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## Borderland Films

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## BORDERLAND FILMS

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# BORDERLAND

# FILMS

AMERICAN CINEMA, MEXICO,  
AND CANADA DURING THE  
PROGRESSIVE ERA

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*Dominique Brégent-Heald*

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## BORDERLAND FILMS

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## *Introduction*

In 1909 the Selig Polyscope Company released *On the Border*, a “wild and woolly” tale of love and revenge featuring cowboys, gambling houses, and plenty of gunplay. Six years later Selig produced another film also titled *On the Border* (1915), a love story set against a cross-border smuggling ring, which similarly depicted a “phase of western life.” Although not a remake, the later film contained parallel characters and interrelated themes, such as criminality and violence, as well as adventure and romance. Yet while the 1909 film transpires in the U.S.-Mexico border region, the 1915 production portrays life in the borderlands of the United States and Canadian West.<sup>1</sup> Despite their southwestern and northwestern settings, what really matters is that both films take place “on the border,” in territories where neighboring nations, communities, and cultures intersect.

This comparison provides a starting point to examine the emergence of a category of narrative motion pictures that I term *borderland films*. I estimate that during the 1910s the U.S. film industry manufactured and exported approximately five hundred fictional motion pictures set on or about the physical edges of the United States. Although mostly filmed in New York, New Jersey, and, after 1910, southern California and south Texas, these borderland films take place in diverse geographic regions. A

# LUBIN FILMS

*Released Monday, December 5th*  
**On the Mexican Border**



The thrilling story of a railroad builder on the frontier, a girl he loves and a treacherous Mexican. Length about 990 feet.

*Released Thursday, December 1st*  
**Sponny Sam**

Sam just can't help sponning, but he loses nerve when it comes to marriage and another fellow gets the girl. Very funny. Length about 950 feet.

*Released Thursday, December 8th*  
**Reggie's Engagement**


In trying to make a good appearance at the home of his sweetheart, Reggie gets into many predicaments. But it all ends happily. A real laugh-maker. Length about 990 feet.

*Released Monday, December 12th*  
**An Exile's Love**

A young exiled prince loves the daughter of a Southern planter on whose estate he is a gardener. He finally wins her from another would-be lover and his estates are restored to him. Length about 990 feet.


*Released Thursday, December 15th*  
**The Musical Ranch**

A story which combines comedy and love interest in a charming manner. Length about 950 feet.



**Lubin Manufacturing Co.**

Model New Factory  
20th and Indiana Ave. Philadelphia, Pa. Chicago, 22 Fifth Ave. London, 45 Gerrard St. Berlin, 35 Friederich St.



1. Lubin's *On the Mexican Border* (1910), a "typical border drama" of the Southwest. Source: *MPW*, 17 December 1910, 1416.

little more than half of borderland films produced in this period are set in the U.S.-Mexico border region and unfold in the territories of northern Mexico, particularly Baja California Norte, Sonora, and Chihuahua, and in the U.S. states and territories bordering Mexico, most notably California and Texas, as well as Arizona and New Mexico. With the exception of a small number of productions set in the Niagara region or on the Quebec–New York border along the St. Lawrence River, films of the U.S.-Canada borderlands typically transpire in the western interior, especially southern Alberta and northern Montana. Other borderland films take place in the Pacific Northwest, that is, British Columbia, Washington, and Oregon. The Klondike, the transnational region straddling Canada's Yukon Territory and the U.S. state of Alaska, represents another prominent setting for borderland films in this period.

In addition to the geographical and conceptual heterogeneity of borderland films, these productions appeared in a wide variety of film genres and cycles, ranging from westerns, Indian dramas, Spanish or Mexican

costume pictures, and Northwest melodramas to comedies, crime dramas, and military films. The allure of borderland regions for the American cinema resided in their heterogeneous usages. A filmmaker likely chose a borderland setting for a particular production because it offered a dynamic narrative and visual device through which to articulate notions of crossing, transition, and “in-betweenness.” As a technology and an art form, film has the singular ability to construct relations of time and space, to reproduce liminality in terms of imagining the physical landscapes between nation-states, as well as the various racial, gendered, and national encounters that transpire therein. Borderland settings could convey the complex processes revolving around the creation and/or maintenance of boundaries, demarcations, and divisions between the land and its people. Regardless of whether the action takes place in the U.S.-Mexico or U.S.-Canada border regions, a borderland location could thus convey a wide range of utopic and dystopic possibilities.

