Number 188

FRONTIER IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVES: THE UNITED STATES AND BRAZIL

Dr. Janaina Amado
Institute of Humanities
Federal University of Goiás, Brazil

Dr. Walter Nugent
Notre Dame University

Dr. Warren Dean
New York University

This essay is one of a series of Working Papers of the Latin American Program of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. The series includes papers in the humanities and social sciences from Program Fellows, Guest Scholars, workshops, colloquia, and conferences. The series aims to extend the Program's discussions to a wider community throughout the Americas, to help authors obtain timely criticism of work in progress, and to provide, directly or indirectly, scholarly and intellectual context for contemporary policy concerns. Support to make distribution possible is provided by the Inter-American Development Bank.

Single copies of Working Papers may be obtained without charge by writing to:

Latin American Program, Working Papers
The Woodrow Wilson Center
1000 Jefferson Drive, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20560

The Woodrow Wilson Center for International Scholars was created by Congress in 1968 as a "living institution expressing the ideals and concerns of Woodrow Wilson...symbolizing and strengthening the fruitful relations between the world of learning and the world of public affairs." The Center's Latin American Program was established in 1977.

Preface

The following papers were delivered at the Woodrow Wilson Center on June 21, 1990, for the colloquia, "Frontier in Comparative Perspectives: the United States and Brazil," sponsored by the Latin American Program. The colloquia was organized by Dr. Janaina Amado, Dean, Institute of Humanities, Federal University of Goiás, Brazil, and a Fellow at the Wilson Center.

The first paper, written by Dr. Walter Nugent, Professor of United States History, Notre Dame University, addresses current tendencies in the historiography of the West in the United States and analyzes the most relevant themes and positions encompassed by these tendencies.

The second paper was written by Dr. Warren Dean, Professor of Latin American History at New York University. Dean's paper presents the various concepts of "fronteira" that have appeared throughout the course of Brazilian history and historiography.

The final paper, written by Dr. Amado, presents a comparison of the historical processes of occupation of the frontier in Brazil and the United States with particular emphasis on the question of myths regarding the frontier in both countries.

WALTER NUGENT
Professor of United States History
Notre Dame University

"The Frontier in the United States"

It is somewhat daunting to be assigned to shoehorn this topic into twenty minutes. Three strategies suggested themselves: (1) to survey the impressive mass of new scholarship in frontier and western history that has appeared over the past ten years or so. (But you can do that better by looking at the historiographies published recently by Michael Malone and Roger Nichols as well as essays by Malone and David Weber in the Western Historical Quarterly and Richard White in the Pacific Historical Review.) Or, (2) I could lay out specific topics that lend themselves particularly well to inter-American comparison, such as land laws and land tenure patterns, agricultural patterns and rural mobility, public policy regarding conservation and environmental protection, treatment of indigenous peoples, and others. But no one of these, much less all, could be dealt with adequately in the available time. Thus I will follow a third strategy: to discuss what may be a currently developing paradigm shift in frontier and western historical studies in this country. The media have been focussing on it; it may reverberate not only in academe but into public policy; it is very broad and of immediate interest; it is not yet well known beyond American western historians. So I thought I might describe and comment on the main features of what is called the "new western history".

To begin with, a word on frontier and western historiography--what some have started to call "the old western history." The prophet, the father-figure, has been (and still is) Frederick Jackson Turner. We are at this moment exactly one hundred years from the 1890 census that, according to those who supervised it, showed that the historic North American frontier had ended, because it had become impracticable any longer to draw a line on the map showing the western edge of settlement (read, Anglo-American settlement), so jumbled and oasis-like had the western half of the United States become. Three years later, at the 1893 Columbian Exposition, Turner (then 32) read his famous paper on "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" at a session of the American Historical Association. It set the paradigm for understanding several important matters: the settlement of the various American wests, the processes by which settlement took place, the interior colonization of the North America, and frontier and western history.

Turner's ideas swept all competitors from the marketplace of ideas regarding American development for the next several decades. His biographer Ray Allen Billington once wrote that "By 1910 [the frontier hypothesis] was generally accepted, and between that time and the Great Depression of the 1930s it dominated the profession so completely that the American Historical Association was branded one great Turner-verein."[1] Turner died in 1932 in Pasadena. By then critics had begun to voice doubts, and Turner, in his private correspondence (now at the Huntington

---

1 Ray Allen Billington, The Genesis of the Frontier Thesis: A Study in Historical Creativity (San Marino: The Huntington Library, 1971), 3-4.

Library) with former students and colleagues, became defensive. But never did he revise his idea that the frontier experience was fundamental to American development, indeed the American character--those traits created by, or in his words "called out by," the frontier. He also never answered the question his thesis implied, and which he raised at the close of his 1893 census: the thing that shaped it--the frontier--was it no longer there? He never found an answer, even in his last years, except to assert in another famous essay that as the frontier receded into the past, regions would assume ever more distinct differences. This never came to pass, and the regional idea (or in his term, sectional) is now of interest chiefly to historiographers.

Turner left enough unanswered questions, chief among them what happens after the frontier is gone, and so many ambiguities and omissions that Turner-bashing became commonplace during the 1940s and 1950s. Henry Nash Smith's seminal book Virgin Land (1950) treated the frontier as mythology by which people understood themselves and on which they acted; as has been said elsewhere, it is the great American creation myth. Others picked at Turner's variant uses of the term "frontier," and yet others, more recently, noted the absence of women and minorities, and indeed the very West itself beyond the 100th meridian; Turner's frontier, when you get down to it, was the Anglo-American farming frontier of the Northeast and Midwest. By the 1960s the mass of American historians considered the frontier idea a dead letter and looked elsewhere (if usually in vain) for another paradigm. Only the group of a thousand or so historians primarily engaged in western history concerned themselves much with Turner, and many of them were critics.

On the other hand, among the wider American public, the frontier idea retained enormous resonance. John F. Kennedy grabbed the term in such a way as to display his proposals palatably and freshly yet as continuous with those of FDR and Truman. The Mercury and Apollo programs were referred to so often as "frontiers in space" or "the next frontier" that the term went down the intellectual hatch with the ease and invisibility of a cliché. (This still goes on; in the 1986 Strategic Defense Initiative;[2] and we are beginning to hear of a landing on Mars in 2020 as the next frontier.) Thus, while professional historians turned their backs on the frontier concept, Americans in their general culture clung as obsessively as ever to the frontier idea, manifest everywhere, from Kennedy's "New Frontier" to John Wayne to Marlboro ads to theme parks to names of cars (Mustang, Wrangler, Bronco) to country-western music to the ubiquitous blue jeans, the sartorial envy of the world. Although disillusionment had long overtaken the historians, the frontier creation myth flourished as strong as ever.

Enter the new western history. Signs are multiplying that a new paradigm for the history of the West is in the making (including the history of the frontier, though the new western historians shun the term). A substantial article about it, by Richard Bernstein, appeared in the Sunday New York Times magazine early in March. U.S. News & World Report made it the cover story, and an excellent one, of its May 21, 1990

---

2 Gary L. Guertner and Donald M. Snow, The Last Frontier: An Analysis of the Strategic Defense Initiative (Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books, D.C. Heath and Company, 1986).

issue. Earlier, op-ed pieces appeared in the Times and in the Washington Post, stimulated by a public conference called "Trails: Toward a New Western History," organized by the University of Colorado historian Patricia Nelson Limerick and others and held at Santa Fe in August 1989, where the term was first employed. The professional historians are stirred up; at the Organization of American Historians annual meeting here last March, I chaired a session on Turner that drew well over a hundred people, and a year ago at Cincinnati a symposium on Western historiography (including Limerick, among others) given at the last, usually deadly and depleted, slot on the program, drew two or three hundred. Not bad, I thought, for a dead field based on the mistaken ideas of a supposedly discredited historian. So the interest in the new western history is lively. It may in fact constitute a new paradigm. If so, it is not neo-Turnerian but anti-Turnerian.

What, then, does the new western history say? Limerick's book, The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West (New York: W.W. Norton, 1987) is the central statement. But, greatly compressed, the core of the argument appears in a one-page statement by Limerick distributed at the "Trails" conference last August, entitled "What on Earth is the New Western History? (Not a Manifesto, but One Person's Convictions)." She made these points: the "West" is a place--most broadly, the trans-Mississippi area, or the area west of the 100th meridian. The new western historians reject the term "frontier" because it "is nationalistic and often racist (in essence, the area where white people get scarce); when cleared of its ethnocentrism, the term loses an exact definition." Instead of "frontier" they imply "invasion, conquest, colonization, exploitation,

development, expansion of the world market," a process involving "the convergence of diverse people--women as well as men, Indians, Europeans, Latin Americans, Asians, Afro-Americans--in the region, and their encounters with each other and with the natural environment." The frontier, moreover, did not end in 1890 "or any other year" but still goes on, first as conflict and cooperation among the region's "diverse cast of characters," and second, as "human efforts to 'master' nature in the region." And finally, they reject "the old model of 'progress' and 'development,' and face up to the possibility that some roads of western development led directly to failure and to injury," so that "in western American history, heroism and villainy, virtue and vice, nobility and shoddiness appear in roughly the same proportions as they appear in any other subject of human history....This is only disillusioning to those who have come to depend on illusions."

Limerick is, of course, not the only new western historian. Others, prominent and often-cited, include Donald Worster, author of the books Dust Bowl and Rivers of Empire (describing what he calls the "hydrualic society" that capitalism has foisted on nature in California and elsewhere), and Richard White, author of a brilliant environmental history (beginning before the Indians arrived) of Island County, Washington, and Roots of Dependency (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), applying third-world dependency theory to three very different American Indian groups and their relations to Anglo-America. All of these books have appeared since 1980.

