More than forty years ago, William Goetzmann wrote in his magisterial study *Exploration and Empire*, “It is the thesis of this book that explorers, as they go out into the unknown, are ‘programmed’ by the knowledge, values, and objectives of the civilized centers from which they depart. They are alert to discover evidence of the things they have been sent to find.” Goetzmann’s thesis is still valid, and his 1966 book is still the gold standard on exploration of the US West, but readers’ reactions to the idea of the “civilized center” and the “knowledge, values, and objectives” that such places promulgated has shifted somewhat. Goetzmann’s own programming meant that he accepted both the inevitability and beneficence of the “Winning of the West,” to use Theodore Roosevelt’s term, by the civilized centres. Since 1966, other scholars have complicated these issues. Post-colonial theory worldwide has focussed on the ways explorers used “the other” in contrast to both their own cultures and familiar landforms and weather terms to explore the mysteries in their own psyches and societies. More important, it has returned subjectivity to those who are being explored, be they Pashtuns
in Afghanistan or Nahathaways in Rupert’s Land. The homogenizing views of “savagery,” at least partially developed from the idea of the “infidel” during crusading days, tinged mainstream European explorers’ perception of non-Europeans during the ages of exploration and empire, but those views are crumbling under challenges from turn-of-the-millennium critics supported with both the explored’s own reactions and the messages of individuality and surprise noted by the explorers themselves.

Mary Louise Pratt is best known for her term “contact zone,” but perhaps a more useful concept that she has developed is that of the “anti-conquest”—the narrative of exploration that pitches itself not as conquest but as innocent scientific or commercial exploring. The anti-conquest seems objective and neutral and is perhaps even couched in terms of universal benefit to humankind. Perhaps rather than an anti-conquest narrative, Pratt should have called this the covert conquest because its rhetoric leads inescapably to the incorporation of land and people into empire. Dean Neu and Richard Therrien carry the study of these procedures into the treaty period and up to the present, showing how something as seemingly neutral as accounting can be used, for instance, to justify the taking of 115,000 acres of Blackfoot land without actually handing over any money to the dispossessed Blackfoot people.\(^\text{2}\) Mapping, likewise, suggests that an area was, previous to the explorers, “unknown” and thus underutilized and in need of liberation into its full potential—obviously a job for the explorers, or at least the European or Euro–North American civilizations that they represented. Naming and classifying the flora and fauna are similarly acts of covert conquest. Mapping, naming, and bureaucratic manoeuvres all suggested that the land was empty and unused, ripe for the picking, without any untoward suggestions of violence or coercion.

Both Lewis and Clark and their successors in the United States, and the North West Company and Hudson’s Bay Company explorers and later surveys in Canada were part of the imperial scheme that Pratt describes, but there were variations. Before the Palliser and Hind expeditions, Canadian explorers were working for fur trade companies, and for them the land could not be empty. Because the Canadians were traders rather than trappers, they needed to know which people were where, what resources they traditionally commanded or could command, and what could induce
them to trade with the company represented by the explorer rather than with a rival company or not at all. None of the explorers on the US side was as consistently concerned with the fur trade, not even Jedediah Smith. As Goetzmann points out, Lewis and Clark were instructed to look for the broadest possible uses of the West to keep it from being the preserve of any special interests—including the fur trade. Goetzmann saw American mountain men as aspiring entrepreneurs, interested in any kind of main chance. Because they were themselves trappers, for the most part, they did not need to worry about trade relationships with Indigenous peoples, though they did need personal relationships because they were still primarily dependent upon Indigenous women to prepare furs and to provide them with meals and clothing, a relationship that Goetzmann does not touch upon.

