

# West of the Border

*The Multicultural Literature  
of the Western American Frontiers*



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# Introduction

## *Rites of Passage, Contact Zones, and the American Frontiers*

In an essay entitled “The Melting Pot,” Robert Laxalt describes the borders and boundaries of a small “copper company town” that evolved into a “real international settlement” fraught with cultural divisions. Laxalt observes, “There were some other words, not so nice, for it then. . . . There was Greek Town, Hunky Town, Jap Town, Wop Town, and Mid Town. That meant the middle of town, and it was where all the ‘white people’ lived. The rest of us were cheap labor for the copper mines and the smelter. The ‘foreigners’ stuck together for the most part, but once in a while, you could get a scrap if you were a Hunky and you crossed the line into Greek Town. Our common enemy was Mid Town. Anytime you crossed that line, you were in for big trouble.”<sup>1</sup> Laxalt’s “Melting Pot” essay recalls a central myth of American cultural formation, a myth first applied to frontier life by Frederick Jackson Turner, the historian whose famous paper “The Significance of the Frontier in American History” (1893) sparked the systematic study of the frontier. In his “frontier melting pot thesis,” Turner postulates that “the frontier promoted the formation of a composite nationality for the American people. . . . In the crucible of the frontier the immigrants were Americanized, liberated, and fused into a mixed race, English in neither nationality nor characteristics.”<sup>2</sup> In the passage from Laxalt, however, the emphasis is on divided cultures, the crossing of lines, and the threat of “big trouble”—

highlighting the struggles for power among American cultural groups as they mediate their multiple ethnicities to construct a national identity that is neither inherently separatist nor homogeneously unified. In Laxalt's image of cultural "others" building lives for themselves on the periphery of Mid Town—the place where "white people" (really the Anglo community) reside—we find the idea of the frontier borderlands as social rite of passage.

For the fin-de-siècle historian, the social rite of passage occurs when sundry ethnicities conjoin, intermingle, lose their individual identities, and form a whole new nationality on the frontiers. Of course, Turner's immigrants are largely of Scotch and German descent. The peripheral communities Laxalt describes, too, with the exception of the Japanese, are all European. And Laxalt explains that eventually "all the barriers broke down. They [the 'whites'] finally accepted us as human." He ends his essay with the bittersweet observation that as the inevitable process of Americanization occurs, "the old-country people would be only a dimming memory . . . and the melting would be done."<sup>3</sup> Laxalt evokes Turner's belief that the melting pot narrative ends when immigrants are "Americanized" and "liberated."

However, the fictional and nonfictional writings of some immigrant and nonimmigrant Americans on the frontiers call into question the myth of melting-pot liberation. In the literature of non-European frontier cultures—Asian, Mexican, and Native American—melting-pot "liberation" is not often the corollary of culture contact. The frontier dynamics of a burgeoning America were highly intricate and complicated during Turner's time. In the nineteenth century and at the turn into the twentieth, Anglo immigrants from the East Coast confronted aboriginal Native Americans, African captives, Asians immigrating from further west, and Mexicans who had become aliens in their own land after the Mexican-American War. As Gloria Anzaldúa states of the Chicano people: "They'd like to think I have melted in the pot. But I haven't, we haven't."<sup>4</sup> Instead, the mestiza (mixed) people "sustain contradictions" and tolerate ambiguity; they "juggle cultures" and "operat[e] in a pluralistic mode."<sup>5</sup> Yet in spite of the conflicts and contradictions that erupt, such mediation can be potentially dynamic, invoking creativity and social rejuvenation.

Fusion into a mixed race and inclusion in U.S. society was not possible for some groups, like Mexicans and Asians, who were deemed inherently unassimilable despite their attempts to become "Americanized." By the early twentieth century, many federal officials concluded that regardless of the U.S. govern-

ment's efforts, Native Americans failed to assimilate. Further, melting-pot liberation presumes a mechanical, unidirectional movement of society toward integration. In some cases, cultures compromised assimilation by merging their traditions and Anglo cultural customs, a process anthropologists call syncretism. This intermingling of traditions from disparate cultures can denote either cultural tolerance or resistance.<sup>6</sup> For instance, whereas the Okanogan novelist and folklorist Mourning Dove considers the points of correspondence between Okanogan and Anglo traditions when she rewrites trickster tales for a white readership, conversely, Native American prophets put up resistance by appropriating Christianity only to reject it. At times, the appropriation and subversion of the dominant culture occur simultaneously in syncretic forms. Subversion may be an unintended consequence of adopting the dominant culture.<sup>7</sup> James Beckwourth, the half-black fur trapper and adopted Crow tribal member, sanctions Anglo rule when he passes as white in his autobiography. Narrating his experiences with the Crow tribe and with white fur traders, Beckwourth endorses frontier conquest even as he reveals the humanity of the Crows. Ultimately, the merging of cultural and literary traditions occurs within culturally fluid contexts.

