Essays on Frontiers in World History

Edited by George Wolfskill and Stanley Palmer
Essays on Frontiers in World History
The Walter Prescott Webb Memorial Lectures: XIV

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Essays on Frontiers in World History

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On April 5, 1979, the History Department of the University of Texas at Arlington was host for the fourteenth annual Walter Prescott Webb Memorial Lectures.

Those several hundred guests who attended heard exciting and stimulating lectures on comparative world frontiers. Walter Prescott Webb would probably have enjoyed this series of lectures because the frontier theme was dominant in most of his own work; moreover, the Webb frontier hypothesis, as well as that of Frederick Jackson Turner, received considerable attention and reexamination in the lectures.

Four of the essays in this volume represent lectures delivered by Professor Warren Dean of New York University; Professor W. J. Eccles of the University of Toronto; Professor Leonard Thompson of Yale University; and Professor Robin W. Winks, also of Yale University. Also included is an essay by Professor Philip Wayne Powell of the University of California at Santa Barbara, winner of the fifth annual Webb-Smith Essay Prize.

In the preparation of this volume, the editors have incurred obligations along the way. We wish to express our gratitude to Rosario Garza and Tad Howington of the University of Texas at Arlington Library for their efforts with the maps, and to Earleen Cook, also of the library staff, for help with the complexities of the footnoting. Alison Tartt, the copy editor, has saved us from innumerable follies.

George Wolfskill
Stanley Palmer
Ask Americans—those from the United States, anyway—what they think of when they hear the word frontier. The answer is almost certain to be something about cowboys and Indians, longhorns and buffaloes, and shoot-outs on Main Street.

Ask most American historians—again those from the United States—what they think of when they hear the word frontier. The answer is almost certain to include the names of those historians most associated with frontier history, Frederick Jackson Turner and Walter Prescott Webb.

Yet neither Turner nor Webb thought of themselves in such restricted terms. Turner, in “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” certainly his most famous work, was probably less concerned with the frontier as a phenomenon than he was with identifying a recurring theme around which to organize and synthesize a national history of the United States. The frontier was important to the extent that it gave meaning to a much larger story.

Walter Prescott Webb, although an offspring of the sand and sun, the ceaseless wind, and the bone-chilling cold of West Texas, did not consider himself a “frontier” historian either, certainly not a “Western” historian. In his most celebrated work, The Great Plains, which received the Loubat Prize of Columbia University in 1931, Webb was less concerned with the frontier concept than he was in demonstrating that the West, the trans-Mississippi West, was just not like the East. The West had developed its own style, its own institutions, its own culture, not because it was a frontier, but because of its differing physical circumstances.

In his last important work, The Great Frontier, Webb conceived of the New World discoveries as the Great Frontier for England and Western Europe—the Metropolis, he called them. But Webb’s Great Frontier/Metropolis concept was less concerned with the nature of
that frontier than it was with the economic "boom" in European civilization that the frontier created.

If Turner and Webb were not frontier historians in the strictest sense, they nevertheless triggered a healthy and enthusiastic interest in the study of the frontier phenomenon. That interest eventually carried beyond merely the study of a frontier to comparative studies of frontiers, in which the stated objective more often than not was to put the Turner/Webb theses to the test.

The definition of frontier was implicit in many if not most of these early comparative studies. The frontier was thought of as a land mass of varying size, a belt of land, perhaps, beyond the settled parts, where newcomers sought to appropriate land and its resources, usually at the expense of aborigines.

But the definition was not to remain that simple. It had not been that simple with Turner or Webb. There was a time when Turner was content to define frontier simply as the "thin red line," the "barometric line that recorded the advance of settlement," a line that separated the settled from the unsettled, the "meeting point between savagery and civilization." That definition, however, gave way to the idea that the frontier was not just a line or even an area, but rather a complex process, always in a state of becoming.

The process included the steady spread of settlement, the economic, political and social changes in the lands at the edge of settlement, the recurring settlement of successive areas of land, and the evolution of these successive areas from primitive pioneer life to what Turner considered the final stage, that of an urban manufacturing society. "As you know," Turner wrote to a friend, "the 'West' with which I dealt, was a process rather than a fixed geographical region...." Turner thought of these successive areas, each in a different stage of development, as if they were colonies of the eastern United States, and an understanding of "the interior," as he called these areas, was "a necessary element in an understanding of the America of the time." And in addition to all else, Turner was well aware that the frontier was, as much as anything, a state of mind.

As Webb used the term in The Great Plains, the frontier was a line that marked "the stark contrast between the East and the West." In his definition the ninety-eighth meridian was the frontier, "a sort of institutional fault line separating two physical environments, two animal kingdoms, two vegetable kingdoms, and, finally, two human cultures, ancient and modern, i.e., Indian and European."

But Webb had some of the same problems with defining the frontier that Turner did. If the frontier was a line in The Great Plains, the frontier became space and process in The Great Frontier.
Not only that. The way Webb used new-found continents as "frontiers" for Europe at least implied that Turner's recurring frontiers within North America did not really matter much.

Webb's definition emerged from a series of questions. "What effect," he asked, "did the uncovering of three new continents around 1500 have on the civilization that discovered and for a time owned the continents? How did the sudden acquisition of all that land affect the individual," Webb wanted to know, "and the institutions of the time such as absolutism, democracy, slavery, and religious policy."4

But the key question was what all that land (frontier) did to economic practice (process). The answer was that the New World discoveries, what Webb called the Great Frontier, precipitated a boom for the European Metropolis. According to his hypothesis, it was the boom which produced new institutions such as capitalism, participatory democracy, and the modern concept of progress. The "big boom, based on all the resources of the Great Frontier," Webb wrote, somewhat pessimistically, "lasted so long that it was considered normal and its institutions permanent."5

Those who have since taken up the work of studying the frontier phenomenon and of comparing frontiers have not only challenged the "line and process" concepts of Turner and Webb, they have gone beyond, asking new questions and framing new definitions. The basic question, of course, still remains: What is a frontier? Are there different types of frontiers? How long does a frontier stay a frontier? Or is there no time limit?

These and other related questions have sometimes produced provocative results. The frontier may, for example, have had to do with the way in which aborigines were viewed, which provided approval for behavior that might otherwise be considered immoral or illegal at the very least. The treatment of the American Indian, of course, instantly comes to mind.

The questioning and testing of the Turner/Webb definitions have led to a rather wide variety of demographic models and classification systems for studying and comparing frontiers. The bibliography in this volume should provide the general reader with some feel for the state of the art.

The authors of the essays in this volume of the Webb Memorial Lectures series are among those who have made notable contributions to that historiography of comparative frontiers. Their essays are arranged in approximate chronological order based on the most critical frontier period with which each is concerned. Thus the volume commences with Philip Wayne Powell's essay, winner of the
Webb-Smith Essay Prize, on the Gran Chichimeca followed by W. J. Eccles's essay on New France, both are closely related to the frontier history of the United States. The scene then shifts to Brazil, still an area of the western hemisphere, but one approached by Warren Dean somewhat differently than Powell or Eccles approached their areas. These areas are in contrast to two frontier areas of the British Empire, South Africa, the subject of Leonard Thompson's essay, and Australia, the subject of Robin Winks's essay. The five essays, then, are truly wide-ranging, spanning four continents and a time frame of some 400 years.

The authors have produced provocative essays with contrasting emphases and differing—sometimes contradictory—conclusions. Nevertheless, they share fairly traditional goals. Those goals are achieved by employing essentially the same formula, that of discussing the physical environment and aborigines, the incursion of a new culture, and the interaction of that new culture with the indigenous culture. In general, they acknowledge their debt to Turner and Webb and, in the case of Powell, to that other great historian of the American frontier, Herbert Eugene Bolton. And, except for Dean, they undertake with considerable success to relate their efforts to the existing body of literature for their respective frontiers.

Powell emphasizes the fact that it was the presence of a precious resource that was the prime consideration in the northern Mexican frontier. The plateau between the eastern and the western Sierras Madres north of Mexico City contained fabulous wealth—the Silver Frontier of the Gran Chichimeca. In order to control the silver mines and the stock-raising haciendas, the Spanish government pursued aggressive viceregal policies against the Chichimecas, policies that were honed and refined and used again in other places. Once subdued, the Gran Chichimeca of New Spain became a base for later penetration into Texas and New Mexico.

The theme of violent warfare and enslavement of the conquered Chichimecas dominates the period of initial contact with the aborigines. But this, in turn, was followed by a policy of pacification. The pacification was remarkably successful and developed some quite positive features in racial relations, such things as the concept of amnesty, the providing of sustenance during transitional or "civilizing" periods, training in husbandry, and religious accommodation.

Powell is quite sensitive to the remarkable similarities in the physical environment of the Gran Chichimeca and the land that Webb wrote about, similarities that produced adaptations in such things as transport, technology, commercial activity, and labor utilization. But the similarities also carried into areas that would be
more familiar to lay persons, especially moviegoers, such things as Indian attacks on covered-wagon trains, widespread use of horse and gun, stock-rustling, torture of prisoners, employment of friendly Indians as scouts, preference of Indian leaders for dealing with military officers rather than the clergy in making peace, the importance of forts, and the importance of ritualistic observances.

In the next essay, Eccles asserts unequivocally that the Turner thesis does not fit the circumstances encountered in New France. There was no frontier "line," rather there was a series of lines of great length and no breadth along the water routes, fanning out to the north, south, and west. Unlike the Anglo American and the Spanish frontier experiences, this frontier was not one of settlement. New France was a river empire.

If the Gran Chichimeca was a silver frontier, New France was a fur frontier. In exploiting the fur trade, the French developed a special relationship with the aborigines. The French, Eccles argues, were never numerous enough to threaten the native peoples. Moreover, in their struggles with the British, the French were dependent on the Indians for help. They therefore tried not to offend the Indians. Unlike some other places where the newcomers conquered the natives and sometimes enslaved them, the Indians of New France remained free, retained sovereignty over their lands, and, in fact, only tolerated the isolated French trading posts because there they obtained the European goods they wanted.

In the continuing debate over the persistence or change of institutions on the frontier, Eccles asserts that few original or enduring institutions resulted from the development of New France. Traces of democracy were minimal. Institutions at the parish level mirrored those in the mother country. On the frontier of New France, historical change tended to result, not from local circumstances but rather from events and decisions made in Europe. "The long arm of the government at Versailles," Eccles notes, "reached far out into the wilderness."

The frontiers of South America that have received any serious attention have almost invariably been those identified with an important crop that readily lent itself to world commerce. The Paulista West, that huge area in the interior of the Brazilian state of São Paulo, is no exception. The Paulista West was (and is) a frontier of sugar and coffee, and the thrust of Dean's essay is the ecological impact of human occupation and of sugar and coffee culture on that environment. Other themes such as the treatment of the aborigines, the role of government, and institutional change are subordinated and are important only as they contribute to an understanding of the
major theme, the ecological degradation of the environment. Of the factors contributing to that degradation, the most serious was the system of shifting cultivation called swidden or slash-and-burn. The system is one widely used in the tropical forests of Asia and Africa as well as South America. In simplest terms it consists of cutting the trees and underbrush on an area selected for cultivation, leaving the cuttings to dry, and then, before the start of the rainy season, burning off the area. The resulting ash acts as a natural fertilizer, making the soil unusually rich but only for a brief time, perhaps three to five years. The land is then abandoned, sometimes for as long as twenty to twenty-five years. The process is then repeated.

The exploitive nature of sugar and coffee horticulture, stock-raising, and, later, gold and silver mining in Minas Gerais, Mato Grosso, and Goiás not only transformed the economy of the Paulista West, but it also radically altered its racial composition. The military companies known as bandeiras enslaved or eradicated tribes as far as the Paraná River. The shifting cultivation of sugar and coffee attracted an exotic mixture of blacks, mestizos, Spaniards, Italians, and even a few Japanese, along with the Portuguese. The result was a cultural pluralism not reflected in the older areas.

In Southern Africa, the unusual geographic and environmental factors allowed a very small group of settlers at the Cape of Good Hope to occupy a territory the size of Great Britain before being challenged by the powerful Bantu farmers. That eventual encounter produced a racism that was and is a strong and persistent factor in relations between Afrikaners and the native Africans. Thompson’s convincing argument that racism already existed in Europe before the development of overseas frontiers does not seem to diminish the fact that South African racism is a frontier product.

As settlers moved north and east, farther and farther away from the arable southwest, they had little choice but to become stockfarmers, with some families running sheep and cattle on areas of six thousand acres and more. This helped to produce a unified culture that was reinforced by the fact that the good harbors and an outlet to the world economy were concentrated in the Cape area, meaning that all political, economic, and cultural institutions emanated from the Cape peninsula.

Thompson asserts that attempts at central control of the frontier from the Cape were weak and half-hearted in both the Dutch and British systems. The British did not make efforts to prevent the Voortrekkers, or stockfarmers, from leaving the Cape Colony nor did they discourage the development of semiautonomous institutions by Voortrekkers, including a system of defense using fast-mov-
ing commando units (a word of Afrikaans origin). As a result of the tenuous connection with the government at the Cape, the patriarchal family became the standard Voortrekker social unit, and as the British changed institutions in the Cape Colony the Voortrekkers remained largely unaffected.

Winks's essay on Australia places considerable emphasis on the attitude toward the aborigines by contrasting Australia with New Zealand. Immigrants to Australia were often convicts transported half a world away from home. Many were illiterate and brutalized, with little or no appreciation of human worth. The aborigines—dark and physically unattractive by English standards—only enflamed darker passions among the immigrants and stimulated racial prejudices that led finally to a policy of annihilation.

But newcomers to New Zealand, as Winks points out, came of their own accord, seeking to recreate the best of that which British society denied to them at home. The aborigines, the Maoris, were an attractive people with a complex indigenous society, settled villages, and a highly developed religion. Here the policy was one of assimilation. By the end of the nineteenth century the Maoris were given full citizenship and representation in government. Winks thinks that the native policy in Australia was comparable to that in the United States, while the New Zealand policy was more akin to the accommodationist approach in Canada.

There is, of course, a great deal more in these essays than has thus far been indicated. The reader, in passing, will learn something of the significance in frontier development of missions, missionaries, religion, presidios, soldiers, wars, slavery, reservations, race, disease, gold, silver, diamonds, transportation, government, and more.

The essays are independent of each other; from essay to essay there is no explicit comparative dialogue. Moreover, they are straightforward, what might be called "traditional" history, in which each writer looks for institutional development in the frontier of his choice rather than using the more complex methodologies that now characterize much of comparative studies of frontiers. The methodologies here are not so sophisticated as, for example, those used in the studies sponsored by the University of Oklahoma. But in fulfilling their assignments—providing an overview of their current research on frontiers—the authors of these essays have done their work and done it well.

If the essays stand alone, they are nonetheless interrelated. It is eminently clear, for example, that each writer is, in his own way, attempting to move away from the Turner/Webb line-and-process con-
cept of the frontier to one that emphasizes the frontier, as Thompson
so neatly defines it, as "an area of interpenetration between so-
cieties." And the essays share a certain melancholic mood, a pessi-
mism resulting from the consensus that, regardless of time or place,
these frontiers have closed and that this closing was not for the bet-
ter. In that sense, each author deserves the label, to use Winks's own
term, of "catastrophic" historian.

Walter Webb once conceded, with his sly, crooked grin, that he
preferred "the frontier theory over the frontier in fact." 7 Webb would
be pleased with the "frontier in theory" that is contained in these
stimulating essays.

Notes

1. Quoted in Wilbur R. Jacobs, John W. Caughey, and Joe B. Frantz, Turner,
    Bolton, and Webb (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1965), pp. 8,
    13.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., pp. 83–84.
4. Ibid., p. 88.
5. Ibid., p. 89.
6. See David Harry Miller and Jerome O. Steffen, eds., The Frontier: Com-
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North America's first frontier was an upcountry advance of settlement and civilization set in motion by the 1546–1548 silver discoveries in Mexico's Zacatecas Sierras. The ensuing rush of Forty-Eighters and Forty-Niners, opportunity seekers, and adventurous homebuilders began Mexico's "Silver Age." The reverberations were global, imperial, and commercial. The opening of the Zacatecas mother lode produced three centuries of European-guided thrust into the heartland of this northern New World.

Almost overnight, this first frontier became a melting pot of disparate racial and cultural elements and levels—American Indian, European, and African—that quickened formation of a Mexican people. It was the first phase of a northward flow of Mexican blood that reaches into our time. This frontier was the cornerstone of later Spanish-Mexican colonization and empire building, the genesis of a basic ingredient of North American history. Failure to recognize and understand this first frontier inhibits any genuine search for identity by those of Mexican lineage who, by northward marches—theirs or ancestral—are now United States Westerners.

This first epoch of the Spanish borderlands can rightfully be called the "silver frontier" or, preferably, the Chichimeca frontier, thus commemorating the aboriginal inhabitants and the appropriate sixteenth-century usage. Chronologically, it began in 1546 and closed, or "passed beyond," at the century's turning, when the farther Nueva Vizcaya and more distant New Mexico became the new frontiers. The dozen years after 1590 embraced a pacification process that ended the bloody and terribly destructive forty-year conflict called the Chichimeca War [1550–1590]. This war was the first and longest of North America's military showdowns between a sophisticated society—the northward-moving, clothes-wearing Indians, Spaniards, Negroes, and mixtures of these—and the very primitive, very naked Chichimeca nations. A massive official investigation of
Philip Wayne Powell

this Chichimeca Peace was completed in 1603, an event that serves better than most to close this frontier story.1

Geographically, Gran Chichimeca was largely limited to the plateau lying between the two great Sierras Madres, east and west. Its southern edge was a curve hinged on the west just north of Guadalajara and on the east in Querétaro country, dipping to the twentieth parallel east of Lake Chapala. There was no northern limit except the vast unknown beyond the Chichimeca nations, horizons that did not begin to acquire civilization’s nomenclature until the closing years of the first frontier’s life. In effect, however, and within the definable sixteenth-century story, the northern edge was the farthest advance of those called the Chichimecas, roughly an east-west line between the towns of Saltillo and Durango.

Since this early Mexican frontier is so little known, I preface my delineation of its people and institutions with a brief historical summary and some parallels and contrasts with the later, more familiar Anglo American experiences. This unorthodox introduction may help to bridge the cultural and chronological chasm between the very recent and the distant: the very Anglo and the quintessentially Ibero American.2

The Zacatecas silver strike triggered a quick opening of north-south roads, binding that wilderness bonanza to the lands of Cartesian Conquest. Three routes in the west linked the new mother lode to Guadalajara country, whence came the discoverers and earliest miners. Far more important was the Mexico City-Zacatecas road, some 350 miles of the Royal Inland Highway (Camino Real de la Tierra Adentro), an overnight creation of the Silver Rush. This royal road fastened the new frontier to the civilized south, thence to the vital Mexico-Veracruz artery and trans-Atlantic shipping. Immediate heavy demands upon this Silver Highway impelled quick improvement to accommodate the largest wagons and two-axled carro in addition to the customary pack trains and two-wheeled carretas. This was the continent’s first great wilderness road, the first stretch of a 1,500-mile wagon road that by the turn of the century would begin feeding the colonization of New Mexico.

Travelers and cargo on the new roads immediately intensified the marauding talents of the Chichimeca warriors, who took to ambush the white strangers as they crossed the Indians’ ancestral hunting, warring, and trading paths. Chichimeca braves began plundering this traffic in 1550, thus opening a forty-year war of death and destruction that paled the memory of the Cartesian-Aztec clash. The costs of this Chichimeca War—in time, property, and lives—far exceeded those of Cortés’s invasion, and this seemingly endless col-
Central Mexico in the Sixteenth Century
The Gran Chichimeca in the Sixteenth Century
lision of Naked Ones and Clothes-Wearers was the major human
drama of this early frontier.

During the four decades after mid-century, the Chichimeca War
was an agonizing experience for Europeans and for the sedentary, so-
phisticated Indians who formed the bulk of the northward advance.
The incoming southerners never completely adapted themselves to
the hit-and-run, ambush style of guerrilla fighting waged by the wil-
derness warriors. The newcomers did not even become truly ac-
customed to their tormentors' nudity, which was a continuing shock
to the European mind.

The Chichimeca Bowman, in his own territory and its contigu-
ous lands, was so formidable a fighter that he was never overcome
in war by the European and Indian intruders. The northern brave
grew more redoubtable in the last decade of the war, when his at-
tacks became more effective with the use of horses. The Spanish
purchased the Chichimeca Peace of the 1590s through diplo-
my and gift-giving; it was not a military triumph for the Clothes-
Wearers. This first failure of sedentary peoples to cope with the war-
fare of primitive nomadic and seminomadic New World Indians
would be echoed in later continental history.

The awesome prowess of the wilderness brave, on his own
ground, helps to explain the pervasive preoccupation of the new
frontier people with defense against Chichimeca attack. It also made
this frontier something quite distinct from the so-called Spanish
Conquest. As we shall see, the Chichimeca War reversed the Con-
quest pattern of individualistic and "joint-stock company" initia-
tives—devoid of and antagonistic to governmental participation—
and stirred the borderland settlers to clamor for the crown's support
and supervision of their defense.

Because of the intruders' slow adjustment to Chichimeca tac-
tics, the northern war intensified during the first two decades. At
one point, in 1561, populous Zacatecas was in a virtual state of siege,
isolated by Chichimeca attacks. Even so, the great veins of the Gua-
najuato Sierras were discovered, and mining was begun in the mid-
1550s; outlying ranches were raided, but the main mining center,
growing to a town and then a city, was not seriously threatened.
Other silver towns, far from fortified population centers such as
Mazapil, Sombrerete, Chalchihuites, San Martín, and Charcas, main-
tained a precarious existence, had difficulty in receiving supplies and
sending out silver, and were sometimes abandoned.

New Spain's fourth viceroy, Martín Enríquez (1568–1580), was
the first to make the Chichimeca War a primary subject for govern-
mental attention. Responding to the frontier people's struggle and to
the demonstrated failure of private defense, Enríquez quickly introduced the presidio on the northern frontier. The presidio existed primarily to defend the Mexico-Zacatecas road as well as to protect other travel routes and strategic locations. Simultaneously, the viceroy strengthened and more closely supervised the northern military administration by appointing able men. The men who assumed the posts of teniente de capitán general in the Mexican and Guadalajara audiencias were usually university-educated judges, thus beginning a long history of such high-ranking leadership for the borderlands. Don Martín also initiated a policy of special taxation to support the frontier soldiers and presidios. From this time to the end of Spanish rule, there was always a category of gastos de guerra in the royal treasury; it was temporarily called gastos de la paz when the Chichimeca conflict was winding down in the 1590s.

Perhaps most importantly, the Enríquez administration inaugurated and presided over the beginnings of debate—by high clergy, other officials, and men experienced in the northern war—on the controversial subject of the justice of waging war against the hostile aborigines. This had been a judicial and moral problem close to crown conscience since the days of Queen Isabel and the New World discovery. The majority viewed the fight against the Chichimecas as a justifiable defense and recommended a kind of "total war" called guerra a fuego y a sangre ("war by fire and blood"), thereby making legal a limited enslavement for those captured and proven guilty of raiding. The main opponents of this decision were the Dominican brothers and heirs of Antonio de Montesinos and Bartolomé de las Casas.³

Enslavement of captured Chichimecas continued into the next decade, but such servitude was limited by precedents set by Viceroy Enríquez. Moreover, clerical reversal of the "just" war decision and increasing outrage at the evils of the soldiers' sales of the captured enemy resulted in a shift toward pacification by the 1580s. Meanwhile, the Chichimeca War continued and intensified, reaching a critical stage in the late 1570s and early 1580s.

These crisis years generated a royal decision toward greater liberality in financial support, a rapid increase of frontier soldiery, additional presidios (amounting to a total of nearly fifty), and predictable complaints from the frontier people that all this was not enough. The heightened conflict coincided with a weakness in the viceregal government caused by the early death of Enríquez's successor as well as a clerical change to unanimity against the war and Chichimeca enslavement.⁴

In this same historical moment, a dynamic new viceroy, the
Marqués de Villamanrique, came on the scene. Forceful and impatient, the viceroy quickly saw the Chichimeca War as the most important and immediate problem of the realm. He determined to end it by a drastic cut in frontier soldiery and presidios. He thus sought to halt the frontier slave traffic by removing its principal practitioners, hoping thereby to stop the war by eliminating a basic cause of Chichimeca hostility.

Such sudden reversal of policy threw a scare into the frontier people and caused grave concern among those most experienced in the Gran Chichimeca. More moderate views finally turned Villamanrique toward a safer and more promising end of the war and of the Chichimeca enslavement that he so strongly condemned.

During the reign of the frontier's only mestizo captain, Miguel Caldera (half Spanish, half Chichimeca), the Villamanrique administration fashioned a Chichimeca peace from 1587 to 1589. This peace was based on gift-giving diplomacy; a policy of protection of those accepting peace and settlement against attack by Indians still hostile or mistreatment by the Clothes-Wearers; continuing government rations of food, clothing, and utensils; training in husbandry; and teaching of the Christian religion and ways.

Responsibility for this program was soon inherited by the able and widely respected viceroy Louis de Velasco (1590–1595), who had long lived in Mexico and had served as a frontier general. Don Luis wisely retained Captain Caldera, now titled "Chief Justice (Justicia Mayor) of all the new settlements," whom he placed in immediate command of the pacification process. Velasco described the wilderness-born mestizo as "the man most necessary in all these realms for making the Chichimeca Peace; the first and foremost promoter of this Peace." Viceroy the Conde de Monterrey (1595–1603) presided over completion of the peace, including the Visit of 1601–1603 which describes in detail this innovative milestone in North American frontier history.

Throughout the Chichimeca War, mining (mainly of silver) flourished in output as well as in the technical refinement of its smelting and amalgamation (patio) processes, especially in areas of sizable population such as Zacatecas and Guanajuato. But the age of silver booms remained precarious and rudimentary in the outlying, smaller settlements, where there were reports of slowdowns and abandonment because of Chichimeca attacks. The peace triggered another major discovery, that of San Luis Potosí (Cerro de San Pedro). Captain Caldera discovered this silver lode while overseeing diplomacy of gift-giving in that area among the Guachichiles, the strongest and largest of the Chichimeca nations.
The pull of successive silver strikes projected settlement into distant, isolated, and dangerous places, separated from southern civilization by vast stretches of *despoblado* (uninhabited land; wilderness), the *tierra de guerra* of Chichimeca ambush. Simultaneously there was also a slower, more compact northward advance which spilled over the southern edges of the Chichimeca “arc.” In this nearer borderland, stock raising—accompanied by some town-founding (e.g., Celaya, Apaseo)—pushed outward from crowded conditions in the lands of Cortesian victory. Thus, Querétaro country and the Michocán-Guanajuato border steadily filled with *estancias*, ranches producing not only cattle, horses, mules, and smaller stock, but homesites for *estancieros* and their retinues, including the hardy cowboy or vaquero, who often doubled as a Chichimeca fighter. Stock raising was also, of course, a necessary adjunct of mining, and was thus an attachment to the distant mining camps and towns.

Characteristically, and sometimes by government requirement in land grants, the borderland *estancias* not only provided fighting men for defense and reprisal in the Chichimeca War, but also gave defensive shelter to travelers, in what was called the *casafuerte* (literally, “strong house”). This stock ranching spearheaded the Clothes-Wearers’ advance into the San Francisco Valley of southern Guachichil country, opening up the large region that came to be called San Luis Potosí.

The Silver Frontier’s capital, manpower, and provisions soon provided basic support to the farther borderlands. Thus, Francisco de Ibarra’s valuable explorations into the northwestern Sierras, a province that came to be called (with Basque love of the motherland) Nueva Vizcaya, was supplied from Zacatecas country. This new province in the west and Monterrey in the east became, at century’s end, the next frontiers.

Similarly, the sixteenth-century Gran Chichimeca made possible the advance to New Mexico. Without an understanding of the antecedent frontier, the New Mexican story is rootless. And the later advance into Texas was also based upon wealth, lands, stock, and families traceable to the first frontier. The Marqués de Aguayo, leader of the Texas enterprise, was the heir of a vast mineral, ranching, and commercial estate begun by Captain Alonso López de Loya (Mazapil and Río Grande) and greatly expanded by his son-in-law, Captain Francisco de Urdiñola, a Basque who rose from common frontier soldier to become the viceregal selection to lead the New Mexico colonization. Urdiñola’s appointment was cancelled because of charges that Urdiñola had murdered his wife and some employ-
This first frontier contained virtually all elements and incidents that would later characterize Anglo American expansion. Thus, the Mexico-Zacatecas road was the scene of many a Chichimeca attack upon trains of covered wagons; and those who fell before such onslaughts were scalped, tortured, and carried into captivity, as later portrayed in Anglo Westerns and Hollywood epics. In the early decades, such Chichimeca raids were carried out by warriors on foot, much as forest Indians fought on the early Anglo frontiers; but later raids were by Indian horsemen, as in the trans-Mississippi West. Early fighting on the Chichimeca frontier was a confrontation of crossbow and harquebus against bow and arrow, similar to the first Eastern Seaboard fighting of Europeans and Indians, but differing from the later combat that employed rifles, six-shooters, and widespread Indian use of guns and horses. However, Chichimeca skill, speed, and penetrating power with bow and arrow—not excelled anywhere, according to awed chroniclers from Europe—must have approximated (or bettered?) the accuracy of the Plains Indians' use of rifles on horseback.

As in later continental history, this early frontier was much affected by the slowness with which Europeans adapted to the warring ways of the Naked Ones. On the Chichimeca frontier, there were episodes that read like Braddock's Defeat and Custer's Last Stand; it was a common complaint that loss of life and property resulted from the appointment of captains and generals inexperienced in frontier circumstances, men who were ignorant or fatally disdainful of Chichimeca bravery and tactics. During the 1580s, frontier warfare passed into the hands of experienced captains, such as Juan Morlete, Miguel Caldera, Francisco de Urdiñola, and the famous general Rodrigo del Río de Loza, who in many years of fighting the Chichimecas rose from common soldier to general.

As also in later North American history, the Chichimecas were romanticized and defended by a distant society that did not know them as well as did the frontier people suffering from their raids and rustling. Thus it was easier for Dominicans than Franciscans to view the Chichimeca War as unjust and to protest against enslavement of the primitives; for the Black Friars, the distant Chichimeca was an abstraction, unknown at first hand. But Franciscans, with an early roll of martyrs to Chichimeca arrows and torture, not only became reluctant to enter such service, but generally favored the policy of guerra a fuego y a sangre. These frontier friars, notably unsuccessful
in attracting the Chichimeca until the captains and viceregal government brought peace in the 1590s, were often antagonistic to any lenient treatment of Chichimecas because of their attacks on the peaceful, Christianized Indians so beloved of the padres.

The debates on "just" war and Chichimeca enslavement took place, of course, in the viceregal capital and grew out of the "Lasca­elian" leanings of royal conscience. Such a debate would have been unthinkable in the frontier environment, where the only "good" Chichimecas were either dead or enslaved. In this debate, of course, there is some parallelism with later Eastern-Seaboard attitudes toward a distant, abstract Indian by comparison with the frontier people's proximity to the red man.

There are other parallels in types, attitudes, and dramatic episodes: the stock-rustling ("horse-thievin'") hostile; captured white women among the Chichimecas (as also among the mestizos, mulattoes, Christian Indians) and the ransoming and rescue thereof; pacified Chichimecas serving as scouts and allies against those still hostile; a noticeable preference of the warring chiefs for dealing diplomatically with their white military counterparts rather than with missionaries or others; the unpopularity of frontier military service against the Indian warrior (desertions and deaths accounted for rapid personnel turnover); fort, or presidio, systems and the defensive stockade, or casafuerte; the ubiquitous mule pack train accompanying military or diplomatic forays into hostile Indian country; and the ritualistic powwows of Indian chiefs and white captains.

There are also some notable contrasts that contribute to an understanding of the first frontier by comparing it with later ones. Thus, Spanish Mexican horsemanship and expertise in the use of pack animals were surely superior to the Anglo versions. In fact, the Mexicans transmitted much of this earlier knowledge of livestock to westward-moving Anglos, along with more than a little of the vocabulary pertaining thereto.

There was no truly professional military force on the Chichimeca frontier. The bulk of the fighting was shouldered by frontier settlers (home builders, often heads of families, who were only temporarily—and not always—in royal pay) or adventurous opportunity seekers who usually became frontier residents. The surprise attack on Indian villages, with extermination in mind, was not practiced by the Clothes-Wearers on the Chichimeca frontier; the major objective was the taking of captives for later sale or, beginning in the Enriquez administration, for placement in government hands of a limited servitude combined with training in civilized ways and Christianity.
Pacification efforts on the Chichimeca frontier constituted a formal doctrine of Indian relations: amnesty; provisioning for sustenance during a transition "civilizing" period; protection against other hostiles and Clothes-Wearers; training in husbandry; missionary attention; settlement on frontier lands (in contrast with the later Anglo practice of distant removal). All of this was aimed at early incorporation into a Europeanized society and its ways. This integrationist doctrine, sometimes attempted even during the earliest and bloodiest phases of the war, reached its highest success with the Peace of the 1590s and became a basic part of the Spanish-Mexican frontier policy and practice for more than two centuries. Such consistency of policy in borderland circumstances highlights "Spain's frontiering genius" and is a striking contrast with the more erratic course of Indian policy in Anglo America.

These few examples in parallelism and contraposition serve to illuminate the characteristics of the distant "first" frontier. The more fundamental and significant characteristics of the earlier frontier—those elements most essential to historical reconstruction of it—are to be found, of course, in the makeup of the frontier people and their institutions—how they began, how they changed, and how they interacted with the environment.

