Roots in the Earth

Richard L. Boke
ROOTS IN THE EARTH

Richard L. Boke

Over one hundred thousand rural people live on the Rio Grande, north of Elephant Butte Dam—north of Hot Springs, New Mexico. They are one of the oldest settled groups in the United States. They are largely Spanish and Mexican in origin. They do not have enough farm land, enough range land, enough water to make a living off the land. There is not enough work to make a living from wages. Together, wages and the land are no longer giving these people an adequate living. While the population has grown greater, the land itself has grown poorer through overuse; through overdependence of the people upon it.

Roots in the Earth was made to bring this problem to the public. It was made because many of us feel that the motion picture is the best medium to give the public an understanding of the social and physical problems that concern it. Since there are many places in the United States where rural people and their lands are suffering from overdependence of men on the land, the material has much more than local significance.

The picture will be released with both Spanish and English commentary. We made a Spanish version because we feel it is important to reach the Spanish-speaking population in New Mexico and other parts of the Southwest. It will be used widely with New Mexican Spanish-speaking communities and in Latin American countries. The Brazilian embassy has asked for another narration to be voiced in Portuguese for use in Brazil. Latin American groups are much interested in the fact that we in the United States are interested in the Spanish-speaking population in this country.

The script published here was the first step in the making of the picture. During the process of photography, of film cutting and editing, of writing the final narration and adding the musical score, the original script has been changed many times. Three elements make the picture—narration, film, and the musical score. No one of them stands by
People tilling the soil is an old story. The dependence of a man on the soil is an old story. Agriculture—the breaking of the earth, the planting of the seed, the gathering of the grain. The settled life, the home, the flocks and the fields—the unfolding of a man's life and a woman's life on the earth. This is all-old, this story of man on the soil, a long relationship, a settled dependence, its complexities only those of dealing with natural moods of season and success and failure.

But time and pressing needs have wrought changes, and today in hardly a corner of the earth does the simple relationship between man and soil stand. And when erosion comes to a man and his land, when his living becomes precarious, we look beyond the old simplicities to the new forces of today.

Juan Vigil is a man, and he has a house in the village of Cordova, and his neighbors have similar houses in the village of Cordova. He and his neighbors have farms near Cordova.
Cordova is one of seven villages in the valley of Santa Cruz. There are Chimayo, Santa Cruz, Santuario in the main valley, and Cordova, Cundiyo, and Truchas back among the hills. These towns and Juan Vigil and his neighbors are there because the Santa Cruz River is there. In a dry land the Santa Cruz means crops and life for a man.

The Santa Cruz Valley and the Santa Cruz River are one of many valleys and rivers that together make the big head of the Rio Grande. There are the Chama, the the Taos, the Hondo, and the Red rivers—they feed the Rio Grande with water and make it a thing of life and movement for 1,500 miles.

It's no distance from where the Santa Cruz gathers its waters in the peaks to where it joins the Rio Grande, but it's 1,500 miles from here south and southeast to the Gulf. Past Santa Fe, past San Felipe, watering the fields at Albuquerque, and south, past the mouth of the Puerco, over the dam to water the fields at El Paso and on past the Pecos, flowing between nations, watering Texan fields and Mexican fields—supporting American town and Mexican village, passing on between its people and its land into the Gulf.


Shot of valley and watershed from peaks.

Junction points of these streams with the Rio Grande.

\[SCU\]—Flowing mass of the Rio Grande.

Inner courtyard in Santa Fe. Shot across river at San Felipe. Shot of Albuquerque and Middle Rio Grande from top of Sandias (or city street scene).

This is the Rio Grande today. The river with its people, land, villages, and cities.

Three hundred years ago Juan Vigil's people and his neighbors' people passed up the Rio Grande, settled here and there along the valley where land and water were easily joined to grow corn and beans and support villages.

And one of these places was the Santa Cruz Valley. Here a Vigil broke the earth, brought water from the river to the soil, built a house. He and his family rooted in the old pattern of man and soil, a pattern that grew up and down the valley. It was not a new pattern for the Rio Grande. For a thousand years or more the Indians had used the valley and its waters to support a small population of scattered pueblos. Human use was an old and settled part of the valley life.