Many nineteenth-century and turn-of-the-century U.S. authors—Native American, Asian American, African American, and Anglo American—lived in the culturally fluid contexts of the contact zones at the frontier. Residing “west of the border,” the frontier cultural others encountered Anglo Manifest Destiny and wrote about their imagined fates. “West of the border” is then not so much a geographical place as zones of culture contact and conflict in which writers negotiated their positions between cultures. As the nation was being formed, there was not a single frontier event in which white frontiersmen undertook a continual, “heroic” push to the Pacific coast as they “civilized” society; instead, multiple frontiers were occupied by diverse cultural groups at disparate geographical points. Employing Victor Turner’s theory of rites of passage in conjunction with borderland theory, *West of the Border* analyzes the works of writers who live between cultures and negotiate their new American identities through cross-cultural dialogues.



Following Frederick Jackson Turner’s pronouncement of his frontier thesis, U.S. history departments engaged in a heated debate that resulted in a mound

of substantial scholarship.<sup>8</sup> However, his thesis also influenced frontier studies in U.S. literature. In his “frontier thesis,” Turner states: “The existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession, and the advance of American settlement westward, explain American development.”<sup>9</sup> Turner’s emphasis on the land and the westering frontiersman was mirrored in the literary scholarship on the U.S. frontier.

Scholars, at first, studied literature depicting “the advance of American settlement westward” by self-reliant, individualist frontiersmen who encountered the “wild, uninhabited” territories and transformed them into cultured “civilizations.”<sup>10</sup> Their perspectives often coincided with the frontiersman’s monolithic view of Native Americans as a mass of faceless savages who were merely obstacles to frontier settlement. More recently, the Turnerian position has been extended as interest has arisen in the fiction and journals of pioneer women: literary critics and historians alike consider whether the frontier experience empowered or alienated women in liberating them from restrictive gender conventions.<sup>11</sup> Other frontier literary studies emphasize “the existence of an area of free land” in analyzing the relationship between pioneers and the landscape: Henry Nash Smith’s groundbreaking study *Virgin Land* traces the impact of “free land” on the American consciousness.<sup>12</sup> Combining gender and landscape studies, Annette Kolodny’s *The Lay of the Land* and *The Land Before Her* examine the gendered metaphors employed by male and female explorers, fiction writers, travelers, and pioneers who first experienced and wrote about the U.S. frontier landscape.<sup>13</sup>

Currently, ethnohistorians are reconceiving the frontier as a human, intercultural zone, and their view is beginning to inform literary studies. According to James Axtell, ethnohistory is the study of “multiple and shifting frontiers between different cultures.” Ethnohistorians view frontiers not as “geographical spaces accidentally occupied by people” but as “human spaces” where “diverse cultures came together.”<sup>14</sup> Similarly, in introducing their collection *The Frontier in History: North America and South Africa Compared*, Leonard Thompson and Howard Lamar define the frontier as “a territory or zone of interpenetration between two previously distinct societies.” They say that “usually, one of the societies is indigenous to the region, or at least has occupied it for many generations; the other is intrusive.”<sup>15</sup> An implication of Thompson and Lamar’s definition is that there is a potential threat of colonialism—the subjugation of native people by invaders.

In *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, Mary Louise Pratt's discussion of the "contact zone" in colonial encounters resembles the ethnohistorians' "frontier." Borrowing the concept from linguistics, Pratt states that contact zones are "social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination—like colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out across the globe today."<sup>16</sup> Similarly, in her cultural autobiography *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, Anzaldúa describes borderlands as "physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other"; in their coming together, "*un choque*, a cultural collision" is formed.<sup>17</sup> Both historians and critics suggest that frontiers are characterized by the clash of cultures, sometimes in unequal power relations.

*West of the Border*, then, draws on this view of frontiers as places where cultures make contact rather than on the Turnerian notion of the frontier as an "area of free land" traversed by westering pioneers. Within the context of culture contact, the U.S. frontier experience is like a rite of passage for groups west of the border. Many literary scholars have viewed the frontier as a rite of passage for white frontiersmen. Richard Slotkin asserts that the frontier myth depicts the frontiersman's "initiation" into "a higher state of being or manhood."<sup>18</sup> Eric Heyne declares, "Crossing the frontier is a quintessentially American act, our national (male) rite of passage. . . ."<sup>19</sup> Victor Turner, the anthropologist, theorized about rites of passage in several works throughout his life. His theories were inspired by Arnold van Gennep's *Rites de Passage* (1908). Van Gennep distinguishes three stages in these rites: the initiand's separation from his social group, his experience in the transitional or liminal state, and his reincorporation into the original culture.<sup>20</sup> According to Turner, the liminal realm is unlike the initiand's past or future state since he exists in no well-defined cultural space but is "necessarily ambiguous." Hence, in the liminal realm, individuals are "neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial."<sup>21</sup> For the multicultural writers discussed in *West of the Border*, the American frontiers are like the liminal or transitional phase in a rite of passage. Kolodny proposes a redefinition of the frontier "as a specifiable first moment on that liminal borderland between distinct cultures."<sup>22</sup> Ronald Takaki asserts that "America represented liminality" to immigrants in that it was a place for them "to become new people in a society still being defined and formed."<sup>23</sup>