The Frontier People

The aboriginal inhabitants of the Gran Chichimeca were classified by contemporary writers into "nations" of Guachichiles, Zacatecos, Guamares, and Pames, with some subdivisions. Observers described them as living in rancherías, or clusters of rancherías, suggesting tribal relationships. Throughout the Gran Chichimeca, life varied little, and it is thus valid to portray these peoples in general terms. There was greater homogeneity among the Chichimeca nations than among the more complex and disparate "history-makers" who invaded their territory. Generalizations are thus more valid in the first case; fuller treatment and some basic distinctions are necessary in delineating the second.

In all the Gran Chichimeca, complete or near nudity was universal: women sometimes wore loin covers, like tiny skirts, and some men used a kind of breechcloth which they discarded, going into battle, "for the effect." Shelter was crude, usually a conical hut of thatch, or caves. Food was obtained by hunting and gathering—rodents, snakes, frogs, birds, fish, deer, mesquite pods, acorns, roots and seeds, cactus apples (tunas). Religious practices were primitive,
hardly discernible to the more sophisticated invaders from the south. Chieftainship, locally limited and of low visibility, was so lacking in authority that it was a constant frustration to the Clothes-Wearers' diplomatic efforts.

During the four decades after 1550, natives of the Gran Chichimeca changed in sufficient ways. They became addicted to certain of the invaders' goods and customs, such as eating the meat of domesticated animals (mule meat became a great favorite). They also used Spanish cloth and clothing. As a result of enslavement or childhood training among the Clothes-Wearers, an increasing number of ladinos (those knowing the invaders' tongues and ways) came into being and, by their knowledge of the enemy, achieved strong chieftainship among the nations, thus making diplomatic relations more effective.

In the areas of closest contact with sedentary peoples, diseases undoubtedly aggravated the attrition that came from war and capture. Although the Chichimecas were still raiding successfully in the 1580s—often increasingly so, with horses and astute ladino leadership—such attrition certainly undermined the earlier intransigence of Chichimeca hostility and thus smoothed the way toward pacification.

By contrast with these native inhabitants of the Gran Chichimeca, the peoples moving into the area after 1546 were heterogeneous in terms of blood, customs, migrational motives, and ancestral memories. To overcome difficulties posed by the many and fundamental dissimilarities—while yet exploiting the universality of their sedentary ways, comparative sophistication, and use of body covering—these may be called the "Clothes-Wearers" in contrast to the "Naked Ones."

The northward migration of the Clothes-Wearers, though it took place under Spanish sovereignty, was, in the main, a non-Spanish movement. (Chroniclers constantly refer to "Spaniards" as distinct from Chichimecas, but the former term must be understood to include Indians, Negroes, and mixed races.) The advance of settlement into this frontier was usually guided by the Spanish-blooded minority, who provided mineral and town-founding initiatives and government for the greater numbers of Indians (such as Tarascans, Otomíes, Mexica or Aztecs, Tlaxcalans, Cholulans), free blacks, slave Negroes, mulattos, and all mixtures of these ethnic groups.

This large migration was not of military makeup, nor was it a diplomatic-military thrust for sovereignty, such as the Cortesian Conquest had been. It was simply a move to new homes, a migration of settlers such as so often occurred later in the continent. This Spanish-Indian-Negro expansion was, above all, not a part of the so-
called Spanish Conquest which, in any case, was a collaborative Spanish-Indian overthrow of Aztec hegemony.

Spaniards going to the new frontier themselves varied as to class, origin, customs, and motives. One of the most conspicuous elements was the quantity of Basques, from blacksmiths to bonanza kings, who impressed their own and their madre patria's names upon the land and its history. There were mining men already moneyed by previous discoveries or other rewarding activity. There were the penniless, or nearly so, looking for adventure, with end-of-the-rainbow visions; there were government officials dedicated to royal service in the global imperial bureaucracy and, likely enough, on the lookout for extra-official enrichment; churchmen, regular and secular, of all ranks (except bishop and archbishop); laborers of all kinds, salaried, or as relatives and retinue of the more affluent; artisans; businessmen, local or itinerant (e.g., wagoner merchants); salaried soldiery, after 1568; charcoal makers and sellers; blacksmiths; inn-keepers (men and women); wives and children. There was also, among the white population, a sprinkling of other Europeans: Portuguese (many of them either Jewish or "New Christians"), Greek, English, French, Italian, Flemish, German, and Austrian.

The northward-moving Indians were usually laborers seeking salaries or retinue for entrepreneurial Spaniards, Indian governors, and principales; defensive colonists, attracted by grants of privileges, such as tax or tribute exemption and lands given by the vice-regal government; military allies of Spanish-mestizo soldiery in defensive or reprisal actions; some miners, e.g., Otomies in San Luis Potosí country; many merchants, since this was a popular occupation among the advanced nations of the south; and finally, women and children, as the families of these pioneers.

Many of the frontier folk were mestizos, part of that rapidly growing amalgam of Spaniard and Indian. In motive, occupation, and social category, they ranged from the lowest vagabonds to the elite, including men such as the descendants of the Zacatecas discoverer Juan de Tolosa, whose wife was the daughter of Herán Cortés and Doña Isabel Moctezuma. Within this wide range was the heroic Spanish Chichimeca mestizo of humble beginnings, Captain and Frontier Justice Miguel Caldera, the first important historical personage born in the North American wilderness. Most mestizos among the frontier people were simple adventurers and laborers, engaged in the many varieties of mining and ranching labor, or as local shopkeepers or artisans.

It is not possible to determine how many Negroes and mulattoes, enslaved and free, migrated to this frontier, but they appear to
have formed a goodly percentage of the Clothes-Wearers' total. The mine owners took them as slaves for mining, and this practice continued throughout the century. Free Negroes and mulattoes, who accounted for a noticeably large population segment in the New Spain of the 1570s, engaged themselves for salaries or as retinue in most every laboring category; thus, inter alia, they might serve as public criers or as vaqueros. During the entire life of this frontier, *cimarrones* (escaped Negroes) raided travel routes and outlying settlements, sometimes in alliance with Chichimeca braves. There were also *zambos* (of Indian Negro mixture; thus the origin of the term *sambo*) and people of every imaginable kind and percentage of race mixture, making the inhabitants of the Chichimeca frontier as colorful in deed, culture, and complexion as any people in the New World.

The frontier people inevitably changed in the contradistinctive circumstances of this wilderness zone. Peculiarities of northern mining; the broader, freer horizons of stock raising; the burdens of greater travel distances between settlements; the constant Chichimeca danger; the unfamiliarity and avidity of large stretches of land, strange and new flora and fauna—all these factors helped reshape these first northerners into a peculiar frontier breed in the new Mexican land.

The earliest mining camps, virtually without governmental authority in their first months of existence, were scenes of fighting, feuding, claim-jumping, and all the turbulence made famous on later frontiers. Even with officialdom's arrival, the northern mining towns were noted for law evasion, fraud in tax matters, and stealing of mining and ore-processing areas. And it was the need for an audit of the royal treasury office (*real caja*) in Zacatecas that produced the large 1601–1603 *Visita* of the Chichimeca Peace. Here was a land where fighting, weapons, ceaseless litigation, and frequency of jail sentences were all the close companions of silver mining. Ever since those distant days the Mexican *norteño* has been a conspicuous weapons-carrier. Traditional intimacy with arms, combined with a notable hardiness in horsemanship, born of the distances and toughness of terrain, forged a northerner who, in our own times, was a commanding force in the 1910 revolution. The prototype of the famous rebel cavalryman was born on the Chichimeca frontier.

Broad expanses of land and sparse aboriginal population widely spread in mountain lairs characterized the vast haciendas that still exist in this stock-raising region and created a way of life far more expansive than was possible or legal in most lands of the Cortesian Conquest. Distances were so great that even the frontier miles
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seemed stretched beyond the "standard," since on this land the fleetest of horses paced over the plains and level basin lands.¹¹

Mining and stock raising, however, were pursuits of such long tradition and basic techniques that frontier circumstances could not radically alter them. But confrontation with the Naked Ones did seriously change European ways and attitudes. In their primitivity and distinctive warfare, the Chichimecas were a perennial fear-inducing shock to frontiersmen of all races.

The changes wrought by the Chichimeca War and Peace can hardly be overemphasized. This is particularly true of the quick transformation from the bold individualism of Conquest goals and attitudes to the far less heroic pleading for government help. Every imaginable kind of person entered the Chichimeca frontier—except a "fighting class." There was no order of knighthood, nor even an encomendero class, as in the south, committed to tutelary protection or crown military service. Thus the frontier people petitioned the crown for aid and welcomed governmental responsibility for defense.

Even so, frontier residents had to depend heavily on their own resources to save lives and property. Inns and estancias kept arms, armed men, and even Indian allies and scouts for defense against Chichimeca attack. Homes in exposed mining camps and towns were constructed in special ways to enhance defense capabilities (churches and conventos likewise). Wagoner merchants regularly employed armed horsemen as a defensive escort. Stock ranchers contributed their vaqueros for reprisals against Chichimecas in times of emergency or crisis. Frontier towns in exposed positions coordinated community arsenals with private arms for defense, and local church or mission bells called the citizenry to armed assembly when there was threat of Indian attack.¹²

Frontier captains, constituting an increasing number of Chichimeca War veterans, changed noticeably with their borderland experiences. Knowing intimately the frontier hardships and dangers and the nature of the enemy, these veterans were realists who knew that peace must come by means other than perpetual fighting. From the eager slave-seekers of earlier years, the captains metamorphosed into advocates and practitioners of diplomacy and purchased peace. This was a notable modification, given the cruelties and hatreds on both sides, of a warfare which reached all categories of the population. It was also a pragmatic reversion to "old Spanish customs."

When the Peace of the 1590s came, these captains and other veteran Chichimeca fighters formed a reservoir of frontier-toughened
colonists ready for the adventures of Nueva Vizcaya and New Mexico. Some were engaged in the Peace itself, as captain-protectors of newly pacified Chichimecas, or as teachers of husbandry for the Indian converts. Such men helped create precedents that buttressed expansion to farther frontiers.

More significant were the changes in racial and cultural composition. In this melting pot, sophisticated nations of the south, often strangers to each other, came together in an unknown land to engage in colonizing and other enterprises. Here they inevitably intermingled with non-Indians, mestizos, mulattoes, zambos, and, of course, with pacified Chichimecas. In short, the Chichimeca frontier was a convergence of the many bloods, classes, and cultural levels that have gone into the making of Mexicans. This borderland medley was not at all the simplistic conflict of Spaniards and Indians that uninformed opinion puts under the heading of “Spanish Conquest.”

As the frontier people intermingled and had children, they produced a breed seasoned in the wilderness and in enemy action. This mixture of races occurred in a frontier which eventually embraced continental distances commensurate to the Anglo American westward movement: the distance from Querétaro to Alta California’s San Francisco approximated that between the Alleghenies and the shores of the Pacific. The expansion begun on the sixteenth-century frontier launched a single-direction destiny as basic to Mexicans as the westward march was for Anglo Americans. This “pull of the North” still influences Mexico, just as the western magnet continues to drain and increasingly influence the eastern United States.

Despite the significance of this centuries-long expansion, the theme is comparatively ignored in Mexico; not only is it little studied, it is disdained. As an Anglo East looks down its older nose at a parvenu West, so Mexicans concentrated in the Valley of Anáhuac and its immediate environs judge the “less civilized” north. Mexicans have not been sufficiently interested to mythologize (nationalize?) the centuries of adventurous unfolding of this frontier to incorporate its story in their search for identity.

The Institutional Frontier

The institutional innovations and changes on the Chichimeca frontier illumine the abiding features of this upcountry advance of civilization.

First, of course, was the creation and growth of the frontier min-
ing camp and town and the development of mineral law and mining methods and practices. Thus began a period of adjustment to an environment that usually differed much from the southern lands. For example, pervasive lack of water for ore processing led to the founding of towns rather far from the mining sites. Thus San Luis Potosi lies a dozen difficult miles from the mines sustaining it; and the López-Urdiñola ores out of Mazapil were hauled westward to the ore-refining hacienda and the town of Río Grande.

The scarcity and delays in transport of mercury, the greater difficulties in obtaining slave Negro or other labor, and the high and increasing costs of free labor by comparison with nearer and more abundant labor in the southern country were all factors differentiating the new northern mining areas from the southern ones. Mining necessity, more than the demands of war, made this borderland a natural place to refine techniques of the mule train. Multiple-mule-team covered wagons plied between Mexico City and Zacatecas and on into New Mexico; these were the prototypes for the later, more famous “twenty-mule-team” hauling in California history.13

The whole subject of mining, stock raising, transport, technical factors, commercial activity, governmental facets, labor, and social elements is still an open field for the investigator. A few famous titles and types from the Anglo American West suggest Mexican potentialities and authentic counterparts: Calamity Jane, “Bonanza,” The Covered Wagon, The Mine with the Iron Door, Cimarron; and that popular Anglo “Western”, Treasure of the Sierra Madre.

Similarly, there is a wide field for exploration in the characteristics of governmental development, especially as affected by distance, by jurisdictional clashes and feuds (e.g., Mexican versus Guadalajara audiencias and patria chica rivalries), and by frontier “scofflawism.” Some of this is known for the eighteenth century, a fact that highlights our relative inattention to the first frontier and the seventeenth century. Such neglect also inhibits our understanding of the origins and early growth of those famous borderland creations, the mission and the presidio.

These North American frontier institutions were born in the Gran Chichimeca. In both cases, the establishments of the first frontier differed in important ways from better known later versions. Thus, the seminal essay by Herbert Eugene Bolton on the Spanish mission as a frontier institution14 was primarily based on seventeenth- and eighteenth-century examples; the sixteenth-century prototype differed markedly from that later flowering, though the roots are discernible.

Missionary effort, primarily Franciscan, began in the 1530s on
the fringes of the Chichimeca arc, in Michoacan-Querétaro-Jalisco country. From then until the Peace of the 1590s proselytizing among Chichimecas was largely a failure, with none of the famed successes of subsequent centuries. The intransigent Chichimecas displayed a hostility that contained strong signs of anti-Christianity. These people were notable in their targeting of friars for ridicule, torture, and killing, and in an addiction to the raiding of peaceful Indians either leaning toward or accepting Christianity.

Beyond idiomatic difficulties, the multiplicity of dialects and languages plagued the padres all the way from Querétaro to Alta California and from Nayarit to eastern Texas. Chichimecan hostility further dampened missionary fervor with repeated martyrdoms, usually the result of a constant lack of military protection. Since the military themselves were not fully successful in frontier defense, it is not surprising that the missionaries fared so badly. Even had there been imperial imperatives for stronger military support—such as English, French, or Russian threats in later years—the fighting proficiency and unyielding hostility of the Chichimeca would probably have doomed the missionaries to failure. As it was, missionary successes in the Gran Chichimeca had to wait upon the development of diplomatic talents among the military captains, beginning in the late 1580s.

One often gets a contrary impression from the writings of the religious chroniclers, Franciscan and Jesuit. Their complaints about soldiery and their firm adherence to the illusion that they were the only truly effective peacemakers among heathen foster to this day a disproportionate sympathy for the mission padres by comparison with the military. More extensive study of archival materials relating to the secular frontier problems is needed to balance such judgments for the sixteenth century, in ways that Bolton did for later “mission” borderlands.

An example of this kind of corrective is the Conde de Monterrey frontier investigation [Visita] detailing the Chichimeca Peace. Here, in words not written for public consumption, it is clear that the Peace was won by captains rather than friars. The frontier chief justice, Captain Miguel Caldera, not only structured and supervised the government’s giving of gifts to the Chichimeca but was also in charge of convento (mission) construction and friar protection. In the Visita itself, there is some indication that the friars did not always appreciate their “second-fiddle” role; given the friar-crown tensions of the second half of the sixteenth century, this is not surprising.

The frontier presidio in North America began its long and im-
important history at the outset of the Martín Enríquez viceroyalty. This governor had hardly settled in Mexico City when he ordered construction of seven presidios to protect the Silver Highway to Zacatecas.

So notable was this innovation that it was immortalized in verse by New Spain’s poet laureate, Fernán González de Eslava, under the title: “Of the Seven Forts that Viceroy Don Martín Enríquez ordered Built, with Garrisons of Soldiers, on the Road that Goes from the City of Mexico to the Mines of Zacatecas, to End the Damage which the Chichimecas do to Merchants and Travelers on that Highway.” The poet’s clarification of his theme forms a subtitle: “The author of this colloquy uses these seven forts to symbolize the Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist; to show that those who travel this world to reach the mines of Heaven, find refuge in these Sacraments, where they are safe against the enemies of the soul.” I know of no other presidios or presidio systems given such literary recognition; and this is as it should be, for the Enríquez forts were the beginning.

The presidio on this frontier was made of masonry, usually adobe, with a garrison of three or more men, under a captain or a caudillo (comparable to the rank of master sergeant). A captain might be in charge of two or more forts when they were grouped closely enough that he could conveniently do this. Occasionally, the term presidio meant a garrison only, as in a well-established town or city such as Guanajuato.

It is a strong indication of the presidio’s value that, within some fifteen years of the Enríquez start, there were nearly fifty such establishments on the Chichimeca frontier. By comparison, northern New Spain’s presidios in the late eighteenth century numbered about thirty. True, later presidios were often larger and more complex than those of the first frontier. But the sheer quantity of them on a frontier much smaller than the later borderlands underscores the seriousness of the Chichimeca War and the respect accorded it by the viceregal government.

Even by later standards, the presidio of the Gran Chichimeca was not always a small construction. Thus, the description of the one at Jalpa, in 1576, says that it was “of size to enclose all the pack animals (arrias o recuas) that might arrive, even to the number of more than two hundred, and all the travelers and necessary soldiers.” Some of the main presidios, such as those on the heavily traveled Camino Real de la Tierra Adentro, were of similar or greater capacity; today’s remains of the fort at Nieto Pass, a bit north of Querétaro, certainly indicate this. A recent personal survey of these ruins has convinced me that the remaining towers, at least, are
basically of sixteenth-century construction with some later repairs. This presidio may have been unusually large, for it was located at a fork linking the important San Miguel and Guanajuato country to the main Mexico-Zacatecas Road.

The societal roles of these archetypal presidios have not yet received proper scholarly attention. Inevitably, the presidios served needs other than military. Travelers and soldiers tightly packed in such isolated forts certainly engaged in all manner of intercourse. Some trading (including that of contraband) doubtless took place, as did religious activity, gambling, brawling, criminality, and biological perpetuation. But the presidios were also visible evidence of a distant king's efforts on behalf of his vassals, thus strengthening loyalty to the crown as well as providing protection against common danger. These presidios cannot be ignored in any serious study of life on the Mexican norteño.

There also developed in the Gran Chichimeca a concomitant of the presidios, a frontier militia. With government pay for soldiers and captains, and recruitment solely in New Spain, the militia was the first of its kind in North America. This soldiery escorted wagon trains through tierra de guerra; carried out interpresidio patrolling, scouting, and reprisal raids (entradas); and maintained presidio garrisoning.

Life for these frontier soldiers was notoriously hard. It was characterized by low pay, the need to furnish their own horses and costly equipment, sleeping on the ground in open country, the risk of wounds, death, or, worst of all, capture and mutilative torture and scalping. The soldiers endured frequent ill-will of other frontier people, either in criticism of a job done or for objectionable behavior in settled areas (e.g., gambling away military equipment or failure to pay debts). Death and desertions took a heavy toll in the frontier soldiery. But such service could also mean advancement for the durable ones; out of the common soldiery came many of the captains and alcaldes mayores (provincial judges, usually also with military jurisdiction), and sometimes even a general.

Saddle diplomacy—the process of powwow and palaver among the wilderness rancherias to gain Chichimeca acceptance of peace, gifts, settlement on lands suitable for agriculture, and tutelary protection—was the responsibility of the king's captains, under a frontier-wide authority exercised by the mestizo captain Miguel Caldera. The captains, specifically commissioned "protectors" of the newly pacified and settled Chichemecas, attended to the regular distribution of gifts and rations of food and clothing. These captains
also protected the new gente del rey ["the king's people"] against Chichimecas still hostile or from mistreatment or molestation by others of the frontier people, whether Spanish, Indian, Negro, or mestizo. This institutional pattern was called protectoria.

Captain-protectorship had roots in the encomienda concept of peninsular reconquest and its variant in a New World environment. In the Chichimeca Peace, the captain-protectors played a role similar to that of the encomendero in lands of the sedentary, more culturally advanced Indian nations. Thus, they protected their new charges, saw to their sustenance and general well-being, attended to their Christianization by aiding and protecting the missions and friars, and worked with the recently pacified ones as military allies. In such duties, the captain-protectors strengthened ties of respect, admiration, and even affection with the newly incorporated Chichimeca chiefs and warriors. One example of this was the prompt and eager volunteering of the Guachichiles to serve as fighters against the rebellious Indians of San Andrés in the western Sierras in 1592. With three of their own captains already named Miguel Caldera, they gladly enrolled under Chief Justice Caldera to crush this uprising. Viceroy Velasco expressed his satisfaction with this Guachichil "patriotism" on behalf of the frontier peace.

The title of captain-protector continued on in San Luis Potosí and Nuevo Santander and the pacification of Sierra Gorda country. In 1783–1784, Viceroy Matías de Gálvez, planning a government for the western city of Colotlán in the western Sierras, considered "re-establishing the position of Captain-Protector, as it earlier had been with the rôle of Justice and Government, political and Military." This might be called a bicentennial bow to the deeds of the continent's first great half-breed frontiersman, Miguel Caldera, for Colotlán, as the home of a beloved half-sister and headquarters for his quelling of the San Andrés uprising of 1592, was well known to him.

Similarly basic to the Chichimeca Peace was the concept of proveeduría: regular governmental supply, through the captain-protectors, of food and clothing, plus utensils for cooking, sewing, and farming. Such ministration was intended to sustain the gente del rey for some years while they learned to support themselves. This government largess was really a policy of enlightened self-interest, a precocious brand of "corn Christianism," luring the infidels to the civilization and Christianity that were synonymous terms in the European mind of that day.

In some outlying areas of the Chichimeca frontier, proveeduría continued for many years after the Peace, sometimes stimulated by
Chichimeca threats of resumption of hostility and isolated ranche­ría living. Proveeduría, as peacemaking and peacekeeping, became standard frontier policy for the remainder of the Spanish Empire period; it was often used with accompanying amnesties and protectoría to placate more distant nations such as the Apaches, Comanches, Seris, Pimas, and Sibubapas.

Closely linked with these protective and provisioning processes was the training of incoming Chichimecas in the basic arts of sedentary, civilized life. The most fundamental phase of this—training in agriculture—was entrusted to soldier-veterans of the Chichimeca War, men called labradores who were given government salaries to teach the neophytes. This labrador system suited certain other frontier realities: close personal relationship with the captain-protectors, valuable aid to the relatively few friars, whose hands were filled with the difficulties of teaching Christianity and who, in any case, did not see or appreciate husbandry as one of their primary roles; and a sensible and practical way of giving worthy employment to disbanded veterans. This labrador system was the genesis of a later frontier practice in Upper California where presidia soldiers assigned to mission protection also served as teachers of husbandry to primitive Indians.

The royal government’s insistence that the nearest friars attend gift-giving and ration-giving sessions of the Peace—a practice labeled intervención—was, in effect, an effort to stimulate a missionary enterprise hitherto unfruitful. The Chichemeca era thus established the mission as a successful frontier institution and a model for later times. In a practical and symbolic move, the viceregal government distributed reading primers in Christian doctrine “for the provisioning of the royal crops for Chichimecas”—a peculiar wording that might have been an accounting convenience (the primers were shipped with agricultural supplies). Or, perhaps more likely, this mixture of corn-planting tools with reading primers specifically aimed at Chichimeca children might have purposefully expressed the elemental interrelationships of the several parts of the peace process. The primers themselves were a worthy attempt to reach beyond the practicalities of mere subsistence.

One other enduring cornerstone of the Chichimeca Peace was royally sponsored settlement of nearly 1,000 Tlaxcalans (690 married adults, 187 children, and 55 unmarried or widowed adults—a total of 932), distributed among several strategic frontier sites. In return for extensive privileges (titles of nobility, tax exemptions, concessions pertaining to lands and stock, carrying Spanish arms and
riding horses), the Tlaxcalans were to establish homes and agricultural and pastoral enterprises near the new Chichimeca settlements. They would thus serve as exemplary practitioners of European customs and ways.

This Tlaxcalan trek and frontier colonization was not entirely original in concept, for similar viceregal sponsorship of advanced Indian cultures for defensive and tutelary settlement in the north had been planned and sometimes effected, on smaller scale, during the Chichimeca War. But the Tlaxcalan enterprise was the greatest and most successful of these efforts, and it was of major importance for subsequent frontier history. Descendants of these first Tlaxcalan pioneers multiplied and were utilized in similar fashion on more distant frontiers in Texas and New Mexico. In seventeenth- and eighteenth-century colonization plans, Tlaxcalans were sent as far as upper Texas, Oklahoma, and even to Florida. The practice was common enough that the word *Tlaxcalan* came to be virtually synonymous with Indian frontier colonist, whether of Indian stock or not.

The success of these Tlaxcalan frontier plantations in the 1590s led to the transplanting of other Indian nations. Thus, Tarascans went into Jalisco, Sinaloa, and Sonora; Opatas of Southern Sonora were sent to Arizona to teach the Pimas; and the Indians of Baja California were sent to Alta California. In short, just as the earliest conquistadores profited from the aid of Indian allies to triumph over other Indians, so did the Spanish crown establish an enduring frontier practice of taming hostile primitives by the use of Indian colonist-teachers.

On the vast New World stage, the half-century of Spanish-Mexican northward advance after 1546 set an enduring pattern for the successive frontiers that extended Castillian sovereignty until it stretched over about half of the North American continent. In these five or six decades, Spain’s long centuries of frontier experience, from the mountains and flatlands of Asturias-León and the Duero to the mountains and plains encasing Granada, were revived and renewed in the strangeness of the Mexican lands and peoples. Issuing from a former Aztec hegemony and a new-fledged Castillian sovereignty, these later Spanish frontiersmen, always in company with native allies and apprentices in this replay of *moros y cristianos*, carved out and then tamed this first of the continental borderlands. In doing so, Spanish Indian pioneers built homes, capital, roads, commerce, towns, governmental structure—all the basic ingredients and institutions of civilized living—and established a new kind of society that would be Mexican. And this first frontier people led the
way toward the continent’s heart, bequeathing to their descendants a compass whose northward-pointed needle never wavered.

Eventually, of course, there came an end to most of the institutions that defined this first frontier. This cannot be said, however, of the people created in that land and time: the descendant of the American-European-African settler that fought, civilized, and finally absorbed the aboriginal Chichimeca lives today on both sides of the boundary between Mexico and the United States. On either side of that line, when those of Mexican ancestry seek their roots and identities, North America’s first frontier will be their starting point.

Notes

1. For fuller information on this investigation, a major document and turning point in American frontier history, see Philip Wayne Powell, Mexico’s Miguel Caldera: The Taming of America’s First Frontier (1548–1597) (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1977).

2. The scarcity of scholarly attention to Mexico’s post-Cortesian half-century accounts for much of the general incognizance of this early Spanish American borderland. This neglect has made imperative my reliance upon a voluminous documentation, mostly unprinted, in the archives and libraries of Mexico and Spain. At the end of this essay, I have appended a small note on sources to show the scope of this archival investigation and to point out the principal published works bearing on this frontier theme.

3. A convenient and authoritative treatment in English of these sixteenth-century Spanish debates on “just” war is Lewis Hanke, The Spanish Struggle for Justice in the Conquest of America (Boston: Little, Brown, 1965).

4. C. M. Stafford Poole, “War by Fire and Blood—The Church and the Chichimecas, 1585,” The Americas 22, no. 2 (October 1965): 115–137.

5. Viceroy Velasco to the King, 5 June 1590, Archivo General de Indias (AGI), Sevilla, Audiencia de Mexico, 58–3–11.

6. See especially the work of Chevalier and the large amount of documentation on frontier land grants in Archivo General de la Nación (AGN), Mexico City, Mercedes and Tierras.


10. Hispanic archives, peninsular and overseas, are exceedingly rich in data-packed documents under such titles as “Probanza de Méritos” and “Información de Servicios.” These are individual biographies, attested by witnesses, drawn up and notarized for purposes of impressing the king and his Council of the Indies with the individual’s qualifications for an award of a government post, a pension, or a title (or a combination of these). Such records exist for most of the significant personalities of this frontier; e.g., the Ibarras, the Oñates, the Saldivars, Urdenola, Gabriel Ortiz de Fuenmayor (Caldera’s successor), etc. Equally fascinating are the many documents detailing the military adventures and commercial or governmental activities of lesser figures (e.g., colonists, town-founders, soldiers, wagoner merchants, and combinations of these), packed with the drama of a frontier society in its formation and its hardships, but also containing much material unknown to historians, geographers, anthropologists, ethnologists, and novelists. Two random samples are “The Services of Juan del Rio, a Merchant-soldier in the Far Outpost of Mazapil in the 1570s” (AGI, Audiencia de Guadalajara 47, document 18); and “The probanza of Simón de Albistur, Frontier Resident and Soldier of Many Adventures in the Chichimeca War, from 1572 to 1581, Now Asking the King to Reward Him with a Government Office” (AGI, Audiencia de Guadalajara 27).

11. No. 196, Nueva Galicia, Nueva España, Cespedes, Museo Nacional de Mexico (MNM), Mexico City, Sección de Manuscritos.

12. The frontier houses of missionary friars were then called conventos. I use the word mission because this term defines their purpose and is more familiar to the English language reader.


15. An exception proving the rule was some early Franciscan success at San Miguel el Grande (now Allende), undoubtedly due to the quick growth of this settlement as a transport center on the Mexico-Zacatecas road, and its location on the fringe of the Gran Chichimeca where some rancerias of aborigines had long lived next to more advanced cultures, the Otomi and the Tarascan.

16. “Conde de Monterrey Frontier Visita” (CMFV) forms legajo 851 of AGI, Contaduría. It is described at some length in Philip Wayne Powell, “Peacemaking on North America’s First Frontier,” *The Americas* 16,
no. 3 [January 1960]: 221–250; and more recently in Powell, Mexico’s Miguel Caldera, pp. 244–251, 302.

17. Fernán González de Eslava, Coloquios espirituales y sacramentales y canciones divinas [Mexico, 1610].


19. Licenciado Santiago del Riego to Viceroy Enríquez, 10 August 1576. AGI, Patronato 182, ramo 52. For a picture of the model of this presidio, see Powell, Mexico’s Miguel Caldera, p. 46.


21. CMFV, Cuaderno de diferentes papeles, pp. 138–139.

Sources

MANUSCRIPTS
Archivo General de la Nación [AGN], Mexico City. The several sections containing large quantities of frontier material are: General de Parte, Historia, Indios, Mercedes, Ordenanzas, Tierras, Reales Cédulas [Duplicados]. These contain information on frontier land grants (e.g., for ranching homesites, inns); all kinds of government regulations (e.g., private armament, road building, highway inspections); defensive Indian settlement; private and commercial shipments of goods (food, clothing, utensils); exploration, mining properties and technical matters.

Archivo Historico de Hacienda [AHH], Mexico City. Contains treasury records, such as enlistments and appointment contracts for frontier soldiers, bonds and contracts of paymasters and bursars for the Chichimeca War. There is much detail other than the strictly financial; thus, descriptions of frontier captains are sometimes included in commissions.

Museo Nacional de Mexico [MNM], Mexico City. The large Sección de Manuscritos includes transcripts from Spanish archives—inter alia, local and regional descriptions by royal officials.

Archivo General de Indias [AGI], Sevilla. The several sections containing quantities of frontier material are: Audiencia de Guadalajara, Audiencia de México, Contaduría, Indiferente General, Patronato Real. In these are official correspondence of all kinds: service records (probanzas de méritos), accounts of explorations, treasury records, official investigations, and some maps and plans.

Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley. Contains a section entitled Mexican Manuscripts and large quantities of transcripts and microfilm copies from archives in Spain and Mexico.

PRINTED DOCUMENTS

BOOKS
Dávila Garibi, José Ignacio. La sociedad de Zacatecas en los albores del régimen colonial: Actuación de los principales fundadores y primeros funcionarios públicos de la ciudad. Mexico: Antigua librería Robredo de J. Porrua e hijos, 1939.
Las Casas, Gonzalo de. Noticia de los Chichimecas y justicia de la guerra que se les ha hecho por los españoles. In Hermann Trimborn, Quellen zur Kulturgeschichte des präkolumbischen Amerika. Stuttgart: Streckert and Schröder, 1936.
Frederick Jackson Turner, in his seminal essay "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," defined the frontier as the outer edge of the wave of American westward expansion, lying at the hither edge of free land. In this frontier zone Turner saw the germs of European institutions developing in an American environment. It was "the line of most rapid and effective Americanization. . . . Moving westward, the frontier became more and more American," for, as he put it, "the wilderness masters the colonist." Thus the advance of the frontier, according to Turner, "meant a steady movement away from the influence of Europe, a steady growth of independence on American lines." He saw peculiar institutions developing along this advancing frontier that profoundly modified and influenced those of the earlier settled regions on the Atlantic seaboard. In this theory there is an element akin to the Whig interpretation of British history—the result becomes the cause.

