

“LAND SPECULATION AND OTHER PROCESSES IN AMERICAN HISTORICAL GEOGRAPHY”

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From the time that William Bradford and the rest of the Mayflower crew beheld the American continent until the present, when their descendants sometimes gloomily survey it, much has happened. To say the place has changed is an understatement and to conclude it is a product of the “march of history” or “progress” is an oversimplification. “America is process” seems to be the most applicable cliché. While narcissistic self-examinations of the nation will be plentiful this year, perhaps it is appropriate that process rather than events, personalities, or even environmental conditions should receive our attention. Thus, this essay attempts to identify those historical-geographic processes in American development that have given the United States its distinctive characteristics.

CULTURAL HISTORICAL-GEOGRAPHIC PROCESSES

What, then, has taken place in mid-latitude North America continuously over the last two or three hundred years? Which processes (defined here as continua of similar events) have made the landscape of the United States what it is today? Five are suggested here.

The first continuous process in changing the face of the continent is the removal of its former occupants. The story of the acculturation and oftentimes elimination of American Indians needs little elaboration in view of the documentation and narrative already available in quantity.¹ The mappable waves of disease, resource extraction, and socio-legal discrimination in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries represent a process of removal as efficient as the swipe of a hand across a poker table.²

The second major geographic process is also a story retold sometimes at the expense of truth. The subduing of the wilderness in myth and media often over glamorizes the universal and continuous surgery that the continent has experienced since the colonial period.³ The cutting edge of this operation was and is the frontier, real or perceived.⁴ The process is often portrayed

¹ The most sensitive historian of the Indian removal is probably Wilbur R. Jacobs. See “The Indian and the Frontier in American History—A Need for Revision,” *Western Historical Quarterly* (January 1973): 43-56 and *Dispossessing the American Indian: Indians and Whites on the Colonial Frontier* (New York: Scribner, 1972). The impact of the Judeo-Christian ethic upon the Indians is analyzed in “An Indian Plea to Churches,” *Los Angeles Times*, 6 February 1972. Another popular source is Dee Brown, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1971).

² Even though they are mappable, few maps of same have been drawn. Maps of Indian land cessions were made by Charles C. Royce in “Indian Land Cessions in the United States,” *Bureau of American Ethnology, Eighteenth Annual Report* (Washington, 1899).

³ Semipopular reading on the subject includes: Lynn T. White, “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis,” *Science* (10 March 1967): 1203-6; Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (New Haven, 1967); and Hans Huth, *Nature and the American: Three Centuries of Changing Attitudes* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957).

⁴ One cannot discuss the American frontier without having read Frederick Jackson Turner’s essay, “The Frontier in American History,” first presented before a session of the American Historical Association in 1898. It has been reprinted several times in books and journals and has inspired an avalanche of commentary that continues today.

more vividly in literature and folklore than in the scholarly works of historians. We are all “Sons of the Pioneers” even though most Americans were never near the frontier.

The frontier was where the action was. Subduing the wilderness on the frontier included entering an area, building homes, clearing and planting, using pristine resources, launching towns, carrying on trade, introducing industry, and establishing settlement patterns. The frontier permitted several subprocesses to work in developing American culture, some of which are listed by Wilbur Zelinsky:⁵ (1) the selection of individual or cultural traits; (2) the transfer of people and their cultural freight over long distances—a fact which had the effect of weakening components of the group culture and at the same time making new components easier to adopt; (3) the borrowing of cultural traits from the Amerindians; (4) the evolution of American culture through pure chance, interchange with the habitat, socioeconomic processes, and spatial reshuffling—all of which created the beginnings of distinct regions identifiable in spatial and temporal contexts; and (5) the connection of the frontier with the rest of the globe despite problems of transportation and communication.

This notion of national culture, or national character if you will, is, then, a product of the American wilderness experience, direct or vicarious.⁶ The processes of hunting, clearing land, building roads, and mining the earth suggest pioneer characteristics such as self reliance, individualism, thrift, pragmatism, and the work ethic. These are traits we often ascribe to our heroes and to ourselves. They are national characteristics that both Jefferson and Turner attributed to American uniqueness. It can be shown that these traits contributed to the establishment of distinctive regional settlement patterns, such as those of New England, the Corn Belt, and the Mormon region.