The experience of liminality or transition, for the authors discussed in this book, characterizes the borderlands and shapes their writings.

Following Victor Turner's theories, how, we can ask, do initiands in the U.S. frontier rite of passage function in the borderlands? Existing in transitional or in-between states, initiands are mediators within their cultures; yet prior to adopting a new status, they also receive the prescriptions of their cultures.<sup>24</sup> Turner describes the transitional realm as lacking structure: the initiand is an outsider in society and he temporarily loses his social and cultural status. Because the initiand separates from his culture, the transitional state is "potentially a period of scrutinization of the central values and axioms of the culture in which it occurs";<sup>25</sup> hence, the initiand engages in "speculation and criticism" of society.<sup>26</sup> Ronald Grimes compares the traditional understanding of ritual with Turner's view of ritual: "Ritual had been portrayed as the most backward-looking, foot-dragging of cultural forms. It was hardly capable of acting on society; rather, it was a 'repository' or 'reflection' of it. Always it was passive, inert. Turner painted another picture, that of a cultural 'agent,' energetic, subversive, creative, socially critical."<sup>27</sup> Rites of passage are not only "subversive" and "socially critical," but "seedbeds of cultural creativity"; during the transitional phases of ritual, initiands experience "an instant of pure potentiality when everything, as it were, trembles in the balance."<sup>28</sup> In fact, Turner maintains, liminal conditions often generate "myths, symbols, rituals, philosophical systems, and works of art."<sup>29</sup>

*West of the Border* explores the literary works produced by writers who are themselves "betwixt and between" cultural identities. They write from the experience of culture contact in which the U.S. frontier is like the transitional phase in a social, cultural, and historical rite of passage. Van Gennep observes that rites of passage "'accompany every change of place, state, social position and age'" in an individual or cohort.<sup>30</sup> Turner views rites of passage as social and historical when he states that there are "phases of history that are in many respects 'homologous' to the liminal periods of important rituals in stable and repetitive societies, when major groups or social categories in those societies are passing from one cultural state to another."<sup>31</sup> Producing works that mediate between disparate cultures on the frontiers, the writers negotiate social, cultural, and identity frontiers through cross-cultural dialogues.

Further, the writers experience the frontiers and embody borders in their culturally ambiguous identities. Like the initiands in rites of passage, they are

“threshold people” who are socially marginal because of their mixed identities. Both the Paiute translator Sarah Winnemucca Hopkins and Beckwourth are cross-cultural negotiators in their autobiographies. In her role as translator, Hopkins linguistically mediates between white and Paiute societies—her bilingualism results in her being between cultures; and Beckwourth incorporates frontiers into his identity—a biracial fur trapper of black and white parentage, he passes as both white and Crow. Also, Trickster, a character from Native American mythology, mediates between white, Native American, and Mexican groups in the postcontact milieu. Employing the Trickster character in his novel, the Cherokee author John Rollin Ridge encodes his experience of Cherokee Removal in the character of a Mexican trickster/bandit. Sui Sin Far and Onoto Watanna, Eurasian sisters of British and Chinese ancestry, arbitrate their mixed identities on the Asian frontier. Moreover, Onoto Watanna, Mary Austin, and James Beckwourth act as “transethnics”: Onoto Watanna adopts Japanese clothing and persona; Austin and Beckwourth do likewise with Native American. Victor Turner finds that the “transvestism” of initiands in rites of passage is an emblem of their loss of status. For instance, “the passive attitude of the male initiands may be symbolized by the wearing of female apparel.”<sup>32</sup> Onoto Watanna masks her Chinese cultural heritage by wearing Japanese garments. Beckwourth’s transvestism, ironically, supports his status as a heroic “Indian chief.” Similarly, Austin, the southwestern writer and ethnographer, purposely appropriates Native American cultural forms to foster her life’s aesthetic project.

