

SECTION FIVE

BORDER CROSSERS

EVERYONE WHO CROSSES a border is a transgressor of one kind or another, either entering or departing a space that is not “theirs.” At the same time, borders are never more real than when they are crossed, even if the crossers flout them. The articles in this section consider three different groups of border crossers and border transgressors, three different groups of Americans who entered the Canadian West: prostitutes, club women, and African Americans. Each group made specific and strategic uses of the border to suit its own needs, build particular identities, and resist particular circumstances.

A number of western industries crossed the 49th parallel. The fur trade, logging, ranching, mining, and agriculture all crossed the line, pushing and pulling trappers, loggers, cowboys, miners, and harvest hands to wherever they could sell their skills on either side of the border. Char Smith follows the migrations of the women sex workers whose work was so closely tied to western industries that drew disproportionate numbers of men to the ranges, mining camps, and forests of the North American West. Unlike the male workforce, however, women in the highly stratified sex trade crossed the class lines of their clientele.

No other transborder labourers were as reviled as the American prostitutes who crossed the western Canadian-American border. Their journeys illuminate the intersecting boundaries of sex and class, public morality and private behaviour. They illuminate, too, the various meanings of border crossings, those that the women chose voluntarily, to work, and those they endured involuntarily, as Canadian authorities deported them. National identity and citizenship, too, became more complex: a means to attract customers, or for the state to deport the women back to the United States. So, too, did the treasured concept of western mobility suggest different meanings for women who simply moved to work and for whom the border was just one more line to be crossed.

The genteel club women discussed in Nora Faires' article present a quite different example of experiences had by a group of American women in western Canada, and a very different connection between identity and mobility. Americans were a significant minority in Calgary, making up more than 13 per cent of the city's foreign-born population in 1911, with a political and economic influence far beyond their numbers. The American Women's Club of Calgary, founded in 1912, was dominated by well-to-do married white women for whom the Club erected protective boundaries that reinforced American identities and promised an eventual return to homes south of the border. Unlike the American prostitutes who had to or were forced to stay on the move, the Club women chose to see themselves as being on the move even when they clearly weren't, because only then could they retain their American identities. As women crossed the Club threshold, they found a haven from conflicting national demands for their loyalty and their identity.

Cheryl Foggo's family was not as unwanted as the prostitutes nor as valued as the elite American club women from whose social circles they were excluded. Foggo, a fourth-generation Canadian, tells her own story of growing up Black in the Canadian West, where racist social boundaries "fenced out" African Canadians, both subtly and blatantly. Foggo, an author and filmmaker, screened portions of a film about her family's history in Alberta at the "Unsettled Pasts" conference. For this volume, she graciously allowed us to reprint excerpts from her autobiography, *Pourin*'

Down Rain, and wrote a new introduction for the article. Foggo probes her own identity, her family's historic ties to Canada, and her own, the cross-border migrations and the cross-border movements through which she crafted her own identity as an African Canadian woman in Alberta.

The excerpts from *Pourin' Down Rain* chronicle the complexities of African Canadian history and identity, as Foggo uncovers progressive layers of her own awareness of race, of racism in the United States and Canada, and sources of Black identity and strength that also crossed the 49th parallel. The narrative of her own maturation, and her reflections from a 2006 perspective on the autobiography she began to write in 1985, further emphasize the importance of time and place—of history and context—to how we understand ourselves and our pasts.

These three groups of border-crossers and -transgressors highlight the multiple meanings that can be attached to or derived from that crossing. Each group made different uses of the border and different uses of their American identities once they had crossed the line. The prostitutes were never going to be considered talented or charming, and were never going to be welcome despite their best efforts to stay. They used the line in a manner nation states feared—as something that could enable and only occasionally hinder their work in the sex trade. They also occasionally used it as a source of identity and pride, for marketing purposes, which would have horrified the club women. They crossed the border in addition to transgressing many other boundaries of gendered and racialized propriety. By contrast, the Club women could move in some of the highest social circles in Calgary but saw themselves as sojourners even when they weren't. They used the border the way their class, gender, and race wanted it to be used: as a marker of national and personal identity one could be proud of, as a marker of difference-but-sameness, as a line that could reinforce other hierarchies (like class, race, and gender). They tended to stay put once they had crossed the line, yet they carried the border with them always—to remind themselves that they were not “home,” that they were “outsiders” despite racial and class privilege. For Foggo, the borders of race remained even when the national border had been crossed, yet racism was performed differently in Canada than in

the United States, a difference that mattered, even if Canada did not fulfill the dreams that drew Black Americans north. Like African Americans, African Canadians always contend with issues of belonging, and of the intersecting histories and identities of being Black while being Canadian, or being American. Nowhere do the histories of border crossings become more complex, or more densely clear, than in the difficult histories of forced migration from Africa to North America, and the efforts to forge Black communities and identities across those difficult social and historical borderlands.