Regardless of the degree of credence one grants to Turner's hypothesis, there was one frontier in North America to which it did not apply, namely, the frontier of New France that endured for two centuries. Turner himself vainly sought to make that frontier fit his model in his article "The Rise and Fall of New France." And A. L. Burt subsequently sought to demonstrate that the social values and institutions of New France were completely dominated by the frontier environment. But the arguments Burt presented in support of his a priori conclusions are, to say the least, unconvincing.

The difficulty is that the Canadian frontier, prior to the British conquest, was unique. Unlike the American frontier, it was not a line of settlement or a zone that developed its own original and enduring institutions. Rather, it was merely a series of lines stretching west, north, and south into the wilderness along the water routes, lines that had length but no breadth. On this frontier a specific way of life developed which had not a little effect on society in the settle-
ments of the St. Lawrence Valley. Yet the changes that occurred on it, and the way it developed over time, were governed not so much by events and conditions on the frontier itself as by events and decisions made in Europe. To a large degree this frontier, stretching thousands of miles into the heart of the North American continent, was the frontier not of Quebec and Montreal, but of La Rochelle, Bordeaux, and Versailles. For it was the policies and resultant decisions made in the latter place that dictated the course of major events on this remote frontier.

Down to 1663, the French crown had little influence on events in America. During those early years it was private entrepreneurs—fishermen, fur traders, and missionaries—who established and maintained the French presence, first in Acadia, than far inland in the St. Lawrence Valley. Agricultural settlements were eventually undertaken merely to protect the fishing, fur trade, and missionary bases, not, it should be noted, as the forerunners of an intensive colonization effort.

In this regard the French experience differed markedly from that of the Spanish and the English. In Acadia the French were never numerous enough to constitute a threat to the resident Indian peoples. When, in the 1530s and 1540s, they attempted to establish a base on the St. Lawrence near Quebec, they quickly aroused the enmity of the local Iroquoian tribes and were forced to withdraw. Some seventy years later when the French returned to the site, those tribes were no longer there. Likely they had been decimated by disease contracted from Europeans and forced to flee for security from their Algonkin enemies, joining either the Iroquois to the south (in what is today New York) or the Hurons to the west.

Therefore, when the French finally established themselves in what came to be called Canada, they had no need to dispute with the Indians for possession of the land, no need to purchase it. The land was vacant. In 1616, a quarter of a century before Montreal was established, the Algonkins and Hurons, far from opposing the French presence, pleaded with Champlain to establish a post on the island to facilitate trade and provide a secure base for the prosecution of their wars with the Iroquois confederacy.

The Algonkins and Hurons came to the French settlements periodically to trade their furs and to discuss concerted action against the Iroquois. But contact there dwindled once the French had established posts in Huronia. The Hurons regarded the trade in furs not solely as a commercial transaction but also, and perhaps chiefly, as an exchange of gifts to seal their military alliance. For the French the fur trade, the mainstay of their enterprise in America, demanded
that good relations be maintained with the Indian suppliers of furs. By the same token the Indians had to tolerate the French to obtain European goods and military aid. Thus from the outset on this frontier, trade and war were closely entwined.\(^7\)

When, in 1615, French missionaries arrived to begin their drive to convert all the Indian nations to Christianity, this need for good relations was strengthened. And three-quarters of a century later another motive appeared and became the dominant one: namely, Anglo-French imperial rivalry, the belief in both countries that whatever benefitted the other had to be opposed. The armed hostilities that occupied more than thirty of the ensuing seventy odd years required that the French maintain close economic and military alliances with the Indian nations to offset the great superiority in numbers enjoyed by the Anglo-Americans. Here, then, was the most distinctive feature of this peculiar Canadian frontier. Whereas the Spanish destroyed some nine-tenths of the Indian population and
then enslaved the survivors, and the English steadily drove the Indians off their lands until, after the conquest of New France, they were at last able to embark on a policy of genocide with impunity, the French from the outset were dependent on the Indians and dared do nothing that might offend them.

Second only to the role of the Indians in the development of this frontier was geography. In the thirteen English colonies, the rivers flowing from the Appalachians to the Atlantic were, with one exception, not navigable by oceangoing ships of the day for any great distance, the fall line being close to the coast. The exception was the Hudson River, but access beyond its headwaters to the Great Lakes was blocked by the powerful Five Nations’ confederacy. At Hudson Bay in the north the interior could be reached along the rivers flowing from the west only by canoe during the short frost-free season through country that was scarce in game. Food supplies had to be transported inland through a wide zone that came to be known as “the starving country.” Thus, after the Hudson’s Bay Company had established itself on the shores of the bay in 1670, it made only one attempt to penetrate inland before the conquest of New France, and that ended in disaster.

At the beginning of the seventeenth century, the French gained control of the St. Lawrence and established their main base at Quebec, nearly 1,000 miles from the ocean. From there they had easy access along the Ottawa and St. Lawrence rivers to the Great Lakes. The watershed between those lakes and the Mississippi was low and short, presenting no transport problem. Similarly, the portage from Lake Superior to the rivers flowing into Lake Winnipeg was easily traversed, and once at Lake Winnipeg the French could travel along the northern rivers to the Rocky Mountains, Hudson Bay, or even the Arctic Ocean had they so desired. At the beginning of the eighteenth century the French, for reasons of imperial policy, seized the region at the mouth of the Mississippi. This gave them control of the two main watercourses draining the southern half of the continent and with it, control of the whole interior from the western slopes of the Appalachians to the Rocky Mountains. New France could thus be aptly described as a river empire.

To make use of these river routes some form of water transport was needed and also food supplies en route. Here again the French were fortunate. The Indian’s birch-bark canoe was, until the nineteenth century, the only viable vessel. It was easily manufactured with nothing more than an axe, a knife, and an awl. Although light enough to be carried over a portage by one or two men, it could carry a load varying from 1,000 to 4,000 pounds depending on its size.
Happily for the French, the birch trees that provided the bark for these canoes grew in profusion in the areas they controlled but were scarce to the south and nonexistent around Hudson Bay. The French thus acquired control of the rivers of the interior and a monopoly on the craft needed to voyage along them.

As for food supplies, here again they were lucky. The St. Lawrence Valley, Great Lakes Basin, and the plains south of Lake Winnipeg lay on the northern edge of the corn belt. Dried, leached corn was highly nutritious and easily stored and transported. In addition, fish and game abounded. Food supplies presented no serious problems to the French during long voyages to the interior. It was, therefore, no accident that the French had reached the Rocky Mountains while the English were still struggling over the Appalachians.

Unlike the English, the French did not occupy these lands that they traversed. In their frail canoes they were more akin to merchant seamen voyaging across the Atlantic to obtain a cargo at some distant port. Their canoes left no more imprint on the country they traversed than did the wake of a sailing ship on the ocean. Unlike the Anglo American or the Spanish frontier, theirs was not a frontier of settlement. They did not destroy the forest or drive off the wildlife and the Indians as they advanced, creating farms, roads, and towns—in sum, changing the whole appearance and function of the land. In the St. Lawrence Valley there were farms, but they were unlike those anywhere else on the continent. The Canadian farms were laid out in long narrow strips running back from the great river, which was the colony’s main, and for many years, only highway. Travellers up the river from Quebec to Montreal noted that the whole colony came steadily into view like a long straggling village street: every few hundred yards a farmhouse, every few miles a parish church. At the rear of these farms lay the virgin forest, waiting for future generations of settlers.

In this one respect the Canadian frontier fitted Turner’s pattern. The abundance of free land had profound effects on Canadian society, making of it something markedly at variance with that of the parent society in France and somewhat akin to that of the English colonies. This free land permitted all who desired it to become landholders, as it removed the necessity to work permanently for wages.

Yet the comparison with the English colonies cannot be carried too far. One feature that was notably absent in New France was the village community. Attempts by royal officials to have the settlers concentrate their homes and farm buildings in village centers that would be more easily defended and supervised by the authorities met with failure. The settlers, from the outset, insisted on living on
their individual strips of land in a dispersed fashion, more vulnerable to attack but affording privacy, elbow room, and freedom from surveillance. Economic independence thus bred an independent attitude toward life and toward authority, something that newcomers from France and the royal officials constantly remarked upon.\textsuperscript{12}

It would, however, be a mistake to attribute this characteristic to the availability of free land alone. A major cause was indeed the Canadians' relative affluence, to which the land situation notably contributed. But another equally important factor was the absence of taxation in New France. Whereas French peasants paid out between one-third and one-half of their produce and earnings in feudal dues, taxes, and tithe,\textsuperscript{13} the Canadians paid less than 10 percent in seigneurial dues while their tithe was half that levied in northern France.\textsuperscript{14}

This edge of settlement was certainly a frontier of sorts, one that still exists today. But its only denizens were small bands of nomadic Indian hunters. It was not a frontier zone where two different peoples met, mingled, or clashed. On the northern horizon was the ragged line of the Laurentian Mountains stretching to the sub-Arctic tundra. To the south were the Appalachians with the St. Lawrence River flowing majestically through the alluvial plain. Down that river the fur traders' canoes brought something of the western frontier to the doorstep of most of the homes in the colony.

Inevitably, from the earliest days this river pulled the French westward. From Quebec the watercourse led to an outpost at Trois Rivieres, established to store the furs brought from the northern hinterland at the head of the St. Maurice River. Subsequently, a missionary and fur trade base was established among the Huron tribes on the shores of Georgian Bay. In 1642, this was followed by the establishment of a major missionary settlement at Montreal. It was at these two mission centers, Ste. Marie des Hurons and Montreal, that a curious form of frontier developed, a religious frontier of the intellect where first the Recollets and then the Jesuits struggled to convert the Indians to Christianity and to persuade them to adopt the European way of life.\textsuperscript{15}

In the charter of the Company of One Hundred Associates, founded by Cardinal Richelieu in 1627, the preamble affirmed that the main purpose of the company was to assist in the conversion of the Indian nations to Christianity. Article seventeen of the charter declared that the descendants of the French who settled permanently in the colony, and also those Indians who became practicing Christians, would be regarded as French subjects. As such they could take up residence in France whenever they wished and there
acquire, bequeath, and succeed to property and accept grants and legacies just as could any other of the king’s subjects, without the need to obtain naturalization papers. That no North American Indians ever sought to avail themselves of this privilege does not detract from the well-meaning intent of the French crown. When in 1640 a large part of the island of Montreal was granted to the Seminary of Saint Sulpice, the opening sentence of the patent stated, “Our greatest desire being to establish a strong colony in New France in order to instruct the wild peoples of those regions in the knowledge of God and to bring them to a civil way of life . . .” Montreal was thus the only city in the New World established solely to serve the Indian people.

The attempt was, however, a failure. The Jesuits eventually succeeded in grasping the basic tenets of the Hurons’ religious beliefs and came to accept that much that they had at first condemned as vicious, as the work of Satan, was, in fact, innocent and reconcilable with Christian teaching. Still, they insisted on striving to have the Indians reject much that was basic to their entire way of life. They strove continually to assimilate them into European civilization. The Hurons resented these well-meaning efforts and would have driven the Jesuits out of their country had it not been that the Company of One Hundred Associates made the continued presence of the missionaries a condition of trade: no missionaries, no more trade goods. On one point the Jesuits were adamant; only those who had been baptized and lived according to Christian precepts in this world could enjoy eternal life in the next. The Indians were appalled by the notion that any of them who became Christian would thus cut themselves off after death from their ancestors as well as from members of their families who remained true to their old beliefs. The struggle was thus extended beyond the final human frontier. When one member of a family accepted Christianity, the others were inclined to follow suit merely to keep the family unit intact after death. Eventually a majority in a few villages were converted, and converts from other villages joined them, while those who chose to remain pagan had to remove themselves. The Huron nation thus became divided into opposing factions.

When diseases of European origin swept through the Huron villages, wiping out half the population, the black-robed priests were held responsible, as indeed they likely—but inadvertently—were. With the people thus weakened and divided among themselves, they fell easy prey to the savage onslaughts of the better-armed Iroquois confederacy. The Huron nation was destroyed; only a few scattered remnants remained. The great experiment had failed. It had proven
impossible to assimilate the Indians. The only persons to be assimilated were some young French fur traders who, to the dismay of the Jesuits, adopted the Indian way of life.

The French learned a great deal from the Indians, and they could not have survived in the environment without that acquired knowledge. They adopted some items of Indian clothing and their canoes, snowshoes, and toboggans. They also accepted some of the Indians' values. Like the Indians, they became supremely stoical and revered personal bravery and hardihood above all. They showed a fierce independence of spirit and a marked disinclination to abide by prudent bourgeois or peasant values.¹⁹

Yet too much should not be made of this cultural adaptation, for the Canadians still remained distinctly European. The laws and institutions that governed their lives were those of France modified to suit local conditions. Their religion was purely that of Rome. Similarly, society in the settlements showed no influence of the Indians' permissive sexual mores. Although many of the French, when among the Indians, freely availed themselves of the opportunities presented by the accepted Indian view that a girl was the mistress of her own body before marriage and could sleep with any man who took her fancy, this practice had no perceivable influence on the mores of the Canadians at home.²⁰ There, premarital chastity was the norm, adultery was regarded as a crime, and every effort was made to conceal lapses from the accepted standards.

The system of government remained the paternal autocracy of France. Only at a parish level was there any trace of democracy, but this was the village democracy of the mother country. The much vaunted democracy of the American frontier was conspicuous by its absence.²¹ Also lacking was the frontier spirit of egalitarianism. Society in both the settlements and in the west was distinctly hierarchical, status-ordered, and dominated by the nobility who controlled the fur trade and who held 53 percent of the seigneuries, the senior posts in the administration.²²

The casual anarchy of the Indian villages did not have any discernible influence on society in the French settlements. The rule of French law was accepted in the colony and on the frontier, although the Indians could never be brought to submit to it. The word civilized had not yet come into use in either the French or English languages. The distinction that the French made was between an ordered society living under the rule of law, that is, policé, and a society without laws, or sauvage.²³ The French always referred to the Indians as les sauvages, but the word cannot be translated as "savages." As the French of the seventeenth and eighteenth cen-
turies used the term, it had no pejorative meaning. It merely meant wild or free, as opposed to domesticated, or subject to man-made coercive laws.

The French were acutely aware of the basic difference between their attitude toward communal life and that of the Indians. They noted the obvious and, to them, astonishing degree of personal freedom enjoyed by the Indians, who were their own masters, accountable for their actions to no one but themselves and the needs of their families, and for whom the concept of private property or the accumulation of surplus wealth had no meaning. An eighteenth-century Jesuit historian, Pierre-François-Xavier de Charlevoix, who had spent some years at Quebec and subsequently voyaged through the west to New Orleans, expressed the dilemma that the Indians' concept of freedom and polity posed for the French:

In one word these American Indians are perfectly convinced that man is born free, that no power on earth has the right to attack their liberty, and that nothing could compensate them for the lack of it. On this point it has not been easy to disabuse the Christians [Indians] and make them understand that as a result of the corruption of our nature, manifested by way of sin, unrestrained freedom to do bad, differs little from a sort of necessity to commit it, in view of the inclination that sweeps us towards it. The law that restrains us brings us back to our basic liberty while appearing to deprive us of it. 24

Charlevoix did, however, qualify this declaration by admitting that the Indians, with their simpler appetites and by internalized restraint, were able to cope with freedom much more easily than could Europeans. Judging from the attitudes and reactions of the Canadians, indeed the whole structure of their society, they agreed with Charlevoix on the need for social coercion.

After the destruction of the Huronia mission the evangelical drive of the French missionaries was greatly diminished; the age of the Jesuit martyrs was over. The clergy now devoted themselves mainly to serving the slowly increasing body of settlers in the St. Lawrence Valley. Mission posts were established throughout the Great Lakes Basin. But always alongside them were the ubiquitous cabins of the fur traders. It was the latter that proved to the dismay of the clerics to be the greater attraction for the Indians. 25

By the mid-seventeenth century the western Canadian frontier had assumed the character that it was to retain until the third decade of the nineteenth century. In 1663, when the French crown took over
the administration of New France from the moribund Company of One Hundred Associates, the secretary of state responsible for the colonies, Jean-Baptiste Colbert, sought to prevent French expansion into the west. He laid it down as crown policy that the limit of settlement was to be the western end of the island of Montreal. No concessions of land were to be granted or fur trading posts established beyond that point. The meager French population was to be concentrated along the St. Lawrence downstream from Montreal, there to devote itself to agriculture to make the colony self-sufficient in food stuffs and to engage in such industries as lumbering, shipbuilding, fishing, and the exchange of Canadian goods for West Indian tropical produce and French manufactured wares. Furs were not to be neglected, but the settlers were not to voyage to the west in search of them. Instead, the Indians were to bring their furs to Montreal to trade. In short, Colbert wanted New France to play the same mercantilist role in the French empire as the thirteen colonies played in that of England.

Despite his best efforts, including stringent laws that could invoke the death penalty, Colbert was not able to prevent the French settlers from voyaging westward. Every year a few hundred adventurers [the famous *coureurs de bois*) defied the edicts, leaving the colony to travel to the distant Indian villages to obtain the pick of the furs. These men were able to earn in one summer more than could be gained in five years of back-breaking labor, clearing a few acres of virgin forest to raise a subsistence crop.

In addition, the imbalance of the sexes was a powerful motive for men to abandon the land for a roving life in the west. To establish a viable farm, a wife was a necessity; children were the only source of labor, the only security for the future. Yet during these years the shortage of women in the colony meant that only one man in six could hope to find a wife. Not until the second decade of the eighteenth century were the sexes in balance. Moreover, the Indian girls were comely and their sexual mores very permissive. Thus, despite the royal edicts, French penetration of the west continued throughout the basin of the Great Lakes and beyond.

The fur traders, once they had left the confines of the settlements, did not cast off all the trammels of civilization. They still remained subject to the laws of the colony, the regulations enacted by the officials at Quebec and Montreal, and frequently even direct orders of the Minister of Marine. The long arm of the government at Versailles reached far out into the wilderness. The main instrument of control was the *congé*, or license. The *congé* system was introduced by Colbert in 1681 in an attempt to reduce the number of cou-
reurs de bois and to curb the drain on the supply of labor desperately needed to clear the land and bring it into production. In 1696, a temporary glut of beaver pelts that flooded the European market caused the minister to revoke the congés. They were reintroduced in 1716, revoked again in 1720, and reinstituted in 1726.

The original congé system was simple enough. The governor-general was authorized to issue twenty-five of the permits a year, each one allowing a canoe with three men to go to the west to trade. By order of the king they were supposed to be granted without charge to the poorer families and to charitable institutions such as hospitals. The recipients could then sell them to the fur traders, the usual price in the 1680s being one thousand livres, the equivalent of fifty pounds sterling. The intention was that they would serve as a form of poor relief. The person who actually made use of the congé had to register it with the authorities at Montreal before departing for the west and give the names of the men paddling the canoe. In this way, it was hoped, not more than seventy-five would be out of the colony at a time, and the authorities would know who was legally in the west.

In the eighteenth century, the canoes used in the trade became bigger, carrying loads of up to 4,000 pounds and requiring crews of five to twelve men. The number of canoes going west was limited not by an arbitrary edict but by the needs of the trade and by military policy. The governor-general issued as many congés as he deemed appropriate, selling them by auction to the highest bidder and using the proceeds for charitable purposes.

Another effective instrument of control over the voyageurs who paddled the canoes for wages was their engagement, or contract. In the eighteenth century hundreds of these engagements were drawn up by the notaries of Montreal every year. They stated the name of the voyageur, the parish where he resided, and the name of the fur trader hiring him. Frequently the post to which he was to go was also cited. But unfortunately for the historian some notaries merely wrote in pays d’en haut, which meant virtually anywhere in the west, and when he was to return—that same summer or a year or two hence.

The voyageur’s duties and responsibilities were carefully spelled out in the engagement, along with the wages and fringe benefits that he was to receive. Every such contract declared that the voyageur could not quit his master’s service before its completion and that he had to obey all honest and legal orders. The penalty for noncompliance was forfeiture of the stipulated wages, which were not to be paid until the voyageur returned to Montreal.
The voyageurs were thus obliged to behave in as seemly a manner in the west as in the central colony. The military commandant at the western posts also saw to it that the voyageurs did not get out of hand. It was not just the economically disadvantaged, the illiterate, and the semicivilized who lived on this frontier. There, too, the colonial nobility maintained a dominant role.34

Occasionally a troublemaker was sent back to Montreal under armed escort to be dealt with by the civil authorities. Even in civil matters men who went to the west and failed to live up to their contractual obligations could be brought to account by a complaint to a post commandant who would see that the offender was sent back to Montreal with the autumn convoy.35 In addition, there were chaplains at the main posts who could exert considerable pressure by denying absolution to any man who flouted the moral laws of the church. This frontier was anything but lawless; it was not a zone where the Canadians were free of the normal restraints of their society.36

Trading posts were soon established at the eastern end of Lake Ontario, at Niagara, on the Illinois River, at Michilimackinac, on both sides of Lake Superior, and on the shores of Hudson Bay and James Bay. When, in 1689, William of Orange seized the throne of England and brought that kingdom into the coalition of powers struggling to curb Louis XIV's aggressive foreign policy, New France was assaulted by the English colonies and their Iroquois allies. The Canadians were able to repel these assaults and, by enlisting the aid of their Indian fur trading partners, to carry the war to the enemy. The war also provided the means to expand the volume of the fur trade. New posts with military garrisons were established throughout the west at the crown's expense, ostensibly to provide arms and supplies to the Indian allies, but in reality to garner furs.37

This development was to have a profound effect on Canadian society. The officers appointed to command these western posts gained control of the fur trade.38 At the same time the officer corps of these colonial regulars, the Troupes de la Marine, came increasingly to be drawn from the ranks of the Canadian seigneurs until eventually they formed a military caste.39 Moreover, the Canadian labor force in the trade, the voyageurs who transported the trade goods to the Indians, lived in their villages for months on end, accompanied their war parties, and brought the furs back to Montreal, thereby gaining the training needed for forest warfare. Out of necessity, they became the finest guerrilla fighters in America. The fur trade thus was to the Canadian military establishment what the Atlantic fish-
eries were to the naval powers of Europe, a vital training ground and manpower reserve to be drawn on in time of war. War and the fur trade were inextricably joined.

The short-term economic consequences of this expansion of the fur trade under the guise of military operations were, however, calamitous. Beaver fur was the mainstay of the trade, being used in the manufacture of felt hats. The amount of this fur being exported from Canada to France came to exceed the market requirements some five times over. The company that had bought the monopoly privilege of marketing beaver for 500,000 livres a year could not be expected to renew its lease under those conditions. But neither could the crown afford to lose its only source of revenue in the colony.

In 1696, the Minister of Marine, Louis Phélypeaux de Pontchartrain, felt obliged to take drastic action. He ordered the suspension of all trade in beaver pelts and the abandonment of all but one post in the west; Fort St. Louis de Illinois was to be retained for purely military purposes. The colonial officials and the Canadian fur trading community were aghast when the order was received. The governor-general and the intendant at Quebec wrote at great length pleading for a reversal of the edict. They declared that to withdraw from the west in this fashion while the colony was engaged in a bitter war with the English and their Iroquois allies might prove fatal. Would it not be an open invitation to the enemy to occupy the abandoned posts? A desperate and extremely expensive military campaign would then have to be mounted to oust them; otherwise, all the western Indian nations would be drawn into the English camp, and the fate of New France would be doomed.40

Pontchartrain was forced to cancel his edict. It was clear that France was irrevocably committed to the maintenance of its tenuous hold on the interior of the continent, even though the economic benefits to be derived from the vast region were, at the time, negligible. The commercial frontier of fur trade posts linked by the water routes had thus become primarily a military and political frontier that had to be maintained regardless of cost. Three years later, in 1700, on the eve of renewed Anglo French hostilities, Louis XIV incorporated this western military frontier as a basic feature of French imperial policy. Settlements were to be established at Detroit ("the narrows") and at the mouth of the Mississippi, forts were to be established down the length of that river, and all the Indian nations from the Great Lakes to the Gulf of Mexico were to be secured in an alliance to bar the English colonials from the territory west of the Alleghenies. They were to be kept hemmed in between the Atlantic and the eastern slope of the mountains.41 Missionaries, now agents of French imperi-
alism, were dispatched to the Mississippi Valley to assist the military and the fur traders in holding all the Indian nations to the French cause. Fur traders had to supply the missionaries with the goods they needed, and if this could not be done at a profit, then it had to be done with the aid of crown subsidies. Religion and commerce both had to serve the one end, that of the new French imperial policy. The whole fabric and purpose of the French presence on this peculiar frontier in the west had undergone a radical change. From this point on, the Canadian frontier was merely the western limit of the new French empire. The Indian nations were to be treated as French allies and clients to contain the English in just the same way as Poland and certain of the German states were used to contain the Hapsburg empire in central Europe.

There were, however, two sides to this frontier. There were two peoples involved. To this point it has been viewed only from one side, that of the French. The question that still has to be asked is how this frontier zone where two cultures met, Indian and French, appeared to the Indians. What hypotheses would an Indian Turner or Webb have conceived to explain what was transpiring and the consequences it had for the Indian peoples?

To the Indians of the north, unlike those facing the English colonists to the south, the French would not have appeared as a sinister force that seriously threatened their traditional way of life or their control of their ancestral lands. In 1754, the Mission Iroquois, who a century before had been converted to Christianity by the Jesuits and had removed to New France, put the issue very succinctly:

Brethren, are you ignorant of the difference between our Father and the English? Go see the forts our Father has erected, and you will see that the land beneath his walls is still hunting ground, having fixed himself in those places we frequent, only to supply our wants; whilst the English, on the contrary, no sooner get possession of a country than the game is forced to leave it; the trees fall down before them, the earth becomes bare, and we find among them hardly wherewithal to shelter us when the night falls.

To the Indian nations on the borderlands of New England, the French were a powerful ally, providing them with the means to resist the steady encroachment of English settlement on their lands. From the French point of view, the Abenakis, Micmacs, and Malecites served as buffer to keep the English well back from the St. Lawrence River, which the French had long claimed to be the true frontier be-
between the lands of the English and French crowns. In 1704, Governor-General Vaudreuil persuaded a large band of Abenakis to remove from Acadia to lands ceded to them on the St. Francois River south of Quebec and at Bécancour near Trois Rivières to protect the southern approaches to the seigneurial settlements.

In the west the French claimed sovereignty over the entire continent from the Alleghenies to the Pacific, a claim that the English refused to recognize. In reality, the French claim was illusionary, advanced to justify their exclusion of the English. In that time and place it had no meaning for the simple reason that the Indians were still sovereign in all the lands they occupied. The Indians merely tolerated the French at specific points to provide them with the European goods they desired. The maps drawn by cartographers of North America depicting a vast area under French control and, after 1713, a similarly vast area spreading out from Hudson Bay under British sovereignty are, to say the least, mythical. The British never controlled more than a few isolated points on the uninhabited shores of Hudson Bay. The French, with the exception of small settlements at Detroit and in the Illinois country on lands not occupied by Indians, never controlled anything in the west beyond the range of their muskets and small cannon at their dispersed forts. Down to the conquest of New France the Indian nations dominated the west. It was de facto their country regardless of the extravagant claims made at Versailles and Westminster. The French claims to territorial sovereignty beyond the confines of their actual settlements were, in fact, claims against the English. They were an attempt to forestall the English rather than an actual usurpation of the lands which the Indians occupied. The English claims to lands they had never even seen were, at the time, no more valid than the English kings' claim to the throne of France, a claim which was not relinquished until 1802, when it was omitted from the preamble to the Treaty of Amiens.

When the French wished to establish a post they had first to obtain the consent of the Indians in the region. They could maintain these posts only by providing the Indians with the goods and services they required at prices they were willing to pay. Were either the price or the quality to prove unsatisfactory, the Indians had the option, which they exercised frequently enough to keep it viable, of going to the English traders of New York, Pennsylvania, or Hudson Bay. The French were much more dependent on the Indians than the latter were on the French, who, few in numbers, had to rely on the Indians to bar English westward expansion. For each of the French post commanders, his main responsibility, carefully spelled out in his official instructions, was to keep the Indians in his district from
entering into any negotiations with the English. The military officer also had to strive to keep the various nations at peace with each other. This last was no easy task since many of these tribes, from time immemorial, had been in a permanent state of war with each other. To them war had always been a form of blood sport which allowed their young braves to demonstrate valor and prove their manhood; casualties had usually been light. But with the appearance of European fur traders an economic motive had been added as tribes fought to preserve a privileged position as middlemen, to deny firearms to their foes, or to gain access themselves to supplies of those new and deadly weapons. At mid-century one of the more experienced western post commanders, Jacques Le Gardeur de St. Pierre, reported from Lac de la Pluie that at a meeting he had convened of the Sakis, Puants, and Fox he had had scant success in his attempts to have them cease warring with the Sioux. He reported that they were extremely recalcitrant, insubordinate, greedy for gifts, and never satisfied with what they were given.

The French, clearly, were not masters of the situation. Like all the commandants of the western posts, St. Pierre had orders emanating from Versailles to find an overland route to the Pacific Ocean. In his journal of 1750, he described in detail the difficulties he had encountered among the warring tribes, now well supplied with horses, as he and his men pushed westward along the Saskatchewan River. To indicate what he had to face he cited one incident that had occurred at his main base, Fort La Reine, on the Assiniboine River. Two hundred armed Assiniboine warriors invaded the fort without warning and made it plain that they intended to kill St. Pierre and his five men and then pillage the fort’s supplies. In desperation St. Pierre dashed into the powder magazine, knocked the lid off a keg of gunpowder, seized a brand from a fire, and strode into their midst. Holding the brand over the open keg he told the warriors that their intentions were obvious, but at least he would have the satisfaction of taking them with him. At that they flew for the gate and almost knocked it off its hinges in their haste to get away.

St. Pierre’s lieutenant, the Chevalier de Niverville, did eventually succeed in establishing a post, Fort La Jonquière, in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains. But the route through the lands of the warring Cree, Sioux, and Blackfoot and the attendant problem of supplies made it impossible to proceed further or even to sustain the fort. This spot marked the final extent of French westward expansion.

When the French sought to subdue a recalcitrant tribe by force, even though they were able on occasion to enlist the aid of tribes
hostile to the one under attack, this aid was always at best, half-hearted. In 1737, after an indecisive war with the Fo... nation, Governor-General Beaupré reported to the Minister of Marine that the Indian nations had their policies just as the French had theirs. They were not willing to see one of their nations destroyed, even a hostile one, fearing that they would be next. "The Indians in general," Beaupré wrote, "greatly fear us but they love us not at all and the attitudes they display to us are never sincere."51 In short, the Indians regarded the French as another nation akin to themselves—more powerful in many ways, hence tolerated—but made to serve Indian aims whenever possible.

That the west was the land of the Indians was made plain by the mundane fact that the fur traders were always obliged to travel in convoy. One or two canoes travelling alone were all too likely to be ambushed at a portage, the voyageurs killed, and their trade goods or furs pillaged. Governors-general frequently complained of the heavy loss of life resulting from voyageurs who, having grown careless or impatient, set off in small groups and were never heard of again.52 A dispute in an Indian village was all too frequently settled by a swift blow from a tomahawk. When the French authorities discovered the identities of those responsible for such acts and demanded retribution, they could expect to receive it only if the perpetrators' fellow tribesmen agreed that it should be made. Every voyageur travelling to the Indian country was required by law to take a musket with him for self-defense and return with it on pain of a three-hundred-livre fine—the equivalent of about two years' earnings. Many Canadians were killed when the tribe they happened to be with was attacked by an enemy tribe. Here, too, the French could do nothing. On occasion they were even taunted by the Indians for their failure to exact vengeance.53

Although the French sought by every means to keep the tribes in the west at peace with each other, it was, ironically, only the constant state of war among them that permitted the French to retain the upper hand.54 At least twice, in 1744 and 1747, the western tribes became so disgruntled with the French—likely owing to the scarcity and high prices of trade goods caused by the English wartime blockade of the Atlantic shipping lanes and spurred on by the English authorities in New York—that several nations joined forces to drive the French out of the west. While the 1744 uprising proved abortive, that of 1747 caused heavy casualties among the Canadians and required a determined military effort to suppress.55 Had the English in New York had the wit to provide adequate support to the Indians, the French might well have lost complete control of the situation.
Despite such contretemps, the French for over half a century enjoyed success in their policy of containing the westward drive of the English colonies. To a considerable degree this was due to the ineptitude and the racist attitude of the English colonials in their dealings with the Indians. From the very beginning of English settlement in Virginia and New England, the Indians were regarded as little better than savage beasts who had to be driven out or destroyed to make way for godly English settlers. In the eighteenth century, a main factor that kept the Indians in the French alliance was the pernicious trading habits of the English fur traders. In 1716, the Indian commissioners at Albany received a deputation from the Oneidas, who complained of the dearness of goods. The Oneidas went on to state that many of the “far Indians” would come to Albany to trade but for the fact “that many of them have made the experiment, they found themselves so Scandalously imposed on and Cheated by the Traders that it discouraged them from returning.”

In contrast to this way of dealing, the French—for political more than economic reasons—went to great lengths to gain and hold the allegiance of the Indian nations. Every year over 20,000 livres were budgeted for presents to be distributed to the various tribes. In some years, as in 1741, the sum could rise to over 65,000 livres. In time of war the amounts spent to subsidize the Indian allies became astronomical. The Indians, it might be noted, regarded these gifts not as presents but as tribute. Silver and enamelled medallions were distributed to chiefs who had demonstrated their support of the French cause. When they went to Montreal to confer with the governor-general they were wined and dined as would have been the ambassadors of European powers. Some, to their great delight, had their portraits painted. Some were taken as honored guests on trips to Versailles to impress them with the might and splendor of their French allies. When political pressure demanded it, the prices the French traders offered for furs were raised by decree, and the post commanders were ordered to see to it that the traders complied.

