Hereford were a major asset.

Under Collins, cattle ranching blossomed. Through “drought and depression” the Ranch saw national fame with Collins at the helm.\(^11\) Collins improved and expanded the irrigation, artesian wells, and hay fields. Over the ten years that he improved the property, Hereford bulls from Baca Ranch herds increased both in regard and demand. As settlement moved West, so did the cattle industry, and the Baca Ranch played a large role in introducing the Hereford breed into commercial herds.\(^12\) In 1945, the ranch held a Hereford and Hereford Cross cattle auction that broke the world record and attracted an estimated 3,500 buyers, according to the *Colorado Transcript* newspaper.\(^13\) The Royal Domino line was developed at the Baca and became nationally acknowledged for stock breeding. In 1949, Collins was named “Cattlemen of the Year,” and was known to have developed one of the best ranches within the U.S.\(^14\) Nationally, the Baca Ranch began to gain respect, and through the lens of cattle ranching, people began to see the ranch as a land of value that should be preserved.

**Mining History**

Just as the careful and successful ranching practices are a triumph, mining on the Baca Ranch was tragic. The history of the Baca Ranch is marked with miners and developers attempting to extract the rich minerals from the property. Unfortunately, mining practices brought damage to the land, unlike ranching practices, and did not retain the original land grant’s pristine nature. The property was ideal for mining, however, not just due to its source of gold, copper, and iron, but also because materials required for mining, such as water and timber, were naturally present. The mines stretched for twelve miles across the Sangre de Cristo range.\(^15\)

By the 1870s when Adams became manager of the ranch, squatters had built and inhabited several small towns on the land. Two of the largest were Cottonwood and Duncan. Most of the inhabitants of these squatter’s towns were miners. During the time that William Gilpin, a former governor, owned the property, he encouraged mineral exploration. While he retained the mineral rights and earned royalties on all minerals extracted, he allowed the miners to remain. Adams terminated the mining boom in 1885.\(^16\) He entered into a legal contention over the mineral rights with the ultimate ruling in his favor. He had the trespassers in the towns of Cottonwood, Duncan, and others removed, and began to attempt mining himself. In 1900, U.S. Marshals officially evicted the residents of Cottonwood and Duncan.\(^17\)

Landowners were persistent with mining ambitions. To encourage mining, a train spur from Moffat to Crestone was built in 1901 by the Rio Grande Sangre de Cristo Railroad. In 1908 there was a combination of thirty developed and partially-developed mining claims. The same year, the largest mine, Independent Mine, had produced more than $300,000 in ore, but this extraction was expensive, damaging, and dangerous. Until Major Collin’s leadership in cattle
ranching, the main focus of the grant had been mining. Afterwards, the mining craze subsided. Mineral extraction came at a high cost, as did the refining process, due to the distance of such facilities from Baca Ranch. Ultimately, the fixation with mining ended, and the focus of the ranch began to shift to other resources. Although prospectors no longer attempted to extract metals, developers began to set their sights on a more precious resource: the water. The aquifers are the lifeblood of the ranch, and if removed, the land would be parched.

Lawsuits and Developers
From its origin, the Baca Ranch was filled with contention and disputes. The often changing ownership was symptomatic of unappreciative or exploitative beliefs about land ownership and use. Legal issues surfaced when grazing and mineral rights came to the forefront of the Ranch. The issue reached an apex, culminating with the 1900 U.S. Marshal eviction which was a result of a court ruling about these rights. The Ranch was contested in court again when two leasers, George Dimick and Charles Matheson, refused to forego their lease even after it was terminated.

Not long after the SLV Land and Mining Company, later renamed SLV Land and Cattle, purchased the Baca Ranch, several developers created a subsidiary company, planning to auction off the ranch in 9,200 tracts of land for agriculture, cattle ranching, timber, and mineral extraction. This project elicited heavy controversy, however, and was terminated. The citizens of the San Luis Valley by then had placed invaluable worth on the land. In 1950, the Newhall Land and Farming Company of Arizona and California purchased the land for $1,000,000, and the grazing rights and commercial herd for $750,000. By this point the value of the Baca Ranch was established, and in retrospect, it is somewhat risible that the original sale to Gilpin was a meagre thirty cents per acre, even considering inflation.