Like the authors’ mixed “American” identities, their writings are formal hybrids, works composed from a variety of cultural sources. As the frontier is a zone of cultural conflict, so is hybrid frontier literature; two accents, voices, consciousnesses therein “come together and consciously fight it out on the territory of the utterance,” according to Bakhtin.<sup>33</sup> For example, David Murray states that autobiography was not a traditional Native American form.<sup>34</sup> Hopkins appropriates the autobiography in order to reach an Anglo audience but uses that form to convey the collective life of the Paiutes. She also includes within her autobiography two traditional Native American genres: the tribal origin story and historical narrative. Beckwourth’s as-told-to autobiography includes a Native American coup tale and war narrative as well as European essay and poetical verse. The postcontact trickster tale “White Men Are Snakes” evinces hybridity by incorporating biblical narrative into its structure. Also,



Mourning Dove revises Okanogan trickster tales for an audience of white children by excising scatological and “superstitious” details. Finally, Austin employs Native American myths, tropes, and translations in many of her novels and essays. Undoubtedly, that the authors inhabit the borderlands as “threshold people” effects their construction of hybrid works.

If the American borderlands are like thresholds to a new state of being, they differ from the transitional states described by Turner in his theories of ritual. As I stated above, Turner finds that in the transitional phase, initiands are subversive and socially critical; yet he is ambiguous about whether they can sustain cultural critique. For Turner, the liminal or transitional stage is resolved when the initiand returns to the structure of society.<sup>35</sup> Because the initiands return to the same tribal society from which they separate in a rite of passage, Turner claims the action in the transitional state is not much more than “a subversive flicker” instantly contained in the status quo.<sup>36</sup> At the same time, he postulates exceptions to this rule; for instance, he describes the Tallensi shaman who may experience “the transformation of what is essentially a liminal or extrastructural phase into a permanent condition of sacred ‘outsiderness’” from which he may “criticize” and “mediate” between members of society.<sup>37</sup> Turner’s theories arise from his investigation of rites of passage in which initiands separate from and return to the same tribal status quo. The frontiers allow for social critique because many of the writers in this study do not rejoin the same cultural group from which they separate. Native Americans, for example, separate from tribal culture only to become reincorporated into an Anglo American–dominated social order. Turner states, “What the initiand seeks through rite and myth is not a moral *exemplum* so much as the power to transcend the limits of his previous status.”<sup>38</sup> In the homogenous social structure that embraces ritual, the initiand can enjoy transcendence, knowing the return to social order is inevitable. Frontier writers west of the border seek out or even create moral exempla as they confront not a return to their own traditional social structure but further immersion in antistructure as they are defined by Anglo American culture. Of necessity, then, the borderlands become a place of social critique in which some writers, unlike Turner’s initiands, shape and influence the dominant culture rather than succumb to its inscription (Beckwourth being a notable exception).

Given the creative and transformative possibilities fostered by the transitional state, Turner focused almost exclusively on the liminal by the end of his

career when theorizing rites of passage. He stresses the “positive and active” qualities of the transitional phase: its ability to transcend structure through “flow,” the experience of “direct, unmediated communion with one another.”<sup>39</sup> Similarly, Frederick Jackson Turner, the historian, considers the frontier to be a margin of social renewal. For the latter, social order is inverted on the frontier as the pioneering frontiersman finds himself in “continuous touch with the simplicity of primitive society” and in the position of remaking American society. As Frederick Jackson Turner states, “American social development has been continually beginning over again on the frontier.”<sup>40</sup> Although he does not use the terms “limen” or “transitional phase,” Frederick Jackson Turner exalts its culturally creative and socially transformative properties: for him the frontier effects the “perennial rebirth, this fluidity of American life, [and] this expansion westward with its new opportunities,” all of which “furnish the forces dominating American character.”<sup>41</sup>

However, for cultural others, being in the borderlands between groups that make contact is not always reenlivening or creative. As Anzaldúa asserts, “hatred, anger and exploitation” characterize the border for Chicanos.<sup>42</sup> Pratt ascribes to the frontier contact zone “conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict.”<sup>43</sup> Similarly, Robert Berkhofer argues that the Anglo American frontier “was perceived more as a zone of conflict than one of cooperation.”<sup>44</sup> On the frontiers, both whites and nonwhites faced alien cultures, engaged in conflicts, and competed in the struggle for survival.

At the same time, frontiers were not simply sites of victimhood or negation; rather, they were places where cultural others mediated between groups and defined and analyzed social and cultural problems. Authors between cultures found themselves in the “pure potentiality” of the borderlands, scrutinizing the social milieu they confronted. The frontier prepared them to grapple with the problems of Americanization as they separated from their original cultures and faced a new culture that debated what to do with them. Also, existing between cultures, the authors used their writings to imagine or to revise the anticipated destinies of their societies and to reconfigure U.S. culture.

