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*The 98th Meridian*

June 6, 1894. CHAP. 22.—An act defining and permanently fixing the northern boundary line of the Warm Springs Indian Reservation, in the State of Oregon.

28 Stat., p. 85. *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That the true northern boundary line of the Warm Springs Indian Reservation, in the State of Oregon, as defined in the treaty of June twenty-fifth, eighteen hundred and fifty-five, made between the United States, represented by Joel Palmer, superintendent of Indian affairs of Oregon Territory, and the confederated tribes and bands of Indians in middle Oregon, in which the boundaries of the Indian reservation now called the Warm Springs Reservation were fixed, is hereby declared to be that part of the line run and surveyed by T. B. Handley, in the year eighteen hundred and seventy-one, from the initial point up to and including the twenty-sixth mile thereof; thence in a due west course to the summit of the Cascade Mountains, as found by the commissioners, Mark A. Fullerton, William H. H. Dufar, and James F. Payne, in the report to the Secretary of the Interior of date June eighth, eighteen hundred and ninety-one, in pursuance of an appointment for such purpose under a provision of the Indian appropriation act approved August nineteenth, eighteen hundred and ninety.*

Warm Springs Indian Reservation. Boundary established. Vol. 12, p. 953.

Vol. 24, p. 355.

Approved, June 6, 1894.

Public Law decreeing Northern Boundary of Warm Springs Reservation, Oregon (1894)

1. In 1894, Congress passed a law “defining and permanently fixing the northern boundary line of the Warm Springs Reservation, in the State of Oregon.” The statute continues with a seemingly accurate description of the location of this boundary line, “hereby declared to be that part of the line run and surveyed by T.B. Handley, in the year eighteen hundred and seventy-one, from the initial point up to and including the twenty-sixth mile thereof; thence in a due west course to the summit of the Cascade Mountains.” This bit of almost-archaic writing is nevertheless interesting for two reasons. On the one hand, it describes a line personally surveyed by one T.B. Handley. On the other, it describes a natural feature (the Cascade Mountains) as a limitation on this boundary. It could be said, then, that the process of drawing boundaries is one that involves the negotiation of both natural and man-made elements.



“A Man’s home is his castle : one of the earliest attempts at landscaping and beautifying the prairie home” (190?) (Source: Fred Hultstrand History in Pictures Collection, NDIRS-NDSU, Fargo, ND)

2. This line, though marking the northernmost boundary the Warm Springs Reservation, conjures the idea of a settlement as a place that is demarcated. And that is precisely what makes the image of a frontier home, with its combination of natural and man-made objects, quite compelling. This hand-painted picture certainly evokes the idea of a frontier. Above we have a homesteading couple in North Dakota, circa 1900. They stand in front of a makeshift hovel made of mud brick. Their house also features wooden window frames, mullions, and jambs. There is also a corrugated metal overhang. A caption tells us that this photograph depicts a first attempt to beautify a frontier home with landscaping. Though minimal, the landscape intervention is quite deliberate. In the foreground, we see gatherings of prairie grass placed in a circle of stones of various sizes. The woman stands between two planted shrubs. Her hands hide behind the trees — a frontier Daphne of sorts. But I also want to call attention to the object hanging above the woman — it is a buffalo skull.