The frontier experience also spawned the American extractive mentality. Our infant colonial economy was based on nature’s harvest and domestication of the natural landscape continued the process. Carl Sauer suggested years ago that the United States is one of the most used up countries on the globe.⁷ Expansive utilization of resources is detailed elsewhere in this issue of *The Journal of Geography*. Let it be sufficient to suggest that the frontier experience, the subjugation of the wilderness, and the utilization of resources are intertwined experiences that have left their marks on our national consciousness. They cannot be separated from one another or from the heritage of almost any region, however small, in our country.

A third major geographic-historical process, urbanization, is also described elsewhere in this issue. The process of urbanization has been continual, is of major proportions, and has affected the visual landscapes and spatial patterns of the entire nation.⁸ In addition, the record of several

Material dealing with Turner’s geography is cited in D. G. Holtgrieve, “Frederick Jackson Turner As a Regionalist,” *Professional Geographer* (May 1974): 159-65. The most complete and readable frontier history is Ray A. Billington’s *Westward Expansion*, 3rd ed. (New York: Macmillan Co., 1967).

⁵ Wilbur Zelinsky, *The Cultural Geography of the United States* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1973), pp. 5-9. This long-awaited masterpiece is a treasure of ideas about the historical-cultural development of the United States. See especially its annotated bibliography for a possible lifetime of further study.

⁶ A fine collection of essays dealing with the character of Americans is a book by that title edited by Michael McGiffert (Homewood, Ill.: Dorsey Press, 1970). See also John Gillin, “National and Regional Cultural Values in the United States,” *Social Forces* (December 1955): 107-13.

⁷ Carl O. Sauer, “Theme of Plant and Animal Destruction in Economic History,” in *Land and Life: A Selection from the Writings of Carl Ortwin Sauer*, ed. John Leighly (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), p. 148.

⁸ The volume of material on American urban growth is overwhelming, but John R. Borchert, “American Metropolitan Evolution,” *Geographical Review* (July 1967): 301-22; Lewis Mumford, *The City in History* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1968); and Howard Nelson, “Town Founding and the American Frontier,” *Yearbook*,

American subcultures cannot be understood without consideration of the urban setting. Urbanization, through its secondary effects, has touched even remote areas. The creation of a market for agricultural and other products has sometimes dictated the activities and land uses of rural areas. The development of transportation nets between and within cities has linked all Americans to the urban complex.

A fourth major process traceable to colonial origins and still active (perhaps hyperactive) today is our national quest for efficiency. It is reflected in our architecture, our economic system of production and consumption, and even in our recreational habits. But nowhere is this quest for the efficient more evident than in our transport systems (current AMTRAK scheduling notwithstanding). The saying that “time is money” can easily be extended to read that distance is time, which is money, which in turn is a function of efficiency.

Migration and mobility, George Pierson’s M factor, if seen in a historical perspective, can also be termed a function of our traditional quest for efficiency. The example of migration to labor centers is self-evident. Migrations to other kinds of opportunities and the places they represent are quests for a more efficient (successful) place in society or nature. The forced migrations of black slaves are perhaps the best examples of human movement as the price for efficiency. Vertical mobility might also be considered a function of someone’s perception of the right order of things. Even the notion of change itself has been reflected in the American scene. David Lowenthal has presented a shopping list of examples, identifiable in almost any American community, of places that visually equate change, progress, and efficiency.⁹

Efficiency in the American context often includes expeditious profit making, and when profits are made on land, a fifth historical-geographic process in nation making comes to the fore—land speculation. Indeed, it may be that the single most important process in understanding the settlement geography of the United States involves the obtaining, holding, and selling of land as a commodity. In no other place has so much land changed ownership so many times over such a short period of time. Nowhere else has the exchange of land molded the destinies of provinces, states, cities, and large populations. Nowhere else has Mother Earth been more dissected on surveyors’ maps and in commodity exchanges than in the United States. Since this fifth process also seems to be the least discussed among geographers, it is given some detail in the paragraphs that follow.¹⁰

LAND SPECULATION AS A MAJOR FORCE IN AMERICAN DEVELOPMENT

The new world, from its old world discovery, was a speculation to its explorers, its first colonists, and the kings who sponsored both. All looked upon the new world as a source of

Association of Pacific Coast Geographers (1974), pp. 7-23 are suggested as places to start if the reader has not already done so.

⁹ David Lowenthal, “The American Scene,” *Geographical Review* (January 1968): 61-68.