The Newhall Company sold the famous purebred Hereford cattle, and then the entire property to the Arizona-Colorado Land and Cattle Company. This was yet another developing company that had plans to subdivide the ranch, but it actually succeeded in 1971, selling plots of land in order to create the Baca Grande, a leisure living community. Developments included roads and underground utilities, installed to make the area residential. A supplement printed by the Baca Grande Corporation boasted: “We could have carved the Baca Grande into sixty-six thousand homesites. We settled for sixty-six hundred,” while another brochure touted large guest rooms, television, sauna and pool facilities, a restaurant, a banquet hall, lounges, and events such as tennis and picnics. The entire project was focused on money and set the stage for further development or exploitation.

New development plans were formulated in 1979 by Canadian oilman, Maurice Strong, who created the American Water Development Inc. (AWDI). His goal was to sell water to the Front Range, piping it from the aquifer under the Baca Ranch. San Luis Valley residents and nature conscious groups protested and contested this action in court. In a 1994 Colorado Supreme Court case, American Water Development v. City of Alamosa, AWDI was forced to relinquish water rights to the Baca aquifer. Another point of contention arose when the Cabeza de Baca Land and Cattle Company LLC, led by Gary Boyce, who grew up in the San Luis Valley, bought the ranch and financed a ballot to challenge the Colorado Supreme Court ruling and regain access to the aquifer, but the San Luis Valley was resilient and the ballot reflected this with a three to one tally against the developers. Later, it came
to light that Yale University was a fifty percent partner in Cabeza de Baca, and fearing scandal from involvement, donated its 1.6 million dollars in profit to The Nature Conservancy to acquire the land.24

Today, The Nature Conservancy and the National Park Service own the land, entrusting it to the Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve, of which it is now a part of, the Rio Grande National Forest, and the Baca National Wildlife Refuge. Congress authorized this land acquisition in the year 2000, and the treasure of nature at the Baca Ranch has been preserved.25 In this regard, the Baca is at last owned by the American people.

Ecological Value
It was vital that the Baca Ranch be preserved. Its inclusion into the Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve has helped protect an ecosystem that is the only home in the world to eight species of insects, and seventy other rare plant and animal types.26 The Ranch possesses and protects the tallest dunes in North America, and has two precious aquifers underneath. During Alfred Collins’ time at the ranch, he guarded the water unyieldingly, and according the Wray Gazette, did not “allow one drop to leave the property.”27 An early description of the dunes was attributed to Zebulon Pike, who stated that “their appearance was exactly that of the sea in a storm…”28 Little did he know that an aquifer underneath helped shape and undergird the massive sand dunes. This water is vital to the vegetation there, and therefore the entire ecological system, including insects.29 Some of the aquifer’s water is streamed and circulated into San Luis Valley irrigation, and helps support an agricultural environment that produces twenty-five percent of the nation’s potatoes.30 The Baca Ranch, with all its assets, is truly an American treasure.

Tragedy & Triumph
Today, the Baca Ranch integrates the cherished culture of San Luis Valley ranching, and as part of the Great Sand Dunes National Park, is one of the most revered locations in the world.31 The complexity of land ownership and usage of the Baca Ranch threatened to leave tragedy in its wake. The people involved, in contrast to the natural wealth of the earth, held inextricable motivations that blurred lines between human progress and monetary gain. The pristine nature of the Baca Ranch, with its aquifers, brimming with plants, fascinating animals, insects, and mystery under a soaring, sheltering sky, deserves to be preserved. Ultimately, when people decide to treasure the breathtaking wonder of nature and come to truly cherish it, that is the real triumph.
“A Look Over the Mountain”:
The Triumphs of Denver’s Five Points Neighborhood
Luke Ortiz-Grabe