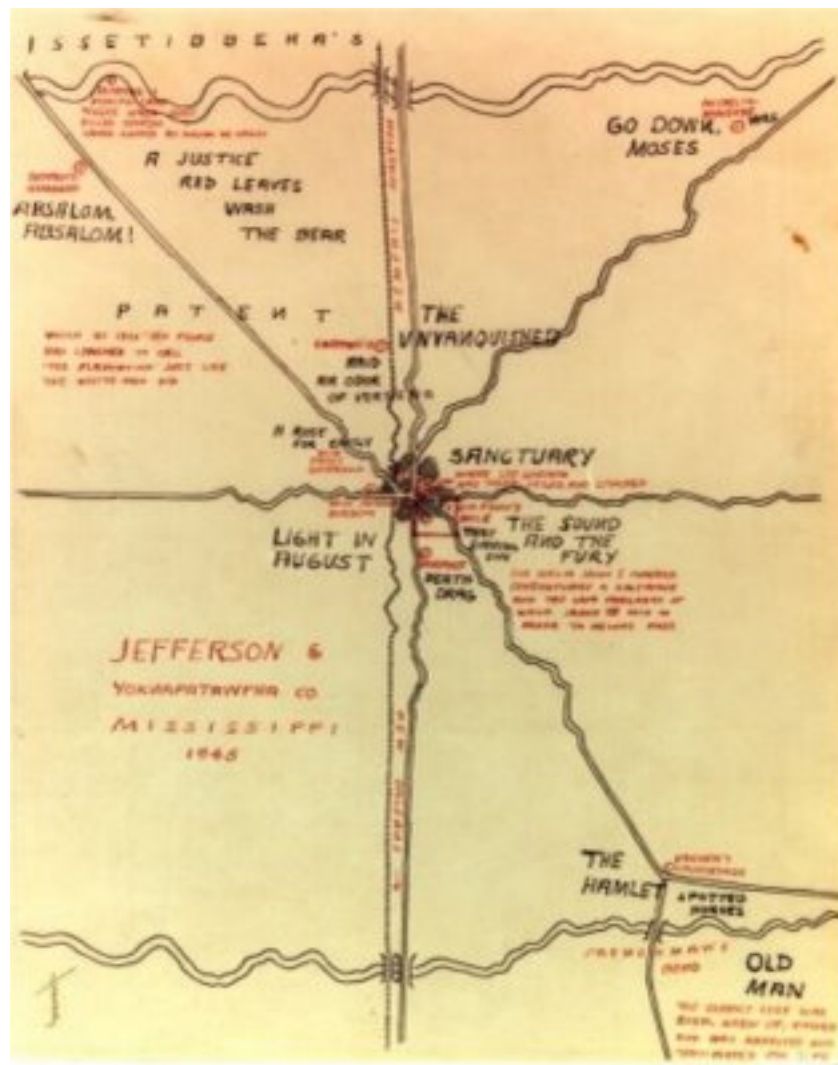
Horace Swartley, "Geological Boundary Stake, 4 Corners" (1908) from glass photonegative  
(Source: H.S. Poley Collection, Denver Public Library)

3. If one looks carefully, one can see a buffalo skull in the above plate, dated 1908. Here, however, the skull supports a tower-like stone. This rock, the caption indicates, is a "Geological Boundary Stake" marking the "Four Corners" area — the place where the boundaries of New Mexico, Arizona, Utah, and Colorado converge at a single point. Boundaries are important to a concept of a frontier. Or, put another way, a moving boundary is vital to the concept of a frontier. Without a boundary that keeps moving, there would be no "O'er there" or no "Go West, young man!"

Boundary-making has a name. In the annals of turgid and motheaten legalese, the term "delimitation" signals the making of boundaries. Thus in 1852, William Gladstone spoke of how "Other nations are to delimit for themselves the possessions and status of the clergy." Years later, in an 1885 issue of the Times of London, an editor weighed in on the significance of "the question of delimiting the Russo-Afghan frontier." To delimit, then, carries a literal and figurative meaning. Though a delimitation may involve the identification of geographic coordinates and natural boundaries, we can think of the end result as a line that separates two regimes.

How, then, to identify these two regimes? We can begin by giving them the landscape-y name of "terrain." Historians like [Frederick Jackson Turner](#), [William Cronon](#), and political scientists/environmental planners like [Frank and Deborah Popper](#) all identified or have written about what, I suppose, would go by the general name of a capital "F" Frontier. Like them, we can

think of a Frontier as a space, terrain, or idea that works in the negative. Unlike a dense, dank, and congested city, a Frontier is unpopulated, unspoiled, undeveloped. The Frontier is the “out there.” Yet distinguishing between these two realms – Frontier and non-Frontier, may be too facile. The same goes for any distinction between the separate geographical and literary terrains implicit in a Frontier. Works by Turner, Cronon, and the Poppers complicate the idea of a Frontier as both space and idea. And here, I once again introduce the idea of the boundary. It is my contention that there is much to be made in a comparison of boundary-making to authorship – and it only begins with inscribing lines on maps.