The flocks of the Spanish were new, though—the beginning of an industry that was to have many consequences in the Rio Grande and the life of the people. But it started simply. Spanish and Indian lived and shared the same life. The villages grew, and churches rose. A matter of decades of settlement in the Santa Cruz and
other valleys, grew a population, a quiet way of life.

A way of life with one pattern growing from many patterns. The day has its growth. The morning rising—the wood—the fire—the meal—morning tasks for the woman—the man—the child. Then the last meal, the coming of night, more fire and lights in the house. Day dies into night, and night into another day, until one added to another builds the new pattern of the week and the day of rest, and the whole begins again until it grows into the old pattern of month. Month grows to season, and season brings subtle change to the small patterns of day and week, as the winter day turns into spring day and life expands from the house and village. Juan and his neighbors clean and repair the ditches, break and plant soil in the fields. Each man goes to his field. Stream water gives growth to the seed. Crops break the soil. Life moves from the house into the open. The herder takes the stock further afield. Women plaster the houses against the summer rains.

Life quickens with summer heat. The crops grow. Men go to work early, rest in midday heat. Children and dogs move their play from sun to shade.

Dawn with light coming over village in snow.

Woman entering door with wood, in snow.

Dusk and evening scene same location dawn, same in snow.

People entering church through snow.

Old Montoya sitting on porch.

Juan and others in ditch-cleaning scenes.

Plowing, planting scenes.

Man and team going down road with plow on wagon.

Water flowing from ditch over plowed field.

*CU* shots young crop.

Old Montoya on stoop.

Herder and stock moving.

*CU* of herder and stock moving into hills.

Women plastering houses.

Juan napping at noonday in shade.

Group of men walking to work at dawn.

*CU* Juan opening ditch gate, with water flowing from open ditch to field.
Sundays are still in the sun. People sit and talk quietly in the shade—in the coolness of the church, the shade of cottonwoods.

Heavy rains come, streak the walls, break the ditches, turn the river muddier.

Village crops are high in September and the summer old. Men and women pick the red chiles in the field and hang them against the house walls to dry. Frost brings the herder and his sheep off the mountain. He takes his wheat and corn to the mill to grind for winter flour. He brings wood from the hills and mountains to be stacked awaiting first snows and bitter nights.

Fiesta marks the harvest. Music and laughter fills the villages.

Gradually in house and village, life turns inward, as snow creeps downward from the peaks. Fields lie empty and stock drifts to low levels. Hands that plowed the field and picked chile and corn turn to wood cutting and weaving. On the best days old men sit bundled against the south wall in the winter sun.

Men resting at high noon. Children and dogs in shade.


Medium closeup of rain beating adobe walls. Flash floods breaking ditches.


Fiesta dance scenes. CU of participants, dancers, musicians, 'etc.


Wood-chopping by house in snow. Interior weaving scene. Old man against wall in sun with snow in village.
Storm sweeps down from the mountain and through the valley leaving empty plazas and snow piling in the fields. Stock breaks snow for feed. The shepherd watches. The horseman breaks trail to the next village. There is fiesta and music at Christmas. Through the winter, snow piles on the peaks, piles water for next summer's corn while fields lie still and lifeless below. Deep snows gather, waiting for the release of spring and summer sun; waiting to water fields of corn and chile, waiting for the long sea journey.

And so the valleys filled and the pattern of yearly life grew to something like surety, molded by mountain and stream, by woodland and grassland, by the nature of the people and the nature of earth and sky and soil.

And so it was through two centuries, the seventeenth and the eighteenth and even on into and through most of the nineteenth. The field of Juan Vigil in 1800 was the field of a Vigil in 1900.

But eastward the Civil War marked the end of an era, the triumph of capital and industry, and nineteenth century America rocked under the accelerating expansions of a nation building. Railroads, cities, factories, the

Scenes of heavy snowfall.
Snow drifting in heavy wind and piling in roads.
Herder and flock in storm.
Horseman in heavy snow.