1 Malvin R. Goode, "A Look Over the Mountain," July 2, 1965, Box 2, Clarence and Fairfax Holmes Papers, Denver Public Library, Denver, CO.
2 Redlining is the discriminatory practice of using racial and ethnic criteria to refuse residential and business loans within specific metropolitan areas. Mortgage lenders drew red lines around neighborhoods that they refused to offer loans to, and used factors such as race to identify neighborhoods they classified as “hazardous,” especially inner city ones; thereby injecting discrimination into the practice to deny financial services or to charge minorities more than non-redlined neighborhoods.
3 De facto segregation, which can be due to race, happens "by fact" rather than by legal requirement. A Latin expression, de facto means "by fact." It refers to something that exists in practice but not necessarily ordered by law.
15 Duane Howell, "Five Honored in Racial Relations," The Denver Post (Denver, CO), March 6, 1964.
16 "Denver Civilian Heroes Honored by Club," Denver Post (Denver, CO).
18 Clarence F. Holmes, "The appointment book to Clarence Holmes’ dentistry practice.," Box 1, Clarence and Fairfax Holmes Papers, Western History and Genealogy Archives, Denver Public Library, Denver, CO.
19 Roy Wilkins and Clarence F. Holmes, "Final Installment for NAACP Notification," November 27, 1962, Box 2, Clarence and Fairfax Holmes Papers, Western History and Genealogy Archives, Denver Public Libraries, Denver, CO.
20 "Given Statistics on ‘Solid South,’" Box 2, Clarence and Fairfax Holmes Papers, Western History and Genealogy Archives, Denver Public Library, Denver, CO.
21 Clarence F. Holmes, "Response to the Founding of the NAACP Branch of Denver," Box 2, Clarence and Fairfax Holmes Papers, Western History and Genealogy Archives, Denver Public Library, Denver, CO.

24 Certificate to Dr. Holmes for membership campaign for the YMCA Glenarm Branch, 1935, Box 1, Clarence and Fairfax Holmes Papers, Western History and Genealogy Archives, Denver Public Library, Denver, CO.


26 Clarence F. Holmes, Photo of NAACP Denver in front of the Glenarm Branch of the YMCA, June 26, 1926, photograph, Photo-box 2, Clarence and Fairfax Papers, Western History and Genealogy Archives, Denver Public Library, Denver, CO.

27 *Church choir and onlookers of an NAACP event in Five Points*, photograph, Photo-box 2, Clarence and Fairfax Holmes Paper, Western History and Genealogy Archives, Denver Public Library, Denver, CO.

28 "Presentation Card for the First Annual NAACP Freedom Fund Ball," July 29, 1961, Box 2, Clarence and Fairfax Holmes Papers, Western History and Genealogy Archives, Denver Public Library, Denver, CO.

29 Leroy Smith, "Coors Salutes The 5-Points Business Association Juneteenth '85," 1985, Box 1, Otha Rice, Sr. Papers, Blair-Caldwell African-American Research Library, Denver, CO.


31 "27th Annual Juneteenth Celebration," 1993, Box 1, Otha Rice, Sr. Papers, Blair-Caldwell African-American Research Library, Denver, CO.


33 "Record of Rice's Tap Room, such as the contents inside the restaurants and the activities that happened there," September 1964, Box 1, Otha Rice, Sr. Papers, Blair-Caldwell African-American Research Library, Denver, CO.


36 Goodstein, "Five Points," 151.

37 *Rocky Mountain Legacy: Jazz in Five Points*, Public Broadcasting System.

38 *Rocky Mountain Legacy: Jazz in Five Points*, Public Broadcasting System.


41 Rodolfo Gonzales, "Boxing Record Book for Rodolfo Gonzales," 1946, Box 1, Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales Papers, Western History and Genealogy Archives, Denver Public Library, Denver, CO.

