

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Great Plains Quarterly

Great Plains Studies, Center for

Summer 2007

Review of *The Line Which Separates: Race, Gender, and the Making of the Alberta-Montana Borderlands*. By Sheila McManus

Lissa Wadewitz
Stanford University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly>



Part of the [Other International and Area Studies Commons](#)

Wadewitz, Lissa, "Review of *The Line Which Separates: Race, Gender, and the Making of the Alberta-Montana Borderlands*. By Sheila McManus" (2007). *Great Plains Quarterly*. 1501.

<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly/1501>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Great Plains Studies, Center for at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Great Plains Quarterly by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

The Line Which Separates: Race, Gender, and the Making of the Alberta-Montana Borderlands. By Sheila McManus. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005. xxiii + 236 pp. Maps, notes, bibliography, index. \$69.95 cloth, \$29.95 paper.

Drawing upon the writings of poststructuralists, cultural geographers, and feminist postcolonial scholars, Sheila McManus illustrates that although the West was critical to American and Canadian nation building, the late nineteenth-century Alberta-Montana border remained tenuous and challenged national consolidation on both sides of the line. Three pairs of chapters outline how Canada and the United States tried to incorporate their respective Wests into larger visions of nationhood and make the forty-ninth parallel a meaningful marker for regional residents.

The first two chapters illustrate how both governments sought to know and manage their western regions through surveys, maps, and land policies. The second pair explores the treatment of the Blackfoot and their responses to white incursions. Even as both countries sought to contain “their” aboriginal peoples on reserves, persistent Indian mobility highlighted the weaknesses of the border and governmental controls. The final two chapters address the linkages between immigration policies, idealized notions of who should settle the West, and who actually came. Assumptions about the western landscape, ethnicity, and

gender strongly influenced the formation of government policies, but settler diversity defied federal hopes for the region. Even the arrival of white women—supposedly the final step in the colonization process—challenged the strength and meaning of the nation-state in this western borderland.

This is a well-written, relatively short book that would work well in comparative U.S.-Canadian undergraduate courses or classes on the history of the Great Plains. That being said, because of its length and the author's reliance on a relatively limited number of sources, many issues remain unexplored. McManus skirts over the spatial and economic impacts of early ranching enterprises and neglects to explore systematically issues of religion, the role of missionaries, or the effects of disease on the aboriginal population. In addition, while the author shows her command of a wide range of literature throughout the text, her tendency to quote other scholars or reference their work sometimes results in obscuring her own voice and unique interpretations.

Still, *The Line Which Separates* is a major contribution to the growing field of northern borderlands history because the author carefully dissects precisely how American and Canadian approaches to their respective Wests differed. This book is thus a welcome, readable addition to the literature and clearly shows that our "other border" is also worthy of serious study.

LISSA WADEWITZ
The Bill Lane Center for the Study
of the North American West
Stanford University