

A COMPANION TO THE AMERICAN WEST

Edited by
William Deverell

A Companion to the American West

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Introduction

WILLIAM DEVERELL

Over the past two decades, historians have rewritten the history of the American West. Inspired and challenged by deep changes within the historical discipline itself, scholars interested in the American West asked new questions of their sources, plunged into innovative subdisciplines, and took off in any number of novel directions in their teaching and their research.

That ferment, of which this volume is part, energized not only the field but the entire American historical profession. Influential essays and monographs on the West found their way into courses and reading lists addressing other regions and other historical topics altogether. Scholars who had only recently been “prominent western historians” became, simply, “prominent historians” who had stories to tell about America through western prisms. Utilizing the scholarly tools of new or newly energized subfields such as environmental history, ethnic studies, and others, western historians dug into the regional past and emerged with compelling insights about historical change in region and nation both. By reexamining conventional understandings of, for example, power and nature, or race and gender, western historians and their work often stood at the center of historical debates extending well beyond the region’s geographic or political boundaries.

That excitement continues to this day and in the essays that make up this book. A number of years in the making, this collection consists of twenty-five original essays on various themes and issues in western American history. It is devoted to the nineteenth and twentieth-century history of the region. This chronological imbalance away from earlier periods has garnered thoughtful criticism, even from within the pages that follow. In “Thinking Through the West,” the introductory section opening this collection, Stephen Aron contributes an essay that makes a persuasive argument that western historians encounter analytical blind spots when they inadvertently fix the West in place by concentrating only on the region’s history over the past two hundred years. Such a point is well taken, and I urge readers to contemplate Professor Aron’s challenges about historical period and chronology as they read and think about all of the contributions in this book. As both Aron and Elliott West, author of the introductory section’s other essay, point out, the American West has not always been where it is today. How it, and we, got to be “here” is the product of historical processes every bit as much of the centuries before 1800 as after.

This book's contributors, an illustrious gathering of younger and more established scholars, have written superb essays that examine a multitude of topics. Ranging from such themes as western environmental history to the history of western tourism, and from the religious history of the modern West to the history of labor, the essays are meant to provide readers with an introduction to a particular topic, an evaluation of critical works, and an assessment of scholarly gaps in our understanding. Several essays address the same topic from the vantage point of different periods or centuries so that changes over long stretches of time might be more easily discerned.

What we hope will emerge from this volume are a cascade of fresh insights, succinct assessments, and spirited calls for additional scholarly work in western history. Our collective aim has been to produce a volume that brings together many of the insights born of twenty years' worth of scholarly reimaginings of the West's history into a book where the whole is indeed greater than the sum of the excellent parts. As the fortunate person granted the privilege of pulling these talented and patient authors and their work together, I can claim with confidence that we've succeeded.

William Deverell

Pasadena, California

PART I

Thinking Through
the American West

CHAPTER ONE

The Making of the First American West and the Unmaking of Other Realms

STEPHEN ARON

This compendium, like other new collections about the history of the American West, tilts to the nineteenth and twentieth century and to that country which today makes up the western United States. That presentist and regionalist focus is in keeping with the trend in scholarship, which has emphasized the recent history of the region that is our American West (Limerick, 1987; White, 1991; Milner, O'Connor, and Sandweiss, 1994; Matsumoto and Allmendinger, 1999). But limiting western history to the more recent past and to the place that we know as the West distorts our vision. Reading present-day boundaries backwards pretends that the West is where it always was. That fixed sense of place loses sight of the contested character of the West's shifting borders. Beginning the history of the American West in the nineteenth century pushes Anglo-American conquest too much to the fore and gives it an air of inevitability. Drained of its contingencies, the westward expansion of the United States can hardly be imagined as anything but manifestly destined.

In hopes of restoring a more contingent and contested vision of western history, this essay reassesses the origins of westward expansion and the development of the "western country" during the eighteenth century. To be sure, this first western country that Americans eventually conquered, colonized, and consolidated lay east of the Mississippi River. It was not, in other words, our West. And yet, as I've argued at length elsewhere (Aron, 1994, 1996), the processes that shaped this first American West in the eighteenth century established patterns that prefigured the next century's expansion into lands further west.

It is impossible, however, to understand the making of the western country in the eighteenth century – or any century – by treating it only as a "West." Then, as now, the West was not west at all for many of the people who lived there or moved there. In the eighteenth century this western country, indeed, much of North America, was the site of population movements from various directions. It was also the focus of intensive rivalries between European empires. Through the century the whole continent, and particularly its eastern half, was very much up for grabs. The designs of French, Spanish, and British empire-builders competed with those of westward-minded Americans, and all of these expansionist schemes were entangled with the counter-colonial aspirations of diverse Indian inhabitants. Making the first American West – and subsequent ones too – required breaking the claims of these rivals (Taylor, 2001).

Above all, American control of this West involved the subjugation of Indian peoples, for whom the country was not west, or north, or south. For indigenous peoples in what was to become the eastern half of the United States, these were homelands, though some Indians were themselves relatively recent arrivals to the region (Richter, 2001). Through the eighteenth century, “eastern” Indians pursued a variety of paths to resist dispossession and dependency. These included migrations, accommodations, incorporations, confederations, and revitalizations. All proved successful for a time, especially so long as one or another European power lent support to their cause. But once those imperial rivals withdrew, Indian options narrowed and the pace of westward expansion quickened.

Frontier and Borderlands

Two terms, frontier and borderlands, loom large in this interpretation of the making of the first American West and the unmaking of other dreams. Thanks especially to Frederick Jackson Turner, western historians have long paid homage to the importance of the first. In recent years, however, the field has turned away from Turner’s one hundred year old vision of the “significance of the frontier in American history.” Turner’s definition of frontier, his critics have maintained, is at best too vague; often, for example, Turner made frontier synonymous with West. For Turner, that West had its eastern boundary at the Appalachians, which is certainly not how the current generation of Americans imagine the region’s geography. Worse still, the frontier as Turner construed it appears a sexist and ethnocentric anachronism. Thus, the western history that has been written in a Turnerian key neglected the experiences of the majority of westerners (who were not all white men) and ignored the devastating cultural and ecological casualties that accompanied the westward expansion of the United States. Given all these faults, several prominent “new western historians” have sought to excise Turner’s influence and banish the word frontier from their vocabulary (White, 1991; Klein, 1997).

That would be unfortunate, for Turner’s thesis, despite its age, omissions, and errors, has some lessons to impart to students of any or all of America’s Wests. Indeed, Turner’s recognition that the United States had many Wests explained his fascination with the nation’s first West. In the lands between the Appalachians and the Mississippi, Turner discerned patterns that would shape subsequent American expansions. That insight still holds, though western historians must pay attention to the flows from other directions as well. As this essay argues, lands became Wests (and not Norths, Souths, Easts, or simply homelands), because rival claimants were vanquished.

