

# I

## THE PRODUCTION OF HISTORY, THE BECOMING OF PLACE

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Human geography and social and economic history cannot be prized apart. . . . The “becoming” of any settled area involves the local coexistence of structuring processes which vary in their geographical extent and temporal duration and which concretely interpenetrate with one another through the time-space specific practices of mediating agents, through the lived biographies of actual people. . . . The production of history, the becoming of places and the formation of biographies are enwrapped in one another and inseparable from the dialectical intertwinings of human practice, power relations and knowledge.

—Allan Pred, *Place, Practice and Structure*

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This is a book about a region and about the international border that divides it and, by mediating cross-border relationships, also connects its separate parts. Scholars have written histories of nation-states and other discrete political or territorial entities, while geographers long have shown an interest in borderlands, boundaries, and frontiers, but through much of the twentieth century most historians have overlooked regions and other less clearly bounded units of territory or space.<sup>1</sup> Regions associated with ethnic minorities or thought of as the home of a distinctive regional culture sometimes have drawn attention, but other less easily demarcated units have been difficult to describe, harder still to study, and generally have escaped close scrutiny, even when they have played important political or economic roles in ordering hu-

man affairs and the life of nations. This has been especially so in the case of transnational regions, like the one that provides the focus of this volume.

“Traditionally,” geographer Michael Bradshaw has written,

a “region” has been defined as a tract of land with relatively homogeneous characteristics and marked boundaries. Such a definition has commonly led to the drawing of boundaries along features of the natural environment, such as mountain ranges and rivers. This has had the effect of imbuing the boundaries with a false permanence, and of emphasizing the interactions between people living inside the region and their natural environment. The region becomes a rather introspective entity, while the importance of social structures and inter-regional linkages are minimised. And yet almost every boundary defined in this way can be disputed, and different geographers may use different bases for drawing boundaries.<sup>2</sup>

Departing from such topographical definitions, other scholars also have resisted trying to specify the extent of regions. “Regional boundaries,” David Harvey has concurred, “are invariably fuzzy and subject to perpetual modification because relative distances alter with improvement in transportation and communication.”<sup>3</sup> “Regions,” Bradshaw therefore concluded, “are constantly being constructed, destroyed and reconstructed as local and non-local processes of social development interact within [a] particular section of the earth’s surface.”<sup>4</sup>

Like other regions, the Great Lakes region also has been fluid and difficult to define. Canadian geographer Cole Harris, for example, has described one portion of it, Central Canada, as having “only fuzzy locational meanings,”<sup>5</sup> while Almon Parkins, author of *The Historical Geography of Detroit* (1918), called the American “region” of the Great Lakes “irregular and somewhat indefinite of area.”<sup>6</sup> While we associate it with the watershed of the Great Lakes and the upper St. Lawrence River, the Great Lakes region is not treated here as a fixed geographical entity. Nor do we generally regard it as a “borderland” zone of cultural mixing or, after historian Richard White, a cultural “middle ground,”<sup>7</sup> although sometimes, to varying degrees, it also has been that for the United States, Canada, and the Great Lakes basin’s native peoples. Rather, we see “region” in the Great Lakes basin as an area integrated by a fluid and dynamic set of economic (and other) relationships. As with all great structures, the givens of topography presented both opportunities as well as constraints, and for centuries the area’s indigenous peoples worked through these at the level of everyday life, in thousands of local cycles and encounters that produced no unitary historical narrative, though doubt-

less hundreds of oral traditions.<sup>8</sup> The coming of Europeans to North America inaugurated a new era in the environmental and human history of the continent, superimposed upon the givens of topography, geology, climate, flora, and fauna. Throughout, the flow of goods, capital, and especially people, which is a central focus of this volume, has identified a Great Lakes *economic* region that, in contradistinction to most definitions of “borderland,” developed a certain coherence and cohesiveness independent of the borders that happened to divide it. The Great Lakes and other such regions are thus “landscapes of action, of meaning, and of experience,” in which place interacted with people, not merely containers or vessels in which human action happened.<sup>9</sup>