And they reconfigured culture by attempting to shape frontier intercultural relations. *From* the borderlands the authors anticipate the establishment of white dominance; *in* the borderlands the expected social order is presently becoming; hence, the authors exist in a potentially creative space. Unlike Victor Turner’s initiands who separate from and return to the same tribal society

in a rite of passage, writers “west of the border” separate from and return to different cultures on the American frontiers; social inversion is thus double-edged. As Frederick Jackson Turner states, the culture and customs of the Anglo American frontiersman are inverted in the wilderness when “he shouts the war cry and takes the scalp in orthodox Indian fashion.”<sup>45</sup> In the borderlands, cultural others find their native laws and customs subverted by Anglos. But cultural others also invert the prescriptions of the dominant society in order to negotiate the frontiers, and they endeavor to shape their own historical and social fates through cross-cultural dialogues. Confronted with their cultural and social co-optation, these writers face the closing of the frontiers.

According to Turner, the historian, the frontier officially closed in 1890 when the continent had been crossed and its “free land” exhausted. However, Turner’s claim was based on the authority of Patrick Porter, the superintendent of the U.S. Census, who, it is said, lacked expertise in both demographics and statistical analysis. Challenging Turner’s claim that the frontier closed in 1890, Gerald D. Nash asserts that,

as eminent geographers who were Turner’s contemporaries pointed out, specifically Isaiah Bowman, the western frontiers did not disappear in 1890. Frontier-type settlement, Bowman noted, continued steadily in the United States (and western Canada) between 1890 and 1930. Indeed, between 1905 and 1915 more than 500,000 Americans participated in a land rush to the western Canadian provinces, a rush that was one of the largest of its kind. When compared to the censuses of 1900 or 1910, that of 1890 was not especially distinctive. From the perspective of 1990, therefore, 1890 may not have been as significant a watershed as contemporaries believed.<sup>46</sup>

If, as Nash asserts, “the western frontier did not disappear in 1890,” when did the frontier close?<sup>47</sup> As human spaces where cultures meet, frontiers close when one group can no longer rule and define itself because another group exercises control over it.<sup>48</sup> The sociological factors that indicate the closing of a frontier are extermination, assimilation, exclusion, and/or expulsion, although in some cases there may be an impasse between groups.<sup>49</sup> On the borders where Native Americans, Mexicans, and Asians encountered Anglo Americans, specific historical contests ensued over control of the frontiers as

different sides determined whether to efface the frontier by eliminating the other or brave the experience of culture contact.

Assimilation to white customs, expulsion from their land, and extermination through wars menaced Native Americans in their frontier relations with Anglo Americans. Tribes confronted land-hungry settlers and missionaries who sought to convert them to Christianity. The U.S. government removed Native Americans from their land and totally dispersed the tribes or placed them on reservations where they were unable to consolidate their power and retaliate effectively. On reservations, government agents acculturated the tribes by giving them European-style clothing, offering them an Anglo education, and training them in agricultural methods. Opponents of the reservation system argued that Native Americans would more quickly become assimilated if they were individual property owners and U.S. citizens. The Dawes Act of 1887 sought to make them independent farmers by allotting 160 acres of land to each head of a household. However, a consequence of the Dawes Act was that the government also appropriated for white settlers large tracts of land allegedly not being used by tribes. Ironically, allotment divested the Plains tribes of 60 percent of 138 million acres of their land. Further, their farming ventures failed to profit them because the most effective uses of Plains land—that is, ranching or large-scale farming—required tracts of land larger than 160 acres.

While allotment and reservationism threatened tribal cultures, Native Americans resisted the closing of the frontiers. They exploited religious factionalism among Anglo Americans to achieve their own ends. Among their various acts of resistance were “religious revitalization movements . . . last-ditch stands, passive resistance through factional splits, and antagonistic acculturation as time went on.”<sup>50</sup> Ultimately, as Native Americans were displaced from their lands and stripped of their tribal customs, the frontier was closed to them. However, in the early twentieth century, the Indian Reorganization Act under the liberal auspices of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs John Collier, proposed to abolish allotment, reestablish Native American government, and effect the cultural and aesthetic revival of aboriginal traditions. Collier, it seems, desired to right the wrongs done to Native Americans, although some tribal groups (for example, the Navajos) criticized the Indian Reorganization Act for employing a liberal guise to justify once again controlling Native American life.<sup>51</sup>

While Mexicans, like Native Americans, were perceived as an obstacle to Manifest Destiny, they, unlike the aboriginal tribes, were not considered assimilable by nineteenth-century Anglo Americans. In the nineteenth century, the Mexican-American War erupted over the issue of U.S. expansion: the United States annexation of Texas in 1845 fueled Mexican aggression as did the feud over whether the border of Texas was the Rio Grande or the Nueces River.