Because marriage in the custom of the country entailed certain reciprocal responsibilities that many mountain men either did not understand or chose to ignore, marriages, instead of establishing kinship relations, often led to hostilities. For the mountain men, Native people became obstacles rather than trading partners. Except to John Wesley Powell, who would eventually found the American Bureau of Ethnology, and to army officers surveying for potential railroad routes and collecting information about the war-making abilities of various Indians, Indigenous people were not of interest to US explorers or mountain men because the Americans did not visualize them as having any place in the future of the area. Goetzmann argues that when the mountain men turned to being Oregon Trail guides at the end of the fur trade era, they demonstrated the pro-settler bias that had been theirs all along. The fur trade expeditions found the passes for what became the Oregon Trail and provided guides for the “great and inevitable folk movement” that passed along it and other trails to the Pacific, bringing “the two chief forces of contemporary civilization, science and organized Protestant Christianity.”

Goetzmann’s programming led him to miss the social implications in his own account—he even speaks with an alarming lack of irony about the cavalry’s “final solution’ to the Indian problem”—and to portray Americans as winners in the contest for the West while Spaniards (Mexicans) and British (Canadians) are the losers because their primary focus was not on
settlement or complete exploitation of territory. The Canadian Prairies and British Columbia, one might conclude from reading Goetzmann, were merely the leftovers after the Americans had taken everything worth having. Not surprisingly, few Canadians, even the expansionist Ontarians, who pushed for the annexation and settlement of Rupert’s Land, shared Goetzmann’s conclusions—the Canadian climate was healthier with no stagnant ponds and the soil was better in the northern fertile belt than in the Great American Desert.

Goetzmann’s programming also led him to underestimate Canadian achievements—Alexander Mackenzie beat Lewis and Clark to the Pacific by a decade, which Goetzmann acknowledges only backhandedly—and especially to underestimate the systematic and scientific documentation carried out by fur trade explorers. Germaine Warkentin explains that the scientific work of Hudson’s Bay Company factor Andrew Graham has only recently been credited to him instead of to his early collaborator Thomas Hutchins, but the voluminous notes of many HBC men have long been available. They contain plentiful observations on soil, climate, terrain, and the other things that Goetzmann values. As Barbara Belyea points out in her edition of Anthony Henday’s travels across the northern Plains, the HBC furnished all its explorers with detailed instructions for entering information of this sort. Henday was to use his compass and dead reckoning to figure out where and how far he had gone; he was to note the depths of the water, the rivers and lakes he navigated or passed, whether or not they joined the fabled Ocean of the West; the names of the “Nation” of people whom he passed; the nature of the land and vegetation; and any indication of minerals. Clearly, he was not just looking for information that would be useful to the fur trade. Like Lewis and Clark, Henday was deficient in ways of measuring longitude and proceeded primarily by dead reckoning. Although he is generally credited with being the first white man to see the Canadian Rockies, Belyea suggests that his daily estimates of distance travelled were far too optimistic and that he was never as far West as historians have suggested. But it is his own voluminous documentation that allows her to come to this conclusion.

Belyea, more than any other scholar, has pointed out the enormous difficulty of squaring explorers’ reports of where they were and whom they had contacted with the names on contemporary maps and the ascribed
tribal names of contemporary peoples. Even landforms themselves change in their representation. European conventions of establishing watersheds divide streams into mainstems and tributaries. “Fall Indian” (probably the ancestors of today’s Gros Ventre and Hidatsa and Arapaho people) conventions instead represented rivers as equal paths through the mountains. Lewis and Clark, following their conventions and the theory that mainstems in adjoining watersheds mirrored each other, asked the wrong questions of Indigenous people and of their maps, and ended up taking a long detour to the headwaters (the assumptions embedded in the language are almost impossible to avoid) of the Columbia.