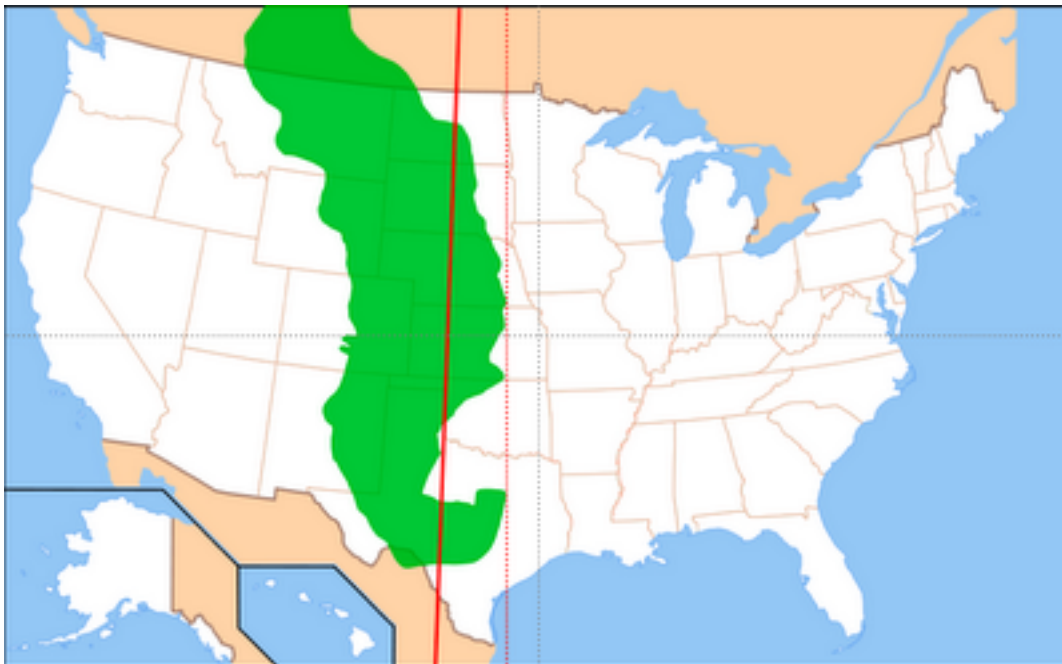


William Faulkner, Map of Yoknapatawpha County (1945)

4. How apposite, then, it is to recall another idea, that of an imaginary cartography? Can we think of William Faulkner’s map of [Yoknapatawpha County](#) as a [conflation of literary and geographical terrains](#)? [As I indicated in an earlier post](#), art historian [W.J.T. Mitchell](#) famously suggested how

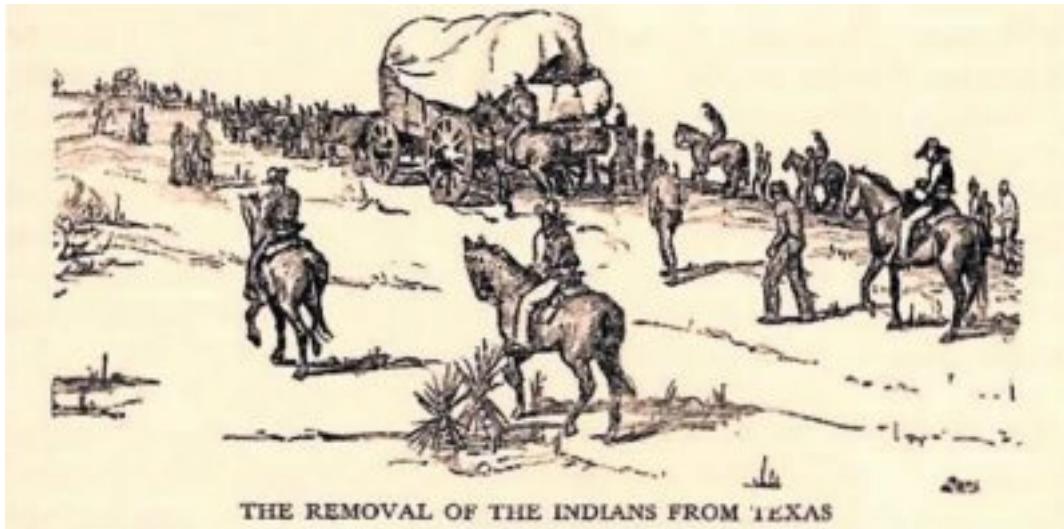
novels feature an implicit spatial narrative: “[S]patial form is a crucial aspect of the experience and interpretation of literature in all ages and cultures. The burden of proof, in other words, is not ... to show that some works have spatial form but ... to provide an example of any work that does not” [1]. We can even assign a fancy (if not new) name to this. Let’s call it narrative-delimitation ... the making of boundaries with a narrative.

