

## CHAPTER 1

---



# What Is Borderlands History?

*What is borderlands history? In the broadest sense, North American borderlands history encompasses the interactions between different peoples, empires, and nations in the continent's past. Rather than focusing on the history of discrete nations, ethnic groups, or people, borderlands historians focus on places of encounter, whether the contemporary international borders of the United States, Mexico, and Canada, or such older meeting grounds as the Ohio River Valley or Missouri. They approach borderlands as contact zones where no single group rules supreme—places that exist in between colonial empires and indigenous territories, literate and nonliterate societies, nation-states and non-state societies. Borderlands are crossroads where people and their institutions and traditions come together, creating distinctive ways of organizing space and transforming the seemingly fixed edges of empires and nations into fluid spaces.*

*As a concept used by professional historians, "borderlands" dates back to the 1920s, when historian Herbert Eugene Bolton examined the Spanish colonial possessions in North America, from California to Florida, that eventually became part of the United States. Bolton challenged U.S. historians to think of national historical origins and influences beyond the familiar world of the British Empire and its colonies on the eastern seaboard of North America. In recent decades, historians have found the term borderland useful in understanding not only what became the current U.S.-Mexico border region but contact zones across the continent, as well. The interest in boundaries and their crossing—themes that are often obscured when historians focus too closely on nations and empires—helps us to understand the impact of the global movement of people, goods, capital, ideas, and fashions across borders today.*

*Major Problems in Borderlands History surveys the North American past from the point of view of its borderlands. The essays and documents discuss people and events likely to be familiar to you—the founding of early European colonies, U.S. independence, the War of 1812, the U.S.-Mexican War, Prohibition, and the like. But less widely known events and actors—expanding native peoples, the Bourbon reforms of the Spanish Empire, fleeing slaves and servants, border surveyors, the Mexican Revolution, key U.S. immigration legislation—also take center stage. In one sense, this volume is clearly a work of U.S. history, but it is also Canadian and Mexican and native history. And its overriding theme is that we must take into account the meetings of different peoples and nations if*

*we are to understand our past and present. We cannot simply read current boundaries back into the past as though they always existed and as though the present and its boundaries are the only possible outcomes of the past.*

## ESSAYS

---

The three essays in this chapter introduce borderlands as a field of study. They reveal the kinds of questions that borderlands historians ask and how their approach is a departure from conventional nation-centered history. The authors discuss major developments in the history of the borderlands of North America and other places, but they are equally interested in how historians study this history: what kinds of questions they ask, what kinds of questions they should ask, what major historical turning points a borderlands approach suggests, what topics in borderlands history have been well-researched, and which ones remain relatively unexplored.

Michiel Baud and Willem Van Schendel call for historians to examine many world borders and to compare them over time. Rather than focusing on the central governments that created borders across the world, these two scholars emphasize the ways that border-making shaped the lives of borderlands residents and how borderlanders in turn made their own history. They emphasize that there are very different kinds of borderlands: Some are conflictual and perpetually violent, others noncontroversial and peaceful; some are characterized by strong cross-border cultural and economic ties, whereas others divide very different societies. In their account, the contemporary national borders of North America are not unique places onto themselves, but rather part of global processes and patterns.

Jeremy Adelman and Stephen Aron focus on the borderlands past of North America. Unlike Baud and Van Schendel, they emphasize the importance of European empires, rather than borderlands residents, in making this history. In places where European powers competed for control, Indians and other societies had broad autonomy and power. But in the nineteenth century, when European powers gave way to the nation-states of Canada, the United States, and Mexico, natives ended up as conquered people forced to live in the context of national, not borderlands, societies. National borders were much more constraining and less open than the porous borderlands of the colonial era. Historians, they argue, need to pay more attention to this major turning point and the break with the more open past that it represents.

Benjamin Johnson and Andrew Graybill trace the ways that historians have approached the U.S.-Mexico and U.S.-Canada borderlands. Although *borderlands* has traditionally been a term used to describe the parts of the contemporary United States previously held by Spain, in recent years the term has taken on a much wider set of meanings. Histories of the U.S.-Canada borderlands have increasingly addressed themes similar to those of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, a trend that Johnson and Graybill applaud. Unlike Adelman and Aron, they emphasize continued exchange and influence across national borders.

These essays include a number of major concepts and debates in borderlands history. How do they help explain why historians are drawn to borderlands and borders? How have historians' approaches and the meaning of the term *borderlands* changed over time? How is the kind of history practiced in each article different from history centered on a particular country?

## A Comparative Approach to Borderlands

MICHIEL BAUD AND WILLEM VAN SCHENDEL

National borders are political constructs, imagined projections of territorial power. Although they appear on maps in deceptively precise forms, they reflect, at least initially, merely the mental images of politicians, lawyers, and intellectuals. Their practical consequences are often quite different. No matter how clearly borders are drawn on official maps, how many customs officials are appointed, or how many watchtowers are built, people will ignore borders whenever it suits them. In doing so, they challenge the political status quo of which borders are the ultimate symbol. People also take advantage of borders in ways that are not intended or anticipated by their creators. Revolutionaries hide behind them, seeking the protection of another sovereignty; local inhabitants cross them whenever services or products are cheaper or more attractive on the other side; and traders are quick to take advantage of price and tax differentials. Because of such unintended and often subversive consequences, border regions have their own social dynamics and historical development.

Here, we are more interested in the historical effects of borders than in the politico-legal aspects of their creation. We look at the struggles and adaptations that the imposition of a border causes in the regions bisected by it, and we posit the need for comparative historical research into the history of *borderlands*. But we are also interested in the question of how the social dynamics of border regions affect the formation and territorialization of states. These questions should be studied systematically because they refer to important historical processes in the modern world.

Our point of departure is that we can properly understand the often unintended and unanticipated social consequences of national borders only by focusing on border regions and comparing them through time and space. Traditionally, border studies have adopted a view from the center; we argue for a view from the periphery. In this article we identify some of the central factors involved in the history of borderlands.

The historical analysis of borders is especially important in the case of the modern states in the eighteenth to twentieth centuries. In this period, borders all over the world became crucial elements in a new, increasingly global system of states.

Borders became markers in two ways. First, they revealed the territorial consolidation of states. Most states tried to curb regional autonomy and were no longer content with "rough edges." This was especially clear in the case of the colonial and postcolonial states in the so-called Third World. By taking possession of disputed or unclaimed areas, state elites tried to resolve the problem of loosely defined border regions to which two or even more states might lay claim. In this way, they drew sharper lines between citizens, invested with certain rights and duties, and "aliens" or "foreigners." If there is one thing that has been central to all borders, it has been the contest about these rules of inclusion and exclusion and the efforts of people to use, manipulate, or avoid the resulting border restrictions.

The mapping of modern borders, a process first perfected in Europe but soon applied all over the world, thus symbolized a collective attempt by state elites to establish a worldwide system of clear-cut territorial jurisdictions and to have their legal and political sovereignty confirmed cartographically. The mapping of borders tended to proceed in three stages: *establishment*, *demarcation*, and *control* of the border. As a result, conflicting territorial claims by neighboring states could no longer be ignored or played down: they had to be faced by means of negotiation, confrontation, or arbitration.

Second, borders became markers of the actual power that states wielded over their own societies. Leaders of the new states adopted the ambitious goal of making the state the dominant force in their societies, but to what extent could they really impose their jurisdiction on "the people"? Recent research has shown that these ambitions often failed because of the opposition of a stubborn society. The confrontation between "state" and "people" was especially clear in marginal areas such as borderlands. Even borders themselves were often a result of negotiations between regional society and the central state.

In this article the notion of *borderland* is of central importance. A borderland is usually understood as the region in one nation that is significantly affected by an international border. However, we favor a cross-border perspective, in which the region on *both* sides of a state border is taken as the unit of analysis. This approach allows us to take into account the paradoxical character of borderlands. Borders create political, social, and cultural distinctions, but simultaneously imply the existence of (new) networks and systems of interaction across them. The existence of a border is our point of departure, but at the same time we draw attention to the social networks that reach across that border.

Jorge Bustamante has argued that from the perspective of national centers of authority, the border between countries is a sharp line, an impenetrable barrier. But from the perspective of the border, borderlands are broad scenes of intense interactions in which people from both sides work out everyday accommodations based on face-to-face relationships. In this way, the study of border regions implies a critique of state-centered approaches that picture borders as unchanging, uncontested, and unproblematic. We argue that there is a definite heuristic and comparative value in studying the various ways in which people have manipulated and circumvented the constructed barriers that result from the territorialization of modern states.

The drawing of borderlines and the creation of borderlands are the outcome of the establishment of modern states all over the world. The wish for well-defined, fixed boundaries was a direct consequence of the idea of exclusive and uncontested territorial state power that emerged in the nineteenth century. This development was the belated result of the legal principle of *uti possidetis*, which implied flexible and often contested state boundaries. Many new states based the delimitation of their territory on this principle but in the process changed its meaning, often mixing it with arguments that sought to legitimize state borders in new legal, cultural, or racial terms. In this way, state elites removed the emphasis on the flexible nature of borders and used it to claim their eternal and irreversible sovereignty over a given territory.

Most modern borders were conceived in state capitals where they were negotiated in the corridors of power and made final on drawing boards. Their creation can often be pinpointed in time. Their precise location was marked on a map, which was then ratified by the states concerned, or else imposed by one state on its neighbor. Clearly, the state was always involved. State employees stationed in the borderland and their superiors in the provincial or state capitals could develop very different perspectives on their mission in the borderland. Customs officials might become involved in smuggling, schoolteachers might resist assimilatory language policy, and security forces might refuse to risk their lives against well-armed separatists.

In addition to the state and the regional elite, the "common people" of the borderland made its social history. Their relationship with the regional elites and the two states that claimed the borderland largely determined the social dynamics that unfolded in the region. How these peasants, nomadic herdsman, traders, and so on (re)defined their territories in reaction to the creation of a border shaped subsequent events in the borderland. These definitions were an expression of local conceptions of the triangle of power relations between state, regional elite, and local people at the time. Once the definitions were formulated, they in turn began to exert a powerful influence on power relations.

The historical development of borderlands was determined simultaneously by the situation in two states, and by the social, economic, and political interactions between them. Such interactions vary enormously, and differences can be clearly reflected in the shared borderlands. Borders have long acted as ethnic or religious divides, although in modern history such differences have very often been state-induced rather than local phenomena. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, borders have served more prominently as political and economic divides. Colonial borders delineated the territorial claims of European superpowers in far-flung parts of their empires. During the Cold War, borders all over the world became markers of competing political projects, giving rise to imagery of iron and bamboo curtains.

One of our main points is that borders are too readily reified. Generally speaking, there has always been an enormous gap between the rhetoric of border maintenance and daily life in borderlands. In the vast majority of cases it was possible for borderland people to cross the border, legally or illegally. The interesting questions are when they did so and for what motives.

The creation of a border sets the scene for new power relations in the borderland, based on new local definitions of social and territorial boundaries, and new confrontations between social groups. This process has become more pronounced as a result of massive transnational migration, both "voluntary" (e.g., labor migrants) and "involuntary" (e.g., refugees), which has come to characterize many parts of the contemporary world. Such migration presents a new challenge to national states and diminishes the salience of national borders.

The social history of borderlands is determined first and foremost by the spatial dimension. Borderlands are geographically defined areas that can be drawn on a map like any other region. Traditional geography often thought in terms of two separate borderlands—one on each side of the border—but we argue that these should be seen as two parts of a single borderland.<sup>1</sup> How far does the borderland extend "inland" from the border? At what point can we say that the influence of the border becomes so weak as to be no longer of importance to the lives of the people? This problem can best be approached by focusing on social networks in borderlands because these distinguish the borderland and determine the actual historical development of the region. We may roughly divide the border region into three geographical zones.

First, there is the *border heartland*, abutting on the border and dominated by its existence. Here, social networks are shaped directly by the border, depend on it for their survival, and have no option but to adapt continually to its vagaries. Often such regions were peripheral to the development of the central state, but nowadays they may be bustling industrial and urban regions: the Basle region where Germany meets Switzerland and France, the borderland between Singapore and Malaysia, and the U.S.-Mexican borderland (which nowadays boasts some of the fastest-growing cities of the American continent) are cases in point. Second, there is the *intermediate borderland*, the region that always feels the influence of the border but in intensities varying from moderate to weak. And finally there is the *outer borderland*, which only under specific circumstances feels the effects of the border. It is affected by the existence of the border in the same way that land protected by an embankment is affected by the sea. In daily life the border hardly plays a role at all, but there is always a hint of suspense, a slight tinge of uncertainty. Just as a tidal wave may sweep far into the interior, so a political storm may suddenly engulf this zone and involve it directly in border dynamics. In this way, borderlands may at times, though briefly, stretch to embrace entire countries.