It was, therefore, no accident that the French garnered the lion’s share of the fur trade. Small wonder then that the American Gazetteer, published in London in 1762, in the entry on Montreal commented, “The French have found some secret of conciliating the affections of the savages, which our traders seem stranger to, or at least take no care to put it in practice.” Several of the French post commanders in the west might well have shaken their heads wryly had they read that observation. Yet the fact remains that when England and France went to war in America, the great majority of the Indian nations supported the French cause.
From 1700 on, French policy was to use Canada, Cape Breton, and Louisiana as pieces on the political and military chessboard to keep England and her colonies in check. The expansion of the English colonies had to be curbed. The population of the French colonies compared to that of the English was too meager to perform this task alone. Military assistance from the Indian nations was therefore vital. Distance, too, was vital for logistical reasons. In time of war, space could be traded for time. This required that the French first control that space, and it could be done only with the concurrence of the peoples who occupied and dominated it, the Indians.

In 1754, hostilities began in the Ohio Valley in a war that was to last until 1763. Named the Seven Years War by European historians and the French and Indian War by Americans, it was called the War of the Conquest by Canadians. In North America throughout this war the policy of the French government was simple. Use New France as a cat's paw; keep the English on the defensive and oblige them to dispatch as large a proportion of their navy and army as possible to America; keep them occupied there, hence unable to operate in Europe or against such vital parts of the French commercial empire as the West Indies, India, or the African slave coast. In this aim they succeeded admirably; but they still lost the war.

In addition to raising some 22,000 colonial troops and militia, Britain had to send to America 23,000 regular troops from its 140,000-man army and engage a quarter of the Royal Navy to defend its colonies. The French opposed this force with 12 of their 395 army infantry battalions (approximately 6,000 officers and men), plus 2,000 colonial regulars, the Canadian militia, and the Indian allies. The cost of the war was equally revealing. Whereas England spent 80,000,000 pounds on the conquest of Canada, the total of the budgets for French Canada, for both civil and military purposes during the war years 1755–1760 was less than five million pounds sterling. Even at that, England succeeded in conquering Canada only as a result of the stupidity of the French commander, the Marquis de Montcalm, and the incompetence of the Ministry of Marine.

To a large degree, the astonishing success that the French military enjoyed in this war was due to the strategy employed by the governor-general and commander-in-chief in New France, Pierre de Regaud de Vaudreuil-Cavagnial. Canadian born, he had in his youth voyaged through the west as a junior officer in the colonial regulars and subsequently rose to be governor of Louisiana. He understood the frontier in all its aspects, and he made excellent use of all that it had to offer. Vaudreuil's strategy was to make use of the river routes that the French controlled and of his Indian allies. War parties of In-
dians, accompanied by Canadian militia and led by cadets of the regulars, ravaged the American frontier forts and settlements, tying down considerable forces for their defense.

With the British and American forces dispersed around the periphery of New France, from Halifax to Albany to the Ohio, Vaudreuil was able to utilize his main force to strike swiftly before the enemy could muster superior numbers. In 1756, Oswego, the American fort and supply base on Lake Ontario, was taken and destroyed, giving the French control of the Great Lakes. The following year, while the main British force was being mustered at Halifax for an attack on Louisbourg, Vaudreuil launched an attack on Fort William Henry on Lake George, destroyed it, and would have gone on to destroy Fort Edward on the Hudson but for the pusillanimity of his field commander, Montcalm. Yet he at least had gained control of Lake Champlain, thereby blocking that invasion route to Canada. It was then Albany, not Montreal, that was threatened.

In all of these operations the Canadian militia and the Indian auxiliaries played a prominent role. The Canadians, after their years of experience in the wilderness with the fur brigades, could travel and fight as well or better than the Indians. They moved swiftly and silently along the rivers and through the forest, unencumbered by baggage and living off the land. They would strike without warning, then fade back into the wilderness with their prisoners, scalps, and booty before the Anglo American forces could react effectively. Despite the best efforts of the Canadians to curb the cruelty of the Indians and to protect their prisoners, many of them were killed out of hand, some savagely tortured. When, after a successful raid, an Indian war party ran out of food, it was not unusual for a prisoner to go into the cooking pot. Making one's food supply walk had definite military advantages. Such actions served as a form of psychological warfare. The Anglo American forces, and the British regulars who had never encountered anything like it, were horrified and terrified. One sudden war whoop near a frontier fort or a supply convoy in the forest caused immediate panic.

Despite the manifest success of Vaudreuil's extended frontier strategy and his guerrilla tactics, he was not without his critics. Montcalm, the obtuse, defeatist commander of the French army battalions, vociferously opposed both. He advocated the abandonment of the distant outposts and the recall of all the colony's forces to the central colony in order to concentrate them for the invasion that was sure to come. Vaudreuil refused, declaring that with a virtual handful of men on the frontier he had tied down vastly superior enemy forces. He was well aware, given the size of the reinforcements sent
from Britain, that eventually the forts in the west would have to be abandoned. But he intended to delay that event as long as possible, disputing the ground as he withdrew his forces. The further he kept the enemy from the central colony, from Montreal and Quebec, the better. Once the enemy arrived there in force, the fate of the French empire in America could all too easily be settled in one brief battle—as, in fact, proved to be the case. He relied on the fact that the war could not last forever. He therefore persisted in his Fabian strategy of trading space for time, hoping that peace would come in Europe before he had exhausted both.

Without the support of the Indian allies this strategy would have been out of the question. Their reasons for participating in the war so actively on the side of the French can only be guessed at. Some tribes from the far northwest appear to have done so because they received ample supplies of goods before taking part in a campaign and were richly rewarded for the scalps and prisoners they brought in. For them, it was more rewarding to hunt British soldiers and settlers than beaver. Another motive for supporting the French was that, down to 1758, they were the winning side. Those nations whose lands bordered on the advancing frontiers of Virginia and Pennsylvania clearly were taking advantage of the Anglo French war to halt that advance. They were not so much allies of the French as the French were their allies, aiding them in their struggle for survival.

In seeking to view this epic contest on the western frontier of European civilization from the viewpoint of the Indians waging war on their own eastern or southern frontiers, two things stand out. First, none of them appear to have envisaged the conquest of New France and the removal of French power from the continent. Second, they engaged in the war as independent, sovereign powers. They fought alongside the French and heeded their directives only when it suited them. As Montcalm's aide-de-camp, Louis-Antoine de Bougainville, remarked, "The Indians treat us imperiously, they lay down laws to us which they do not abide by themselves." That these Indian allies consulted no interests but their own was made plain in 1758, when the Delawares, Shawnees, and Mingoes made their peace with the Anglo Americans at Easton, Pennsylvania, in return for hollow assurances that lands taken from them would be returned. This event marked the turning of the tide of war against the French; they were forced to abandon the Ohio Valley to the British.

In 1759, Montcalm threw away a glorious opportunity to destroy completely Wolfe's army at Quebec, and the city fell to the
British. The following year, owing to the ineptitude of the French Ministry of Marine that failed to send reinforcements and supplies in time to its army besieging Quebec, the French forces were obliged to lay down their arms and surrender the colony. For long-range political reasons the French government then decided it would be best were Britain to retain Canada at the end of the war. The colony and the Canadians were abandoned to their conquerors. Louisiana, again for political reasons, was ceded to Spain.

The capitulation of Montreal, drafted by Vaudreuil, contained, to his honor, this clause: "The Savages or Indian Allies of his most Christian Majesty, shall be maintained in the lands they inhabit; if they choose to remain there; they shall not be molested on any pretense whatsoever, for having carried arms, and served his most Christian Majesty. . . ." The article was acceded to by the British commander-in-chief, Jeffrey Amherst, and the subsequent Proclamation of 1763 sought to enforce it.

Yet, with the removal of French power in North America, the Indians were doomed. They could no longer play the French off against the English and so retain their independence. When, outraged by the treatment they received from Anglo American traders who took over the old French posts, they attempted to drive them and the British military out of their country, they were quickly crushed. They had only one source of arms and supplies, the traders they sought to drive out of their lands. Once their limited stock of arms and ammunition was exhausted they had to submit.

In the Treaty of Paris of 1763, by articles four and seven, France ceded "Canada and all its dependencies," including all the lands east and north of the Mississippi with the exception of the city of New Orleans. No mention was made of the Indian nations whose lands these were, nor, conveniently, was the validity of French claims to sovereignty over those lands ever questioned. The Proclamation of 1763 sought to protect the Indian nations temporarily from the rapacity of land speculators and settlers. But it was clear that they would be allowed to occupy their lands and continue their old way of life only as long as the British government saw fit.

In the north the fur trade frontier quickly revived with the peace and was pushed to its extreme limits, the Pacific and Arctic oceans. Commercial rivalry between savagely competing fur trade companies—bringing in its train the unbridled sale of liquor to the Indians on whom it reacted like a toxic poison, followed by epidemics of small pox—decimated the northern and western tribes. They were thus unable to offer any resistance to the flood of settlers onto their ancestral lands. The sad, demoralized remnants of these once proud
peoples were then herded onto reservations by the Canadian authorities with the expectation that the last of them would soon die off and cease to be a problem.

The old, unique frontier of New France that had been a line having length but no breadth was now replaced by the broad Turnerian frontier line of settlement. In Canada its coming had, inadvertently, been delayed by the French for two and one-half centuries.

Notes


4. On this point, Richard Pares commented, "The most important thing in the history of an empire is the history of its mother country. Colonial history is made at home." Quoted in Dale Miquelon, Dugard of Rouen (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1978), p. x. Walter Prescott Webb would not have been in agreement. In his The Great Frontier (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1952) he states, "The overriding influence of the frontier on the Metropolis, on Western civilization, is of such importance as to require special emphasis" (p. 13). He was able to make such assertions because he never really defined what he meant by the term frontier. Usually he appears to mean the entire continent. This is clearly what is implied by his statement "It was inherently a vast body of wealth without proprietors" (ibid.).


7. On French relations with the Hurons, see ibid.


17. Ibid., pp. 20-26.


21. Assemblies were occasionally called by the civil authorities to discuss specific issues, and edicts were subsequently promulgated by the royal officials to deal with them. See Allana G. Reid, "Representative Assemblies in New France," *Canadian Historical Review* 23 [March 1946]: 19-26. There was, in fact, far more actual democracy in both old and New France than Webb imagined. One reason is that he confused democracy with egalitarianism and liberty; see *The Great Frontier*, pp. 30-48.


26. AN C11A, vol. 36, f. 44, Mémoire Instructif des Intentions de Sa Ma-
jésté Pour Le Gouverneur et l’Intendant de Canada, 1716; W. J. Eccles, Frontenac the Courtier Governor (Toronto: McClellan and Stewart, 1959), pp. 77–78.

27. Eccles, Frontenac, pp. 75–98.


31. Ibid., pp. 90–91.

32. For an explanation of the problems attendant on the congé system and the leasing of the western posts, see AN C11A, vol. 91, ff. 231–234, La Galissonière au Ministre, Que. 23 oct. 1748. A photograph of a congé issued to the Sieur de la Vérendrye appears in RAPQ 1922–1923, facing p. 228.

33. The bulk of these engagements are conserved at the Archives du Québec à Montréal.

34. Here again conditions on the Canadian frontier bear no resemblance to those that Webb described as bound to prevail on the North American frontier; see The Great Frontier, pp. 30–45.


45. RAPO 1938–1939, p. 25, Vaudreuil au Ministre, Mtl. 3 avril 1704. This removal of the Abenakis occasioned a bitter protest from Marguerite Hertel, widow of the seigneur of St. Francois, a part of whose seigneury was appropriated for these Indians. Her protest was rejected by the crown. This case appears to be the only one in which lands were taken from European titleholders and given to Indians. See Public Archives of Canada, Beauharnois Papers (M. G. 18, G6), Marguerite Hertel, veuve Crevier à M. de Beauharnois intendant, à St. François 23 jan. 1703; Nouvelle-France. Documents historiques, vol. 1, pp. 187–188, Le Conseil de Marine, 19 jan. 1722.

46. The map of the western part of New France by M. Bellin, Ingénieur du Roy et de la Marine, published in 1755, indicates various areas as the country of (“pays des . . .”) the different nations. The regions north of Lake Huron and Lake Superior are marked, “Toute cette coste n’est pas connue. On ne connoit point le cours de toutes ces Rivieres.” Specific rivers are marked “Riviere Inconnue à tous les geographes.”

47. But see Webb, The Great Frontier, p. 3, where the Indians are dismissed as being of no consequence in the history of the frontier. Their lands are treated as vacant and the very existence of the Indians is barely acknowledged. He wrote, “I am ignoring the scattered Indian population who did present some resistance but were not a major problem except for the few people who were in contact with them on the farthest fringes of settlement.”


50. Ibid.

51. AN C11A, vol. 65, f. 143, Beauharnois au Ministre, Qué. 17 oct. 1736.


54. AN C11A, vol. 29, f. 44, D’Aigremont au Ministre, Qué. 14 nov. 1708.


59. For the impression such treatment made on one Onondaga chieftain, see the entry for Teganissorens in *The Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 1 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969), pp. 619–623.


63. RAPQ, Journal de M. Bougainville, p. 227.


68. Francis Parkman, *History of the Conspiracy of Pontiac* (Boston: C. C. Little and J. Brown, 1851); Howard H. Peckham, *Pontiac and the Indian Uprising* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1947). These dated works are both highly unsatisfactory treatments of this important episode. A critical examination, viewing it from both sides of the hill and not just from that of the Anglo Americans, is long overdue.


The Brazilian frontier known as the Paulista West is an area of some 76,000 square miles in the western interior of the state of São Paulo. This region long remained a frontier in the sense that an internal demarcation between white and aboriginal settlement was maintained for more than three centuries. The first whites appeared in the 1550s; the last native American tribal lands were appropriated only after 1900.

For centuries the Paulista West was a nearly static frontier. The area contained a very sparse population until the beginning of sugar and coffee planting in the nineteenth century. But from the 1870s onward, when Brazil's coffee began to find an increasing overseas market, the surging influx of native whites and then of European immigrants erased in a few years the entire primeval landscape, replacing it with coffee groves, subsistence crops, and pastures. This essay will treat the frontier of the Paulista West mostly from an ecological point of view. Other main themes—institutional transformation, the role of government, and the treatment of native populations along the frontier—will be considered in their relation to this theme of ecological degradation resultant from the settlement of this area.¹

The Natural Environment

The importance of the subject is evident, even though it is difficult to study this relationship retrospectively. The principal problem is that almost all contemporaneous sources, mostly the written reports of whites, neglected to comment on ecological phenomena. For the most part, white contemporaries were thoroughly biased, often perversely so, since they viewed human activities in the natural environment as beneficial, even divinely ordained.

The environment encountered by the first Europeans was not a
hostile one, though it must have appeared extremely strange to them. The coast of São Paulo, hemmed in by a crystalline escarpment 2,700 feet high, was bordered with tropical rain forest; patches of it are still in place, relatively untouched. Once that barrier was crossed, the whites entered a new environment. The altitude moderates the climate of the Paulista West; temperatures average 71°F. in January and 43–50°F. in July, the coldest winter month. Temperatures below 32°F. are virtually never experienced in the extreme northwest of the state and only rarely in the rest of the Paulista West. Rainfall, often torrential along the coastal range, averages fifty inches annually in most of the region, rising to sixty inches along the eastern border with the state of Minas Gerais. Rainfall becomes more seasonal from south to north. In the south there is a barely perceptible seasonality, while in the north it extends up to four months during the winter. Seasonality is not as extreme as yearly variation, which surpasses 25 percent in some parts of the interior.2

The Paulista West is part of the immense Paraná River watershed which joins the Paraguay River and finally empties into the Rio de la Plata. In the state of São Paulo this watershed extends all the way to the coastal range. The Paulista West can therefore be considered a vast inclined plane, drained by parallel tributaries that flow to the northwest. The underlying geological structure is basalt and gneiss. Along the extent of the watershed rises a basaltic outcropping, dividing the West into two areas, the Western Plateau and the Peripheral Depression. Both have been subject to a series of complex sedimentary processes since the Mesozoic era. The soils of the West are derived largely from basalt and sandstone, which have weathered from age-old chemical processes. The basaltic soils are rich in iron, which accounts for their dark reddish-brown color, and are also heavily laced with calcium, manganese, and aluminum. The humus of the forest cover maintains the porosity of these soils despite their high clay content. Their great depth makes them extremely water-retentive. The sandstone-derived soils, interspersed among the basaltic, vary in calcium content; those poorer in calcium are the more easily eroded. Thus the drainage system has left in place at the higher elevations soils that are more fertile because they are less acid.3

The native vegetation of the Paulista West has been divided into three types: tropical semideciduous forest; campos (open fields; that is, unused grasslands or prairie); and campos cerrados ("closed" fields or pasture in contrast to "open range"), more loosely called cerrados. The cerrado has the physical appearance of being intermediate between the other two. Gradations are locally recognized
between cerrado and campo, called campo sujo ("dirty field"), and between cerrado and forest, called cerradão.

The forests of São Paulo are now greatly reduced and considerably degraded from their original state. The forests of the Paulista West were largely tropical and semideciduous, mingling with non-deciduous arboreal species. The periodicity of foliage marked the dry and wet seasons. The trees of the forest formed an upper canopy nearly one hundred feet high. Under them could be found a second arboreal and at least two subarboreal levels with sufficient access to sunlight to include heliotropes. Those areas enjoying more rainfall were bountifully endowed with epiphytes and lianas. In the southern part of the Paulista West, in the state of Paraná, at the higher and cooler elevations the Araucaria pine stretched in immense stands across the Paranapanema River.4

The campo is the most difficult of the three types to recon-
struct historically because it was the easiest to transform. Travellers at the beginning of the nineteenth century mentioned the absence of bushes and the dominance of Gramineae, a variety of grasses that grew to a height of no more than one and a half feet.5

The cerrado contains only two trophic levels—herbaceous and an upper level of stunted trees or bushes—and is associated with a drier climate than the forest, since its species have adapted to a seasonal lack of moisture in the upper five to six feet of soil. Those species located there have not, however, had to adopt techniques of water conservation or storage because ground water continues to be available throughout the year.

To discover the original distribution of vegetation constitutes an important but difficult historical problem. The forest, cerrado, and campo represent different arrays of resources. The original extent of these resources must first be determined. The problem is especially difficult in relation to the Paulista West because it was a zone of transition in which all three types reached their furthest extent. It is not possible, in our present state of knowledge, to determine which types in historical times were in advance and which in retreat. By about 1800, observations concerning their distribution are available for limited areas of the interior. But by that time much human intervention had taken place so that even these sparse notices cannot be taken as firm evidence of the original distribution.

Ecologists and geographers have examined the problem of distribution mainly in relation to a definition of the cerrado.6 We now know that there are some 300 species of the cerrado, although a great number of these do not display adaptations that would indicate a long period of evolution. Many of the species have low nutrient requirements and are tolerant of the ionized aluminum present in the soils of the open fields. The cerrado spreads over one quarter of the land surface of Brazil, from Maranhão in the north to Mato Grosso do Sul in the south. It is an example of vegetative cover adaptive to soils that are poorer than those covered by forest, soils that are served by scarcer and more seasonal rain but which are more retentive of water than those of the open range.

The cerrado tends to invade the campo when assisted by lightning-kindled fire, a phenomenon which is quite common and may occur even in a rain forest. It is also possible that cerrado is a successional stage, the cerrado invading campo as ground water becomes increasingly fixed by grasses and improving the porosity of the soil through its own additions of decayed root systems. The forest improves the soil further through its deposits of litter, which produces humus that the forest itself recycles. The forest, as it spreads, alters
the microclimate by reducing the seasonality of rain and by moderating temperature extremes.

Finally, it is also possible that the cerrado is a disclimax, caused by the impoverishment of soils through human action. For example, it is well known that the repeated setting of fires has the effect of degrading forest to cerrado and to campo quite independently of climatic change. In their original state the soils of the Paulista West were among the world’s richest. But the removal of forest cover destroyed the carrying capacity of the soils, since their fertility derives largely from the fragile layer of humus. In the absence of vegetation, rain leaches the calcium, which increases acidity. Acids reduce the aluminum that is so abundant in these soils to an ionized state, in which condition it competes freely for nitrogen, phosphates, and other nutrients needed by the vegetation. Ionized aluminum is also toxic to most plants. The iron in the soils also forms oxides which render the soils impermeable to rain and thus cause rapid erosion of the humus. The heat of the sun, in extreme temperatures, then bakes the dense iron oxides into brick-like laterite.

Empirical studies have given support to each of these theses concerning the cerrado. The capacity of each of the vegetational systems to maintain itself in anomalous conditions, however, makes it difficult to reach a conclusion concerning the nature of the cerrado. It has therefore been suggested that the cerrado at its center is a true climax, but that on its fringes, which would include São Paulo, it is a disclimax.

Before the Arrival of the Whites

The effect of human intervention in the cerrado forms a second problem for our knowledge of the original distribution of vegetational cover in the Paulista West. If human beings have intervened on a scale large enough to degrade the original distribution of vegetation, they should have left some record of their activities or at least of their indirect effects. It seems likely that before human intervention, primeval forest covered all of the Paulista West, with the exception of certain high tablelands west of the basalt outcroppings and near the border with Minas Gerais, where drainage is too rapid to permit the invasion of arboreal or subarboreal species. If forest was absent anywhere else, it would probably have been along the lower river valleys, away from the river course, where sediments would be naturally eroded.

The original ecological state of the Paulista West is difficult to
describe because human presence there is perhaps ten thousand years old, a period which may have included substantial climatic changes. The dwellers at Lagoa Santa, Minas Gerais, were probably using fire by that date, but the extent of their civilization has never been determined. The burning of vegetation by hunter-gatherers may have taken place in all three of the ecosystems in order to drive out prey, kill snakes, or even lure prey by stimulating a fresh growth of grasses. Burnings for any of these purposes may have accidentally spread over large areas.

With the appearance of semiagricultural tribes in the area about 1,000 years ago—500 years before the arrival of the first whites—burning can be confidently asserted. The tribes of the Paulista West were the Guaraní, Tupiniquim, and Tupinamba. For these tribes São Paulo was also a frontier. The center of Guaraní settlement was the west and southwest. Pressing eastward by the time of the arrival of the Portuguese in the first half of the sixteenth century, the Guaraní maintained a major trail that crossed the state of Paraná and southern São Paulo and terminated near present-day Santos. The Tupinamba arrived in São Paulo from the east, while the Tupiniquim occupied the intermediate region.

All these groups were dependent on farming for most of their subsistence. They cultivated corn and root crops such as manioc, aipim, inhame, cará, mangarito, and sweet potatoes, and also grew peanuts, pumpkins, and tobacco. Their planting was done on forested land because of the fertility of its humus. The forest was cleared by cutting so as to dry out the underbush. This was followed by burning, which destroyed many of the trees and caused others to fall and rot away. Burning turned the entire mass of vegetation and litter into minerals immediately available for absorption by the crops. At the same time burning eliminated the competitive demand which ground cover offered to the crops for soil nutrients. The burned clearing would then be planted several years in succession, each planting being preceded by burning. The field would eventually be abandoned once an appreciable decline in fertility was observed.

This system of planting, called slash-and-burn or swidden, is immensely wasteful of vegetation, but it is efficient in producing food with minimal labor. In areas in which the soil and climate are favorable, the forest will grow back in a few decades. Because it is shorter and less dense, this second growth, called capoeira, is easily distinguishable from primeval forest. The second or scrub growth was easier to burn than primeval forest. It was also easier to plant because a burned field of primeval forest, while remarkably fertile, produced an amazing number of hardy weeds. For this reason burned
primeval forest was sometimes left fallow, to be burned again the next season before the first planting in order to reduce the weed growth.

These Tupi-Guarani cultivators did not expand to the point of occupying, and hence degrading, all the available forest because they did not reach a crisis in their food supply. These tribes did not domesticate animals for food (this was nearly impossible in a swidden regime), but depended rather on hunting, fishing, and gathering of ant paste (içá) and nuts for protein. They were known to leave their plantings untended while they moved in yearly migrations to the coast to catch fish and shellfish, and to the Araucaria pine forests in Paraná to collect pine nuts for smoking and storing.¹⁰

But these activities did imply a population sufficiently dense that agriculture was critical to its survival. The Tupi-Guarani were apparently more intensive agriculturists than later tribal peoples in the area. The constant warfare among tribes may also be taken as a sign of struggle for resources. It is estimated that the native population in the Paulista West, over the 500 years before the arrival of the Europeans, averaged about one person per 250 acres for a total population of about 200,000. Since each person would require only one quarter of an acre per year of plantings, about 25 million acres would have been burned over those five centuries. The burning would, of course, have occurred repeatedly in the same places. Supposing that ten burnings in the same field would discourage further planting, then perhaps 5 percent of the Paulista West was thus transformed before the arrival of the whites.

Additional lands may have been degraded by burning in order to drive out or to lure game—or accidentally. Nevertheless, it seems unlikely that the total land area was substantial. Certainly it is not large enough to account for the corridor of cerrado between Franca and Mogi-Mirim or the campos of Araraquara, Avanhandava, and Rio Pardo—Campos Novos. Unless the extent of earlier burning by nonagricultural peoples is judged to have been much more widespread than supposed, the open, unused areas observed in the 1500s cannot be attributed to the Indians.

It is interesting that the Tupi language provides a word (voçoroca) to describe erosion caused by ground water flowing through soil that has lost its root system. Their language also supplies a word (tapanhoacanga) to describe one of the products of laterization, the process by which concentrations of iron and aluminum hydroxides are deposited in the soil of humid tropical and subtropical regions. These words may be of fairly recent origin, for there are indications that voçoroca and tapanhoacanga may have been used only by
mixed-breed Tupi speakers after 1500. It is also significant that the French naturalist Auguste de Saint-Hilaire was surprised to learn that the area around the city of São Paulo had been campo in the 1500s, when, at the time of his observation in 1819, it seemed appropriate for forest.\[11\]

**Intrusion of the Whites**

The Portuguese arrived along the coast of São Paulo in the 1530s. Their first economic activity, sugar planting, quickly lost importance to the plantations begun farther north, in Bahia and Pernambuco, nearer the metropolitan market. The growing of brazilwood (a red dyestuff), the other principal staple of the colony, did not extend as far south as São Paulo. The first contacts of the Portuguese with the Tupi-Guarani led to some enslaving of the natives, mainly for work on the sugar plantations of the north.

Constant warfare among the tribal groups greatly facilitated the intrusion of the whites on the plateau. The location of their first settlement, which became the permanent center of expansion (and is today the center of the metropolis of São Paulo), was chosen because it was an elevation in the first campo the Portuguese found after surmounting the escarpment. They fortified it and began to raid for slaves, an activity which continued, with varying intensity, until the beginning of the nineteenth century.

The slave traffic was necessarily affected by death in battle and the susceptibility of the Tupi-Guarani to smallpox, a disease which afflicted them only after they were rounded up by the whites. Smallpox killed perhaps three quarters of the natives in the vicinity of the city of São Paulo in the first generation of enslavement. The Indian slave trade was also limited because, for a variety of reasons, native Americans were less in demand by the northern sugar planters than were imported Africans.

Nevertheless, slave-raiding constituted a peculiar form of frontier expansion. The Europeans in the Paulista West did not barter with the tribal peoples, who lived by their traditional hunting and gathering methods. Where economic resources were few, slave-raiding grew in importance. The mammals of the Paulista West did not bear commercially attractive pelts; forest products like vanilla remained of minor significance; the coastal escarpment prevented trade in lumber, which might have altered considerably the Europeans' initial relationship to the forest. São Paulo thus contained only one extractive product of value: its human forest-dwellers. De-
spite the vast expanse of land which would have to be scoured, slaves offered the advantage that they could be walked to market. The only hindrance to the colonists' traffic in slaves was the presence of the Jesuits who, interested only in the natives' religious conversions to Roman Catholicism, constantly spoke up against slavery and managed to obtain from the crown repeated prohibitions of its practice.

Still, the colonists relentlessly pressed upon the Tupi-Guarani. Those slaves they took to farm their own estates they called administrados, or administered persons, under the pretense that they had received them from public authorities as wards. The repeated European attacks upon the Indians caused some tribal groups to sue for peace. These defeated peoples were conducted to aldeamentos, or settlements, similar to the reducción in Spanish territories. At first placed under the control of the Jesuits, these settlements were later taken over by the governors. Wherever the control, these lands were not sufficient to enable the tribal people to continue their hunting and gathering practices which the Europeans condemned as forms of idleness.

Even under these unequal conditions of master and slave, the Indians and Europeans exchanged techniques of environmental exploitation. From the beginning, the Portuguese depended on the Tupi-Guarani for their food supplies, chiefly fish and game. And the slaves continued to plant their native crops. The colonists became so dependent on maize that they came to call it milho, a generic word for meal, just as in Americanized English milo has become a generic word for grain. The colonists accepted the Indian practice of burning and planting in the forest. They did not attempt to teach their slaves the European method of farming with the plow; the additional labor which the plow required would have been, in economic terms, irrational because the sparse population was conducive to extensive, not intensive, cultivation. The Portuguese therefore continued, under more precarious conditions, the Indian custom of living off the natural accumulation of capital in the soil.

The Portuguese brought with them to São Paulo a wide variety of plants and animals unknown to the natives. Most important of these were beans, rice, sugar cane, and bananas. These were not only cultivated by subdued Indians but were passed along from tribe to tribe beyond the frontier. The colonists also brought chickens and swine. Chickens were difficult to raise outside the towns because they were defenseless against predators; pigs, however, were hardy and could be left to root in the forest. In the towns whole new types of fruit trees—peaches, figs, oranges, and limes—became important
sources of food. The Portuguese also introduced technologies of metal—iron knives, axes, and hoes—which led to more intensive cultivation.\textsuperscript{14}

Cattle raising, too, was an agricultural novelty, and was adapted to the new environment in a manner quite different from peasant production in Europe. The cattle were not integrated within the confines of the farm but rather set loose in open fields to roam and feed as they would. Again, the logic was to conserve labor and capital. The mild climate eliminated the need to stable animals or to store forage. Besides the grasslands surrounding the city of São Paulo, more land was available in patches in the direction of Sorocaba. It was estimated that 40 to 55 head might graze on 250 acres, a herd of 3,000 to 4,000 could be managed by no more than six men.

The new agricultural system introduced by the Portuguese transformed the relationship of humans to the environment. The new staple crops were more demanding of the soil than any of the native crops, excepting corn. Beans, rice, and pigs increased the supply of protein, making it nutritionally possible for tribes of hunter-gatherers to develop into a stable peasantry.

**Exploration and Westward Expansion**

By 1600, the population within the area colonized by whites rose to about two persons per 250 acres, and per capita crop land rose to nearly one and a half acres per person. São Paulo was probably the only town with a population over 200 persons. The frontier extended along the coast as far south as Iguape, on the highland along the Paraiba do Sul River Valley from Rio de Janeiro to São Paulo, and in an arc with a radius of nearly forty miles around the capital from Jundiaí to Itu to Sorocaba. For several hundred miles beyond this area, slave-hunting had driven out and thus eliminated the Indian population.

By the second quarter of the seventeenth century a series of distant political events propelled the whites forward to immensely longer expeditions. The absorption of the kingdom of Portugal by Spain provided the colonists in Portuguese territory with an excuse to cross the boundary line drawn by the Treaty of Tordesillas. The boundary line passed, from north to south, through the Paulista West.

Expeditions were sent to the region of the Spanish Jesuit reductions in the western part of the present-day state of Paraná. There the Portuguese explorers enslaved Guarani tribesmen as the Spanish
Jesuits fled west and south. When Portugal succeeded in reestablishing its independence in 1640, Spanish territory became fair game. With most of their Asian trading posts lost to the Dutch, the Lisbon authorities now sought more intensive profit from their New World colony.

The colonists of São Paulo had hunted for precious metals since their first days on the plateau. Small amounts of gold had indeed been found a few miles north and west of the capital. With encouragement from the crown, the captain-general of São Paulo now opened for exploration an area of 1.3 million square miles, which includes all of the present states from Rio Grande do Sul in the south to Goiás in the north. The search for gold, silver, and slaves went on for half a century.

This was the heroic epoch of the bandeiras. As many as 2,000 or 3,000 men joined these military companies which remained in the forest for several years and penetrated more than 600 miles into the interior. Their techniques were entirely indigenous: the men went on foot along forest trails beaten by the Indians and engaged in itinerant hunting and planting, always doubling back to collect the harvest. In the mythology of the bandeiras their slave-raiding mission is usually downplayed, while their role in expanding Brazilian boundaries is triumphantly elaborated. There can be no doubt of their successes: the explorers located immense deposits of gold, first in Minas Gerais, then in Mato Grosso and Goiás. Their discoveries transformed the economy of the colony.

By the 1720s the effect of these military expeditions was to complete the subjugation of tribal peoples as far west as the Paraná River. Those groups which were not conquered withdrew farther north, west, and south. But the practice of slaving had unwittingly worked a kind of selectivity upon the tribes. Those peoples most agricultural and least given to war had been captured or reduced; the survivors developed perforce a life-style modelled on the bandeiras. That is, they took to plundering, living off stores accumulated by other tribes, and seeking members of other tribes as slaves. Thus the Caiapó who lived near the confluence of the Rio Grande and Paraná, engaged in piracy as far as the mouth of the Tietê. The Gualaxó of Mato Grosso do Sul, who had acquired the horse from the Spanish, were more than a match for the still dismounted white military bands. All of this conflict probably meant that in the Paulista West the working of the land declined, that the intensity of the human attack upon the forest abated.

