

Converging Empires

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Introduction

Along the northwestern edge of North America, where the continent meets and extends out into the North Pacific Ocean, lies an area that was long omitted or deliberately obscured on early European maps because its contours were unknown to those who drew them.¹ Located, at various times, at the farthest edges of the Russian, British, Spanish, and American empires, the rocky coast of the continent gives way to a series of islands that reach across the North Pacific to connect it to Asia. Along the shores of what are now the Alaska panhandle and British Columbia, a series of archipelagos protects much of the mainland from the direct impact of the great waves that have made the journey across the Pacific Ocean. Made up of hundreds of densely forested islands and misty, interconnected channels carved into the landscape by glacial retreat, these archipelagos are home to ecologically rich and strikingly beautiful landscapes that extend from what is now the Washington coast to the Gulf of Alaska.² Further west, the cedar, pine and fir-covered islands of southeast Alaska and British Columbia give way to a rockier and more austere landscape marked by glaciers that tie land to sea along Alaska's southern coast. At the end of the Alaskan peninsula, the Aleutian island chain stretches further westward still, dividing the Pacific Ocean from the Bering Sea and linking the continent of North America to the Kamchatka Peninsula. The Kuril Islands, in turn, extend south and west to connect the Kamchatka Peninsula to the island of Hokkaido. Taken together, these islands sketch an arc across the North Pacific Ocean that is testament to the interconnected nature of the continents of Asia and North America—a link obscured even today on maps that center the Atlantic rather than the Pacific Ocean.

Another conduit connecting the two continents across the North Pacific is the Kuroshio, or Japan Current, which carries the warm waters of the western mid-Pacific north along the coast of Japan—a Pacific archipelago made up of numerous islands itself—and eastward across the North Pacific until it nears the shores of western North America, where it divides off the west coast of Haida Gwaii, which the British called Queen Charlotte's Islands.³ Other forces that have connected the people of the Pacific Rim through history include the tsunamis produced by the enormous earthquakes that periodically rock its coasts, as was the case in 1700 when a tsunami created by a major



The North Pacific Ocean and its borderlands including key locations referred to in the text.



earthquake along the Pacific coast of North America hit the Japanese coast without warning.⁴

It was along the northeastern coast of the Pacific Rim, where the waves of the Pacific Ocean wash ashore on the west coast of the North American continent, that the interests of Britain, Japan, and the United States converged during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁵ Both Spain and Russia had left their mark on the north Pacific coast during earlier centuries, but neither remained an active presence in the region by the end of the nineteenth century. Instead, Britain and the United States vied with each other over the boundaries of their respective territorial claims and shared with Japan a keen interest in both the marine and the land-based natural resources of the region. By the early twentieth century, the northwestern coast of North America had become a place where various territorial and ocean boundaries intersected, creating an increasingly complex and multilayered jurisdictional web. Together, Indigenous, provincial, territorial, village, municipal, national, and maritime borders created a dynamic legal landscape that Indigenous and non-Indigenous people alike negotiated in myriad ways as they moved through the spaces they delineated. People of all backgrounds, including prospectors, adventurers, and settlers from Europe, British North America and later Canada, the United States, Latin America, and Asia—including Japan, China, and the Philippines—made and remade themselves as they traveled across and between the boundaries that defined these jurisdictions according to the complex mix of obstacle and opportunity each represented.⁶

Latecomers from distant corners of the globe were not the first to create this coast as a borderlands region. Long before the imperial interests of Britain, the United States, and Japan converged along the northeastern shores of the Pacific Ocean, and even before the arrival of the Russians and the Spanish, it had functioned as a borderland between both land and sea and as an area where multiple, intersecting boundaries important to the Indigenous peoples of the region had evolved over time without reference to the imperial or national boundaries that would later be superimposed. In contrast to the way this coast was envisioned by Europeans, Alan D. McMillan and Iain McKechnie remind us, the Indigenous peoples who had lived along it for millennia regarded it as located not at the edges but at the center of the physical, cultural, and spiritual worlds in which they lived.⁷ Often cloaked in fog and battered by westerly gales during fall and winter, narrow, stony beaches piled high with logs washed ashore during winter storms speak to the dense forests that cover much of the arable land. During spring and summer, streams fed by winter snow plunge down the steep cliffs that line the edges of the conti-