Frank and Deobrah Popper conceived of “[Buffalo Commons](#)” as a literary device. According to them: “The Buffalo Commons provided a metaphor for reenvisioning settlement practices on the Plains. As a metaphor it was meant to evoke the characteristic and the intrinsic in order to clarify what to preserve and build on. We drew the metaphor from a narrative about how the region was shaped. The metaphor crystallized a regional story and became usable for the future; metaphor helped move the story past nostalgia to make understanding of place a forward-looking means for adaptation. The adaptation grew out of the challenge inherent in a metaphor that simultaneously suggested change, alluded to a history in revision, and had several possible interpretations that themselves had an uneasy relationship with each other. As a result, the Buffalo Commons metaphor again made the Buffalo Commons proposal and prediction more concrete” [2] In subsequent essays, the Poppers talked about the importance of a boundary line — the 98th meridian — to the identification of the physical domain of the Buffalo Commons.



Map of Great Plains (in Green), with 100th and 98th Meridians (solid and dashed lines, respectively)





From Walter Prescott Webb, *Texas Rangers: A Century of Frontier Defense* (1935)

6. This image from Webb's other famous book, [Texas Rangers](#)(1935), invites another idea. Here, note how the Rangers are "removing" Indians. The implication is that they are being ousted, moved from one delimited terrain - Texas - to another. The forced removal of a population from an area connotes a type of violence ... a sudden, physical dislocation against the will.



Frederick Jackson Turner (1861-1932)

7. Even Frederick Jackson Turner, the most famous promulgator of how a shifting boundary defines and redefines the Frontier, understood the narrative potential implicit in the drawing of a boundary. Note how the idea of reading helps create the notion of a readable, yet constantly changing Frontier in “The Significance of the Frontier in American History”, his groundbreaking and controversial 1893 lecture (known as the “[Frontier Thesis](#)”): “The United States lies like a huge page in the history of society. Line by line as we read this continental page from West to East we find the record of social evolution. It begins with the Indians and the hunter; it goes on to tell of the disintegration of savagery by the entrance of the trader, the pathfinder of civilization; we read the annals of the pastoral stage in ranch life; the exploitation of the soil by the raising of unrotated crops of corn and wheat in sparsely settled farming communities; the intensive culture of the denser farm settlement; and finally the manufacturing organization with city and factory



system. This page is familiar to the student of census statistics, but how little of it has been used by our historians. Particularly in the Eastern states this page is a palimpsest. What is now a manufacturing State was in an earlier decade an area of intensive farming” [3]



Edward Kerneys, Statue of Buffalo, Grand Basin, World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago (1893)  
(Source: Brooklyn Museum Archives, Goodyear Archival Collection)

8. To conflate the realms of fact and fiction even further, I point out that Turner is also a character in Thomas Pynchon's 2005 novel, *Against the Day*. Much of the action in that novel takes place inside the [1893 Columbian Exposition](#), the very event where Turner delivered his "Frontier Thesis". One of the novel's multiple narrators tells us that we are to understand a different idea of the West. He paraphrases Turner's "Frontier Thesis", remarking how "Back in July my colleague Freddie Turner came out here from Harvard and gave a speech before a bunch of anthro people who were all in town for their convention and of course the Fair. To the effect that the Western frontier we all though we knew from song and story was no longer on the map but gone, absorbed — a dead duck" [4]. He points down at the grounds of the Exhibition and says, "here's where the

trail comes to its end at last, along with the American Cowboy who used to live on it” [5]. Pynchon then muses, “But if the Frontier was now gone, did that mean Lew [the narrator] was about to be disconnected, too, from himself? Sent off into exile, into some silence beyond silence as retribution for a remote and ancient vice always just about to be remembered, half stunned, in a half dream like a surgeon’s knot taken swiftly in the tissue of time and pulled snug, delivered into the control of potent operatives who did not wish him well?” [6]



Photograph, mid-1870s , of a pile of American bison skulls waiting to be ground for fertilizer. (Burton Historical Collection, Denver Pub. Lib.)