During the 1820s, as the cotton kingdom expanded in the South, U.S. planters migrated to the Mexican territory of Texas. Consequently, Mexico outlawed slavery in 1829 and U.S. immigration to Texas in 1830, but since U.S. citizens outnumbered Mexicans in Texas by this time, they defied the antislavery law. In 1836, an armed insurrection of 187 U.S. rebels in Texas was defeated at the Alamo by the Mexican army, led by General Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna. A few days later, the Mexican army captured another Texas detachment of 350 men and executed them all in the town of Goliad. In retaliation for these acts, Sam Houston surprised Santa Anna's forces near the San Jacinto River, killed 630 Mexicans, forcing Mexico to cede Texas to the Americans.

After the official annexation of Texas in 1845, Mexico broke off diplomatic relations with the United States. The two countries continued to fight over the border of Texas: the United States declared the border to be the Rio Grande, whereas Mexico insisted it was the Nueces River, 150 miles north. Soon after President James Polk ordered General Zachary Taylor to occupy the disputed area with his troops, a skirmish broke out that served as a pretext for war. At the same time, in the Mexican territory of California, the illegal immigration of Americans increased because California proved to be an excellent source of raw materials. In 1846, these immigrants, under the aegis of the "Bear Flag Republic," revolted against Mexico and declared their independence in California. In addition, Commander John D. Sloat of the U.S. Navy sailed into Monterey Bay and took possession of California.

The Mexican-American War ended in 1848 with the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo. Mexico accepted the Rio Grande as its border and ceded California, New Mexico, Nevada, and parts of Colorado, Arizona, and Utah to the United States in exchange for \$15 million. Following the Mexican-American War, that frontier stayed painfully open for many displaced Mexicans who remained in contact with their conquerors. Those living in areas annexed to the United States suffered the alienation of being foreigners in their own land.<sup>52</sup> Nine days after Mexico relinquished California to the United

States, gold was found there. The Foreign Miners' Tax, which targeted Spanish-speaking miners, was a reminder to the displaced Mexicans of their national alienation.

Unlike the Native Americans and Mexicans who were the conquered subjects of westering Anglo invaders, Asians, coming from further west, forged a counter frontier and were feared as potential colonizers. To Americans, Asians represented the Yellow Peril: military invasion, racial intermixing, and the moral degeneracy of America through Asian influence. There is no evidence, however, that Asian immigrants espoused any ideology akin to Manifest Destiny. They migrated to the western United States to mine the "Gold Mountain" and to work as laborers on the railroad. At first, Anglo Americans encouraged Asians to immigrate because they were a much needed source of cheap labor, but when they started to compete with whites for jobs, they became the objects of discriminatory legislation. Chapters 3 and 4 develop the historical context in which Americans sought to close the Asian frontier through anti-immigration, exclusion, and anti-miscegenation laws. While the frequently unjust legislative and social practices of Anglos often inform the historical perspectives of writers west of the border, the emphasis is on their efforts to seek inclusion in American life.

If closed frontiers bolster the power and supremacy of the dominant culture, then open frontiers are ambiguous, contradictory, subversive, pluralistic, and resistant. Closed frontiers denote the termination of intercultural relations and the institution of Anglo dominance; open frontiers indicate the continuation of intercultural relations and resistance to Anglo dominance. However, open and closed frontiers are abstract and ideal categories since states of openness and closure are never absolute. Rather, American identity and culture involve a constant negotiation between open- and closed-frontier politics, and frontier politics emerge from the tension between the possibility inherent in the transitional phase and the order prescribed by the dominant Anglo culture. Writers west of the border position themselves in relation to potential (if unrealized) closed frontiers. Both Beckwourth and Ridge seek to close the frontier through their writings. Ridge closes the frontier when he loses faith in Trickster's mediating abilities; Beckwourth does so when, seeking renown as a white hero, he uses his insider position in Crow society to instruct Anglo Americans in extermination techniques. Both Beckwourth and Joaquin Murieta (Ridge's bandit) exist between cultures but also identify with Anglo American culture

and accept its inevitable dominance. Conversely, Sarah Winnemucca Hopkins, Sui Sin Far, and many of the authors of the trickster tales employ their writings to wedge open the frontier that is closing upon them. Caught in the time period in which Japanese people went from being viewed as fascinating exotics to potential conquerors, Onoto Watanna betrays an ambiguous position to frontier politics. Finally, writing after Turner claimed that the frontier was closed, Mary Austin attempts to reopen it by rejecting assimilation and emphasizing the art, spirituality, and customs of the aboriginal people.<sup>53</sup>

Through the frontier autobiographies of James P. Beckwourth (1856) and Sarah Winnemucca Hopkins (1883), chapter 1 examines how “double consciousness” affects their social rite of passage. Double consciousness results from Beckwourth’s and Hopkins’s existence between cultures: Beckwourth juggles black, white, and Crow identities; Hopkins, as translator, mediates between Paiutes and whites on the frontier. In addition, double consciousness is a function of Beckwourth’s and Hopkins’s bicultural collaboration with white editors, their rhetorical relationship to a white audience, and the texts’ autoethnographic form as the writers “engage with the colonizer’s own terms.”<sup>54</sup> They do this through such double-voiced strategies as parody and hidden polemic.