Worster, giving the keynote address at the Santa Fe "Trails" conference, asked historians and others interested in the West to note "that this region now is dominated by the military-industrial complex, that its economic health rises and falls with the prospects of the Pentagon and nuclear winter...that the West has been forever poisoned by nuclear fallout and, since the war [World War II] has found itself sick and dying of radiation, racked by the problems of nuclear waste disposal, living in white-knuckled fear on the skirts of Rocky Flats Arsenal, Alamagordo, Los Alamos, Hanford, the Nevada test site. Clearly there [is] more to the West than we [have] yet been told by either Turner or the postwar generation." Worster demands, among "some of the most important arguments of the new history," that "the invaded and subject peoples of the West must be given a voice in the region's history;" that we recognize that "the drive for the economic development of the West was often a ruthless assault on nature and has left behind it many landscapes of ruin;" and that "the West has been ruled by concentrated power and, here as in other places, power has hidden its corruption behind beguiling masks." Worster closed by saying that "if [the new western history] delivers what it promises, [it] will help the American West to become a more thoughtful and self-aware community than it has been, a community that no longer believes in its special innocence but accepts the fact that it is inextricably part of a flawed world."1

---

1 Donald Worster, "Beyond the Agrarian Myth: Changing Visions of the American West," unpublished keynote address for the conference on "Trails: Towards a New Western History," Santa Fe, NM, September 27, 1989. Richard White and Peggy Pascoe, at the Santa Fe conference, William Cronon in various essays, and a number of others have also made signal contributions to the new western history, but to discuss them would impose too much on your time. Limerick and Worster give you the gist of it, and to flesh out the argument I urge you to read Miriam Horn's excellent essay, "How the West was Really Won," in the May 21, 1990, U.S. News & World Report.

My own comment on this constellation of ideas includes the following points:

Yes, the frontier is still going on--but not the Turnerian, agricultural frontier, which in fact did close about 1915 (and about 1930 on the Canadian prairies), rather than in 1890, as I tried to explain in an essay published in the Western Historical Quarterly.2

Yes, the frontier process is over if one refers only to the family-farm frontier, or the bizarre demography of placer-mining and range-cattle frontiers; but I agree that the frontier as exploitation, as conflict and conquest, is not over: appropriation of grazing land, water, mineral resouces and other resouces for strictly private gain continues without regard for the public community, either presently existing or in subsequent generations.

Yes, the West should be treated by historians as a place, the area west of the 100th meridian, not just as a process; but no, that area was not the whole story. There were earlier "wests," now called the Northeast or the Piedmont or the Midwest, which did go through a repeating process that I, unlike Turner, define demographically--young men and women, amazingly fertile, producing on average of eight children per family (the white birth rate was 55 in 1800 but is now about 16). More than half survived infant and child mortality, grew up, married each other, sought new land because there was no room on their parents' places, and finding that new land was in fact available, proceeded to breed to the biological

---

2 Walter Nugent, "Frontiers and Empires in the Late Nineteenth Century," Western Historical Quarterly, 20 (November 1989), 393-408.

limit just as their parents had done. This repeating process went on for nearly three hundred years, ending about 1915 in the northern Great Plains and about 1930 on the prairies of Saskatchewan and Alberta.

Yes indeed, there were others besides Anglo-Americans involved, and very often, contact with Anglo-Americans has been destructive for those others.

Yes, the frontier process, in the area now called the West, has continued, and has often meant conquest and exploitation. But no, it was not simply that; for many the dream became reality and still does. A year ago, travelling though Galway, Ireland, I read in the local newspaper about Tony Kelly, who as a child share-cropped with his family on a local estate, emigrated to England, then Australia, then Canada, and finally California. He had just come back to Galway after years in San Francisco working for Bay Area Rapid Transit, and bought that very estate as his retirement home. For Kelly and for many (by no means everyone), the western dream did become realized; if it hadn't, southern California would not continue to be one of the fastest-growing metropolitan areas in the world-- and unlike others, probably the wealthiest.

Looking beyond specific points of agreement or dissent, consider the new western history as an emerging paradigm. Like all good paradigms in Thomas Kuhn's well-known definition,[3] it provides a great many unanswered questions and unexplored topics--questions and topics that the old paradigm did not even reveal. And, as in other paradigm shifts, the old one has been chipped away at for some time; hence the new

3 Thomas Kuhn, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962).

questions and topics have already been hinted at in monographic scholarship in the last ten years (sometimes earlier). As Limerick recently pointed out on the PBS program "Bookmark," if it hadn't been for this monographic work--in Kuhn's term, "normal science"--a synthesis like hers could never have happened. We will see more, however, about exploitation--migrant workers, women, blacks in the West, other workers; more about conquest, treated as such--conquest of resources, water, of nature in many aspects; more about western aspects of class, gender, and race, the nexus of concern for a great many historians of the United States at this moment.

We will read more about the twentieth-century West. Turner said the frontier ended in 1890 and many historians stopped there with him. But we have another hundred years of history to account for, and since it is the history of the fastest-growing region, which many think is the leading edge, the most intensely American, it cries out for historical treatment. Sometimes the mode of analysis will be tragic, as in Donald Worster's writings, and sometimes ironic, as Richard White said at Santa Fe of his own work. Sometimes it will be in dissertationese, or the sturdy opacity of engineers' reports.

I have distinguished elsewhere[4] between agricultural and exploitative frontiers--the colorless many and the colorful few, respectively--and this may prove useful to others. Some may push it further, distinguishing frontiers of settlement or colonization vs. imperial

4 Nugent, "Frontiers and Empires."

outposts; settler societies, involving massive European or Anglo-American overtaking of weak aboriginal peoples, have survived in the form of the United States, Brazil, Argentina, Australia, and a few other places, while imperial outposts imposed on long-developing cultures such as India or Indo-China went out of business in the twentieth century. Still other writers may want to distinguish frontiers of commerce or agriculture from plantations or colonies of exploitation, as Paul Leroy-Beaulieu did decades ago with regard to French expansionism, terms that may have other applications.[5] In whatever form, more of the new western history is in the offing.

Finally: Are there broader consequences of the new western history beyond professional history? What must the new western history do to achieve resonance among the general public, or to affect the related ideas of American exceptionalism or the American sense of mission? (Michael Ignatieff, reviewing Seymour Martin Lipset's new book, Continental Divide,[6] in the New York Times on May 13, remarked that a "sense of mission" remained endemic in only a few cultures now that it has disappeared in the Soviet Union and eastern Europe--those cultures being the United States, Libya, and Iran. Canada, Ignatieff wrote, never has had a "sense of mission" beyond keeping itself together and out of our ever-eager embrace.) Is there in fact something exceptional about America, which Turner said was a result of our frontier past? My own answer is yes, until the agricultural frontier disappeared. That was indeed

---

5 Paul Leroy-Beaulieu, De la Colonisation chez les Peuples Modernes (6th ed.; Paris: Felix Alcan, Editeur, 1908), II: 540-41.

6 Seymour Martin Lipset, Continental Divide: The Values and Institutions of the United States and Canada (New York: Routledge, 1990).

exceptional (or nearly so; Canada had one too), a vast resource that never existed in historic times in Europe, a resource permitting Americans of previous centuries to ignore Malthus, as Malthus himself understood when he called America a "new habitat." Since that frontier disappeared, the physical basis for exceptionalism has been absent. But the idea of exceptionalism lingers on. More than that, it guides our thought and our actions.[7]

The idea of American exceptionalism rests above all on the mythology of the frontier. The new western historians are, simply put, demythologizing it. They will not be universally praised for doing so. Why not? Because the old versus new western history argument has many more directly political consequences than most historiographical debates. The "sense of mission," the justification for American "presences"--military, naval, or of other kinds--in the rest of the world, is being attacked. The "sense of mission" has been a very lasting, indeed central, part of our national worldview.

It has not, to be sure, lacked for opponents in the past. They include those who did not want to annex Canada in 1812, those who opposed the war with Mexico and the engorgement of half of its territory, those who were against empire-building in 1898, those who, early, middle and late, opposed the American presence in Vietnam, and over a long time, the many unilateral interventions in Latin America. Those historic dissident

---

7 On Turner's frontier thesis and the idea of exceptionalism, see Martin Ridge, "Ray Allen Billington, Western History, and American Exceptionalism," Pacific Historical Review, 56 (November 1987), 495-511.

groups were not just the irresponsible Lefties of their time, though more aggressive and imperial-minded Americans tried to dismiss them as such. Nor are the new western historians of this time. They ask for a less mythologized, more realistic, more empahtetic history of the frontier and the West.

I must say I hope they are listened to. In my review of Limerick's book in the Western Historical Quarterly, I urged that it be taken seriously.[8] She and the other new western historians are offering a new view, much more fully drawn than the old critiques of Turner, a view speaking directly to a quite central idea in the American mind. Their ideas are important to consider. It may hurt to do so, but the alternative (a closed mind) is worse: to quote (appropriately today) from the stunning Brazilian novel, An Invincible Memory by João Ubaldo Ribeiro: "...people who are excessively sure that there's only one way and one truth, a truth entirely known to them, are dangerous and prone to all types of crime. To know the truth and try to impose it on others, in a world where everything changes and is cloaked under all kinds of appearances, is a serious madness."[9]

---

8 November 1988, 449-50.

9 João Ubaldo Ribeiro, An Invincible Memory (New York: Harper & Row, 1989), 446. Published originally as Viva O Povo Brasileiro in Rio de Janeiro by Editora Nova Fronteira -- the "New Frontier Press."