mental mainland, periodically interrupted by deep fjords. Protected from exposure to the waves of the open ocean by countless small islands separated by narrow channels and waterways rich in natural resources, including cedar, seals, sea otters, fish, shellfish, and other forms of marine life, this environment was one that had long sustained and been shaped by the Indigenous peoples who made it their home over many centuries.⁸

This wealth of resources was one element that led to the incorporation of this borderlands region within the framework of empire. Also a factor that made this north Pacific borderland an object of imperial and commercial competition was its proximity to the world's largest ocean, at once a watery boundary in itself and a major transportation route. The northwest coast was valuable in the eyes of both Britain and the United States not only because it provided access to the shortest route to Asia but also because it functioned as an outer perimeter that served at times, at least in the imagination of those at the center, as a buffer against intrusion into the heart of the continent. The ability of a colonial power to assert a territorial claim in the region provided access to a wide range of both land-based and marine resources. Those that came to be mined or harvested on an industrial scale—from the whales and sea otters that first drew European sailors into the North Pacific, to gold, copper, lumber, and fish of various kinds—were soon integrated into far broader economic networks that in time extended south along the Pacific coast to Washington, Oregon, California, Mexico, Peru, and Chile and across the Pacific Ocean to Russia, Japan, China, Korea, Siberia, Australasia, and the Philippines.⁹ Beginning with Russia's incorporation of the Alaskan coast into its colonial empire and Spain's claims arising from its explorations of the waters surrounding Vancouver Island and Haida Gwaii during the waning decades of the eighteenth century, one empire after another laid claim to the region in an effort to gain exclusive access to its resources, endeavors that in time not only attracted labor migrants from around the world but also framed encounters between latecomers and the Indigenous peoples of the region in a wide and ever-changing variety of ways.

While Britain and the United States had displaced or acquired Russian and Spanish claims along the north Pacific coast by the end of the nineteenth century, they were soon joined by a rapidly modernizing and ever more confident Japan increasingly interested in asserting an identity as a Pacific power and maximizing its share of the marine resources of the North Pacific, including fur seals and various fisheries. British and American commercial interests engaged in both the harvest and the trade of marine mammal pelts had long played a key role in linking the northwest coast of North America to Asia.

Both Britain and the United States sought to build on this foundation to establish a continuing presence in the North Pacific as the twentieth century unfolded. Even as the United States pressed westward beyond its Pacific coast to extend its influence over Alaska, Hawaii, and the Philippines, however, Japan increasingly pressed eastward both to reinforce its position as a Pacific nation that itself had a significant geopolitical role in maintaining the balance of power in the Pacific and to secure access to a share of marine resources along the north Pacific coast. By the early twentieth century, as a result, what had long been regarded by Europeans as a remote and intensely local area located at the periphery of empire had become ever more closely interconnected through travel and capital not only to centers of finance and industry in Europe and North America but to a diasporic economic network centered in Japan that extended across the Pacific.¹⁰

Within this broader framework, I pay particular attention to the ways that Japanese labor migrants, as subjects of an expanding non-European imperial power actively engaged in projecting itself out into the North Pacific Ocean, and Indigenous people negotiated the liminal spaces of this borderlands region. A focus on Japanese migrants permits a closer examination of ways in which they understood their presence in the North American West and their encounters with Indigenous people, as well as the reciprocal question of how Indigenous people perceived Japanese immigrants—as colonial settlers whose presence was not qualitatively different from that of Euro-Canadian or American settlers or otherwise.¹¹ The inclusion of Japanese migrants, active participants in that colonial endeavor and yet relegated to the margins of settler society in some of the same ways as Indigenous peoples, also helps to avoid reducing a multifaceted and complicated story of historical encounter to the simpler binaries against which historians warn.¹² As in my previous work, my approach assumes that such encounters were shaped not just by the racialized legal structures the dominant societies alone imposed but also by social and cultural considerations specific to Japanese migrants, on the one hand, and to the various Indigenous groups they encountered, on the other.¹³

