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## Clovis: City on Wheels

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*Windell Kilmer and Mark Miller*

*Clovis: City On Wheels*

*In nineteenth-century industrial cities, machines hummed to produce goods. Today the machines of Clovis, New Mexico hum in the pursuit of leisure.*

CLOVIS, NEW MEXICO PEOPLE are uncommonly aware of the edges between their city and the great plains. They hold accurate images of the grain elevators and radio towers of their skyline, because they rely on these man-made symbols for orientation. There are few natural features surrounding Clovis to attract townspeople out to them. Looking for arrowheads and artifacts in draws and arroyos is one of the few exurban activities.



Residents of mountain cities such as Santa Fe were asked questions similar to those asked of residents of Clovis and other plains cities. Mountain city residents described ski slopes, tumbling streams, and the changing colors of the mountains around them. Residents are less aware of their man-made community when it is located in a varied natural setting than when it is located on a plain.

Clovis is a stark image of the absolute city, a tiny Manhattan, a great non-outdoors, formed by the buildings, machines and faces of other people. Moving around it in an automobile is the most persistent impression that Clovis residents have of their city, according to interviews we made there. Here are some excerpts:

*A 21-year-old male college student*

Q. Where is the major center of activity?

A. Along Main Street, from First to Seventh. After eight in the evening nothing else happens in town.

Q. Are there other centers of activity?

A. Yes, Hilltop Plaza (shopping center). There's a Baskin-Robbins ice cream store that stays open late at night. A major department store is there, too.

Q. Describe the atmosphere of these centers of activity.

A. Hurried atmosphere. busy. Everyone is still friendly, though.

Q. What physical presences are outstanding at these centers?

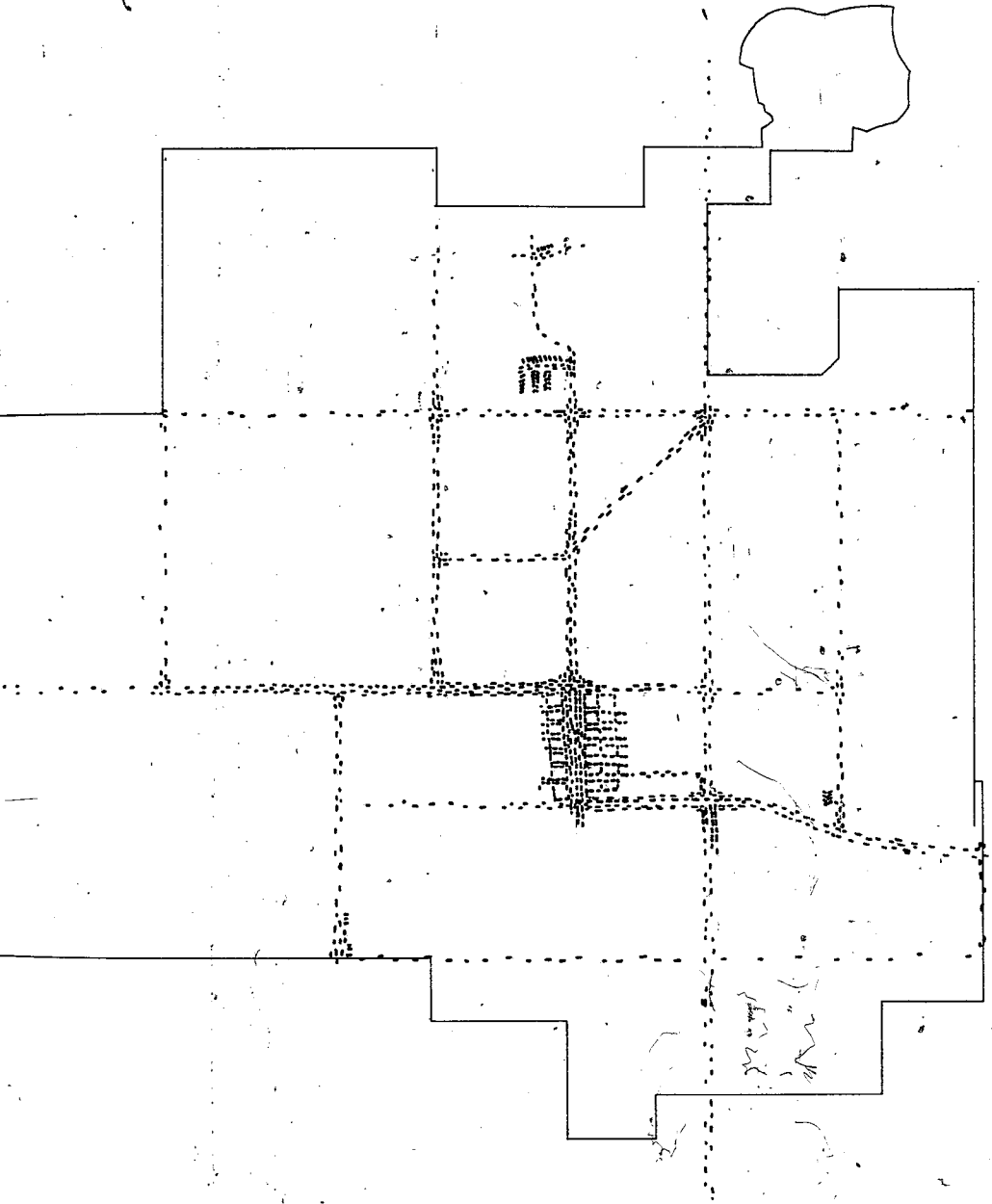
A. On East Mabry Drive, the wind sometimes blows the smoke over from the city dump. Some people are so bothered by it that they won't get out of their cars.