Interior scenes.
Woman looking out window.
Man working before fire.
Woman working around the stove.
Musicians playing at baile with dancers.

CU of house in snow.
Semi-long-shot of peaks in snow.

CU sign Gettysburg 23 mi.
" " Antietam 7 mi.
" " American Express.
" " Standard Oil.
" " Bell Telephone.

Railroad yards.
Stock-driving scene: 1,000 head.
commercial stock industry, and commercial farming mushroomed to make an America of buildings and markets, of buying and selling.

The 1880's brought the railroad to the Rio Grande. With and following the railroad came commercial America.

Already, in the 60's and 70's the little valleys north of Santa Fe had filled. There was beginning pressure on the land, more people, more stock. Pressure that started Juan Vigil looking for land in outlying valleys. He went over the mountains into a western branch of the Rio Grande—into the Puerco. He found water there, easy to divert to good soil. He found fine grass, a fertile valley for stock and farms. Others came, and once again in these outlying valleys villages grew—in the Puerco—Cabezon and Cuba, Salazar and Regina, and La Ventana.

But commercial America brought many things to these people who had already settled and used and lived on the land here.

To Juan Vigil IV, in Cordova, it brought wage work. He went

MCU John Deere Factory and sign.
" International Harvester and sign.
" McCormack Deering.
Typical New York mansion, 1880's.
Row of N. Y. brownstone houses.

 possible shot D. R. & G. W. train.
Bond and Company
Sheep

Scene Cordova and fields filling valley.
Scene Cundiyo and fields filling valley.
Scene Vallecritos and fields filling valley.
Man plowing in long narrow field.
Long-shot of wagon on hill road leaving town.
CU of man or man and woman on moving wagon seat.

MCU of running stream (V. G.)
Steers feeding in heavy grass.
Adobe house and yard away from trees sunbaked.
Same village scene from hillside.

Juan Vigil walking into camera.
to work on the railroad. 'Til gradually through the 80's and 90's and through the war into the 20's, many of his neighbors or his neighbors' sons went to work. At one season or another they traveled onward from village and town 'til nearly every family had a man working somewhere for some part of the year. They built the railroads; they manned the mines and the smelters. For Anglo lumber companies they cut the timber. For growing livestock companies they herded sheep in New Mexico and Colorado, in Montana and Wyoming. For the sugar companies of Colorado and other states they harvested the beets.

Finally the villages were supplying 12,000 part-time workers to the west. From the railroad Juan came home with money in his pocket. Money added to the food and materials from the fields and dwindling available ranges to support his people and the other village people of the Rio Grande.

With the one hand, commercial America brought wage work for the people. With the other, it brought new ideas of land and its use. Land became something to buy and sell, to get hold of for profit. The Vigil family and other villagers had grazed a few head of sheep and goats to furnish wool.

Spanish-American section-gang working.

*CU* of Spanish-American swinging pick.

6 different scenes of men leaving villages.

MCU of working scene in smelters.

*CU* of man operating carriage in sawmill.

Spanish-American with big flock of sheep.

*CU* in beet fields, possibly in factory.

Immense pile of sugar beets with factory in background.

*CU* Juan Vigil's head and shoulders, very animated, dressed for town—fade into

Saturday evening street scene.

Store goods on shelf in Cordova room.

Scenes of land company offices and real estate offices.

2 scenes with small flocks of either sheep or goats.
and cheese, milk and meat. Now
the same villagers, as shepherders,
tended herds of thousands. They
watched the sheep of the commer-
cial operator graze. In the sum-
mer they trailed them into the
mountain pastures. In the winter
trailed them down, grazing
through valley grass lands. And so
the flocks that the Vigils herded for
others spread out over most of the
Rio Grande. At the same time
herders of village stock, a handful
of goats or sheep, a few cows,
grazed their stock over ever-nar-
rowing pastures. Year by year
Juan found worse, feed for his
stock. Year by year he watched the
land that was left to him and his
cattle grow poorer.