Which current names on the map correspond with the streams that Henday travelled is perhaps unknowable. Although contemporary scholars such as Belyea, Malcolm Lewis, James Ronda, and Mark Warhus are looking carefully at maps produced for explorers by Indigenous people, they have not usually been able to gain access to the detailed oral traditions that the maps accompanied.10 Certainly Indigenous people followed pragmatic routes such as those featuring easily discerned landmarks that may not have had any particular geological significance. As Malcolm Lewis points out, however, the Pawnees, for instance, used star charts that mapped villages on earth in accordance with the star patterns that were associated with the ancestors and founders of each of the Pawnee villages.11 Lewis and Clark, Henday, and many other early explorers were relatively amateurish in their use of the scientific instruments available to them, but they did add detail to the ways that European maps, particularly Arrowsmith’s, laid claim to North America by depicting her rivers and mountains and enormous breadth from sea to sea on a particular grid that mimicked the landforms not as one would ordinarily visualize them but as one might see them if the globe were both flattened and miniaturized. But in addition to producing these covert conquests, the explorers were also erasing a different way of knowing the land that was subjective and based on how to get from point to point following already known food sources, trade routes, and sacred places.

The grid map made homesteading possible but also hampered settlers in taking land by breaking it up in ways that contradicted the actual lay of the land, and it also hampered the preservation of mental maps that focussed on the everyday uses of the land. One can, for instance, contrast the
explorers’ maps with Amos Bad Heart Bull’s remarkable series of maps of the Black Hills. Scientific map-making is enormously useful because it reduces everything to the same scale and provides a method of linking all parts of the world, but it is not always the most useful way to produce a map for everyday chores, as anyone knows who has ever prepared a map showing the way to one’s house marked by such landmarks as railway and grain elevator in the country or traffic light and neighbours’ kitschy lawn ornaments in town. Because scientific map-making virtually drove out Indigenous map-making, it extinguished a way of seeing and conceptualizing the West.

The two sets of captains from the age of exploration who have arguably had the most influence on how we visualize and depict the West, including the Great Plains, are Lewis and Clark and David Thompson. The importance of Lewis and Clark comes more from their nationalistic significance than from their skill as either explorers or cartographers. States mark highways as part of the Lewis and Clark Trail, and buffs and re-enactors follow parts of their route every summer. The Missouri itself, despite the dams and lakes of the Pick-Sloan projects, still testifies to their passage in the names given its tributaries, and their inland voyaging has been painstakingly documented. Scholars and buffs have produced whole libraries of editions of their journals and of writings about them. One of their Indigenous guides, the teenaged Bird Woman, Sacagawea, is on the obverse of a gold-coloured US one dollar coin. Yet despite the emphasis on Sacagawea, there is little indication in popular accounts of the Lewis and Clark expedition that theirs was primarily a guided tour. Indigenous people could almost always answer their questions—their biggest difficulty may have been in deciding which questions to ask.

David Thompson is a less nationalistic hero than Lewis and Clark, though as poor-immigrant-makes-good-in-new-world, he perhaps could be more of one. Rather, Thompson is acclaimed as the apotheosis of the scientific explorer. He is the only Canadian that Goetzmann allows in his pantheon. Thompson, a lad of fourteen, arrived in Churchill on Hudson Bay in 1784. According to Goetzmann, Thompson’s explorations and the North American maps of Aaron Arrowsmith, which recorded many of the discoveries of Thompson and other fur trade explorers, were the main inspiration of Lewis and Clark. According to Germaine Warkentin, Thompson was “the most outstanding of Canadian exploration writers in
English, possessing the most reflective cast of mind and the greatest powers of synthesis.” She credits him with both scrupulous attention to detail and a synthesizing intelligence that allowed him to find the system of what he called “the Great Plains.” She notes his “courteous inquiry” into the lives of Indigenous people but does not point out how dependent he, like other fur trade explorers, was on his mixed-blood wife and on the knowledge and skills of many other Indigenous companions and even rivals.13

Although European records of the Great Plains begin with Coronado (1541) in the south and Henry Kelsey (1690) in the north, Thompson’s systematization is important. As Lewis and Clark would do later, Thompson thought in terms of rivers, but unlike them, he did not think in terms of watersheds. Instead, he saw the Plains from the Gulf of Mexico to Hudson Bay as a whole, traversed from west to east by rivers that ran eventually into Hudson Bay, the Gulf of Mexico, or the Arctic Ocean. Understanding correctly that the southern rivers were flat and wide, forming characteristic braided channels, he also observed that from the Missouri north, the rivers ran in deep valleys. Thompson accounted for this by proposing that a flood from the Gulf of Mexico had washed all the deep soil up to the north and left the south a cactus-covered desert. He also noted that the rivers of the plains did not form lakes. He had already remarked, “These fine plains will in time become the abode of mankind, probably some civilized leading pastoral life tending Cattle and Sheep.” Farmers, he believed, would have to stay at the northern verge of the plains, where wood was available.14