WARREN DEAN
Department of History
New York University

"The Frontier in Brazil"

"Frontier" is a concept not much employed by Brazilian historians or geographers. Often their use of the term has been in response to the queries of North Americans, to whom they express that the transcription, fronteira, sounds odd in the Portuguese language, in which that word signifies a political border. The concept refers to a phenomenon that has been even more long lasting and influential in Brazilian history than in that of the United States and therefore it has come to be experimented with. Still, with few exceptions, Brazilian historians have not been willing to invest the frontier experience with the same nationalist meanings or democratic sentiments that for a very long time reigned in the United States and still inhabit the North American psyche. What follows represents, by way of explanation, a précis of the history of the Brazilian frontier, up to the beginning of the postwar period, incorporating some of the views of Brazilians and foreigners who have written on the subject.[10]

There is an alternate term in Portuguese that deserves to be given some consideration by North American historians, even though there is no cognate in English and even though the word will be hard for them to

10 Mary Lombardi has provided a most useful introduction to the use of the term in "The Frontier in Brazilian History: An Historiographic Essay," Pacific Historical Review, 44 (November 1975), 437-457.

pronounce: sertão. The sertão is the interior, any place inland and in distinction from the coast. The Portuguese applied the term to their own interior, before they set sail for other, unfamiliar coasts. The nautical Portuguese regarded all coasts as knowable, nameable, and conquerable. Interiors, however, were dicey. The navigators' will extended no further than the range of their caravels' cannon. Landing parties sent forth to descry the unknown were watched with misgiving as they disappeared amid the trees. Often enough they did not return. The dangers of the newly descried land, at first imagined to be an earthly paradise, were soon manifest, and "sertão" acquired dark and sinister meanings.[11]

The distinction between coast and sertão was intensified by Portuguese colonial authorities, ever anxious to concentrate their subject population along the coast, where it might be more readily taxed and drafted. The policy extended to the indigenes, whom missionaries enticed to "descend" to hamlets constructed for them near the ports. The towns and cities, chartered by royal decree, were invested with all political power, cultural advantages, and whatever revenues that were allowed to remain in the colony. The untamed interior was thus conceptually relegated by the directing elite to the same inferior mental location that was occupied by rural zones of southern Europe. This occurred, unfortunately, long before the Portuguese possessed any significant knowledge of this new world. Not surprisingly, however, they did not subsequently devote much curiosity to its mysteries. Not enough is made

---

11 Some of the travails of the first explorers can be studied in Pero Lopes de Souza, Diario de Navegacão (Rio de Janeiro, 1867). The initial rosy prospects of the explorers are described in Sérgio Buarque de Hollanda Visão do Paraiso (São Paulo, 1959).

of this characteristic of frontiers, perhaps: the invader of the frontier is always alien to the new habitat. Success in occupation involves acquisition of information about it, usually from the conquered population. The contempt of the conquerors for the vanquished typically interfered with this process, however. This may well be a major cause of the brevity of the abundance noted on pioneer fronts and the succeeding impoverishment.[12]

Colonial policies do not account, however, for the reluctance of neo-Europeans to migrate to the sertão. The major part of the Brazilian population remains shore bound nearly 170 years after independence. The frontier advanced slowly and exhibited until recently a curious inertia. This was because the soils available to traditional farmers do not extend very far inland. They required forest soils, and forest, fostered by moist prevailing westerlies, grew only as far as the mountainous seaward barriers that loom two to three thousand meters high. For some of this coastline, the barrier is no more than a hundred kilometers from the sea. Beyond that limit stretches dry savanna or thorn scrubland, whose soils are toxified by free aluminum, and whose species evolved under the influence of lightening-set fire. About a quarter of Brazil's surface is covered with savanna that resisted every form of exploitation except cattle raising. Thus, in Brazilian usage, "sertão" acquired the alternate connotation of thinly populated, semidesertic cattle range. Beyond the savanna, and all along the Amazon, from its mouth to the foothills of the

12 There is surprisingly little description of nature or indigenes by the Portuguese. Historians must rely heavily on the accounts of French and Dutch interlopers like Jean de Léry, Histoire d'un voyage fait en la terre du Brésil (Paris, 1972).

Andes, lay the third great biome, the Amazon forest, closely related to the coastal forest, yet distinct from it. The Amazon forest, insulated from the coast by the broad belt of savanna, was thus a frontier beyond a frontier, frequently penetrated but scarcely settled.

The sertão was not only arid, it was inaccessible. The land forms of Brazil forbid easy communication with the coast. The mountain barrier along much of the coast is in the form of a nearly vertical palisade that challenges civil engineering skills even in this century. Nearly everywhere it creates fall lines that block interior river navigation. Beyond the palisades, furthermore, the rivers flow not seaward, but landward. They are everywhere interrupted by rapids and falls that to river transport was a via crucis, continually interrupted by unloading and portage. For example, the 500-kilometer voyage down the strategically important Tieté took a month or more.

The Portuguese invaders spent the whole of the sixteenth century in furious combat with the powerful coastal Tupi-speaking tribes, who were aided by French interlopers. The Portuguese demanded from the Tupi subordination and labor and acceptance of Christianity, which is to say bondage and the abandonment of their culture. The mission of conquest presupposed the emplacement of a society of castes and the dismissal of the accumulated lore of the indigenes as the delusions of the devil. Once the French were expelled and the surviving Tupi incorporated as auxiliaries and concubines, the succeeding two centuries were spent foraging the sertão for more Indians to enslave on coastal wheat and sugar plantations. Except for the Guarani, however, the interior tribes were only

incipiently agricultural and therefore scarce and hard to catch. Once carried off to the coast, they soon died of introduced diseases. The susceptibility of Indians to Old World diseases made possible a "frontier" in the North American sense, that is one substantially emptied of its prior inhabitants. By 1800 this had been largely accomplished, as far as the Paran, the São Francisco, and the Negro rivers.[13]

It is also essential to the concept of a "frontier" in the North American sense that the political borders of a territory for some considerable period extend well beyond those of settlement. Without this sort of "elbow room," one is observing nothing more than a frontier in the European sense: a contested border. The Portuguese gained that advantage in 1494, six years before the discovery of Brazil, when they drew with Spain a line down the globe at 49 degrees west, intersecting some 2.5 million square kilometers of South America. Another 5.5 million were gained through repeated military incursions over the next 250 years. So-called "rescue," i.e., slave-raiding expeditions, were licensed by colonial authorities, thereby establishing preemptive official claims, followed by the emplacement of border fortresses, which checked the competing intrusions of Spanish missionaries and Dutch traders. These pretensions were recognized by Spain in treaties of 1750 and 1777, extending Brazilian territory north of the Amazon to the headwaters of its tributaries, to the west up the main channel of the Amazon as far as the seventieth meridian

---

13 See John Hemming, Red Gold: The Conquest of the Brazilian Indians, 1500-1760 (Cambridge, Mass., 1978): Florestan Ferandes, Aspectos do Povoameato de São Paulo no Século XVI (São Paulo, 1948)

and along the Mamoré and the headwaters of the Paraguay, and in the south into the plains and araucaria pine forests east of the Uruguay.[14]

The slave raiders were also searching for gold, stimulated at first by fantastical tales of El Dorado, and later by the very real successes of the Spanish in Mexico and Bolivia. Gold and diamonds were at last found well in the interior, in Mato Grosso, Goiás, and Minas Gerais. The ensuing boom greatly increased the colony's populaton of Portuguese and Africans, who managed to sluice at least two billion grams of gold off river banks and hillsides by 1800. The sertão thus acquired another identity, that of a dense preserve of precious natural resources. Its master was the sertanista--the mestizo specialist in violence, parleyer in Tupi, tracker of game and escaped slaves, discoverer of gold-bearing streams, machete-wielding cutter of trails. The sertão had become the place one entered to make one's fortune, arduous and risky, but profitable to the reckless and ruthless.

The Portuguese crown considered its property all the land it "discovered" and "conquered." No residual Indian rights were recognized, though they might be awarded farm lands as a grace, once they were converted. Royal governors and proprietors were authorized to bestow grants, at no important cost, to persons of wealth and influence in immense tracts, which might easily measure 130 square kilometers (nearly the size of the District of Columbia). This practice was continued until the mid-nineteenth century when it was succeeded by sheer claim-jumping legalized post facto by agents of the state. In the meantime, the complicity of the courts permitted grants and squatters' claims to expand

commensurate with hubris to many hundreds of square kilometers, up to the boundary of some other rustic grandee's sphere of influence. The essential element in the history of the Brazilian frontier, along with Indian dispossession, is therefore the monopoly of land titles by immense latifundia, acquired through force and official corruption.14

Small farmers were but a precarious and temporary presence along this frontier. Observers have noted the Brazilian frontier occupation invariably occurred in two stages. In the first, pioneers of low social status cleared the forest, thereby adding considerable value to the land, and squatted. This initial colonization itself usually contained some sort of social structuring--some energetic rustic encouraged kinsmen and neighbors to invade the area under his direction. In the second stage this person applied for title, or he sold his squatter's rights to persons of high social status, who then sought legal title. Or it might happen that persons of high social status, already armed with title, would invade the area and refuse to recognize existing squatters' rights. Whatever the procedure, stratification was rapid, rarely free of violence, in which the losers were designated "intruders" and given the choice of paying some form of rent or moving on. The state invariably connived in this usurpation of public lands by passively legitimizing the usurpers.15

---

14 A classic account of land usurpation is Amador Nogueira Cobra, En um Recanto do Sertão Paulista (São Paulo, 1923). See also Brasil Bandecchi, Origem do Latifundo no Brasil (São Paulo, 1963); Alberto Passos Guimarães, Quatro Século de Latifundio no Brasil (São Paulo, 1964).

15 See José de Souza Martins, Capitalismo e Tradicionalismo (São Paulo, 1975), chapter 3; Donald R. Sawyer, "Fluxo e Refluxo da Fronteira Agricola no Brasil: Ensaio de Interpretacão Estructural e Espacial," Revista Brasileira de Estudos de Populacão, 1 (January-December 1984).