Encounters between Japanese immigrants and Indigenous people along the north Pacific coast were also a product of a far larger contest between empires around the Pacific that pitted both settler nations in the Americas and Japan against Indigenous peoples and the United States and, in time, Canada against Japan. Many of the Japanese who traveled or settled in the north Pacific borderlands left no written record or, if they did, not one that has been preserved. Often all we can do is catch a glimpse of a given individual in accounts produced by others. Where prewar Japanese-language records were

preserved, however, they give us an added level of access to the complex and often contradictory nature of the experiences of racialized peoples in this borderlands region. They also reveal the ambiguous and contingent nature not only of the region itself but of seemingly fixed categories of citizenship and race.¹⁴

Boundary drawing and law would prove to be critical tools utilized by both Canada and the United States to regulate the movement of people in both countries and to control access to local resources, each of which went hand in hand with the inscribing of racial boundaries. Both nations asserted the power not only to define the rights and privileges of their own citizens or subjects but also to limit those of Indigenous people and Asian immigrants, even as they relied on their labor to facilitate the practical integration of British Columbia and Alaska into broader, nation-based political and economic structures. Based on distinct rationales and utilizing different kinds of legal mechanisms, the separate legal constraints imposed on Japanese migrants and Indigenous people on each side of the international border often worked together to privilege Anglo-European settlers in both Canada and the United States. At times, however, both Japanese immigrants and Indigenous people themselves deployed the categories “subject” and “citizen” in an effort to position themselves more favorably in a changing world. On the one hand, the power to bestow or impose status as subject or citizen, or to withhold it, lay at the heart both of colonial practice and of processes of racialization. On the other hand, the ability to claim status as subject or citizen—or to resist such designations—could also serve as a tool that allowed Japanese immigrants and Indigenous people to position themselves more effectively in the shifting borderlands of the north Pacific coast.

National borders, abstract and largely imaginary when first drawn, acquire new meaning as they begin to shape human behavior and categories of belonging or identity.¹⁵ Although never as simply determinative as the colonial powers that constructed them wished they were, the newly articulated national boundaries that cut across the traditional territories of Indigenous peoples—Haida, Tsimshian, Tlingit, and Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in (Hän), among others—often led, over time, to a reframing of identity as they negotiated the jurisdictional spaces that these borders produced. Identity, as various historians have noted, is mutually constructed and defined, neither entirely imposed nor wholly self-determined, but a product of multiple interactions with both the state and others.¹⁶ Like Japanese labor migrants, Indigenous people actively negotiated the intersecting boundaries of race, class, citizenship, and identity that were a product of the evolving bodies of law on each

side of the U.S.-Canada border in ways they perceived to be to their advantage, sometimes engaging in border crossings—whether of national borders or of the boundaries of race and citizenship—that themselves contributed to the infusing of such borders with new meaning.¹⁷ Marginalized though they may have been under the law of both Canada and the United States, in short, Japanese immigrants and Indigenous people were not necessarily marginal actors in any given time and place.