Thompson’s explorations were carried out between 1784 and 1812, but he only began to write his narrative in 1846, and it remained incomplete at his death in 1857.15 Thus, the rhetoric of his narrative probably owes more to the 1850s, a time when Canadian expansionists were already laying claim to the West, than to his actual years of exploration. Thompson devotes much of his narrative to describing the Indigenous people he had met and lived among, particularly the Peeagans [sic] and Nahathaways (Crees), both of whom he describes in the present tense, though recollecting events from a half century earlier. Still, he prophesies that these Plains, whose people he describes so carefully, will “in time” become the dwelling of “mankind,” a phrasing that erases those members of “mankind” he had known and replaces them with herdsmen who may be either Euro-North
American or partially assimilated mixed-blood or Indigenous peoples. Thompson was obviously writing for a Euro–North American audience, since he hoped to sell his narrative to help support his family, and he had become accustomed to Euro–North American assumptions about land and progress—if, indeed, he had ever shed or questioned them in his years as explorer and surveyor. Goetzmann argues that Canadian explorers were only representing the mercantile interests of the Canadian fur companies. Thompson’s narrative, however, shows that he, at least, had come to think in terms of agricultural settlement.

While Thompson and others, such as George Nelson, wrote intelligently about Indigenous beliefs and about everyday life in Indigenous societies, Canadian exploration narratives were still shaped by ideas of savagery and civilization. Thompson, for instance, doubted whether the Nahathaway language, which he found easy for a European to learn and useful for trading and which he accurately described as similar to other languages as far east as the Delawares, was complex enough to “clearly express the doctrines of Christianity in their full force.”

In marked contrast to Thompson’s accounts of Indigenous peoples is Samuel Hearne’s vivid, horrifying, and often anthologized description of the violent raid by his “Northern Indian” companions on a small camp of Esquimaux, published in 1795. That the raid took place and that it was highly unusual are both demonstrated by the fact that it “is still recalled with horror by the Inuit today” and that Franklin’s expedition members later visited the spot and contemplated Hearne’s veracity. But Hearne’s text is suspect—it was, in the manner of the time, edited and probably rewritten by his literary friends. The details and the sensibility recorded in his witness to the killing of a young Inuit woman may be a legitimate eye-witness account, sensibility fictionalized to match eighteenth-century notions of savagery and civilization, or some combination of the two. At any rate, the most memorable and bloody of the descriptions does not appear in Hearne’s field notes. Nor does Hearne—or his editor—attempt to understand the motivation for this encounter. Although the massacre takes place considerably north of the Great Plains, it represents an *entrada* to the continent through Hudson Bay, the same entrance used by the traders onto the Plains. As Owram points out, this northern gateway resulted in a popular
image of the North West as more north than west, and thus not hospitable to agrarian settlers. Hearne's narrative at Bloody Fall provides an example of the Indigenous North American as bloodthirsty savage, though it may well have been largely the European editor's idea of what a bloodthirsty savage should be. Many of Goetzmann's narratives make the same point. It is so inculcated in the genre that Goetzmann himself, as we have seen, cannot entirely escape a sort of unconscious identification with it, just as he does not escape the assumption that Canadian and Mexican explorers (and the country they explored) were inferior to American explorers and American terrain.