¹⁰ Standard descriptions of the American land tenure system, the acquisition and disposal of the public domain, and speculation that resulted therefrom are in Vernon Carstensen, ed., *The Public Lands: Studies in the History of the Public Domain* (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1963) Marion Clawson, *The Land System of the United States: An Introduction to the History and Practice of Land Use and Land Tenure* (Lincoln, Nebr.: University of Nebraska Press, 1964); Benjamin H. Hibbard, *A History of the Public Land Policies* (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1965); Roy Robbins, *Our Landed Heritage: The Public Domain, 1776-1936* (Gloucester, Mass.: P. Smith Co. 1960); and Aaron M. Sakolski, *The Great American Land Bubble* (New York: Harper & Row, reprinted 1966).

riches in minerals, furs, fish, and agricultural abundance, supported by the greater resource of land. The land speculator, as Paul Wallace Gates puts it, was as characteristic of the pioneer West “as was the circuit rider, the rail splitter, or the surveyor, and he transcended them all in shaping its land and social patterns.”¹¹ In Ray Allen Billington’s *Westward Expansion*, land speculation is mentioned 52 times throughout all chronological time periods and fills 93 pages.¹² Such national historic figures as Washington, Franklin, Patrick Henry, Daniel Webster, John Fremont, and Stephen Austin were active land dealers on no small scale.

During the first hundred years of the colonial period, land was abundant and labor scarce, so land speculation was not common. Most colonists came to North America for free land, because land was unavailable to them in the old world.¹³ However, when the mercantile system upon which the colonial economy was based became sufficiently successful to demand more land, the westward movement began. It was British policy to convey unoccupied lands to private companies or individuals who undertook their management, settlement, and resale. As people began to fill accessible regions within the colonial charter, the acquisition of large, unsettled tracts for monetary gain became more popular.¹⁴ British policy was unable to keep settlers on the east side of frontier proclamation lines, and several major sections of colonial Virginia, New England, New York, Pennsylvania, and the Ohio country were being subdivided by speculators by 1775. The great American land rush was underway even before the Revolution.¹⁵

Upon the founding of the new American Republic, one of the first problems faced by the government was the formulation of a land settlement policy. Hamilton’s plan was to gather quick returns even if speculators would also profit greatly from land sales. Jefferson, on the other hand, recommended a free or low-priced land policy to make available small parcels for the benefit of the small farmer.¹⁶ The Jefferson ideal was never realized. Costs of transportation to the frontier; costs of tools and equipment; sometimes adverse political, religious, or ethnic opinions; and the need for the new government to raise revenue all worked against the possibility that the poor migrant settler from the city would ever get “free” land.

Culminating in a frantic land boom in 1836, town jobbing and other forms of speculative activity were rampant from Maine to Texas, but particularly in the Old Northwest after the ordinances of 1784, 1785, and 1787. Between 1830 and 1837 cities appeared on maps and in the minds of investors on an unprecedented scale. Here raged “Michigan fever,” as land speculation in the Northwest Territory was called. Also not to be ignored were timberland speculations in Maine, town jobbing in Louisiana, and wholesale American settlement in Texas.

The first half of the nineteenth century was characterized by continuing struggles between settlers and land speculators over the terms of federal land sales. The speculator favored large parcels near developed or populated areas, whereas the settler asked for small parcels at low prices near the frontier. Both were accommodated through a series of land laws and policies that can be listed only partially here. These laws and policies included warrants for military service,

¹¹ Paul Wallace Gates, “Land Policy and Tenancy in the Prairie States,” *Journal of Economic History* (January 1941): 60-82. Gates, an acknowledged national expert in land speculation processes, has compiled most of his ideas in a new book, *Landlords and Tenants on the Prairie Frontier: Studies in Land Policy* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University, 1973).

¹² Billington, *Westward Expansion*.

¹³ Sakolski, *Great American Land Bubble*, p. 2 and Clawson, *Land System*, p. 14.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Billington, *Westward Expansion*, pp. 144-47.

¹⁶ Gates, “Land Policy”: 62, 72 and Mark Irving, “The Homestead Ideal and Conservation of the Public Domain,” *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 22 (1963): 263.

direct sales, preemption, and outright grants for special purposes. Until the passage of the Preemption Act in 1841 (giving squatters a means to pay for and legalize their homes), speculation was active in all parts of the country. Thereafter, speculative activity became rather restricted in region and in time span as old lands were filled and new lands opened to settlement.