Shortly after the first discoveries of gold in Minas Gerais in 1695, the European intruders suffered a terrible reverse. They were
expelled from the region by newcomers from Bahia, who took control and managed to obtain the separation of the region from São Paulo. Meanwhile, the Paulistas continued the search for gold, locating two other alluvial fields. One was in Cuiabá, in Mato Grosso, about 900 miles northwest of the city of São Paulo; the other was in Goiás, 600 miles north-northwest. Both of these gold strikes were well beyond the areas cleared of Indians and were extremely difficult to reach.

**Developing the Frontier Economy**

The earliest form of communication with Cuiabá was by water. Dugout canoes were launched in the Tietê River a few miles beyond Itu at a place called Porto Feliz. These river explorers, called monções, then followed the Paraná to the Rio Pardo, where they proceeded up that river and down others until Cuiabá was reached—the entire trip requiring more than two months. The canoe convoys were large expeditions of maybe 3,000 men, and sometimes more. Each canoe, about fifty feet long, could hold 10 men. The river explorations continued throughout the eighteenth century, although less often after a road was opened in 1737 between São Paulo and Goiás. By then Cuiabá was in decline, and its trade turned overland by way of Goiás. The colonial government, nevertheless, remained interested in the river route because it more directly linked the coast with the boundaries which the government wished to defend in Mato Grosso from Iguatemi to Bela Vista, Aquidauana, and Albuquerque.¹⁸

The building of canoes represented the first intensive use of forest hardwoods. The canoe makers preferred peroba; indeed, so desirable was this wood that the entrepreneurs virtually denuded the area around Porto Feliz. By 1760, a rise in the price of tree trunks led to canoes being launched from Piracicaba and Tietê. In the Paulista West the tallest trees were normally found along watercourses. Yet later travellers mentioned a curious lack of tall trees along the Tietê. It is likely that the building of dugouts eliminated trees over twenty feet tall along the river as far as Avanhandava. The Tietê and Piracicaba apparently ran clear until historic times, with little transport of sediment. But with the felling of trees the rivers became extremely turbid. It is possible that the river expeditions ended simply because of the scarcity of perobas of acceptable size and at convenient distances from the launching sites.¹⁹

Probably even more important, however, is the fact that developments in horse and mule breeding made possible yet another shift
in the economy. The gold fields of Minas Gerais were of such immense value that other areas of Brazil were substantially reoriented toward supplying Minas Gerais with foodstuffs and animals. In the 1720s, therefore, the Paulistas began moving in great numbers to the southern provinces of Rio Grande do Sul, Santa Catarina, which was separated from São Paulo in 1738, and Paraná, which remained part of São Paulo until 1854. These were the Campos Gerais, the “fields everywhere,” which reached their easternmost extension east of the city of São Paulo and gradually broadened as they spread into Paraná. The open fields extended still further, beyond the Rio Grande do Sul, where they merged with the Uruguayan and Argentine pampas.

The cattle, horses, and mules bred in the Campos Gerais were brought to the yearly fair of Sorocaba. By the early nineteenth century, 30,000 to 40,000 animals were being sold annually. Most of the animals were driven to Minas Gerais via Atibaia, or on to Rio de Janeiro. Some of the mules were sold to the drivers who made the long trek to Goiás and Cuiabá. A mule train could carry much more than a convoy of canoes. But the mules were limited in utility because they could not traverse forest. All the earlier penetrations of the Paulista West had followed the Indian routes, which were always forest trails. The Tupi-Guarani required forest, and so had the colonial explorers, because they sustained themselves with hunting and swidden cultivation. But mules required forage. The mule trains would therefore have to follow the grasslands, and the drivers would have to be fed on the way at settlements scattered along the edge of the forest.

The best route that presented itself for passage to Goiás was along the eastern border with Minas Gerais, from Jundiaí to Mogi-Mirim to Casa Branca to Franca, then across the Rio Grande to Uberraba and northward. For all this distance, except for brief interruptions, there stretched in a north-south direction a narrow band of campo and cerrado. The town of Franca lay in the midst of a relatively large expanse of campo and thus began to develop as a cattle-raising center. The cerrado along the Goiás road was the farthest extension west and south of the immense cerrados of Minas Gerais. It is possible that this area had earlier been enlarged by burnings.

The establishment not only of cattle ranches but also of overland trade with the mines opened the wayside to settlement by squatters. The frontier provided the attraction of more abundant harvests in primeval forest. But the settlement was not merely a reaction to the relative fertility of the soil. The frontier people or pioneers in São Paulo were called caipiras, from a Tupi expression probably meaning “cutters of forest” or “forest cultivators.” Their or-
Walogwa Dean

Backgrounds were in the racial blending of Indians, whites, and African freedmen, with the Indian stock predominating. They were thus also called coboclos, an insulting word from a Tupi expression meaning "mixed breed." Over the course of the eighteenth century this subordinate social group came gradually to be perceived by the dominant white settlers as both racially distinct and culturally inferior.

The subordination of this mixed racial group consisted specifically in their exclusion from land ownership. In theory, the colonial authorities granted land to anyone who was willing to work it. The grants, known as sesmarias, were bestowed, however, only upon the most prominent persons in a locality. Moreover, they were always for large amounts of land—averaging about fifteen square miles. The intention was to establish a landed aristocracy that was not only loyal to the crown but that would also produce colonial exports. While those who claimed these land grants were often squatters in the area, at least until the mid-eighteenth century, they were always individuals of social prestige who possessed some form of wealth, usually Indian slaves. Most important, they were invariably whites.

Beneath these white landowners were persons who were classified racially as whites and whose connections with the holders of the land grants were close enough to enable them to obtain recognition of their squatters' rights within, or along the boundaries of, the landholdings. To maintain their precarious rights these smallholders felt obligated to demonstrate their fealty to their fellow white grantees by their deferential behavior.

Without favor in the eyes of all whites were those Indian and mixed-blooded free persons who had risen socially from the population of administered persons. Over the course of the eighteenth century captive Indians had gradually ceased to be treated as property. Their owners had been enjoined by periodic laws, most notably one in 1758, to turn them over to public authorities for settlement in the aldeamentos. Even though they were then illegally leased back by corrupt directors to these white settlers, the general laxness of control and continued racial mixing tended to turn the Indians into freedmen.

The social transformation of these groups can be observed in censuses. At first, they were listed as household property; later they are enumerated as separate households, the last names corresponding to their tribal origins. For example, we read of "José Carijó," with the notation vive a favor ("lives on favor"), meaning that José Carijó lived by casual work for others. One census taker noted by way of
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Despite these legal and social changes, the whites added to their stocks of slaves by intermittent purchases of Indian children, if the tribe was willing, or by slave raids if it was not. As late as 1808, a royal order that contradicted earlier orders encouraged the taking of Indian captives in order to hasten their acculturation. Captors were granted ownership for a term of fifteen years. Indians continued to be held under this order even after Brazilian independence, and the practice was not legally abolished until 1831. Some Indians were, in fact, captured well after that date.

Meanwhile, as the whites became prosperous through their exports of gold, they began to replace Indian slaves with African ones. This development may be regarded as the principal reason for the gradual manumission of Indians. Over the course of the eighteenth century some of the mulatto offspring of these slaves were also emancipated.

The caipiras, or mixed-blooded frontiersmen, were available only for casual labor on the estates of the whites. They were reserved for certain tasks such as mule driving and the burning and preparation of new fields. Intensive labor in the fields was performed only by the slaves. In part, this distinction in types of laborers was political, based on the need of whites to surround themselves with persons who could be trusted to bear arms. It was also certainly the result of the frontier situation. Free persons such as the caipiras had the alternative of squatting on unclaimed land. Landowners could not offer them wages that were any greater than what they could derive from the land; moreover, their estates were frequently less fertile than new swidden plots and attracted only a slight degree of mechanization. But white farmers came to regard the refusal of the caipiras to work steadily for them as signs simply of inherent laziness and improvidence.

The frontier can thus be called a caipira frontier in which the leading edge was composed of settlers practicing the slash-and-burn tradition of swidden, only to be periodically subjected to eviction by persons of greater political power and wealth. Because they planted for subsistence, the caipiras were not disconnected from the economy of the white-controlled area. But they preferred to settle along trade routes which permitted them to buy what they could not produce for themselves, mainly salt (found nowhere in the Paulista West), but also knives, hoes, and firearms (manufactured from iron deposits near Sorocaba and in Minas Gerais). The caipiras also pro-
duced tobacco, salt pork, and live pigs which were driven to market in the towns. They also supplied the mule-train drivers their rations of corn, meal, manioc, and beans.

These mixed-breed farmers preferred confronting the forest to remaining on lands that had been appropriated. Although the schools, churches, hospitals, and police performed useful and essential functions, the social institutions of the settled areas were controlled by those same persons who obtained the land grants. For the impoverished smallholders, liberation from this social hierarchy involved total dissipation. Travellers in caipira regions were often repelled by what they presumed to be stupidity and apathy, by a population ridden by parasitism and subject to famine in years of crop failure.

There is some evidence that the caipira frontier had not escaped completely from white social control. Judges often sentenced malefactors to banishment beyond the line of settlement. There they were joined by persons evading creditors, personal enemies or tragedies, or the police. This frontier was also invaded by escaped African slaves, who sometimes formed communities called quilombos. To judge from the frequency with which this term is encountered as a place name, these communities were common in the interior of São Paulo. The mixed-breed settlers were generally hostile to the residents of the African villages, and both were hostile to the tribal groups. This frontier was thus a place of considerable violence, and caipiras sometimes fled from strangers, abandoning their dwellings and hiding in the forest until the intruders had departed.

The caipira frontier, while isolated, was nonetheless integrated with the settlements of the plantations and towns in insignificant ways. For example, contact between the mixed-breeds' farms and the plantations and towns led to communication with the isolated mines of the far interior, resulted in the trade of certain special goods, and permitted the caipira frontier to serve as a disposal area or escape route for persons who could not be integrated into the social order. The mixed-breed settlers also formed a buffer zone against Indian attack, to the advantage of the white plantation owners and the state.

The caipiras likewise added to the value of the land. Generally speaking, the clearing of a given acreage of forest doubled its price. The constant expropriation of squatter holdings thus obeyed the laws of economic rationality. Only where the potential value of the land for export crops was slight, or where the caipiras were densely settled, were their rights recognized and the rural neighborhoods of smallholders preserved.
The Land Question and the Nineteenth-Century Economy

Until the coming of the railroad, São Paulo remained extremely rural. Most of the population clusters were no larger than the Tupi-Guarani communities of 200 or so inhabitants. The city of São Paulo contained perhaps 6,000 persons, and the dozen or more larger towns each had no more than 1,000 to 3,000 persons.

But in the late eighteenth century all of this changed rapidly. By 1798, São Paulo's population reached 160,000 or about 8 persons per square mile, and the number of small towns doubled.26 This urbanization was the result of the growth of the sugar plantations. The Portuguese crown, embarrassed since the 1760s by the decline in gold production and pressed by military necessity, began to encourage agricultural exports. The coastal escarpment of São Paulo had always kept transport costs high, but after 1800 improved roads made possible an increasing flow of sugar exports.

Sugar was usually planted on land recently cleared of primeval forest. The towns at the edge of settlement, therefore, began to experience rapid growth. Itu and Porto Feliz, which still had some primeval forest and were well-connected by road to São Paulo, were the first to be planted with sugar. Campinas, beyond Jundiaí, and Piracicaba, beyond Itu, grew rapidly after 1800. By 1820, there were more than one hundred sugar refining mills in Campinas. Most of the successful petitioners for land grants in Atibaia, Bragança, Mogi-Mirim, Limeira, or Capivari—all lying in an arc about one hundred miles north of São Paulo—stated that they were the owners of many slaves and intended to construct a sugar refining mill.27

Sugar cane was planted from shoots and was allowed to grow back after harvest. Replanting was then carried out and often repeated for as many as ten years; afterwards the field would be abandoned to allow native vegetation to take over. If the second growth (capoeira) was vigorous, sugar would be planted again after three years, and the cycle continued until the cane finally failed. This constituted a much more intensive use of soil than that of swidden cultivation; it therefore caused a rapid decline in humus content.

The amount of land per worker in sugar cane was also much larger than that of subsistence farmers. Swidden clearings of about two acres per person, which included about half an acre for trade goods, required about 600 hours of labor per year.28

The slaves, therefore, could barely provide for their own subsistence by work on their one “free” day each week, although some of their subsistence may have been produced during their regular work week. Since sugar cultivation required about as much labor as sub-
sistence farming, the slaves were available to work five or six times more land than subsistence farmers. Their total hours of labor might amount to an agonizing 3,500 per year. Since some slaves were diverted to the operation of the mill or to transport, the sugar plantation probably burned about four times as much forest per worker as did the swidden cultivator.

The mills also made heavy demands on the forest. The process of boiling down the syrup to a crystalline state consumed huge amounts of firewood. The size of the forest was therefore a major constraint on the continuation of sugar planting in a given region. In Itu, for example, this crisis was already reached by 1830. Further advance into the forest was not practical because of transportation costs. The mills also required large numbers of oxen to provide power to the grinding rollers and to bring the cane from the fields. In forested areas these beasts were underfed for lack of pasture; the poor animals were often worked to death and simply replaced by other oxen.

Cattle ranches were formed near Franca and in the open fields west of Botucatu, north of the basalt outcroppings. Other areas of highland campo nearer the sugar zone, near Avanhandava and Araraquara, were occupied only later, since cattle raised there would have had to be driven through forest. Most of the ranchers were emigrants from cattle-raising areas in Minas Gerais. By 1824, the town of Franca was 60 percent mineiro (a native of Minas Gerais), and most of the land titles in the region of Campos Novos were also taken by mineiros. The ranchers were evidently transferring considerable resources because they immediately assumed a social position superior to the caipiras and began to purchase slaves.29

The ranchers, like the forest cultivators, set fire to the open fields. The practice of burning became established as soon as the original cover had been grazed and trampled by the cattle. Burning has the same effect in grassland as in forest; the mineral content of the vegetation enters the soil and provides a sudden stimulus to new growth. Burning, however, has to be followed immediately by rain in order to dissolve the mineral content into the soil; without rain the ashen material is lost to wind erosion. Even under the most favorable meteorological conditions, however, burning degrades the vegetation by interrupting seasonal states and by favoring only those species which can be burned.

Thus, historically, the process of laterization was initiated in São Paulo. The burning also impoverished the fauna, destroying nests and burrows and young or small animals. For example, the disappearance of anteaters and armadillos caused ants to swarm.
 Builders of nests sometimes six feet high or more, these ants ate "more grass than the cows," one observer lamented.\textsuperscript{30} Burning was not practiced only at the beginning of the rainy season; it could be carried out whenever the owner wanted an immediate increase in forage. This practice increased the potential for rapid erosion. As early as 1819, the naturalist Auguste de Saint-Hilaire, passing through Franca, mentioned a dust storm preceding a downpour of rain.\textsuperscript{31} This burning of fields was a destructive practice. Yet it is easy to understand the alacrity with which fields were burned, once one has seen the marvelous carpet of new green shoots that spring up when burning is done just before the rains come.

With the establishment of Brazilian independence and the regency of Pedro II in 1831, the whole question of land ownership in São Paulo became blurred. The government abolished sesmarias, those large land grants given to the social aristocracy, but found itself unable to enforce any new forms of land title. This anomalous situation went on until 1850, when a law was passed declaring that henceforth public lands would be sold to private owners; legal title would then derive only from bills of sale authorized by the government. The frontier in the Paulista West had in the meantime advanced by perhaps as much as sixty miles, and large expanses of land had been occupied without legal formalities. The law of 1850 specified that these holdings, if uncontested, would be recognized upon registration. Registration was duly carried out in São Paulo between 1855 and 1857.\textsuperscript{32}

The legalization of squatter's rights, known as posses, accelerated the private appropriation of land. The old sesmarias had been astonishingly large: nine square miles "for the sustenance of my numerous and needy family" might become two or three square leagues in the cattle regions. But there was no limit to what a locally powerful planter or rancher could claim in squatter's rights. The legendary mineiro José Teodoro de Souza laid claim to some 1,000 square miles in the area of Campos Novos, a claim that was never challenged by the police or courts. One traveller in the 1850s found settlers at the confluence of the Rio Grande and Paranaiba River who showed him "vast extents of backlands" and said "All that is my plantation."\textsuperscript{33}

The law of 1850 had made some allowance for smallholders, particularly to encourage immigration. Indeed, the act was clearly opposed in principle to the further extension of the great landed estates. Yet enforcement of it was mocked by persons of wealth and power who continued to claim public lands without payment or title. The eviction of the mixed-breed settlers which this usurpation
required and the disputes among the supposed *posseiros* (squatters) produced "murders, looting, and devastation" along the edges of the frontier. "Of all our laws," said one government official, referring to the mixed-breed settlers located near Avanhandava in 1858, "they have a vague idea only about the one on lands, and that one they speak of with hostility and fear."

About the only function that the state retained in this pillaging of the public domain was that courts invariably awarded land title to the strongest among the pretenders. Granting of title was, of course, a final step, since title gave legitimacy to the land. But holdings were often sold without title. Sale was then a step in establishing a claim, since the buyers were thus bound to defend the pretensions of the squatter. By a law of 1900, the state of São Paulo (which acquired federal lands by the Constitution of 1891) legalized all landholdings claimed after 1857. By the turn of the century perhaps 8,000 square miles of unclaimed land remained. But these lands, too, were later inevitably claimed and the claims legalized by state laws.

No rights of the native Americans to tribal lands were ever recognized by the government in São Paulo. The law held that all of Brazil belonged to the crown by right of conquest; the king could dispose of it as he wished. The Indian settlements, with their insufficient endowments of land, reverted to individually owned plots once the tribal group, the *aldeado*, had become acculturated to European ways. But the Indian lands were also encroached upon by whites, since neither the imperial nor the state government set aside natural preserves. Public lands were alienated to the last acre: none were saved from degradation.

The frontier may be considered the boundary between indigenous and invading peoples. In this situation the invaders almost always possess a range of techniques for the exploitation of nature which are more intensive than those of the natives and can therefore support a denser population. European expansionism, however, was impelled by the search for exports to send back to the continent to provide a profit to those who organized the colonizing effort. The frontier was thus always an extractive frontier, not merely a frontier of settlement. The invasion of the Europeans was, besides, an exercise in appropriation in which the land and its natural resources became part of a capital stock in the possession of relatively few people. Their ownership of the land and resources made possible their domination of the frontier society.

Sugar cane stimulated population growth in São Paulo. By 1822, 345,000 persons were counted in the census, more than twice the number a quarter-century earlier. Plantations had been founded as
far west as Rio Claro, Araras, and Mogi-Mirim. Meanwhile, in the Paraíba do Sul Valley, between São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, a new crop—coffee—was growing in importance. By the 1830s it was the principal export of that region. The coffee bean was first brought to the Paulista West hesitantly because of the fear of freezes. But as the worldwide price of coffee rose, sugar cane fields were converted into coffee groves. Coffee was more valuable by weight and therefore cheaper to ship. It was also subject to less spoilage en route. Coffee had first been brought to Brazil some two centuries later than sugar. The bean had not encountered local parasites nor had its Old World parasites yet caught up with it; it was also relatively resistant to aluminum toxicity.

The coffee tree takes five years to reach maturity. Thereafter, the trees can be expected to produce for fifteen to forty years, depending on soil conditions. The planters therefore placed the trees in the best possible soil. The most sought-after trees were the padrões, which required very fertile soil and were at the same time quite sensitive to frost. Until the trees reached maturity, subsistence crops were grown among them. Techniques of cultivation did not differ radically from swidden, in that the humus layer of the forest provided the necessary fertility. There was no fertilization, except that leaves and branches which had fallen to the ground were generally gathered under the trees to serve as mulch. The ground was hoed frequently to keep down weeds which competed for moisture. No other effort was made to maintain the fertility of the soil. But because of the nature of the slave regime, even these simple tasks were poorly carried out.

Coffee production intensified in the Paulista West during the 1850s and 1860s, mainly in those areas in which cane had been raised. In the late 1860s and early 1870s there was a brief but very profitable boom in cotton, caused by the disruptive effect of the Civil War in the United States on the world market. Population in the settled areas of São Paulo rose to 564,000 by 1854, and 837,000 by 1872, a density of 12 to 15 persons per square mile. Nearly all of the increase came in rural areas. By 1870, the main lines of the railroad had been completed and the final phase of occupation of the Paulista West begun. Thanks to an elaborate system of inclined planes and cable traction, the barrier of the coastal escarpment was finally overcome. In 1868, the port of Santos was linked to the town of Jundiaí, about forty miles beyond São Paulo; by the 1880s, Itu, Sorocaba, Mogi-Mirim, and Araraquara were all connected by rail with Santos via the city of São Paulo. Railroads continued to assault the primeval forest; they often followed
the traces of Indian trails, since the highland routes were also the regions of the most fertile soil. The railways dramatically opened the way for a huge increase in coffee production which had hitherto been restrained by its dependence on mule pack trains.39

Paradoxically, a technologically advanced instrument made possible the extension of the most primitive agricultural techniques. Without the railroad, agriculture would have had to intensify in place. The wood-burning locomotives also represented a new demand upon primeval forest. The railroad facilitated the installation of stationary steam engines [also wood-burning] for textile spinning and weaving, coffee and grain milling, but, most important, for lumbering. The sawmills supplied railroad crossties and building materials.

From the early 1870s to 1900 the expansion of the coffee frontier was extremely rapid. Brought on by rapid eroding of their steep terrain and the destruction of Asian coffee plantations by blight, the decadence of plantations in the Paraíba do Sul Valley led to a rapid increase in the value of potential coffee acreage in the Paulista West. The employment of African slaves had become more and more expensive after 1850, when the English had imposed an end to the slave traffic. Rising prices of slaves in the coffee areas encouraged an inter-provincial traffic, which was nevertheless insufficient to meet the needs of the planters. Slaves in Brazil did not reproduce themselves, and those who were Brazilian-born were increasingly difficult to control. The problem was finally resolved by the abolition of slavery in 1888. This act of emancipation made São Paulo suddenly attractive to European immigrants, mainly Italians, as a place of employment. The planters persuaded the state to subsidize this inflow of workers. The 1890s, therefore, witnessed a huge immigration which continued unabated until the mid 1920s. The crush of new population, in turn, pushed the frontier across the state line into Paraná.

After the installation of railroads and the reality of massive immigration, the rapid advance of the frontier was the result more of speculative than of productive interests. Taking into consideration all of the associated requirements for subsistence crops and forage, the effective demand for coffee could have been met by a much more modest advance of the frontier. By 1900, perhaps 6,000 square miles were needed for coffee plantations. But even that quantity was exaggerated by the overplanting of coffee trees. Farming techniques were little improved by the introduction of wage labor. The interest of the workers lay in finding employment on plantations most recently opened. There they were allowed to plant between coffee rows,
where the soil was most fertile. These new planters and workers would extract as much as possible from the land and then move on to another plantation. It was in this fashion that the frontier moved rapidly inland.

**Assault upon the Indians**

The areas beyond the frontier settlements of the caipiras, the mixed breeds, had been largely though not entirely cleared of native tribal people by the early eighteenth century. The expansion of whites into the grasslands of Mato Grosso and into the Campos Gerais of Paraná required further attacks upon the Indians. During the late eighteenth century, the Indians had responded by retreating to the forests of Paraná and Paraguay and back across the Paraná and Paranapanema rivers to the Paulista West.

In the nineteenth century, therefore, the tribal groups resident in the region were peoples several times uprooted. They depended far less upon a subsistence agriculture than had their ancestors. It is possible that they were reverting to hunting and gathering because of an increased abundance of game produced by the disappearance of human predators during the eighteenth century. It is also possible that the tribal groups had made an adaptation to being hunted by whites; they were avoiding the vulnerability of a settled existence and dependence on cultivated fields.\(^40\) The returned tribal groups chose to situate themselves along watercourses, perhaps because the caipiras avoided river bottoms from fear of the sezões (malaria or typhoid fevers). The Indians may also have found greater opportunities for subsistence along the rivers.

By the 1850s the population of tribal people in São Paulo was scattered and thin. To the north of the Tietê River were the Caiapó, and to the south were the Kaingang and Oti-Xavante. In the whole of the Paulista West there may have been only 10,000 tribal people occupying as many as 40,000 square miles. The incursions of the whites caused some of these groups to sue the government for peace; for these people the policy of reserved Indian settlements was continued. A law of 1845 reformed the settlements and placed them under the direction of Capuchin priests. By this date, however, the reserves were already an anachronism, since the whites no longer regarded the Indians brought to them as a useful labor pool.\(^41\) The flow of ranchers into the open lands west of Botucatu created a new confrontation. As long as the mixed-breed pioneers had borne the
brunt of Indian contact, the frontier had known periods of stability
during which trade and cultural exchanges occurred. By contrast, the
ranchers, whose cattle were extremely vulnerable to Indian attack,
could not tolerate the presence of tribal people.

Beginning around 1860, therefore, the ranchers organized vigilante
bands whose purpose was no longer what it had been a half-
century earlier—to capture the Indians for slaves. Now their goal
was simply to exterminate the natives. These bands, casually orga-
nized from time to time, were called *dadas* or *batidas*. Their prey,
the Indians, were dismissed as savages and called *bugres*, a pejora-
tive term intense enough to imply the denial of their humanity. By
the 1880s, there had evolved the professional Indian killer, the *bug-
reiro*. The tactic of the raiding party was to attack the Indians’ vil-
lages at dawn. Everyone, women and children as well as men, would
be shot and the huts and fields burned. Sometimes the huts would
be left intact but the food stores poisoned. Occasionally, captives
were taken, usually women, who would serve the *bugreiros* as sex-
ual slaves. The last male of the Oti-Xavante tribe was, in 1903, a
slave; he had been captured and sold ten years before.42

**Epilogue**

The conquest of the first 40,000 square miles of the Paulista West
had taken 300 years. The last 40,000 square miles required only 50
years. The Europeans had left in place large stands of forest, which
were only gradually cleared away. As late as 1920 about half of the
total area was still forested. But the introduction of heavy sawmills
and trucks greatly increased the exploitation of timber. The scat-
tered stands of pine were quickly removed. *Caipira* subsistence
farmers living amid the forests continued to send valuable timber up
in smoke since they were without legal rights to it or to the means
to transport it. In some areas forest was burned to provide pasture.
This is a farming procedure which is extremely improvident and
wasteful, but it is still being carried out in the Amazon Basin.43

The plantations were commonly converted into pasture once
the yield of the coffee trees fell. The humus layer had been fully ex-
pected. One survey showed, over a period of only two decades, a loss
of 75 percent of humus content and a large increase in acidity.44
Estates would be sold off, often in bankruptcy proceedings, for what-
ever they could fetch, to ranchers who continued the process of deg-
radation by removing the groves and burning for pasture. This re-
placement of plantations with ranches produced the phenomenon of
the "hollow frontier," that is, of a population thinner behind the frontier than at its edge.

With the disappearance of habitats, hundreds of species of fauna also disappeared or became very rare in the West—monkeys, alligators, wildcats, parrots, toucans, deer, tapir. One Paulista, writing in 1860, described a journey through the forest in which he encountered flocks of parrots "soaring and wheeling rudely and disagreeably overhead." He noted that as the human population advanced the parrots "will tend to emigrate, until one day they'll disappear." Parrots were also hunted commercially for sale in Rio de Janeiro.45

There was, however, no sense of loss of the natural environment. The white landowners had set the caipiras loose in the forest, to civilize [desbravar] it and to defeat [derrubar] it. The European immigrant laborers had been contained on the plantations by their fear of the primeval forest; when they fled, it was to the city. Civilization, meaning urban civilization, was the cultural ideal. Even the tamed regularity of the farm fell short of it. For the Jesuits the forest did not contain the presence of the Deity; it was, rather, the abode of the Devil. As long as the heathen remained in it, they could not be receptive to Christianity.46

European travellers in São Paulo exhibited little curiosity concerning the forest. It is clear that they found their passage through it oppressive and fearsome. They much preferred the campo or cerrado. No doubt their alienation arose partly from the strangeness of the flora. The colonists had transformed the towns not only with European fruit trees, but with European flowering and decorative species, the better to restore their sense of place. The caipiras possessed at least a sense of belonging, the heritage of their Indian forebears. Their inseparability from nature was belied, perhaps, by their use of fire. But there was a mysterious power in the act of a mixed-breed backwoodsman spying along the river a deer he wished to kill. He would strip off his clothes, a symbol of his alienation from his prey, before he picked up his weapon for the kill.47

In summary, the fate of the São Paulo frontier was to have its natural resources despoiled, its ecosystems severely damaged, and its native inhabitants virtually exterminated. Those who accomplished this process nevertheless regarded their work as a brilliant achievement.

The São Paulo frontier did not produce a broadening of human potentialities for the settlers because it duplicated, even caricatured, the inequalities of the conqueror society, Portugal. It is true that the export of coffee made possible the importation of an array of human resources as well as capital resources that soon produced for the
human population higher material standards of living. As a result, however, the Paulista West was bequeathed a weakened agricultural base.

In the wake of this environmental degradation the descendants of the original settlers have undertaken to manage their remaining resources. But the historical policies, practices, and attitudes of extraction and degradation in the Paulista West continue even today because the original frontier has been extended into Paraná, Mato Grosso, Goiás, and well beyond.

**Glossary**

administrado: a person, usually Indian, administered or governed by the settlers, church, or state.

aldeamento: a settlement or village specifically set aside for Indians.

bandeira: a colonial exploratory expedition into the interior of the state of São Paulo. From the Portuguese word meaning "flag" or "standard," planted as guideposts by the members (bandeirante) of the expedition. Loosely, any resident of São Paulo.

bugreiro: a killer of Indians. From bugre, a pejorative term, meaning "savage," for any Indian; more generally, a Brazilian word for a brutish, crude, or treacherous person.

caiçara: from a Tupi Indian word meaning "cutter of forest." A frontiersman in São Paulo of mixed racial origins (Indian, white, black), with Indian predominating, pejoratively, a caboclo, i.e. half-breed or mulatto. Most generally, in Brazilian, caiçara can mean rustic, boor, hillbilly.

campo: open field or country, grassland, prairie; generally uncultivated.

capoeira: new or second growth, scrub growth, underbrush; often as a result of burning.

cerrado: "closed" or enclosed, sometimes fenced land, thick with flora; woodsry pasture or meadow; often privately owned and for cattle grazing.

monções: river explorers in the interior of São Paulo and Mato Grosso, usually travelling in large canoes.

posseiro: a squatter on land to which he has no legal title; from posse, a possession or holding.

sesmaria: a land grant, usually of great size; also a historical term of land measurement; literally, "the place they receive the seeds."

**Notes**

1. Assistance for the research in connection with this article was provided by the Penrose Fund of the American Philosophical Society. The editors would like to thank Professor Carlos Nogueira-Martins of the Univer-
sity of Texas at Arlington for his explanations of the Portuguese terms in this essay. (See Glossary preceding these notes.)


5. Geografia do Brasil, pp. 91–116.


7. An attempted solution to the problem, based on toponymy, is Helmut Troppmair, A cobertura vegetal primitivo do estado de São Paulo [São Paulo: Instituto de Geografia, 1969]. The method does not take into account changes which occurred before the name was bestowed. The map accompanying the study is too small to judge the result, though the method is interesting. It may be noted that land grants, sesmarias, do in some cases provide information on vegetation. Compilation of this information would be a worthwhile if laborious process. See Arquivo Público do Estado de São Paulo, Sesmarias, Patentes e Provisões.


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29. Von Spix and von Martius, Viagem pela capitanía, pp. 66, 85; Arquivo Público do Estado de São Paulo, TC, População Franca, No. 44.


31. Saint-Hilaire, Viagem à província, p. 86.


33. Amador Nogueira Cobra, Em um recanto do sertão paulista [São Paulo: Hennies, 1923].

34. Antonio Mariano de Azevedo, Relatorio ... sobre os exames de que foi

35. Ibid.


41. Arquivo Público do Estado de São Paulo, TI, Policia, No. 110, Baron of Antonina to President of Province, 1872; Tidei Lima, p. 87.

42. Ibid., pp. 136–142.


44. Monbeig, Pionniers, pp. 78–79.

45. Salvador José Correa Coelho, Passeio à minha terra (São Paulo: Typ. da Lei, 1860), p. 76.

46. Baeta Neves, O combate dos soldados, pp. 51, 63.

The dominant tradition in American frontier historiography emanates from the work of Frederick Jackson Turner, whose ideas were formulated in an ethos dominated by late nineteenth-century Social Darwinism, American nationalism, and Midwest regionalism. Though his formulation contained numerous insights of permanent value, his work had serious flaws. He contended that the American frontier experience was unique and that it was therefore incomparable, whereas, though everything is in some sense unique, everything is also related to other things in systematic and comparable ways. Turner also saw the history of the American frontier exclusively from the point of view of the white intruders, whereas the indigenous Indian peoples were also key actors in the frontier process. Finally, Turner described American frontier society as egalitarian, whereas—as George Orwell would have said—even among whites, some were distinctly more equal than others. These flaws continue to crop up in the works of Turner's latter-day disciples, including Ray Allen Billington.