This view of borderlands as changeable spatial units clashes with the visual representations of borders that we find on maps. Most of the time, these maps are of limited use for understanding the historical reality of borderlands because they are both too static and too simple. At the same time, they are indispensable as sources for the politics and ideologies of nation building, which in turn influence life in the borderlands. It is crucial to realize that the ideological and practical choices underlying the creation of maps shape our thinking about borders. The political significance of maps is so great that in many Latin American countries mapmaking is the monopoly of the military. It is remarkable that, in this age of satellite monitoring, India, Bangladesh, and other South Asian states

continue to deny their own citizens access to maps of border regions, even out-dated ones. It is hard to miss the importance of this issue when, as in the case of Ecuador, national maps are manufactured that confer on the country almost twice the territory that it possesses in reality. But we hardly give a thought to the messages that mapmakers send when they mark the border with a bold dotted line and select different colors for the territories on either side of it. Likewise, we rarely reflect on the use of larger or smaller print to represent national, regional, and local units, or on the omission of old names for cross-border regions (e.g., Bengal) in favor of new, state-sponsored units of administration (Bangladesh; West Bengal, India). The borderlands that we study, which extend on both sides of the border, are *never* shown on maps. For this reason alone, the spatial representations of border regions provided by maps ought to be part of the subject matter of border studies.

We now turn to what Lawrence Herzog has called “transboundary social formation,” the extent to which political, economic, and cultural networks overlap in the borderland. In this section we explore the political consequences of the changing “triangle of power relations” between state, regional elite, and local people in the borderland.

Borderlands are areas that are bisected by a state border. The actual boundary lines—demarcated by means of posts, stones, flags, fences, walls, or other landmarks, and highlighted by means of customhouses, border guards, and checkpoints—form their backbone. This display of statehood symbolizes the effort of each state to maintain exclusive control of its half of the borderland, and in this respect the border is the ultimate symbol of its sovereignty. But this does not imply that the effort is ever wholly successful.

First, the power of the state is usually circumscribed by supra-state, international political networks that may be more or less formal, long-lived, and powerful. Among the more formal and long-lived are international alliances, colonial empires, the United Nations, and the European Community; among the less formal are international organizations based on ethnic allegiances, governments in exile, and the “long-distance nationalism” of emigrant groups. Such networks impinge on all regions of the state, including borderlands. Borderlands are not special in this regard, although supra-state political networks may affect border regions in specific ways.

Second, only in borderlands is the power of the state also circumscribed by local political networks that (continue to) connect the two sides and are therefore international too. Cross-border political networks allow borderland politicians more leverage with regard to the state than their counterparts in interior regions, as well as access to the political resources of two state units. If cross-border political networks are strong, they may successfully defend “border interests” in the two state capitals. The political project symbolized by the state border is to eliminate such cross-border networks and to make borderland politicians resemble their counterparts in the interior. Structurally speaking, this is a shared interest of the two neighboring states, and they will often cooperate in stamping out cross-border political networks. When their relations are strained, however, states will use these networks to embarrass or subvert their neighbor. This is

potentially dangerous line of action because it strengthens the borderland politicians against the state and may backfire, as in the case of Kashmir, where there was repeated, damaging war between India and Pakistan, as well as a movement for an independent Kashmir.

*The Quiet Borderland.* If state, regional elite, and local population are knit into a coherent power structure in which tension is relatively low, the borderland is likely to be peaceful. In these cases, territorial control by the state does not lead to major confrontations in the borderland, because the interests of the three actors are taken into account at every step. All three welcome, or at least accept, the creation and existence of the border, each for reasons of their own. We may call this the *harmonious* variant of the quiet borderland. A case in point is the Dutch/Belgian borderland after Belgium seceded from the Netherlands in 1830.

If state, regional elite, and local people are knit into a power structure in which the state clearly predominates, the creation of a borderland is also likely to be a relatively peaceful process. Here territorial redefinition can indeed lead to strong clashes of interest between the actors, but these will not be articulated in open confrontations. The interests of the state will prevail, as neither regional elite nor common people has the power to resist openly. We may call this the *enforced* variant of the quiet borderland. Border relations are in abeyance rather than peaceful. An example is the borderland between North and South Korea, after the Korean War ended in 1953.

*The Unruly Borderland.* When power structures are less coherent, borderlands are unlikely to be quiescent. The state may dominate, or have absorbed, a regional elite, but if neither state nor regional elite has established a commanding position over the local population, the borderland will be difficult to control. Local society proves to be unruly, resisting the new social and territorial boundaries and the rules that come with them. In its attempt to enforce its sovereignty, the state is often exposed as weak because it oversteps the limits of its power and makes unrealistic claims to overlordship over civil society. The position of the regional elite weakens because it is exposed as an agent of the state rather than a protector of local rights and concerns. The usual policy in these cases is for the state to arm the regional elite and station troops in the borderland in an attempt to enforce state rule. If this policy of militarization is successful, the enforced variant of the quiet borderland ensues; if not, the borderland remains turbulent and disorderly despite the presence of an army of occupation, which may resort to a reign of terror. Northern Ireland is a case in point. Here in the late 1960s a Protestant elite backed up by the British state lost its ability to control a Catholic population. Neither British armed forces nor Protestant vigilantes could contain the armed insurrection of a section of the population that sought to merge the border region with the neighboring Republic of Ireland.

*The Rebellious Borderland.* In the case of a rebellious borderland, a regional elite sides with the local population against a state that seeks in vain to impose its authority on a border. The rebellion, led by the regional elite, challenges state control over the borderland, ignores the new border, and attempts to establish



a regional counter-government. Such rebellions can be regionalist, separatist, or irredentist in their objectives. If the state is unable to crush the rebellion, the borderland can develop into a separate state with or without international recognition, or it can be annexed by a neighboring state. An example of a rebellious borderland is the Golden Triangle straddling the borders of China, Laos, Thailand, and Burma. Here various guerrilla groups (ethnic, left-wing, and drug-related) have been fighting state armies and each other for decades in attempts to establish separate states. Other current examples are Kurdistan (the rebellious borderlands of Iran, Iraq, and Turkey), the southern border region of Sudan, and the coca-producing regions of Colombia, Bolivia, and Peru.

Local communities along most international borders continue their cross-border economic links. In many cases they do not really have a choice because the government fails to integrate the border economy into the larger national economy. Cross-border economic and commercial activities are often based on preexisting networks of kinship, friendship, and entrepreneurial partnership that now span both sides of the border.

Much like the economies of other regions, cross-border economic networks are influenced by macroeconomic forces. Fluctuations in world market conditions may alter the productive structure of the borderland, change agricultural technology, introduce new crops, lead to new industrial activities, and so on. Unlike other regions, however, borderlands connect two economic systems. The economic policy of one state may create a scarcity or abundance of certain goods and services on one side of the border. Different national taxes may lead to sharply different prices and a reversal or intensification of existing commercial activity. For example, the policy of successive Nigerian governments to subsidize the consumer price of gasoline led to the illegal drain of this commodity to neighboring Benin where it was sold for higher prices. Such developments may motivate the state to impose strict border controls, making trade virtually impossible and provoking smuggling. Or the state may condone such trade in order to defuse the tensions that its economic policy causes, at least in the borderland. Finally, state officials themselves may actively engage in border trade for public or private gain.

Smuggling is a typical border activity in which the political and the economic come together. It develops whenever a state tries to impose restrictions on border trade that are not acceptable to (some of) those living in the borderland and that cannot be enforced.

Whenever a state applies restrictions on cross-border trade, it invites smuggling. Of course, smuggling is not confined to inhabitants of the borderland, nor does it involve all (or even most) of them. But it is most evident in the borderland, and this gives the entire border economy an air of stealth and subterfuge in the eyes of the state.

Border economies are always strongly influenced by political measures, and political processes on either side of the border do not normally coincide. Border economies react instantly to short-term policy changes, and constant adaptation lends them a speculative, restive character. This is one reason why it is so important to treat the region on both sides of the border as a single unit: changing

economic policies on one side of the border lead to immediate adaptations on the other side as well.

Theorists of borderlands have tried to make a distinction between "natural" and "unnatural" borders, based on geographical parameters. Rivers, watersheds, and mountains are often considered perfect natural borders. Other theorists have tried to do the same with culture, ethnicity, or language. For them, a border is natural if it separates groups that differ clearly with respect to phenotype (race), language, or culture. The "naturalness" of such borders, however, is usually more apparent than real: evidently, differences in phenotype, language, and culture have often been manipulated in the service of a nationalist ideology that needed to legitimize existing borders by establishing, strengthening, or highlighting these differences after the fact.

After the United States conquered a large part of Mexico's northern territory in 1848, it strongly promoted the English language there. In the twentieth century, however, extensive immigration of Mexican workers into the United States made it increasingly difficult to maintain the artificial separation of Spanish and English. Nowadays Spanish is widely spoken in the entire borderland, and in daily life language is no longer a marker of the border.

There can be no doubt that borders that cut through a fairly homogeneous population should be distinguished from borders that coincide with cultural or ethnic divides. Where people from the other side of a border can be recognized easily by their physical appearance—clothing, language, or behavior—it is less easy for them to move back and forth across the border, and their position on the opposite side is less secure. Examples include the position of Haitians in the Dominican Republic or of Bolivians in Argentina. Where material or cultural differences are less obvious—as in the case of Bangladeshis in India or U.S. citizens in Canada—"passing" is much easier.

Despite attempts by central states to control their borderlanders and to impose a "national" culture on them, a fascinating aspect of many borderlands is the development of a "creole" or "syncretic" border culture. When two or more languages meet, a border lingua franca often comes into existence. Where different religions prevail on both sides of the border, people may visit each other's religious festivals, as well as festivities marking national holidays. Cross-border (and often interethnic) networks of friendship, courtship, and kinship are as much part of the border culture as cross-border economic and political partnerships. The existence of such border cultures is often resented by central governments. Government measures to suppress or deny these border cultures may take the form of attacking symbols of borderland unity—for example, by prohibiting the use of the local language in communications with state officials—and initiating a cultural offensive to replace border cultures by a more "civilized" national culture. State denial or suppression of borderland cultures has usually obscured these from the eyes of outsiders, including academics.

The study of borderlands invites us to look at states, concepts of social space, and local history from a different perspective. It helps us pose questions in a new form. There is an extensive literature on how states have dealt with their borderlands, but historians have paid much less attention to how borderlands have dealt

with their states. As a result, borderlands have been represented as far more passive and reactive than is warranted. The study of borderlands assigns an active historical role to borderlands and their population. The purpose is to redress the imbalance of "state-centered" studies, and to discover which social impulses originated in the borderlands and what effects they had locally as well as beyond the borderland. We are interested in the cut-and-thrust of life as it was lived in thousands of borderlands all over the world and the ways in which local societies dealt with the appearance (and sometimes disappearance) of national borders in their territory.

The study of borderlands in Europe deals with a long process of trial and error in which the modern state developed more or less organically. Borders came to be generally accepted, and when violence between states broke out, disagreement about the location of borders usually was not the main cause. In the other continents, the modern state and its approach to borders usually arrived as one of the trappings of colonial rule. In each continent, it encountered a different situation. In Asia, for example, highly developed states existed with their own conceptions of territorial integrity and boundaries, which differed from the European model. As a result, in many parts of Asia precolonial statecraft exerted a powerful influence over colonial administration. Colonial borders were often superimposed on much older political and religious divides. After decolonization, Asia boasted strong and populous regional states that were able to engage in large-scale military campaigns to settle any border conflicts. These in turn brought in the major world powers as mediators, arms dealers, and combatants in border conflicts (for example, between China and India in 1962, Iran and Iraq in 1980–88, and Iraq and Kuwait in 1989–90). In the process, local border disputes were elevated to the level of major world events. The impact of Asian border wars on contemporary global politics underlines the importance of analyzing the long-term repercussions of encounters between well-developed local definitions of state boundaries and external, "colonial" definitions of territoriality.