Considered from a nation-based perspective, the Indigenous and settler communities of northern British Columbia, Alaska, and the Yukon appear as relatively insignificant settlements at the periphery of empire and the nation-state—distant outposts whose history would seem to tell us little of the concerns and objectives of those at the center. Considered from a regional perspective, we come to see this borderlands region as central to the development of key policies and ideas regarding matters close to the heart of each nation, including national identity, the contours of citizenship, and the nature of sovereign authority as it was understood by both Indigenous and invading peoples. Policies enforced along the national borders that cut through the region both on land and at sea shed light not only on how each nation, including Canada, the United States, and Japan, came to define itself but also, as in other borderlands areas, on how “process[es] of territorialization” unfolded within the context of each nation-state.¹⁸ A regional lens also allows us to engage stories that are obscured by histories that center the nation-state. It brings into focus the roles of the Indigenous people who had made the north Pacific borderlands their home for millennia prior to the imposition of colonial rule both in responding to and in facilitating change. This, in turn, provides a basis for comparing the impact of the racialized legal framework imposed on both Indigenous peoples and Asian immigrants on each side of the U.S.-Canada border, including ways in which these constraints reinforced one another, as well as the strategies developed by members of both groups to counter the restrictions they faced.

Borderlands Historiographies

Although the steep mountain peaks that mark the northern stretch of the U.S.-Canada border that divides Alaska from British Columbia and the Yukon, like the tree- or ice-covered landscapes of the north Pacific coast, have captured the imagination of almost all who come into contact with them, the north Pacific borderlands have been largely ignored by borderlands historians of North America, as contrasted with the attention given to the U.S.-

Mexico border and, to a lesser extent, the border the United States shares with Canada along the forty-ninth parallel.¹⁹ Seemingly regarded as too remote and inconsequential to be of much significance in broader national or international contexts, this region has generally been left to historians of Russian America to consider more closely, or to those who focus either on Alaska state history or on the history of British Columbia as a province.²⁰

Both of the international borders that cut across the North American continent from east to west had been firmly in place for half a century or more before disagreements between Britain and the United States regarding the precise location of the B.C.-Alaska border were generally resolved in 1903. The international borders that transect the continent, as Richard White explains in his history of the American West, were historically produced, the product of a series of contingent moments that occurred over a period of eight decades, with the result that it was not geography but history that determined where they came to be drawn.²¹ In North America, imperial contests and interactions with Indigenous peoples played a central role in the articulation of the national borders that were inscribed across this continent over time.²² These boundaries, in effect, sketch time across space.²³ The same is true of the northernmost stretch of the Canada-U.S. border that separates Alaska from British Columbia and the Yukon. It differs, however, from those that transect the continent to the extent that the Pacific coastline itself played a key role in delimiting the borders of both the United States and Canada and in shaping the ways these borderlands were perceived over time. The boundary line that sets British Columbia apart from the Alaska panhandle more or less traces the height of the Coast Mountains, following what was imagined as the natural boundary that divides the watersheds on either side of those mountains. The U.S.-Canada border then bends abruptly north to follow the 141st meridian to the Arctic Ocean, slicing across the bioregion it bisects as sharply—and as illogically—as any other of North America’s international borders.²⁴ In this and other ways, the “nature” of the borderland region along the north Pacific coast differs both literally and figuratively from that along the forty-ninth parallel or the U.S.-Mexico border, even as all three border regions also share many of the same characteristics.²⁵

As along the U.S.-Mexico border, where, Juanita Sundberg argues, nonhuman actors have played as significant a role as human actors in shaping both its history and the ways it has been enforced, nonhuman actors have always played a significant role in shaping the history of the north Pacific borderlands.²⁶ There, as elsewhere, the terrain, including both the geographical features that contribute to boundary drawing and those that attract human

endeavor, such as mineral deposits or deep natural harbors, are also factors that shape or explain human activity in the region, including enforcement-related practices on the part of government officials. The same is true of the behavior of both land and marine animal populations. State-sanctioned crossing points were far and few between along the northern stretches of the U.S.-Canada border during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, ensuring that enforcement was at best sporadic and uneven, even as the establishment of border crossings in itself, as along the U.S.-Mexico border and other sections of the U.S.-Canada border, gave rise to new patterns of movement across it, whether of people or of animals.²⁷ Early Japanese travelers, it should be noted, would not have been unfamiliar with the notion of policing or monitoring travel at border checkpoints, a practice that was actively utilized by the Tokugawa shogunate to restrict movement between domains in Japan during the Edo period in order to avoid the erosion of its own authority.²⁸

