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Turner, the Boltonians, and the Borderlands

DAVID J. WEBER

FOR MUCH OF THIS CENTURY, Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis has been regarded as a most useful, if not the most useful, concept for understanding the distinctive features of American civilization. The existence of a frontier, Turner argued, explained much of the difference between Europe and the New World. As he put it in the famous paper that he delivered to the American Historical Association in 1893, "The peculiarity of American institutions is the fact that they have been compelled to adapt themselves to the changes of an expanding people—to the changes involved in crossing a continent, in winning a wilderness, and in developing . . . the primitive economic and political conditions of the frontier into the complexity of city life."¹ Turner suggested that circumstances peculiar to the American frontier, such as free land, opportunity, and common danger from Indians, shaped American character and institutions in specific ways: the frontier quickened assimilation of immigrants, had a "consolidating" and "nationalizing" effect on young America, and promoted democracy.² Moreover, Turner wrote, "to the frontier the American intellect owes its striking characteristics": inventiveness, practicality, inquisitiveness, restlessness, optimism, and individualism.³

This overarching explanation of American history rejected the conventional wisdom that American institutions and character had been transplanted unchanged from Europe. As Ray Allen Billington, the foremost explicator of Turner's ideas, once wrote, Turner "shook the academic world to its foundations."⁴ Radical as it was, Turner's frontier thesis came to enjoy widespread acceptance, spawning a remarkable series of books and articles before coming under attack in the 1930s and 1940s. Much of the criticism was well-founded.

I wish to thank Allan G. Bogue, William Cronon, Donald C. Cutter, Lawrence Kinnaird, Patricia Nelson Limerick, and Donald Worcester for commenting on an earlier draft of this manuscript, which I read in a shorter version at the annual meeting of the Organization of American Historians held in Minneapolis in April 1985.

¹ Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," in George Rogers Taylor, ed., *The Turner Thesis Concerning the Role of the Frontier in American History* (3d edn., Lexington, Mass., 1972), 3. Turner's essay is available in a number of sources.

² *Ibid.*, 12, 17, 22.

³ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁴ Billington, *The Genesis of the Frontier Thesis: A Study in Historical Creativity* (San Marino, Calif., 1971), 3.

Turner had overstated his case and failed to define terms carefully. He even used the term “frontier” imprecisely, sometimes to represent a place, sometimes a process, and sometimes a condition (a looseness of expression that I myself have failed to avoid in this essay). By the 1950s, however, Turner’s defenders had clarified and refined his thesis in a convincing fashion. In modified form, it remains yet today a useful model for many historians.⁵

SINCE TURNER OFFERED A CONVINCING EXPLANATION of how the New World came to differ from the Old,⁶ it might be supposed that the thesis would have been embraced by scholars who have studied the northward advance of the Mexican frontier into the area of the present-day United States, as well as by those who have interested themselves in the Anglo-American westward movement. In general, that has not been the case. Nearly all of Turner’s students ignored racial and ethnic minorities in the West, Hispanics and the Hispanic frontier not excepted.⁷ Moreover, scholars who specialize in the Hispanic frontiers of North America—the shifting region that has come to be called the Spanish Borderlands—have largely ignored Turner.⁸ Some of his ideas have been fruitfully applied to the Borderlands by scholars working out of traditions unrelated to the Borderlands “school,” but his thesis has made little impact on the historiography of the Borderlands or of Mexico itself. Yet Herbert Eugene Bolton, the founder of the Borderlands school, recognized at an early date the wisdom of applying Turner’s thesis to Spanish-American frontiers.

Bolton received his doctorate in medieval history from the University of Pennsylvania but earlier studied American history under Turner at Wisconsin. As an undergraduate, Bolton took a course from Turner in 1895, less than two years after Turner delivered his famous address. Bolton stayed on at Wisconsin to do a master’s degree under Turner and for the rest of his career was proud to have

⁵ The best study of the reception of Turner’s ideas is by Billington. See his *The American Frontier Thesis: Attack and Defense* (Washington, D.C., 1971). The most sophisticated defense of Turner is Billington’s *America’s Frontier Heritage* (New York, 1966). For recent assertions of the general validity of Turner’s thesis, see Margaret Walsh, *The American Frontier Revisited* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J., 1981), 15, 71; and John Barker, *The Super Historians: Makers of Our Past* (New York, 1982), 346.

⁶ As Turner put it, “The advance of the frontier has meant a steady movement away from Europe”; “Significance of the Frontier,” 5.

⁷ For a discussion of how Turner and his students ignored ethnic minorities, see Frederick C. Luebke, “Ethnic Minorities in the American West,” in Michael P. Malone, ed., *Historians and the American West* (Lincoln, Nebr., 1983), 387–404. Luebke wrote, “Turner provided the key to ethnic history in his methodology, but his students fumbled at the door”; *ibid.*, 403. An important exception was Arthur Preston Whitaker, who worked under Turner at Harvard. See Whitaker, *The Spanish-American Frontier, 1783–1795: The Westward Movement and the Spanish Retreat in the Mississippi Valley* (1927; reprint edn., Lincoln, Nebr., 1969). Whitaker dedicated his book to Turner. He did not, however, attempt to apply the Turner thesis to the Spanish frontier but focused instead on diplomacy and politics.

⁸ Although the area examined by the scholars of the Bolton school of Spanish Borderlands historiography extends from California to Florida, this essay focuses on the western Borderlands, from California to Texas, and on the area that lies above the present U.S.-Mexican border. This region was Bolton’s major interest and is the area that has attracted the most attention from Borderlands scholars. Moreover, to treat both the eastern and western Borderlands in a single brief essay would be unwieldy. See Donald C. Cutter, “The Western Spanish Borderlands,” in Malone, *Historians and the American West*, 40–41.

been, as he put it, one of Turner's "boys."⁹ In 1911 Bolton took a position at the University of California—a job that he obtained with Turner's help. That year Bolton told Berkeley's president, Benjamin Ide Wheeler, that, although Turner had directed the attention of researchers toward the West, he had "not thus far reached beyond the Mississippi Valley." Historians at Berkeley, Bolton suggested to Wheeler, should extend Turner's work by studying the Southwest and the Far West, particularly Spanish activities in the area that is now the United States.¹⁰ Bolton did not simply want to study what Turner and his disciples had neglected; he also saw the need to analyze the Hispanic frontier as Turner had the Anglo-American frontier. "For him who interprets, with Turner's insight, the methods and the significance of the Spanish-American frontier," Bolton wrote in 1917, "there awaits a recognition not less marked or less deserved."¹¹

Bolton continued to play this refrain. In 1932, in his own address to the American Historical Association, "The Epic of Greater America," he harkened back to the Turner thesis. Bolton asked, "Who has tried to state the significance of the frontier in terms of the Americas?"¹² In a seminar in Mexico City in 1946, Bolton sang the praises of Turner's "epic" essay to his students and then urged them to consider "to what extent his thesis is applicable or inapplicable to Mexico. . . . Perhaps the scholar who some day will discover and formulate such a thesis sits before me. Who can tell?"¹³ No such student sat before Bolton that day or any other day. Bolton pointed the way, but he did not lead by example. In his own writing, he rarely attempted to apply to the Hispanic frontier the questions raised by Turner.¹⁴

Bolton's published work suggests that he was far more interested in the impact of Spaniards on the frontier than in the influence of the frontier on Spaniards. Heroic figures and the high drama of exploration and international rivalry captivated him, and the establishment of Spanish institutions in the Borderlands interested him intensely. Bolton clearly saw the mission and the presidio as "characteristically and designedly frontier institutions," but he saw them as extending, holding, and "civilizing" the frontier.¹⁵ How frontier conditions might have altered these institutions or their inhabitants seldom concerned him.