By contrast, in much of Africa and the Americas colonial rule was generally less restricted by precolonial state formation and local definitions of territoriality. Here colonial borders were more frequently drawn without any regard for local society and in places where no history of state border formation existed. In Latin America, the principal problem for the Spanish crown and the independent successor states of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was how to physically occupy the immense territory. It was said in nineteenth-century Latin America that to govern was to populate, *gobernar es poblar*. This desire to control the marginal frontier areas was part of the "civilizing" policy that aimed at the incorporation or extermination of indigenous populations that were considered a symbol of "barbarism" and a threat to state formation and nationalism. This ideological content, combining political, economic, and moral objectives, may explain the fascination of Latin American politicians and historians with the "frontier" and the agricultural colonization of frontier regions.

With respect to political boundaries, the Spanish colonizers used the territorial boundaries of the Inca and Aztec empires to organize their colonial

jurisdictions in Spanish America. But in many other regions they established borders with no regard for local territorial definitions. In a historical process that extended over three centuries, they created colonial borders that were sometimes superimposed on native borders but that often cut across them. Most of these colonial borders survived in the postcolonial period. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, border conflicts between the new states did occur, but they had nothing to do with the pre-Columbian political structures; rather, they were determined by the national ambitions of the new ruling elites. Only very recently have some pro-Indian politicians and intellectuals in the Andes started questioning the legitimacy of existing borders between Latin American countries, arguing that they ignore indigenous ethnic and spatial structures. In this they find inspiration in the arrangement on the U.S.-Canadian border, where Native American groups recognized as such by both governments are allowed to cross without any state interference.

[I]n a broader comparative perspective, the history of African borders is different in two ways. First, in most parts of the continent colonization occurred quite late and lasted only about sixty years. The borders that were drawn normally preceded nation building and state formation. Even the postcolonial states had relatively little time and inclination to come to grips with the resulting complicated situation. Although they accepted the colonial divisions for the postcolonial period during meetings of the Organization of African Unity in 1963 and 1964, they have not really been able to find a way out of the maze of ethnic boundaries, precolonial state borders, and colonial demarcations, as their serious falling-out over the status of the Western Sahara demonstrated. Cross-border ethnic, economic, and political ties have remained important, resulting in high levels of interaction between peoples and goods on either side of most African borders. This may be interpreted as the survival of ancient networks of regional trade and a form of protest against a predatory postcolonial state. It can also be seen as a result of the disintegration of old (trading) networks and the expansion of new export-oriented production. Intensive cross-border contact is a distinct characteristic of African borderlands. Ieuan Griffiths even suggests that African borders are specifically characterized by their permeability.

Clearly, there are broad regional differences in state formation and the imposition of national borders. But whether these different historical experiences warrant a distinction between three regional types of borderlands—Eurasian, African, and American—remains to be seen. The value of such models can be assessed only in their application. They may help us to better understand the complexity of the social history of any borderland. They may also allow us to gain a better insight into the structural similarities and contrasts of borderland dynamics and to make more systematic and meaningful comparisons.

National borders are political constructs that have exerted a remarkable influence on the minds of professional historians and the ways in which they have constructed historical narratives. People living in borderlands have often been rather less impressed by borders, as their attempts to create their own local history demonstrate.

We invite researchers to undertake the comparative history of borderlands. We have argued that the study of borders and borderlands has been unduly restricted by an emphasis on the geographical, legal, and political aspects of the creation and consequences of borders. This has led to a state-centered approach, in which researchers took the central state as their point of departure. Further, they have tended to focus their research on only one side of a certain border. In this way, they have grounded their research upon these artificial lines in social space and—often unwittingly and unwillingly—confirmed the nationalist claims that borders represent. By taking both sides of the border as a starting point for research, it will be easier to understand the social, cultural, and economic dynamics of borderlands and the particular historical transformations that they have experienced. It is necessary to invest borderlands, and their population, with a more active historical role. We should ask which social and political impulses originated in borderlands and what effect they had locally as well as beyond the borderland—particularly in relation to state building on both sides of the border. The crucial question is what borderlands can teach us about ways of conceptualizing social space and local identity, and the roles these have played in promoting or thwarting the development of modern states.

We began by emphasizing the artificial character of borders. They are prime examples of how mental constructs can become social realities. Once agreed upon in diplomatic meetings and neatly drawn on maps, borders become something real for the people living near them. To understand this process, it is necessary to explore new sources of information. Borderland historians may have to rely on oral history to reconstruct the historical self-images and perceptions of social groups in the borderland and the impact of these on people's political, economic, and cultural behavior. We feel that this is one of the most challenging tasks of borderland studies.

Whatever may be their real impact, borders become part of the perception and mental map of borderlanders. The paradox of how borders simultaneously separate and unite is the direct consequence of this mental mapmaking. Borders divide people living on both sides, who may have had a long history of cultural and social contact, but at the same time it unites them in the experience of closeness to the border and (partial) dependence on it. This paradoxical character of borders can be considered a metaphor of the ambiguities of nation building, which have recently provoked so much interest. This may be the strongest argument for the study of the mental, cultural, or ethnic consequences of borders. Research on the changing practice and meaning of borders can provide us with valuable clues as to the magnitude and limitations of the most powerful mental construction of the present-day world, the nation-state. Borderland studies offer a way of correcting the distortions inherent in state-centered national histories. They can be powerful exactly because they dispute the territoriality to which modern states lay claim. It is with this conviction that we propose the study of borderlands, not as another historical super-specialization but as an indispensable focus on the modern world.

## From Borderlands to Borders

JEREMY ADELMAN AND STEPHEN ARON

The last decade has witnessed a sharp debate about the significance of the "frontier" in North American history. Among some self-proclaimed "new western historians," the word that Frederick Jackson Turner made synonymous with the study of American expansion has become a shibboleth, denoting a triumphalist and Anglocentric narrative of continental conquest. Even his defenders acknowledge the imperialist suppositions of Turner's thesis, yet some historians continue to assert the significance of a recast frontier. Reconstructed as a zone of intercultural penetration, the frontier has gained a new historiographic lease on life.

In many ways, this reformulation revives the notion of "borderlands" that was closely associated with Turner's protégé, Herbert Eugene Bolton. For Bolton, a historian of New Spain's northern territories, Turner's east-to-west model of American development shortchanged the divergent sources of European expansion. More so than Turner's Anglo-American frontier in which pioneer progress necessarily entailed Indian retreat, Bolton's concept of the Spanish borderlands appreciated the extended cohabitation between natives and newcomers that prevailed on the perimeters of European colonial empires. Picking up on this insight, recent historians have substituted "borderland" for all of North America's "frontiers" and, in doing so, have enriched our understanding of the complexity and contingency of intercultural relations. Instead of straightforward conquests, the history of North American borderland-frontiers has been rewritten to emphasize the accommodations between invaders and indigenes and the hybrid residuals of these encounters.

Yet the recent alignment of frontiers as borderlands has often buried an aspect of Bolton's story. For Bolton, northern New Spain was a different kind of frontier because it highlighted the friction between two Old World powers in the New: Spain and England. Too often, students of borderlands neglect the power politics of territorial hegemony. They overlook the essentially competitive nature of European imperialism and the ways in which these rivalries shaped transitions from colonies to nation-states in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Absent the inter-imperial dimension of borderlands, the cross-cultural relations that defined frontiers take on a too simple face: "Europe" blurs into a single element, and "Indians" merge into a common front.

Moreover, by stressing the persistence of cross-cultural mixing, social fluidity, and the creation of syncretic formations, new work on borderlands-frontiers has downplayed profound changes in favor of continuity. In such work, a timeless legacy of cultural continuity shrouds the rise and fall of empires, the struggles between emerging independent nation-states, and the fate of increasingly dependent indigenous and métis/mestizo peoples. By contrast, Turner's

*frontier*—warts and all—took into account the underlying transformations. Problematic as efforts to isolate apertures and closures have been, Tuner's frontier concept at least insisted on temporal boundaries.

In this essay, we seek to disentangle frontiers from borderlands to rescue the virtues of each construct. By frontier, we understand a meeting place of peoples in which geographic and cultural borders were not clearly defined. Consistent with recent studies of frontiers as *borderless* lands, we stress how intercultural relations produced mixing and accommodation as opposed to unambiguous triumph. Yet Bolton's original accent on the region as a site of imperial rivalry is no less important. Accordingly, we reserve the designation of borderlands for the contested boundaries between colonial domains. In a pairing of the intercolonial and intercultural dimensions, differences of European rationales and styles come to the fore, as do shifts in those rationales and styles. Equally important to the history of borderlands and frontiers were the ways in which Indians exploited these differences and compelled these shifts, partly to resist submission but mainly to negotiate intercultural relations on terms more to their liking. In this fashion, borderlands and frontiers together provide us with the vocabulary to describe the variegated nature of European imperialism and of indigenous reactions to colonial encroachments. This essay, in short, argues that the conflicts over borderlands shaped the peculiar and contingent character of frontier relations.

Nor, we insist, was this a timeless process across what Patricia Nelson Limerick has provocatively, if misleadingly, categorized as an "unbroken past." Like Turner's opening and closing frontier, borderlands also signifies an era with discrete turning points. Across the Atlantic in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Old World empires imploded, yielding to new political configurations. In North America, as these dynasties ceded to nation-states, a new liberal cant came to govern international affairs. By no means was this a frictionless transition. Well into the nineteenth century, bellicose citizens of the United States coveted the lands of their neighbors—as Upper Canadians learned during the War of 1812 and northern Mexicans painfully discovered in the 1830s and especially in the 1840s. By the century's end, however, treaties recognized borders. The lexicon of mutual respect for boundaries inscribed in treaties crept into international diplomacy. What is more, with few exceptions, competition in trade and not territorial dominion was, by the end of the nineteenth century, the guiding framework of power politics. This shift from inter-imperial struggle to international coexistence turned borderlands into *bordered* lands. To the peoples for whom contested borderlands afforded room to maneuver and preserve some element of autonomy, this transition narrowed the scope for political independence. With states claiming exclusive dominions over all territories within their borders, Indians lost the ability to play off rivalries; they could no longer take advantage of occupying the lands "in between." Thus, as colonial borderlands gave way to national borders, fluid and "inclusive" intercultural frontiers yielded to hardened and more "exclusive" hierarchies.

We hope that reformulating the borderlands concept along these lines offers a framework for a more comparative and common "American" history. In the spirit of Bolton's "Epic of Greater America," this essay explores the transition

from borderlands to borders in three North American theaters: the Great Lakes, the Lower Missouri Valley, and the Greater Rio Grande Basin. In the eighteenth century, each of these frontier regions was the site of intense imperial rivalry and of particularly fluid relations between indigenous peoples and European interlopers—in other words, these were borderlands. But, by the early nineteenth century, as empires were succeeded by incipient nation-states and imperial rivalries faded in North America, ethnic and social relations rigidified. From a borderland world in which ethnic mixing prevailed and in which still independent Indian and mestizo/métis peoples negotiated favorable terms of trade with competing colonial regimes, border fixing opened a new chapter in North American history in which property rights, citizenship, and population movements became the purview of state authorities.

We begin in the Great Lakes, where imperial rivalries allowed the greatest degree of Indian autonomy and where the bordered future first dawned. The Great Lakes region that now forms the boundary between the United States and Canada, what the French called the *pays d'en haut*, was contested territory before there was a United States, Canada, or even a New France. It was, however, Europeans' drive for the North American peltry that turned these woodlands into borderlands. Beginning in the seventeenth century, the fur trade molded the pattern of imperial competition and indigenous responses from one end of the Great Lakes to the other. In the middle of the eighteenth century, the focus of British-French rivalry had shifted to this region straddling the Great Lakes. Taking advantage of European dependence on Indian allies and traders, indigenes shaped the parameters of intercultural trade and military engagement. But, during the second half of the eighteenth century, the equation changed. If warfare brought these borderlands into existence, it also undid them: a series of wars—the Seven Years' War, the American Revolution, and the War of 1812—shattered the balance of forces and transformed the Great Lakes borderlands into a boundary between emerging nation-states. In the process, Indians lost first their power to determine the terms of exchange and, subsequently, were stripped of most of their lands.