The characteristics of tropical and subtropical ecosystems decisively influenced frontier settlement. The invaders adopted indigenous slash-and-burn agriculture, which provided extremely high yields from plots that measured probably no more than a hectare per family. It also necessitated large reserves of second growth forest--perhaps forty or fifty hectares per family--and depended on fish and game for most protein. To this regime was added the iron hoe, a few European domesticates--of which a decisive one was the sugarcane plant--and pigs and cattle. The animals were not needed for crop production since the plow was discarded. Weeds did not appear for two or three seasons and buried vegetation supplied abundant fertility. Thus free slaves were put to less than a quarter of the labor endured by their relatives in Portugal, and the remaining tasks were much less onerous. This might appear a paradise, but there were severe costs. Most important, the tropical farmer competed with native pests and plagues that were far more persistent than any dreamed of in tepid and domesticated Europe. Among them saova, the leaf-cutting ants, must be regarded as the principal limiting factor to stable agriculture. They attacked every crop, native or exotic, dominated all sites except waterlogged soils, and were utterly uncontrollable. The only sure way to avoid them was to plant in newly burned primary forest.

Slash-and-burn agriculture thus determined an itenerant, extensive agriculture so itinerant that town sites were constantly shifted, their population dispersed and reformed a league or two leagues away, a generation after their foundation. Grantees of a square league of land (43 square kilometers) often requested a second grant, alleging that their first had been used up. Land "used up" in this fashion was turned over to

pasture. Cattle raising was vastly more extensive even than agriculture. On native grasslands it was possible to graze one head to a hectare, but overgrazing and the repeated use of fire to suppress unpalatable growth degraded soils and favored dominance by weeds. The average carrying capacity was therefore closer to one head to four hectares, a rate inferior to that achieved by hunting for native animals on the original grasslands. Cattle, however, could be walked immense distances to town markets, thus they offered an economic rationale for the occupation of vast areas of land unsuitable for farming and thereby expanded the pale of neo-European settlement. They also prevented, over large areas, the regrowth of forest on abandoned farm sites.

This pattern of occupation was called the "hallow frontier" by James J. Parsons in 1969. In fact, Sergio Milliet noted the phenomenon in 1939, in his careful study of the demographic effects of the dramatic expansion of coffee cultivation in São Paulo. A frontier that moves forward like a brushfire, leaving only wasteland behind it, seems a perverse sort of frontier, indeed.[16]

he Portuguese, when they departed Brazil early in the nineteenth century, left behind a despoiled sertão and a society quite unlike any they had proposed. Gold workings were by then largely played out and scattered. The intermixed descendents of captive Africans, Indians, and whites formed a population of hardy rusticity, upon whom urban, coastal dwellers affixed the pejorative caboclo. Oddly, this was a Tupi word,

16 James J. Parsons, Latin America (New York, 1942); Sérgio Milliet, Roteiro de Café e Outros Ensaios (São Paulo, 1939).

probably meaning "dweller in a white man's house." Possibly the Tupi themselves had meant to insult those whom they saw as collaborationists. The standard Brazilian dictionary contains sixty-five synonyms for caboclo, nearly all of them pejoratives. Disparaging terms that caboclos would have applied to town dwellers were unfortunately unlikely to be collected by lexicographers--once again the conventional historian is betrayed by the urbane sources. The caboclos were none other than the rural dispossessed, socially disqualified from applying for titles to their homesteads. They were also refugees or exiles from the oppression of the towns and mines: vagrants, jobless, petty thieves, deserters, and escaped slaves. They survived as best they might, separated from whatever succor town life might provide, and linked to town markets only by a furtive trade in uncertain and small-scale surpluses.[17]

The elite of the newly independent Brazilian empire clearly viewed this mestizo and mulatto population, along with the African slaves, as an obstacle to the construction of the nation and the realization of what we would now call economic development. Backward, ignorant, feckless, they would have to be replaced by European agricultural colonists. A few colonies of immigrants were installed--the only experience of sponsored smallholding. Unfortunately, they were badly managed and failed or multiplied only slowly. The slave trade was consequently allowed to persist until it was crushed by British intervention; slavery itself lingered until 1888.

---

17 Waldemar de Almeida Barbosa, Negros e Quilombos em Minas Gerais (Belo Horizonte, 1972); Laura de Mello e Souza, Os Desclassificados do Ouro: A Pobreza Mineira no Século XVIII (Rio de Janeiro, 1982).

Successful in warfare and diplomatic maneuvering with its disorganized neighbors, Brazil somewhat enlarged its boundaries in every direction, even withstanding the pretensions of France and Britain. It also succeeded at last in attracting capital and achieving fairly rapid growth through coffee planting and rubber gathering. Immigrants from Italy, Spain, and Portugal worked the plantations of the highlands of São Paulo, a region not much removed from the coast, yet bypassed in the earlier rummaging for gold. Caboclos gathered rubber far up the southern tributaries of the Amazon, where frenzied competition for the commodity led Brazil to its greatest diplomatic coup, the acquisition of the territory of Acre from Bolivia.

The coffee frontier was extremely concentrated in the hands of a few thousand families. Ex-slaves were largely excluded from it, except as casual labor. Most of the immigrant workers returned to their homelands with their earnings, or wandered off to the cities, or ended their days on the plantations. Some few obtained land, especially as the coffee trade broke down in the 1920s, but 70 to 80 percent of rural workers remained employees. Rubber gathering was viciously exploitative from beginning to end: when it collapsed after 1913, most of those engaged in it returned to their homelands in the northeast.[18]

---

18 Martin Katzman, "Social Relations of Production on the Brazilian Frontier," in David Harry Miller and Jerome O. Steffen, The Frontier: Comparative Studies (Norman, Okla., 1977); Verena Stalcke, Coffee Planters, Workers and Women (New York, 1988); Barbara Weinstein, The Brazilian Rubber Boom (Stanford, 1984).

The realities of the historical process of settlement never entirely suffocated apologetic interpretation. In the 1920s, historians linked to governing circles and the plantation elite of São Paulo commemorated the seventeenth-century slave raiders who set out from that city. Dubbing them bandeirantes--"flagbearers," they not only exalted their ancestors but also reminded the rest of the country of the critical role of their state in the expansion of Brazil's borders. In the 1930s, the authoritarian regime of Getulio Vargas, seeking to occupy more effectively the great highland arc stretching from the Araguaia-Tocantins to northern Mato Grosso, found in Cassiano Ricardo a lyrical propagandist. His March to the West (Marcha para o Oeste) was a paean to Brazilian pioneering that interpreted the subjugation of indigenes and Africans as a sort of racial corporativism.[19]

Much the more characteristic reaction has been a crise de conscience, first most powerfully expressed by Euclides da Cunha, a journalist who in 1902 horrified the urban middle classes with his report of a military expedition sent to the Northeast to destroy a millenarian mystic and his rustic followers. Like da Cunha, the extraordinarily popular novelist Moneiro Lobato expressed conflicting attitudes toward the social and environmental costs for export-let prosperity, but demonstrated sympathy for the oppressed and suffering caboclo. Even the conservative political essayist Alberto Torres concurred, as a means of subjecting to scorn the "liberal" oligarchy that had so enthusiastically embraced racist and imperialist Europe. Since Capistrano de Abreu, whose posthumous book

---

19 Affonso de Escragnolle Taunay, Historia das Bandeiras Paulistas (São Paulo, 1953), Cassiano Ricardo, Marcha para o Oeste (2 vols.; Rio de Janeiro, 1942).

Caminhos Antigos e o Povoamento do Brasil (Old Roads and the Peopling of Brazil), published in 1930, and Sergio Buarque de Hollanda, whose book Monções, first appeared in 1945, a sort of antidote to Ricardo, Brazilian historians who have seriously studied westward expansion have invested it with its unavoidable cargo of tragedy, waste, and injustice.[20]

Indeed, the generation of the 1960s and 1970s, confronted with the plans of a military government to occupy the Amazon at whatever cost to the forest and to its inhabitants, all in the name of national security and economic development, have applied radical paradigms that subordinated the natural world to economicist logic. The recent wave of concern among urban Brazilians for the rainforest has resulted in a literature of "ecologism" that has already swamped the cost-benefit analyses and long-distance applications of the Grundrisse, but has yet to locate the real frontier, in distinction to the frontier of fantasy. It is to be hoped that social scientists and historians at the Universities of Para, Amazonas, Mato Grosso, and Acre will soon present us with a new, more realistic historiography of this last, still living frontier.[21]

---

20 Euclides da Cunha, Os Sertões (Rio de Janeiro, 1902); José Bento Monteiro Lobato, A Onda Verde (São Paulo, 1921); Alberto Torres, O Problema Nacional Brasileiro (Rio de Janeiro, 1914); Capistrano de Abreu, Caminhos Antigos e o Povoamento do Brasil (Rio de Janeiro, 1930); Sérgio Buarque de Hollanda, Monções (São Paulo, 1945); see also Alcantara Machado, Vida e Morte do Bandeirante (São Paulo, 1955).

21 For recent interpretations, based mostly on contemporary frontier expansion, see Robert Cardos de Oliveira, Do Indio ao Burgre (2d. ed., Rio de Janeiro, 1976); Octavio Velho, Frentes de Expansão o Strutura Agraria (Rio de Janeiro, 1972) and Capitalismo Autoritario; José de Souza Martins, Expropriacão e Violencia: A Questão Politica no Campo (2d. ed., São Paulo, 1982). For revisionist interpretations of the colonial frontier, see for example, Luiz Felipe Baeta Neves, O Combate dos Soldados de Cristo na Terra dos Papagaios (Rio de Janeiro, 1978); Carlos Davidoff, Bandeirantes, Verso e Reverso (3d. ed; São Paulo, 1986). Among foreign students of the Brazilian frontier, see Martin Katzman, Cities and Frontiers in Brazil (Cambridge, Mass., 1977); Joe Foweraker, The Struggle for Land (Cambridge, England, 1981).