But what to call these zones of shared and contested occupancy? Here I argue that frontier, despite its Turner-tainted past, remains a vital designation for territories where political control was undetermined and boundaries – cultural and geographic – were uncertain. Although Turner described this unsettled situation as “the meeting point between [Indian] savagery and [European] civilization,” (Turner, 1994a) more recent scholarship has recast frontier in more neutral terms as the meeting point between indigenous and intrusive societies. Operating from this definition, historians have probed the intersection between Indians and Europeans and have recovered a frontier past in which cultures not only collided, but also coincided. In fact, an outpouring of new research has shown that, from the Caribbean to Canada

and from the Atlantic to the Pacific, the mingling of Indian, European (and African) peoples rarely produced straightforward results. Instead, in rewriting the history of frontiers, historians have now emphasized the many unexpected twists and turns that characterized the contest for North America (Lamar and Thompson 1981; Cronon, Miles, and Gitlin 1992; Cayton and Teute 1998).

Helpful as the term frontier has been, it alone does not capture the complexity of the contest from which Wests were eventually made. Rarely, if ever, was this a two-sided competition. As this essay details, some Indian leaders struggled to build confederations that would unite diverse Indian peoples against one or another colonial power. But these efforts were only partly successful, leaving Indians still divided against themselves. So, too, imperial powers were locked in competition with each other. Accordingly, Jeremy Adelman and I add the term borderlands to demarcate the zones in which the claims of two or more colonial empires overlapped (Adelman and Aron, 1999).

Like the word "frontier", the term "borderlands" has a problematic history. It is associated most closely with Turner's protégé, Herbert Eugene Bolton. As father of the borderlands school of history, Bolton directed attention away from the east to west orientation of Turner's frontier thesis and toward the northward expansion of Spanish-American settlements. More so than Turner's Anglo-American frontier, in which westward advance presumed Indian retreat, Bolton's work, along with that of his many students, appreciated the extended cohabitation between natives and newcomers that prevailed on the northern perimeters of New Spain. But Bolton, like Turner, paid little attention to the predicaments of Indians, and, as many several recent critics have pointed out, his preference for Catholic padres stigmatized his vision of borderlands' (Weber, 1986; Hurtado, 1995; Worcester, 1991).

As such scholarship attests, the trick is to throw out Bolton's biases without also draining the still useful borderlands bathwater. In fact, it is in combination that frontier and borderlands provide a vocabulary to analyze the making of American Wests. Frontier refers to territories where Indians and colonials intersected; borderlands delineate the overlay of imperial rivalries. That frontiers and borderlands went together is crucial to this interpretation, for the latter certainly shaped the nature of the former. In eighteenth-century North America, the presence of borderlands in the territory between the Appalachians and the Mississippi perpetuated frontiers in which complex cultural mixtures and accommodations often prevailed. In this telling, then, the making of the first American West (and future American Wests too) involves the demise of borderlands and the closing of one kind of frontier.

Early Encroachments: Mingling, Conflict, and Coexistence

Prior to the middle of the eighteenth century, the territory that was to become the first American West had attracted attention from Spanish, French, and English colonizers, but it remained very much Indian countries. First among Europeans to penetrate the region were Spanish explorers, moving north and west from their Florida base. They soon departed, though their microbes wreaked devastation on native populations. Beginning in the late seventeenth century, French explorers, missionaries, and fur traders ventured south and west from settlements along the St Lawrence River and founded a few posts around the Great Lakes and along the Mississippi

River. In the early eighteenth century, the French added a couple of villages in what is now Illinois to their colonial presence south of the Great Lakes. Yet, impressive as the crescent of French settlements stretching from the St Lawrence to the Great Lakes and to the mouth of the Mississippi appeared on maps, they were so widely scattered and sparsely peopled that they hardly challenged the Indians' hold on the country (Eccles, 1969; Trigger, 1986; Ekberg, 1998; Usner, 1992; Thomas, 1990; Hoffman, 2001).

Indeed, the French had no interest in upsetting the area's demographic composition. After all, a diminished Indian presence would deprive French traders of the partners from whom they obtained valuable animal pelts. Marrying Indian women, these traders inserted themselves into their wives' extended families. Together, French colonists and Indians fashioned ways of living and trading that blended cultures. French colonial authorities were often displeased by the extent and uncontrolled nature of frontier mingling. Nor did they like the expense of making gifts, which native partners insisted was essential to building intersocietal understanding. But these same officials recognized that gift-giving was part of the cost of doing business with Indian fur-suppliers. Even more, French policymakers needed Indians as military allies if English colonists were to be prevented from moving west and encroaching on French (not to mention Indian) claims (White, 1991).

That threat became more menacing as the population of British North America multiplied in the early decades of the eighteenth century. In 1700, the census of the Atlantic seaboard colonies had already reached two hundred and fifty thousand. Through the seventeenth century, however, the inland spread of settlements had been limited. Almost all English colonists lived near the ocean, and no significant communities had been established above the fall lines of the major rivers that flowed into the Atlantic. Although coastal Indian peoples had been dispossessed, native groups in the Appalachian foothills and beyond retained their lands and their ability to check English expansion. But rapid population growth altered the balance of numbers and power. High birth rates and a flood of immigrants – not just from England, but from various parts of the British Isles as well as the European continent – swelled the population of the seaboard colonies to one million three hundred thousand by 1750. Included in this tally were more than two hundred thousand persons of African descent, though the transatlantic voyage and subsequent westward movements of these people were involuntary. Together, this ethnically diverse assortment of free and unfree pioneers pushed colonial settlements deeper into the interior, occupying lands above the fall lines and to the foothills of the Appalachians (Nobles, 1997; Hine and Faragher, 2000; Hinderaker and Mancall, 2003).

That advance was uneven, for some Indian groups, like the Iroquois of north-western New York, effectively resisted colonial encroachments. A loose-knit confederacy, the Iroquois had the numbers to defend their lands. The geographic position of Iroquoia, between English and French domains, also helped by reducing the dependency of the Iroquois on one or the other European power.

Still, this borderland geography also strained Iroquois unity and security, inspiring military blows aimed not at English or French colonists, but at Indian groups to the west. Being between also exposed the Iroquois to epidemic diseases that by the seventeenth century had cut populations in half. Trading opportunities significantly depleted the stock of fur-bearing animals too, threatening the Iroquois' future access

to the European goods upon which they had become more dependent. In response, the Iroquois invaded the territories of western neighbors. As in precolonial times, replenishing numbers by taking and then adopting captives remained a prime rationale for making war. But the pressures were much greater than before, and, armed with European-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. This they did through a series of destructive forays first against Huron towns and later against villages in the Ohio Valley. By the end of the seventeenth century, these “beaver wars” caused the disappearance of some peoples and the dislocation of many others. If not strengthened or truly unified by these invasions, the Iroquois maintained the power to hold their own ground against would be usurpers – at least through the first half of the eighteenth century (Jennings, 1984; Richter and Merrell, 1987; Richter, 1992; Dennis, 1993).

South of Iroquoia, in Pennsylvania, Indian groups already faced more immediate pressures and possessed fewer viable options. Take, for example, the situation of the Shawnees, who, like tens of thousands of European immigrants, were recent arrivals to Pennsylvania. Prior to the beaver wars, the Shawnees had inhabited villages on both sides of the Ohio River. Driven from those lands by Iroquois invaders in the late seventeenth century, Shawnees dispersed in small contingents into Alabama, Georgia, and the Carolinas, before partially regrouping in villages along Pennsylvania’s Susquehanna River (Mancall, 1991). Into the second decade of the eighteenth century, peaceful relations prevailed between the Shawnees and the predominantly Quaker population of Pennsylvania. But the demographic and political character of the colony shifted decisively in the next decades. Where the colony’s founder, William Penn, heeded Indian claims and preserved intercultural amity, his political successors were determined to get as much land as possible, a desire shared by the tens of thousands of non-Quaker immigrants who poured into Pennsylvania after 1710. Lacking the confederated strength of the Iroquois or the advantages of borderland positioning, Shawnees had little chance in a war against the expanded numbers of land-hungry colonists. So, instead of making a futile military stand, many Shawnees chose to migrate once again. Seeking refuge from white encroachments, several hundred Shawnees, along with other Pennsylvania Indian peoples, began trickling back into the Ohio Country after 1715 (McConnell, 1992).