Beckwourth’s double consciousness is manifested in the dual, paradoxical structure of the autobiography, which couples a conventional, heroic frontier saga with his insights about Crow humanism and ingenuity. While simultaneous narratives that both bolster and subvert Anglo rule create a schism in Beckwourth’s autobiographical self, he attempts to heal the rift in his divided self and to close the frontier when he concludes his narrative with an essay on how to exterminate the Plains tribes. Unlike Beckwourth, who is controlled by his double consciousness, Hopkins employs hers rhetorically to persuade her audience. Working in the historical period between reservationism and allotment, she dismantles Anglo stereotypes of Native Americans to modify and rebuild their image. Ultimately, Hopkins seeks to pry open the frontiers by preventing the unjust agency system from destroying the Paiutes and by reimagining assimilation as an open-frontier policy.

Similarly, trickster border narratives, examined in chapter 2, respond to frontier politics. Native American trickster border narratives, created after first contact with whites, reimagine relations between colonizers and natives. Like the Trickster of precontact myths, the Trickster of postcontact tales is a mediator, but the newer figure takes on the auxiliary function of cultural intercessor. In Native

American mythology, Trickster was a figure who ordered the world for humans soon after it was created and then disappeared when his work was complete. Trickster border narratives portray the second coming of Trickster, who returns with the potential to reorder the chaos of the frontier for Native Americans.

Through Trickster's performance as cultural mediator, authors and raconteurs test Trickster's ability to respond to culture contact. Some tales simply lament the negation of Trickster's work by whites; others suggest behaviors that tribes must practice in order to survive the frontier. In *Coyote Stories* (1933), Mourning Dove practices assimilation by rewriting Trickster for a white audience. The variable success of her revisions speaks to the uneven outcome of assimilation. Through Trickster, Mourning Dove discovers a position of intercultural synthesis and of cultural critique from which to write. As opposed to Mourning Dove, John Rollin Ridge, in his 1854 dime novel about the trickster-bandit Joaquin Murieta, doubts the mediating ability of his Trickster. In an allegory, Ridge links injustice toward Mexicans during the Gold Rush with the abuses inflicted on Cherokees during removal, but he dismantles the allegory as he creates trickster writing. Masquerading as social critique, his novel performs a "ritual of status reversal" that "reaffirm[s] the order of structure".<sup>55</sup> In the end, the rangers murder the rebel Murieta and quash the Mexican resistance. Whereas Beckwourth closes the frontier and reinforces his assumed identity as a white hero, Ridge closes it believing that the trickster-bandit is impotent to reorder the frontier.

At the turn of the nineteenth century, Chinese people became the objects of exclusion and antimiscegenation legislation that sought to maintain a Chinese "bachelor society," prevent Asians and whites from intermarrying, and stay the spread of the "Yellow Peril." Chapter 3 focuses on the cultural work of Sui Sin Far, who uses her fiction to counteract both the restrictions of the Asian frontier and the mainstream representations of Chinese life that link marriage to bride bartering and evince miscegenation phobia. Born of an English father and a Chinese mother, Sui Sin Far embraced her Asian identity when she could have passed as white. A bold activist who agitated against racism toward the Chinese, she exploits her mixed identity in her fiction. Her collection of short stories *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* (1912) explains Asian marriage traditions to mystified white readers and portrays intermarriage as a viable option for men and women in the United States. Within the private realm of marriage relations, Sui Sin Far seeks to maintain an open frontier.



Unlike Sui Sin Far, who shapes her fiction to answer America's stolid anti-Chinese fervor, Onoto Watanna (Sui Sin Far's biological sister and the focus of chapter 4) chose to pass as Japanese in order to exploit American interest in Japanese exoticism and secure her fame and fortune as a romance writer. In Japanese American romance novels like *Miss Nume of Japan* (1899) and *A Japanese Blossom* (1906), she idealizes Japan and envisions Japanese people as assimilable, noble, attractive marriage partners and model U.S. citizens. As anti-Japanese sentiment evolved, the concept of Japanese American romance became oxymoronic for Onoto Watanna and her interracial couples began to push against the line of social acceptability. Confronting American antipathy for the Japanese, she strives to make her characters and stories more appealing to her audience. Consequently, besides producing Oriental stereotypes, she acts as an apologist for the Japanese and deflates "Yellow Peril" paranoia. In so doing, she maintains an ambiguous position in frontier politics.