Despite the discrepancies between these disparate film categories and the iconographic differences within and between the various territories situated on the boundaries of the United States, motion pictures of the early twentieth century exhibited recurring characters, motifs, and themes that characterized North America’s borderland regions in similar ways. Whether set in the northern or southern perimeters of the United States, border settings functioned as sites for intercultural encounters and social (racial and gendered) interactions, as zones of human and animal mobility, and for transboundary commerce and trade. North America’s border regions (both on screen and off) were also divisive places of conflict, coercion, and competition. The filmic borderlands created complex and paradoxical spaces to explore the social construction of nation, race, and gender in North America’s borderland regions but ultimately expressed broader anxieties over maintaining gendered, racial, and national boundaries during the early twentieth century.

While this book uncovers the connections and continuities between the peoples and places of the various border regions within North America in the early twentieth century, it also demonstrates that a marked change in filmic representations of the border zones occurred within the historical



and social contexts of the Mexican Revolution and World War I. Cinematic constructions of the borderlands positioned the U.S.-Mexico border as a threat to security, while the U.S.-Canada border appeared relatively benign—a view in line with contemporary discourses of these regions in the popular imagination. The contrasting representations of North America's border regions functioned as exemplars of the evolving relationships of the United States to each of its neighbors.<sup>2</sup>

*Borderland Films* reveals the ways that the American cinema, its critics, and its audiences functioned in circuits of meaning making in which all participants helped to shape perceptions of North America's border regions. The early American cinema did not construct its interrelated narratives of the various border regions out of thin air but drew from a broader trajectory of western frontier mythology and regional fiction, as well as paintings, photographs, and other nonfilmic visual sources. Early moviegoers most likely recognized many of the thematic concerns, images, and characters within borderland films. Audience familiarity with the subject matter and locations added to the appeal of borderland settings for the early film industry as it transitioned from producing nonfiction films or actualities to narrative or story-based films. Motion pictures quickly achieved a mass audience that dwarfed these proto-cinematic productions of North America's borderlands. Potentially film could overcome differences in language, politics, and religion, reaching diverse groups of North Americans in ways that newspapers, literature, and theater could not. The far-reaching appeal of motion pictures likely established popular conceptions of North America's border regions both domestically and throughout much of the world, as the U.S. film industry emerged as the central force in the global film market.<sup>3</sup>

At the same time that the U.S. film industry was evolving into the nation's premier mass medium and the incontrovertible leader in the international film trade, the social function of cinema was highly contested as various groups from both within and outside the industry struggled over its boundaries and the character of filmic representation. The creation of cinema as public entertainment became the focus of Progressive Era debates over shifting values in North American society. Filmic border

regions provided a diegetic space to explore the various tensions and contradictions occurring within the American cinema and North American society and culture at a particular historic moment.

A spirit of reform and the perceived need to impose order for the betterment of the United States and its citizens characterized the Progressive Era, which spanned the 1890s through the end of the World War I. Progressivism was a movement marked by tremendous diversity, as Progressives often did not agree on the best methods to achieve their goals. One strand of Progressivism included reformers who focused their efforts on regulating North America's budding leisure industry. The separation between work and leisure time, declining hours of labor, and a modicum of discretionary income provided wage earners with novel opportunities for consumption. In response entrepreneurs offered working men and women a variety of novel recreational outlets, including amusement parks, dance halls, organized spectator sports, penny arcades, vaudeville houses, and motion picture theaters. These public, heterosocial, and commercialized forms of mass culture challenged the Victorian cultural consensus defined by restraint, traditional standards of taste, and inviolable divisions between class, race, and gender. The emergent film culture played a critical role in promoting the revolution in morals and manners leading to the modern age. Public commercialized leisure offered men and women pleasure and freedom, which challenged ideas about sexuality and notions of propriety held by the dominant social order, that is, the Protestant middle class.<sup>4</sup>

Responding to these social upheavals, Progressive reformers argued that motion pictures could corrupt the moral conduct of working-class communities, especially women and children. Hence the U.S. film industry consciously attempted to raise cinema's cultural legitimacy. Exhibitors offered more amenities to broaden their audience base and increase their profitability. Companies skewed their film product to appeal to (or appease) reformers, particularly middle-class women, without alienating their working-class, urban, and immigrant patrons. The industry promoted film as a universal language that could overcome a host of sociocultural divisions while it simultaneously exported Americanized cultural commodities.<sup>5</sup>