The departure of Shawnees cleared lands for white pioneers, but it did not entirely erase the legacy of intercultural amity and cross-cultural exchange that had earlier characterized the Pennsylvania frontier. In Pennsylvania, and in the inland “back-countries” of other mid-Atlantic colonies, contact between Indians and Europeans brought not only conflict, but also “cultural fusion,” which was, in historians Robert Hine and John Mack Faragher’s estimation, “one of the most notable – and least understood – developments of early American history” (Hine and Faragher, 2000: 71). If this “composite culture” did not go as far as that jointly created by French and Indians in the Great Lakes, the results of backcountry–Indian cohabitation were sometimes startling. Mutual adaptations blurred distinctions between settler and native material lives and means of subsistence. Dwelling in similarly constructed log cabins and drawing sustenance from a comparable mix of hunting, herding, and

farming, Pennsylvania Indians and settlers seemed to converge not only geographically but also culturally (Jordan and Kaups, 1989 and, for a contrasting view, Merrell, 1999).

Yet these borrowings and congruencies did not make for lasting accommodation or joint occupation. As the eighteenth century progressed, more and more of Pennsylvania's Indians headed west to the Upper Ohio Valley. But the buffer they hoped to establish between themselves and white pioneers proved fleeting. By mid-century, pioneers in Pennsylvania, as well as in the western parts of Virginia and the Carolinas, were poised to cross the Appalachian divide, to move where the rivers flowed away from the Atlantic and take control of the land of "western waters."

Britain's "Western Country" and Beyond

In the third quarter of the eighteenth century, the westward expansion of British America breached the Appalachians, but not before the Ohio Valley became the focal point of imperial competition, the starting point of a trans-Atlantic war, and the turning point in an Indian uprising that sought to restore borderland conditions.

For the British Empire, each of these episodes ended in apparent triumph. Initially unsuccessful in dislodging the French from their fort at the forks of the Ohio River, British armies ultimately wrested control of that stronghold. Likewise, early setbacks in the wider war turned into a decisive victory. In the resulting treaty of peace, France lost its North American "South," along with all its claims on the continent. Although insurgent western Indians then created havoc on the borders of British American settlement, the revolt was soon put down. Still, all these triumphs left ambiguous legacies. New France disappeared from North American maps, but Spain emerged as a rival for control of the western country, thanks to its acquisition of French claims west of the Mississippi River. Indians did not eradicate colonial rule or bring back the French, but their uprising reminded British authorities that the conquest and consolidation of the western country was incomplete. Chastened, these officials rescinded efforts to put the fur trade on a commercial basis and returned to prewar precepts of intercultural exchange. In addition, British administrators pledged to restrain the westward colonization of settlers; by the King's Proclamation of 1763, the lands from the crest of the Appalachians to the Mississippi were to stay exclusively in native hands. By 1775, however, British authorities and western Indians learned that neither royal edict nor various native strategies could keep backcountry settlers out of Indian country (Anderson, 2000; Jennings, 1988; Hinderaker, 1997; Barr, 2001; Dowd, 2002).

A quarter century earlier, the French had also tried to make the Appalachians into an impermeable boundary. To block British access to the region beyond the mountains, an army of French-Canadian colonists and Indian allies had marched to the future site of Pittsburgh, constructed a fort, and ordered English traders out of the western country. But French attempts to consolidate control over a South clashed with the ambitions of the British in the West. Unwilling to concede control of the fur trade and of so much valuable real estate to the French, the British countered by sending an armed force into the Ohio Valley.

The ensuing struggle extended to both sides of the Atlantic, but Americans now remember it as the "French and Indian War." The name is misleading, for it suggests

that all Indians sided with the French and that French and Indian interests were identical. But Indians fought on both sides and for their own reasons. In the Ohio Country, where it all began, many Indians, especially those who had migrated from Pennsylvania, shared the French fear of British expansion. At the same time, they resented French attempts to monopolize trade. In addition, British leaders worked to win over Ohio Indians by promising to create a fixed boundary between colonial settlements and Indian countries. Whether aligned with the French or the British, Ohio Indians fought (or chose not to fight) for their own interests, which were best served not by total victory for one or the other colonial regime, but by a stalemate between imperial rivals and a continuing competition between their traders.

Rather than a renovated borderland, the war dealt the French out of North America. By the 1763 Treaty of Paris, Britain gained control of Canada and of French claims below the Great Lakes and east of the Mississippi River (with the exception of New Orleans, which, along with French possessions west of the Mississippi, was transferred to Spain). Flushed with victory and freed of competition with the French, British officials hatched plans to erect a much less accommodating regime across its newly won frontier. Treating Indian peoples of the Ohio Valley and Great Lakes as defeated peoples, the British commander Lord Jeffrey Amherst did not propose to negotiate; he intended to dictate the terms of intercultural relations. The practice of making presents to Indians, which Amherst viewed as mere “bribes” to “purchase good behavior,” was to be eliminated (Barr, 2001: 152–3). He informed Indians that henceforth British traders would pay market prices for the pelts they obtained, and misbehaving natives would be punished by having their access to imported goods cut off.

Incensed by such unilateral impositions, Indian war parties from dozens of villages around the Great Lakes and Ohio Valley attacked British posts in the western country and raided settlements on the other side of the mountains. British authorities saw in these attacks evidence of a vast conspiracy, but the Indians’ uprising was not the work of a centrally coordinated confederation. The insurgents did, however, draw inspiration from a number of prophets who offered similar visions of Indian renaissance through rituals of cultural purification. Particularly notable in awakening the spirit of cultural revival was the Delaware prophet Neolin. Traveling widely, Neolin preached a return to ancient customs and a cleansing of European influences (Dowd, 1992, 2002).

The message of Indian revitalization through de-Europeanization resonated with tremendous force throughout the Ohio Country and Great Lakes Region, but a complete detachment from colonial ways was almost unimaginable to Neolin or his adherents. Generations of cross-cultural exchange had woven items and ideas of European origin into the fabric of woodland Indian life. Even as Neolin heralded a world cleansed of European things and thinking, his home, with its “stone cellar, stairway, stone chimney and fireplace” reminded a visiting Christian missionary “of an English dwelling” (Dexter, 1899: 61, 68). Indeed, Neolin’s vision bore the imprint of Christian missionization, especially in its fervent crusade against the consumption of alcohol and its threat of eternal damnation for those who resisted calls for cultural revitalization.