The Great Lakes basin has been pivotal to a great deal of the domestic and foreign policy of two countries (and two European empires), as well, the native peoples for whom it was an ancestral home. During the past three centuries, these various protagonists devoted considerable energy in their attempts to shape, defeat, or benefit from the economic and political integration of the area and in the politics of imposing, tightening, or relaxing the line that formed that region’s internal-yet-international border. We argue that in some respects this border has been an artificial and permeable line, particularly for movements of capital. But the border also has been a principal mechanism for articulating and implementing immigration, economic development, and nation-building policies while it has become, on a symbolic level, the embodiment of national identity and sovereignty. As such, the border has held sharply different meanings for Canadians and Americans. Nonetheless, while Canadian and American historians have examined the economic and political developments that transformed their respective country’s interior and have produced monographic studies on specific U.S.-Canadian topics, few—American or Canadian—simultaneously have traced the connections between Canadian and American economic development, pondered the practical and symbolic meanings of the border, and followed the cross-border movements of goods, capital, and especially people that have given the Great Lakes basin its transnational dimension. This is the aim of our volume.

This study is shaped by two interwoven narratives. “Within any given place . . .,” geographer Allan Pred has written, “certain institutional projects are dominant in terms of the impact they have on the daily paths and life paths of specific people [and] also are the outcome and source of most significant structural properties, or social relations, within a place.”<sup>10</sup> Between the Euro-

peans' arrival and the beginning of the twentieth century, the two human projects that emerged as most dominant in structuring human affairs in the Great Lakes basin were nation building and capital formation.<sup>11</sup> Capital formation involved the accumulation of wealth, the increasingly systematic and rational pursuit of profit through trade and investment, the organization of systems of production and distribution, and the recruitment, mobilization, and deployment of labor power. Nation building involved efforts to develop feelings of loyalty and patriotism and notions of identity and citizenship in relation to a large political (and often ethnic) collectivity and to fashion bureaucratic mechanisms to unite, administer, and govern large (and often expanding) units of territory and their inhabitants, that is to say, to form a nation-state. Of course, both projects also involved a myriad of smaller, situationally specific tasks and details. Together, these two broad themes furnished the great organizing principles for much of Western Europe and North America during the period.<sup>12</sup>

Coupling capital formation and nation building suggests a dualism (capital vs. nation), but in the period they more typically formed not an opposition but a duality or pairing.<sup>13</sup> Historically, the two have converged in the operations of the state (hence the telling term "political economy"). Capital holders have used the state (governmental and administrative institutions, political and administrative processes and personnel, and public resources, at all levels) to assist in capital formation and in the generation of private profit. Conversely, in the interests of "the nation," the state (historically, the various states) has promoted economic activities and institutions that would create prosperity, foster political, governmental, and social stability, and bind the disparate places and people under its jurisdiction and administration more tightly together.

During the early, mercantilist phase of the European imperial enterprise in North America, nation building and capital formation, as advanced through the instrumentality of state activity (like colonization and war), shared broadly similar aims and objectives in both the French and British colonies; the relationship it tried to construct (without wholly succeeding) was one of extraction and dependency in the interests of nation, state, and capital. After the American Revolution severed the imperial connection between Great Britain and its thirteen American colonies, the economic and political development of these new United States and the British province of Quebec (which the British had seized from the French) diverged. In the

United States, the new national government and the governments of the states encouraged unfettered economic development. At both the federal and state levels, constitutional provisions, legislation, court decisions, and executive actions protected and extended private property rights, encouraged business activity, fostered the development of a national market, and eliminated barriers to commerce and enterprise. Both the states and the national government similarly spurred on territorial expansion. A policy of virtually open immigration, broad white male suffrage, liberal land policy (preemption or “squatter’s rights” and homestead legislation), an easy mechanism for the integration of newly settled lands into the United States, the removal of the native populations, governmental support of transportation and other internal improvements, and similar measures promoted the spread of the American population, both native and foreign-born, deep into the interior. Together, these policies and actions helped give rise to a vigorous capitalist market economy, particularly in the villages, towns, and cities of the Northeast.

While U.S. capitalist economic development gathered momentum, Canada by contrast wrestled with the legacy of its protracted engagement with imperialism and economic dependency. Though American expansionist interests may have turned more south- and westward after the 1790s, “Canadians” (many of them expatriate Loyalists, especially in the interior) remained keenly interested in the United States. Galvanized by American attacks during the War of 1812, those same Canadians debated the Canada-United States political and economic relationship, worried over Canadian political unity, strove for Canadian economic development (which by capitalist standards lagged behind that of the United States), and, after confederation in 1867, resolved to accomplish Canadian economic and political integration.