By the 1840s, the Great Plains was tolerably well filled in on the European maps. The rivers were accurately delineated, and the general idea of the Rockies, Selkirks, Sierras, and coastal ranges was clear enough to show that the Plains lay completely in their rainshadow and did not communicate with the Pacific. The imputed savagery of the Plains peoples was both an impediment to Euro–North American settlement and a rationalization for Euro–North Americans to dispossess the Aboriginal inhabitants and to occupy the Plains. The Aboriginal inhabitants were self-evidently, according to spokesmen of European origin, not worthy of a land so rich and wide. This was the message passed on to the East and to Great Britain, though it was, until the 1860s, more resounding in the United States than in Canada.

The intellectual traditions that were being overwritten during the age of exploration and the response of Indigenous peoples to Euro–North Americans and their varied agendas are much harder to gauge. Scholars, particularly James Ronda, have begun to practice a species of North American subaltern studies to remove the overburden of written documentation and try to determine how Indigenous people understood the invasion. The Indigenous response to the explorers is important in its own right as a part of the intellectual history of the Great Plains and also because it is impossible to evaluate how Indigenous concepts have influenced mainstream formulations if we do not first recognize the Indigenous ideas. Ronda focusses on using Lewis and Clark's texts to discover Indigenous responses to the Corps of Discovery, particularly the response of the Mandans, with whom the expedition spent the winter of 1804–5 and who
thus had the opportunity for observation. More recently, Matthew Jones began an exhaustive survey of both written and oral historical records of the interactions between the Oto-Missouria people and Lewis and Clark.

Like many of the African groups that Pratt discusses, who had to make sense of explorers, the Mandans had pegged Europeans and Euro-North Americans as traders interested mainly in furs. As such, they were expected to assume the mutual obligations of kinship, either through marriage or through ceremonial or personal recognition as fictive kin on the part of Indigenous community members. Thus, in the Indigenous world view, commercial relations were governed, first of all, by kinship relations. Likewise, relationships to the non-human world were a balance of practical observations of the habits of prey animals—such as bison—and ceremonial relations with the manito or spirit of each animal. Thompson provides a particularly clear observation of the balance.

When we related the scarcity of the Bison and Deer [the Peeagans] were pleased at it and said it would be to them a plentiful winter. Their argument was; [sic] the Bison and Deer have passed the latter part of the summer and the fall of the leaves upon the Missisouri [sic], and have made the ground bare of grass and can no longer live there; they must come to us for grass to live on in our country. . . . The winter proved that they reasoned right.

In addition to such practiced observation, “the religious hunter, at the death of each animal, says, or does, something, as thanks to the Manito of the species for being permitted to kill it.” For the most part, Euro-North American tradition has been to amplify the use of observation and to minimize or eliminate the relationship to the manito. Thus, we see radio collaring as a major source of information about the movements of animals, especially large predators. The introduction of non-native food animals, especially cattle and hogs, has further emphasized scientific management, especially in feedlots and hog-confinement operations, and virtually eliminated the sacramal, especially as none of the European earth-centred religions of animal guardians seem to have been transplanted along with the cattle and hogs.
Oral traditions also emphasize the importance of both secular and sacred observations as well as expectations of a certain fluidity among humans, animals, plants, and elements such as rivers, stars, and rocks, considered animate in many Indigenous cultures but not in most transplanted European ones. Among Euro–North American scholars, it is mostly anthropologists, folklorists, linguists, and literary scholars who have studied these relationships, while a new generation of Indigenous scholars is once again examining these from within the cultures. Because this cosmology has, unfortunately, become only a background to the hinterland intellectual interpretation of the Plains that I am pursuing here, I will not discuss it in detail. The treaties—particularly on the Canadian Plains, where Indigenous negotiators had more hand in crafting some of the conditions—demonstrate how Indigenous traditions show through and contrast with the mainstream Euro–North American attitudes expressed both by settlers and in the “scientific” explorations that formed the proximate basis of settlement. Terms like “as long as the grass shall grow and the waters run” were sacred and specific parameters, not just figures of speech, though Euro–North American explorers and legislators, as well as the general public, viewed them as such.