Is it possible, then, to think of the Popper’s idea of the Buffalo Commons as a method to correct cycles of damage in the past? The idea of “silence as retribution” thus casts a darker pallor to the terrain on the other side of a boundary between Frontier and non-Frontier.



Stack of buffalo hides at Dodge City, Kansas, hide yard (1870?) (Source: Kansas State Historical Society)

9. To say that the creation of a West in the American imagination came at a price is almost too obvious. But this is a powerful idea still present in contemporary literature. Though there is no outright mention of a cartographical line in Cormac McCarthy's 1985 novel, *Blood Meridian*, or *Evening Redness in the West*, there is at least an implicit imagining of the West. The meridian in the novel could be an allusion to the 98th parallel (much of the narrative action occurs to the West of that line), and yet McCarthy's narrative operates as a revisionist take on the idea of the Frontier, one that depends on the crossing of literal and figurative boundaries in order to enter into dark [Dante-esque](#) (or [Conrad-esque](#)) netherworlds. His description of Mexicans encountering a band of American bounty hunters affirms this point: "These people had seen Americans in plenty, dusty laggard trains of them months out of their own country and half crazed with the enormity of their own presence in that immense and bloodslaked waste ...." [7]

Or, as Captain White, whose dragooning of eager n'er do wells for an expedition to collect scalps will set the stage for much of the carnage in *Blood Meridian*, tells "the kid", the novel's main protagonist: "Right now they are forming in Washington a commission to come out here and draw up the boundary lines between our country and Mexico. I don't think there's any question that ultimately Sonora will become a United States territory. Guaymas is a U S Port. Americans will be able to get to California without having to pass through our benighted sister republic and our citizens will be protected at last from the notorious packs of cutthroats presently infesting the

routes with which they are obliged to travel ... We are to be instruments of liberation in a dark and troubled land” [8].



P. Arst, “Native American Men on Horseback Attack White Men as They Defend Themselves with Rifles”, illustration from Edwin Eastman, *Seven and Nine Years Among the Comanches and Apaches* (Jersye, 1874)

Such expeditions turn the Frontier into a killing field. White’s men are eventually attacked by a lance-bearing [Comanche](#) war party, a “legion of horrors” like a “company of mounted clowns ... all howling in a barbarous tongue and riding down upon them like a horde from a hell more horrible yet than the brimstone land of Christian reckoning” [9].



Lieutenant Read, 3rd Infantry, and John O. Auston, chief of the scouts, crouch near a scalped Ralph Morrison near Fort Dodge, Kansas. Morrison was scalped by a Cheyenne war party in 1886 (Source: Library of Congress)

10. Boundary. Frontier. Border. Each contains intersecting layers of violence. The crossing of a boundary into a Frontier is one type of violence, known otherwise as trespass. Violence is also implicit in the drawing of a boundary on a map. A rendering of a single cartographical line may undo years of history and reopen old wars and wounds. As [Étienne Balibar](#) suggests, such linemaking, for all its arbitrariness, can change the status of a person who happens to be on the wrong side of the line [10]. Yet the human body can become the very site of such violence. Cormac McCarthy thus describes the end result of the above-mentioned raid, dozens of scalping victims, lying like “maimed and naked monks in the bloodslaked dust” [11].

**Notes**

- [1] W.J.T. Mitchell, "Spatial Form in Literature: Toward a General Theory", *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (Spring, 1980), p. 541.
- [2] Frank and Deborah Popper, "The Buffalo Commons: Metaphor as Method", *Geographical Review*, Vol. 89, No. 4 (Oct., 1999), p. 501.
- [3] Fredrick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History", in *The Frontier in American History* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1997) p. 11
- [4] Thomas Pynchon, *Against the Day* (New York: Penguin, 2005), p. 72
- [5] *Ibid.*, p. 73.
- [6] *Ibid.*
- [7] Cormac McCarthy, *Blood Meridian: or, Evening Redness in the West* (New York: Vintage, 1992 [1985]), p. 177.
- [8] *Ibid.*, p. 84.
- [9] *Ibid.*, p. 52, 53.
- [10] Étienne Balibar, "Outline of a Topography of Cruelty: Citizenship and Civility in the Era of Global Violence", in *We, The People of Europe: Reflections on Transnational Citizenship*, James Swenson, trans. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), p.122
- [11] *Blood Meridian*, p. 54.