The politics of population, as they related to European imperialism, both mirrored these developments and also helped to shape the history of North America. While native peoples valued their own numbers and experienced large scale population loss, whether through death or dispersal, as a catastrophe, Europeans did not always view population as an asset. In a Malthusian European world, surplus population was seen as a burden to society and to the state; and the “loss” of population through migration (or even death—recall Swift’s satirical proposal that the rich *eat* the children of the Irish poor)<sup>14</sup> thus might be perceived as both a public and private good. But emigration to overseas colonies not only relieved the social “problem” of overpopulation; it also transformed surplus population into an asset, for in the colonies the ad-

dition of more people raised colonial output, contributed to defense, and eased chronic colonial labor shortages.<sup>15</sup> By the middle of the nineteenth century, the market and industrial revolutions, together with the rise of the democratic state, transformed people in Europe, too, from social liability to political, economic, and national resource. In fact, people became the very instrument and measure of nation (as citizens, mothers, and soldiers) and of capital (as workers and mothers of future workers). The identity now imputed to them revolved, in the first instance, around their loyalty and patriotism; in the second, around the productivity of their hands and their loins and their labor power. With patriotic, productive people as a principal resource of both capital and nation, death—the loss of population—now became a state tragedy. Migration via voluntary removal was considered a type of social “death” (with its implied subtexts of betrayal to nation and desertion from productive labor). Beyond mere tragedy, it became a national disgrace.

These facts and perceptions about population weighed heavily on the comparative history of Canada and the United States. Following the American Revolution, French Canada closed in on itself, some 70,000 people in the 1760s renewing themselves from within by natural increase and no immigration. Southern Ontario received its first nonnative settlers in the 1780s, growing rapidly to 120,000 by 1810, almost entirely through immigration from the United States. On both sides, settlers were motivated by government policies that affirmed the prospects of owning their own lands and engaging in a market economy, focused particularly on wheat. The Gallatin Report of 1808 and other measures before and after set the stage for American manufacturing to flourish, while Canada’s progress towards domestic industry was delayed for decades by cheap imports from overseas and, increasingly, from the United States. For a brief period in the 1820s and 1830s, Ontario’s shore of Lake Erie was the “next best west” and Americans streamed through and settled; their presence remains visible in the present-day Canadian landscape. By the 1840s, the frontier had moved on into Michigan, Indiana, Illinois, and Wisconsin, and land-seeking Americans turned away from Canada as a migrant destination.

These shifts in demographic trends and migration patterns after the American Revolution reflected the divergence in economic development between the two countries. Government-sponsored efforts at encouraging western settlement, though evident in Canada, were undercut by government policies that conduced to a less vibrant economy there and by Canada’s loca-

tional disadvantages relative to American migration and immigration destinations. In the competing projects of capital formation and nation building within North America, Canada was outpaced by the United States.

Since pre-Columbian times, the Great Lakes basin was a “principal theatre” of action in North America (to borrow historian Helen Hornbeck Tanner’s apt phrase).<sup>16</sup> It became even more so after the arrival of the European empire builders and the rise of American and Canadian nation builders and capitalists. That an international border was made to run through it (with the American Revolution’s “winners” to its south and “losers” to its north) and that this border remained so permeable magnified its strategic importance to all parties. Its definition as an economic region involved the movements of goods and capital. But migration was no less central an element in winning, losing, and defining the region and, in turn, advancing or retarding the projects of capital and nation for both Canadians and Americans. As Canadians migrated to the American side of the lakes, they made much of the Canadian side into a source of labor for the American economy, depleted it of those same labor resources, and thus transformed it into the extended hinterland of the region’s American towns and cities.