The number and magnitude of the surveys of the American West carried out by the railroads and United States Geological Survey are simply staggering. Mountains and canyons, flat lands and sloping ones, dry lands and wet, prairie, forest, and desert: all were traversed, measured, and mapped. Fossils and rock strata, plants and animals, Indigenous people and their languages all were grist for the often competing surveys. According to Goetzmann, scientists were to survey everything from “ancient Silurian mollusks” to “sun-bleached Comanche skulls.” This inclusion of people as part of the environment showed the underlying ideology of the great scientific and railroad surveys: this mapping and classification was solely for the purpose of Euro/Afro/North American utilization and culture. True, individual Comanches might continue to exist, but Comanche civilization, to Goetzmann as well as to the surveyors themselves, was as firmly past as the ancient Silurian mollusks themselves.

The railroad surveys were obviously for the purpose of opening commerce and settlement across the Plains, linking the coasts and firmly
cementing the hinterland status of the Plains in their tributary position, while the mountains and deserts would be transformed from the sublime to the merely picturesque. According to Goetzmann, Gouvenor Warren’s 1857 map for the railroad surveys was the culminating achievement of what Goetzmann calls the “Great Reconnaissance,” the first accurate, instrument-based outline, a master map of the West. On the other hand, some of the geologists were too esoteric for practical westerners, failing to map simple, practical occurrences—such as coal mines or salt licks. Nor, despite their careful studies, did the botanists look for agricultural potential outside California and Oregon, assuming that the rest of the area, including the Plains, was really desert. *Pacific Railroad Reports* included observation on Indians, with an emphasis on their war-making capacities. This was no longer a narrative of covert conquest but a plan of warfare. Later, Wheeler would provide maps for soldiers to use in their campaigns against Apache and Paiute peoples. The pragmatic Hayden, who found ways to praise everything he mapped as either useful or picturesque, also surveyed the Great Plains in the firm belief that rain follows the plough. For westerners and intending western entrepreneurs, science for its own sake or reforms like John Wesley Powell’s that would limit individual exploitation were worthless. The surveys were blueprints for building the land into the market economy.

In Canada, the railway surveys came only after Confederation. The first non–fur trade surveyors to cross the Prairies were the Hind and Palliser expeditions of the late 1850s. The Hind expedition, sent by the Canadian government to see what the North West held, mingled a sentimental look at the supposedly remnant Crees with an eager anticipation of Euro–North American settlement. Henry Youle Hind had his own version of rain following the plough. It was prairie fires, he believed, that caused soil sterility and had wiped out trees “south of the Qu’Appelle and Assiniboine.” Fire suppression, he believed, would allow willows and aspens to develop and humus would render the soil both more fertile and more moist. Fire does regenerate prairie grassland and clear it of woody shrubs and trees, but grassland soil does not lack fertility, and trees do not bring moisture except to the extent that shelter belts capture snow and slow down wind evaporation. Fast-growing trees, however, are thirsty and their large leaf
areas transpire more water than the narrow leaves of grass. Salt cedar, for instance, is an introduced invasive tree that can actually empty rivers and reservoirs. Hind was similarly confused about the decline in numbers of the buffalo—though to what extent the Canadian buffalo had already declined by 1858 is by no means clear. He blamed both the “careless thriftless” Crees who took only the “tongue and hump” of the buffalo, and what he believed was the sheerly destructive use of impoundment. Shortly afterward, however, he wrote that “buffalo were fast disappearing before the encroachments of white men”—the reason that the Crees demanded presents before allowing Hind’s expedition to cross their land, already beset by too many whites and Métis.27