⁹ John Francis Bannon, *Herbert Eugene Bolton: The Historian and the Man, 1870–1953* (Tucson, Ariz., 1978), 14–15, 21.

¹⁰ Report from Bolton to Wheeler, December 18, 1911, in John Francis Bannon, ed., *Bolton and the Spanish Borderlands* (Norman, Okla., 1964), 25.

¹¹ Bolton, "The Mission as a Frontier Institution in the Spanish American Colonies," in Bannon, *Bolton and the Spanish Borderlands*, 189. Bolton presented this essay as a faculty research lecture at the University of California in March 1917; it was reprinted widely.

¹² Bolton, "The Epic of Greater America," in Bannon, *Bolton and the Spanish Borderlands*, 332. This essay was first published in the *American Historical Review*; *AHR*, 38 (1932–33): 448–74.

¹³ Bolton, "The Northward Movement in New Spain," in Bannon, *Bolton and the Spanish Borderlands*, 68. Also see *ibid.*, 78. This essay began as an outline for the seminar in Mexico City.

¹⁴ For a recent analysis of Bolton's work and that of his followers, see Cutter, "Western Spanish Borderlands," 39–56. For recent historiographical essays on more specific topics, see Ellwyn R. Stoddard et al., eds., *Borderlands Sourcebook: A Guide to the Literature on Northern Mexico and the American Southwest* (Norman, Okla., 1983). Included are two essays by Ralph H. Vigil, "Exploration and Conquest" and "Colonial Institutions." The index to this large reference work cites Turner only twice, although the volume does include an interesting review of theoretical literature by anthropologist Paul Kutsche, entitled "Borders and Frontiers."

¹⁵ Bolton, "Mission as a Frontier Institution," 192, 199.

In his engaging survey, *The Spanish Borderlands*, published in the Chronicles of America series in 1921, Bolton denied by implication that the frontier influenced Hispanic institutions and character. In Bolton's view, Spanish absolutism reached to all corners of the New World under the Habsburgs and stifled initiative, individual liberty, and self-government.¹⁶ Because of the pervasive influence of their government, Bolton wrote, Spaniards "attained to little greater degree of personal freedom and little larger share in their own government in a frontier presidio than in the City of Mexico or in Seville."¹⁷ One exception was the remote province of Alta California. On that frontier, Bolton explained, a peculiar set of conditions—the benign climate, unusually fertile soil, the abundance of Indian labor, the paternalism of the Spanish monarchy, and the area's distance from markets—conspired to dull initiative and produce an "idle" group of Hispanic frontiersmen.¹⁸ Idle they may have been, but, Bolton suggested, the Californios were superior to other Mexicans because they were isolated from the rest of Mexico and had "the greater degree of independence, social at least if not political," that distance afforded them. Even at that early date, Bolton thought that he detected a "mellower spirit" in California.¹⁹

Bolton's students followed his example rather than his admonitions. None explicitly applied the Turner thesis to Spanish-American frontiers. Of course, some of the 104 Ph.D.'s whom Bolton trained employed the term "frontier" in the titles of their books, and many made notable contributions to our knowledge of the Hispanic frontier in North America. In the process, the Bolton school offered a valuable balance to the chauvinism of the Turnerians, who had come to see the term "frontier" as synonymous with the Anglo-American frontier. Some second-generation Boltonians recognized that frontiers had two sides and looked searchingly at interactions along Euro-Indian frontiers.²⁰ But Bolton's extraordinary academic progeny concerned itself more with archival research and the reconstruction of the particulars of the past than with theory in general or with the impact of the frontier on Mexican society or institutions in particular.²¹

¹⁶ Bolton, *The Spanish Borderlands: A Chronicle of Old Florida and the Southwest* (New Haven, Conn., 1921), 233–34.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 289.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 290–91, 293.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 294.

²⁰ See Jack D. Forbes, "Frontiers in American History," *Journal of the West*, 1 (1962): 63–73.

²¹ Bannon listed all of the recipients of M.A.'s and Ph.D.'s whom Bolton directed; *Herbert Eugene Bolton*, 283–90. Bolton himself used the term "frontier" in his famous essay "Mission as a Frontier Institution" and in his *Athanase de Mezières and the Louisiana-Texas Frontier, 1768–1780* (Cleveland, Ohio, 1914). Also see Lawrence Kinnaird, ed., *The Frontiers of New Spain: Nicolás de Lafora's Description, 1766–1768* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1958); Alfred Barnaby Thomas, ed. and trans., *Forgotten Frontiers: A Study of the Spanish Indian Policy of Don Juan Bautista de Anza, Governor of New Mexico, 1777–1787; From Original Documents in the Archives of Spain, Mexico, and New Mexico* (Norman, Okla., 1932); and Max L. Moorhead, *The Apache Frontier: Jacobo de Ugarte and Spanish-Indian Relations in Northern New Spain, 1769–1791* (Norman, Okla., 1968). A sample of the scholarship of some of Bolton's students, characterized by works that are highly particular and consist in many cases of edited documents, appears in a Festschrift published in 1932, by which time Bolton had trained over fifty Ph.D.'s. See *New Spain and the Anglo-American West: Historical Contributions Presented to Herbert Eugene Bolton*, 2 vols. (Los Angeles, 1932). Also see *Greater America: Essays in Honor of Herbert Eugene Bolton* (Berkeley, 1945). This collection is another Festschrift and contains "A Bibliography of the Historical Writings of the Students of Herbert Eugene Bolton." I do not mean to suggest that all of the Boltonians

Nowhere was the scanty interest of the Borderlands school in the Turner thesis better illustrated than in John Francis Bannon's *The Spanish Borderlands Frontier*. Published in 1970, Bannon's study was the first effort to synthesize the burgeoning literature on the Spanish-American frontier in what is today the United States. Bannon's survey appeared in the *Histories of the American Frontier* series, edited by Ray Allen Billington, Turner's most distinguished disciple. Nonetheless, Bannon's *Spanish Borderlands Frontier* contains no mention of Turner or his thesis.