Film spectatorship and the practice of moviegoing became key elements in the formation of an alternative public sphere. As Miriam Hansen shows, beyond projecting images, early cinema offered audiences a public space to make sense of the transformative changes accompanying modernity.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, while some Progressive reformers condemned moviegoing and motion pictures, others recognized that film not only entertained but also could serve a prescriptive function. Filmmakers used motion pictures as tools of social uplift and moral reform by broadly aligning film consumers with the specific interests of the film producers. Recognizing “the unique psychic force of the moving picture,” the film industry was well aware of its potential to influence public opinion.<sup>7</sup> For instance, motion pictures could teach early audiences, particularly new immigrants, how to dress and act or even how to think about Canada, Mexico, and the borders they share with the United States.<sup>8</sup>

Borderland films offered theatergoers, to borrow Norma Iglesias’s phrase, “social representations” that shifted according to the state of U.S. relationships with its neighbors.<sup>9</sup> Filmmakers who fashioned these evolving representations of borderlands did so not only in response to broader changes in the film industry but also in the contexts of the shifting and asymmetrical relationships between the United States, Canada, and Mexico while helping audiences negotiate the transitions therein. Although producers either consciously or unconsciously ascribed certain meanings to North American border regions via the medium of film, audiences interpreted these productions in multiple and often contradictory ways. Spectators actively participated in a widespread discourse about the early American cinema and its engagement with border issues. While the predominance of borderland films from an Anglo-American perspective (a category loosely identifying non-Mexicans, though excluding Asians, Indigenous peoples, and African Americans) engendered concerns over cultural imperialism in Mexico and Canada, as well as periodic counterhegemonic reactions, transborder audiences did not necessarily disparage the U.S. film product; film culture was woven into the fabric of daily life throughout much of North America.

In reconstructing the interconnected histories of film and the borderland

regions of North America during the early twentieth century, *Borderland Films* draws from the historical and theoretical literature surrounding the study of North America's borderlands, as well as the early American cinema and the Progressive Era. The scholarship on borders, borderlands, and frontiers encompasses a bewildering range of approaches and methodologies. Cultural and literary theorists tend to examine border regions through Mary Louise Pratt's concept of the "contact zone," a space of colonial encounters, or Homi Bhabha's postcolonial articulation of the "third space," which offers ways of thinking about these in-between regions as hybrid, interstitial, and liminal.<sup>10</sup> For example, many studies of Chicana/o culture articulate theories of U.S.-Mexico borderlands as a space of resistance from which to destabilize hierarchies of gendered and racial difference.<sup>11</sup> Such borderlands studies' concepts as liminality, hybridity, and identity construction have also influenced Canadian studies scholarship.<sup>12</sup>

Meanwhile historians of North American border regions have adopted lines of inquiry related to narratives of nation-state formation or regional and geographical developments. The modern nation-states of North America created borders that sliced through existing communities and ecological systems. These national boundaries were the result of specific historical circumstances, yet all were the products of interlocking processes of colonial ambitions, state building, and national expansion.<sup>13</sup> Although cross-border political, commercial, social, and cultural ties remained vital, the United States, Canada, and Mexico maintained territorial borders, largely by regulating and enforcing laws about the flow of goods and the movement of people. Diverse subnational communities as well as livestock, fish, and wildlife that straddled the national boundaries endeavored to preserve their economic and social networks in ways that undermined international borders as markers of territorial difference. In other words, while nation-states imposed *borders*, local communities made *borderlands*.

As Benjamin Johnson and Andrew Graybill note, the term *borderlands* has served "as a sort of shorthand to refer to the present-day U.S. Southwest and the Mexican North."<sup>14</sup> The proliferation of histories of the U.S.-Mexico border region, which focus on such wide-ranging topics as race and citizenship, immigration policies, environmental implications, labor and class

relations, nation-state formation, and border enforcement, indicates that this is a thriving node of internationalized intellectual analysis.<sup>15</sup> Since the late 1980s geographers and historians have also examined continuity and change along the U.S.-Canada border, as well as transborder social, economic, and cultural relations.<sup>16</sup> For the most part the historiography on the U.S.-Canada borderlands diffuses into broad regional streams: the western interior (plains and prairies) and the Pacific Northwest; the Great Lakes Basin and the easternmost provinces and states; and the Klondike.<sup>17</sup>