At the other extreme, there are historians who apply the term frontier to such heterogeneous circumstances, without definition or taxonomic order, as to deprive it of intellectual rigor. If one judges by its newsletter and by the book published under its auspices in 1977, that is the weakness of the Oklahoma school of frontier history. The Frontier: Comparative Studies is a series of scholarly and often interesting essays on situations as disparate as the Roman Empire and modern Brazil. But the authors have attached their own meaning to the term frontier, and the relationships between the essays are not apparent.

In a series of seminars at Yale University, Howard Lamar and I have been grappling with these issues for some while. The rest of this introductory section owes much to our seminar discussions.
While we consider that Walter Prescott Webb stretched the frontier concept beyond its appropriate limits, we admire him for having counteracted the principal flaws in the Turner tradition.

The basic problem is to define and describe a concept that is not culture-bound and that nevertheless has content specific enough to be a useful tool for analyzing and illuminating significant historical processes. In our usage, a frontier is an area of interpenetration between societies. It contains three elements: a territorial element, a zone or territory as distinct from a boundary line; a human element, comprising peoples of initially separate and distinct societies; and a process element by which relations among such peoples commence, develop, and eventually crystallize. A frontier opens with the first contact between members of the two societies. It closes when a single authority has established political and economic dominance over the zone. When we talk of a frontier closing, we do not imply that the relations between the inhabitants then become static or rigid, but rather that a new structural situation has been created and the ongoing historical process is no longer a frontier process.

If the frontier concept is to have general applicability and not be culture-bound, one should not assume that an intrusive society necessarily emerges as the winner in the struggle for power in a frontier zone. Even in the period of European expansion there were many cases where white intruders were palpably the losers, as with the Raleigh settlement in Virginia. Moreover, to distinguish winners from losers is not always a simple matter, but depends upon one's time frame. At a given moment, one segment of a society may be winning and another losing; but the winners in one generation may be the losers in the next.

There are many types of frontiers. The interacting societies may have similar or different technological levels and modes of production. The amount of technological differentiation between the societies is one key variable in a frontier situation. It often, but not invariably, determines the outcome of a struggle for power in a frontier zone.

The occupations of participants in a frontier zone form a second key variable. There is, for example, a great difference between a zone in which the intrusive element consists of transients who continue to regard their country of origin as their home, and one which includes settlers who intend to found new homes for themselves and their descendants in the frontier zone itself. The ultimate decision-makers in a metropole may have a weak or a strong commitment to a frontier zone.
The extent of the commitment of each of the interacting societies is a third key variable. These variables may change over time. In an early phase a few peripatetic traders or a few missionaries with very little influence over their metropolitan governments may be the only representatives of an intrusive society in a frontier zone, but the stake of members of the metropolitan society may then increase to the stage where its government becomes committed to making an all-out effort to gain control of the territory.

We should also distinguish different levels of abstraction at which to examine frontier processes. At the highest level, one might take cognizance of everything that is discernible about every sort of frontier in the entire human experience. We would then recognize that all empires, most states, and many acephalous societies have generated frontier processes. At an intermediate level, one might confine the scope to great themes that have limits in time, or in space, or in typology. One might compare the histories of the frontiers of the great pre-Cartesian empires of Rome and China, or the frontiers of nonliterate societies, or frontiers created by specific occupational groups such as traders, missionaries, or settlers. Or, again, one might follow Walter Prescott Webb and focus on the frontiers created by the expansion of Europeans and of commercial and industrial capitalism in the modern era, or on a regional example of such frontiers, such as North America or Southern Africa. Finally, at the micro level, small areas might be studied in depth over short periods, to reveal the great complexities that exist whenever fragments of originally separate and distinct societies interact with each other, as in seventeenth-century New England or Virginia.

The mandate for this essay is to discuss the frontier in Southern African history. If one were to deal with all the frontier processes known to have existed in the region, one should certainly include those created by the expansion of pastoralists (Khoikhoi or “Hottentots”) into areas previously inhabited exclusively by hunter-gatherers (San or “Bushmen”), and also those created by the infiltration of Bantu-speaking farmers into the eastern part of Southern Africa where they interacted with the pastoralists and hunter-gatherers. However, after brief references to those pre-da Gaman processes, I propose to treat Southern Africa as a regional example of the frontiers created by the expansion of Europe and of the capitalist economy.

Typologically, the expansion of Europeans into Southern Africa falls into the intermediate level of abstraction and is comparable to the Australian case. In Southern Africa as in Australia, intrusive Eu-
Europeans had great technological superiority over the indigenous peoples and included settler communities that became the dynamic elements in the frontier zones and were often able to invoke logistic and even military support from Europe. Nevertheless, there are enormous differences between the frontier processes in the two regions and, consequently, differences in the structures of Australian and Southern African societies as they emerged from the frontier epoch.

The most crucial contrast relates to the indigenous populations. All the Australian aborigines were Stone Age seminomadic bands, and they had been isolated from other human groups for many millennia. In Southern Africa, on the other hand, although somewhat similar communities still existed, especially in the western part of the region, by the time of da Gama the eastern part was quite densely occupied by Bantu-speaking people who herded sheep and cattle, cultivated sorghum, made pottery, worked iron, and lived in stable villages. Moreover, being cattle-keepers and forming the southernmost branch of the Eurasian population continuum, they were already exposed to smallpox and other European diseases and had some immunity against them. Consequently, the white settlers in Australia wrested control of successive frontier zones with relative ease, rapidly became an overwhelming majority of the population in every fertile part of the region, and developed a political economy that was not dependent on aboriginal labor. In Southern Africa, on the other hand, the local people resisted white settlement for long periods, especially in the eastern part of the region, and even since they became subjected to white rule they continue to form a large majority of the total population, they retain occupation of significant blocks of land, and they play a vital role as laborers in the white-dominated capitalist economy.

There is another difference. Only one European power, England, was responsible for the colonization of Australia, and it supplied nearly all the settlers who migrated there during the frontier epoch. But two metropolitan powers, Holland and England, colonized Southern Africa and provided that region with successive rival layers of white settlers. As a result of these differences, the legacy of the frontier epoch in Australia is a radical, liberal, democratic, white society whereas its legacy in Southern Africa is a society rigorously stratified by race.
The Environment and Phases of White Expansion

Southern Africa is predominantly an arid region. Before the discovery of diamonds and gold and the introduction of industrial technology in the second half of the nineteenth century, rainfall was the most valued resource and its incidence varies tremendously.

Most of the western three-fifths of the region has an average of less than twenty inches of rain a year and was not suitable for arable farming with preindustrial technology. The exception is the Cape peninsula, its immediate hinterland, and the adjacent coastal strip to its east where grain could have been cultivated because there are reliable winter rains. The eastern two-fifths of the region has an average of more than twenty inches of rain a year, nearly all of it falling in summer. Although there are considerable variations from year to year and also intermittent periods of prolonged drought, crop production is generally feasible except in the mountains, the most formidable of which form an escarpment within a hundred miles of the Indian Ocean, rising to over 11,000 feet above sea level in the Drakensberg.

Most of Southern Africa is free of the human and animal diseases that are the scourge of tropical Africa. But in the coastal lowlands and the river valleys of the northern and eastern parts of the region, anopheles mosquitoes undermined human health, and tsetse flies made pastoral farming impossible.

The best natural harbors in Southern Africa are in the Cape peninsula; but Table Bay is exposed to the northwest winds that prevail in winter, frequently reaching gale force, while False Bay is exposed to the summer southeaster. None of the river estuaries are navigable by oceangoing ships without extensive dredging, and all the rivers are obstructed by cascades as the land rises steeply toward the mountain escarpment.

These factors profoundly influenced the history of Southern Africa both before and after the beginning of white colonization. By the time of Vasco da Gama, the western sector was sparsely occupied by people whose ancestors had probably lived in the region for many millennia. Some lived in small bands as hunter-gatherers; others possessed sheep and cattle, were organized in larger communities, and occupied the better pasturelands, especially those in the winter rainfall area. All these people formed a relatively closed, isolated population. Whites would call the hunter-gatherers Bushmen, and the pastoralists Hottentots. But those terms acquired such derogatory connotations that it is preferable to use the indigenous terms San and Khoikhoi, or to refer to them jointly as Khoisan.
Members of a different genetic population had infiltrated from the north into the eastern sector of the region since early in the Christian era. They constituted the southernmost prong of a continental movement that probably originated in eastern Nigeria. They spoke related Bantu languages; they made iron tools and weapons; they cultivated sorghum and vegetables as well as herded sheep and cattle; and they were organized in cohesive, autonomous chiefdoms, some of which included as many as 50,000 people. By the time of da Gama, their iron-working, mixed-farming culture prevailed throughout most of the eastern part of Southern Africa.

Some of the Khoisan peoples had been driven into mountain refuges or westward into the arid territories beyond the twenty-inch rainfall line. Many had been incorporated into the farming communities, with the result that the Bantu-speaking peoples of Southern Africa had acquired Khoisan genes and several Khoisan cultural traits, including use of clicks in their languages.

Before Europeans began to sail round the Cape, a frontier zone between Bantu-speaking farmers and Khoisan hunters and herders ran northward from the vicinity of the Fish River to the Molopo River and beyond, following approximately the twenty-inch rainfall line that set a limit to arable farming. In the coastal part of that zone, on either side of the Fish River, the Xhosa chiefdoms were gradually overcoming and incorporating the easternmost Khoikhoi, but they did not break through the arid area around modern Port Elizabeth to occupy the rich winter rainfall lands of the southwestern Cape.

When the directors of the Dutch East India Company decided to found a way station on the Southern African mainland to service their fleets on passage between Europe and Indonesia, they selected the Cape peninsula for its harbors and its climate. That decision initiated a frontier interaction between the Europeans and the Khoisan peoples. Its history falls into two phases, distinguished by environmental factors. In the first phase, from 1652 to about 1713, the frontier zone extended about seventy-five miles northward and forty-five miles eastward from Cape Town through much of the area of good winter rains. White colonists occupied land at the expense of Khoikhoi pastoralists, and used it to produce wine and wheat as well as raise sheep and cattle. The Khoikhoi of that area quite rapidly lost their livestock and thus their capacity to preserve their autonomy. Often they bartered sheep or cattle with company officials or colonists in exchange for copper, tobacco, or brandy. Sometimes Europeans seized livestock by force. On three occasions Khoikhoi went to war but were quite easily overcome. The effects of European fire-
arms were compounded by internal divisions among the Khoikhoi and their lack of strong leadership. The coup de grace came in 1713, when a smallpox epidemic swept away many Khoikhoi. Thereafter the arable area near Cape Town lay inside the frontier and was irrevocably controlled by Europeans. The Khoikhoi survivors who remained there were working for Europeans as farm laborers and domestic servants. 

By 1700, colonists were beginning to open up a very different type of frontier in the arid territories north and east of the arable belt. Despite the fact that there were still fewer than 1,200 European men, women, and children in the colony at this time, they were already producing more grain and wine than could be absorbed by the market, which was limited to the needs of passing ships or the inhabitants of the town. Moreover, arable land was becoming expensive, capital was scarce, and slaves were being imported from tropical Africa, Madagascar, and southeast Asia to perform manual and artisan work in the town and on the farms.

Among the European colonists only a limited number of farmers, innkeepers, and petty traders were content with their way of life within the small arable area of the western Cape. But an outlet did exist in the territories beyond: there a man could set himself up as a trekboer (stockfarmer) with a little capital or, if he lacked even that, could become the bijwoner (tenant) of a trekboer. The government facilitated rapid expansion into those territories by permitting colonists to occupy large tracts of land for very low annual rents and in time even allowed them to treat such holdings as marketable properties.

During the eighteenth century, the European population of the colony grew quite rapidly, by natural increase rather than fresh immigration, to reach about 20,100 by the end of the century. The greater part of the increase became trekboers who spread outward with flocks of sheep toward the Orange River in the north and the Fish River in the east. Each family occupied about 6,100 acres or more and usually moved on when it had exhausted the meager pastures.

The Khoikhoi inhabitants—demoralized by the conquest of their fellows in the southwestern Cape and by successive smallpox epidemics in 1713, 1755, and 1767—offered relatively little resistance. As they in turn lost their livestock and their control over water supplies, their chiefdoms broke up into small family groups, most of whom became clients of trekboers, herding their sheep and doing their domestic work. Aboriginal hunters raided trekboer livestock from time to time. They did not check white expansion until
the 1770s, however, when they began harassing the colonists in the northeastern frontier zone from bases in the Sneeuwberg. They would stop the advance of the white settlers until the second decade of the nineteenth century.\(^\text{11}\)

The environment affected this phase of white expansion in Southern Africa in three ways. It made it possible for a few thousand white people to consolidate a bridgehead in the Cape peninsula and to occupy a territory as large as Great Britain before they came up against the numerous and powerful Bantu-speaking farmers. Second, the aridity of the area made it necessary for the whites who moved out from the arable southwest to become extensive stockfarmers. And third, since the Cape peninsula contained the only good natural harbors in the area, the expanding white society formed a single economic, political, and cultural continuum, whereas in North America, as later in Australia, there were several points of entry from the sea and as many different social and economic networks and subcultures.

By 1770, the eastern fringe of the colonial society was impinging on the western fringe of the African mixed-farming society on either side of the twenty-inch rainfall line. This was the beginning of a long struggle for control of the fertile eastern two-fifths of Southern Africa. For the next forty years the Zuurveld, the area west of the Fish River, was a typical frontier zone. White pastoralists and Xhosa mixed farmers were intermingling here and fighting a series of inconclusive wars. In 1812, however, deploying imperial troops as well as colonial levies, the British made a decisive advance, driving 20,000 Xhosa across the Fish River and effectively closing the Zuurveld frontier zone. Thereafter the whites, with professional soldiers and superior firepower, advanced beyond the Fish.

A typical war started with an African attack, intended to avenge previous defeats, and ended when white forces had swept deep into Xhosa territory, destroying crops and seizing cattle. In 1856—having sustained a series of such defeats in 1819, 1834–1835, 1846–1847, and 1850–1853—many Xhosa resorted to a supernatural, millennial remedy. They killed their cattle and destroyed their grain in the belief that such a demonstration of confidence in the power of their ancestors would cause the disappearance of white people. In fact, the result was mass starvation and the subjection of the survivors to white control.\(^\text{12}\)

Meanwhile, several thousand trekboers (later known as Voor­trekkers) had left the Cape Colony with the intention of carving out new homes for themselves and establishing governments independent of British control in the eastern part of Southern Africa.\(^\text{13}\) At
that time the *mfecane* wars, launched by the Zulu king Shaka and his Ndebele rival, Mzilikazi, had devastated and partially depopulated much of the fertile grassland on the High Veld between the Maloti Mountains and the Limpopo River, as well as many square miles of the lowlands in Natal, south of the Tugela River. The Ndebele and the Zulu attempted to prevent the *Voortrekkers* from settling in those areas, but the *Voortrekkers* warded off mass African onslaughts by lashing their wagons together to form defensive laagers. They then went over to the attack, driving the Ndebele northward across the Limpopo River and defeating Dingaan’s Zulu regiments. After that, they were able to found settlements in Natal and on the High Veld on both sides of the Vaal River.

By 1870, Natal had become a British colony with a few thousand settlers from the British Isles, and the *Voortrekkers* were expanding from several different nuclear settlements on the High Veld at the expense of their African neighbors in a series of frontier zones. Of these, the most fiercely contested was in the fertile Caledon River Valley, where the Basuto under their founder, King Moshoeshoe, re-

![Southern Africa in the Nineteenth Century](image_url)
sisted Afrikaner penetration for many years before losing control of the land on the northern side of the river and accepting white rule in 1868.\textsuperscript{16}

Even so, in 1870, large areas were still controlled by autonomous African chiefdoms. The colony of Natal had a revitalized Zulu kingdom to its north and Mpondo and other chiefdoms to its south. The Voortrekkers\textsuperscript{1} republic in the Transvaal was almost surrounded by independent African communities: the Tswana to the west; the Swazi, the Pedi, the Tsonga and others to the east; and the Venda to the north, with a reconstituted Ndebele kingdom across the Limpopo River.

Environmental factors as well as African power had also set limits to white expansion. In particular, mosquitoes and tsetse flies prevented Afrikaners from founding durable settlements in the Lowveld of the eastern Transvaal and from creating a trade route through southern Mozambique to the sea at Delagoa Bay and thus breaking the monopoly of their external trade by British colonial merchants and their agents.

After 1870, the Europeans rapidly established hegemony over the remaining African communities.\textsuperscript{17} In 1879, after losing an entire regiment at Isandhlwana, the British mounted a major expedition to conquer the Zulu.\textsuperscript{18} The Pedi and the Venda defied the Transvaal Boers for many years before they were finally subdued in the 1890s. On the other hand, the Mpondo, the Swazi, and most of the Tswana chiefdoms submitted to the white authorities without a fight in the face of strong pressures after they had been nearly encircled by white-controlled territories. Nevertheless, whites in the eastern part of Southern Africa did not actually farm much land beyond what had been devastated during the mfecane wars in the 1820s. Africans maintained effective occupation of most of the land in the Transkei, Lesotho (Basutoland), KwaZulu (Zululand), Botswana (Bechuanaland Protectorate), and considerable blocks in the Ciskei, Natal, Swaziland, and the Transvaal.\textsuperscript{19}

After the discovery of gold in the Witwatersrand, in 1885, another frontier was created in the heart of the Transvaal Boer republic. This was an entirely different type of frontier. Johannesburg became the core of an aggressive urban society in which European capitalists dominated the labor force divided sharply between well-paid white artisans and low-paid African migrant laborers. The African laborers shuttled between their rural homes and the mines where they stayed for about a year at a time and were limited to unskilled tasks. This industrial society bore outwards upon the surrounding agrarian society, whose Boer landowners dominated their
African labor-tenants much as their ancestors had dominated Khoikhoi clients in the Cape Colony before the Great Trek.\textsuperscript{20}

**Central Governments and the Cape Colony**

Before about 1870, Southern Africa was of secondary importance in the Dutch and British imperial systems. Businessmen in those two countries valued the Cape peninsula for its strategic position between Europe and the sources of spices in southwest Asia. Beyond what was necessary to maintain an efficient refreshment station in the peninsula and to prevent rivals from capturing it, they had no major interest in Southern Africa, a region not known to contain significant resources.

For over one and a half centuries Dutch and British officials sought to give effect to this perspective by keeping their colonists within prescribed boundaries. In the 1650s, Jan van Riebeeck, the first commander, planted an almond hedge to confine the colony to a portion of the Cape peninsula. Officials also contemplated digging a canal across the Cape flats to separate the peninsula from the mainland. Later governors laid down a succession of boundary lines leading inland from points on the southeast coast. Finally, after defeating the Xhosa in 1812, the British built forts along the Fish River. Colonists were prohibited from crossing these successive official boundaries. But all such proclamations were dead letters because the economic considerations that caused the metropolitan governments to wish to limit the area of European settlement also prevented them from creating a bureaucracy strong enough to exact compliance from the colonists.

The Dutch East India Company kept nearly all its personnel in the peninsula. Elsewhere, it established district offices at Stellenbosch in 1679, Swellendam in 1746, and Graaff-Reinet in 1786, but it staffed each of them with only one general-purpose official (landdrost), a clerk or two, and at most a handful of soldiers. Each landdrost had to administer a district of immense area. In practice, however, beyond the Cape peninsula and more particularly beyond the arable belt, the government possessed scarcely any instruments for exerting its authority on a regular basis. As a last resort, however, it could bring the colonists to heel by cutting off their supplies of ammunition.

The trekboers consequently lived as semiautonomous family units, bartering their farm produce and sheep and cattle with travelling traders in exchange for firearms and ammunition and modest
quantities of clothing, groceries, and brandy. They devised their own system of defense, forming commando units under their own elected officers to deal with aboriginal hunting bands who preyed on their herds. They could usually ignore with impunity proclamations that were intended to limit their movements or moderate their dealings with their slaves and their Khoisan clients. There was also nothing to stop Bantu-speaking Africans from entering the colony, and by the end of the eighteenth century the peripheries of the colonial society and the African farming society were intermingled in a broad frontier zone on either side of the Fish River—the beginning of a process that proved to be irreversible.21

The Batavian regime (1803–1806) and its British successor did make some efforts to strengthen the local administration. They divided the colony into smaller districts and sent judges on circuit to hear cases at the district headquarters. But in the 1830s, the British did not prevent the Voortrekkers from leaving the colony. They merely made half-hearted attempts to form alliances with the brown and black rulers of the states through which the Voortrekkers travelled—the Griqua states and Moshweshwe’s Lesotho. The alliances did not hinder the Voortrekkers from penetrating to the central High Veld.

In the 1850s, after a disastrous short-lived attempt to exercise authority over a vast area between the Orange and the Vaal rivers, the British withdrew. They repudiated their treaty commitments to the brown and black rulers and granted sweeping political powers to the whites in the form of representative parliamentary institutions in the Cape Colony and Natal and outright independence to the Voortrekker communities who formed independent republics on either side of the Vaal River.22

After 1870, British policy in Southern Africa became decidedly expansionist, especially when the Conservative (or Liberal Unionist) party was in power. Colonization had already generated forces that favored imperial expansion in the region. The British immigrants who had settled in Natal and the eastern part of the Cape Colony looked to the metropolitan government to support their interests against those of both Africans and Afrikaners. The traders who exchanged imported goods for wool, ivory, and other local products in the interior, the bankers and merchants in Cape Town, Port Elizabeth, East London, and Durban on whom those traders depended; and the London and other British houses with which they in turn were associated—all tended to believe that imperial advances into areas occupied by Africans and Afrikaners would protect and enhance their interests. Missionaries, too, used their influence with
the evangelical network in Britain to promote imperial expansion, assuming that a British regime would provide a climate conducive to evangelization and give Africans some protection from the rapacity of white laymen. Moreover, many (maybe even most) of the imperial officials and senior military officers who served in Southern Africa were expansionists.

Previously, pressures from such sources had been tempered by the resistance of the British taxpayer to unremunerative commitments. Now, however—with capital pouring into Southern Africa for the development of the mining industries, with pseudoscientific racism pervasive in Western culture, and with other European nations making claims to African territories—the expansionist forces gathered momentum, coming to a climax at the turn of the century.23

Great Britain played an active role in the subjection of the remaining African chiefdoms, notably in the Zulu war of 1879, which was a clear-cut case of imperial aggression. And, after annexing the Transvaal in 1877 and disannexing it in the face of Afrikaner resistance four years later, Britain became involved in a major war to conquer the two republics in 1899. After 1905, however, Great Britain abandoned the effort to exert political control over the region and with it surrendered the only levers it had possessed that might have safeguarded the interests of the black majority. A Liberal government gave responsible government to the white inhabitants of the former republics and encouraged their politicians to join with those of Natal and the Cape Colony to form a united, self-governing British dominion, the Union of South Africa, which was inaugurated in 1910. The frontier era in Southern Africa thus ended with the establishment of political power in the hands of the local white population, who shared economic power with metropolitan capitalists.24

Frontier

The eighteenth century was the period when European colonists in Africa became Afrikaners, as they adapted to an environment that differed profoundly from northwestern Europe. The most distinctive changes took place in the rapidly expanding frontier zones, where trekboers acquired traits that would persist among their descendants in the nineteenth century and leave traces still discernible today.

The typical trekboer social unit was a patriarchal family of two or three generations, served by several Khoikhoi client families and
perhaps a slave or two, occupying more than 6,000 acres of land and owning several hundred sheep and a few head of cattle. The nearest shop and government office might be several hundred miles away at Stellenbosch or, after 1745, at Swellendam, or, by the end of the century, at Graaff-Reinet, across country that could only be traversed on foot, on horseback, or by ox wagon. Since Cape Town remained the only port of entry into the colony, trekboers became more divorced from European culture, Dutch political authority, and the market economy the further they trekked from Cape Town. 25

The government appointed several men (heemraden) to assist a landdrost. For example, heemraden would sit with a landdrost in the district court to adjudicate petty civil disputes. The government also appointed veldkornets as its agents in each subdivision of a district. But criminal cases could only be tried in Cape Town and heemraden and veldkornets were part-time, unpaid officials— influential members of the trekboer community, whose interests they represented and prejudices they shared. 26 For defense—and often for aggression—against the aborigines whose hunting and collecting grounds they were occupying, the able-bodied men of a locality joined together to form raiding units (commandos). The government supplied these groups with ammunition and recognized the officers they elected. 27 Consequently, if the Cape officials were to exert any authority in the frontier zone, they had to work with and not against the wishes of the trekboers.

It is sometimes asserted that these embryonic Afrikaners were a Puritan community, comparable to their contemporaries in New England. 28 Nothing could be farther from the truth. With the exception of fewer than 200 French Huguenots who arrived between 1679 and 1680, most of the original settlers were former employees of the Dutch East India Company and were by no means particularly religious. The company treated the Dutch Reformed Church as the state church and appointed a few clergy to the Cape. But the religious establishment was no stronger than the lay bureaucracy. 29 On the contrary, trekboers rarely encountered clergy, nor did they possess the institutions of an organized Puritan community.

Family autonomy and slender economic, cultural, and political links with Cape Town and the world beyond were, therefore, the hallmarks of white frontier society in its formative period in South Africa. The fragility and yet the necessity of these links were demonstrated in 1795-1801, when trekboer factions ousted unpopular landdrosts from both Graaff-Reinet and Swellendam. They proclaimed independent republics but soon proved incapable of creating effective political institutions or acquiring general legitimacy in
their own communities. The Cape authorities readily brought them to heel by cutting off supplies of ammunition.\textsuperscript{30}

The British regime transformed the institutions of local government in the Cape Colony, but the Voortrekkers revived them in their republics. Elected veldkornets played important roles at the local level, especially in dealings with Africans.\textsuperscript{31} At the state level, however, the Voortrekkers were endemically factious. They migrated from the Cape Colony in numerous compact groups of kinsmen and neighbors and founded their new homes in widely dispersed localities. Bitter rivalries developed among the leaders of the principal groups. They differed about the policies they should adopt toward the British officials and the principles on which they should establish their own government.

In Natal, the first, abortive Afrikaner republic, they tried to manage with an all-powerful elected legislature and no executive. In practice, however, Andries Pretorius emerged as an independent leader.\textsuperscript{32} Those who settled in the Orange Free State eventually rallied behind a written constitution that established a balance between a unicameral, elected legislature (Volksraad) and an elected president. The Orange Free State constitution contained several provisions taken from the American constitution: clauses proclaiming equality before the law, debarring the Volksraad from prohibiting peaceful assembly and petition, and guaranteeing the right to property and also to personal freedom and freedom of the press. The constitution also included an amending procedure that was much more difficult than the procedure required for ordinary legislation. After a turbulent beginning—a mob forced the first president out of office—the Free Staters operated these institutions with considerable success. The constraints on legislators and officials were generally respected and toward the end of the century the country earned the applause of visitors such as James Bryce, the British constitutional lawyer.\textsuperscript{33}

The Voortrekkers who settled beyond the Vaal River failed for many years to devise stable political institutions. Even though all their leaders had accepted a constitutional document by 1860, they quarrelled again during the ensuing decade. In 1877, the state was so fragile that a small British detachment was able to run up the Union Jack in Pretoria and dismiss the president and the Volksraad without any physical resistance. However, British misrule soon evoked a patriotic response and, after they had regained their independence in 1881, the Transvaalers allowed Paul Kruger to become a strong president. He was able to ignore the prolix and confused constitutional document when it suited his purpose, even to the extent of dismiss-
ing a chief justice who contended that the Volksraad was not enacting laws constitutionally and that they were therefore invalid. Kruger dealt shrewdly with the peripheral frontier zones abutting on African chiefdoms. He also coped skillfully with the problems of the internal frontier zone around Johannesburg until eventually both republics were overwhelmed by superior British forces.

Thus, in the Transvaal during the nineteenth century the excessively individualistic qualities promoted by dispersed settlement and a near-subsistence economy were gradually overborne by a strong, autocratic president in response to pressures from within and without. Both the anarchic and the authoritarian tendencies would survive into the twentieth century. After the Second World War, the latter would prevail and South Africa would diverge still further from all other societies created by colonization from northwestern Europe.

The Frontier and Racial Attitudes

In an important pioneer work first published in 1937, I. D. MacCrone contended that racism in South Africa was essentially a frontier product—and especially a product of the trekboer-Khoisan frontier of the eighteenth century. He characterized trekboer society as individualistic, masculine, violent, and prone to degeneracy, but held together by a common racial consciousness.

MacCrone's views have now been modified in several respects. Winthrop Jordan and others have demonstrated that racist tendencies were present in European culture before the time of Columbus and da Gama. Martin Legassick and others have shown that such tendencies in the seventeenth century were confirmed and sharpened by the East Indian Company officials as well as by the settlers in and around Cape Town, and that racist behavior was as much the product of perceived interests as of attitudes.

The society that took shape in the arable belt of good winter rainfall in the seventeenth century was culturally heterogeneous and sharply stratified. Differences of status and wealth corresponded roughly, though not precisely, with the easily discernible physical differences between the white officials and settlers and the rest of the population.

By contemporary European standards, the Khoikhoi inhabitants were physically unattractive and culturally unimpressive. Indeed, travellers' reports were making Hottentot a byword in Europe for the lowest type of human species. Moreover, although other ele-
ments in the colonial population possessed valuable artisan skills, nearly all of them were slaves or ex-slaves. The eighteenth-century trekboers were therefore a fragment of a society where dark-skinned people of all sorts had inferior status and were regarded as inferiors. The trekboers' own experiences with hunter-collectors and Khoikhoi herders accentuated their racist proclivities. Later, in a statement written to justify the emigration of the Voortrekkers, Piet Retief equated race with class. Throughout the rest of the nineteenth century racism was a potent factor in all frontier zones between Boers and Africans.

Men always outnumbered women in trekboer and Voortrekker society, for males predominated among the fresh arrivals from the southwest. Consequently, there was much concubinage between Boer men and Khoikhoi and African women. Most of the offspring of such unions were brought up by their mothers and excluded from membership in Boer society. In some cases, they formed communities with Khoikhoi families who were retreating before the advancing trekboer frontiersmen rather than becoming incorporated as clients. Such communities were known as Bastards, later as Griquas. They were treated differentially by whites, even though they resembled trekboers in their mode of life and their culture. Race was the principal determinant of status in frontier society in Southern Africa.

In the nineteenth century, these Southern African attitudes were by no means unique. Racism was becoming more and more deeply embedded in the European consciousness and similar circumstances were evoking similar responses wherever white people penetrated into alien societies, as in Australia and North America. The British immigrants who settled in the eastern part of the Cape Colony and in Natal rapidly became negrophobic because, in addition, they felt threatened by the numerically superior Africans around them. They had left Britain in response to advertisements that emphasized the attractions of life in South Africa and made no reference to the dangers. Whites on both sides refrained from recruiting blacks to fight for them when they went to war with one another, as they did in 1881 and 1899. Even missionaries, with few exceptions, considered it desirable to subject African chiefdoms to white control, on the ground that that was a necessary prelude to converting and civilizing them.

For their part, in the early stages of their contacts with whites, the native peoples of Southern Africa had scarcely any sense of racial solidarity. Depending on the context, Africans identified with their age group or sex group, their kinsfolk, their neighborhood, their chief-
The Southern African Frontier

dom, or, at most, their linguistic community. The Nguni (Xhosa, Zulu, Mpondo, etc.) perceived themselves as being different from the Sotho, and vice versa. Both distinguished themselves from the Khoisan peoples. There were deep historic rivalries between chiefdoms and between different segments of the same chiefdom. These were compounded by the mfecane wars which caused such widespread material and moral collapse on the eve of the Great Trek that many Africans welcomed white missionaries, traders, government officials, and even Voortrekkers as saviors.

Indeed, the first reaction of most Africans to the arrival of the white people was to try to incorporate them into their social and political systems and to enlist their support against their traditional rivals. Survivors of an early eighteenth-century shipwreck on the Mpondo coast became the progenitors of a clan still known as the Abelungu ("white people"). King Moshoeshoe of Lesotho used missionaries as agents of territorial expansion as well as scribes and interpreters of the wider world. In his final effort to preserve autonomy for his people, he persuaded the British government to annex what was left of his country rather than have it completely dismembered by the Boers of the Orange Free State.

In most cases, cross-cutting alliances were advantageous to whites. Whites had local allies in every significant frontier confrontation in Southern Africa. In the seventeenth century, the Khoikhoi chiefdoms in the vicinity of the Cape peninsula split into supporters and opponents of the Dutch. Khoikhoi and Cape coloreds (mixed race) fought on the side of the whites in the hundred years of intermittent warfare against the Xhosa and the Thembu; and so, after 1835, did the Mfengu, people of northern Nguni origin, who fled westwards from the Zulu and were placed by British officials on land conquered from the Xhosa. Colored clients who accompanied the Voortrekkers worked for them and fought for them; thirty colored men died with Piet Retief and seventy other white Voortrekkers at the hands of the Zulu. Mpande split the Zulu nation, and it was his regiments that delivered the final blow to Dingaan in 1840. Whites used Swazi allies in their campaigns against the Pedi in the eastern Transvaal. African contingents recruited in the colony of Natal fought alongside the British army against the Zulu in 1879 and alongside the Natal militia against the rebel forces in 1906. And so on, through every frontier campaign in Southern Africa. But the converse did not apply. Scarcely any whites helped Africans resist white expansion. Even John Dunn, a Scottish adventurer whom the Zulu monarchy provided with wives, cattle, and chiefly status, deserted to the British as soon as the war began in 1879.
ment that was built on a hill overlooking Pretoria to celebrate the centenary of the Great Trek contains a sculptured frieze around the inside wall which commemorates the death of Piet Retief and his party at the hands of the Zulu and the subsequent Voortrekker victory at “Blood River.” There is no indication that nonwhites ever fought side by side with the whites against the Africans.