JANAINA AMADO
Professor of History
Universidade de Goiás

"The Frontier in Comparative Perspective: The United States and Brazil"

I. CONQUEST OF THE WEST: SUMMARY

In Brazil and the United States, the process of opening, conquest, occupation, annexation, and incorporation of new lands, popularly known as the "Conquest of the West," represents a fundamental historical experience for the two countries, since it was through this process that Brazil and the United States obtained the immense territories that characterize both countries.[22] Since the process is old and touches on all the aspects of life, it is necessarily impregnated with the most notable

---

22 The history of frontiers in a comparative perspective still represents a new field of research. For good examples, see Alistair Hennessy, The Frontier in Latin American History (University of New Mexico Press, 1978); Howard Lamar and Leonard Thompson, eds., The Frontier in History: North America and Southern Africa Compared (Yale University Press, 1981); George Wolfskill and Stanley Palmer, Essays on Frontiers in World History (University of Texas at Arlington, 1983); William W. Savage and Stephen Thompson, The Frontier: Comparative Studies (University of Oklahoma Press, 1979); James Gump, "The Subjugation of Zulus and Sioux: A Comparative Study," in Western Historical Quarterly, 19, No. 1 (January 1988), pp. 21-36.

Only two books compare the American and the Brazilian frontier in a systematic way: Clodomir Viana Moog, Bandeirantes e Pioneiros (Rio: Editora Globo, 1954), an original book when published, now considered a classic, and Otavio Guilherme Alves Velho, Capitalismo Autoritorio e Campesinato (Rio: Zahar Editores, 1976), which includes a comparison with the Russian frontier and deals basically with the relation among frontiers, political process, and peasantry.

Two important books compare the American and the Brazilian cultures, respectively, from an anthropological and a historical approach: Roberto Da Matta, Universo do Carnaval (Rio: Edicões Pinakotheke, 1981), Malandros e Heroes, and Richard Morse, O Espelho de Prospero (Rio: Companhia das Letras, 1989).

historical characteristics of the two countries. This process represents one of the most important elements of the imagery of the two nations, from the colonial period to the present. The historical process of land occupation in Brazil and the United States is strongly related to the ways in which the two peoples conceive of and imagine the world and its inhabitants. It also represents the basis upon which the two notions of national identity were constructed and have been permanently reconstructed. What makes the United States, the United States, and Brazil, Brazil is intimately related to the historical processes of land occupation.[23] In this paper, I will attempt to develop some ideas on the first two topics.

II. CONQUEST OF THE WEST: HISTORY

1. Similarities between the Two Countries

Brazil and the United States were discovered in the same period and within the same historical context. They are part of what has been traditionally referred to as the "New World." Both nations began as colonies and became independent in a similar world. Since then, they have shared the common destiny of being American nations, each in its own manner (at times, even in an opposite manner).

The accumulations of the immense territories that today make up the two countries were lengthy and extremely different processes. The processes were initiated in the eastern coast on narrow strips of land from

23 The expression is from DaMatta, Universo do Carnaval.

which the first European colonizers settled and moved westward. The conquest of the West profoundly altered the environment of the countries, and continues to alter the environment, as is dramatically evident in Alaska and the Amazon. In both cases, the conquest of the West involved an open confrontation with the original indigenous population and its progressive decimation. The process counted on the participation of Africans (initially as slaves) and immigrants of different origins, coming from countries in Europe, Asia, and America itself.

In Brazil and the United States, the conquest of the West was related to different economic activities, like mining, cattle breeding, agriculture, commerce, etc., and to many geographically distinct areas. With the passing of time, this diversity caused the formation within each country of regions and subregions with their own characteristics. These regions maintained between them complex relations, that were both complimentary and oppositional. Thus, there is no possibility of identifying, in historical terms, a uniform "West" in each country. The two processes of the conquest of the West are and were marked by extreme violence. Not so much by the kind of violence made popular, for example, in the "cowboy" films--which is general and indiscriminate--but by a selective, social violence that systematically targets the poor and those who occupy the lowest levels of society: Indians, blacks and all the other "less whites," women, poor migrants and immigrants, workers, and those dispossessed of land or capital, etc.

2. *Differences between the Two Countries*

The American process gave way to the incorporation of adjacent territories (the concrete historical basis for the formulation of the "frontier thesis" in the United States). The Brazilian process resulted from the incorporation of nonadjacent land and from booms of intermittent occupations. In the United States, the process of expansion of the thirteen original colonies resulted in direct confrontations and/or negotiation with other countries (such as the war with Mexico and the Louisiana and Florida purchases). In Brazil, the original territory, east of the Line of Tordesilhas, was large and, for various reasons, its enlargement did not result in serious international conflicts or lengthy negotiations with other countries.

The majority of the territory of the United States was acquired during the nineteenth century, while most of Brazil's boundaries were fixed by the end of the eighteenth century. In the United States, the annexation of new lands and their effective occupation by white settlers, as well as their economic exploitation and integration into the rest of the country, occurred at the same time. The result of this is that, with the probable exception of small areas of Alaska, all of the remaining territory of the United States has already been settled by whites and integrated into the rest of the nation. In Brazil, the existence of the national territory preceded the process of colonization. Also, the economic exploitation of the regions was never continuous. For example, it was only in the 1930s, after a brief period of mining activities in the eighteenth century, that the midwest of Brazil became more densely populated and exploited by the white population. Certain regions of the Amazon are still being colonized

at the present time. In Brazil, the conquest of the West is an ongoing process, with dramatic characteristics, such as numerous social conflicts and ecological problems.

3. Historiography of the West

Recently, there has been much progress in the two countries on the works that address the conquest of the West. This has occurred despite the demand by present historians of the American West for more works based on comprehensive historical concepts and methodologies, capable of explaining the whole historical process. It has also occurred despite the present historians of the Brazilian West's demand for more works based on precise concepts, capable of providing specific historical analysis.

In the United States, a growing number of historians of the American West have been successful in overcoming the use of simple description or historical conclusions based on traditional methodology and concepts. They have utilized interpretative analyses based on new data and scientific concepts. The result of their work is the construction of a "new" and revolutionary history of the West, able to contradict and dismantle the traditional history of the region based on the Turner thesis.[24]

---

24 The historiography about the American frontier is extremely large and does not fit the space I have here. Among more recent contributions, see: Michael P. Malone, ed., Historians and the American West (University of Nebraska Press, 1983); Gerald D. Nash and Richard W. Etulian, The Twentieth Century West: Historical Interpretations (University of New Mexico Press, 1989); Glenda Riley, The Female Frontier: A Comparative View of Women on the Prairie and the Plains (University Press of Kansas, 1988); Gerald D. Nash, The American West Transformed: The Impact of The Second World War (Indiana University Press, 1985); Roger L. Nichols, ed., American Frontier and Western Issues: A Historiographical Review (Greenwood Press, 1986); William H. McNeill, The Great Frontier: Freedom and Hierarchy in Modern Times

In Brazil, a growing number of scholars have attempted to liberate themselves from hollow paradigms and concepts, derived from a mechanical application of the tenets of Marxism and also from a reading of interpretations of interpretations of interpretations of classical Marxist authors. Without abandoning the standard general explanations, these specialists have tried to understand the specifics of each region or phase of the conquest of the West, while at the same time trying to incorporate (as Americans have already been doing for some time) the advances in the studies related to women, ethnicity, daily life, and culture.[25]

(Princeton University Press, 1983); Jerome O. Steffen, Comparative Frontiers: A Proposal for Studying the American West (University of Oklahoma Press, 1980); Carl Guarinieri and David Alvarez, eds., Religion and Society in the American West (University Press of America, 1987).

I like this group of books published in the 1950s and 1960s: Roderick Nash, Wilderness and the American Mind (Yale University Press, 1967); Henry Nash Smith, Virgin Land: The American West as a Symbol and Myth (Harvard University Press, 1950); Leo Marx, The Machine in the Garden (Oxford University Press, 1964); R. W. N. Lewis, The American Adam (The University of Chicago Press, 1955).

25 About frontier areas in Brazil see, among others: Sérgio Buarque de Holanda, Visão do Paraiso (São Paulo: Cia. Editora Nacional, 1959) and Monções (São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1962, 2nd edition); Alcantara Machado, Vida e Morte do Bandeirante (São Paulo: Melhoramentos, 1962 3rd edition); José de Souza Martins, Os Camponeses e a Politica no Brasil (Petrópolis: Vozes, 1981), Não Ha Terra Para Plantar Neste Verão (São Paulo: Hucitec, 1985), and Capitalismo e Tradicionalismo (São Paulo: Hucitec, 1972); Bertha Becker, Geopolitica da Amazonia: A Nova Fronteira de Recursos (Rio: Zahar, 1982); Carlos Davidoff, Bandeirantes, Verso e Reverso (São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1980); Charles Wood and José Alberto Magno de Carvalho, The Demography of Inequality in Brazil (Cambridge University Press, 1988); Warren Dean, Brazil and the Struggle for Rubber: A Study in Environmental History (Cambridge University Press, 1987); Judith Lisansky, Migrants to Amazonia: Spontaneous Colonization in the Brazilian Frontier (Westview Press, 1990); Sue Branford and Oriel Glock, The Last Frontier - Fighting Over Land in the Amazon (London: Zed Books Ltd., 1985); Martin Katzman, Cities and Frontiers in Brazil (Cambridge University Press, 1977); Joe Foweraker, The Struggle for Land in Brazil (Cambridge University Press, 1981); Marianne Schmink and Charles Wood, eds., Frontier Expansion in Amazonia (University of Florida Press, 1984); Emilio Moran, The Dilemma of Amazonian Development (Westview Press, 1983); Ghillean T. Prance and Thomas E. Lovejoy, Amazonia (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1985).