European colonialism exacerbated existing enmities by altering the means and ends of intra-Indian conflicts. Across the breadth of the Great Lakes country, European microbes triggered epidemics in places where Europeans were barely known. In and around Iroquoia, populations declined by 50 percent. As in pre-colonial times, replenishing numbers by taking and then adopting captives remained a chief rationale for warfare. But the pressures were much greater than before, and, with Dutch-supplied firearms, the Iroquois had new means to wage combat. More important, they had new ends: where precolonial ways of war venerated symbolic demonstrations of courage while limiting actual bloodshed, seventeenth-century Iroquois raids aimed at gaining control of fur-bearing and fur-trading territories. A series of forays against Huron towns and later against Ohio and Illinois villages caused the disappearance of some peoples and the dislocation of others. Refugees scattered south, east, and especially west, re congregating in multi-ethnic communities around Lake Michigan and Lake Superior.



Traders led the French advance into the Great Lakes hinterland, followed by missionaries. From a base in the St. Lawrence, French traders fanned out into the interior, adopting aboriginal technologies for communication and transportation. During the seventeenth century, traders on both sides of the ethnic divide became skilled negotiators over the price and political significance of the exchange. Thus this intercultural trade quickly evolved into political allegiances, bringing Algonquian and Huron peoples, whose commercial links stretched as far as the upper Great Lakes, into alliance with the French.

French penetration and the advantage given to Indian groups north of the Great Lakes brought French allies into conflict with Iroquois to the south—who themselves were engaged in analogous relations first with the Dutch and later English through the Hudson River waterway. This rivalry over the Great Lakes would prove devastating, especially to Huronia, and set the tone for a persistent competition for the gateway to northern North America.

By the mid-seventeenth century, the rivalry began to congeal. As beaver stocks were depleted, Iroquois-Huron competition mounted, culminating in the destruction of Huronia in the 1640s. Coupled with the defection of the fur-trading firm of Groseillers and Raddison to the English and the creation of the Hudson's Bay Company in 1670, French traders rushed to reconstruct exchange networks, to rebuild the Huron intermediating roles, and to defend against other European traders. The pattern of diplomatic-commercial relations did not radically change with the evisceration of Huronia, but the mere coexistence that typified the French-Huron alliance yielded to more intimate bonds. In accord with Indian customs, nuptial alliances and *métissage* became the metaphor for political entente. Moreover, purely commercial calculations were subordinated to the mandates of intercultural diplomacy. So long as Indians were in the position to demand gifts as the price of alliance, the administrators of the French Empire had little choice but to sacrifice profits to presents.

Global imperial struggles heightened these political imperatives. After the War of the Spanish Succession (1701–14), the French moved to hem the English in along the Atlantic seaboard. Doing so required a more extensive presence in the interior, and the fur trade gained additional geo-political significance. The French deepened the central practice forged in the Huronia days—to combine indissolubly economic exchange relations with a network of political alliances.

Competition from the Hudson's Bay Company in the north Anglo-American traders to the south fueled the drive to consolidate the sprawling *postes du nord*. By the 1730s and 1740s, permanent posts were built as far as the Lower Saskatchewan River, checking the encroachment of the Hudson's Bay Company. These posts—with hubs at the present-day Straits of Mackinac and Detroit, Michigan—served as nodal points for formalized commercial-diplomatic relations. The French never proclaimed territorial sovereignty, merely the right of passage to posts, thus enabling Indians to shape considerably the terms of exchange. For the French, preserving the fealty of Indian allies involved greater attention to reciprocity and rising investments in "gifting." Herein flourished the political economy of what Richard White has called "the middle ground."

However, this tenuous common world forged by French men and Algonquian men and women—replete with ethnic mixing, syncretism, and cohabitation—rested on the contingencies of imperial rivalry. And these contingencies in turn depended on underlying shifts in metropolitan power balances. The growing population of the British colonies and English traders' increased presence in the traditional bailiwicks of New France destabilized the inclusive foundations of French-Algonquian relations. For the four decades after the Treaty of Utrecht (1713), New England and New France lived in tense, competitive peace, interrupted by an inconclusive war in 1744, and ultimately brought to a close by the events of 1759, with the fall of Quebec and Niagara. Ironically, France was winning the battle for control of the fur trade; Albany could not meet the Montreal challenge so long as the French were prepared to forsake profits in favor of presents. Gift giving and alliances had their costs: so long as the peltry trade dominated the economic concerns of merchant capitalists in Montreal and policy makers in France, population growth through arable agricultural settlement was at best a secondary goal. For the French, continental sprawl did not translate into large-scale permanent settlement of the frontier or a particular interest in the commodification of Indians' primary resource: subsistence lands.

British encroachment and French defensiveness presented Indians in between with possibilities—and perils. Many Indians favored English goods and drove harder and more expensive bargains with their French allies. Nor were the military bonds quite as solid as the French hoped; Indians were content to refer to the French as "fathers" to reinforce French obligations, but this did not imply deference to ethnic hierarchies.

Warfare jeopardized this borderland balance. Once its strength, French reliance on Indian allies became a debility. The thin reach of the French in North America made its hinterland the weak point of empire, and it was here—not in Europe—that the British chose to strike its decisive blows in the Seven Years' War (1756–63). Hemmed in, the British began changing borderland rules. Intercultural diplomacy gave way to a spirit of outright conquest. Territorial colonization replaced exchange. To be sure, at the very edges of their domain, especially in the Ohio Valley, the British partially respected borderland ways. Only with the French gone and imperial rivalry eclipsed did the British, with Jeffrey Amherst as commander-in-chief and governor-general leading the way, attempt to impose unilateral commercial rules. Thus, in North America, the British sphere became the first to host the transition from borderland to frontier colonies.

This was the first chapter in the waning of these borderlands. If Amherst aimed to accelerate the obliteration of borderland ways to emphasize the unrivaled presence of the British, his plans inspired a series of loosely coordinated uprisings among the Indians of the Great Lakes country from 1763 to 1764. Here, the British saw the lurking French hand. Indeed, the Indians fought to restore, if not the French presence, then the borderland legacy. In the wake of the Indian revolt, the British recoiled from ushering in a phase of full-throated, unmediated frontier dominion.

The next phase in the demise came with the American Revolution. Like the British after the Seven Years' War, American authorities picked up on Amherst's aborted designs. They, too, attempted to dictate the terms of intercourse. Furthermore, the national independence of the American republic removed the restraining influence that British policy had attempted to exert on the expansion of colonial settlement. In the wake of the revolution, swarms of westering settlers pursuing personal independence through private land ownership poured into the Ohio Valley. As never before, the lands of Great Lakes Indians became the targets for European occupation. This was a decisive moment in the shift from borderlands to bordered lands.

The northern borders of New Spain were for Bolton the classic, indeed only, borderlands. Yet, ironically, the greater Rio Grande was the last region to become a true borderland. Well into the eighteenth century, Spain continued to deal with Indian peoples as subjects and not partners. Only belatedly, in response to threats from colonial rivals, did Iberian authorities turn to the diplomacy of gift-alliances and commercial exchange. Their heirs in the Mexican Republic, however, could not solidify these tentative borderland arrangements. Thus it was that in northern Mexico the United States deployed manifest destiny to mount a war of conquest, attempting first to eviscerate the borderlands and then to push the border between the United States and the Republic of Mexico south to the Rio Grande.

Having discovered major silver deposits in the region of Zacatecas in the 1540s, Spanish conquerors spread their domain further north and established in 1563 the vast northern province of Nueva Vizcaya, embracing the frontier region from southern Chihuahua to Saltillo, from which all expeditions into New Mexico and the Mississippi would be staged. Until the late seventeenth century, the north was of little interest, for tribute payment was difficult, the population too dispersed to serve as effective sources of mining labor, and the establishment of *encomiendas* a discredited option for incorporating new territories (especially after the New Laws of 1542, designed to protect Indians from Spanish exploitation). After Juan de Oñate's ill-fated New Mexican venture, the northern frontier became a "military-missionary venture." A combination of missions, mainly Franciscans and later Jesuits, and presidios—military outposts—staked out the Spanish claim. Pioneered by the vanguards of military conquest and religious conversions, Spanish civilians never migrated en masse to this region, nor for that matter to Spain's other northern provinces.

If Bolton conceived of frontier missions as one-way vectors to strip aboriginals of their native cultures, he left half the story out: Indians resisted much of Catholic penetration or used friars as buffers against civilian Spanish exploitation. The long-term effect was as varied as the people the friars encountered. On the whole, they did better among sedentary villagers, such as the Yaquis, than semi-nomads such as the Apaches. Indeed, settlements of mission converts (*reducciones*) made easy prey for predators. The combination of the Spanish spreading from the south and natives fleeing from the north and east compressed the subsistence base, especially of nomads, forcing them into sustenance by plunder. Undaunted, missionaries continued to carry out their purposes.

Military outposts also dotted the land. In the wake of the 1680 Pueblo Revolt, Spanish officials called for greater investment of manpower, resources, and a comprehensive pacification of Indians. As it was, frontier Indians were increasingly forced to rely on the defenses of Spanish presidios as Apache nations proved a greater menace to their livelihoods than Spanish acculturation. From the beginning of the eighteenth century, military outposts existed largely to ward off Apaches—other Indians were willing to accept the Spanish protective umbrella.

What made this increasingly violent frontier region into a borderland was the arrival of the French at the mouth of the Mississippi in the 1680s. This accentuated the vulnerability of New Spain's northern frontier. The Spanish governor, fearing Indian alliances with the French intruders and more alarmed at the prospect of a French overland threat to Mexican silver (previously, European rivals restricted their attack on the Spanish silver supply to high-seas plunder and maritime contraband), ordered military expeditions to drive the French back up the Mississippi as far as the Missouri. But France's threat was clear: in coming down from the Great Lakes to seal off the English and seeking overland access to New Spain's silver, they encroached on the porous northern frontier and posed a direct challenge to Spanish sovereignty. No longer a Spanish-Indian frontier, this had become an imperial borderland.

Confrontation with France drew Spanish interest to Texas, hitherto a backwater of Iberian concern so long as the silver wealth of central and northern Mexico faced no overland threat. In 1691, Texas was officially created as a frontier province to buffer the "silver provinces." After the War of the Spanish Succession, Spanish officials, with the help of a renegade French trader, Louis Juchereau de Saint-Denis, struggled to reoccupy Texas. The linchpin of borderland policy involved a profound mutation of Spanish approaches to Indian populations. Rather than create vassal subjects through conquest, eighteenth-century Iberian envoys went north with instructions to imitate the French and English patterns of signing treaties with Indians, implying a mutual relationship between autonomous peoples and abandoning the principle of paternalistic pacification.

Imperial warfare was, once again, a watershed. The Seven Years' War forced Spain to adopt more consciously a borderland-style approach to the frontier. This was paradoxical: French defeat in 1762 might have brought relief to northern Mexican outposts: gone were the French trading parties plying their contraband through the silver provinces, gone was the French military threat from Louisiana. Viceregal authorities breathed a premature sigh of relief. They did not account for the defensive agency of Indians themselves, for Comanche-Apache conflict only intensified. Reinforcement and reform did little to alleviate the damage. By the 1770s, these borderlands were becoming a dark and bloody ground. Apache raids struck deep into the heart of Nueva Vizcaya, leaving behind charred remains in the Valle de San Bartolomé, Parras, Saltillo, and the royal mines of Guarisamey. These were not pre-political acts of banditry: many raiding parties were made up of multi-ethnic peoples, Indians, Africans, Europeans, and mestizos, with complex internal hierarchies and elaborate

espionage networks. Nor did they sabotage commodity flows: raiding parties systematically sold their loot to rival European buyers.

To such mayhem, the Spanish responded by abandoning all local pretense of paternalistic pacification in favor of a policy of calculated deceit through negotiation. Some Spanish authorities, most notably Viceroy Bernardo de Gálvez, urged the adoption of "the French model," by which he meant that Spain should trade guns with, rather than aim them at, Indians.

Thus, by the 1790s, Spain was inching away from paternalistic pacification and adopting a borderland stance of accommodation and reciprocal exchange with Indian peoples. The inter-imperial truce after the Seven Years' War provided only short-lived respite from European interloping. Spain lost Florida but kept Cuba; it acquired Louisiana by default, thereby extending silver's buffer into the Mississippi Basin. But U.S. independence in 1783 posed a new problem for Mexico. Just as Spain embraced borderland tactics, the Iberian flank faced the emerging territorial threat of the United States.