The Indians’ incorporation of foreign elements included not only the adaptation of colonial things and colonial thinking but also the adoption of colonists. From their

raids against backcountry settlements, Ohio Valley Indians brought back scores of captives, who, in keeping with long-standing practices, were sometimes adopted. These wartime additions joined the already heterogeneous population of Ohio Valley villages, which consisted of a diverse *mélange* of Pennsylvania Indians who had migrated west to escape Anglo-American encirclement and Illinois Indians who had drifted east to position themselves between French and British trading orbits. As part of their incorporation into multiethnic Indian communities, backcountry-born captives learned Native ways of living and thinking. Not all made the transition successfully. Enough did, however, so that when the British demanded the return of prisoners as a condition of restoring peace and trade, a significant number resisted repatriation (Axtell, 1985). Escorting the returnees back to their former homes, the British commander Henry Bouquet discovered that many considered their liberation a new captivity. Some had to be chained lest they escape back to their adopted kin, and these “continued many days in bitter lamentations, even refusing sustenance” (Smith, 1765: 27).

Although an army commanded by Bouquet won a victory against Ohio Indians and recovered the reluctant colonist-captives, the cost of putting down the uprising and the loss of fur trade revenues prompted a reversal of Amherst’s vindictive policies. British officials took on the guise of French authorities and embraced a more accommodating stance. Like the French, British leaders acceded to certain Indian protocols. Gift-giving came back as the basis of trade, and British leaders renewed their promise to prevent settlers from trespassing across the Appalachians (Aron, forthcoming).

Did the King really intend to enforce this ban on westward colonization? Not according to many of his most influential subjects. As George Washington saw it, the Appalachian boundary was merely “a temporary expedient” (Abbot, 1988: 6). After all, wealthy and well-connected gentlemen on both sides of the Atlantic had schemed for decades about acquiring vast tracts of trans-Appalachian land. Anticipating an unparalleled windfall, speculators formed companies and successfully petitioned the crown for enormous grants (Bailyn, 1986). Gentlemen who missed the “present opportunity of hunting out good lands,” warned Washington, “will never regain it” (Abbot, 1988: 6).

The proclamation line also displeased humbler backcountry settlers, who harbored land acquisition dreams of their own and who were contemptuous of imperial officials and their injunctions. During the mid and late 1760s, hundreds of settlers penetrated Appalachian valleys. Pushing and poaching even deeper into Indian country were scores of white hunters, who began to make regular fall and winter hunts in what are now Kentucky and Tennessee. These “long hunters” challenged the monopoly that Indian hunters had previously held as suppliers of skins and furs. Worse still from the perspective of Ohio Valley Indians, many long hunters engaged in land hunting on the side, scouting tracts for future settlements for themselves, or sometimes for wealthy speculators (Belue, 1996; Aron, 1996; Faragher, 1992).

Colonial authorities could do little in the face of the brazen defiance of long hunters; they had neither the money nor the manpower to police thousands of square miles of Appalachian frontier. The problem, it seemed to many gentry authorities, was that backcountry settlers in general, and long hunters in particular, too closely

resembled the Indian peoples whose lands they invaded and whose role in the fur trade they usurped. Residents of western Pennsylvania, reported Thomas Gage, the British military commander for North America in 1772, “differ[ed] little from Indians in their manner of life” (Davies, 1972–81, vol. 1: 203). Backcountry residents, agreed Sir William Johnson, supervisor of Britain’s relations with northern Indians, were “a lawless set of people as fond of independency as” Indians, “and more regardless of government, owing to ignorance, prejudice, democratical principles and their remote situation” (Davies, 1972–81, vol. 1: 225).

Admitting that backcountry people “are not to be confined by any boundaries or limits,” Johnson attempted to defuse conflict by convincing Indians to withdraw from contested territory (Davies, 1972–81, vol. 1: 225). An opponent of Amherst’s punitive policies, Johnson had influential friends among northern Indians, whose interests he earnestly wished to protect. But Johnson was also deeply interested in the acquisition of land to enrich himself and his friends. At Fort Stanwix in November 1768 he persuaded an assembly of more than three thousand Indians, principally members of the Iroquois confederacy, to cede their claims to lands south of the Ohio River and east of the mouth of the Great Kanawha. Almost completely absent from the council were representatives of the Shawnees and Delawares, whose villages lay closest to the lands in question. Johnson knew that these and other Ohio Indians had their own interest in the ceded lands, but he let himself believe that the Shawnees and Delawares were dependents of the Iroquois and that his negotiating partners had a right of conquest to Ohio Valley lands dating from the seventeenth-century beaver wars (Jones, 1982; Hurt, 2002).

Not surprisingly, the treaty won few friends in the Ohio Country, and militant opposition to British policies soon reemerged. Resentment ran especially high in several Shawnee villages, where enraged men denounced the pretensions of the Iroquois and the British. Adding insult to injury, the British made no allowance for gifts to Ohio Indians and failed to insist that the Iroquois share theirs. Talk of war once again dominated village councils. Even more alarming to officials of the British Indian Department was word that disenchanted Ohio Indians were putting together a confederacy. Reports that Shawnee emissaries had in 1769 traveled across Indian country disturbed colonial leaders, as did news of a well-attended conclave in which preparations for a united front against the Fort Stanwix Treaty and against further Anglo-American expansion were discussed.

To thwart the possibility of confederation, British officials worked to isolate militants. It was a time-tested strategy, and it worked again in the Ohio Country in the early 1770s. British officials detached southeastern, Great Lakes, and many Ohio Indians from the envisioned union. Great Lakes Indians decided that the lands south of the Ohio River were too distant to defend. Further south, colonial officers negotiated two treaties with the Cherokees, which kept them from joining with the Shawnees.

For their part, the Shawnees divided between peace and war camps, but the latter faction gained the upper hand after a group of backcountry ruffians murdered thirteen Shawnee and Mingo Indians in the spring of 1774. As was customary, relatives of the victims demanded revenge. Retaliation soon escalated. Matters came to a head in October 1774, when 1,100 Virginia militiamen narrowly defeated 300 Shawnee warriors at the Battle of Point Pleasant.

In the treaty conference that followed, Shawnee headmen yielded hunting rights south of the Ohio River, but were guaranteed again a firm boundary between Indian country and backcountry. Where the previous Proclamation of 1763 had set the boundary at the crest of the Appalachians, the new proposal moved the line to the Ohio River. Sensing that this divide too would not last long, hundreds of Shawnees embarked on another westward migration. This one took them across the Mississippi River into territory that France had ceded to Spain in 1763. West of what was now Britain's "western country," they sought a new and more permanent refuge.

As the third quarter of the eighteenth century drew to a close, Spain had not yet established much of a presence in the western country that lay to the east of the Mississippi River – or for that matter on its own side of the Mississippi. During the 1760s and early 1770s, Spain had dramatically expanded its holdings in North America. In addition to acquiring France's claims on the west bank of the Mississippi, Spain had planted a few missions in California. But across the Spanish "North," possessions were at best partially possessed. Older colonies in New Mexico, Florida, and Texas remained sparsely colonized, and their Indian inhabitants were incompletely conquered. That was even truer of California's isolated settlements and of those along the west bank of the Mississippi. Only a handful of Spanish officials actually inhabited the former French colonies, and these authorities made no attempt to Hispanicize the customs, manners, or language of *habitants*. For most French colonists, the change in colonial regimes made little difference. For many Indians as well, life went on as before. Just as the British in the 1760s emulated French accommodations, so, too, the Spanish in the Mississippi Valley assured Indians that trade would be encouraged and gifts would be given. Such promises attracted Shawnee migrants and inspired hope among natives who stayed east of the Mississippi that Anglo-Spanish competition might prevent a mixed Indian country from becoming a mere western country (Nasatir, 1976; Calloway, 1995).