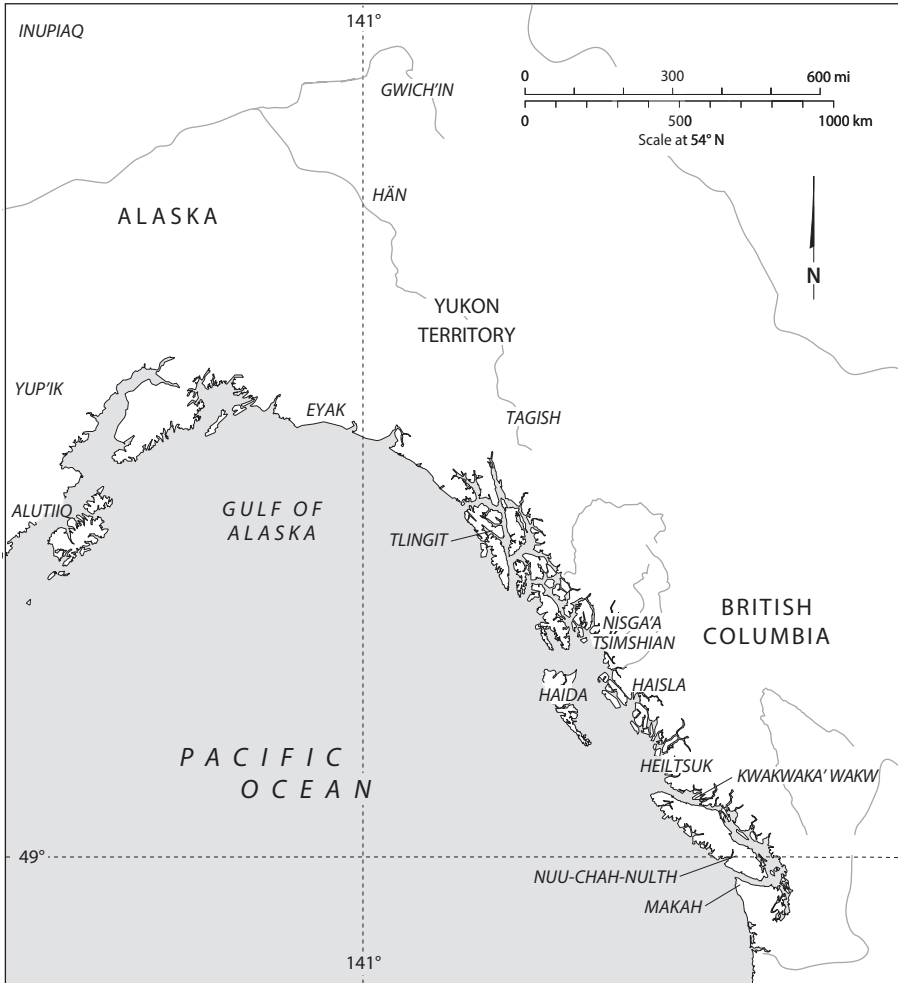
Borderlands, by definition, are places where power is liminal and contested, often areas where imperial or state power has yet to be consolidated.²⁹ They are not, as Mary L. Dudziak and Leti Volpp explain, just geographical areas where the borders of the nation-state and the limits of its political authority are challenged or enforced. Transient and unstable, fluid and evolving, they are also areas that function as “interstitial zones of hybridization” and as contact zones between both people and ideas “that can open up new possibilities of both repression and liberation.”³⁰