With such a huge human flow across the permeable Canada-U.S. border during the nineteenth century, the areas the immigrants traversed sometimes and in some ways were a borderland, a zone of cultural mixing and interchange. Here it mattered which loyalties and identities Canadian migrants brought with them and which they retained. But it is singularly impressive that this huge Canadian influx appears to have given rise to no identifiably “Canadian” (or, at least, Anglo-Canadian or British Canadian) ethnic communities in the Upper Midwest. Given the direction of the flow and the inequality of the economic relationship between the American and Canadian sides of the Great Lakes basin, it might be surmised that this “borderland” was less a zone of cultural mixing than the place where many “Canadians” (with a perhaps still weak sense of national identity) gradually—or quickly—became Americans.<sup>17</sup> Even if this surmise underestimates the complexity of the process and Canadian migrants to a considerable extent replicated European immigrant patterns, it nonetheless underscores how and why, by the late twentieth century, the border acquired so much political and symbolic salience for the Canadian project of nation building.<sup>18</sup> But it must be remembered that *de jure* political boundaries are not necessarily the same as *de facto* economic or cultural ones. The Great Lakes basin might have remained

a distant piece of Great Britain or France; it might have become entirely American or entirely Canadian. It even might have become a separate nation. No outcome was so structurally overdetermined as to make it preordained. Ours is a story of what geography, capital, and state shaped, but what people made.

Finally, a word about terminology is in order. The term “Upper Midwest” perhaps needs no lengthy qualification: while some regional planners have used the name to denote the area comprising Michigan’s Upper Peninsula, Minnesota, the Dakotas, and Montana, we use it in a more functional way to refer simply to that tier of Midwestern states (or portions thereof) that border on the Great Lakes, that is to say, the “upper” portion of the Old Northwest Territory. By contrast, the country now known as Canada and its provinces have borne an assortment of names, and more extensive clarification is in order here. For the sake of consistency, we generally (if sometimes anachronistically) have referred to areas of what is today Canada as “Canada” when we have meant either the modern country or those areas as a collectivity. Lower Canada, as a general geographical designation, is roughly inclusive of much of Quebec, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island; as politically defined in 1791, it is that portion of Quebec lying beyond and to the south of the drainage basin of Hudson Bay. Upper Canada is the political unit roughly coterminous with much of present-day Ontario, that is, the part that drains into the Great Lakes; but as a geographical area it effectively contains the broad Great Lakes hinterland, which included large portions of what became, after the American Revolution, the territories and later states of the Old Northwest. Both these designations, of course, relate to where each broad area lies with respect to the mouth of the St. Lawrence, that is to say, downriver or upriver. Thus, Lower Canada, except where noted, refers here to Quebec, and Upper Canada to Ontario. The reader also might note that portions of Upper Canada/Ontario also once commonly were referred to as “Canada West,” whereas the term “western Canada” describes that portion of Canada situated west of the Lake of the Woods (the provinces located west of present-day Ontario). The terms “Ontario” and “Upper Canada” are used here more or less synonymously and interchangeably, but we have employed more precise geographical terminology when these other designations have not sufficed.<sup>19</sup> It also might be noted that, in customary usage, “southwestern Ontario” refers to the Ontario peninsula, that neck of land sweeping south- and westward from Toronto to Detroit, even though a

look at the present-day map of the province, which sprawls westward to the western tip of Lake Superior, might incline one to refer to it as southeastern Ontario. Finally, it perhaps also should be said in this context that the coauthors of this volume take no stand on contemporary issues of Canadian unity by their use of particular terminology; as we write this book, the term “Canadian” is de facto and de jure a designation for Anglo-Canadians, Quebecois, Canada’s native peoples (or First Peoples), and so-called ethnic Canadians alike, and it is as such that we have used it here.

Thinking in novel ways about the Canadian-U.S. border and relationship historically has most frequently involved the political doctrine known as “continentalism.” On the Canadian side, continentalism most often has signaled a desire for greater northern economic integration as an antidote for Canadian economic recession or stagnation, real or imagined. From the American side, continentalism wittingly or not has carried forward a legacy of expansionism (and later imperialism) from which it has not managed to detach itself. In identifying processes conducing toward transnational regional integration and in highlighting transnational relationships in the Great Lakes basin, the coauthors of this volume disavow any intention of arguing for a Canadian-American political merger or any other such arrangement that would compromise Canadian (or American) sovereignty, unity, or cultural integrity. The recent North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), concluded while this volume was in the early planning stage, and more recent international and domestic developments associated with the “war on terror” make this disavowal especially relevant. In this spirit, it might be noted, the coauthors of this volume include two Americans, one Canadian, and one American of Canadian descent.