4. Concept of Capitalism

I think that the principal task of the historian is to explain, that is, relate people, facts, and processes that have occurred across time from an explicit method and body of concepts. The historical explanation should not intend to be the only one or present itself as the real one. On the contrary, exactly because it is historical, it is changeable and multiplicative, representing only one (and, depending on the time, not even the most adequate) among the available systems of explanation of one historical period. The work of one historian or group of historians represents only one version among various versions that constitute the history of the period. Having said this, I return to my earlier assertion: only as an explanation is history worthwhile, since only then can it respond to the human necessity to comprehend the world.

However, in order to explain, it is necessary to find a model that is applicable to everything for which an explanation is desired. It is in this sense that the concept of "capitalism" appears to be particularly adequate for the study of the process of the conquest of the West. It is the only concept sufficiently all-inclusive and flexible to embrace the formidable variety of facts and times that constitute the subject referred to as the conquest of the West. And, as a result, it is also the only concept able to relate so many distinctive ideas. For example, things such as the systematic massacre of the Indians in the United States and in Brazil from the beginning of the nineteenth century, the hordes of immigrants that arrived in the two countries during the same time, the extraordinary wealth of California and the extraordinary poverty of the Amazon, the

inequality of wealth in California and the inequality of wealth in the Amazon, etc.

III. CONQUEST OF THE WEST: SYMBOLISM

In the United States and in Brazil, the process of the conquest of the West has been a fundamental element in the formation of the imagery of the two peoples. "Imagery" is here defined as a group of ideas, symbols, feelings, and fantasies of a society, nation, culture, or civilization. It embodies all of the "inert, obscure and unconscious components of a certain way of looking at the world, the survivals, the archaisms, the sympathies, the irrationality," as Carlo Ginzburg stated.[26]

In order to recognize the importance of the conquest of the West in the formation of the imagery of the United States, one need only recall the quantity of popular heroes related to the experience (Daniel Boone, David Crocket, Paul Bunyan, among so many others), the various social prototypes and mythical figures created (like the "pioneer" and the "cowboy"), the extensive literature situated in the West (which assembles authors of the importance of Twain, Melville, Hawthorne, and Steinbeck, and authors such as Louis L'Amour--we cannot forget the "dime novels"), the "western" cinematography, country music, etc. In the Brazilian case, there also exists a pleiad of heroes and prototypes related to the "Conquest of the West" and manifestations of the subject in all of the arts.

1. Myth

While the conquest of the West was occurring in the United States and Brazil, it was also transforming itself into a very powerful symbolic field, expressed in all cultural manifestations, popular or erudite, of the two nations. The conquest of the West became, in the United States and Brazil, a myth. "Myth" here is used in the sense, noted by Richard Slotkin, of "a narrative that dramatizes the world vision and experience into a constellation of compelling metaphors";26 so, it does not have the popular meaning of "lie" or "falsehood." On the contrary: although, it generally refers to protagonists, places, and events invented (which cannot be found in the real world), the myth expresses the most basic truth for human beings, that which is born of social experience and purified by collective imagination during the ages. Myth expresses, as Joseph Campbell recalls, "the penultimate truth (because the ultimate one cannot be expressed in words)."[27]

---

26 Richard Slotkin, Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860 (Wesleyan University Press, 1973). Books about myth that were specially useful to me: Joseph Campbell, The Hero With a Thousand Faces (Bantam Books, 1972); Mircea Eliade, Myth and Reality (Harper and Row, 1963); Carl Jung and C. Kereny, Essay on a Science of Mythology (Harper and Row, 1963); Marshall Sahlins, Historical Metaphors and Mythical Realities (University of Michigan Press, 1981); Claude Lévi-Strauss, Myth and Meaning (University of Toronto Press, 1978); Ivan Strenski, Four Theories of Myth in Twentieth-Century History (Cassirer, Eliade, Lévi-Strauss, Malinowsky) (University of Iowa Press, 1987); Clifford Geertz, Myth, Symbol, and Culture (W.W. Norton Company Inc., 1971); Michel Izard and Pierre Smith, eds., Between Belief and Transgression: Structuralist Essays in Religion, History and Myth (University of Chicago Press, 1982); Frank Whalins, ed., Contemporary Approaches for the Study of Religion, Vol. 1: Humanities (Berlin: Mouton, 1983).

27 Joseph Campbell,The Power of Myth (Doubleday, 1988).

The myth filters from the collective experience symbols capable of expressing the most basic, durable, and diffused sentiments and ideas among human beings, those with which everybody can identify themselves and that Karl Jung called "archetypes." These symbols constitute mythological narratives. Apparently very simple, with a fixed structure, the mythological narratives are capable of summarizing and answering the most important questions posed by the people who created and repeated them; questions that only children and philosophers have the courage to pose, but from which no human being can escape, such as: How was the world created? When will it end? Why does it function in such a manner? What is my role in it?, and so on. Myths are similar in this respect to the best works of literature; they are not preoccupied with reproducing real beings and facts but are capable of expressing the essence of the world.

The elements that compose the mythical narrative are related among themselves in a peculiar manner, similar to that of dreams: they do not obey a sequential logic and are even able to shelter contradictions. The responses furnished by the myths are metaphoric: every myth is endowed with a "hypnoia," an underthought, more important than its literal sense. This "underthought" generally is not understood at a rational level and does not need to be. It is captured by the collective unconsciousness that takes charge of internalizing and socializing it. In expressing and resolving, at the symbolic level, the most pointed emotional and social conflicts, the myth exercises the important role of agglutinant of the society, of depository of everything that is common among culture, civilization, or nation.

The myth is a collective and anonymous work, constructed during the ages. No one person or group is able to create a myth alone (however, it can serve as a theme for the creation of one); just as no one can create a myth solely based on the desire to do so. The creation of the myth depends on its capacity to express archetypes and it is related to a deep and collective necessity.

In order to be as comprehensive as possible, all myths are vague. A myth can be applied to many situations and can be used in different historical periods, by different social groups and for different objectives. In order to express so much variety, there exist many myths and also versions of the same myth that have been constructed across time. It is also usual to have more than one version of each myth during the same period; these prevailing myths express the adaptations of the original myth to the situation of various groups at that moment.

There is an interchange between the myths and their versions. There are changes among the narratives: restructuring of old and apparently forgotten versions, redefinition of meanings, etc. But changes in the structure of myths are slow since they only occur when societies radically alter their way of thinking, feeling, and organizing the world. Moreover, one myth or version always predominates over the rest, until it is substituted.

The myth is not good, bad, conservative, revolutionary, traditional, or liberal. The myths acquire these characteristics during the process of their social appropriation. In this process, the sectors or classes of a society

elaborate their version of a myth and try to impose it as if it were the only version, as if it were the myth itself. When a segment attempts to impose its version of a myth, it is, at a symbolic level, attempting to transfer the authority conferred by the myth--which is immense--to a person or group. From then on, this group tries to become the myth itself.

All this occurs under a larger process of social hegemony.[28] In this process one or more social classes, having already reached political power, attempt to lead the society to accept and share their version of the world, ideas, values, behavior, etc. So, the attempt to do the same thing with the myth is only one among the various phases of the greater process of social hegemony, a phase different from the others, with its own characteristics and expressions, but that can only be understood if related to the rest.

In all societies there exists a dispute on the appropriation of the myth, and this process involves the use of force and negotiation.[29] However, the intensity of dispute varies: in times of social crisis, of great changes, revolutions, etc, it is very strong. But in periods of social stability it can be so weak that it becomes almost imperceptible. This is because, in the periods of stability, the process of hegemony is not threatened and so a myth or version tends to predominate over the others with greater ease, and to be accepted without major contestation. The success or failure of an attempt at social appropriation of a myth depends on many factors. But it

---

28 The concept of "hegemony" used here was first developed by Antonio Gramsci. Now it has been used and developed by many other authors.
29 In the beautiful article "Superscribing Symbols: The Myth of Guandi, Chinese God of War" (Journal of Asian Studies, 47, No. 4 [November 1988], pp. 778-795), Prasenjit Duara demonstrated how the same Chinese myth, The Myth of Guandi, was appropriate in different periods and for different purposes.

always relates in some form to the representativeness of the group that makes the attempt and to its capacity to convince others to share their myth.

2. *Myth and Conquest of the West*

The conquest of the West in the United States and Brazil could be transformed into myth because (a) it refers to a fundamental historical experience for the two peoples (circumstantial or particularized experiences do not have the power to transform themselves into myths). It deals with old experiences that were repeated many times, which facilitates their recollection. It was lived by large and different segments of the society and, therefore, it is a collective experience. Yet it still contains elements extremely varied, which facilitates the fiction; and (b) it represents a privileged raw material to be magnified, since it provides all the basic elements that constitute myths. That is: courageous beings who confront difficulties that seemed insurmountable in order to realize their objectives; unknown lands, animals, and forces of nature that need to be tamed; tribulations of every sort; adversaries who have diverse religions, customs, powers and values--adversaries who threaten and seduce; worlds in conflict; disputes between different gods and beliefs; the discovery of the other, etc.[30]

Once the myth of the conquest of the West was created in Brazil and the United States, what did the Brazilian and American societies do with it?

---

30 Walter Nugent presented an interesting typology of frontiers, suggesting that myths normally derive from one type of frontier, whose characteristics he describes; in "Frontiers and Empires in the Late Nineteenth Century," Western Historical Quarterly, 20, No. 4 (November 1989), pp. 393-408.