Mary Austin, the subject of chapter 5, writes after the western coast of America has been reached and Native America has been invaded by westering settlers. A white woman, Austin demonstrates—even as she raises complex concerns about the appropriation of native cultures by whites—that resistance to Anglo dominance is not wholly the domain of minority authors. By adopting native and aboriginal guises, she legitimates her work of reopening the frontier closed to Mexicans and Native Americans. Austin inverts the structure of the closed frontier by incorporating, revising, and building upon the language and concepts of conservation and anthropology in such works as *The Land of Journeys' Ending* (1924) and *One-Smoke Stories* (1934). Reopening the frontier is linked, for Austin, to her political, artistic, and literary historical projects. Nature must be conserved because it produces culture, and native cultures must be protected because they are the origins of a distinctly American aesthetic, cultural, and literary tradition.



When shaping *West of the Border*, several factors influenced my choice of subject matter. I wanted, for one thing, to contribute to the recovery of noncanonical works in American literary studies by considering marginalized writers and unfamiliar works. Since many previous books on U.S. frontier literature discuss the pioneering frontiersman, I chose writers who played diverse roles on

the frontiers. Hopkins was a translator for the military, Beckwourth, a fur trader and Indian chief; Mourning Dove was an amateur folklorist, Ridge, a newspaper editor and dime novelist; Sui Sin Far was an activist for Chinese rights, Onoto Watanna, a popular romance writer; and Austin was a conservationist and anthropologist. By approaching multicultural frontier literature from several different perspectives, I explore the complexity and variety of American frontier interactions, not just the Anglo frontiersman's encounter with "free land."

In addition to examining various kinds of frontiers, I have sought writers for whom the frontier experience was truly multicultural. This criterion helps explain a choice of writers that might seem unusual.<sup>56</sup> All of the writers exhibit biculturality; some, like Ridge and Beckwourth, negotiate several ethnic identities, evincing "triculturality." As a result, many writers employ the narratives of other cultures: the Cherokee Anglo author Ridge tells the story of Mexicans in nineteenth-century California; Austin appropriates the lore of several Southwestern cultures; and Onoto Watanna adopts Japan and Japanese characters as the basis of her novels. All of the writers enable my exploration of the intercultural complexities of the U.S. borderlands. I hope this book might pave the way for other studies of intercultural American literature, such as that of the Canadian, Hawaiian, and Alaskan frontiers.

Still, the question must be asked: why read these works? Besides their obvious interest to scholars in American studies and cultural studies, for those interested in multicultural literature the writings raise timely and provocative issues about the relation between culture and literature, the function of stereotypes in ethnic writing, and the contributions of marginalized writers to literary history, among other things. Beckwourth and Onoto Watanna, for instance, call into question the use of stereotypes in ethnic writing. In explaining his frontier identity, Beckwourth employs several conventional, often contrasting types, like the Indian-hater and the Indian chief, only to reveal how these representations cannot effectively convey his experiences. Onoto Watanna, who both responds to and replicates Japanese stereotypes, makes her readers ponder the inherent negativity of stereotypes and reevaluate the function of the popular romance in American culture. Other writers, like Sui Sin Far and Austin, make valuable contributions to realist-regionalist fiction at the turn of the last century. Sui Sin Far, whose *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* (1912) precedes both James Joyce's *Dubliners* (1916) and Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919),

creates a collection of short stories that are linked by character, theme, and setting. Yet in addition, she interrelates the stories dialogically, creating a point of view in one story only to qualify that point of view in another story. Austin, a self-proclaimed regionalist writer, extends the boundaries of regionalism when she produces theoretical, travel, and folkloric writings. Austin's social, political, and artistic commitment to the land and people of the Southwest enables her to broaden the theoretical and generic borders of regionalist writing. The works of all the writers in this book reveal how they shape different literary forms cross-culturally to develop a genuinely U.S. literature.

Finally, the writers and works suggest issues relevant to American society at the turn into the twenty-first century by raising critical concerns about frontier politics and ideology. They also expand the boundaries of frontier studies by giving voice to minorities who refuse to be silenced. Their texts, which embody the voices of cultural others, form a continuum of responses to the Anglo American frontier migration. Some writers capitulate (often uneasily) to the inevitability of Manifest Destiny; others protest the hegemony of white Americans or seek to undo the ruling majority's course in the West. While *West of the Border* illustrates the historical dialectic between open- and closed-frontier politics, such tension is inherent in U.S. pluralism to this day. Throughout history, the United States defines and redefines itself as it struggles to establish not only its geographical borders but the boundaries of its national identity.