Like Bolton, Bannon implicitly rejected the idea that the frontier democratized Hispanic institutions. "The shadow of Spanish absolutism," he wrote, "allowed the Spanish frontiersman little chance to develop a sense of self-expression or a feeling of self-reliance."²² Although a small body of scholarship suggested other possibilities, Bannon concluded that Hispanic, in contrast to Anglo-American, frontiersmen lacked self-determination and the personal liberty to move freely over space. "Rugged individualism was foreign to the Borderlands," he concluded.²³ Bannon did suggest, however, that the physical environment on the frontier shaped Spanish economic life and institutions. The "rugged, arid, and often sterile" terrain encouraged ranching and mining rather than agriculture.²⁴ Moreover, hostile Indians (along what Turner called "the meeting point between savagery and civilization") provided the reason for the existence of two major Spanish frontier institutions—the presidio and the mission.²⁵

In the decade and a half since Bannon's synthesis appeared, Borderlands historians of the Bolton school have continued to investigate many of the themes that were of interest to Bolton and, with few exceptions, to ignore Turner. Borderlands specialists have written fine books examining such traditional subjects as international rivalries, Spanish-Indian relations, the lives of prominent persons, and the presidio and the mission. If Turner's ideas influenced these scholars, their work does not reveal it.²⁶ Historians following two other modes of inquiry, however, have used Turner's ideas in ways that have deepened our understanding of the Borderlands.

did narrow work based on archival research. Many of them also wrote wide-ranging, interpretive essays. See, for example, Norris Hundley, Jr., and John A. Schutz, eds., *The American West: Frontier and Region: Interpretations by John Walton Caughey* (Los Angeles, 1969).

²² Bannon, *The Spanish Borderlands Frontier, 1513–1821* (New York, 1970), 5.

²³ *Ibid.*, 6, 237–38.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 233–34.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 234; and Turner, "Significance of the Frontier," 4.

²⁶ See, for example, Warren L. Cook, *Flood Tide of Empire: Spain and the Pacific Northwest, 1543–1819* (New Haven, Conn., 1973); Abraham P. Nasatir, *Borderland in Retreat: From Spanish Louisiana to the Far Southwest* (Albuquerque, N.Mex., 1976); Elizabeth A. H. John, *Storms Brewed in Other Men's Worlds: The Confrontation of Indians, Spanish, and French in the Southwest, 1540–1795* (College Station, Tex., 1975). For biography, see, for example, Felix D. Almaraz, Jr., *Tragic Cavalier: Governor Manuel de Salcedo of Texas, 1808–1813* (Austin, Tex., 1971); Edwin A. Beilharz, *Felipe de Neve: First Governor of California* (San Francisco, 1971); and Francis F. Guest, *Fernán Francisco de Lasuén (1736–1803): A Biography* (Washington, D.C., 1973). On institutions, see Max L. Moorhead, *The Presidio: Bastion of the Spanish Borderlands* (Norman, Okla., 1975); John L. Kessell, *Mission of Sorrows: Jesuit Guevavi and the Pimas, 1691–1767* (Tucson, Ariz., 1970), *Friars, Soldiers, and Reformers: Hispanic Arizona and the Sonora Mission Frontier, 1767–1856* (Tucson, Ariz., 1976), and *Kiva, Cross, and Crown: The Pecos Indians and New Mexico, 1540–1840* (Washington, D.C., 1979).

ONE GROUP CONSISTS of those who have attempted comparative analyses. Some of these scholars began in the 1920s, if not before, to apply the Turner thesis to frontiers throughout Spanish America.²⁷ Although these writers would disagree among themselves on many points, their collective effort suggests several conclusions that apply to the Spanish-American frontiers that pushed into areas now in the American West.

First, these historians noted that the physical environments of frontiers differ, so the impacts of frontier environments on cultures also differ. The distinguished Peruvian historian Victor Andrés Belaúnde pointed out, in an essay published in English in 1923, that the mere existence of plentiful free land, the key ingredient on the American frontier according to Turner, was not sufficient in itself to shape institutions and culture. Quality of land was more important than quantity. Land had to be accessible and capable of productivity, but much of Latin America is tropical rain forest or marginal sierra or altiplano, possessing little of what Belaúnde called "human value." Because they could not effectively exploit these marginal frontier lands, he argued, some Latin American nations "lack . . . the characteristics of frontier countries."²⁸ Turner, who claimed that the American frontier was unique, might not have disagreed. After all, he had argued that "Western democracy . . . came stark and strong and full of life, from the American forest" and would hardly have expected the Amazon jungle or the arid frontiers of northern Mexico to make the same impact on society that the more hospitable woodlands of the Old Northwest did.²⁹

Second, in their comparative studies these scholars have moved well beyond the simple notion of the frontier as a line between "savagery and civilization" to remind

²⁷ I refer here deliberately to Spanish America rather than to Latin America in order not to confuse Portuguese America with Spanish America and to exempt the considerable literature on Brazilian frontiers from the discussion. For a bibliography on this subject and an often insightful if disjointed essay comparing Latin American and Anglo-American frontiers, see Alistair Hennessy, *The Frontier in Latin American History* (Albuquerque, N.Mex., 1978). Some of the most sophisticated works in frontier history have been written on Brazilian frontiers. See, especially, Martin T. Katzman, "The Brazilian Frontier in Comparative Perspective," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 17 (1975): 266–85. Since Hennessy's work appeared, students of Latin America have continued to probe the question of comparative frontiers. William Frederick Sharp concluded that "the classic waves of frontier development described by Frederick Jackson Turner did not occur in the Chocó." See his *Slavery on the Spanish Frontier: The Colombian Chocó, 1680–1810* (Norman, Okla., 1976), 3. Jane M. Rausch reached a similar but more guarded conclusion. See Rausch, *A Tropical Plains Frontier: The Llanos of Colombia, 1531–1831* (Albuquerque, N.Mex., 1984), 230, 245. The works of other scholars who have attempted to make broad comparisons of Anglo-American and Spanish-American frontiers are cited below. In addition, see Seymour Martin Lipsett, "The Newness of the New Nation," in C. Vann Woodward, ed., *The Comparative Approach to American History* (New York, 1968), 70–71; and C. H. Haring, *The Spanish Empire in America* (New York, 1947), 30–41. Haring employed an implicitly Turnerian approach to an analysis of the impact of the New World environment on the English, Portuguese, and Spanish frontiers. Also see Dietrich Gerhard, "The Frontier in Comparative View," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 1 (1959): 205–29. Gerhard, in this landmark essay, noted that "Latin America would be another appropriate area for comparison. I do not feel, however, competent to deal with it" (p. 206).

²⁸ Belaúnde, *The Frontier in Hispanic America*, Rice Institute Pamphlets, no. 10 (Houston, Tex., 1923), 208. Other writers would agree with Belaúnde. See, for example, Donald J. Lehmer, "The Second Frontier: The Spanish," in Robert G. Ferris, ed., *The American West: An Appraisal* (Santa Fe, N.Mex., 1963), 143–44.