“Borderlands, as a plural noun,” Pekka Hämäläinen and Samuel Truett note, reflects a “multidirectional, multivocal vision” of the spaces surrounding any border, best understood, as Truett explains, as “a shifting mosaic of human spaces—some interwoven, others less so,” that reflect both the colonial and other historical contests that unfolded across any given borderlands region over time.³¹ These are places where people rooted in distinctive cultural traditions, often unfamiliar with one another’s practices, encountered one another in, at times, unexpected ways.³² The stories of such individuals, Truett reminds us, can tell us a great deal about “how ordinary people emerged from the shadows of state and corporate control to reshape the borderlands on their own terms,” as well as about the worlds through which they moved.³³ A transpacific framework allows us, in turn, as David Igler and other historians of the Pacific world have shown, to situate the “more intimate realms of cultural encounters” that occurred in places like the north Pacific borderlands within the broader context of “large-scale geopolitical relations,” making it possible both to identify larger historical patterns that connect different areas of the world, including new forms of labor migration, and, at the same

time, to evaluate their impact on local and Indigenous populations in particular places.³⁴

The formal incorporation of Alaska and British Columbia by the United States and Canada within the borders of each nation-state, together with the arrival of growing numbers of labor migrants, including Japanese set in motion by parallel processes of modernization and industrialization, brought newcomers from around the world into increasing contact with the Indigenous coastal people. Many such encounters occurred within the framework of new forms of extractive industry along the north Pacific coast, including logging, mining, and fisheries of one kind or another, all of which structured relations between Indigenous people and Japanese or other colonial settlers in different ways.³⁵ The maritime spaces of the Pacific Ocean, both border and borderlands region in its own right, were also places where such contacts occurred, even as they also served as a conduit both for transpacific migration and for the projection of imperial power throughout the Pacific world over many centuries.³⁶

Long before European powers arrived, the north Pacific coast was already a complex borderlands region, where the maritime and land-based territories of a wide range of Indigenous peoples—Aleut, Alutiiq, Eyak, Tlingit, Haida, Tsimshian, Haisla, Heiltsuk, Nisga'a, and Kwakiutl, among others—intersected and overlapped.³⁷ Although the national and imperial boundaries etched across this landscape by Russian, British, and American agents during the nineteenth century were superimposed on these Indigenous territories—a practice that David A. Chang notes is itself a “hallmark of colonialism”—they were never able simply to displace Indigenous understandings of place and kinship.³⁸ Grounded in culturally distinct ways of conceptualizing space and delineating territories, at times overlapping and equally capable of shifting and evolving over time, the boundaries of Indigenous territories were not as rigidly mechanical as those of nation-states. More important in Indigenous contexts were the cultural landscapes that connected people to place through oral histories. Often tied to particular landforms, such oral histories infused place with both lived and spiritual dimensions that were central to their identities as distinct peoples.³⁹ Along the north Pacific coast as elsewhere, Julie Cruikshank explains, this produced separate yet intersecting histories of place. Mount St. Elias and Mount Fairweather, both key links in the chain of mountain peaks that mark the borders of Alaska, British Columbia, and the Yukon, Cruikshank notes by way of example, “play a significant role in both Tlingit oral traditions and European exploration narratives.”⁴⁰ While the histories of Indigenous peoples along the north Pacific coast are so varied and complex



Indigenous peoples along the north Pacific coast referred to in the text and the general areas where their traditional territories are located.

that it is impossible for any book to take them fully into account, particularly a book focused on the convergence of three empires, I am acutely aware that imperial powers and colonial settlers constituted only a small subset of the significant actors in this borderlands region at any given time and that, despite the sweeping claims of European powers to overarching sovereignty, the great majority of it remained—and to a significant extent remains today—unceded Indigenous territory.⁴¹

Chapters

Chapter 1 traces the historical contexts that set the stage for the convergence of British, American, and Japanese interests along the Pacific coast of North America during the twentieth century. It focuses, in particular, on the legal and geopolitical contests among European imperial powers, including Russia and Spain, that help to explain the contours that the national boundaries that later cut across the northwestern reaches of the North American continent would assume, as well as the role that Indigenous resistance to colonial pressure played in the articulation of these boundaries. This chapter situates these events within the broader framework of colonial endeavor around the North Pacific Rim, particularly those that had an impact on Japan, setting in motion forces that contributed to the demise of the Tokugawa shogunate in 1867, the same year that Canada entered Confederation and the United States acquired Russia's interests in Alaska. These developments, taken together, remade the political geography of the North Pacific Rim and opened the door to Japan's own incorporation of Hokkaido, the traditional homeland of the Ainu people that is now regarded as the northernmost of Japan's four major islands. Japan's determined effort to remake itself as a modern, imperial nation, together with the demand for labor that followed from the formal incorporation of the north Pacific borderlands by Canada and the United States, in turn, created the conditions that in time led Japanese labor emigrants to cross the Pacific Ocean in search of employment.