The Revolutionary War and the Early Republic

During the final quarter of the eighteenth century, the conquest, colonization, and consolidation of the western country intensified, but the outcome of these processes remained contested and contingent. Indians resisted, as before, by migrations, accommodations, incorporations, revitalizations, and confederations. They did so, however, in a geopolitical context that was dramatically transformed by the American Revolution. The war and resulting American independence reshuffled intercultural and inter-imperial relations across North America, especially in the fervently disputed country between the Appalachians and the Mississippi. Into the 1790s, the fate of these lands was as yet unsettled.

The sustained colonization of trans-Appalachia coincided with the beginning of the Revolutionary War. In the same month that Massachusetts minutemen engaged British soldiers at Lexington and Concord, Daniel Boone led thirty men to the Kentucky River. There, Boone and his men commenced construction on a fort that was to be the headquarters for a new colony. Though the fort was designated Boonesborough, the proposed colony was called Transylvania, which was also the name of the company of North Carolina land speculators for whom Boone worked. Boone's employers had acquired their claim to hundreds of thousands of acres of

Kentucky lands through a purchase from the Cherokees. Accounts of the Transylvania Company's purchase and of its colony-planting disturbed rival speculators who feared being shut out of the profits from the resale of prime lands in central Kentucky. "There is something in that affair which I neither understand, nor like, and wish I may not have cause to dislike it worse as the mystery unfolds," wrote George Washington of the Transylvania Company's daring plans (Lester, 1935: 41). With their own plans for engrossing Kentucky threatened, colonial governors in Virginia and North Carolina also condemned the illegal purchase and settlement made by the Transylvania Company. The call to command the Continental Army soon diverted Washington's attentions, and the outbreak of Revolution unseated the colonial governors of Virginia and North Carolina who had voided the claims of the Transylvania Company. Still, the Transylvania enterprise had plenty of enemies among patriot elites, who looked to new state legislatures and the Continental Congress to nullify the company's presumed title. Challenges arose among trans-Appalachian pioneers as well. At least three other parties established settlements in central Kentucky in the spring of 1775. These men did not immediately recognize the ownership of the Transylvania Company, nor did most of the pioneers who moved into Kentucky that year and the next.

Through the Revolution and long after it, the questions of who owned the land and how it would be distributed were a prime concern on both sides of the Appalachians. On these questions, legislators and litigants engaged in seemingly endless wrangling. During the Revolution, though, Kentucky pioneers were more concerned with their struggle with Indians, who threatened from both north and south. That conflict, too, continued after the United States had won its independence (Perkins, 1998; Friend, 1999).

As before the Revolution, Indians divided about the best means to protect the integrity of their countries and their cultures. Among Cherokees, the decision to sell hunting lands to the Transylvania partners aggravated those divisions. In general, older headmen saw the deal as an unwelcome necessity. Younger men, however, accused these leaders of betraying their people. Two years later, after accommodation-minded leaders agreed to cede additional lands to the revolutionary governments of Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, and Virginia, militants moved out, establishing new towns further west in the Tennessee Valley. From this new location, which afforded better access to British supplies, the secessionists vowed to fight pioneer expansion (Perdue, 1998; Sheidley, 1999; Cumfer, 2001; Finger, 2001).

Similar generational and strategic splits afflicted Indian villages north of the Ohio River. Advocates of accommodation wished to remain neutral in the war between Britain and some of her colonists. If necessary, they were willing to concede Kentucky to settlers, but wished to see the Ohio River accepted as a permanent boundary. Again more militant factions preferred to force pioneers back to the other side of the mountains. To do so, they rallied to the British cause, or more accurately, they rallied to their own cause with British supplies. Militants also rekindled the idea of a pan-Indian confederacy. Just a few years earlier, calls for a united front against colonial encroachments won little backing in Cherokee councils. Only a handful of Cherokees joined the Shawnees at Point Pleasant in 1774. That was not surprising, for Shawnees and Cherokees had more typically fought one another for control of hunting lands south of the Ohio River. By contrast, during the Revolution, some

Cherokees and some Shawnees fought together. In the same month that the rebellious colonies declared their independence from Britain, thirteen Cherokees united with four Shawnees to kill two Kentucky men. Other joint ventures followed.

British supplies allowed loosely confederated western Indians to mount larger and longer campaigns against Kentucky settlements. In March 1777, a mixed group of two hundred Ohio Indians led by the Shawnee headman Blackfish began hit and run strikes that harassed pioneers for several months. By fall, when that year's "Indian summer" finally ended, seven stations had been abandoned; just four remained. These were in disarray, their inhabitants nearly destitute of corn and livestock. The following year, Blackfish brought another war party across the Ohio River. In February 1778, this force captured two-dozen Kentucky pioneers, including Daniel Boone. Instead of killing Boone, Blackfish adopted him, and instead of wiping out Boonesborough, the Indians determined to incorporate the pioneers at that station. Although Ohio Indians had a long and successful history of assimilating enemies, what Blackfish's band contemplated in 1778 – absorbing an entire community – was exceptionally ambitious. Too ambitious, as it turned out. Boone and several other adopted captives escaped, and Boonesborough settlers opted to defend their lands with their lives if necessary. As a counter-colonial strategy, incorporation of adversaries clearly had its limits (Aron, 1996).

By 1778, the lands around Boonesborough no longer belonged to the Transylvania Company, whose claim had been invalidated by the state of Virginia. Unfortunately for pioneers, Virginia legislators enacted new laws that only added to the disarray about ownership of land. Yet in spite of the confusion and the continuing raids of Indians, the number of trans-Appalachian colonists grew, and their range expanded into eastern and central Tennessee.

As pioneer ranks increased and as the government of Virginia allocated materiel for the defense of trans-Appalachian settlements, Americans were able to go on the offensive. A May 1779 attack against the Shawnee village of Chillicothe claimed the life of Blackfish and cost inhabitants their homes, their household items, many of their horses, and much of their food supply. A wider round of village razings the following summer left hundreds of Ohio Indians in a desperate condition. Taking the war to native villages also weakened the Indians' attachment to the British, who were faulted for failing to deliver essential supplies and promised presents. Some warriors talked of severing their ties with the British and aligning with the Americans. Yet Americans repeatedly undermined these efforts by launching indiscriminate raids that killed Indians regardless of their political allegiances. Dissatisfied with the British and hopelessly at odds with the Americans, many Ohio Indians joined the Delaware headman, Captain Pipe, in wishing openly for the return of the French. We have "never known of any other Father," Pipe told British officials, whom he downgraded as mere "brothers" (O'Donnell, 1992: 131). In fact, though, what Ohio Indians wanted was not to exchange the French for the British, but to restore a borderland in which imperial competition prevented any European empire from asserting dominance.