²⁹ Turner, as quoted in Rex W. Strickland, *The Turner Thesis and the Dry World* (El Paso, Tex., 1964), 16. Strickland saw the Turner thesis as inapplicable to the Rio Grande Valley of New Mexico and West Texas.

us that a variety of indigenous societies can exist in a frontier zone and that different host societies have different impacts on the cultures and institutions of intruders. Hence, an understanding of the frontier process must take into account peoples and their motives on both sides of a frontier. Spanish-Americans, comparative historians tell us, attempted to assimilate indigenous Americans rather than push them back or annihilate them as the English generally did. Moreover, Spaniards often encountered indigenous peoples whose culture rendered them easily assimilable. The Spanish-American frontier, in the words of geographer Marvin Mikesell, was a "frontier of inclusion" in contrast to the Anglo-American "frontier of exclusion."³⁰

Third, these historians have also moved beyond the simple environmentalism expressed in Turner's famous essay.³¹ Several of those who have compared Latin American and Anglo-American frontiers have concluded that the culture pioneers brought to the frontier was far more important than the impact of the frontier on that culture.³² In advancing this argument, Billington has nearly turned Turner's thesis on its head. He has suggested that Turner did not intend to explain all of American history as shaped by a single force. Notwithstanding Turner's unequivocal assertion that "free land, its continuous recession, and the advance of American settlement westward, explain American development,"³³ Billington concluded that the frontier could *not* "affect *major* changes in either the personalities or the behavioral patterns of frontiersmen. . . . The bulk of the customs and beliefs of the pioneers were transmitted, and were only slightly modified by the changing culture in which they lived. . . . Men, not geography, explain the differences between the Anglo-American and Latin-American frontiers, for individuals of different backgrounds will respond in different ways to identical physical environments."³⁴ Ironically, those historians of comparative frontiers who have modified and reinterpreted Turner's thesis have moved closer to Bolton's

³⁰ Mikesell, "Comparative Studies in Frontier History," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 50 (1960): 65. Also see Hennessy, *Frontiers in Latin American History*, 19–20; and Forbes, "Frontiers in American History," 65, and "Frontiers in American History and the Role of the Frontier Historian," *Ethnohistory*, 15 (1968): 205; T. M. Pearce, "The 'Other' Frontiers of the American West," *Arizona and the West*, 4 (1962): 105–12; and Owen Lattimore, "The Frontier in History," in Robert A. Manners and David Kaplan, eds., *Theory in Anthropology* (Chicago, 1968), 375. For a recent summation, see Howard Lamar and Leonard Thompson, eds., *The Frontier in History: North America and Southern Africa Compared* (New Haven, Conn., 1981).

³¹ Billington made a convincing case that Turner was not simply an environmentalist or a monocausationist, but that is not apparent in Turner's famous and influential essay. See Billington, *The American Frontier Thesis*, 13–15.

³² Even Belaúnde, who made a strong case for environmental differences, used politics and culture to explain why the frontier failed to provide opportunity in those areas where Latin America's geography resembled that of the United States; *The Frontier in Hispanic America*, 212–13. Also see Lehmer, "The Second Frontier," 144–50; and William H. Lyon, "The Third Generation and the Frontier Hypothesis," *Arizona and the West*, 4 (1962): 48.

³³ Turner, "Significance of the Frontier," 3.

³⁴ Billington, *America's Frontier Heritage*, 54. (Emphasis added.) Billington expressed similar sentiments in three other essays: "The Frontier in American Thought and Character," in Archibald B. Lewis and Thomas F. McGann, eds., *The New World Looks at Its History* (Austin, Tex., 1963), 78–79; "Frontiers," in Woodward, *The Comparative Approach to American History*, 77–78; and "Turner and Webb," in Harold M. Hollingsworth and Sandra L. Myres, eds., *Essays on the American West* (Austin, Tex., 1969), 89.

position. In his own work, and in that of many of his students, Bolton focused on the interplay of cultures on both sides of the frontier, be it Spanish and Indian or Spanish and French. Bolton also stressed the importance of the institutions and the culture of the individuals that the invading country brought to a frontier. Nonetheless, with only a few exceptions, historians working in the Bolton tradition have paid scant attention to how comparative studies of frontiers might shed light on our understanding of the Borderlands.³⁵ There is additional irony here in that Bolton was an early and passionate advocate of comparative analysis in the study of hemispheric history.

A few other scholars, however, whose training was not in the Bolton tradition, have taken up the challenge of applying Turner's ideas explicitly to Mexico's far northern frontiers. Their conclusions have varied. The least sophisticated inquiry is a study by Rex Strickland, who argued unequivocally that the Spanish-American frontier "did not produce even a semblance of democracy."³⁶ Silvio Zavala, the eminent Mexican historian, offered a more measured assessment.³⁷ Turner's thesis, Zavala believed, might apply to the northern frontier of Mexico—part of which now lies in the present United States. Citing Alexander von Humboldt approvingly, Zavala suggested that the insecurity of life in the Mexican north and

³⁵ Bannon, for example, relied solely on Lehmer's "The Second Frontier" in his study of the Spanish Borderlands. For other exceptions, see Forbes, "Frontiers in American History"; Oakah L. Jones, Jr., *Los Paisanos: Spanish Settlers on the Northern Frontier of New Spain* (Norman, Okla., 1979); and David J. Weber, *The Mexican Frontier, 1821–1846: The American Southwest under Mexico* (Albuquerque, N.Mex., 1982). Also see Sandra L. Myres, "The Ranching Frontier," in Hollingsworth and Myres, *Essays on the American West*, 33; and David J. Weber, ed., *Foreigners in Their Native Land: Historical Roots of the Mexican Americans* (Albuquerque, N.Mex., 1973), 19–21. Jones is a second-generation Bolton student, having studied with Max L. Moorhead, a student of Bolton's. Forbes and I are third-generation Boltonians, having studied with Donald C. Cutter, who studied with Bolton but finished his work under Lawrence Kinnaird, another student of Bolton's. Myres studied under Donald Worcester, who completed his M.A. under Bolton's supervision and his Ph.D. under Kinnaird. In speaking of a third generation of Boltonians, however, I may be pushing the idea of Bolton's influence and "school" too far.

³⁶ Strickland, *Turner Thesis*, 8. Strickland received his Ph.D. from the University of Texas, where he worked under Walter Prescott Webb. Webb argued that Spanish institutions did not adapt to the environmental challenge of the Great Plains. Although Spaniards succeeded as explorers on the high plains, they failed as colonists. Unlike Strickland, Webb did not mention Turner or the frontier thesis and instead denied the direct influence of Turner on his thinking. It is clear, however, that Webb had read Turner's essay before writing his book. See Webb, *The Great Plains* (Boston, 1931), 85–139; and Gregory M. Tobin, *The Making of a History: Walter Prescott Webb and the Great Plains* (Austin, Tex., 1976), 110–11. Also see Necah Stewart Furman, *Walter Prescott Webb: His Life and Impact* (Albuquerque, N.Mex., 1976), 122. Two decades after the appearance of *The Great Plains*, Webb urged historians to examine the frontiers of Latin America in light of Turner's thesis: Webb, *The Great Frontier* (Austin, Tex., 1951), 411–12.