He made a precarious living
tending the herds of others, and
together his flocks and the com-
mercial herds fed too heavily off
the grass and shrubs of the Rio
Grande. They made too many
mouths for the food there. And
gradually there was less feed for
all. Juan’s flock grazes on the
worst range. It continues to graze
there, though the ear’th becomes
poorer for it, continues to graze
because villagers need meat and
milk and there is no other choice.

Today, Juan Vigil and his
neighbors live by much of the old
pattern. But it is not the same, for
Herder on hill watching thousands
of sheep in V. G.
CU of herder.
Man with burros and flock of
sheep trailing into mountains.
Short scenes of tremendous flocks
with herder over different types.

CU sheep scenes (on fair range
where possible).
Scene 1. New Mexico Land & Tim-
ber Co. No Trespass.
2. Fernandez Land & Cattle Co.

Herder on knoll watching small
flock goats or sheep.
CU of herder.
CU sheep or goats grazing bad
range.

Montage of closeups feeding
mouths of sheep, goats, cows.

Juan watching his flock graze on
poor eroded range.

Scene of gas pump, “Germ Pro-
cessed Motor Oil,” with Cordova
adobe houses in background.
the new has come upon it. It is no simple relationship between a man and soil. That went some decades ago.

Today, Juan and many villagers no longer trail in from beet field and railroad with money in the pocket. There has not been much work since 1930. They sit in the sun, help in the fields, do simple work around the place, or work on public road and school in place of smelter. Only one man finds outside work where five men found it before.

And over the mountains on the Rio Puerco, forty years have brought almost the death of a valley. A Vigil came in 1870. He and his neighbors put the valley under irrigation. The towns grew. In 1890, Cabezón had three stores and seven saloons. In 1900, Cuba had become an agricultural center.

Today, look at Cabezón, look at Casa Salazar, look at Cuba—look at the land and the Rio Puerco. The dam that brought the Vigil's water has washed out. He sees the valley cut deep. His water is lost in a canyon. His ditches are clogged. Some of his neighbors plow and harvest, but the harvest is poor. He tends his few cows, but they are poor, and the cattle are gone.

Scene idle industrial plant.
MCU Coca-Cola sign in—setting adobe buildings and chiles.

CU idle machinery.
CUs and M long-shots of idling men and groups of men. In some closeups, detail poor clothing, shoes, etc., will speak for situation.

MCU shot of man hoeing.
WPA working crews.
School scene: WPA sign: road work.

Same grass and stream shot as earlier in script in V. G.
Dissolve into shot of present-day Rio Puerco, where cut is deep.

MCU of saloon front.

Dissolve into street shot of Cabezón today.
CU of old balconied building at Casa Salazar.
Street scene in Cuba of dilapidated bars and gas stations with some activity.

Long-shot deep cut Puerco in relation to valley.
CU Puerco bank and tree at top.
Women out working in poor fields.
his land, too. Cows and field together no longer bring a living. In a short span of decades he and his valley have prospered and no longer prosper.

The picture changes from valley to valley over the Rio Grande but is still the same in so many villages, in so much land on the upper river. People live on in the old vital pattern of season and soil. They come and go. They build new homes, make over old—raise corn, chile, tend stock, trade at the stores. Juan talks against the wall with his neighbor. Village life grew strong roots long before commercial America brought to it problems of employment and ever-narrowing resources. The strong roots remain though life goes on in a poorer land. It's future lies in that land.

Here on this upper river are many interests, stockman and farmer, lumberman and store-keeper, and the public agencies holding responsibility for great acreages of land. Together they work and plan toward a new stability of people and land and waters on the Rio Grande.

MCU shabby house and yards. Cows in bad condition on bad valley range. 
CU tilt from Juan's idle hands to face.

Shot of Cordova roof-tops from hill.

SCU of wheat heads. 
CU women winnowing wheat. 
SCU running water-wheel of village mill. 
Man coming up hill in Model T. 
New house. 
Woman plastering.

Cordova street scene.

SCU Quiet scene man carving.
SCU Chile and corn against adobe house wall.
SLS Sheep and herder moving quietly along hillside in good grass. 
CU Hands of old Spanish-American man. 
SCU of Rio Grande waters.