The end of the American Revolution bore more nightmarish tidings for western Indians. Although Indians had failed to dislodge pioneers from their trans-Appalachian settlements, they had not lost ground either. Through seven years of bloody raids and retaliations, they had inflicted heavy casualties on Kentucky settlers – seven times higher per capita than those suffered by Americans east of the

Appalachians. Nonetheless, when terms of the peace between Great Britain and the United States reached the western country, Indians discovered to their dismay that all of the lands below the Great Lakes had been ceded to the new nation. By the 1783 Treaty of Paris, some two hundred and thirty million acres of trans-Appalachian lands, all of which had supposedly been permanently guaranteed to Indians by royal decree, had now become the first West of the United States.

Of course, the remapping stipulated by the 1783 Treaty of Paris did not really alter the situation on the ground. As was the case twenty years earlier when a previous agreement in Paris had attached the western country to the British Empire, the 1783 accord could not alone make the West American. Yet, just as British officers pretended that western Indians had surrendered along with the French, so Americans prepared to dictate, not negotiate, with those whom they dismissed as defeated peoples. Indians, needless to say, did not consider themselves conquered in the 1760s or the 1780s. To be sure, in the 1780s, more than a thousand Shawnees and Delawares joined several hundred Cherokees in relocating to Spanish territory across the Mississippi. There they reunited with earlier migrants. Those who stayed behind resigned themselves to the loss of Kentucky, but a growing majority determined to contest any American occupations on the north side of the river. For ten years after the end of the Revolution their confederated resistance effectively limited the advance of American colonization north of the Ohio River and frustrated the efforts of the national government of the United States to consolidate its administration over the "Northwest Territory" (Hurt, 1996; Cayton, 1986).

Various factors contributed to the good fortunes of the Indian confederacy. First, the British betrayal was not as complete as the latest Treaty of Paris suggested. Making peace did not mean that King George III and his ministers had reconciled themselves to the loss of American colonies. Because the crown's agents viewed western Indians as crucial to recovering his majesty's possessions, they rushed to reassure their wartime partners that the alliance continued. Reneging on the treaty provision that stipulated the evacuation of British posts south of the Great Lakes, British officials promised Indians that these forts would be maintained and would dispense the gifts, trade goods, and arms that natives needed to defend their homelands. To further weaken the hold of the United States over its West, Britain returned west Florida to its Spanish enemy. This put Spain in control of the Gulf Coast and the mouth of the Mississippi. It left the western country isolated by mountains on the east and bordered by imperial rivals on the north, west, and south. For Indians, it meant that many still enjoyed the advantages of being in between (Calloway, 1987; Allen, 1992; Nelson, 1999).

The arrogance, incompetence, and divisions among American adversaries bolstered the Indian confederacy too. By treating natives as conquered peoples, by allowing murderers of Indians to go unpunished, and by failing to keep squatters from trespassing across the Ohio, Americans left Indians with little choice but to unite and fight. By contrast, the new nation lacked such common purpose or concerted power. Its own confederation of states assigned the national government too few resources to quell Indian resistance or assert control over the settlement of western lands. The ratification of a national constitution strengthened the federal government, but the army of the United States initially proved unable to break Indian defiance. First in 1790 and again in 1791, the federal government mustered its troops to attack Ohio Indians, and both times the armies were routed. In the second confrontation, an

American force, under the inept command of General Arthur St Clair, lost 630 soldiers. In terms of casualties, the battle ranked – and still ranks – as the greatest victory North American Indians ever won against the United States (Sword, 1985).

In the wake of St Clair's shattering defeat, the Indian confederacy gained confidence and followers. Word of the victory spread quickly from one village to the next, encouraging warriors from around the Ohio Country and Great Lakes to enlist in the common cause. Likewise, the fresh visions of new prophets, which foretold future victories, fired new converts and new recruits. Convinced of their military and spiritual superiority, Indian negotiators notified their humbled American counterparts that the United States must remove its citizens once and for all from lands north of the Ohio River. Indian diplomats also scorned American offers to buy additional lands. "Money to us, is of no value," an Indian diplomat lectured, "and no consideration whatever can induce us to sell the lands on which we get sustenance for our women and children" (Calloway, 1994: 181). Rather than waste so much blood and treasure trying to wrest land from its rightful inhabitants, Indian speakers proposed a cheaper alternative that would guarantee peace between peoples: the government of the United States should pay poor squatters, who would thus be compensated for "all their labor and improvements" and could then occupy land elsewhere (Calloway, 1994: 182).

Rewarding squatters with payments from the federal treasury was not what President George Washington had in mind. Washington, of course, had long despised unruly pioneers who interfered with the orderly settlement and profitable engrossment of western lands. As President, that animosity deepened. Squatters, in the view of Washington and other Federalists, deprived the national government of revenue by illegally occupying public lands, and they stirred up conflict with Indians that consumed the better part of the federal budget. Washington's displeasure, in fact, extended to more than just squatters; he was displeased with western citizens in general, who seemed to him forever ungrateful.

Certainly, the first generation of western Americans (like future generations of westerners) griped incessantly about the national government's shortcomings. Complainers, of which there were plenty, accused the Washington administration of being too conciliatory towards Indians. They blamed the government as well for its indifference to their economic prospects, which involved opening Indian lands for white settlement, guaranteeing property titles, and securing commercial opportunities (Rohrbough, 1968, 1978). This last element depended above all on bringing goods up and down the Mississippi. Yet the Spanish had closed the mouth of that waterway to American shipping, and the national government appeared too willing to accept the situation or too weak to change it.

Both the Spanish and the British attempted to exploit the gathering discontent of western Americans. In addition to inviting Indian migrants to resettle on their side of the Mississippi, the Spanish officials recognized that many Americans in the Ohio Valley were "disgusted with their Government" and surmised that weak national attachments might be easily shifted by liberal land offerings (Houck, 1909, vol. 2: 255). Taking advantage of the generous terms offered by the Spanish, several hundred Kentuckians and Tennesseans relocated in what is now Missouri. Meanwhile, the British lured American settlers to Upper Canada (Ontario) with similar inducements. Both Spanish and British officials also entered into secret talks with western

leaders in hopes of detaching all or part of the trans-Appalachian territory from the United States.

Weak as its national government was and discontented as its western citizens were, the United States possessed a great and growing advantage over its imperial rivals and its Indian antagonists: numbers. In the 1790s, the American population topped four million, having doubled every twenty-five years during the eighteenth century. The trans-Appalachian segment was expanding even more quickly. By 1790, the first national census registered more than seventy thousand people in Kentucky, with another thirty thousand scattered in other western country settlements. By comparison, the population of Indians north of the Ohio River numbered only about twenty thousand, and this figure was declining as a result of wars, diseases, and migrations.

And so, in 1794, the United States sent another army to crack the power and unity of the Indian confederacy. Its commander, General Anthony Wayne, proved much abler than his predecessors. At Fallen Timbers in what is now northwestern Ohio, Wayne's troops defeated the Indian forces. It was an important triumph, though it alone was not decisive. What turned Fallen Timbers into a catastrophic defeat for confederated Indians were changes in the international scene. Locked in conflict with Revolutionary France, the monarchies of Spain and Britain decided to avoid a confrontation with the American republic. Consequently, the Spanish temporarily opened the Mississippi to American navigation, and the British betrayed their Indian allies once more. They closed their forts to retreating Indians and cut them off from resupply. Without this assistance, Indians could not stop Wayne from systematically destroying villages and burning cornfields. Surviving warriors scattered back to defend their homes. At the treaty session that followed, Wayne compelled vanquished Indians to surrender much of what was soon to become the state of Ohio (Cayton, 1998; Nelson, 1985).