Chapter 2 considers ways in which Indigenous people and Japanese migrants responded to the establishment of the northernmost section of the U.S.-Canada border as it was etched across the landscape in the wake of the United States' acquisition of Russian interests in Alaska. At times, members of each group seized on this newly articulated boundary to engage in complex acts of repositioning that took into account ways in which U.S. or Canadian law structured constraint and opportunity on each side of that border, only to find themselves caught in the conceptual gap between "immigrant" and "Indigene." The chapter also addresses ways in which perceptions of indigeneity rooted in Japanese history and culture shaped encounters between Japanese and Indigenous people along the north Pacific coast. While Japanese immigrants shared certain attitudes with their Euro-American neighbors, viewing the land as empty and open to settlement, they also argued that Japanese had a special connection to the Indigenous peoples of the north Pacific coast that entitled them to assert a presence there in ways Europeans could not. Though

it is tempting to consider Japan's boundaries as "natural" in ways that those of Canada and the United States are not, given that Japan is an island nation, its boundaries are also a product of history and not geography alone, as demonstrated by its incorporation of Hokkaido, the Ryukyu Islands, and Taiwan within its borders during the early Meiji era.

Exclusion on various scales and in a variety of forms was central to the reimagining of the north Pacific coast as Euro-Canadian or American space, including restricting the entry of Japanese migrants at international borders, the denial of the full rights of citizenship to Japanese immigrants and Indigenous people, and barring access to certain kinds of occupations by law or in practice. On both sides of the Canada-U.S. border, exclusion also sometimes took the form of overt expulsion. [Chapter 3](#) examines instances where Japanese and Chinese labor migrants were driven out of towns in British Columbia, Alaska, and the Yukon, arguing that the use of personal violence to enforce local and municipal boundaries was, as elsewhere, integral to the reimagining of this region as quintessentially white. Like government-sanctioned forms of exclusion, the expulsion of Japanese migrants—part of a larger pattern of racialized violence and intimidation that swept through western North America at the time—mirrored efforts to erase the Indigenous presence from the colonial landscape in both Canada and the United States. While each was positioned differently within a global context, Canada as a British dominion and the United States as an independent nation, they repeatedly worked together during the early decades of the twentieth century, up to and including World War II, to ensure that the racialized barriers they erected against both Japanese immigration and the acknowledgment of Indigenous land rights reinforced those of the other.

[Chapter 4](#) addresses the convergence of U.S., British, and Japanese interests in the ocean waters off the northwestern coast of North America and considers the impact that the marine boundaries cutting through the waters of this environmentally sensitive region had on both Japanese immigrants and Indigenous people. On each side of the international border, the regulatory reach of the U.S. government, in particular, extended well out into coastal waters in the form of treaty agreements that pertained to the harvesting of marine mammals. Overlapping fisheries created varying spaces of encounter between Japanese immigrants and the Indigenous coastal peoples most affected by the impact of industrial-scale fisheries that often devastated the traditional fisheries on which they had relied for centuries. Both groups were the target of efforts along the B.C. coast to exclude them from some of the very fisheries that they had helped found. While Japanese often competed with Indigenous fishers, their shared local interests and mutual efforts to avoid the impact of exclusionary law and

policy produced far more intricate sets of alignments and divisions among and within racialized groups than has often been recognized.⁴² The many boundaries that came to structure the north Pacific coast, largely intended to divide, as such, produced not only new and unanticipated patterns of association and interconnection but also new patterns of migration across them.