Englishman John Palliser’s appointment to head a survey expedition resulted from his own enthusiasm for the Wild West of the buffalo hunts that he had participated in and written about in 1847. He was not for the most part optimistic about agricultural settlement in the prairies, describing the area that is still called the Palliser Triangle today as an extension of the “more or less arid desert” separating the eastern states of the United States from the Pacific Coast. “This central desert extends, however, but a short way into the British territory, forming a triangle, having for its base the 49th parallel from longitude 100° to 114° W., with its apex reaching to the 52nd parallel of latitude.” Palliser did, however, see a fairly good possibility of settlement in what the expansionists would call the “fertile belt” between the northern forests and the southern triangle. Hind’s and Palliser’s observations that there was a large arable belt of land in the prairies were bolstered by the theories of American geographer Lorin Blodgett, who wrote in 1857 that climate did not depend on latitude but in fact got warmer toward the west as well as toward the south. Thus, Canadian expansionists in the 1850s and 1860s perceived that settlement would come to Rupert’s Land along the valleys of the Saskatchewan River, even though they were not like the wide alluvial lands along the upper St. Lawrence and lower Great Lakes.28

The idea of the West was inescapably part of Confederation. It would provide an outlet for Ontario, Quebec, and the Maritimes, and would allow the new Dominion to flourish rather than to stagnate, blocked from expansion by cold in the north and by the dynamic United States in the south.
The acquisition of Rupert’s Land and of a Pacific port in British Columbia were necessary to the dream, and British Columbia was induced to join by the promise of a transcontinental railway, which was originally planned to follow the expected settlement path along the Fertile Belt. The 1874 Dominion Land Survey initiated the same kind of instrumental grid survey that was being undertaken across the US West. While the 1850s and 1860s had been relatively dry, the 1870s and 1880s found the prairies in a wet cycle that evoked an optimistic response. John Macoun, the botanist of the survey, was delighted by the prairie flowers and proclaimed the prairies—including the Palliser Triangle and the lands that Hind had found too rocky or alkaline—the best place in the world. His theory of wind patterns suggested that the southern prairies would furnish both enough water and a long-enough frost-free season to ripen crops. The cooler climate, according to Macoun, guaranteed that Canadian settlers would be healthier than those of the United States, while the American desert actually helped build up rains to fall in Canada. Macoun’s creative and wishful thinking, and his enthusiasm for the southern prairies allowed railway builders to consider running the first Canadian transcontinental railway further south, near the US border, rather than north, through the parkland belt.  

One major advantage of the southern route was that it would establish an indisputable Canadian presence in the area and hold the region against American expansion. Canadian fears of American annexation were considerably more realistic than Macoun’s accounts of climate. Prime Minister John A. Macdonald himself, as a young lawyer in Kingston, had witnessed one of the more quixotic of the Fenian raids in 1837 and had served as a lawyer for the doomed Polish dreamer who had led the abortive raid. The American cry of “54°40’ or fight!” had threatened to merge British Columbia with Oregon Territory and gain the entire West Coast for the United States, destroying the possibility of a British polity from sea to sea. The Minnesota Uprising of 1862, when Santee and Yankton Dakota indignation at persistent treaty violations boiled over into a widespread and bloody but uncoordinated attack on non-Native settlers, left between two hundred and eight hundred settlers and soldiers dead, and many times that number demoralized and fleeing from the frontier. Despite the concentration of the US Army on the Civil War in 1862, American soldiers quickly
arrested hundreds of Dakota and mixed-blood men, while many others, with or without their families, fled north to safety. More than three hundred Dakotas were convicted in summary trials, and while Abraham Lincoln did manage to arrange clemency for nearly 90 percent of them, thirty-eight were hanged in the largest mass execution in US history. Ironically, Lincoln, who had begun his public career as an unsuccessful Indian fighter in the Black Hawk War, signed their death warrants the month before he signed the Emancipation Proclamation. The recoil of the US settlement frontier following the Uprising and its aftermath undoubtedly dampened annexationist pressure to go North, but it did not stop it. The Dakota people who claimed and were granted refuge in Canada might have pointed out their ancestors’ part in fighting back the Americans during the War of 1812 and their continuing role as guardians of British territory through scaring away intending American settlers, but they do not seem to have made anything of the issue. Sitting Bull, however, a decade and a half later, would unsuccessfully remind the Crown of its obligations to its 1812 allies.32