By treating North American history from a comparative perspective, the borderlands paradigm has begun to challenge nationalist assumptions.<sup>18</sup> However, the focal point of the majority of postnationalist borderlands research rests on the mutually exclusive bilateral relationships between Mexico and the United States or between Canada and the United States as opposed to a continental or hemispheric paradigm. As Claudia Sadowski-Smith and Claire Fox postulate, only through an “inter-Americas studies” perspective that connects the institutionalized fields of United States, Canadian, and Latin American historical studies can we begin to challenge nationalism and U.S. domination in the hemisphere.<sup>19</sup>

*Borderland Films* seeks to answer this call by drawing from these overlapping bodies of interdisciplinary research.<sup>20</sup> This inter-Americas framework yields insights into the disjunctive similarities between cultural representations of landscape representation, liminality, racial, gendered, and sexual identities, lawlessness, and conflict in North America’s border regions, thus revising previous assumptions about borderlands that stem from examining the U.S.-Mexico and U.S.-Canada border regions in isolation.

This book extends borderlands studies by using motion pictures to shed light on the complex interrelationships between the United States, Mexico, and Canada. In attempting to sort out the struggles between the various interconnected communities within North America’s border regions, historians have tended to privilege the printed word. While the analysis of textual evidence is fundamental to understanding the shifting meanings of these in-between regions, film also provides a lens through which to observe mercurial constructions of the border regions within the popular imaginary. While not an accurate reflection of reality, film distorts

the past no more or less than archival evidence.<sup>21</sup> As cultural artifacts, motion pictures can reveal wide-ranging sociopolitical and historical shifts either by reinforcing the dominant ideology or by calling it into question. Motion pictures are valuable primary sources that help to re-create how popular understandings of North America's border regions have changed over time and the role that film culture has played in shaping attitudes toward nation-states neighboring the United States.

Scholars have begun to explore filmic representations of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands.<sup>22</sup> Yet by focusing on only two nations and their shared border, one can overlook analogous patterns and processes, as well as deviances that a broader, integrated perspective can reveal. A comparative examination of border films challenges notions of national and regional exceptionalism, which has tended to characterize the similarities and differences between North America's border regions in terms of their cinematic representations and histories. Borderland films reinforced and challenged the dominant myths about Mexico and Canada, as well as the borders each nation shares with the United States.

A few words on terminology, periodization, methodology, and sources are in order. In recent years the study of geographic borders, as well as metaphoric ones, has pervaded a variety of academic disciplines. Yet the concept remains enigmatic. There has been little consensus among scholars on concrete definitions of *borders*, *boundaries*, *borderlands*, and *frontiers*. Each of these terms refers to a particular set of historical, social, political, and cultural processes or phenomena, yet it is tempting to use these concepts as synonyms for one another.<sup>23</sup> Adding to this challenge, the early film industry frequently employed the terms *frontier*, *border*, and *borderlands* interchangeably. A case in point can be found in the synopsis for a motion picture titled *Life on the Border* (1911), which conflated the terms *border* and *frontier*. Selig dubbed *Life on the Border* a "true story of the early days of the West" featuring various "*border* characters. . . . This is a realistic and picturesque story of the hardships which early settlers had to undergo during the pioneer days on our great American *frontier*."<sup>24</sup>

In *Borderland Films* I have endeavored to be as precise as possible. I use *frontier* to refer to the loosely defined geopolitical region in the interior

of North America at a time of Anglo-American and Canadian westward settlement and expansion; *border* to indicate a discrete area of demarcation that separates modern nation-states; and *borderland(s)* or *border (land) region* to designate a wider and more inclusive zone of transnational and cultural interactions. I use *Spanish Borderlands* to designate the northwestern territories of Mexico prior to the Mexican-American War (1846–48), specifically present-day California and parts of Arizona and New Mexico.<sup>25</sup> The term *borderland films* pertains to a category of narrative motion pictures wherein the border region provides a backdrop against which to view the popular discourses surrounding nationality, race, and gender.

The labels ascribed to the various characters of the filmic borderlands also breeds misunderstanding. Synopses for motion pictures, for instance, refer to characters as “Mexican,” but it was usually unclear whether this meant Mexican nationals or persons of Mexican descent residing in the United States. Moreover, whether the narrative takes place in the U.S.-Mexico or U.S.-Canada borderlands and regardless of the actual proportion of Native blood, the film industry identified characters of mixed European and Native ancestry as “half-breeds.” Similarly the film industry called full-blooded aboriginal characters simply “Indians” and rarely distinguished between the multiple and disparate Indigenous communities of North America’s border regions. I use *Indian* and *half-breed* to indicate Anglo-American and/or Anglo-Canadian portrayals of Indigenous and mixed-race peoples or where historical context dictates usage. While I recognize the imprecise nature of these labels, I use the terms *Aboriginal* or *Indigenous*, *mestizo/a*, and *Métis* to refer collectively to the first inhabitants of North America, their descendants, and peoples of dual Indigenous and European ancestry.