**Land and Labor**

By the seventeenth century there were vast differences between the economic and cultural institutions that existed in northwestern Europe, especially in the Low Countries, and those that prevailed in Southern Africa. In northwestern Europe, land was owned by private individuals and, like other commodities, was disposable by sale and testament. In Southern Africa, on the other hand, land was regarded as being, in the last resort, the property of the community. Its use for hunting, collecting, and pasturage was also communal; but, among arable farmers, each household had the exclusive use of specific portions of land during the cultivating season. A chief, in consultation with his councillors, could admit newcomers into the chiefdom and grant them the same rights as existing members. He could also revoke the rights of a person who abused them. For instance, tribal members could lose their rights by failing to cultivate their fields or by disloyal behavior toward the chief.

In northwestern Europe, wage labor was already an established practice. Indeed, most of the men who became settlers in South Africa in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries did so after a period of service in the Dutch East India Company. Slavery was an established institution in the rest of the Dutch empire by the time the Cape settlement was founded. The company imported slaves into the Cape Colony soon afterwards. Among Southern African indigenous societies, on the other hand, there was no money economy and no wage labor. The various forms of clientage and of communal labor for a chief fell far short of slavery. The most inferior person was not a chattel.

For most of the inhabitants of northwestern Europe cultural transmission was predominantly an informal process that took place within the home, supplemented in various degrees and with various effects by the teachings of religious authorities and the discipline imposed by employers. These practices promoted individualism and differentiation. Standardized public education was the exception
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rather than the rule in Europe before the late nineteenth century. Among Southern Africans, on the other hand, early transmission within the family was followed by about six months of intensive formal education under the control of elders who inculcated the norms of the society to boys and girls in separate initiation schools, a process that included rituals that emphasized the passage from adolescence to maturity and promoted social solidarity.

When Europeans encountered Africans, differences such as those concerning property, wages, and a range of cultural matters were compounded by communication problems. Their languages were poles apart. The meanings of words were often distorted in translation, so that even when both parties were negotiating in good faith there was scope for serious misunderstanding. An African chief such as Moshoeshoe might construe an agreement as meaning that he was permitting a white family to occupy a designated piece of land on customary African conditions, whereas the family in question might genuinely believe that they had bought the land and could do with it whatever they wished. Often, however, white settlers did not act in good faith; they raised their expectations and stepped up their demands as their power in a frontier zone increased.

As the Southern African frontiers advanced, the whites devised policies to reconcile their conflicting interests. For reasons of security and economy, colonial governments tried repeatedly to prevent frontier zones from coming into being by proclaiming boundaries and prohibiting all forms of intercourse between the colonial and the indigenous societies. Such attempts were of no avail. From the beginning, white settlers in Southern Africa ignored the boundaries and used as laborers the indigenous people as well as imported slaves. These contradictory tendencies—exclusive and incorporative—have persisted to the present day in Southern Africa. So has the synthesis that emerged in the frontier era. Settlers sought to acquire the services of as many indigenous people as they needed. But they also sought to exclude all other Africans from the lands they claimed as farms.

Natal is a good example of this process. While it was a Voortrekkers' republic, the territory was still an open frontier zone, and physical force was the principal mode of interaction. The Voortrekkers, needing more servants than the colored people they had brought with them from the Cape Colony, turned to the local population. At first, as a result of the mfecane wars, there were few Africans in the area claimed by the Voortrekkers. So the commandos, when they fought against the Zulus, made a point of capturing children as well
as cattle for distribution when a campaign ended. These captives were called apprentices, and were meant to become free at the age of twenty-one if male or twenty-five in the case of females.

However, from the Blood River campaign onward, there was a continuous influx of Africans into Natal—people who were returning to their homelands from which they had been ejected by Shaka two decades earlier. It has been estimated that the African population of the Natal republic increased from 10,000 in 1838 to 50,000 in 1843. Consequently, the Voortrekkers had reason to be concerned about the threat to security.

To cope with this problem, the Natal Volksraad decided that no more than five African families should live on any one farm. It passed laws prohibiting Africans from owning firearms or horses, denied Africans the right to exist in the white areas of the republic except as servants of white people, and required Africans who were there to possess passes signed by their employers when they left their employers' property. In 1843, the Volksraad also resolved that all “surplus” Africans should be moved southward beyond the Mtamvuna River, instructing the commandant-general to send them there by persuasion if possible, by force if necessary. But that was never done. More and more Africans lived in the republic, and they were not effectively controlled by the white authorities. The Voortrekker state was too weak to enforce its blueprint.

After the British annexation of Natal, the colonial government faced the same problem of reconciling the need for security with the demands for labor. The African population continued to mount rapidly, as people returned from KwaZulu across the Tugela River to the north and from Mpondo country to the south. By 1870, the colony contained about a quarter of a million Africans but only 18,000 whites, most of whom were recent immigrants from Britain.

It was Theophilus Shepstone, a colonial-born son of a missionary, who, as secretary for native affairs, master-minded the solution to the problem. In so doing, he was obliged to pay serious attention to the interests of the settlers, who acquired a major role in affairs with the introduction of a representative form of government in 1856. Shepstone supervised the movement of most of the Africans to reservations (known locally as “locations”), where they were able to maintain their traditional customs and modes of production.

But there were important modifications. Their chiefs were subordinated to white officials. Their disputes with whites were adjudicated by magistrates who applied the Roman Dutch law of the colony. They paid an annual tax for every hut that they occupied. And they were exposed to new commodities and new ideas by white trad-
ers and missionaries. The remaining Africans were occupants of mission reserves, squatters on crown lands, rent-paying residents on land owned but not occupied by white people (including lands owned by commercial companies which derived substantial earnings from this practice of "Kaffir-farming"), or farm laborers who were paid partly in cash but largely in kind.  

This arrangement was, in essence, an application of the principal expedients that the Voortrekker government had envisaged but lacked the means to enforce. Initially, although the white settlers got possession of most of the land, including most of the fertile land, the reservations were sufficient to sustain the bulk of the African population. Some Africans even managed to produce a surplus of grain for sale to whites. By the end of the nineteenth century, however, the Africans had increased to over half a million, and they still outnumbered the whites by ten to one. Yet the whites owned nearly four-fifths of the land, while the reservations, amounting to less than one-fifth, were overcrowded and deteriorating.

The result was that about half the African population did not live on the reservations, but on private lands belonging to white people. The Africans made up the differences between what they produced and what they needed for subsistence and acquired money for tax payments, and, in some cases, for rent payments, by working for whites. Except for the farm laborers, a typical African family sent one or more of its members for a year or so at a time to the towns and villages in Natal, to railroad construction sites, to the Kimberley diamond fields, or to the gold mining industry on the Witwatersrand. There, African wages were extremely low. The majority of the whites knew scarcely anything about the conditions on the reservations and accepted the myth that African earnings supplemented a prosperous subsistence economy. Thus, by the time the frontier era closed, the African population of Natal was poverty-ridden. Migrant labor had become a necessity for Africans and a boon for whites. Some of the Africans rebelled against these conditions in 1906, but they were easily suppressed by the Natal militia.

The process of African impoverishment in Natal was typical of the region as a whole. In other frontier zones, too, whites gradually obtained possession of choice land and control of the labor they required. Initially, they also achieved their goals by the use of force, which was gradually superseded by bureaucratic controls. In other frontier zones there was usually a period when the Africans were able to produce a surplus of grain. And a ready market existed among the white population. On the High Veld, for example, the Afrikanders were essentially a pastoral community until the end of the
nineteenth century, just as their predecessors had been in the Cape Colony in the eighteenth century. However, land losses plus population increase and taxation gradually turned the African reservations into importers of food and exporters of labor. The tempo of African incorporation into the white-controlled, capitalist economy increased rapidly after 1870. By 1899, the gold mining industry possessed an elaborate labor-recruiting organization and cheap black migrant labor was a core feature of the political economy of the entire Southern African region.58

Meanwhile, the indigenous peoples of Southern Africa were becoming influenced, in various degrees, by Western culture. As the Khoikhoi survivors became incorporated in the Cape Colony in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, they became an atomized rural and urban proletariat, adopting the culture of their masters. Christian missionaries were not a significant factor in Southern Africa before the nineteenth century, and consequently had little effect on the white-Khoisan frontier during most of its existence. But from the beginning of the nineteenth century, missionaries working inside as well as outside the Cape Colony eventually converted virtually the entire Cape colored community to Christianity; the descendants of some of the Asian slaves, however, remained Muslim.

In the white-African frontier zones of the nineteenth century, European missionaries were the principal transmitters of the intrusive culture. British and continental missionary societies abounded. In many frontier zones missionaries were the first white residents—the true pioneers—to be followed by traders and settlers. They often attached themselves to African chiefs, serving them as communicators with white secular authorities and informants about the wider world. Among the Mfengu and the Basuto, whose societies had been disrupted by the mfecane wars, they soon made converts, for the traditional rituals and belief systems had already proved incapable of averting disaster. Generally, however, extensive conversions were delayed until whites had established hegemony within a zone. Then, Africans looked to missionaries as people who had access to powers that would help them to cope with a situation their ancestors had never envisaged. By the end of the nineteenth century, nearly all the African peoples of the region had experienced missionary influence, at least at second hand, and nearly a quarter of them had been baptized into a mission church.59

The missionaries have been judged in different ways. They have been applauded as beneficent advisors, modernizers, and mediators between the two cultures, as well as evangelists.60 They have also been denounced as agents in conquest.61 In fact, the missionaries
varied greatly. Some identified closely with the people among whom they worked, such as Eugéne Casalis, the first French Protestant missionary of Moshoeshoe of Lesotho. Others identified essentially with white settlers, as did several of the Wesleyan missionaries to the Xhosa.

Since missionaries founded the first schools for Africans and provided nearly all the Western education that was available to them in the nineteenth century, their influence over the first generations of literate Africans was profound. However, while they often criticized the discriminatory laws and practices of white society, even the most sensitive missionaries were firmly grounded in nineteenth-century European culture and believed that it was their duty to civilize and uplift as well as to evangelize. Their model of civilization was an idealized version of contemporary Europe. Consequently, they denounced customs that were integral to the cohesion and stability of African societies, including lobola (bride-price), polygamy, clientage, and traditional educational systems; the missionaries thereby alienated their protégés from their own backgrounds, including, in many cases, their own families.62

Missionaries also transmitted their own political attitudes, arousing expectations that colonial society was capable of fundamental reform, including the incorporation of Africans into full citizenship. This approach found no encouragement in the Boer republics, which applied absolute, all-pervasive color bars, and very little encouragement in Natal. But in the Cape Colony the constitution of 1853 provided that men could vote in parliamentary elections regardless of their race, provided they possessed specific economic and educational qualifications. As a result, by 1909, 10 percent of the colonial electorate were colored men and nearly 5 percent were Africans.

Consequently, the hopes of the new, mission-educated African elite were forced on the Cape Colony. The Cape system should be reformed and extended throughout Southern Africa.63 At the turn of the century, the British encouraged such hopes in the propaganda they produced to vindicate the war against the Boer republics. But disillusionment followed. The Treaty of Vereeniging that ended the war assured the Boers that no African would have the vote when parliamentary institutions were introduced in the former republics. The British government fulfilled that promise in 1907. And the constitution that united South Africa in 1910 created an all-white, sovereign central parliament.64 Thus, when the frontier era ended, the seeds of apartheid were already planted in Southern Africa.
Some Comparisons with the Frontier in North America

The Southern African frontier is comparable with the North American. Both are regional examples of the frontiers created by the expansion of Europe and of the market economy in the modern era. In both cases there was a vast technological gulf between the intruders, who had access to firearms, wheeled transport, and a literary culture, and the indigenous peoples who previously possessed none of those things. In both cases the intruders were predominantly settlers, committed to creating permanent homes for themselves and their descendants in the successive frontier zones. The vast majority of the settlers in both regions came from the Protestant culture of northwestern Europe. And in both regions settlers acquired political autonomy before the frontiers finally closed and were largely responsible for prescribing the status and the role of the surviving indigenous peoples. Nevertheless, there were enormous differences between the frontier processes in the two regions and, consequently, between the structures of the two societies that emerged from the frontier epoch at the end of the nineteenth century.

The most crucial difference was numerical. By the time of Columbus, the inhabitants of the Americas had been isolated from the Eurasian land mass for many millennia, with the result that they had not experienced several of the diseases that were endemic in Europe. Consequently, the American Indians had no immunity against them. Smallpox, in particular, caused catastrophe after catastrophe as it spread from the European fishing fleets in the Newfoundland banks and the St. Lawrence estuary and from the Spanish settlements in the Caribbean and on the mainland. Throughout North America the disease frontier preceded the frontier of settlement; nearly every Indian community sustained losses that undermined its morale and damaged its social system as well as decimating its numbers before it had to face European settlers. Thereafter the settlers, with their superior technology, were able to acquire control over the land with relative ease. In the western part of Southern Africa the Khoisan peoples, too, were an isolated population, and they suffered severely from smallpox. The Bantu-speaking Africans of the eastern part of the region constituted the southernmost extension of the Eurasian population continuum. But they were already conditioned to the disease carried by Europeans, and smallpox epidemics do not seem to have affected them much more severely than they did the white settlers.

Furthermore, the scale of European migration to the two regions
differed immensely. North America had the natural resources to attract large numbers of Europeans from the seventeenth century onward, whereas Southern Africa provided scarcely any attraction before the 1870s, and even then the influx was minute in comparison with the flood that flowed westward across the Atlantic. Consequently, North American settlers were soon able to muster a majority in nearly every frontier zone in which they had a stake, and, when the frontiers closed at the end of the nineteenth century, the Indians, numbering only one quarter of a million, formed less than one-third of 1 percent of the population of the region and their societies had been profoundly disrupted. On the other hand, Africans outnumbered whites in all frontier zones in the eastern part of Southern Africa and, when the frontier epoch ended, they amounted to six million people, or 80 percent of the population of the Southern African region, and their social systems remained substantially intact and vigorous despite their subjection to white hegemony.

Second, although the frontiers in both regions were parts of a single economic process, which Walter Prescott Webb and Immanuel Wallerstein have described from opposing ideological viewpoints, they were quite different. In North America, every frontier zone was closely integrated into the market economy. From an early stage, the English colonies were providing their metropole with furs, timber, tobacco, rice, and indigo; and at all subsequent stages, as the frontiers moved westward from the Atlantic seaboard, American frontier people were producing commodities for metropolitan markets. In Southern Africa, on the other hand, the trekboers and Voortrekkers were intentionally minimizing their dependence on the market, since it was controlled in the eighteenth century by a commercial company that exploited them and in the nineteenth century by a government that was alien and unsympathetic. Although the Boers required imported weaponry and (when possible) clothing and groceries, the cattle, sheep, and farm produce they gave in exchange did not reach Europe and were of relatively little significance to the metropolitan economies.

Thus the American frontier economy was substantially capitalist, and it bred a tradition of successful acquisitiveness; whereas the Southern African frontier economy was near the subsistence end of the spectrum, and the Boers were suspicious of the forces that controlled their overseas trade. Consequently, the Afrikaner people entered into a prolonged crisis when the closing of the frontiers coincided with the rise of the mining industries that led, for the first time, to the full integration of Southern Africa into the capitalist
world economy. But the Americans, already full-blooded capitalists, were able to adapt to the conditions created by the closing of their frontiers with comparatively ease.

A third great difference between the frontier processes in the two regions concerned the fate of the indigenous peoples. In Southern Africa, the frontier zones were scenes of economic integration. At all stages the whites depended on the labor services of the local inhabitants—first the Khoikhoi and later the Bantu-speaking Africans. By the end of the frontier epoch, the Africans had become an original type of semiproletariat, supplying an oscillating flow of migrant labor to the white-controlled economy, since they could not wrest a full subsistence from their reservations. In North America, Indians and whites were originally partners in the fur trade, but that trade ceased in area after area as the game became exterminated. Indians did not perform other significant roles in the burgeoning capitalist economy in North America. Of the two main systems of production in the English colonies, one comprised self-sufficient settler communities, and the other included slaves imported from Africa; in the nineteenth century, successive waves of European immigrants supplied the wage labor in the growing industrial areas. The Indians who survived smallpox, wars, and removals ended up on reservations that constituted a minute portion of the continent which they had formerly dominated; since the whites had no use for the Indians, they ignored them until late into the twentieth century. Thus, the Southern Africa that emerged from the frontier epoch was a herrenvolk democracy in which Africans formed a subordinate caste; whereas, in North America the surviving descendants of the indigenous inhabitants were simply excluded from the society created by the intruders who had displaced them.

Notes


4. Established scholars as well as students have taken part in these seminars. Howard Lamar and I are particularly indebted to Jeffrey Butler, William Cronon, Alfred Crosby, Hermann Giliomee, Stanley Greenberg, Richard Metcalf, George Miles, and Clyde Milner. We also benefitted from a discussion of our ideas with the members of the Yale-Wesleyan Southern African Research Program in September 1978. A visiting fellowship at All Souls College, Oxford, in the Michaelmas term of 1978 enabled me to receive valuable feedback in seminars in the universities of Oxford, London, and Birmingham.


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and Customs of the Xhosa in 1807, translated from the original manuscript in German by William Fehr (Cape Town: Balkema, 1968).

13. C. F. J. Muller, Die Oorsprong van die Groot Trek (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 1974).


17. Leonard Thompson, "The Subjection of the African Chiefdoms," in OHSA, vol. 2, pp. 244-286. African resistance has become a major theme in recent historical writing; e.g. Chanaiwa, Profiles of Self-Determination.


19. The following table, derived from the Report of the Natives Land Commission, 1913-16, U.G. 19 (Pretoria: Government Printer, 1916), vol. 1, appendix 3, p. 9, and appendix 4, p. 9, indicates the distribution of the land and of the "native" (i.e., Bantu-speaking African) population in the Union of Southern Africa in about 1913, when the frontier era had closed:
Leonard Thompson

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Farms Owned by Whites</th>
<th>Farms Owned by Natives Only</th>
<th>Native Reserves, Mission Reserves, and Farms Owned by Natives</th>
<th>Crown Lands Occupied by Natives</th>
<th>Unoccupied Crown Lands</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Urban Areas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cape Province</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>78.1</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natal</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>48.4</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>30.4</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transvaal</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>61.0</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orange Free State</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>97.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Union</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>74.0</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Percentage of the Total Native Population on the Different Categories of Land

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cape Province</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natal</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transvaal</td>
<td>23.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orange Free State</td>
<td>14.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Union</td>
<td>12.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


25. Opinions differ as to the extent to which *trekboer* society was involved in a market economy and was capitalist in spirit. Neumark, in *Economic Influences*, contends that the frontier economy was fundamentally commercial; Guelke, in “Frontier Settlement,” considers that it was essentially near subsistence. In “Social and Economic Processes on the South African Frontier” [forthcoming], Robert Ross explains that the *trekboers* produced most of their subsistence needs, were marginally in the orbit of the market and the money economy, and exploited commercial opportunities when they became available. I agree with Ross, but would stress that their commercial opportunities were meager compared with those of most North American and Australian frontier peoples.


39. MacCrone includes ample evidence of this in Race Attitudes, chapters 6 and 7; so do the accounts of contemporaries such as Henry Lichtenstein (Travels in Southern Africa) and Anders Sparrman (Travels in the Cape).


42. This is a central theme in Christopher Saunders, “Political Processes in the South African Frontier Zone,” in the forthcoming Lamar and Thompson collection.


44. Thompson, Survival in Two Worlds, chapters 3 and 7.

45. Elphick, Kraal and Castle, pp. 130–131.

46. Wilson, OHSA, vol. 1, p. 249.

47. Thompson, OHSA, vol. 1, p. 360.

48. Ibid., p. 363.

49. C. J. Uys, In the Era of Shepstone [Lovedale, South Africa: Lovedale Press, 1933], p. 205.


52. For an example of the traditional initiation system, see Thompson, Survival in Two Worlds, pp. 3–5.


56. For eyewitness accounts of the kidnapping of indigenous children in the 1850s, see Orpen, *Reminiscences*, pp. 302–324.


59. The religious affiliations of the South African communities according to the 1911 census are summarized in Thompson, *Unification*, p. 488.

60. For example, see Brookes and Webb, *A History of Natal*, pp. 101–102.


62. The Lesotho example is described in Thompson, *Survival in Two Worlds*, chapter 3.


65. The North American case is much more complex than the Southern African. Here, I highlight some of the most significant points of comparison with the frontiers created by the westward movement from the Atlantic seaboard to the Pacific in what is now the United States, and, following Turner and Billington, I ignore the French, the Spanish, and the Mexican frontiers. An elaborate bibliography on the history of the American frontier is in Billington, *Westward Expansion*, pp. 663–805. See also Howard R. Lamar, ed., *The Reader's Encyclopaedia of the American West* (New York: Crowell, 1977).


68. The number of other Americans who have at least one Indian American ancestor is not known: it may be very considerable.
When Walter Prescott Webb published *The Great Frontier* in 1952, he made quite clear two of his pedagogical biases. Webb believed that the professional historian has an obligation to reach out to the "lay audience" in order to raise history above sterile academic debate. Webb's conviction that the historian should not write simply for other historians led him to adopt the style of the essayist, the rhetorician, even the evangelist. Significantly, the heart of his book had already appeared in *Harper's Magazine*, where it had caught the attention of many readers, including me as I was about to graduate from college.

*The Great Frontier* breathed new life into the vision of Frederick Jackson Turner. Turner had not thought it important to demonstrate that the history of the United States was unique or even exceptional; he had assumed this to be so and set out to explain why it was. Webb was well aware by the 1930s that a body of scholars, led most particularly by Fred A. Shannon, were said to have driven the last nail into Turner's coffin in the sense that they had found him guilty of being inconsistent in many statements, inaccurate on a number of factual points, and prone to flights of poetry where solid social science analysis was appropriate. But Webb realized that while Turner's *explanation* of American uniqueness had been seriously damaged, virtually no one had questioned his *assumption* that America was unique. That is, Turner's answers had supposedly been "proven wrong," while his questions as stated were allowed to stand. What Webb sought was a broader answer which would let Turner's insights survive by reasserting themselves in rather different form.

Webb's second pedagogical bias was that since the New World had proven to be a great frontier to Europe, as he sought to demonstrate, then Europeans (especially European scholars) should be interested in American history. Webb did not suggest that his Amer-
ican colleagues should examine frontiers elsewhere, with the possible result that they might find their own history somewhat less exceptional. But he was clearly disappointed that Europeans had not sought to apply the Turnerian mode of analysis. “I have often thought,” observed Webb,

that each nation has something peculiar to itself that could be borrowed with advantage by its neighbors. If I could export one thing American to European scholars, something which, I believe, would help them to a better understanding of their troubled world, our troubled world, it would be an understanding of the frontier. . . . The basic assumption for the discussion of the frontier as a factor in western European civilization is that Europe, too, had a frontier.

Although Webb’s earlier book, *The Great Plains*, had placed heavy emphasis on material culture, technology, and artifactual change, *The Great Frontier* sought both to widen the horizon and broaden the debate. As one scholar has noted, Webb attempted “to provide a comprehensive interpretation of modern history in terms of the New World and its impact on Europe.” Webb applied Turner to Europe, making all of North America one grand frontier. The opening of the New World to exploitation and settlement thus changed the ratio between land, population, and capital so as to create boom conditions in Europe. What had become a stable population in Europe now might enjoy a surplus of land and capital; and this surplus would lead to the great period of expansion from 1500 to 1900. The stimulus of bullion, of new trade and trade routes, and of both the vision and reality of opportunity provided Europe—or, rather, the world we now refer to simply as the West—with its modern dynamism. Social mobility, land, and institutional change were thus the proper subjects of study.

Webb’s courageous, even outrageous, book roamed the world as one might peruse an encyclopedia, eager for knowledge of “many wonderful things.” The Texas scholar commented on Africa, Brazil, and British Guiana; on both the Dutch and the British East India companies; on Mexico, the West Indies, and the Republic of Texas; and on Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa. Reflecting his belief that the lay reader was important, Webb cited numerous popular articles from *Reader’s Digest, American Magazine*, and the *Saturday Evening Post*, all with the word *frontier* in their titles. And he appeared to endorse such usage, as when he referred to Ethiopia as the “land of the fabulous frontier.” But Webb was not merely
hunting for new frontiers; rather he was examining, somewhat impressionistically, the evocative power of the word itself.

Two problems arise immediately from the analyses of Turner and Webb. One stems from the tendency of historians who examine a concept derived from popular culture to keep little distance between themselves and the popular manifestations of the idea which they are examining. For instance, Frederick Jackson Turner knew that the frontier was not only a place and a process but a state of mind, and that the state of mind might outlast the place and the process. Nonetheless, Turner was careless as to which of these three frontiers he had in his own mind at a given moment, so that the reader might be excused for occasional confusion. While Webb saw this confusion in Turner, he himself did not always separate that which could be factually demonstrated from that which “common sense” (the historian’s educated leap of faith from evidence to conclusion) might make true. All historians know that they deal with two truths simultaneously: the facts as the researcher uncovers them and the opinions which people believe to be true. Webb respected this basic distinction and felt his principal obligation was to the facts such as they could be reconstructed and proven. Yet he was more excited by the analysis of what people believed to be true. Webb was thus ahead of his time; I think most historians today would agree that it is more important to know what people believed to be true than to reconstruct the actual facts.

**Australia Comes of Age**

What did Australians learn from *The Great Frontier*? Australia did not become a Western frontier until very late in the era of European expansion. Its history thus has to be fitted into the concept of the “secondary windfall” when overseas societies helped to sustain the capitalism already created. On this point there is some ambivalence, for by Webb’s schema secondary windfalls taken as a group were not creators of capitalism, which, he argued, was the product of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Nevertheless, Webb included Australia in his discussion of those “primary windfalls” which depended on the “frontier treasure of gold and silver,” while admitting that the settlement and exploitation of Australia fell outside the time frame he had imposed on the primary windfall. Webb’s argument is less contradictory than it seems, for he also provided his own specific definitions of both types of windfalls. He referred to Australia in the context of the American cattle barons: “What hap-
pened in the Great Plains also happened in South America, Australia, and wherever grass grew on the free frontier." He might also have quoted Patrick Durack, who built an empire of cattle land in Australia in 1878: "'Cattle Kings' ye call us, then we are Kings in grass castles that may be blown away upon a puff of wind."

The second problem arises from the fact that Webb chided non-American historians for not paying sufficient attention to American history, specifically to the contributions of Frederick Jackson Turner. Webb pointed to three scholars as exceptions who proved his case; two were Australian (one transplanted to England), and the third a South African teaching at Cambridge. One of the Australians, W. K. (now Sir Keith) Hancock, had written a book in 1939 about the Australian frontier but admitted later that at the time he had never heard of Turner. This admission tended to prove that European scholars were not paying sufficient attention to American historiography. Webb was convinced of the importance of the American frontier experience to other nations; just as he showed signs of annoyance that Texas was being slighted in the national historiography, so he felt the relevance of American studies to the world scene was not appreciated. Webb's plea—that knowing us better would help Europeans better understand themselves—was a sophisticated extension of the longing of all of us to step beyond ourselves. Today we have, perhaps, come full circle. Americans are now aware that scholars from Japan, the United Kingdom, and Australia (three countries in which the study of America came of age by the 1960s) have their own reasons for examining the United States. We also now know that these reasons cannot be dismissed as minor modifications of America's own reasons for self-study. In short, we have come to appreciate that the study of America originated abroad in the context of the culture from which the study had emerged. This was precisely Webb's point, yet, paradoxically, not his purpose.

Australians might well have wished to examine themselves in order to free their historiography from European, specifically British, formulations. Most were also unlikely to be willing to accept American formulations any more readily. It was not until 1958 that a truly Australian viewpoint on the Australian frontier was formulated by Russel Ward in his book *The Australian Legend*. Ward's title, apparently misunderstood by some of his critics, may have derived from one of Webb's main concerns, namely what people believed to be true. But Ward's book bore the stamp of neither Webb nor Turner but of yet another great American historian, Henry Nash Smith, whose *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* breathed new life into the old questions. Just as the Australian scholar W. K.
Hancock had reached conclusions which were to be labeled Turnerian when, as he admitted, he had never heard of Turner, so Russel Ward wrote an Australian version of *Virgin Land* without ever having read Smith’s book!

Australia thus generated its own frontier thesis (or theses) spontaneously. As it had for America, distance had so tyrannized Australian scholarship as to force Australian scholars to generate their own historical explanations. Just as Turner had been delighted to propound an explanation which would not only account for American uniqueness but also sever American historiography from European theorizing about the Teutonic forest or long-dead barons at Runnymede, and just as Webb had been pleased to reverse Turner and demonstrate that American historiography could teach something to Europeans, the Australians were now no doubt delighted to escape from the conventional wisdoms in which their earlier, largely imperial, historiography had embedded them.

What were these conventional wisdoms? The first was obvious and comprehensive: the tendency to write the history of Australia, indeed of all settler societies within the British Empire, in terms of an almost foreordained movement from colony to nationhood. Australian history had long been simply a subset within British colonial and imperial history. Constitutionally viewed, that history emphasized the transfer of the English language, the common law, representative institutions, and other hallmarks of the mother country in a stately process through which the Australian people were slowly moving toward political independence. Australian history was not only written as though from abroad (England), it was an outward extension of a larger story (the empire), the basic outlines of which were determined abroad. Such a state of intellectual affairs was not likely to remain palatable in the 1950s, when Australians discovered that they had at a stroke passed from the British to the American defensive umbrella and when Australians were, in the face of an unprecedented immigration, trying to define their unique national values.

The second conventional wisdom arose from what is frequently called open-space theory, that body of writing devoted to examining the ways in which various settler, or encroaching, peoples moved into spaces and onto land that was deemed "open," a word which tended to ignore the presence of indigenous populations. Turner's study was a contribution to this body of literature; so, too, was Webb's, as were the works of James C. Malin, S. Daniel Neumark, and P. J. van der Merwe on South Africa, and Harold A. Innis on Canada. Louis Hartz in 1964 would make a fundamental contribution to
this body of theory in his work on *The Founding of New Societies*.\(^\text{13}\)

The first application of open-space theory to Australian history was by Halford John Mackinder, who read his influential paper “The Geographical Pivot of History” to the Royal Geographical Society in London in January 1904, a paper he expanded in 1919 as the book *Democratic Ideals and Reality*.\(^\text{14}\) Mackinder was the first writer of major stature to apply the theory of closed space, as suggested by Turner when he declared the frontier to have ended. The Columbian epoch of exploration and expansion was over; 400 years of boom were at an end. The path of progress once cut by the missionary, the conqueror, the farmer, and the miner was now to be built by the engineer. “Every shock, every disaster or superfluity, is now felt even to the antipodes, and may indeed return from the antipodes.”\(^\text{15}\) Here was a technocratic restatement of Macaulay’s Maori, an assertion of One World based on technology, which could and did appeal to the best liberal-imperialist. There were four arcs which made the circle of commerce complete, a deliberate echo of an earlier mercantilist reasoning: the arcs of power, trade, wages, and labor. Here were population, land, and capital; there were bullion, trade, and opportunity. Mackinder had clearly anticipated Webb when he wrote in his address that “in 400 years the outline of the map of the world had been completed with approximate accuracy.”\(^\text{16}\)

But just as Mackinder, however similar his ideas were to Turner’s, did not cite Turner, so Webb, however similar in primary thrust to Mackinder, did not cite the Oxford geographer. Indeed, Mackinder appears in neither the bibliography nor the index of *The Great Frontier*. By noting the remarkable similarity of ideas here I do not mean to imply a borrowing, acknowledged or otherwise; rather, I mean to add weight to my contention that more than one scholar may arrive at the same or at least similar conclusions from the same data—stated this way it would be surprising if they did not—and that Webb’s fretful concern that historians outside America had yet to discover the frontier was simply wrong. Webb was wrong on two counts: in the person of Mackinder they already had discovered it, and rather than applying it more directly as a result of reading American historians, they would come to their own frontier theses when they were ready to, their theses arising from their own needs.

The question of whether Webb was correct (Elliott argues that he was not)\(^\text{17}\) is not important here, but it is relevant to suggest why Australian scholars should either have embraced Turner and Webb (as in the instance of Fred Alexander, whom Webb mentions, or that of Norman Harper)\(^\text{18}\) or, quite independently, should have been seeking out their own applications of open-space theory. For the lat-
ter group needed to escape from the kind of geopolitics taught by Mackinder and adopted by Haushofer in Germany and Spykman in the United States. By the late 1930s, the Nazi Geopolitical Institute had borrowed so heavily from Mackinder that the spectre of justifications for lebensraum hovered over Mackinder. Thus, quite wrongly but for the time irredeemably, Americans and Australians would not embrace Mackinder's arguments (as they had, in fact, embraced them early in the century) when those arguments kept the center of attention squarely on Europe.

Mackinder's view of Australia was that it was decidedly on the periphery of events, the New World being merely a satellite to the old continent. What mattered to the Australian scholar was dominance over the heartland, Eurasia, the pivotal region of world politics where the natural seats of power might be found. As Mackinder hymned it, he who ruled Eastern Europe would command that heartland, he who ruled the heartland commanded the "world-island"—Europe, Asia, and Africa, all linked by land—and he who
ruled these regions commanded the world. In Europe this was the prevailing geopolitics of the period when Turner came under attack, and while the incredible development of air power under the pressure of World War II rendered Mackinder's map untenable, the imperial attitudes from which his view had arisen remained alive and well in Australian historiography.