Canadian Confederation itself was partly a response to US pressure on Britain to grant its North American colonies to the victorious North in payment of the US government’s claims against Britain for allowing the Confederate ship *Alabama* to raid Union shipping from British ports.33 American Fenians took great interest in the Provisional Government at Red River, formed after the new Dominion government attempted to enter Rupert’s Land before it had been completely ceded by the Hudson’s Bay Company and without the consent of the actual residents of the area. Although Louis Riel, the leader of the Provisional Government, maintained a distance from the Fenians, his Catholicism inclined Ontario annexationists, overwhelmingly Protestant and frequently anti-Catholic, to assume that he was plotting with them. Despite Riel’s steadfast discouragement of Fenian ambitions, there were still ambitious Fenians, and Confederation had not ended US government interest in Canada.34 The US Senate held hearings in 1874 on the possibility of admitting a state to be called Pembina, north of Minnesota.35 An all-Canadian railway route that crossed the Plains near the American border seemed like a prudent anchor against future Pembinas and possibly a permanent barrier to future threats of annexation. Regina’s placement on the bald Saskatchewan prairie at Pile
O’ Bones Creek marked the symbolic demise of the idea that the southern prairies were wasteland and announced that Canada would hold the south for Queen and country.\textsuperscript{36}

While the CPR survey was not complete until shortly before the tracks were laid—quite improbably—through Rogers Pass, the Dominion Land Survey completed the basic mapping, naming, and intellectual incorporation of the Great Plains into a Euro–North American mindset. The lines of longitude and latitude on the maps and the section roads, correction lines ("correcting" the deficient globe for not being square),\textsuperscript{37} and fields apportioned by the square survey on the land itself rendered the curves of rivers and landforms obsolete for describing and judging the land and for proceeding across it. Geography had changed. Euro–North Americans had never doubted that they had inherent rights to settle their people, their animals, and their plants upon the Plains, but they had debated whether or not it was worthy of them. Samuel Aughey, with his theory that rain follows the plough, Lorin Blodgett with his theory that west was just as good as south for providing a long growing season, and John Macoun with his enthusiastic descriptions of and belief in the moderating behaviour of winds and clouds established an argument for settlement.

Native people’s thoughts were irrelevant to both Euro–North American prospective settlers and to their governments. Before the War of 1812, Native peoples had maintained political power by playing off European powers one against the other. The Louisiana Purchase and the Mexican-American War, by removing the French and Spanish from contention for lands the United States wanted to claim, dissolved this strategy on the southern Plains. The War of 1812, by removing the British from the Ohio Valley and all the lands south of the Great Lakes, similarly destroyed the divide-and-conquer (or at least divide-and-resist) strategy in the north. Henceforward, Euro–North American settlers would divide the Great Plains into two co-operating settler nations, and they would neither raise Aboriginal allies against their rival settlers nor invade their rivals’ territories across international borders.

Imperial powers gain their power at least in part by their willingness to spend or risk the lives and welfare of their subjects for the gain of the empire. The subjects, especially where the government has guaranteed
their individual rights, are naturally unwilling to risk their lives and livelihoods in battles in which they stand to lose much and gain little, though appeals to courage, patriotism, and love of adventure will lead individuals and nations to move beyond what prudence would dictate. Americans, it seems, were generally willing to move onto lands granted by treaty to one or more Native nations and then to demand federal help when the invaders very sensibly resented them, but they were not likely to raise warfare against neighbouring whites. Besides, such a course would undercut the implied argument that Euro–North Americans were entitled to the land because they were Christians and because European-style commercial agriculture was a “higher” use of the land than hunting and gathering and riverine horticulture. An agreed-upon boundary line between the United States and Canada, fairly permeable in both directions for Euro–North Americans, was easier to sustain and more satisfactory than Fenian raids or warfare between Euro–North American powers, each with its own Native allies. The massacre of the buffalo, the commissary of Indigenous Plains peoples, coupled with the ease of obtaining, by rail, commercial foodstuffs to support an army in the field meant that Euro–North American settlers and their governments could either defeat Indigenous people militarily or conclude treaties with them that ceded control of the land to the newcomer.