As World War II approached, however, the very mobility of Japanese fishers, together with their intimate knowledge of British Columbia's coastal waters, gave rise to ever more strident allegations of smuggling and spying on both sides of the Canada-U.S. border. Along the coast of Alaska, in particular, alleged intrusions into U.S. waters by fishing vessels registered in Japan were increasingly depicted as the vanguard of a forthcoming invasion. The increasing pressure Japan brought to bear along the northwestern coast of North America during the first half of the twentieth century, reflected in ongoing disputes over both oceangoing fisheries and the hunting of sea lions and fur seals, combined with Japan's long-standing resentment of both the race-based exclusion of Japanese immigrants and the unequal treatment of Japanese settlers by the United States and Canada, heightened tensions among all three, setting the stage for policy decisions that followed the outbreak of war. [Chapter 5](#) argues that the decisions of both nations to forcibly remove not just Japanese subjects but U.S.- and Canadian-born citizens and subjects of Japanese descent from the north Pacific coast can be understood as the culmination of prior efforts both to exclude and to expel migrants of Japanese ancestry. This chapter also considers the forced removal and detention of people of Japanese ancestry in relation both to the forced relocation of the Aleut by the U.S. government and to those taken prisoner by the Japanese Imperial Army and taken to Japan for the duration of the war.

Conclusion

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the area surrounding the north Pacific coast emerged as a distinctive borderlands region produced, in part, by the convergence of three empires in the waters along its shores during that period. The North Pacific was an area where the interests of an expanding Japanese empire actively projecting itself out into the Pacific in a quest for a share of its marine resources encountered Euro-American powers that were themselves engaged in extending their own spheres of influence in the Pacific, in part to reinforce their ties to Asia. Despite the rocky terrain, winter storms, and rough seas that tend to isolate the north Pacific borderlands during certain parts of the year, it was an area that became increasingly connected not

only to the interior of the continent but to other parts of the Pacific Rim. To see this borderland only as a remote outpost marking the northernmost edge of the United States, or the westernmost edge first of British North America and later Canada, as such, is to miss not only the central place it occupied in the lives of the Indigenous peoples who had made it their home for millennia but also the extent to which it functioned, in the eyes of Japanese settlers, as an economic hinterland for an expanding Japanese empire.

Regardless of the national boundaries etched across it, the north Pacific borderlands also functioned, in significant ways and at key times, as a region that defied the borders that divided it. Britain's determination to preserve its access to the Pacific even before Canada was organized as a separate dominion not only resulted in the formation of the colony of British Columbia but also made possible its later incorporation into the Canadian nation-state. The B.C. coast, as such, was central both to the construction of Canada as a trans-continental nation and to the reimagining of the United States as a colonial power justified in projecting its authority not just over the contiguous territories it absorbed as it expanded westward across the continent, but across the Pacific basin. The B.C. coast, however, also disrupted ties between the contiguous U.S. states and Alaska, rendering it, in effect, an island insofar as its connection to other parts of the United States was concerned—a factor that would make the B.C. coast a focus of continuing concern for the United States particularly during times of war.

The borderlands of both Alaska and British Columbia cannot be fully understood in isolation, either in a North American context, where geography and access to the Pacific Ocean help to explain the roles assigned to each within the framework of the nation-state, or within the larger context of the North Pacific Rim, where the interests of Great Britain, Canada, the United States, and Japan converged during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. While the particular locus where their interests were joined and where the resulting contests were played out shifted over time depending on the issues that were of most immediate concern, for each of these imperial powers and their subjects or citizens, as well as for their Indigenous peoples, the north Pacific borderlands represented an ever-changing but always complex mix of obstacle and opportunity, vulnerability and power. Not just the Pacific coast and the northernmost stretches of the U.S.-Canada border that divide the two nation-states but the Pacific Ocean—both border and borderland itself—played a critical role in shaping both the contours of imperial power and the lives of all those who moved through and across the land- and seascapes of this borderlands region.

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