³⁷ In this respect, Zavala stands apart from his Mexican counterparts who, like American historians, have made little attempt to apply Turner's thesis to Mexico's frontiers. See, for example, María del Carmen Velázquez, *Colotlán: Doble frontera contra los bárbaros* (Mexico City, 1961), *Establecimiento y pérdida del septentrión de Nueva España* (Mexico City, 1974), and *El Marqués de Altamira y las Provincias Internas de Nueva España*. Also see César Sepúlveda, *La frontera norte de México: Historia, conflictos, 1672–1975* (Mexico City, 1976), and *Tres ensayos sobre la frontera septentrional de la Nueva España* (Mexico City, 1977). Spanish historians who have examined the Mexican frontier, such as Luis Navarro García and Mario Hernández Sánchez-Barba, have also ignored the Turner thesis. An important exception is Mexican historian Vito Alessio Robles. Although he did not cite Turner, Alessio Robles briefly made some of the same points on which Zavala later elaborated. Alessio Robles, "Las condiciones sociales en el norte de la Nueva España," *Memorias de la Academia Mexicana de la Historia*, 4 (1945): 156–57. American historians, not of the Bolton school, who have explicitly applied the Turner thesis to the Mexican frontier include Strickland and C. Alan Hutchinson.

the unavailability of a docile Indian labor force “stamped the character of the northern people with a certain temper and energy.”³⁸ Zavala also quoted a contemporary of von Humboldt, Miguel Ramos de Arizpe, who claimed that, compared to other Mexicans, northerners were more energetic, hard working, liberty loving, and “devoted to the liberal and mechanical arts.” Mexico’s northern frontier, Zavala concluded, “seemed to be the guardian of liberty,” but he also recognized that the isolated region could become a refuge for political despots, whose power could not be curbed easily by the distant central government.³⁹

Zavala’s idea that distance could encourage despotism seems to apply especially well to Alta California, the most isolated province on the Mexican frontier. The point has been made forcibly by C. Alan Hutchinson, who explicitly tested Turner’s thesis in Mexican California. An Englishman trained outside of the Bolton tradition, Hutchinson found that the region lacked two ingredients that were essential to Turner’s interpretation: land and liberty. Missions or large estates occupied the choicest land in California, Hutchinson argued, and distance alone discouraged Mexicans from moving there. To explain why the California frontier failed to promote democracy and instead became a refuge for petty tyrants, Hutchinson spun Turner’s argument around. “The frontier,” he wrote, “reproduces, in somewhat more visible fashion, what is already present in the homeland from which the settlers came.”⁴⁰ In this sense, the Turner thesis applies. Whereas the American frontier promoted democracy, the Mexican frontier promoted caudillismo, or petty despotism. Finally, Hutchinson argued that frontier California’s abundant and exploitable supply of Indian laborers discouraged the Californios from working with their own hands. Thus, they failed to develop “such frontier virtues as independence or resourcefulness.”⁴¹ Perhaps because he based his conclusions on an examination of the neglected Mexican period (1821–46) rather than the preceding Spanish era, which has held greater interest for historians, Hutchinson’s conclusions regarding the relationship between the frontier and political democracy have been largely ignored by Borderlands scholars.

³⁸ Zavala, “The Frontiers of Hispanic America,” in Walker D. Wyman and Clifton B. Kroeber, *The Frontier in Perspective* (Madison, Wis., 1965), 48. For the larger essay in Spanish of which “Frontier of Hispanic America” is a part, see *Cuadernos Americanos*, 17 (1958): 374–84. For the original Spanish version of “Frontiers of Hispanic America” with more extensive documentation, see David J. Weber, ed., *El México perdido* (Mexico City, 1976), 150–66.

³⁹ Zavala, “Frontiers of Hispanic America,” 49–50. Discussing frontiers generally in the period before 1750, William H. McNeill recently came to a similar conclusion. “Compulsion and legally reinforced forms of social hierarchy were more generally characteristic of frontier society than were equality and freedom”; McNeill, *The Great Frontier: Freedom and Hierarchy in Modern Times* (Princeton, N.J., 1983), 26. McNeill’s explanation, however, differs from Zavala’s yet also applies to some Hispanic frontiers. McNeill saw egalitarianism diminished by the need of frontier elites to control scarce labor and resources, the need to sustain armies for protection on frontiers, and dependency on outside markets.

⁴⁰ Hutchinson, *Frontier Settlement in Mexican California: The Híjar-Padrés Colony and Its Origins, 1769–1835* (New Haven, Conn., 1969), 398. For a reprint of Hutchinson’s commentary on the Turner thesis, see David J. Weber, ed., *New Spain’s Far Northern Frontier: Essays on Spain in the American West, 1540–1821*, (Albuquerque, N. Mex., 1979), 173–77, and *El México perdido*, 140–49. Hutchinson received his Ph.D. from the University of Texas.

⁴¹ Hutchinson, *Frontier Settlement*, 399.

AT THE SAME TIME that a number of scholars tested the frontier thesis in comparative studies, a group of social historians found some of Turner's ideas applicable to the Borderlands. In the main, the Bolton school demonstrated little interest in social history.⁴² The few scholars who have concerned themselves with the nature of Borderlands society have generally come out of other traditions, and, with few exceptions, the most sophisticated studies have been written in the last two decades by historians who have adopted the quantitative methods and interdisciplinary modes of inquiry of the "new" social history. Many who have used these fresh approaches have focused on urban history, where Turner's thesis has little explanatory value.⁴³ Others, however, have written about the era of the shifting Spanish-American colonial frontier and have posed questions that would have intrigued Turner, who was himself a pioneer in interdisciplinary research and in the use of quantitative techniques.⁴⁴ Yet it seems clear that Turner's ideas have influenced these scholars only slightly; they seldom mention him explicitly. Instead, they acknowledge an intellectual debt to the Berkeley school of demography, to American social historians such as John Demos and Stephen Thernstrom, or to the French *Annales* school and focus on questions involving infant mortality, longevity, household size and composition, sex ratios, illegitimacy, and migration.⁴⁵

Several practitioners of the new social history, however, have also commented on the impact of the frontier on Hispanic society. They have implicitly embraced Turner's notion that the frontier altered the character of Mexican frontiersmen in a variety of ways, such as promoting individualism and egalitarianism and providing what Turner called "conditions of social mobility."⁴⁶ The new social historians were not the first to make such suggestions, but they examined frontier society in greater detail and with more sophistication than their predecessors did.⁴⁷

⁴² See, for example, Antonio José Ríos-Bustamante, "A Contribution to the Historiography of the Greater Mexican North in the Eighteenth Century," *Aztlán*, 7 (1976): 350.