Belatedly and ineffectually, Spain turned to the commercial-diplomatic option, the hallmark of a more fully borderland-style approach to Euro-Indian affairs. Presidios became the home for protected Apache families (among many others) who tilled lots and raised livestock that they sold on local markets. Spanish outposts also furnished food and trading goods to allies.

The belated and half-hearted shift from a frontier policy of pacification to borderland accommodation meant that, over the course of a generation, Spain and then independent Mexico lost all its claims from the Ohio to the Rio Grande. First came the French Revolution, whose bellicose fallout hammered the fiscal base of the Iberian war machine on both sides of the Atlantic. In desperation, the Spanish Bourbons opted for diplomatic conniving to thwart competitors swarming from the heartland of North America. The Treaty of San Lorenzo del Escorial (1795) ceded all Spanish claims to the Ohio Valley and granted American traders free navigation of the Mississippi. This calculation, however, had the combined effect of allowing the spread of U.S. goods into the Spanish borderlands, and left Spain's hitherto allies, the Creeks, Choctaws, and Chickasaws, all within the territory of the United States, thereby losing the confederation of southeast tribes as a buffer against American expansionism. In desperation, fearing both a French invasion of the peninsula and American marauding of the borderlands, Godoy was persuaded by Napoleon to cede Louisiana back to France in the Treaty of San Ildefonso (1800). (To be fair to the otherwise venal minister, the treaty did stipulate that the territory not be transferred to a third party.)

This, the minister hoped, would restore the buffer between the greater Rio Grande and the swarming North American heartland. The gamble backfired: Napoleon, in an effort to galvanize American support (or neutrality) in his rivalry with Great Britain, sold the sprawling province to Jefferson in 1803. New Spain was thrust back into the defensive position it had in 1762. But the menace of American expansion eclipsed anything posed by the French or British in an earlier day.

Transatlantic warfare forced Spain into an increasingly borderland-style policy, but the depth of the imperial rivalry over Spain's precious dominions made them prey to interlopers' thirst to claim these possessions as their own. In due course, the borderlands became a bordered land between a hobbled republic to the south and an expanding regime to the north. Bereft of central authority, Mexico City's grip on the northern borderland slipped. To compound matters, the consolidation of the North American heartland as the site of territorial occupation pushed borderland Indians south and west. The Osages jostled with the Cherokees for shrinking hunting grounds, culminating in fierce raiding and counter-raiding in 1818 and 1819. By 1820, East Texas was dotted with hamlets of Cherokee refugees. To their west, semi-sedentary Wacos, Tawakanis, and Taouayas struggled to defend compressed homelands whose own western flank lay open to mobile and ever more armed Comanches. Indian appeals for Mexican treaties, gifts, and territorial guarantees to stabilize the borderlands fell on the fiscally deafened ears of Mexico City rulers. If the region still seemed like a borderland, it was only because one colonial rival was too weak to stake territorial claims, while the other was too busy inducting the Missouri borderland into its frontier designs.

This was more of a borderland by default than by arrangement. Indians defended their dwindling independence with renewed vehemence. Comanche and Lipan Apaches stepped up their raiding—to which the Cherokees replied with offers to Mexican authorities to help stymie nomad assaults if the Americans could be kept out of Cherokee lands. When Mexico wavered, the Cherokees and Comanches even dallied with the idea of a common alliance against all white authority, to no avail. Eventually, the Comanches went their own way and honed their skills in guerrilla warfare. This was not recidivist war. Comanches used their ability to criss-cross the border for profit. They plundered and stole cattle, selling their booty to the other side. Apaches did the same. The Mexican government countered with an even more gruesome form of commodification: offering pecuniary rewards for Indian *piezas*, bits of indigenous bodies, like ears, scalps, and heads. The Mexican state created incentives for large private possess and armies to chase down armed borderlanders. The "scalp market" thrived.

Borderland warfare gave way to war over the border. Fearing Anglo-American penetration, northern Mexican authorities invited new occupants, hoping they would become reliable Mexicans and stabilize these unruly provinces. In effect, Mexico City abandoned the remnants of borderland policies in an effort to consolidate Texan allegiance to the south. It backfired, quite like Spain's former gamble in Missouri. Newcomers turned against their political hosts. The Missouri *empresario* Moses Austin (father of Stephen) set out for San Antonio bearing a proposal to the Texan government (which was still loyal to the fissiparous regime) to settle 300 families in the region. After much wrangling, the Mexican government approved the plan in early 1821. Moses died that year, but Stephen Austin carried out his father's plan. By 1823, settlers were flooding in—to the alarm of local Indians. Cherokees complained to the mayor of Nacogdoches of "illegal" American occupation of their lands. Still, some saw

the Cherokees as potential allies against raiding. Stephen, for one, relied on brokers like Richard Fields to secure some measure of Cherokee loyalty. But settler numbers mounted, eviscerating any hope of borderland accommodation. Indian raiding increased; Mexican authority plunged into civil war. Anglo-American, and even sparse Hispanic dwellers, could not count on protection from the south. It was not long before a local settler chorus rose for switching fealty from Mexico to Washington.

The stage was set first for Texan secession in 1836 and subsequently New Mexico, Arizona, California, Colorado, Utah, and Nevada's annexation to the United States in 1848. An impoverished Mexican state could not secure Indian allies, defend local settlers, or thwart American aggrandizing aims. Texan-American traders like Charles Stillman of Brownsville extended their reach from Matamoros as far as Saltillo and San Luis Potosí, nursing dreams of making the Rio Grande into a great riverine conduit for commerce. Grandiose plans never materialized, but businessmen-cum-frontier consolidators were happy to back a war to incorporate definitively much of the borderland region into the territorial reach of the American republic. In early 1848, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo inscribed the Rio Grande as a border. Within the U.S. side of this line, former Indian lands were given over to occupation and Hispanic ranchos yielded to the surveyors of and claimants to private property. In turn, albeit later during the regime of dictator Porfirio Díaz, the *porfiriato* (1876–1911), Mexico, too, brought the intra-border region into the domain of an enclosed proprietary structure for capitalist occupation. This did not put an end to the relatively unobstructed border crossings of Indians and Mexicans, but they did so most often in search of a wage rather than to escape commercial colonialism—and they did so precisely because border fixing allowed an entirely different commercial rationale to prevail over the erstwhile borderlands. Either way, border peace brought trans-border collusion among nation-states to curb the mobility and autonomy of borderlanders. For many borderlanders on the Mexican side, public armies and private head hunters waged little less than a war of extermination.

This exploration of the transition in North American history from borderlands to borders has emphasized the connections between imperial competition and intercultural relations. Stated simply, where the former flourished, the latter more likely featured inclusive frontiers. Where European colonial domains brushed up against one another, Indian peoples deflected imperial powers from their original purposes and fashioned economic, diplomatic, and personal relations that rested, if not entirely on Indian ground, at least on more common ground. During the eighteenth century, the Spanish, the French, and the British would not have survived their North American rivalries without Indian allies. As the French struggled to restrict British colonists to the east of the Appalachians, as the Spanish sought to slow the drainage of specie to French and British traders, and as the British worked to enlarge their share of North American resources, each empire had to come to terms with Indian peoples. The French learned the art of intercultural mediation, the Spanish abandoned their longstanding policy of paternalistic pacification, and the British, most ironically, on the eve of the American Revolution, showed signs of mastering the diplomacy of the middle

ground. To varying degrees in the borderlands that were the Great Lakes, the lower Missouri Valley, and the Greater Rio Grande, intermarriages and gift exchanges cemented political alliances.

But borderlands born of imperial rivalry and cross-cultural mixing became borders when the costs of ethnic alliances surpassed their benefits and when European empires decayed. The demise of the Great Lakes fur trade and the territorial expansion south of the lakes forced the custodians of the old *pays d'en haut* to abandon their existing diplomatic commitment to Indian partners in favor of a new diplomatic commitment to the peaceable coexistence of states on either side of an international border. Deprived of imperial rivalry, Indians of the Great Lakes struggled on in a futile effort to defend remaining homelands and to preserve the fraying ligaments of cross-cultural exchange. The same held true for the peoples of the Rio Grande. If the Spanish came late to borderland ways of alliance making, nomadic and pueblo Indians did try to manipulate Bourbon frailty to their advantage—although it was this very weakness of Spanish and later Mexican territorial control that led to annexation by the United States.

Thus Indian agency posed contingencies with which European powers had to contend, forcing them to adapt their expansionist ways. Cross-cultural brokering and conflict shaped but did not determine the patterns of coexistence. In the end, Old World conflicts and eighteenth-century warfare provided the decisive markers for hinterland processes. The crucial turning point in the above narratives came with the age of “democratic revolutions”—a process that sundered all three empires of North America and gave way to liberal statemaking. The American and French revolutions shattered the delicate equipoise of borderland adaptations and put Indian peoples on the permanent defensive. The fate of the Missouri Valley exemplified this aboutface most dramatically. The American Revolution and the Jeffersonian ascendancy that followed wrecked generations of syncretic and symbiotic Indian-European arrangements by unleashing a virulent model of homestead property. In Missouri, two rival regimes of occupation converged: one based on slave labor, the other on free, and both had unlimited appetites for land. Thus did Missouri change from borderland to border state. But the conflict between free and slave labor, which for Americans proved to be the biggest difference (and culminated in the carnage of the 1860s), made little difference to Indians, who were displaced by both forms of exclusive occupation.

The Age of Revolution and the ensuing Napoleonic Wars also remapped the borderlands in the Great Lakes and Rio Grande regions. Heightened military conflict not only shattered the French and Spanish regimes in North America and initiated Britain's gradual withdrawal, it also laid waste the rival commercial and intercultural links of the borderlands. As the continental wars spread to North America, culminating in the War of 1812, they wrote the final chapter in the Great Lakes evolution from borderlands to border. Thereafter, border fixing gave way to the birth pangs of Canadian statehood and the coming of age of the American republic.

To be sure, borders formalized but did not foreclose the flow of people, capital, and goods. Even if the eclipse of imperial rivalries afforded less space for



Indian and métis/mestizo autonomy, the prolonged weakness of nation-states left some room to maneuver. International boundaries remained dotted lines that took a generation to solidify. Up to the 1880s, Apaches flaunted the conventions of border crossing—that is, until General Díaz consolidated Mexico City's hold over the nation's north, and General George Crook managed to contain Geronimo and his followers. Almost simultaneously, the Canadian–United States border solidified. For the Canadian Métis, the surviving extension of the Great Lakes middle ground, border drawing narrowed the range of movement, imperiling their folkways and ultimately setting the stage for the uprising of Louis Riel (1869–70, 1885). Lest readers see Apache resistance or Métis freedom as unique, borders and the consolidation of nation-states spelled the end of autonomy for Yaquis, Comanches, Sioux, Blackfoot, and countless other peoples who once occupied these North American borderlands. Hereafter, the states of North America enjoyed unrivaled authority to confer or deny rights to peoples within their borders.

If borders appeared juridically to divide North American people, they also inscribed in notions of citizenship new and *exclusivist* meanings. They defined not only external sovereignty but also internal membership in the political communities of North America. Defended by treaties, borders separated new nation-states; they also helped harden the lines separating members from non-members within states. The rights of citizens—never apportioned equally—were now allocated by the force of law monopolized by ever more consolidated and centralized public authority.

For those included, this unleashed new eras of freedom and autonomy; for the *excluded*, life within nation-states more often meant precisely the opposite—the loss of political, social, and personal status. Furthermore, ossified borders reduced the freedom of “exit,” at a minimum the ability to leave and at best the power to play off rival rulers. With the consolidation of the state form of political communities, borderland peoples began the long political sojourn of survival within unrivaled polities.

Over the long run, excluded or marginal former borderlanders began to reconcile themselves to accommodation, and eventually assertion within multi-ethnic or even multinational states (especially in Canada). In the parlance of census takers and apostles of national integration, borderlanders became “ethnics”—minorities distinguished by phenotype or language from the “national” majority. It took some remarkable political dexterity to transform this particularizing and separating category into a basis for challenging the unitary claims of North American national-statists. Of late, the idiom of self-determination has enabled borderlanders to champion the idea of community sovereignty with rights that even transcend nation-states. This, however, is a recent phenomenon, and should not be projected backward onto peoples who, a century ago, cared little for states and less for nations. Whatever lands Indian and métis/mestizo peoples may reclaim will be won as much in national courts as in their own councils. These triumphs, however, will hardly restore the power and autonomy once enjoyed by the peoples in between.