Mackinder's view of Australia as peripheral to the 400 years of boom was right for his time. For a future time Mackinder was very wrong indeed, and one person who saw just how wrong he was going to be was another prophet of empire, R. S. Amery. In the discussion that took place at the Royal Geographical Society in 1904, Amery observed that

both the sea and the railway are going in the future . . . to be supplemented by the air as a means of locomotion, and when we come to that . . . a great deal of this geography must lose its importance, and the successful powers will be those who have the greatest industrial base. It will not matter whether they are in the center of a continent or on an island; those people who have the industrial power and the power of invention and of science will be able to defeat all others.

The Wright brothers had achieved the first powered flights exactly forty days before Mackinder spoke and Amery rebutted. It would be the effects of that flight, as much as the work of Australian historiographers, which would free the Australian frontier from the tyranny of distance.

**Australia and Comparative Studies**

Historians have lagged behind scholars in other disciplines in their use of new methods of research by which they might arrive at comparative insights. W. Turrentine Jackson has observed that "of the two most often cited articles attempting to summarize the historical interpretations of comparative frontiers, one was written by a geographer and the other by a European specializing in American Studies"—namely, Marvin Mikesell and Dietrich Gerhard. Jackson, like Webb, complains of this lack of comparative work, while noting how many Australian scholars in particular have employed Turner in one way or another. A word on comparative history thus seems in order.
For a long time, most universities have made a mistake in organizing their history curricula around national identities. In most university catalogues, courses are entitled “The History of the United States,” “The History of Germany,” “The History of France,” “The History of Canada,” and (although remarkably seldom in the United States) “The History of Australia.” What such organization surely does, certainly for the less perceptive student, is to induce a subtle Whig bias by which students are led to believe that what history is all about is the rise of the nation-state. This conclusion in turn leads research students to the conclusion that the nation-state is the best receptacle for the collection of historical data.

Stated in this way, the contention is obviously false. Lord Acton was right when he told us to study problems. If a problem is taken as the unit of study (if one studies revolutions, not a revolution), then one is engaging in comparative history. To some scholars, this study has the disadvantage of appearing to be merely fashionable. To its practitioners, it has the disadvantage of being very difficult, requiring the scholar to break from the mold of single-language training and single-culture interpretations. Comparative work also has the enormous disadvantage, in a world of those who perish when they do not publish, of being time consuming and open to many potential dead ends. Finally, the scholar will undoubtedly be accused by area specialists of superficiality in his or her own work. The end result may indeed be a kind of sophisticated parallel study rather than a comparative study. Yet the critics should beware that what one does in national history can also be superficial, and often in ways more subtle and dangerous.

But there are two objections one must take very seriously. The first is that so often what one has done is to study the impact of one society upon another. Is this not in fact what Walter Prescott Webb did? And there is the objection that the comparative approach is restrictive because it looks only at those problems capable of comparison. It would be a mistake to compare the British empire with the Roman empire, a favorite game of the British themselves near the end of the nineteenth century. It was a game in which, they thought, they could congratulate themselves and make foolish predictions about the length of time for which the empire would continue to grow. In truth, this is an inapt comparison because the technologies in which the two empires grew were so utterly different as to defy any legitimacy in comparing the realities of the impact of their cultures upon other, less complex technologies. One must begin, then, with elements, societies, and problems which are in fact compara-
oble. Many scholars have come to argue that frontier studies are comparable, whether using the device of open space theory or, as Louis Hartz would assert, of “fragment society” analysis.

A second very real danger arises. The frontier is metaphor and myth as well as fact; Turner acknowledged the frontier to be a state of mind, and the manner of the examination of America’s self-image in the work of Henry Nash Smith and Richard Slotkin confirms this. The problem is that frontier metaphors have a way of taking on a life of their own, not only in American shoot-outs at the O.K. Corral and in Australian bush ballads, but in political rhetoric and social purpose. An example arises from South Africa. In that nation the metaphor fitted the historiographical needs for several schools of thought; examinations of the role of the frontier in South African history have fed not only the imperial school (Mackinder) and the anti-imperial school (that is, in this instance, the Cape liberal intellectuals), but the Afrikaans school as well. The Afrikaners have seen the Great Trek as a myth of re-creation, just as Americans saw the West as a land of beginning again. The Cape liberals, in turn, used the notion of the frontier to explain how wrong the Afrikaners were to have trekked away from modern civilization. Not only did the Enlightenment not follow them into the interior of South Africa, but regression occurred. The use of frontier metaphor in South Africa thus legitimized the total neglect of the history of the non-European peoples.

The tendency of historians to use metaphor makes the words they write far more enjoyable, more literate than the words of social scientists. But historians tend to forget that their leap of faith between evidence and conclusion is substantially greater when they proceed not from fact to fact, but from metaphor to metaphor. Robert Nisbet, a highly literate and readable sociologist, has written that a historical metaphor “is the synthesis of several complex units into one commanding image, ... the expression of a complex idea not by analysis nor by direct statement but by sudden perception of analytical relation.” Or, as the geographer J. Wreford Watson has put it, the geography induced through an analysis of images provides us with an understanding of the myths, if not the facts, of the American scene. The use of frontier metaphors to conjure up the mental geography of regions may serve many purposes: some liberating (as when Australians employed their frontier to put distance between themselves and the empire of which they were a part), others merely stultifying, conservative, or even racist.

To say that the frontier has been used in Australia in ways analogous to its use in South Africa is not to engage in a comparative
Australia, the Frontier, and the Tyranny of Distance

analysis; rather, it is to say that in recent years the ghost at the table has been Louis Hartz. In *The Founding of New Societies*, Hartz extends the general argument developed in his earlier work, *The Liberal Tradition in America*, in which he first put forward his idea of the "fragment society." In that work he maintained that a centrist, liberal orthodoxy developed in America because its society was derived from the Enlightenment at a moment when it was possible to discard the constraints of feudalism; America did not have to fight to be free, it was born free, and the American Revolution was the proof rather than the cause of this condition. In something of an aside, Hartz suggested that the ideas of the English Chartists "had some effect on the settlement of Australia," indeed had helped to free Australia from the "old European order.

Hartz was following in the footsteps of Turner and Webb in that almost by intuition he grasped truths which could be made demonstrable. For all three scholars, the joy with which they made their leaps of vision was infectious and their prophetic intent clear. Hartz, a member of the government department at Harvard, knew that historians rejected out of hand so-called single-factor analyses on the grounds that all historical events were too complex to be attributed to a single cause. While it was not his intention to posit a single-factor analysis, Hartz wanted to remind historians that "we must not . . . brand as fruitless any attempt to isolate a significant historical variable and to study it by consistently comparing cases." He sought to compare those "new societies" which had developed out of "frontier settings." Later he would develop this argument in the introductory essay to *The Founding of New Societies*.

Consider those scholars who have sought to characterize the warp and woof of the American experience: Turner, Webb, Hartz, David Potter in his *People of Plenty*, and C. Vann Woodward in his essay "The Age of Reinterpretation." Each pointed to not a single but a predominant factor analysis: Turner to the frontier, Webb to that same frontier enlarged and in a new context, Hartz to the freedom of the fragment, Potter to the idea of a natural economic abundance, and Woodward to the concept of a free security. Each was following a dialectic that derived much from Hegel. Thesis clashed with antithesis, synthesis emerged, and in time, under the impact of new experiences in a new environment, that synthesis became a thesis, again to be opposed by other new experiences, another antithesis, producing in time another synthesis. The process was continued, Turner thought, until the triumph of that unique American type, the Western individual.

Behind the analysis one could see the desire to explicate inner
truths, to demonstrate not only the uniqueness, but even implicitly the superiority, of America. Yet each of these prophets (for they were read as such, whatever their intentions) was at base pessimistic. Each felt that the dynamic that had produced a unique America was no longer at work: the frontier had closed, Turner said; 400 years of boom were over, according to Webb; the fragments were no longer ones of a parent culture, Hartz hinted, but were mature and likely to sink into the sins of that maturity; natural economic abundance was no longer available to Americans, Potter concluded; no longer could Americans enjoy a security free either of cost or of moral compromise, Woodward suggested. All of these writers were “catastrophic historians” who anticipated great change, most likely not for the better. Each fragment, Hartz concluded, would confront major crises as its own frontier closed. This was comparative history with vengeance visited upon all, an historical explanation that could admit to the uniqueness of the Australian frontier while linking it not only to a type but to a common process.

American studies in comparative history from Turner to Hartz have suffered from an ever-recurring bias. We Americans have ever been eager to read the history of other nations in terms of the history of our own; we have shown a paradoxical desire to prove that our history has been an exception to the Old World while making our history the normative experience, the departure point, for the histories of other societies founded upon white settlement. Allan Nevins was prescient when, just after World War II, he went to Australia and wrote of the United States as the Old World. Our historians sought to fix upon Australia, New Zealand, and to a lesser extent South Africa, the formulaic devices of an historiography developed initially to liberate the American experience. Turner and Webb were America’s Pirenne and Michelet, bringing a cake of custom to the South Pacific even as they broke that cake when looking eastward across the Atlantic. That Australian scholars should have first found Turner attractive should surprise us no more than that subsequent generations of Australian scholars have rejected Turner and the continuum.

One of the most brilliant and provocative of Australian historians of the frontier has been Russel Ward. As the title of his 1958 book, *The Australian Legend*, should make clear, Ward was primarily interested in examining a myth, in looking at what a people had come to believe was true of their past and, by implication, of their present. To do this he examined the historical facts to see which portions of the self-vision partook of legend and which did not. *The Australian Legend* was a major and complex undertaking
and, as one might expect, on occasion challenged Ward's distinction between legend and fact. One reviewer pointed out what he believed to be a major flaw. "While our national mythology is totally coloured by rural experience," wrote Max Harris, "the fact is that Australia is one of the most highly urbanized countries on earth." This critic argued that since most Australians were and always had been city-dwellers, the outback could not have had the influence Ward attributed to it. Clearly Harris had not read (or had rejected) Henry Nash Smith, for Ward's point was that whatever the facts might be in terms of demography, it was patently clear that most Australians believed something different of themselves. Here again a historian was being hoist on his own petard for choosing to write about what a people believed to be true rather than about the so-called objective truth.

In his concentration on the myths of his society, rather than "all the facts," Ward was interested in discovering the history of the Australian people. As he wrote in "The Australian Legend Re-visited" [in the 1978 retrospective issue of Historical Studies devoted to his work], the book was not meant to be a thorough history of Australia but an attempt to trace and explain the development of the national mystique. Ward looked to the bush: "Poets, painters and drinkers in public houses recognize Ned Kelly, or Ben Hall, or the 'Man from Snowy River' . . . as embodiments of Australian characteristics." Of course Ward, like Henry Nash Smith, knew what he was doing; both were scholars who, while writing scholarly works, were engaged in something far more important. They sought to understand historically the very way contemporary society felt about itself and, by extension, how that society would attempt to meet the future.

The Australian Frontier

Let us look in brief compass at the history of the Australian frontier. There have been four clearly distinguishable "frontiers." Like the United States and New Zealand, Australia was viewed since the end of the eighteenth century as a frontier of European civilization. Terra Australis Incognita, the great unknown land of the South, haunted European, especially British and French, imaginations. Fundamental to the development of Australia is the fact that until World War II about 95 percent of the Australian population was of British stock. Unlike the frontiers of North America, where highly diverse European peoples came together to rub customs off on one another, Australia has represented the transplantation of British working-
class culture, with changes from the British model induced only by the Australian environment. Australia therefore was a British frontier, a land of beginning again for a variety of peoples who had been either unsuccessful or unhappy in Britain: convicts, remittance men, Chartists, Irish who opposed the church and the rule of the United Kingdom, and dissident religious groups, with the Methodists foremost. To Australia were transplanted the religious and class quarrels of nineteenth-century "bleak" Britain, with little notion that such quarrels could be left behind for long.

Internally, the four frontiers were at first relatively distinct. The first lay around Sydney Cove where, in January of 1788, the first fleet of eleven storeships and transports disgorged its contents together with over 1,000 convicts and jailers. About lay the bush, and within the bush lay aborigines whose Stone Age culture ill prepared them to deal with the newcomers. Convicts were sent to New South Wales until 1840 and to Tasmania until 1852; in all some 160,000 arrived, primarily after 1815 (Western Australia also received convicts from 1850 to 1868). Convict settlements were the antithesis of those in North America; the former were tied to a system, ill-organized and inefficient, which precluded free land, social innovation, and the breaking of class barriers through individual performance. In time the majority of convicts were assigned to free settlers, providing a labor force, intensifying class awareness, rooting settlement near the ports of entry (Hobart, Sydney, and Melbourne), and retarding the growth of forms of agriculture which were not amenable to a gang labor system. If there was a true frontier at this time, it lay beyond these settlements in the bush which—precisely because it was at the outer edge of imprisonment—became increasingly attractive, romantic, and remote.

In reality, the bush was not attractive at all but exceptionally inhospitable to settlement. Australian ground cover was prickly, poor, and weakly rooted; the land was arid, water evaporated quickly, and timber cover was sparse except in relatively limited areas such as the Blue Mountains. Compact settlements were difficult to establish, even as the convict period ended, for lack of water and the poverty of transport kept most Australians bound to the seacoast, as they remain to this day. The only economic use of the near interior was for pasturage, and a new frontier emerged upon the basis of sheep.

This second frontier was that of the squatter. Climate and soil did not favor small homesteads, and the grants made to emancipated convicts and garrison men were too small to permit wheat farming. Small settlers lacked capital for expansion, limiting most free set-
tlers to market gardening for Sydney and Hobart and the small towns, and to producing grain for the commissariat. The New South Wales Corps enjoyed a virtual monopoly, especially over the importation of rum, and after John MacArthur built a fortune in this trade he applied his knowledge of monopoly to wool. The pastoral economy that developed rapidly was not a democratic one, resting as it did upon men of capital. From 1821, the first year for commercial export of wool, to 1850, Australian wool growers, despite the immense distance for transport, sent more wool to England than Germany and Spain together. The developing economy increasingly attracted middle-class immigrants to Australia; many had been comfortable in Britain but faced the prospect of a decline, and they took with them sufficient capital to establish a squattocracy upon the land, ultimately becoming a local equivalent of the gentry-bred squirearchy of England.

In the second quarter of the nineteenth century pastoral settlement spread over the vast inland grazing area of southeastern Australia; in 1836 the government recognized this diffusion by imposing an annual license on squatters who had entered the officially “unsettled” districts. The crown thus asserted its title to these lands. Three years later the “unsettled” lands were divided into nine squatting districts, a border police system established, and a commissioner of crown lands named for each district. In 1847 the permanency of the squatters was recognized when New South Wales (which included Victoria and Queensland) was divided into settled, intermediate, and unsettled districts, with one-, eight-, and fourteen-year leases allowed to squatters. The society that developed bore little relationship to the frontier communities of North America, for there was little pressure from additional urban settlers who remained on the coast and little fear of the native population which had been driven to extinction in Tasmania and forced into the dead center of the Australian interior.

During this period of time exploration of the Australian continent began to confirm the initial impression: climate would not permit the settlers a wide range of choice in economic activities. Few rivers offered access to the interior; many of the lakes went dry during the summer; valleys ended in blind canyons below high plateaus. Early movement, therefore, was along the coastal lowlands. In 1813, however, exploration of the Blue Mountains revealed open woodlands to the west, and the first inland town, Bathurst, was founded two years later. Within eight years the first sheep stations were operating at Limestone Plains [after 1913 called Canberra]. In
1837 Sir Thomas Mitchell, the surveyor-general, in travelling from Sydney to Portland Bay (in western Victoria), opened up a rich pastoral area which he named Australia Felix. Charles Sturt sought to find an Australian equivalent of the North American Great Lakes by following the westward-draining rivers from the eastern highlands, but he proved only that nothing lay in the interior except more salt-pans. Further to the north a German named Ludwig Leichhardt crossed the continent to a point north of Darwin, discovering that once away from the tropical lowlands the north was as arid as the south. In 1848 Leichhardt disappeared while attempting another transcontinental journey; his death became the symbol of the unpromising, omniverous outback, a land not of beginning again but of no return. Upon Leichhardt would be built many of the legends of the Australian "frontier," as well as the finest work of the continent's finest author, Patrick White's *Voss*.

The settlement and exploration of Australia and, to the degree that it took place, its interior development originated in the east and south. The far west was isolated by the great distances of the interior. Communication continued to be by sea, and Australians continued to cluster in seaport villages. Railways had to be built by the colonial governments since private enterprise could not thrive in such unpopulated regions, even as the Australian grain farmer demanded cheaper transportation to the ports. Victoria had more capital and began railway construction in the late 1850s (becoming a boom in the 1880s), but its railways did not reach the South Australian border, a quarter of the way across the continent, until 1885, the same year that the first trans-Canadian railway was completed. To this day Australian distances decree travel by air.

Another frontier lay, therefore, to the east of Perth, and it rested on sheep, minerals, and timber. In 1883 one of the richest silver-lead-zinc fields in the world was found at Broken Hill in New South Wales, and from it, from Tasmania, and then from Western Australia would come much of the capital which made the latter part of the nineteenth and early part of the twentieth century boom years for Australia. "Westralia" remained an appendage of the east, just as Queensland—where sugar began to be grown commercially from the 1850s—was dependent on the southeast, and the dryland farmers of South Australia on Victoria and New South Wales. Rather than creating new cultural centers, as the gold rushes and mining booms in Canada and the United States provided to British Columbia, California, and the Rocky Mountains, mining in Australia sharpened the focus of the continent on its two rapidly growing cities, Melbourne and Sydney.
A fourth frontier for Australia lay not within the continent but outside: to the far north, in New Guinea. Populated with Stone Age cultures which European imperialism had passed by until the 1870s, New Guinea (Papua) was at first of interest only because it had attracted the attention of Germany and because it could provide some kanaka labor for the Queensland cane fields. Australia’s West Africa, New Guinea was regarded as too tropical for white settlement; it was popularly dubbed “the land God had made on a Saturday night.” Queensland asserted its presence there in 1884, largely for reasons of security; Britain transferred Papua to Australia in 1902; and in 1914 Australian troops took over the German portion of the island. This land was confirmed to the Commonwealth of Australia, itself the new birth of 1901, by the League of Nations in 1919. There was no immediate rush of settlers, however.

Settlers and Natives in Australia and New Zealand

Until recently, most frontier historiographies have omitted the native peoples except as backdrops to highlight the technology and skills of the settler peoples. In the whole of Turner’s The Frontier in American History there are only nine references to Indians. The aborigine plays a greater role in Ward’s work, but a small one nonetheless. Webb makes few references to American Indians, although he notes the function of the “noble savage” in literature in a fine and overlooked chapter. In Australia and New Zealand native-settler relations developed quite differently. If these relations were to be placed on a scale from benign and accommodationist on the one end to violent and destructive on the other, Australia would be placed close to the latter end and New Zealand close to the former end of the scale.

Four major considerations determined the differing pattern of relations between the encroaching white settler peoples and the indigenous populations. The first factor was the nature of the settlers. The skills and attitudes which they took with them differed depending upon the level of technological change which Britain had reached, their position in British society, and the unique skills they had acquired in relation to the act of settlement. Settlers with different conceptions of themselves and of their purposes would apply different attitudes toward the native populations they encountered. If the settlers intended permanent settlement, they might either attempt to cooperate with the aboriginal society, if only for the purpose of turning it into a reservoir of cheap labor, or they might wish
to remove the aboriginal society because it competed (or potentially could compete) for the land on which the settlers intended to live. Nor might land be the primary issue, for depending upon the prevailing technology and the nature of the demands of world markets, other resources might be the primary targets of settler-native competition. Each high-technology culture perceives the role of technology differently, places different values upon specific aspects of technology, and conditions differently those who go overseas in the service of each technology. Within a managerial group the nature of interaction with the local culture will vary depending upon such matters as the generation, training, marital status, income, rank, expectations, and goals of those sent out.

The settlers who went to Australia did so often against their will, being convicts who at first lived under coerced conditions. Often illiterate and brutalized, unread even in Biblical charity, and not given to accommodationist practices in personal relations (not to speak of interracial ones), they were ill-equipped to find any desirable values in the aboriginal population. Most probably they had never heard of the beau sauvage, and they certainly were not inclined to romanticize the people they encountered. In New Zealand, by contrast, the settlers went of their own will, paid their own way, were more educated and bourgeois, and were more affected by the evangelical movement in England. They were more inclined not only to romanticize but to deal with some justice with the native peoples.

The second factor at work was the nature of the indigenous population. The aborigines of Australia, small and dark-skinned, were the very images of what the prevailing aesthetic mythologies of race thinking in Britain held to be ugly. Furthermore, these nomadic people seemed to have no social organization, art, or cohesive religion—nothing that Victorians or pre-Victorians could seize upon to interpret as worthy of attention. In short, they could not command the respect of the settlers, who in any case were inclined to think of native societies as worthy not of study but only of removal. On the other hand, the New Zealand settlers encountered in the Maori the most complex indigenous society in the South Pacific. Here was a people who lived in settled villages and behind the walls of a pa (fortress), and who had a highly developed, formalized religion that was "visible" in the Western sense. The Maori possessed a sophisticated culture which expressed itself in handsome wood carving, ritualized dances, and beautiful ornaments. The Maori on occasion fought wars in the European manner, even to the point of declaring truces
upon the battlefield. They appeared the very image of the noble savage.

The third of the variables was the nature of the space in which the confrontation took place. Australia was a continent. On a continent one may make one of two decisions: to practice policies leading eventually toward a final solution or to move as quickly as possible to an ultimate peaceful resolution. In Australia the decision by and large was to move to that final negative decision. In Tasmania, the aborigines were tracked down with hunting dogs and ultimately wiped out in a war of genocide, the last dying in her native land in 1876. On the Australian mainland, the aborigine—now called the central Australian aborigine—was made central by being pressed into the interior of the continent. In New Zealand, consisting of two islands, time was short, and one could not postpone a decision for long, because white settlement was encroaching rapidly upon traditional Maori areas. The decision might have been different had the settlers been different, or had the indigenous group been different; it might have been for a war of genocide. But given the first two factors, and the nature of the arena of conflict which forced an early decision, the New Zealand solution ultimately was in favor of racial accommodation, and this despite a series of Maori wars.

The fourth factor was an external one which relates to the tyranny of distance as perceived not from Sydney or Wellington, but from London. What was the degree of commitment to retention of the area on the part of the metropolitan government? The commitment to New Zealand in military terms was not very great. In the midst of the most bitter of the Maori wars, the New Zealand settlers found the British government moving deeper into its Little England phase and withdrawing the imperial troops who were fighting the war. There is a great deal of difference between pursuing a war which is, for the most part, being fought for you by others and discovering that you will have to take up your musket and fight it for yourself. The New Zealand settlers quickly came to the conclusion that they did not care to continue the war solely for themselves, given the nature of the enemy they were facing. In Australia in the early nineteenth century the imperial government was willing to make the military commitment, making possible further postponement of a settlement of the native question. Thus, it should come as no surprise that in New Zealand the Maori would be given their own representatives in Parliament while in Australia the aborigine was systematically excluded from citizenship.
Australia: The Empty, Distant "Frontier"

In terms of open space, much of Australia remains unsettled today, and in this sense is frequently referred to as one of the world's last frontiers. But if by frontier is meant something more subtle than the mere absence of people, Australia is not and never was a true Turnerian frontier. In particular, relatively little of the class formulation of a Turnerian frontier applies to the Australian story. Consider the differences.

Australia was settled from three sides, its interior proved to be desert, and those moving onto the land were overwhelmingly of British stock. Australia was not a land of abundance in terms of variety, and it did not offer a range of entrepreneurial opportunities; the country encouraged concentration of land ownership and monoplistic trading practices rather than free enterprise on the North American model. From the first moment of settlement the average Australian lived in a town; today two-thirds of the population lives in six cities, all on or near the coast. As Sir Keith Hancock has remarked in his autobiography, Australians had "trams on the mind": those who lived in the small towns behind the Blues, the Dandnongs, or the low hills around the ports hankered not for movement further west, not for distance between themselves and others, but for closeness, compactness, and a homogenous society. Mateship, the characteristic Australian term for comradeship, reflected a fear of the outback, not romantic involvement with it, for the outback required a mate rather than promoted rugged individualism. Australia was an urban society; Australian democracy sprang not from its frontier but from its asphalt cities.

To be sure, Jack was as good as his master, but the source of this demand lay in the Chartism of industrial England, in traditions of English lower-class radicalism transplanted almost wholly intact to an alien environment. Australians were transformed by their environment, but that the environment determines the parameters of opportunity is not a particularly Turnerian insight, as the first Biblical wanderers in the wilderness knew. Unlike the Americans, Australians did not embrace nature, did not assume that one must get back to the land to stand erect; they did not approve of mixing peoples, and they did not emphasize individualism.

Yet there were similarities to the Turnerian model, perhaps unsurprisingly so, since Turner's model was highly elastic and capable of embracing contradictions. Australians showed a sense of destiny not unlike that of the American settlers pressing westward. They
were a violent people, given to quick solutions to immediate problems. They admired the new but held to the old. They moved often from place to place, showing a North American physical and social mobility, but theirs was from town to town, city to city. Perhaps most important, Australians embraced a myth of the frontier, of the outback, just as Canadians and Americans embraced myths of their own. Australian literature is filled with the balladry, poetry, and plain voices of "a harsh land, a land that swings, like heart and blood, from heat to mist" (Ian Mudie). Ned Kelly, a Wild Colonial Boy, and other bushrangers would become the plain man's cultural heroes, not alone for being independent but for being men who opposed a system which was urban, capitalistic, and imperially oriented. Australia's most famous painter, Sidney Nolan, caught exactly the mood of the Australian frontiersman. Alone, alienated, far from Europe, he was yet fascinated with a mechanical civilization where, however far across the horizon train tracks might run, they inevitably ended at a port, beyond which stood the world upon which Australia depended, a world that could dash Australian hopes.

The foregoing summary of developments is not particularly original; indeed, as Russel Ward has remarked, my views appear to be in accord with those of most other scholars, excepting himself and H. C. Allen. Ward disagrees with me as he does with most Australian scholars, because he believes that the Australian frontier had many Turnerian qualities.

Ward contends that there are six basic points of difference between his interpretations and mine. He points out that I state that the first frontier was the bush around Sydney; he believes that this implies that subsequent frontiers were not bush as well, when certainly the pastoral or sheep frontier was such. Second, Ward notes that recent research makes it clear that many early squatters did not bring capital from Britain but were currency lads, poor immigrants, and even old convict hands. Third, he feels it "blindingly wrong" to assert that the Australian frontier was not Turnerian, since occupation and development proceeded from the eastern coast westward and, later, from the southeastern coast westward and northward, just as in the United States. He also points out that Western Australia developed separately, in relative isolation, just as California did. Fourth, he argues that the Australian gold rushes caused growth of inland towns at a rate even faster than the growth of Melbourne and Sydney. Fifth, he finds the notion of New Guinea as an Australian frontier "a bizarre idea" equivalent to naming the Philippines, Hawaii, or Alaska part of the American frontier. Finally, he
totally disagrees with my statement that mateship reflected a fear of
the outback and argues that my reference to Nolan contradicts my
conclusion.

My reply is as follows. I do not doubt his first and second points.
That California and Western Australia each developed in isolation
strikes me as having little to do with Turner; the fact that California
was an appendage of the East is more readily explained by present­
day dependency theory than Turnerian open-space theory.44 That the
gold rushes brought many people into inland towns in the second
half of the nineteenth century does not vitiate the fact that two great
cities continued to dominate services, access to the world, and de­
velopment to a far greater extent than New York dominated the Col­
orado, Montana, or Nevada mining towns. That Hawaii and Alaska
were part of an expanding American empire seems patently obvious,
and that the empire was created not only when the frontier was
closed but was seen to be closed within the continental United
States also seems clearly true.45 Finally, it seems to me there need be
no contradiction between romantic involvement and fear; indeed, as
I understand the concept of psychosexuality, this interrelationship
seems to me commonplace.46

While the frontier provides an excellent perspective on Aus­
tralia, it is only one perspective. Comparative studies, to quote C.
Vann Woodward, "illuminate historical discussion after the manner
of an imaginative and disciplined use of simile, metaphor and anal­
ogy."47 When Louis Hartz used Australia to throw light on American
history, he was studying Australia for the reason Americans might
most reasonably be expected to study it, that is, he studied Australia
for the reason Webb wanted Europeans to study America. Hartz's
purpose was to comment on America; had his purpose been dif­
ferent—for example, to promote theoretical ends relating to the
methodology of comparative studies—he would have needed to do
far more.48 If one wishes to isolate for consideration the role of the
frontier in a variety of societies, one must study those societies in
toto before the act of isolation may be attempted; frontier history
must be the end in view, not the beginning or the means.

To understand Australia one must study it in terms not only of
frontier analogies but also of governance, the transfer and diffusion
of cultural norms, the establishment of prefabricated collaborators
in a settler community, even the nature and actions of the people on
the spot. Ward does this, as Hartz did, from an oblique angle. Ul­
timately each scholar, interested most in what a people believed to
be true of themselves, created a self-fulfilling prophecy wherein
what is believed to be true becomes itself a kind of truth.
It is this problem which Geoffrey Blainey explores in *The Tyranny of Distance*, published in 1966. Blainey explicitly places the idea of distance in the stead of Turner's frontier thesis. Blainey argues that Australia must be viewed, not as a continent, but a series of islands, of coastal cities which until recently communicated with one another best by sea, being surrounded on the one side by water and on the other by inhospitable or largely unsettled land. As the frontier protected America, so Australia was shaped by distance: distance from people, from markets, from the protection of the mother country. This distance made Australians self-reliant; the internal distances to be conquered made them aggressive; the low population density and lack of cheap labor assured that the state would build the railways while in the United States they were built by private enterprise. Sea strategy dictated the sites of the early outposts. Wool and gold were feasible exports because their value was high in relation to freight costs. Voluntary, self-subsidized migration from Europe was rarer than in North America because of the factor of distance; migration had to be state-maintained. Because of a rugged outback, an illusory frontier, the people became state-oriented and dependent from the outset on the city. A mixed-enterprise economy emerged. The scarcity of Australian workers meant that they could exert maximum political influence and move the nation quickly toward social welfare, while the steady stream of working-class immigrants to the United States militated against the idea of a welfare state. In the latter "welfarism" became a pejorative term; in Australia, it was generally judged to be "a good thing."

The Australian frontier was thus measured less in terms of the nature of groups moving onto the land than it was in terms of technological changes relating to the sea: clipper ships, steamships, telegraphy, motorized ships, refrigerated cargo vessels, airplanes. World War I taught Australia that it was close enough to Europe and its problems to supply manpower but too far to supply primary produce, and as the ratio of time to reach Europe as against Asia diminished, Australians began to rethink their position in world affairs. Ultimately, Australia found that distance forced Britain to desert it, and willingly accepted the protection of the United States. The poetry of loneliness and exile, the novels of Patrick White and the poems of A. D. Hope, the paintings of Sidney Nolan, all reflected this acute awareness that distance placed Australia at the hither edge of a contracting frontier, of a Europe less and less able to be a major presence in the Australian future. As the ties to Britain weakened, a spirit of separateness grew in the land. As Blainey wrote in his conclusion, "Much of Australia's history had been shaped by the contradiction
that it depended intimately and comprehensively on a country which was further away than almost any other in the world."\textsuperscript{52}

Even in so superficial a summary, the points of departure from Turner, Webb, and Ward are evident. But Blainey is also part of the continuum: he extends the frontier thesis even as he draws upon dependency theory. Again the dialectical method is apparent, technological innovation being substituted for cultural transformation; again the tone is prophetic, the writing leaning heavily on metaphor. Blainey's last sentence is no less elegiac, nervous, and catastrophic than the conclusions of Turner, Potter, and Woodward: "The antipodes were drifting, though where they were drifting no one knew."\textsuperscript{53}

Notes

2. Ibid., p. 7.
5. Ibid., p. 190.
25. The following three paragraphs are based on Robin Winks, *The Relevance of Canadian History* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1979), pp. xii–xiii, 1.
28. I am grateful to Leonard Thompson of Yale University for allowing me to attend certain sessions of his course "Comparative Frontier History: South Africa"; for the use of the bibliography accompanying that course; and to Gerald McSheffrey for pointing me to additional materials.
33. Ibid., pp. 20–21.
34. Ibid., p. 21.
43. Correspondence between Russel Ward and myself, 1978.
45. I am now at work on a book on the idea of American imperialism. As an approach to it, see my *Relevance of Canadian History*, pp. 60–86.
50. Ibid., p. ix.
53. Ibid.
The bibliography of frontier studies is now quite extensive and continues to grow at a steady pace. In compiling this bibliography there is no attempt to be definitive. Included are works by Frederick Jackson Turner and Walter Prescott Webb, the five essayists, some additional sources on each of the five frontiers treated in this volume, and some better known general works. Most of the citations are of books, there is a limited amount of materials from journals and periodicals.

The list is intended primarily for the general reader as an introduction to the subject. Specialists in the fields of frontier history and comparative frontiers are not likely to find much new here.


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The following are the leading publications by the contributors to this volume:


For the frontier in Latin America generally, see Emilio Willems, "Social Change on the Latin American Frontier," in The Frontier: Comparative Studies, edited by David Harry Miller and Jerome O. Steffen (Norman: Uni-


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