⁴³ For a discussion of some of this literature, see Roger W. Lotchin and David J. Weber, "The New Chicano Urban History," *History Teacher*, 16 (1983): 219-47.

⁴⁴ Billington, *The American Frontier Thesis*, 15-16.

⁴⁵ See, for example, James Michael McReynolds, "Family Life in a Borderland Community: Nacogdoches, Texas, 1779-1861" (Ph.D. dissertation, Texas Tech University, 1978). McReynolds modeled his dissertation after studies by John Demos. See Demos, *A Little Commonwealth: Family Life in Plymouth Colony* (New York, 1970). Also see Janie Louise Aragón, "The People of Santa Fe in the 1790s," *Aztlán*, 7 (1976): 391-417. Aragón did not look at frontier society in a broad context but probed census data to answer questions about population growth, occupations, and ethnic structure. For an examination of some of this literature in a broader context than I am able to provide in this brief essay, see Richard Griswold del Castillo, "Quantitative History in the American Southwest: A Survey and Critique," *Western Historical Quarterly*, 15 (1984): 407-26.

⁴⁶ Turner, "Contributions of the West to Democracy," in Ray Allen Billington, ed., *Selected Essays of Frederick Jackson Turner: Frontier and Section* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1961), 95. Also see Gilberto Miguel Hinojosa, *A Borderlands Town in Transition: Laredo, 1755-1870* (College Station, Tex., 1983), 17-18, 43. Hinojosa found a high level of social stratification by ethnic group in Laredo, but he did not attempt to compare the frontier with the metropolis.

⁴⁷ See, for example, France V. Scholes, "Civil Government and Society in New Mexico in the Seventeenth Century," *New Mexico Historical Review*, 10 (1935): 97-98. Scholes argued that the frontier lessened social distinctions. (Scholes was not a Bolton student but studied with Turner at Harvard.) Alessio Robles suggested that the struggle against Indians, the physical environment, and the lack of Indian labor strengthened the character of colonists in the north, making them more energetic, farsighted, and tenacious; "Las condiciones sociales en el norte de la Nueva España," 156-57. François

Alicia Tjarks has written the most ambitious and searching of these new studies. In an article entitled the "Urban Evolution of Texas," she explicitly mentioned the Turner thesis and argued that similarities existed between the American frontier and the proto-urban communities of early eighteenth-century Hispanic Texas. Tjarks found that the Hispanic pioneers in Texas exhibited "all of the features typical of the frontier." They were future-oriented, stoic, strong, lovers of the wild, and reluctant to accept official control.⁴⁸ Tjarks's study of late eighteenth-century census reports in Texas, in which she did not mention Turner, reveals an open society, less stratified than the society of central Mexico. Frontier Texas, she argued, represented a land of opportunity for Mexican immigrants in the late eighteenth century. Although political democracy did not flourish, upward social mobility occurred easily in this "melting pot of races."⁴⁹

Tjarks also studied census returns from late eighteenth-century New Mexico. There, too, she found a racial melting pot but concluded that the process of racial blending occurred more slowly in New Mexico than in Texas. In the case of New Mexico, a considerable amount of racial amalgamation had occurred among Mexican immigrants even before they reached the province. Compared to her work on Texas, Tjarks's study of New Mexico is much narrower chronologically and less suggestive about the impact of the frontier on that society.⁵⁰ But another scholar, Antonio José Ríos-Bustamante, studied census data from late eighteenth-century Albuquerque and found that its frontier community possessed some of the characteristics that Turner noted on the American frontier (although neither Ríos-Bustamante nor Tjarks mentioned Turner in their studies of New Mexico). Albuquerque's citizens, according to Ríos-Bustamante, exhibited a higher degree of social mobility, a more rapidly growing rate of miscegenation, and greater egalitarianism than did the people who lived in central Mexico.⁵¹

Similarly, Leon Campbell did not mention Turner explicitly, but he explained the nature of society at the small military posts in Hispanic Alta California in Turnerian terms. Campbell concluded that in frontier garrisons "social distances between officers and enlisted men were greatly reduced" and upward social

Chevalier described the Mexican north (sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Nueva Galicia and Nueva Vizcaya in particular) as an area that allowed greater individual initiative and enterprise than did central Mexico, but he attributed this to distance from central authority rather than to frontier conditions; Chevalier, *Land and Society in Colonial Mexico: The Great Hacienda*, ed. Lesley Byrd Simpson and trans. Alvin Eustis (1952; reprint edn., Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1970), 148–51. For more recent assessments of the frontier as an area of relatively high social mobility, see Manuel Patricio Servín, "California's Hispanic Heritage: A View into the Spanish Myth," in Weber, *New Spain's Far Northern Frontier*, 117–33; and Ralph Vigil, "The Hispanic Heritage and the Borderlands," *Journal of San Diego History*, 19 (1973): 33, 38–39. For frontier individualism in New Mexico, see Marc Simmons, "Settlement Patterns and Village Plans in Colonial New Mexico," in Weber, *New Spain's Far Northern Frontier*, 97–115.

⁴⁸ Tjarks, "Evolución urbana de Texas durante el siglo XVIII," *Revista de Indias*, 131–38 (1973–74): 609.

⁴⁹ Tjarks, "Comparative Demographic Analysis of Texas, 1777–1793," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, 77 (1974): 322, 293–94.

⁵⁰ Tjarks, "Demographic, Ethnic, and Occupational Structure of New Mexico, 1790: The Census Report of 1790," *The Americas*, 35 (1978): 80.

⁵¹ Ríos-Bustamante, "New Mexico in the Eighteenth Century: Life, Labor, and Trade in la Villa de San Felipe de Albuquerque, 1706–1790," *Aztlán*, 7 (1976): 379.

mobility was easily achieved.⁵² He saw California as a land of opportunity where “the widespread distribution of *land* . . . meant that California society was markedly less rigid than that of the metropolitan regions.”⁵³ Isolated and enjoying a salutary neglect by Spanish officials, Californios “shared in the optimistic dream of the future largely associated only with the Anglo-Saxon culture.”⁵⁴ Some of Campbell’s conclusions stand in opposition to those of C. Alan Hutchinson, with whose work Campbell was apparently unfamiliar.⁵⁵

In a major study of frontier society published at the end of the 1970s, Oakah L. Jones also took a Turnerian view of the frontier—without mentioning Turner. In *Los Paisanos: Spanish Settlers on the Northern Frontier of New Spain*, Jones examined the culture and institutions of Hispanic civilian settlers in the provinces along both sides of what became the U.S.-Mexican border. Frontier conditions, Jones concluded, altered Hispanic society dramatically. Although Hispanic frontiersmen depended on the government in the early stages of settlement, with the passage of time they “became more self-reliant, more individualistic, less class conscious, and more conservative in their political outlook than the people of central New Spain.”⁵⁶ In general, Jones found that the harshness of frontier life had a leveling effect. In a phrase aimed perhaps at cliometricians, Jones noted that on the frontier “class rivalry and distinction had little place except for statistical purposes.”⁵⁷

Thus, although they have rarely cited Turner, Borderlands historians with an interest in social history have suggested in their recent works that Hispanic frontiersmen enjoyed greater opportunity for upward social mobility and lived in a more egalitarian society than their countrymen in the more settled areas of Mexico. Anthropologists, most notably Miguel León-Portilla and Frances León Swadesh, have come to similar conclusions.⁵⁸

⁵² Campbell, “The First Californios: Presidial Society in Spanish California,” *Journal of the West*, 11 (1972), reprinted in Oakah L. Jones, Jr., *The Spanish Borderlands: A First Reader* (Los Angeles, 1974), 112, 115.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 116. (Emphasis added.)