This monograph is a cultural history of filmic representations of the North American borderlands, which also considers the American cinema’s relationships with Mexico and Canada more broadly. The timeframe of *Borderland Films, 1908–19*, overlaps with the later years of the Progressive Era and offers a window through which to examine continuity and change within North American film culture and across its border regions. This study begins in 1908–9, a significant year in terms of film distribution,

changes in exhibition practices and audience demographics, marketing campaigns, and motion picture production. That same year also witnessed a surge in the production of western and Indian subjects, many of which featured border settings. *Borderland Films* does not end with the shift to feature films or with the emergence of Hollywood classicism but rather in 1919–20, the first full year after the end of World War I, which also marks the tail end of the major legislative reform efforts of the Progressive Era.<sup>26</sup>

I discuss motion pictures in which a border setting figures as the central component of the film and is not merely incidental. Film is at the center of this historically based inquiry, which not only includes the interpretation of motion pictures as primary sources but also considers the histories of North America's border regions in the early twentieth century. I analyze filmic portrayals of borders and borderlands and also consider the industry that produced those representations while placing the filmmakers, their motion pictures, critics, and audiences in their larger cultural, social, and political contexts. In contemplating this network of meaning making, I acknowledge the filmmakers' creative intent, the fact that different audiences may have received the film in ways that the producers did not envision, and that connotations and implications within a film frequently changed over time. I interpret meaning by drawing on historical, social, and political evidence from the time of a film's release, while concomitantly considering film culture, along with industrial practices and institutional actors within the relevant historical moment.

Most of the films that I analyze and contextualize here have not been looked at elsewhere. *Borderland Films* restores these important cultural artifacts to the historical record. Regrettably only a handful of the films I discuss in this study are extant. About half of the more than twenty-one thousand feature-length films made before 1951, which used a highly flammable nitrate base, are either lost or have deteriorated beyond repair. For example, the master negatives of every Lubin Company film produced were lost due to an explosion at the Philadelphia warehouse on June 13, 1914.<sup>27</sup> Therefore the study of borderland films as documents of social and cultural history has meant following what the film historian Thomas Cripps calls the "paper trail."<sup>28</sup> To that end I turned to textual primary



sources, such as newspapers, monographs, periodicals, biographies, literary works, and government documents. These existing documents have provided me with insight into the changing histories of the U.S.-Mexico and U.S.-Canada border regions, which enabled me to place motion pictures and the American cinema within the social and cultural history of North America's border regions.

To understand evolving conditions in the U.S. film industry, I conducted archival research at the Margaret Herrick Collection at the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences and at the Motion Picture, Broadcasting, and Recorded Sound Division in the Library of Congress. In addition I relied on reviews and publicity materials, such as studio-generated synopses, advertisements, and stills, found in periodicals and trade journals. The *New York Dramatic Mirror*, a periodical aimed at devotees of the dramatic arts, began covering motion pictures in 1908. Its motion pictures section, particularly the reviews and columns of Frank Woods, championed film as an emerging art form. *Moving Picture World*, founded in 1907 by James P. Chalmers Jr., was the most influential weekly trade journal until approximately 1919. Beginning in 1916 *Moving Picture World* produced a Spanish-language edition for the Latin American film market called *Cine-Mundial*. William A. Johnston's *Motion Picture News* began publication in 1913 and succeeded *Moving Picture World* as the most influential trade journal toward the end of the 1910s. *Variety*, published since 1905, started to cover motion pictures in 1907, and *Motography*, previously known as the *Nickelodeon* (1909–11), ran between 1911 and 1918. *Canadian Moving Picture Digest*, founded in 1915, was the first weekly trade journal for Canadian exhibitors. *Photoplay*, a fan magazine that dates back to 1911, featured story adaptations, articles, and interviews.