## Telling North American Border Histories

ANDREW GRAYBILL AND BENJAMIN JOHNSON

In March 2005 George W. Bush welcomed Mexican president Vicente Fox and Canadian prime minister Paul Martin to his ranch in Crawford, Texas. Their meeting was unusual, if only because the last official U.S. gathering of the three continental heads of state had taken place more than twelve years earlier, for the initialing of the North American Free Trade Agreement. In contrast to the comity of that 1992 visit, this summit revealed significant fissures dividing the nations, including the simmering dispute between Ottawa and Washington over the trade in softwood lumber, and growing vigilantism directed at illegal Mexican immigrants in the American Southwest. But on one thing Bush, Fox, and Martin could readily agree: namely, that the fates of all three countries are knitted together. As Martin put it: "Our safe borders secure our people not only against terrorism, but they make possible a speedy flow of goods, services and people and information among our three nations."

By comparison, historians of North America have been far more hesitant to explore the interconnectedness of Canada, the United States, and Mexico. Doubters need only consult the map section of most books on any one of the three countries; almost invariably, the drawings end abruptly at either the 49th parallel or the Rio Grande, as if weather patterns, topography, or even human beings naturally observe such boundaries. There are several reasons that may explain this persistent habit, but the most significant is the simple fact that the nation-state has come to serve as the basic unit of analysis in the modern practice of historical scholarship. As such, many historians tend to color entirely "within the lines," telling stories, often very good ones, that stop arbitrarily at the boundaries—between North Dakota and Saskatchewan, for example, or between Arizona and Sonora—and that ignore the land and the people just on the other side, as well as the line in between. They also often succumb to the temptation to superimpose these lines on earlier historical periods, when they did not yet exist, thereby assuming the inevitability of the modern map.

Precisely because the nation-state has become the dominant form of political organization in the modern world, we often look at modern maps and the borders that divide nations without questioning or even recognizing these assumptions. By the mid-twentieth century, nation-states has divided up most of the earth's territory, population, and economic life among them, having supplanted, incorporated, or conquered all non-national societies. But rather than unquestioningly accepting the existence of such national borders, we might instead treat them as interesting intellectual problems, and ask some historical questions about them: How did they come to be, and how and why did they take on their current configurations? With what other ways of organizing people and space did they come

into conflict, and how were these struggles resolved? What kinds of goods and which sorts of people did national governments want to cross these borders easily, and which ones not at all? And how many of these items and individuals have actually crossed? Did borders mean the same things to local residents of border areas as they did to national policymakers? How have borders and the issues that they raise been represented in film and literature, and how have these depictions changed expectations about border policies and border crossings? And how have the answers to these sorts of questions changed over time, and why?

By posing these sorts of queries, we seek to uncover the meaning and significance of our national borders, rather than taking them for granted. Like other kinds of transnational and comparative history, our approach offers one productive way of telling stories that transcends both the geographic and conceptual limits imposed by national boundaries, a task to which the historical profession is now turning with great vigor. Nations still matter in these stories—indeed, their governments are often the most powerful actors, and they created the very borders under examination. But as Vicente Fox, George Bush, and Paul Martin all recognized, each nation acts in relation to other nations and to political and economic realities that they cannot always control.

Historians of North America have been posing questions about borders for some time. Recent works on the Canada-U.S. and Mexico-U.S. borders ask similar questions, often feature parallel historical actors, and push accounts of national development to acknowledge wider historical circumstances. Yet scholars of both border regions generally work in personal and intellectual isolation from one another. Indeed, until quite recently, the term “borderlands” served as a sort of shorthand to refer to the present-day U.S. Southwest and the Mexican North, with little thought to the border dividing Canada from the United States. Innovative methodologies and approaches applied to the study of one border have not necessarily been brought to bear on investigations of the other, despite the fact that a range of groups—among them, U.S. government officials, Asian migrants, and smugglers—have adapted the knowledge gained in one borderlands to the challenges posed by its northern or southern counterpart.

A generation ago, “borderlands” referred to the northernmost reaches of the Spanish colonial project, an area that encompasses the present-day U.S. states of California, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, Louisiana, Alabama, Georgia, and Florida. This borderlands history was originally articulated by Herbert Eugene Bolton in the early 1920s, and continued by his protégé John Francis Bannon as a kind of answer, or at least a Hispanic counterpart, to Frederick Jackson Turner’s famous and influential thesis that the frontier experience had shaped a distinctive American character as well as democratic institutions and habits of mind. This field, the original “borderlands” history, challenged U.S. historians to think of national historical origins and influences as having developed beyond the familiar world of the British Empire and the eastern seaboard of North America. Although practitioners of Boltonian borderlands history sought to make a mark on the wider study of U.S. history, for the most part they were unsuccessful. U.S. historians continued to focus on the British roots of American culture and institutions, and historians of Latin America found borderlands

scholarship similarly marginal to their enterprise. At the same time, historians of the American Southwest were as uninterested in crossing the 1848 temporal boundary as were Boltonian scholars in pursuing their studies after the Mexican-American War remade their region.

By the 1970s, the Boltonian school of Borderlands Studies had expanded to include scholars with different agendas and approaches to the study of this region. Students of Mexican American history focused their attention on the marginalization and racialization of people of Mexican descent in the U.S. Southwest after 1848, even as they found the earlier Spanish and Mexican periods relevant to their inquiries. Some scholars in this first wave of Mexican American history had been trained in part as Latin Americanists. They appreciated the continuity between Mexican history and Mexican American history, and recognized the challenge that writing such accounts posed to U.S. historians ignorant of the Latin American past. One of them, Oscar J. Martínez, expanded upon his early work on the twin border towns of El Paso and Juárez to encompass a broader examination of the border itself. At about the same time, scholars of Native American history found much of interest in the areas colonized by New Spain, particularly because the region's Native peoples had endured for nearly four centuries under different forms of colonialism—Spanish, Mexican, and then American—yet had managed to retain their distinct group identity, along with substantial portions of their pre-Columbian territories. In the 1980s, the U.S. Southwest also drew the attention of the “New Western” historians, who found the area—including its colonial past—to be fertile ground for exploration of the themes of conquest, environmental destruction, and myth-making that were so central to their work. Both Patricia Nelson Limerick and Richard White, for example, examined the deep ties between Mexico and the U.S. West in their surveys of the region's history. Limerick even argued for adopting the idea of the “*frontera*,” a term derived from studies of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, which she said offered “a realistic view of this nation's position in the hemisphere and in the world,” one that the concept of the “frontier” did not, because of the latter term's fostering of an “illusion of vacancy” and “triumphal conclusions.” But, for both authors, “border” meant Mexico, and as with the New Western history in general, they almost entirely neglected Canada, its West, and the border that links Canada to the United States.

At about the same time, the Mexican North began attracting greater attention from historians of Mexico. Prompted in part by a broader revitalization of that nation's regional history, these scholars analyzed the relationship of the northern Mexican states with the centers of national power, emphasizing in particular the states' roles in the Mexican Revolution (1911–20). Their work generally treated the North as a set of regions (Baja California and Sonora, Chihuahua, and the Monterrey-dominated Northeast) rather than a unified border zone. Nevertheless, in their accounts, the border with the United States was seen as a major force in the politics, society, and economy of each of these regions.

Broader developments within the academy gave many of these scholars good reason to call themselves, among other things, “borderlands” historians. As it did

for many disciplines, the rise of postmodernism—which seeks to reveal the contradictions, incompleteness, and contingencies of social categories and processes—changed the study of the Spanish or Mexican borderlands. Whereas scholars once viewed “Spaniards,” “Indians,” and “mestizos” as self-evident and distinct categories, they now began to realize that the boundaries between these groups were in fact quite porous, and changed with circumstance and over time. In nineteenth-century New Mexico, for example, a person who began life as a subject of the Spanish crown, might subsequently have claimed membership in a Pueblo Indian community, or assumed an active political role as a Mexican citizen, or become a U.S. citizen—all within the course of three or four decades. The ideas of “borders” and “border-crossing” seemed well-suited to grapple with such complexity. The simultaneous connections and distinctions that the term “border” implies—particularly in the case of such seemingly different nations as Mexico and the United States—spoke directly to the core concerns of postmodernism. Indeed, “borders” and “border-crossing” have become leading metaphors for the postmodern condition, and works that study the U.S.-Mexican borderlands are widely cited by scholars of the history and literature of other regions.

The growing interest in transnational history in the 1990s and early 2000s also drew historians to the study of borders in general, including the U.S.-Mexican borderlands. History as a discipline is still structured to a considerable degree around nation-states, whose territoriality and understandings of their antecedents provide historians with the demarcations of their subjects and time frames. Most historians, particularly of the modern world, are trained and hired as historians of a particular nation. Recently, however, a rising chorus of historians has questioned the tight focus on nationalist historiographies, arguing that such an orientation minimizes transnational and non-national developments and obscures the extent to which nations themselves are shaped by larger dynamics—such as migration, commerce, technology, and ideas—that may be underestimated or ignored by versions of the past yoked too firmly to nation-based inquiry. These historians continue to find nations and national histories important subjects and frames for their work, but they also write stories centered on regions, like the Atlantic and Pacific worlds, or on processes, like migration or global economic networks, or on intellectual and cultural worlds that cut across national boundaries. Accounts of border areas can similarly illuminate the contingency of national histories and provide opportunities for creating stories about the past that transcend both the geographic and conceptual limits imposed by national boundaries.

Contemporary developments along the U.S.-Mexico border have also heightened scholarly interest in the region's history. Population on both sides of the border has been growing rapidly for two generations, an enormous number of manufacturing and assembly plants have been built on the Mexican side, and Mexican immigration to the United States is transforming the social fabric of both nations even as it generates ongoing controversy. By 2000, the border had become the focus of two Mexican scholarly journals, *Frontera Norte* and *Estudios Fronterizos*, published respectively by the border universities El Colegio de la

Frontera Norte and La Universidad Autónoma de Baja California. Although the work of historians from Mexico, the United States, and other countries appear in both journals, the preponderance of the articles they publish are contributed by anthropologists, sociologists, demographers, economists, and policy analysts, with a heavy emphasis on contemporary issues and very recent developments. North of the line, it is estimated that by 2050 one-quarter of the U.S. population may claim Latino—mostly Mexican—ancestry, so the boundary between the United States and Mexico has never seemed so relevant to the U.S. academy as in recent years. And clearly the connections that this border has fostered are as important as the divisions it has ostensibly maintained.

By the first decade of the twenty-first century, then, for an academic to label his or her work as “borderlands” scholarship could mean any number of things: a focus on the northern reaches of New Spain, or on the regional histories of the northern states of Mexico, or on those of the U.S. Southwest; or a concentration on Mexican American history, or Mexican migration, or the region’s ethnohistory; or even an interest in cultural hybridity and identity-formation in the area now bisected by the U.S.-Mexico border. Increasingly, however, historians based in the United States who label themselves as “borderlands historians” have emphasized the key role that the border itself has played in shaping this borderlands: its creation as the result of long processes of colonialism and encounter; the way it has reflected the national projects of Mexico and the United States; and its shifting meanings and implications for the diverse groups who cross the border and call the region their home.

Recent studies have demonstrated the productivity of examining border-making and its impacts on both sides of the line. For example, we now know that the international boundary created in 1848, in the wake of the Mexican-American War, altered class relations in much of the Mexican North. Regional economic elites and the central state no longer needed the services of the subaltern class to act as a military check to Apache and Comanche raids, and so felt free to trample on this group’s rights to land. At the same time, in the Mexican Northeast, the ease of crossing into Texas for work led to the collapse of debt peonage and to generally milder treatment of peasants by hacienda owners, even as large numbers of slaves in Texas fled south across the Rio Grande to Mexico, where slavery had been abolished decades earlier. The policing of the new border probably had the greatest effect on Native peoples, with the Mexican and U.S. governments cooperating in efforts to end the migration and raiding that had been so essential to continued Native independence. The long-standing efforts of ethnic Mexican borderlands communities to maintain their autonomy vis-à-vis the power of the central government persisted throughout the nineteenth century, often through the continuation of cross-border political and economic ties, and sometimes through armed uprisings. The border also became a site where national notions of race and citizenship were forged; by the twentieth century, U.S. immigration restrictions had led to the active policing of the border against migrants—though not Mexican migrants, as most would assume today, but rather Asians, who had been banned from entry into the United States by the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act and the 1907 Gentleman’s Agreement with

Japan. By the 1910s, this border also exhibited a certain vitality in the realm of cultural production, as its dividing river, fences, and markers now became symbols of national and racial difference, disseminated across Mexico and the United States in travel accounts, postcards, novels, and films. Often meant to evoke distance, division, and dread, invocations of the border could also provoke yearning, fascination, and desire. Long before the age of NAFTA, then, the U.S.-Mexico border loomed large in the development of both nations.