Q. Is there anything you dislike about Clovis?

A. Yeah, the roads need improvement, especially downtown. I don't mind the dips down there, but there is brick pavement which needs to come up.

Q. When asked about impressions of the city, you always speak in terms of driving through. Why?

A. I spend a lot of time in my car. Three out of four students here have their own cars. Even the radio station refers to Clovis as "the city on wheels." It's bad to have to walk here. There is only one taxi company for public transportation; no buses. Most people under thirty are concerned about their cars; in fact today would be a good day to drive around and notice the number of people at car washes. Two new ones have just opened up.



Vehicular activity in Clovis, New Mexico.

*A 36-year-old male shoe clerk*

- Q. What kind of impressions do you get when traveling through Clovis?
- A. I don't think I could get any driving through, and I'm too lazy to walk. It's not an easy place for an outsider to travel through. The highways are poorly marked. But it's not difficult to learn your way around.
- Q. What's happening in Clovis?
- A. Everyone drags Main Street, adults and all. They do it to see who they know. On weekends they do it all day long.

*A 24-year-old male engineer*

- Q. You stated that the bars are the center of activity in Clovis. Describe this activity.
- A. Well, you go to a bar for one reason. Some bars are nice, some pretty junky. They're spread out; the good ones are together on one side of town.
- Q. Why is this?
- A. That's where all the traffic comes in from Texas. It comes in that way and goes out the other way.

*A 47-year-old housewife*

- Q. Is it easy to find your way around town?
- A. Yes. All the streets are straight.
- Q. Do you think it's necessary to have a car in Clovis?
- A. Oh, yes, you couldn't get along without one. Everything is so spread out.
- Q. What views are available in Clovis?
- A. I don't think there are any; the country is so flat. The park is about the only pretty view. We just don't have much view here, unless you want to go out in the fields when the grain is ripening. That's pretty.

*A 24-year-old male student*

- Q. What impressions are available traveling through the city?
- A. Flatness, and bigness of the grain elevators. Traffic is comparatively slow because you have to stop at every other traffic light.

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Q. What surfaces and textures are available in the city?

A. Something that will impress the people on the road is the plowed rows of fields.

Q. Does the city function as a whole: politically, economically, and physically?

A. The people here really dig Clovis. Birds of a feather flock together. There are people here that have the ability to think and do think, but there are people here who think on a level of material objects and everyday occurrences but never get beyond that. But the people live here and like it—so I can't knock the people and what they think.