Film is a visual medium, and though there is no replacement for watching motion pictures, the documentary record proffers some clues to how the American cinema conceptualized borderland films during the Progressive Era. The beginnings of film criticism are found in the longer reviews and essays written by such columnists as W. Stephen Bush and Louis Reeves Harrison. Moreover, because these periodicals were aimed at theater owners and film exhibitors, their reviews not only discussed

the plot but also provided a sense of where a particular motion picture fit within the industry as a whole.<sup>29</sup> The trade journals also present a window into audience perception and reception of borderland films. Although the lack of empirical data regarding audience demographics has made it challenging to discern how moviegoers may have engaged with the films they watched, I have interpreted public responses to borderland films by analyzing letters to the editor, film reviews, and advertising press books alongside the relevant social and political contexts.

This study follows both thematic and chronological formats to untangle the relationships between the American cinema and North America's borderland regions between 1908 and 1919. Beginning with romanticized conceptions of both the northern and southern borderlands as *open* spaces characterized by dynamic interracial encounters conditioned by coloniality, cinematic representations (particularly concerning the U.S.-Mexico border zone) transitioned to a more "modern" understanding of *closed* borders requiring regulation and militarization in concert with the exigencies of wartime and shifting geopolitical configurations.

Chapter 1 contemplates the intertwined concepts of frontiers and borderlands. I demonstrate that the American cinema idealized the seemingly disparate landscapes of the Southwest, the Northwest, and the Klondike in similar ways, thereby positioning these borderland regions as central to processes of colonial expansion and U.S. nation building. Chapter 2 expands on these idealized representations of borderscapes and their overlapping colonial narratives by considering the unlikely parallels between borderland films set in the temporally liminal Southland (such as Mission pictures and Spanish costume dramas) and melodramas set in the Northland. The American cinema evinced nostalgia for the transitional period when the Spanish and French colonial regimes capitulated to the consolidation of Anglo-Saxon nation-states in North America. Films of the Southland and the Northland articulated antimodern alternatives to the increasingly regimented and bureaucratized Progressive Era society while emphasizing that this transition was an inevitable outcome of progress.

The next two chapters concentrate on interracial encounters and gender ambiguities in borderland films. Chapter 3 explores how borderland

settings provided a cross-cultural space in which racial boundaries were both challenged and maintained. In particular, Indian dramas depicting miscegenational relationships in North America's border regions actively engaged in Progressive Era debates as to whether Indigenous peoples should separate or assimilate into mainstream society, thereby exploring cultural and biological constructions of race. The frequent appearance of "half-breeds" (mestizo and Métis) and the Anglo-American marginalization of *both* Mexican and French Canadian characters reveals analogous processes of racialization in the borderlands.

Chapter 4 builds on the previous chapter by using borderland films as a lens through which to consider evolving dominant ideologies concerning gender and sexuality alongside the construction and maintenance of racial boundaries during the Progressive Era. Filmmakers employed borderland settings to grapple with changing ideals of Anglo-Saxon femininity (Victorian "cult of true womanhood" versus Progressive Era "new womanhood"). The cinematic borderlands served as male proving grounds for conflicting notions of Anglo-American masculinity in the context of U.S. imperialist ambitions.

While the previous chapters explore the ways the porosity of the filmic borderlands enabled cross-cultural encounters and contestations, Chapter 5 demonstrates how the American cinema positioned the permeability of border zones as dangerous to national security and public safety. The American cinema depicted open borderlands as unsafe (racialized) spaces requiring the creation of firm and policed boundaries at the hands of Anglo-Saxon law-enforcement officials, namely the Texas Rangers along the Rio Grande and North West Mounted Police along the 49th parallel and Alaska-Yukon border.

Filmic representations of the southern and northern borders eventually came to epitomize the changed relationship of the United States to each of its neighbors. Chapter 6 appraises the filmic construction of border regions as war zones during the Mexican Revolution (1910–20) and World War I (1914–18). Borderland films evoked cinema's ability to visualize binational tensions between the United States and both Mexico and Canada and to define borders as places of political instability, displacement, and

armed conflict. I demonstrate that in both Mexico and Canada heightened nationalism and concerns over U.S. cultural imperialism led to state intervention in the importation of U.S. film product, which clashed with the commercial interests of the film industry as a whole.

Separately each chapter recounts different aspects of borderland history—from fluid borderlands to hardening borders and from parallels to dissimilitude—through the optics of the American cinema during the early twentieth century. Taken together they reveal the shared experiences of the three modern nation-states of North America. Borderland films portrayed the tension between borderlands as points of convergence, permeable spaces with opportunities for interaction, and divergence, tools of the nation-state to assert territorial integrity. Both the American cinema and the North American border regions it represented were ultimately contested grounds—spaces of struggle and contestation between diverse communities and with divergent interests.