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* Campbell’s article ranges across both the Spanish and Mexican periods without taking into account changes that might have occurred in California’s institutions or economy with the advent of Mexico’s independence from Spain in 1821.

⁵⁵ See Hutchinson, *Frontier Settlement*.

⁵⁶ Jones, *Los Paisanos*, 238, 252–53.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 247.

⁵⁸ León-Portilla described the distinctive “ethos” of the residents of the present-day Mexican north, which he ascribed in part to the frontier. See León-Portilla, “The Norteño Variety of Mexican Culture: An Ethnohistorical Approach,” in Edward H. Spicer and Raymond H. Thompson, eds., *Plural Society in the Southwest* (New York, 1972), 109–14. Swadesh examined a group of settlers in the Chama Valley of New Mexico and found that frontier conditions made them hard working, self-reliant, and independent. Their society was more fluid and egalitarian than the societies in more settled areas of New Mexico or Mexico, and land and trade with Indians provided opportunities for advancement. See Swadesh, *Los primeros pobladores: Hispanic Americans of the Ute Frontier* (South Bend, Ind., 1974), 17, 46, 60, 156–57, 159, 173. Henry F. Dobyns argued that the Hispanic frontier in Arizona did not promote individualism as Turner found on the American frontier. Instead, Dobyns suggested that Hispanics brought their own sense of individualism with them, and he surmised that “Hispanic individualism probably survived intact.” Dobyns seemed to believe that the Hispanic frontier in Arizona promoted social mobility. He acknowledged that some soldiers achieved upward mobility at the Tucson presidio. His conclusion that “the population of this frontier post remained socially stratified along ethnic lines” must be tempered by his statement that miscegenation was well advanced in the presidio and that “army service function[ed] as one of those institutions of cultural contact between Spaniards and friendly Native American tribesmen which facilitated the acquisition of Hispanic traits by the latter.” Dominated

Ironically, although many of these studies have used quantitative techniques, the idea that frontier society was relatively open is based on impressionistic evidence. No scholar has made a statistical comparison between frontier societies and societies in more settled areas of central Mexico. Hence, claims to “relative” openness have only been asserted, not empirically demonstrated. Conventional wisdom—a wisdom that Turner helped render conventional—suggests, however, that this assertion is probably correct. Nonetheless, it is interesting to note that by the late eighteenth century racial and class distinctions had begun to break down throughout Mexico; for this period we have the most detailed census records and the largest number of studies on the northern frontier.⁵⁹

IF MOST SOCIAL HISTORIANS AND ANTHROPOLOGISTS agree that the frontier altered the character of Mexican frontiersmen in ways that resemble Turner’s description of changes among American frontiersmen, why has Turner’s thesis failed to exert greater influence on Borderlands historiography or, for that matter, on Mexican historiography? Much of the explanation lies in understanding that the frontier never developed mythic importance in Mexican letters and popular culture and that Mexico’s far northern frontier made little impact on Mexico’s national culture and institutions. For Turner, “the *most important* effect of the frontier” was “the promotion of democracy here and in Europe.”⁶⁰ But is there any evidence that the Mexican frontier was a cradle of Mexican democracy or the crucible of a Mexican national character? Some historians have answered that question affirmatively for the northern frontier of sixteenth-century Mexico. Commenting on Spanish expansion northward from Mexico City into the area of Zacatecas, Woodrow Borah characterized that region as a “melting pot” in which different races and ethnic groups “merged into a hybrid culture, clearly Hispanic but equally clearly a subtype—in other words, Mexican. The frontier rather than the center was the creator of Mexican culture and Mexican allegiance.”⁶¹

Other writers have argued convincingly that residents of the present-day northern states of Mexico—Sonora, Sinaloa, Chihuahua, Durango, Coahuila, Nuevo León, and Tamaulipas—possess a unique character that has altered Mexican national life and politics.⁶² No one, however, has made a case that the

by the church and the military, Tucson’s society failed to develop a middle class, much less democracy. See Dobyns, *Spanish Colonial Tucson: A Demographic History* (Tucson, Ariz., 1976), 62, 65, 111–12. Neither Dobyns, León-Portilla, nor Swadesh cited Turner directly.

⁵⁹ See L. N. McAlister, “Social Structure and Social Change in New Spain,” *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 43 (1963): 349–70.

⁶⁰ Turner, “Significance of the Frontier,” 22. (Emphasis added.) Turner wrote a separate essay on “Contributions of the West to Democracy,” published in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1903. For a reprint, see Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York, 1920), 243–68; and Billington, *Selected Essays*, 77–97.

⁶¹ Borah, “Discontinuity and Continuity in Mexican History,” *Pacific Historical Review*, 48 (1979): 15. Philip Wayne Powell advanced a similar argument. See Powell, *Mexico’s Miguel Caldera: The Taming of America’s First Frontier, 1548–1597* (Tucson, Ariz., 1977), 262, and “North America’s First Frontier, 1546–1603,” in George Wolfskill and Stanley Palmer, eds., *Essays on Frontiers in World History* (Austin, Tex., 1981), 26. Zavala took the opposite view; “Frontiers of Hispanic America,” 51.