As this myth was being socially appropriated in the two countries, how many groups did it unite in the difficult journey across time? How many and which alliances, negotiations, and wars were advanced in its name, until it assumed the contemporary versions? I am presently investigating this topic.

Since it is impossible to trace in this paper the entire trajectory of these two myths, I will analyze the final point of this trajectory, how the two myths of the conquest of the West are presented in the United States and Brazil, today.

Some analysts dispute the existence of myths in the present world, alleging that myths were only preponderant in antiquity and, since the Enlightenment (or, as some prefer, since Hegel), were completely surpassed by rationalist explanations, only surviving in the present world as archaisms. I disagree with this position. However, I agree with the fact that, with the passing of time, the myth was confronted with a growing competition from other kinds of narratives (such as the philosophical and historical narratives). But the myth and the capacity to mythologize is an intrinsic characteristic of human societies and exists in any historical period. The present is filled with myths, one only needs to find them. The denial of the existence of myths in contemporary society is an expression of a positivist notion that sees humanity marching triumphantly towards the Kingdom of Absolute Reason.

3. Present Myth of the Conquest of the West

The myth of the conquest of the West in the United States experienced various interpretations across time. At this moment I am interested in its contemporary and predominant version, the one that is in the streets, in the hearts and minds of the American people. This version was summarized in this manner (with delightful irony) by the historian Patricia Limerick:

> Europe was crowded; North America was not. Land in Europe was claimed, owned, and utilized; land in North America was available for the taking. In a migration as elemental as a law of physics, Europeans moved from crowded space to open space, where free land restored opportunity and offered a route to independence. Generation by generation, hardy pioneers, bringing civilization to displace savagery, took on a zone of wilderness, struggled until nature was mastered, and then moved on to the next zone. This process repeated itself sequentially from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and the result was a new nation and a new national character: the European transmuted into the American. Thrown on their own resources, pioneers recreated the social contract from scratch, forming simple democratic communities whose political health vitalized all of America. Indians, symbolic residents of the wilderness, resisted--in a struggle sometimes noble, but always futile. At the completion of the conquest, that chapter of history was

closed. The frontier ended, but the hardiness and independence of the pioneer survived in American character.[31]

In this myth of the conquest of the West, all of the principal themes are present that compose the mythology of the United States, the so-called "American Dream." America is a vast and productive land; it represents a new, innocent, honest, and much better world; it is able to civilize wild lands and peoples; it is a unique nation; it has an exceptional destiny; American people progress while they preserve nature; America is rich, it is the most powerful nation in the world; it is democratic, free, and progressive; it respects the individual; it provides opportunities to be rich and to find happiness to all those who come to live there (all one has to do is to work hard); it is the result of the work, the courage, and the faith of each one of its citizens across time; America has a mission, given by God, that should be taught and shared with each American and with the rest of the world (for this to become possible, sometimes there is no other recourse, unfortunately, but to use force), and so on.[32]

---

31 Patricia Nelson Limerick, The Legacy of Conquest (The Unbroken Past of The American West) (W.W. Norton and Company, 1987), pp.322-323.

32 In a recent paper about American industrial development between 1880 and 1930, Philip Scranton wrote: "The tales we told ourselves denied the pitiful vulnerability, frequent brutality, and widespread poverty of the young republic. They denied the insitutional fractures and cultural hostilities that fueled the lurch toward civil war. They negleted the social costs of competition and industrialization and ignored the ecological expense, ignored women and underplayed the deep suspicion Americans had of government, much less of global adventures" ("Diversity in Diversity: Flexible Manufacturing and American Industrial Development, 1880-1930," paper presented at The Woodrow Wilson Center for Scholars, Washington, D.C., May 1990). About the American Dream and the American myths, see, among others: James Oliver Robertson, American Myth, American Reality (Hill and Wang, 1980); William W. Savage, Jr., The Cowboy Hero: His Image in American History and Culture (University of Oklahoma Press, 1979); Richard Shenkman, Legends, Lies, and Cherished Myths of American History (William Morrow and Company, 1988); Edward Tabor Linenthal, Changing Images of The Warrior Hero in America: A History of Popular Symbolism

Thus, there exists an intense interpenetration of themes between the myth of the conquest of the West and the American Dream. It is an interpenetration so intense that, at times, one gets the impression that one absorbs or dissolves in the other. This is the result of the great importance and central position of the conquest of the West for American mythology.

The contemporary and predominant version of the conquest of the West in Brazil, the one that everybody knows, can be summarized as follows:

> Brazil was discovered by chance, since in reality the Portuguese wanted to land in the Indies. The country was divided up between a few owners, who took possession of the best land available on the coast and consequently became wealthy. Since then free land can only be found far away, in isolated areas, where no one lives, except some Indians. Since the Indians were very lazy and did not want to work, the Portuguese brought slaves from Africa to work for them. The slaves have always been very well treated in Brazil. The first to cultivate our land were the "bandeirantes." They were brave men who confronted every danger and difficulty in order to find gold in the interior of Brazil. They even found one mountain full of emeralds. Then there was no more gold. But thanks to God we are a united country, our land is excellent,

---

(The Edwin Mellen Press, 1982); Robert O'Connor, ed., Texas Myths (Texas A&M University Press, 1986).

> and so it is always possible to feed our people. Little by little, the interior of the country was developed, also with the help of immigrants. President Getulio [Vargas] promoted the interior and the development of Brazil. But it was President Juscelino Kubitschek who really believed in the potential of the country: he constructed Brasília, the most modern capital of the world, from nothing. Now many people are trying to live in the Midwest or in the Amazon. They go in search of land or precious metals. Despite the lack of resources and the difficulties they encounter, some are successful and become rich quickly.[33]

In this modern and hegemonic version of the Brazilian conquest of the West, various recurring themes of the mythology of the country appear: the Brazilian is generous, happy, solitary, and peaceful. In Brazil, there is no racial prejudice. Also, there are no serious social conflicts. The country is very fertile. There are no volcanos, earthquakes, or revolts. Our great President-Fathers know how to guide the destiny of the people. It is true that there are economic and social difficulties in the country, but in the end everything is all right, because God is Brazilian and one can always find a way ("e sempre se pode dar um jeitinho").

The current versions of the myth of the conquest of the West in Brazil and the United States present many similarities. Both are

---

[33] This "version" of the current Brazilian mythology is mine. It is based on what is said by common people and what is written about the subject in textbooks and newspapers.

conservative and crystalize social stereotypes against Indians, blacks, women, and minorities and reduce the protagonists of the conquest of the West to figures of pioneers, colonos, and bandeirantes, all well-behaved heroes. In this white and male history, the conflicts (against the Indians, between the pioneers, etc.) are not presented as social, but as natural (the pioneers fight against the "wilderness," the bandeirantes need to find gold, etc.). The two versions are triumphant, celebrating the success of the protagonists. In the North American version, this success is demonstrated through the relation between the saga of the West and the preservation of the institutions and values most important to the American people, such as democracy, liberty and social ascension; according to the myth, the conquest of the West not only enhanced, but helped create. In the Brazilian version, the success is expressed by economic reward and also by divine protection that the pioneers received (always a guarantee against the bad things of life).

4. Myth and History

Common sense (just as many philosophical and historical theories) presents myth as a synonym of "lie" and history as the synonym of "truth." But neither is the myth a lie, nor history a truth.[34] Myth and history (here, this term is used as the synonym of "historiography") are two

---

34 The books that deal with myth normally deal also with the question of myth and truth. For a more specific approach, see: William McNeill, Mythistory and Other Essays (The University of Chicago Press, 1986); Lee Benson, "The Historian as Mythmaker," in David M. Ellis, ed., The Frontier in American Development (Cornell University Press, 1969), pp. 3-19.

different narratives. They are two ways that men have found to explain to themselves the world and how it works.

Distinctions between myth and history can be found, at first, in the origin of the two narratives: while myth comes from imagination and from unconscious acts, history has its origin in reason and conscious acts. Myths can refer to imaginary protagonists and deeds, while history only refers to real people and events. The myth takes place in another time, an ahistorical time, that existed before the creation of the world, when gods were alive, men and animals talked to each other, and sentiments were free. Historical time, on the contrary, is precise and can be measured through the instruments created by men, such as calendars. Myth is anonymous and history is not.

Thus, there are profound differences between the two kinds of narratives, but these differences do not reside in the opposition "truth/lie." Behind this kind of statement there is always an idealistic notion: that there exists an absolute and eternal truth, one Truth, which needs to be found and, once found, has the power to regulate everything. But, the study of history demonstrates that this Truth does not exist in the real world. It is a fantasy, an expression of a very old desire, as old as the existence of human beings. My truth is different from yours; our truth is different from theirs; today's truth is different from yesterday's and from tomorrow's. In order to exactly express so many truths, there are so many religions, beliefs, philosophies, histories, and myths: "Men do not find truth: they make it, just as they make history....The truth is the most historic of all experiences...the most changeable of all measures," recalled

the French historian Paul Veyne. And the Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa wrote: "The existence of a real and true world/ is a disease of our ideas" ("Que um conjunto real e verdadeiro/ E'uma doencas das nossas ideias").[35]

The relations between myth and history are complicated. There exists a constant interpenetration between the two (to such a point that William McNeill referred to it as "mythistory"). One furnishes raw material to the other, and at times, as in the case of the present versions of the conquest of the West, the two are so close that they look as one. History is endowed with an enormous power to influence society, a power almost as strong as that of the myth. History is capable of conferring identity, of explaining to people and society who and what they are and what is their role in this world. When history adopts the same version disseminated by a myth, it strongly reinforces the myth. It adds its own power to the power of the myth. When history rejects the myth, it inaugurates a zone of tension and dispute between the two kinds of narratives. Centuries may pass until the winner of this dispute is known. The historical narrative can impose itself on the myth or, on the contrary, the myth can condemn the historical narrative to disappear. Many times the dispute does not have a winner. Then, the two versions remain in use, and in this case there are interchanges and mutual influences between them, just as it occurs among the versions of one myth.