42 "Subpoena of Craig Bowers, Mayoral Opponent Running against Gonzales in 1967," April 9, 1968, Box 1, Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales Papers, Western History and Genealogy Archives, Denver Public Library, Denver, CO.


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56 Encyclopedia Staff, "Five Points," Colorado Encyclopedia.


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60 Goodstein, "Five Points," 162.

61 Goodstein, "Five Points," 162.


**The Native American Mascot Controversy: A Case Study of Eaglebeak the Mascot**

Kathryn Kummel


6 Danielle Endres, "American Indian Permission for Mascots: Resistance or Complicity within Rhetorical Colonialism?" *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 18, no. 4 (Winter 2015).


11 Seton, *Boy Scouts*, 75.


23 Colorado Springs High School, *Terror Roundup* (Colorado Springs, CO: 1929); "The Palmer Legend," Palmer Student Council, Colorado Springs, CO, October 12, 2018; the 2018 yearbook printed the Terror Legend, Palmer High School, *Inside Out* (Colorado Springs, CO, 2018): "In the days before the white man/Came across the rolling prairies/Once a tribe of noble warriors/In the valley of the Fountain/Pitched their tents among the fir trees.//’Twas the wise old Wakanago/The strong and skillful leader/Who had made the tribe so powerful./He had trained them in all warfare/He had taught them to be valiant.
Till their foes had learned to fear them/Till at last the other nations/Call their band the tribe of Terrors./Every year at harvest feasting/All the young men fought and wrestled/And the winners of the wrestling/At the harvest feast were honored.// "On your chest will draw a circle/It shall say to all the warriors/That your courage has no ending."// But before he closed the circle/The war whoop called to battle./Forth they rushed, the Terror warriors/Drove their enemies down the canyon/But the young and valiant wrestler/The mightiest among them/Fighting fiercely, fell in battle./Tearless, the old man gazed on him/At the ring of white unfinished// "Oh, my people, let us leave it—/Leave the circle uncompleted/Let it henceforth be our symbol/Let it be our badge of courage./Let the warriors strive to win it/By their feats of strength and wrestling."

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46 King, "On being," 320.

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The Impact of Two Baseball Stadiums Impact on Their Cities—Homerun or Strikeout?
A Case Study of Dodger Stadium & Coors Field
Jack Balaguer

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5 Baxter, “Orphans of the Ravine.”
10 Podair, "How the Dodger Stadium Shaped LA."
11 Podair, "How the Dodger Stadium Shaped LA."
13 Major League Baseball, "Rockies Timeline."
14 Podair, "How the Dodger Stadium Shaped LA."
16 Llamoca, "Remembering The Lost."
17 Podair, "How the Dodger Stadium Shaped LA."
19 Podair, City of Dreams, 299.
24 Vela, "When The Rockies Moved to LoDo."
26 Taylor, "Accounting for Sports."
28 Rosenberg, "Laws That Shaped LA."
29 Llamoca, "Remembering The Lost."
31 Hinojosa, "The Battle."
34 Calhoun, "Ballpark Neighborhood."
35 Jeff Garmany, e-mail interview by the author, January 21, 2019.
36 Garmany, e-mail interview by the author.
37 Podair, *City of Dreams*, 299.
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5 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, 1848, Available from ourdocuments.gov
6 Author Interview San Luis Valley Water Company, December 26, 2014.
7 Christman and Short, The Baca Ranches.
8 Christman and Short, The Baca Ranches.
12 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Intensive Level Cultural Resources.
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19 American Water Development Inc. v. City of Alamosa, et al.
20 “Californian Buys Baca Grant Ranch,” p. 12.

24 American Water Development Inc. v. City of Alamosa, et al.
25 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Intensive Level Cultural Resources.
26 “Colorado’s Baca Ranch.”
27 “Baca Grant Rancher Stockman of Year.”
29 Personal Interview with Andrew Valdez, geologist, Great Sand Dunes National Park, April 21, 2015.
30 Smith "Water claimed under old treaty."
31 Colorado’s Baca Ranch."
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