Conclusion

Looking back, Fallen Timbers marked a critical turning point. Never again, would Indians in the trans-Appalachian West, or for that matter in subsequent Wests, contest American conquest from so favorable a position. In the years that followed, Indians resisted in familiar ways, but widening disparities in numbers and technology diminished their chances for all but the most ephemeral successes. That England, France, and Spain gradually withdrew from competing with the United States also tilted the balance of power further away from Indians.

As the scholar Anthony F. C. Wallace has recently reminded us, the election of Thomas Jefferson to the presidency in 1800 and the control that Jeffersonians assumed over the national government for the next generation contributed as well to the more rapid colonization of western lands and the speedier dispossession of Indian peoples (1999). In contrast to the restraints that George Washington and like-minded Federalists sought to impose on western settlement, Jefferson and his followers made territorial expansion the cornerstone of federal policy. To that end, Jefferson made lands more available by purchasing the vast Louisiana Territory and pressing Indians to cede remaining lands east of the Mississippi in exchange for tracts to the west. Jeffersonians also made lands more affordable to pioneer settlers by reducing the price and easing the terms on public land sales (McCoy, 1980).

Nonetheless, from Fallen Timbers and Jefferson's ascendance, the completion of Indian dispossession was several more decades in the making; not until British, Spanish, and French ambitions to gain or regain the region were thwarted was American possession secured. In the year of Jefferson's election, Spain's retrocession of the Louisiana Territory to France briefly reestablished a French imperial presence in North America. Jefferson feared that Napoleon aimed to reclaim all of France's former domain, in which case American expansion would be halted, and maybe even rolled back. But Napoleon's plans were altered when his army was unable to subdue rebellious slaves in Haiti. Instead of rebuilding a North American Empire, Napoleon's agents sold the Louisiana Territory to the United States in 1803. That transfer cleared imperial competitors from the western borders of the first West and deprived trans-Appalachian Indians of assistance from what had become the new West of the United States (Kukla, 2003). Within the first West, though, Britain still meddled from its posts to the north, and American officials were quick to blame the British for all troubles with Indians south of the Great Lakes. Indeed, stepped-up British aid during the War of 1812 raised Indian hopes anew. But war's end brought yet another betrayal by the British. No more would the British encourage or supply Indians south of the Great Lakes. Following the War of 1812, Spain also pulled back, ceding Florida to the American republic. By 1820, the borders of the first West had been secured, as had the hold of the United States over the region.

In retrospect, what is most striking about the making of the first American West is how long it took, particularly when compared with the more compressed chronologies of subsequent westward expansions. Through the first half of the eighteenth century, Indians and imperial rivals generally checked the inland movement of British American colonists. Judged by geographic range, French and Spanish expansion seemed far more imposing. Moreover, in contrast to the nineteenth century, when American expansion and Indian contraction went hand in hand, eighteenth-century imperialism rested, to varying degrees, on Indian acquiescence. Rather than exclusive occupations, colonial frontiers often featured more inclusive arrangements. Indeed, especially in those borderlands where colonial claims brushed up against one another, Indian peoples skillfully played imperial rivals off one another to fashion more favorable economic and diplomatic relations. Those possibilities declined as the surge of westering pioneers quickened following the Seven Years' War and accelerated even more after the American Revolution. But neither resident Indians nor imperial rivals yet conceded the trans-Appalachian realm to the United States. For a moment in the early 1790s, it appeared that a confederation of Indians, along with one or another European power, might wrest control of at least part of the region back from the United States. Although that moment soon passed, western Indians continued to resist as they could, following the well-worn paths of migrations, accommodations, incorporations, confederations, and revitalizations. Not until the 1830s did the Indians' only road left lead out of the first American West and down the "trail of tears."

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CHAPTER TWO

Thinking West

ELLIOTT WEST

Bibliographical essays are not always compelling reading, so maybe it's best to start with a story.

Jean de L'Archeveque was a young man when he came to America in 1684 with the expedition of Robert Cavalier, sieur de La Salle. La Salle's goal was to establish a French presence in the lower Mississippi valley and challenge Spain's claims to the region. After missing the Mississippi's mouth (perhaps intentionally), the explorer founded a post on the Texas coast, but by 1687 his company's condition was desperate. L'Archeveque helped murder La Salle, showing what one historian has called a "precocious depravity," and managed to survive the internecine struggle that followed. Two years later a Spanish command found him, dressed and painted as an Indian, in a Native village. He vanished temporarily from the record, but by 1696 he was in Santa Fe, where he married well, insinuated his way into local society, and built a considerable business as a trader. He also developed a reputation as a leader in forays against Indians, so when authorities heard in 1720 that the French were luring plains tribes into their economic and military orbit, Jean (now called Juan) signed on with Pedro de Villasur to test the rumors. Marching to the Platte River far to the northeast, they found a village, perhaps of Pawnees, maybe Otoes, and maybe Kansas, that had in fact been courted and armed by the French. At dawn the Indians overran the Spanish camp and killed three dozen whites, including L'Archeveque and Villasur, as well as eleven Native allies.

This man's remarkable odyssey – from castaway and killer in a power play by a great imperial fantasizer, to social lion and merchant on another frontier, and to death by the indirect hand of his birth country – is a healthy reminder of the obstinate refusal of western studies to recognize boundaries, geographic, cultural, perceptual, and disciplinary. Given the prime role of the Spanish, who captured and repatriated L'Archeveque and sent him to the far rim of their empire, maybe his is a northern story, not western at all. Or is it Indian, and so to be told outward from its center in Texas, New Mexico, and Kansas? It is about international competition, multicultural blending and social climbing, politics, trade, Native diplomacy and warfare. So is this imperial history, or social, or ethnic, or economic, or military?

Here is the predicament. Tracking western historical writing and asking about its future will turn into a formless ramble unless we arrange the work into fields and

broader topics. And yet whenever we explore any field or topic, we quickly find that its boundaries cannot contain what we try to put there. It is a dilemma to learn from. Arranging books and articles into historiographical categories shows us just how wide-ranging the work and insights have been; the failure of those categories at their edges teaches us that we learn most about the West when our questions ignore lines that divide what was, after all, a seamless experience.

Negotiations: Exploration and Diplomacy

Jean L'Archeveque's story rankles most with the traditional historical calendar of great western events. In *The Legacy of Conquest* (1987), arguably the most influential of the works of the "New Western History," Patricia Nelson Limerick challenges the tendency to cut off western history around 1900. Forces generated in the nineteenth century, she argues, pushed vigorously into the next. The time is ripe today to call into the question the artificial division at the other end of the nineteenth century. By the traditional view, western history generally, and certainly anything to do with imperial politics, does not really get underway until the first agents of the United States show up shortly after 1800. But as the French-Indian-Spanish L'Archeveque reminds us, the West at that point had long been hotly contested and was still very much up much up for grabs. The nineteenth century ended with one of history's greatest empires firmly in place, but when we imagine that development forward from 1800, not backward from 1900, we see this nation's westward march as one narrative being imposed on many others. Understanding the nineteenth-century West begins with recognizing that Americans stepped into a history already old. Their wresting of military and political control was inseparable from establishing mastery over how that history was told, installing themselves at its forefront, setting the country's peoples in an order of descending power, and through all this trying to impose on the West one out of many possible meanings.