Much of this new borderlands history is explicitly and proudly transnational, and many of its proponents tout it as part of the effort to transcend what they see as the limiting focus of historians—particularly U.S. scholars—on the nation-state. As Samuel Truett and Elliott Young have argued in an influential historiographic review and critique of the new incarnation of borderlands history, “Studying the U.S.-Mexico borderlands allows one to engage ... hidden stories [those that escape nation-centered accounts] while reflecting critically on the process of territorialization that coincided with the rise of nation-states.” For many borderlands scholars, telling these sorts of stories is also a way to contribute to political projects and movements that are critical of nationalism—particularly U.S. nationalism—in an era of remarkable American power.

Nevertheless, scholars of this new borderlands school remain more rooted in the universities, territory, archives, and historiography of the United States than their transnational rhetoric might lead one to believe. Historians of Mexico, particularly Mexican nationals, have not shown nearly the enthusiasm of U.S. historians (almost all of them American nationals) for embracing a rubric of “borderlands” to frame their work. Despite the strong orientation of Mexican historians to the study of that nation’s center of population and political power, there is also a long tradition of writing about the Mexican North. Most scholars of Mexico’s North characterize the border as a zone of conflict between two discrete and highly unequal nation-states, paying scant attention to the cultural hybridity that exists there and overlooking the critique of nation-centered history that characterizes so much of the U.S. literature. When asked by a U.S. historian about Mexican sovereignty, the Mexican historian and diplomat Carlos Rico Ferrat articulated the reasons behind the resistance of some Mexican scholars to the post-national turn. “We have been historically more adamant in asserting our legalistic perspective on legal sovereignty,” he explained, “not only because our law is a major defense against a much stronger nation, but also because that nation is on our border.”

Compared with the long history and great diversity of scholarship on the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, there has been far less academic attention directed at the Canada-U.S. borderlands. Several factors may help to explain this discrepancy. For one thing, Canada and the United States, as advanced liberal capitalist democracies populated mostly by descendents of European settlers, appear to have more in common with one another than they do with Mexico. Accordingly, for most Americans and some Canadians—at least until the emergence of terrorism as a perceived threat to American national security—the international boundary separating the two countries has seemed largely inconsequential, as suggested by the familiar refrain that Canada and the United States share the

longest undefended border in the world. Contrast that with the writer Gloria Anzaldúa's description of the U.S.-Mexico border as "*una herida abierta* [an open wound], where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds." Whereas armies and insurrectionists have splashed their way across the Rio Grande on numerous occasions, since the War of 1812 the northern border has experienced much less international conflict. Even the most contentious issue in the history of the northern borderlands—the dispute over the Oregon boundary—was resolved through diplomatic channels (at almost the same moment that the United States invaded Mexico to conquer what later became the American Southwest). Moreover, the border-related issues that usually divide Washington and Ottawa tend to be of a milder nature (concerns about American cattle possibly transmitting mad cow disease to Canadian livestock, for example) than those (like the intractable matter of illegal immigration) that estrange federal officials in the United States from their Mexican counterparts.

Although there is no body of work on the northern borderlands equivalent to that of the Boltonian school, some Canadian historians did probe the significance of their boundary with the United States. Writing in the late 1920s and 1930s, at roughly the apex of Bolton's career, Walter Sage showed that immigrants in the North American West had repeatedly crossed the border in search of available land and economic opportunities, and that Canada's western provinces were more socially and economically integrated with adjacent U.S. states than they were with Canada's economic and population centers farther to the east. John Bartlet Brebner, a Toronto-born scholar who spent his career at Columbia University in New York, took a similarly continental approach. George F. G. Stanley, on the other hand, placed more emphasis on the importance of the border itself; according to Elizabeth Jameson and Jeremy Mouat, for Stanley, "the border separated American violence, lawlessness, and greed from Canadian civility, order, and managed development." Like the much more influential Boltonians, then, these early Canadian scholars formulated historical narratives that placed their nation within a larger, continental framework.

It was not until the period after the Second World War that other writers picked up these lines of inquiry. When they did, their interpretations tended to emphasize the 49th parallel as a clear marker of national difference, confirming the findings of Stanley rather than Sage. In 1955, Wallace Stegner published *Wolf Willow*, a memoir of the six years he spent as a boy on his family's homestead not far from Eastend, Saskatchewan in the early twentieth century. In his youth, the Iowa-born Stegner had been acutely aware of the existence of the international border with the United States, which passed just south of his parents' farm and whose bifurcating presence saturates the book. Indeed, in one passage from *Wolf Willow*, Stegner noted that the 49th parallel "ran directly through my childhood, dividing me in two." This schism shaped his life in subtle ways: the textbooks he read in school were published in Toronto rather than New York; the signature national holiday he celebrated was Canada Day and not the Fourth of July; his family received mail-order catalogs from Eaton's as opposed to Sears. But even in his childhood, Stegner recognized that the line did more than merely



differentiate social norms. As he writes, "the 49th parallel was an agreement, a rule, a limitation, a fiction perhaps but a legal one, acknowledged by both sides."

Surprisingly—considering the relative inattention to the northern borderlands at the time—another book about the region appeared that very same year. Unlike Stegner's volume, however, *Whoop-Up Country* was the work of an academic historian, Paul F. Sharp, and it was concerned less with the fact of the border than with how the boundary had come to be in the first place. Sharp discovered that Canadian and U.S. officials had trained their gaze on the region at roughly the same moment in the late nineteenth century, and for similar reasons: to abolish the area's illicit whiskey trade and to assert control over its indigenous peoples, all in preparation for the arrival of white settlers. Sharp argued that those efforts were so successful that by 1885 the once unified Alberta-Montana borderlands had been divided and then absorbed by their respective nations. It was this reordered landscape that the young Wallace Stegner recalled from his youth. Though Sharp had approached the 49th parallel through archival collections in the United States and Canada, rather than lived experience, like Stegner he saw the border as a fault line, a marker of fundamental national difference.

*Whoop-up Country* offered a possible model for the trans-border study of the region, and initially seemed to make a wide impact. In the United States, it was broadly and favorably reviewed.... Canadian historians, by contrast, were much less taken with Sharp's account of the border. *Whoop-Up Country* and Sharp's earlier publications remained important works for scholars of the North American West, but Canadian historians roundly criticized him for emphasizing the regional unity of the northern Great Plains. The dominant school of Canadian history at the time, represented by the political economist Harold Innis, stressed the economic links between the eastern core of the nation and its western hinterlands, leaving little room for north-south connections and making it easy for Sharp's more politically oriented account to be treated as a regional, and not national, story. Moreover, the emphasis by Innis and other leading Canadian scholars on Canadian distinctiveness blunted the effect of Sharp's work in Canada. As Thomas Isern and Bruce Shepard have argued, "The reason for Sharp's minimal impact in Canada has been the nationalist orientation of the Canadian historical tradition." Thus, much as in the Mexican academy, Canadian historians resisted integrating their history with that of the United States, and so, again as in Mexico, no cohesive school of border studies emerged in Canada.

In the mid-1970s, however, a fresh generation of historians—mostly from Canada—shifted their attention to the northern borderlands, primarily to the region lying between the Great Lakes and the Pacific Ocean. While these newcomers continued to investigate the area through the prism of real and perceived national divergence, just as Sharp (and Stegner) had, they also infused their work with a heightened sense of Canadian patriotism. Such sentiment was on the rise in Canadian academic circles at that time, fueled by discontent with the ongoing U.S. war in Vietnam, but also by a renewed resistance to the use of American models as explanations for historical development in Canada. Of particular concern to Canadian scholars was Turner's frontier thesis. Though Turner

made no particular claims for the relevance of his thesis to Canada, historians north of the border were keen to prove its inapplicability to their nation's past, and to thus assert the significance of the 49th parallel.

Some of these pieces tackled the Turnerian question head on, arguing that while the United States may have acquired and preserved its unique characteristics through constant westward migration, Canada had looked to the east—to the Old World—for its identity, even as the Dominion expanded onto the western prairies and across the Rocky Mountains. How else to explain the rigid Victorian class structure of Alberta's range cattle industry, especially by comparison to its lawless but (supposedly) leveling American counterpart? And what about that most Canadian of all institutions, the North-West Mounted Police, which took its inspiration from the Royal Irish Constabulary and thus developed in precisely the imperial context that Ottawa planned to replicate in its own hinterlands? Such studies identified a distinct Canadian metropolitanism that stood in contrast, even opposition, to Turner's (American) frontier. And the collective message of these contributions was clear enough: the border marked the northward limit of one country, and the beginning of another, presumably better one.

By the late 1970s, however, some scholars had resumed questioning the definitiveness of the 49th parallel as a continental fault line between the United States and Canada, as Walter Sage had done a half century before. Like Sage, most of these scholars adopted a regional rather than a national perspective on the northern borderlands, one that emphasized the social and environmental connections that created trans-border and geographically discrete areas such as the Pacific Northwest or the Great Plains. Their attention was drawn to the western portion of the border, particularly the Plains, perhaps because this region had been the focus of intense Canadian and U.S. efforts to finalize their borders, whereas east of the Great Lakes the boundary had long been taken for granted. In their research, these authors discovered that various groups—from homesteaders to industrial workers—had more in common with their counterparts directly across the international boundary than they did with their respective Canadian and American countrymen in the distant East. Other historians identified ideas and practices, such as anti-black racism or settlement boosterism, that crossed the line and thus came to characterize life and experience on both sides of the 49th parallel. Taken together, such works called for less emphasis on U.S.-Canadian divergence, and more attention to overlap and interplay. The Canada-U.S. border, in these accounts, was important precisely for its failure to create or mark fundamental national difference. A regionalist approach also characterized a cluster of works on the New England-Eastern Canada borderlands that came out of an institute at the University of Maine in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Until quite recently, scholarly examination of the northern borderlands gravitated toward one of these two poles. Most investigations focused doggedly on the notion of the 49th parallel as a deep fissure dividing U.S. and Canadian society, politics, and culture; a smaller collection of works, meanwhile, identified pockets of regional unity that supersede the boundary line. Both of these approaches have been enormously important in fostering our understanding of

the area and its complex development. But the early years of the twenty-first century have seen a surge of renewed interest in the northern borderlands, and historians have begun to examine the significance of the 49th parallel from new perspectives. Like most of the earlier work, this scholarship has a strongly western cast, for reasons that are difficult to parse but may have something to do with the centrality of conquest and colonialism to the history of the western border. Or perhaps such explanations are more deeply rooted—the phrase “the 49th parallel,” for example, often serves as a shorthand for the entire border, despite the fact that from Lake of the Woods eastward the line does not run along the geographic parallel. These scholars are prompted, at least in part, by the same developments that have piqued interest in the U.S.-Mexico border—the heightened visibility of international commerce, migration, and the critique of nation-centered history. Their studies move beyond the stark dichotomy of similarity and difference and have pushed the field in promising new directions. Most of the work falls into four broad groups.

The first category includes works that interrogate the implications of border-making for indigenous peoples, who had been largely overlooked by earlier writers. As North America's empires and nations attempted to demarcate and absorb their peripheries, Indian groups witnessed the swift and arbitrary division of their homelands. Such circumstances imposed severe limitations, to be sure, including the rupturing of kinship networks, the reduction of hunting grounds, and a more general loss of geographic mobility. But at times, the drawing of borders opened up new and unforeseen possibilities as well. For instance, Aboriginal inhabitants all along the boundary between the United States and Canada, from the colonial period to the late nineteenth century, used the border to their advantage by pitting rival trading companies against one another in their quest for Indian assistance in the fur trade, or by finding sanctuary from their enemies (white and Native) across the line.

