Essays on borderlands history tend to begin with Herbert Eugene Bolton, and this one is no different. Bolton not only coined the phrase “Spanish Borderlands” in his 1921 book, but he also trained a small army of graduate students who launched the field of borderlands history. Their project was enormous. “The history of the United States,” explained Bolton, “has been written almost solely from the standpoint of the East and of the English colonies.” Seeking to highlight the Spanish origins of territories only later claimed by the United States, Bolton explored Spanish settlement from Florida to California and framed narratives of rival European empires in the Americas. His work reminded many historians of the early to mid-twentieth century that, as he described it, “We Saxon Americans” were not the only ones to shape the rise of the United States. Yet in pressing his claim, Bolton did little to alter the prevailing architecture of American history. He told stories of Spanish men and their triumphs over nature and natives. It would take future generations of borderlands scholars to expand Bolton’s critique of the “original thirteen colonies” theory of U.S. history.

It may not have been what Bolton imagined, but the borderlands frameworks in the era of social history, and then under the influence of the cultural turn, chronicled the many cultures and contingencies of a broadly conceptualized American history. Kelly Lytle Hernández is an associate professor of history and codirector of the National Center for History in the Schools at the University of California, Los Angeles. She is the author of *Migra!: A History of the U.S. Border Patrol* (2010).


Spanish borderlands scholars have detailed the lives of everyday men, women, and families living in the interstices between empires and nations. Against narratives of frontiers at the edge of indomitable empires and nation-states, these scholars have found power disputes everywhere. Focused on life, politics, and culture in the regions at the outermost reach of the empire, then nation-state, then back to empire again, they have deftly chronicled the vibrant and complicated life that existed in the American West before Anglo-Americans arrived; their accounts show the incompleteness and uncertainty of that push into the region. Recent and emerging scholarship includes histories of race and rebellion in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands by Kevin Mulroy, John McKiernan-González, and Benjamin Heber Johnson. Rachel St. John, Samuel Truett, Patrick Ettinger, and Lissa Wadewitz provided vivid details regarding the constant permeability of national boundaries. Colin G. Calloway and Pekka Hämäläinen pursued Jeremy Adelman and Stephen Aron's call for the study of empires to borders. Taken together, these works challenge us to reconsider power and conquest along the shifting and often frayed edges of territory claimed by the U.S. federal government. As such, Spanish borderlands scholarship reshaped the history of the American West until the once near-mythic narratives of conquest and cowboys transformed into analy-


ses of contested power and places, cultural exchanges and syncretism, uprisings and resistance, race and racialization, and gender and sexuality. As Albert L. Hurtado has observed, the “borderlands are now central to our understanding of the multicultural American West.”

The shift from dueling empires to the multicultural West required an array of new methods attuned to voices and experiences long ignored. In this essay, I discuss how new regional, conceptual, and methodological approaches to life in border areas will, in the years ahead, deepen our understanding and challenge the history of the region.

Often overshadowed by studies of what many regard as the “troublesome U.S.-Mexico border,” an emerging cohort of historians sees the seeming quiet of the U.S.-Canada border as deceptive. Battles over migration, smuggling, and the environment also shaped everyday life in the northern borderlands. This new research pushes for a reconsideration of the region as a conflict zone, opens new avenues to examine how border struggles and foreign relations shaped the uneven development of the American West, sharpens our understanding of the U.S.-Mexico border as differently rather than uniquely contested, and forces more nuanced analyses of each border’s evolution. In addition, expanding border studies opens new horizons regarding the rise of the West. In particular, scholars may find new comparative opportunities to examine how differing stories of conquest, expansion, and diplomacy affected migration and settlement in the region.

While historians have, for the most part, remained focused upon colonial domains and national borders, geographers, anthropologists, constitutional scholars, cultural theorists, and many others have explored how borderland regions are not simply created by national territories abutting one another. Borderlands, they suggest, are zones defined by any consequential social, political, or cultural divide. Of course, such

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9 John M. Findlay and Ken S. Coates, eds., Parallel Destinies: Canadian-American Relations West of the Rockies (Seattle, 2002); Sheila McManus, The Line Which Separates: Race, Gender, and the Making of the Alberta-Montana Borderlands (Lincoln, 2005); and Wadewitz, “Fishing the Line.”
iterations of this framework may bleed the concept into irrelevance but, along the way, they also highlight that colonial disputes and national borders are not the only way to meaningfully bisect and order communities. For example, systems of managing mobility exist within the nation-state that confine marginalized groups to live geographically apart; embed structural violence into everyday governance; and restrict access to core individual and community needs such as food, shelter, education, and political power. Indian reservations and racial segregation are among the most widely studied systems of specialized inequity within the nation-state, but the study of immigration control and prisons are now receiving increased scholarly attention.