---

35 Paul Veyne, Les Grecs Ont-Ils Cru a Leurs Mythes? Essays Sur l'Imagination Constituante (Paris, Editions du Seuil, 1983)--a wonderful book. Fernando Pessoa, quoted in DaMatta, Carnaval.

The social appropriation of the myth is not innocent. It responds to the interests of groups, segments, classes, and institutions, investing them with the authority of the myth and, thus, legitimizing them. The social appropriation of history is still less innocent: whoever controls history, controls power. "What matters is not the fact, it is its version," says the popular proverb: he who succeeds in convincing others to believe in his/her history is the owner of power, since he/she successfully completed the process of social hegemony. This is the reason why the dispute for the control of history is so intense. Also, it is the reason why the official version of history (which is the hegemonic version) is so well kept, conserved, and divulged as few other things are. This can be seen in the schools, the textbooks, the educational programs on radio and television, the official parades, the commemorations of historical dates, and all the other rituals created for the celebration and glory of this version of history. With which version will the historians of the West remain, in Brazil and the United States?

IV. CONQUEST OF THE WEST, CONQUEST OF SPACES

Last, I have chosen to develop an aspect of the conquest of the West that contributed as much to the transformation of the theme in the myth as to the formation of the notion of national identity--the conquest of space. I will also examine two concepts related to space that permeate the conquest of the West in both the United States and Brazil--the ideas of the "West" and of "frontier."

1. Space

The notion of "space" (side by side with "time") is essential for every person, nation, or culture since it has the power to localize and, consequently, it helps to identify beings and things. It is also a fundamental notion in the formation of the imagery of any society. "Space" is not only understood here as a physical and natural element but as a social product. It is a result of the way human beings organize and alter nature; of the ways nature, already transformed, influences society; of how men in certain historical periods imagine nature; and of how these ideas and fantasies lead men to act.[36]

Thus, "the geography of any place results as much from our vision of it as from what can be seen in it. Not all geography derives from earth, some derives from our idea of the earth. This geography inside the mind can... be more important than the supposedly real geography of earth." Or, as Henry Fielding wrote: "Map me no maps, sir. My head is a map of the whole world." And Melville, in Moby Dick: "It is down in any map; true

---

36 Books about space that were specially useful to me: Peter Gould and Rodney White, Mental Maps (Penguin Books, 1974); Pierre-Henri Derycker, ed., "Conceptions de l'Espace," Recherches Interdisciplinaires (Université Paris X-Nantere, 1983); E.J. Johnston and Paul Claval, Geography Since the Second World War: An International Survey (London: Croom Helm, 1984); Allen J. Scott and Michael Storper, Production, Work, Territory (Allen and Unwin, 1986); Fritz Steele, The Sense of Space (CBI Publishing Company, 1981); Gaston Bachelard, La Poétique de l'Espace (Paris: PUF, 1967, 5th edition); Henri Lefebvre, La Production de l'Espace (Paris: Editions Anthropos, 1974); Jennifer Wolch and Michael Dear, eds., The Power of Geography (Unwin Hyman Inc., 1989). And the books of the geographer Yi-Fu Tuan, who wrote about almost everything I think is important: Topophilia - A Study of Environmental Perceptions, Attitudes and Values (Prentice Hall Inc., 1974); Landscapes of Fear (Pantheon Books, 1979); Segmented Worlds and Self: Group Life and Individual Consciousness (University of Minnesota Press, 1982).

lands never are." Or the Brazilian writer Guimaraes Rosa, in Sagarana: "our thoughts grow stronger than the power of the place" ("o pensamento da gente se forma mais forte do que o poder do lugar").[37]

The construction of "mental maps" (in the expression of the geographers Peter Gould and Rodney White) depends on the perception of space. This perception, especially when applied to new spaces, results from the following: the accumulated knowledge of a society with respect to space; the mental structure that exists during the period; the circumstances in which the new space is found and occupied; the expectations with respect to this matter. In the case of individual perceptions, one must add personal inclinations, preferences, and different sensory capacities.

2. West

As with "North," "South," or "East," and also "right" and "left," at first glance the notion of "West" seems to be an extremely precise direction. However, things are not always what they seem. The location of the West depends on the position(s) of the person(s) who are referring to it. For a Japanese, Europe is the West. For an American, it is the East. "I was born in the Mohave Desert of southern California, an area the books say is indubitably part of the West," wrote the teacher of American history Donald Worster. "I grew up on the Great Plains, and again the books tell

---

37 J. Wreford Watson, "Mental Images and Geographical Reality in the Settlement of North America: A Note on the Geography of North American Settlement," University of Nottingham, Cust Foundation Lectures, 1967; Herman Melville, Moby Dick (many editions in the U.S.); João Guimarães Rosa, Sagarana (Rio: Livraria José Olympio Editora, 1951), p. 75.

me that that is West too. But when I moved some years ago to Hawaii, was I still in the West or was I out of it?" He concluded, "West is just about anything that anyone has ever wanted it to be."[38]

There is one more complication related to the notion of the conquest of the West in the United States and Brazil. Since the conquest of the land did not occur all at once, the West of the two countries was moving around for some time. For a pilgrim on the "Mayflower," the West was the territory immediately beyond the coast of what is today Massachusetts. After one hundred and thirty years, the West could be found in Kentucky, and in sixty more years, it was already confused with the Pacific. The same process of "West each time more to the West" occurred in Brazil.

Another issue is that the notion of "West" depends on all of the ideas and fantasies a society has on the matter. For example, for the Europeans of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, who lived in the extraordinary era of the Great Discoveries, the notion of the "West" was extremely ambiguous and complicated, since it was related to all the changes that occurred during the period. Therefore, as an expression of their fears and of their temptations, the Europeans gave the "West" many strange and opposing names and features, such as Holy Paradise, the Nation of the Amazon, mermaids, Hell, sea monsters, Eldorado, Catai, the Land of Temptations, Preste John's Kingdom, Purgatory. During this era, many navigators, such as the Spanish, landed in the West hoping to reach the East, "for those like Columbus, to whom the East was a place while the West was a mere

---

38 Donald Worster, "New West, True West: Interpreting the Region's History," Western Historical Quartely, 18 (April 1987), pp. 141-156; quotation from p. 142.

direction....But still, as everyone knows, the West for the admiral was a way to get to the East."[39]

The first pioneers of the United States and Brazil brought with them these contradictory notions and applied them to the lands that they discovered and occupied. Thus, before becoming a reality, the American "West" was an imaginary place, full of hope and anguish, fears and dreams. As the historical experience of the conquest of lands began to occur in the United States and Brazil, the "West" acquired a physical outline. Since then it has been located in the Great Plains, in the Mohave Desert, in the Amazon, or in the Pampas. And the imagery then incorporated those new experiences, that is to say: those new fears, anguishes and hopes of the "West."

3. Frontier

"Frontier" here is understood as a strip of land that is being integrated into a country, socioeconomically and culturally. In the history of Brazil and the United States, the notions of the "West" and of the "frontier" have always been intercombined, at many times, representing the same thing. As in the case of the "West," the localization of the frontier depends essentially on the position of the person who refers to it. For a European in the late fifteenth century, the frontier was the entire American continent; for a Brazilian in the late twentieth century, it is in the Amazon; and for today's American, it is in outer space. However,

---

39 Loren Baritz, "The Idea of the West," American Historical Review, 64 (April 1961), pp. 618-639; quoted from pp. 629 and 626.

unlike "West," which at least indicates a direction, "frontier" is an essentially abstract notion and embraces two different and opposite ideas: the idea of separation and the idea of continuity.

The frontier represents the separation between "us" and "others," between "here" and "there," between "present" and "future." "Us," "here," and "present" represent the real and actual space. "Others," "there," and "future" represent the space of the frontier. They are different spaces and they are generally represented as opposites. In the United States and Brazil, the frontiers were identified with wilderness, emptiness, the savage, the Indian, the slave, the colonized, the atheist, the heretic, the weak, the backward. The conquered spaces were already identified with civilization, the civilized, the crowded, the urban, the white man, the colonizer, the Christian, the strong, the advanced. An example of this is the verses of the Puritan Michael Wigglesworth, who in 1662 referred in this way to the frontiers of the New World: "a waste and howling wilderness/ Where none inhabited/ But hellish fiends, and brutish men/ That Devils worshiped."[40]

But the notion of the frontier also consists of the idea of "continuity," if it is true that the frontier represents the distant, unknown, and untamed space where people run risks and confront all sorts of difficulties, real and imaginary. It is also true that the frontier represents the space of hope and of the construction of a better world; a world as similar as possible to the one left behind, a continuity of the abandoned world, but also a better

---

40 Michael Wigglesworth, "God's Controversy with New England" (1662), quoted in Nash, Wilderness and the American Mind, p. 36.

world, not only capable of offering everything that was available in the old one but also what was not available and originated the opening of the frontier--land (free or cheap), job, gold, riches, the possibility of social ascension, adventure, happiness....

The frontier is the space of the wanderers, of those who take to the extreme the difficult experience of facing the "other" and of living with the difference. It is the space of migrants and immigrants, of those who bring within them a world. Day by day, hour by hour, minute by minute, they live the painful and fascinating experience of confronting this world, which is internal and formed by memory, with another world, which is external and formed by experience. And then they construct from these fragments of memory and experience a third and New World.