⁶² See, for example, Barry Carr, “The Peculiarities of the Mexican North, 1880–1928: An Essay in

shifting Mexican-American frontier—those parts that are now within the United States (the border states from California to Texas)—ever made an impact on Mexican character and institutions. Some Mexicans hoped that it might liberate Mexico from its “semifeudal routine,” as one writer put it in 1831, but Mexico’s far northern frontier never exercised such influence. So long as it belonged to Spain or to Mexico, the region was too underpopulated, too peripheral, and too underdeveloped to influence activities in the nation’s core.⁶³ Indeed, in the years before the Mexican-American War, the cutting edge of Mexico’s northern frontier was not the area of most rapid and effective “Mexicanization,” to paraphrase Turner. Nor did Mexicans generally regard the arid, hostile, and remote world of the shifting frontier as a “garden” that would lead to the constant rebirth or regeneration of Mexican culture—an idea that Henry Nash Smith has shown was central to the Anglo-American ethos. The Anglo-American frontier may or may not have promoted democracy, as Turner argued, but, because Americans widely believe that it did, the idea itself is of considerable importance. In Mexico, however, there has been no counterpart to American idealization of frontier life. No myth about the salubrious impact of the frontier exists on which a Mexican Turner might construct a credible intellectual edifice.⁶⁴

Silvio Zavala appears to have been correct in arguing that the far northern frontier was not “the source of the Mexican national type.” In Mexico, the greatest blending of Indian and Hispanic cultures took place in the nation’s center, Zavala explained, making that region the cradle of Mexican civilization. In contrast, he wrote, the northern frontier “can be considered only a source of social peculiarities.”⁶⁵

One of the sources of those peculiarities was the United States, with which Mexico has shared a shifting frontier. Contact with North Americans, which increased dramatically in the first half of the nineteenth century, began to “Americanize” Mexican culture even before the United States invaded northern Mexico in 1846.⁶⁶ Following the conquest and acquisition by the United States of the Mexican frontier in 1846–48, zones of interaction between Hispanics and Anglos continued to exist. By some definitions, these zones of intercultural contact represent frontiers, but not in the sense that Turner meant when he defined the Anglo-American frontier.⁶⁷ Hispanics seldom found opportunity in frontier California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas. To the contrary, Hispanics found opportunity denied them as they became victims of racial discrimination and

Interpretation,” *Institute of Latin American Studies Occasional Papers*, no. 4 (Glasgow, 1971); and León-Portilla, “The Norteño Variety,” 104–07.

⁶³ Zavala, as quoted in Weber, *Mexican Frontier*, 283. I discussed this point further. Also see Hennessy, *The Frontier in Latin American History*, 13, 14, 26.

⁶⁴ Turner, “Significance of the Frontier,” 5; and Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (1950; reprint edn., Cambridge, 1970), 4, 250–60. Also see Powell, *Mexico’s Miguel Caldera*, 226. Powell has lamented that the American “western” of fiction and film has had no counterpart in a Mexican “northern,” and he characterized the Mexican north as “an almost forgotten historical world” in Mexican popular culture. Also see Hennessy, *The Frontier in Latin American History*, 3, 13, 21.

⁶⁵ Zavala, “Frontiers of Hispanic America,” 51.

⁶⁶ Weber, *Mexican Frontier*, 283.

⁶⁷ Forbes, “Frontiers in American History,” 65, 68–69.

xenophobia. Although some individuals managed to make their way up the socioeconomic ladder, Hispanics as a group were pushed to the bottom rungs by biased individuals and institutions—forced to become foreigners in what had been their native land. Hence, Turner's thesis has held no interest for historians studying Hispanic-American frontiers in the United States in the last half of the nineteenth century,⁶⁸ although this period has been especially fertile for applications of the Turner thesis to the Anglo-American westering experience, aspects of which Turnerians have named the cattlemen's frontier, the transportation frontier, the miners' frontier, the farmers' frontier, and the Indian frontier.⁶⁹ It should not be surprising, however, that there has been no corollary study of the "Hispanic frontier" following that group's subjugation at mid-century.

The Turner thesis, then, has had little direct influence on Borderlands scholarship. Although Bolton endorsed Turner's mode of analysis, neither he nor his disciples attempted to apply it. Only a few historians have explicitly tested Turner's ideas in studies of Hispanic frontiers in what is now the United States, and these scholars have not been of the Bolton school. Turner's interpretations, however, have probably influenced some Borderlands scholars who do not explicitly refer to him. His remarkable success in challenging the idea that the "germs" of European institutions planted themselves in North America and spread westward unchecked has led to a new conventional wisdom. It appears that most Borderlands scholars see no need to cite Turner's works or to carry on a running dialogue with him when they assert that the frontier altered the society and institutions of Hispanics.

If the Turner thesis has had little influence on Borderlands scholars in the past, it seems even less likely to gain their interest in the future. The thesis has been modified to the point that historians have difficulty either embracing it as an explanatory device or using it as a foil. Turner's original statement in 1892 was clear: "The existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession, and the advance of American settlement westward, explain American development." Turner and his defenders, however, subsequently refined the thesis so that it has gained sophistication but lost the elegant simplicity and force with which Turner's rhetorical excesses originally endowed it.⁷⁰

Meanwhile, new and more satisfying explanations about frontier interactions have arisen on the foundation that Turner built, and historians have turned increasingly to them. The work of scholars such as geographer Marvin Mikesell, anthropologist Owen Lattimore, and ethnohistorian Jack Forbes have proved

⁶⁸ See, for example, Weber, *Foreigners in Their Native Land*; Leonard Pitt, *The Decline of the Californios: A Social History of the Spanish-Speaking Californians, 1846–1890* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1968); Arnaldo de León, *The Tejano Community, 1836–1900* (Albuquerque, N.Mex., 1982); and Robert J. Rosenbaum, *Mexicano Resistance in the Southwest: "The Sacred Right of Self-Preservation"* (Austin, Tex., 1981).

⁶⁹ These terms are taken from titles of books in the Histories of the American Frontier series, conceived and first edited by Ray Allen Billington and now edited by Howard R. Lamar, Martin Ridge, and David J. Weber and published by the University of New Mexico Press.

⁷⁰ Turner, "Significance of the Frontier," 3. For Turner's rhetoric, see Ronald H. Carpenter, *The Eloquence of Frederick Jackson Turner* (San Marino, Calif., 1983).

especially useful, for they remind us that a frontier represents a human as well as a geographical environment. We no longer think of the frontier as a line between “civilization and savagery” but as an interaction between two different cultures. The natures of these interactive cultures—both the culture of the invader and that of the invaded—combine with the physical environment to produce a dynamic that is unique to time and place. Finally, it seems clear that Borderlands historians, like their counterparts in the history of the American West, have found other avenues of inquiry that take them beyond the Turner thesis, even if they have not yet found a substitute for it.⁷¹

⁷¹ On the history of the American West, see Malone, *Historians and the American West*, 8; and Gene M. Gressley, “Whither Western American History? Speculations on a Direction,” *Pacific Historical Review*, 53 (1984): 493–94. No other overarching explanatory device has replaced Turner’s thesis in Borderlands history, but sociologist Emmanuel Wallerstein’s world systems theory has found growing acceptance among social scientists who work in the border region, even if historians are embracing it timidly. See, for example, the special issue of *Review*, vol. 4 (1981). Also see Timothy G. Baugh, “Southern Plains Societies and Eastern Frontier Pueblo Exchange during the Protohistoric Period,” *Papers of the Archaeological Society of New Mexico*, 9 (1984): 157–67; and Thomas D. Hall, “Varieties of Ethnic Persistence in the American Southwest” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Washington, 1981). In *Mexican Frontier*, I applied Wallerstein’s model to the Southwest when it belonged to Mexico.