The second group focuses on the cross-border migrations of non-Aboriginal peoples. In general, these volumes emphasize the exceptional permeability of the U.S.-Canadian boundary, noting how—for much of the twentieth century—white movement across the line was effectively unimpeded, especially (though not exclusively) in the West. These scholars have noted the varied reasons that led people to move north or south of the border, but most agree that economic opportunity was of paramount importance. Unlike most of the scholarship focusing on the northern borderlands, migration studies encompass the full length of the border, reflecting the heavy impact of cross-border migration in eastern as well as western portions of the borderlands. And yet, despite their numbers, these newcomers seem to have garnered much less notice from residents and federal officials than did arrivals from Europe and Asia. This trend, no doubt, stemmed from the real and perceived similarities between Anglo-Americans and their Canadian counterparts, a notion recently picked up by a number of historians who have emphasized the social continuities found in trans-border regions such as the Great Lakes and Prairie-Plains.

A third group of works examines the relationship of the border to the natural world that it bisects, a division no less capricious to ecosystems than to human

populations. After all, with few topographical features west of the Great Lakes to define it, the boundary between the United States and Canada was marked simply by piles of stones and mounds of dirt for much of the nineteenth century. Given its practical invisibility, it stands to reason that the 49th parallel did little to shape how borderland residents understood their relationship to the land, and indeed some scholars have found that the peculiar and distinct conditions of the region engendered a shared sense of identity rooted firmly in place, one that largely transcended state, provincial, and even national boundaries. Other historians have discovered that the border, in fact, mattered very much, especially for fish and wildlife populations that traversed the line in the course of their migrations. Just as with people, there were animals that states wanted to easily cross borders and those whose mobility it tried to restrict. It took concerted action on the part of government officials in Ottawa and Washington (and beyond) to regulate predation and enforce conservation measures.

A fourth and final collection of studies analyzes the impact of the border on the formation of national identity. In so doing, they revisit some of the observations first made by Paul Sharp in *Whoop-Up County*, particularly the notion that federal officials in the United States and especially in Canada strove to enforce their shared international boundary beginning in the late nineteenth century. These newer works probe the influence of Washington and Ottawa in amplifying the reality as well as the symbolism of the border, while assessing the long-term success of these efforts. For example, some historians have suggested that the northern borderlands were the object in a continental endgame of national expansion, where federal officials in both capitals projected their newfound or resurgent economic and political power into a region once thought too remote for incorporation. And yet, according to other scholars, these grandiose attempts to divide, conquer, and integrate the hinterlands into their respective nations were, in the main, incomplete, as the 49th parallel seems no more significant in creating or marking national difference today than it did more than a century ago, when it was first enforced.

As the previous historiographic discussion suggests, there has been a convergence in the kinds of questions asked by historians of North America's two borders. Yet scholars of these places still work in isolation from one another, reading different bodies of literature, working at different institutions, and publishing with different presses.

First, this book points to the value of comparative accounts of border-making. On the most general level, comparison can help to destabilize normative or exceptionalist explanations, while casting light on similarities as well as structural and contingent differences. Given the isolated state of the two fields, comparison might also inspire the importation of questions salient in one field but not yet applied to the other. For example, the racialization of those crossing from Mexico into the United States by medical inspections has been the subject of sustained scholarly scrutiny, and similar questions might be asked about migrants moving from Canada into the United States, especially French Canadians. Furthermore, a comparative approach to border formation might well help scholars provide more compelling answers to their shared questions about the

ways that boundaries have re-made, and failed to re-make, identities congruent with the claim of modern nation-states to territorial exclusivity. The longer history and greater quantity of literature on the southern border has led many to deploy the U.S.-Mexico border as paradigmatic of borders in general, including the northern border of the United States. The greatly unequal balance of power between Mexico and the United States, and the frequency with which U.S. observers have thought of this in racial terms, however, may make this border more distinctive than diagnostic. Have Canadians and Mexicans and their governments used their borders with the United States in parallel ways, or have the great differences between Canada and Mexico sharply differentiated their border-making projects?

A similar set of questions might be asked with respect to Native peoples and how they dealt with those borders whose creation abrogated some groups' territoriality and sovereignty but offered others the chance to play settler-nations off against one another. For example, the modern national myths of both Canada and Mexico feature celebrations of racial hybridity between European settlers and Indians. To what extent did these racial formations offer political and cultural space for Indian peoples not permitted by the United States' more exclusionist and assimilationist understanding of Indians' place within modernity? More broadly, if some Native peoples were able to navigate a bordered world more successfully than others, was that because of the differing nature of the state-building projects that they faced, or because of their own divisions, heterogeneity, resources, and decisions?

These questions point to more-encompassing comparative inquiries. In a more general sense, do the histories of these two borders teach us similar or different lessons about the ability of modern states to enforce their claims to territorial exclusivity on the ground, and about the impact of those claims on the lives of those living on borders?

Second, some questions about borders cry out not just for comparison, but for integrated accounts. Many historical actors in fact engaged both borders, and recapturing their experiences requires historians to follow in their footsteps. Consider the case of Asian migrants to North America. Canada, the United States, and Mexico all share the Pacific Rim with Japan and China, and starting in the mid-nineteenth century Asians migrated to all three nations, forming interconnected diasporic communities, and encountering nativist movements that articulated notions of nationhood in opposition to them and the networks that had brought them to North America. Asian migrants crossed both borders in pursuit of economic, family, and political goals, and, the differences in the three nations' immigration laws to secure rights of transit otherwise unavailable to them. Yet we miss these stories if we focus on just one nation, or even two nations and their shared border. Other important stories similarly encompass both borders: U.S. bureaucrats and law enforcement officials moved from one American border to the other, presumably taking their understandings and expectations with them as they implemented immigration, customs, and medical procedures on two sometimes very different frontiers. The cultural production surrounding

borders has also often encompassed them both, as suggested by the similarities in the lure of border town cantinas and speakeasies during Prohibition.

Third, if borderlands scholars might profit from broadening their frame to continental dimensions, this book suggests that they would also benefit from narrowing their scope to acknowledge the continued particularities of place. Transnational history can be local history, but some historians writing after the transnational turn emphasize large-scale perspectives that can obscure local and regional distinctiveness. It would be unfortunate if the framing of border histories as transnational studies were to lead scholars to ignore the extent to which border places and border lives have been different from one another, reflective of local and regional histories, geographies, economies, and politics as much as of national and international dynamics. Borders may be international spaces, but border communities are also local spaces whose distinctiveness should be accounted for rather than obscured by the transnational turn in border studies.

Fourth, the approaches to borders taken in this volume open the way for more-nuanced treatments of the relationship between borderlands communities and national states. Contemporary borderlands scholarship portrays the modern state in almost entirely negative terms, as an outside, coercive force whose arrival ends the autonomy and freedom enjoyed by Natives and other peoples who once lived beyond its control. Indeed, the most influential treatment of the emergence of national borders, Jeremy Adelman and Stephen Aron's "From Borderlands to Borders," depicts the rise of national borders as the end of the more-fluid territoriality and identities allowed for by the earlier borderlands between empires and Native peoples. This is with good reason: North America's borders were far removed from the centers of national power and population at the moment of their creation, and the central state was in fact a distant entity controlled by and serving the interests of people far from the border. The United States in particular projected its power more through violence—forcibly opening its new peripheries to national markets and imposing its more-fixed and hierarchical racial categories—than by capturing the imaginations and loyalties of borderlanders themselves.

But this isn't the full picture of the state. Borderlanders, also used national states and their boundaries for their own purposes and sought to forge nations that reflected their own identities. Various groups in all three countries demanded border policies that served their own interests—to provide or control labor, to protect themselves from human and livestock epidemics, and to defend themselves from enemies, to name a few. Others pressed central states to let goods and people pass unhindered, as when Mexican entrepreneurs lobbied for a duty-free zone on their half of the border with the United States, or when Mexican Americans in South Texas agitated for the rights of their families to move between neighboring border cities without encumbrance, or when Métis refugees who had fled Canada during the 1885 Northwest Rebellion sought to return from their cross-border exile in the United States. These examples reflect the continued importance of non-national imagined communities and territoriality, as well as the ways that these projects could be pursued through the methods of state power as much as in contradiction to them. The state ended up as much an

invited guest in the borderlands as it did an armed stranger. The lure of de-centering national histories, an impulse that has given border studies so much of their prominence in the U.S. academy, need not become a brief for anti-nationalist politics or for historical inquiry centered on the nation-state. As the Canadian literary scholar Bryce Traister has insisted in his trenchant critique of U.S. scholarship on the Mexican border, "We have lost our ability to understand the liberal nation-state as a positive and still intriguing contributor rather than impediment to meaningful and even politically progressive identity."

Fifth, this book suggests that borders are simultaneously places and ideas, and should be studied through the lenses of cultural and intellectual—as well as social and political—history. Images and accounts of borders circulated by dime novelists, tourism boosters, journalists, filmmakers, and historians made North American borders resonant well beyond the border regions themselves, engaging the same issues of national territoriality, national and racial difference, and state violence that shaped life in the borderlands. The national differences implied by borders could be used to celebrate (and sell) cultural difference. At other times, depictions of borderlands minimized the starkness of national boundaries, suggesting commonality or solidarity rather than evoking difference or engendering fear. Historians are also producers and consumers of ideas about borders, if often unconsciously. Much North American historical scholarship has read national boundaries backwards into the period before their existence, obscuring non-national forms of territoriality and community that did not simply vanish with the drawing of national boundaries. Exploring the relationship between borders as places and borders as ideas and symbols—tasks that are now split between social and political historians, on the one hand, and cultural historians and literary scholars, on the other—ought to be one of the primary tasks of border scholars.

### FURTHER READING

- Anzaldúa, Gloria, and Sonia Saldívar-Hull. *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1999).
- Bannon, John Francis. *The Spanish Borderlands Frontier, 1513–1821* (1974).
- Bolton, Herbert E. *The Spanish Borderlands: A Chronicle of Old Florida and the Southwest* (1921).
- . "The Epic of Greater America." *American Historical Review* 38 (April 1933): 448–474.
- Brown, Jennifer S. H., and Elizabeth Vibert, eds. *Reading Beyond Words: Contexts for Native History* (2003).
- Diener, Alexander, and Joshua Hagen, eds. *Borderlines in Borderlands: Political Oddities at the Edge of the Nation-State* (2010).
- Hall, Thomas D. *Social Change in the Southwest, 1350–1880* (1989).
- Hurtado, Albert L. "Herbert E. Bolton, Racism, and American History." *Pacific Historical Review* 62 (May 1993): 127–142.
- Johnson, Benjamin, and Andrew Graybill, eds. *Bridging National Borders in North America: Transnational and Comparative Histories* (2009).

- Klein, Kerwin. *Frontiers of Historical Imagination: Narrating the European Conquest of Native America, 1890–1990* (1997).
- Maier, Charles. "Consigning the Twentieth Century to History: Alternative Narratives for the Modern Era." *American Historical Review* 105 (June 2000): 807–831.
- Sahlins, Peter. *Boundaries: The Making of France and Spain in the Pyrenees* (1989).
- Scott, James C. *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* (2009).
- Smith, Linda Tuhiwai. *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (1999).
- Spicer, Edward H. *Cycles of Conquest: The Impact of Spain, Mexico and the United States on the Indians of the Southwest, 1533–1960* (1962).
- Torpey, John. *The Invention of the Passport: Surveillance, Citizenship, and the State* (2000).
- Truett, Samuel, and Elliott Young, eds. *Continental Crossroads: Remapping U.S.-Mexico Borderlands History* (2004).
- Turner, Frederick Jackson. "The Significance of the Frontier in American History." Presented at the American Historical Association Annual Meeting in Chicago in 1893. Printed in the *Proceedings of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin*, December 14, 1893. Reprinted in *Rereading Frederick Jackson Turner: "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" and Other Essays*, ed. John Mack Faragher, pp. 31–60 (1998).
- Usner, Daniel H. Jr., "Borderlands." In *A Companion to Colonial America*, ed. Daniel Vickers, 408–424 (2003).
- Weber, David J. *The Mexican Frontier, 1821–1846: The American Southwest Under Mexico* (1982).
- . "Turner, the Boltonians, and the Borderlands." *American Historical Review* 91 (February 1986): 66–81.
- . *The Spanish Frontier in North America* (1992).
- White, Richard, and Patricia Limerick. *The Frontier in American Culture* (1994).