Nowhere have historians been more mesmerized by eventual American success than in writing about what is traditionally treated as the inaugural episode of far western history, the Lewis and Clark expedition of 1804–6. Stephen Ambrose's fabulously successful *Undaunted Courage* (1996) is only the most recent of a long tradition largely neglectful of the broader context of the internationalized West. The Corps of Discovery seems to ascend the Missouri River into a land waiting for history to arrive. This perspective reinforces the rightness of the rise of an American empire, and, given the genuinely heroic particulars, it makes the expedition the classic expression of our national mythology – brave and questing individuals confronting the wilderness, suffering, succeeding, and being enlarged by the experience.

Lewis, Clark, and Jefferson were indeed woefully ignorant of the region explored – the President told his charges to look for mountains of pure salt and gave them a glossary for conversations with Welshmen he thought were living in North Dakota. But the reason was that the other nations that knew a lot about the West considered their geographic and ethnological knowledge precious commodities to be jealously guarded. Fifty years ago Abraham P. Nasatir (1952) compiled some of the most revealing Spanish documents on the Missouri basin before 1804, and the archaeologists W. Raymond Wood and Thomas D. Thiessen have collected and edited the journals and narratives of English and French Canadian traders from the same area

and time (1985). Readers will see that America's most famous explorers visited Mandans and Hidatsas who were well supplied with awls, knives, rings, and coats, wormers, candy, and corduroy trousers. James Ronda (1998), this generation's leading interpreter of the expedition, shows that Jefferson may have known little about the West, but he was well aware that others were both interested in it and in a better position to grab it; it was the British explorer Alexander Mackenzie's call for England to colonize the Columbia River valley, not some general geographic and scientific curiosity, that sparked Jefferson's decision to send Lewis and Clark into the imagined country of Welshmen and salt mountains.

The United States, that is, entered the West in the middle of an imperial scramble that has barely begun to be explored historically. Once we pull ourselves out of the "triumphalist" perspective that assumes a momentum of events toward an American empire, the need for a far deeper investigation of the global maneuvering and domestic politics entwined in these early explorations is obvious. Donald Jackson's earlier *Thomas Jefferson and the Stony Mountains* (1981) and Ronda's more recent edited collection, *Voyages of Discovery: Essays on the Lewis and Clark Expedition* (1998), point the way, but they also make it embarrassingly clear that historians must spend more time in the extraordinarily deep archives of Spain, Mexico, England, France and (now that the Cold War has turned somewhat sunny) Russia. This multi-imperial perspective will also shift attention toward other expeditions, episodes that have been neglected to an astonishing degree. The last serious look at the Pike expedition is now more than fifty years old (Hollon, 1949), and, except for the good work by Dan Flores (1984), the forays of Freeman and Custis and Hunter and Dunbar up the Red River have been virtually ignored. Eventual control by the United States, once seen from many national angles and from a perspective across a hundred and fifty meridians, will appear more accurately as the result of long chains of circumstance, odd twists, and much luck.

This is not to say, of course, that the United States had no more going for it than other contenders. It entered the fray with comparatively superior numbers, a prodigious reproductive rate, and a growling land hunger among farmers who tended to settle where they wished. The question is, rather, how those advantages expressed themselves. Drew McCoy's *The Elusive Republic* (1980) explores how the Jeffersonian republican vision of the West mingled agrarianism with a binding trade and commerce – a measure of the nation's evolving economy and an antecedent of the mixed impulses that would drive our borders outward again at mid-century. But in the two decades since this contribution, far too little has been done to follow McCoy's lead and examine with some exactness how American self-interest, self-perception, and self-confidence developed and were directed westward during the critical years between 1800 and 1845.

There could be no clearer evidence of pressures building up during those years than the explosive expansion during the three years following 1845. In three great gobblings – the admission of Texas as a state (1845), the acquisition of the Pacific Northwest from Great Britain (1846) and the Mexican War (1846–48) – more territory was acquired than in any other expansionist episode, including the Louisiana Purchase. In barely a blink of time the United States grew from a large republic bordered to the west by plains and mountains into a dual-oceanic, transcontinental nation of imperial proportions. Its sovereignty was extended over dozens of peoples;

into its grasp came a vast storehouse of resources including precious metals, coal, timber, rich soil, copper, and others with a value not to be realized for generations.

In contrast to the preceding period, the considerable literature on these years shows what can be gained by looking at western diplomacy from various angles. For decades the scholarly view of the war with Mexico was dominated by Justin H. Smith's jingoistic *The War With Mexico* (1919), which placed responsibility for the conflict squarely on an aggressive and obstinate Mexico and portrayed United States officials as concerned almost wholly with defending the newly acquired Texas. It is a case lesson in how a historian can examine all available documents and still be wrong. A more balanced view began to emerge with Norman Graebner's *Empire on the Pacific* (1955), which shifted our attention to the Pacific coast and to the agrarian and commercial hunger for land and ports; his book remains a challenge to scholars to look back more closely at how those desires had developed up to 1846. The next generation of historians, writing during the turbulent 1960s and 1970s, were especially attuned to questions of American power and what its exercise said about the nation's economic interests and racial presumptions. Charles Sellers's superb biography of President James K. Polk (1957) explored the impulses and maneuvering of this "continentalist," and his *The Market Revolution* (1991) offered important clues as to how America's economic transformation helped push its borders outward. Gene M. Brack's splendid slim volume, *Mexico Views Manifest Destiny* (1990), described the attempts by increasingly desperate Mexican leaders to find a way out of a political and diplomatic impasse created largely by the appallingly insensitive policies of the United States. Frederick Merk's broad-ranging studies (1967, 1972) of the annexation of Texas and the Oregon country juggle the various economic and political factors at play, as does William H. Freehling's lengthy examination of Texas annexation in *The Road to Disunion* (1990). Finally, we have a superbly researched and argued overview in David Pletcher's *The Diplomacy of Annexation* (1973), which commonsensically looks at all three episodes as interlocking, with decisions and assumptions in each affecting the others and, in the case of the war, resulting in spectacular miscalculation.

Writers also have been drawn to the cultural context of expansion. The phrase "manifest destiny," like the events of the day, takes on various meanings when turned this way and that. From Albert K. Weinberg's early study of its rhetoric (1935) through provocative shorter works by Frederick Merk (1963), William Goetzmann (1966), and Reginald Horsman (1981), the goal of historians has been to link the growth of the nation to its shifts in mood, the evolution of its collective identity, and the development of its ethnic and racial hierarchies. These, as much as economic interests and the ambitions of its leaders, help explain America's leap to the Pacific.

Plenty remains to be done on the remarkable mid-1840s, but what we have so far can suggest approaches and insights for both sides of that expansionist divide. Looking back, we need to look harder at the cultural, economic, and intellectual forces between the 1820s and 1846 as a prelude to the great gulping. Despite recent books on the expeditions of Stephen H. Long (Wood, 1966; Nichols and Halley, 1980) and John Charles Fremont (Roberts, 2000; Chaffin, 2002), for instance, there is a crying need for studies on their cultural contexts and the changes in national attitudes during the quarter century between them.