New scholarship on U.S. immigration control deftly details how federally designed and regionally enforced regulatory matrices forge internal borders by strictly limiting human mobility within and throughout the American West. Far from any formal national boundary, and often located in remote areas, these border regions dragged immigration law into the interior via law enforcement procedures—namely, road checks and registration policies—that drove profoundly consequential political and social inequities into very specific geographies. Grounded in the laws of sovereignty, but enforced according to the cultural logic of national belonging, immigration control practices bisected the region. In particular, beyond individual cases of deportation, the immigration regime shaped the settlement and development of Asian American and Latino communities in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Conceptually, if not empirically, connecting these histories to various internal control efforts such as vagrancy acts may open new fields of analysis for the study of race, labor, and citizenship in the American West. In other words, new research into internal border regions


and the intersectionality of various forms of migration control may break open broad new understandings of the social landscape. Further, by drawing upon the insightful micro-histories of the multicultural West and the thoughtful explorations of resistance in New West analyses, research into immigration control will capture the textures and multiplicity of lives lived through, under, against, and despite internal borders.

Although historians have published sophisticated work on the rise of immigration control, critical and empirically grounded histories of crime and punishment in the American West remain strangely underdeveloped. Scholars typically approach immigration control primarily as a matter of immigration history while, with rare exception, the history of western police, prisons, and criminal justice remains dominated by frontier themes of vigilantism and interpersonal violence. The recent surge of prison histories tends to focus on the Northeast and the South. Yet the West—particularly California, Arizona, and Texas—crucially shaped the politics, practices, and culture of incarceration in the United States. While the tension between slavery and freedom continues to be central to the rise of the country’s prisons, shifting focus to the history of crime and punishment in the West may allow the histories of conquest and genocide to figure more prominently when chronicling the history of U.S. incarceration.

Applying the borderlands approach to the history of crime and punishment will foster rich analyses that do not regard jails and prisons as spaces that hold people aloft from history. Much as borderlands scholars have demonstrated that life, communities, culture, and politics do not halt at an international boundary, this approach situates inmates, detention facilities, and criminal-justice workers within the local, regional, national, and even international political economies of incarceration within the United States. In other words, a borderlands approach will highlight how incarceration unfolded within the social, political, and cultural landscape of the American West.

Finally, the future of borderlands history faces increasing intentionality and pressure to transform it into transnational history; this is a three-pronged project.

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Transnationalizing borderlands history requires conceptual frameworks that broadly incorporate lives beyond formal U.S. territory while demanding that historians conduct substantive research in archives outside the United States and develop intellectual relationships with scholars from outside the country working on shared topics. In other words, transnational history is conceptual, methodological, and professional. Historical scholarship has often been far more hermetically sealed than the persons or processes studied in borderlands regions, but historians increasingly press for a synergy between borderlands frameworks and cross-border research and transnational intellectual communities. Conferences such as the Conference of Mexican, United States, and Canadian Historians, the Tepoztlan Institute for Transnational History of the Americas, and the borderlands interest group within the Western History Association provide opportunities for U.S.-based historians to engage in broader historiographies. The study of the American West will continue to be fundamentally challenged and enriched by archival and intellectual engagements beyond this country. Topics that have been unconsidered, and concepts that have been pushed to the periphery of U.S. national history but sit loudly in Mexican, Canadian, and Caribbean archives, will allow for reinterpretations of the West.\(^{17}\)

Of course, it is impossible to divine what might come in the years ahead. Bolton, after all, most likely never foresaw works such as Ramón A. Gutiérrez’s *When Jesus Came, the Corn Mothers Went Away* or Ned Blackhawk’s *Violence over the Land*.\(^{18}\) Future generations of borderlands historians will continue to push the regional, conceptual, and methodological boundaries of the field that Bolton launched so that we might see the history of the American West in profoundly new and unforeseen ways.