Many regional growth patterns were stimulated by federal land grants to states for a variety of purposes, including education and reclamation.¹⁷ These lands were usually sold in turn by the states as sources of revenue, and many times they fell into the hands of land promoter-developers. Much of the Central Valley in California and the Mississippi delta were disposed of under the swamp land grants, a convenient example of the process. But, of course, the most notorious and criticized grants went to transportation companies as subsidies for railroads, wagon roads, and canals.

The Homestead Act (1862) and its successors were attempts to counteract criticism of the practice of granting large parcels with resultant speculation. intended to relieve unemployment in cities and to increase the number of family farms, the homestead acts nevertheless turned out, in most cases, to be vehicles for promoters, speculators, and land jobbers.¹⁸ Other land giveaways such as the Timber Culture Act of 1873, the Desert Land Act of 1877, and the Timber and Stone Act of 1878 were abused partly out of greed and partly because the laws were not appropriate for semiarid conditions in the far West.¹⁹

In all, 1,031 million of the 1,904 million acres in the 48 contiguous states were acquired and then disposed of as part of the public domain.²⁰ Cash sales and a variety of miscellaneous methods accounted for the disposal of 300 million acres, of which one-third passed directly to speculators. (The term *speculator* does not refer to the farmer who speculated in a small way.) Homesteads totaled 285 million acres with about one-half going to speculators, especially under provisions of the extended homestead act, the stock-raising homestead act, and the Kinkaid Act. Grants to states amounted to 225 million acres, almost all of which went into speculation sales. Railroad grants accounted for 91 million acres, most of which were disposed of through speculative land dealing. Military bounty land warrants (90 million acres) and timber culture entries (35 million acres) were for the most part also acquired and disposed of by speculators. In summary, over one-half of the land disposed of by the federal government in the history of this country went through the hands of professional land dealers before it was occupied.

While a review of the amounts and areas of speculative activities is enlightening, a more important purpose of this essay is to seek an understanding of the effects of land speculation on the geographic patterns of the land. The most obvious effect of land speculation is the survey

¹⁷ Details about land grants to states are in Robbins, *Our Landed Heritage*, and in several essays in Carstensen, *Public Lands*.

¹⁸ Two essays by Paul Wallace Gates point out the deficiencies of the homestead idea. They are: "The Role of the Land Speculator in Western Development," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* (July 1942): 314-33 and "The Homestead Law in an Incongruous Land System," *American Historical Review* (July 1936): 652-81.

¹⁹ John Wesley Powell's *Report on the Lands of the Arid Regions of the United States* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, reprinted 1962) and Walter Prescott Webb's *The Great Plains* (New York: Ginn and Co., 1931) include excellent examples of eastern versus western land use and the adequacy of laws pertaining to these uses. See also Isaiah Bowman, *The Pioneer Fringe* (New York, 1931).

²⁰ Clawson, *Land System*, pp. 65, 87, and 93; Hibbard, *History of Public Land Policies*, p. 570; Robbins, *Our Landed Heritage*; Carstensen, *Public Lands*, pp. 481, 484; and Gates, "Homestead Law." However, no one has figured the exact acreage that was turned over at least once by speculators. The estimates offered here are thus far as close as anyone has come.

system that was used to divide the bounty of new territorial acquisitions.²¹ The purpose of the American rectangular land survey method was to systemize land transactions, and it was very successful. A glance at any midwestern topographic map will illustrate the impact this system had, all in the interests of effective deed recording regardless of topographic features and soil quality. Today our political boundaries, county roads, and plat maps reflect surveyor's notes and land office records. The speculator's role in the survey system was to select prime lands ahead of settlement so that many of the first homesteaded farms in an area were on less than prime land. This was especially possible where railroad grants contained in-lieu clauses allowing company officials to select lands in lieu of lands that, for one reason or another, were not available along rights-of-way.

The total effect of the combination of the survey system itself and the generous proportions of land allowed by the system was to disperse pioneer settlement. (In the East, family land holdings of 160 acres were often twice as large as could be practically farmed.) The dispersal of settlement increased costs for roads, ferries, and other public improvements. The result was either higher taxes or a slowing of regional development. However, in parts of the West the speculative process prevented acquisition of homesteads that would have been much too small for successful semiarid land cultivation. This may be considered a positive effect of land speculation.²²

Extensive land holdings sometimes resulted in occupancy patterns that were less than ideal. A case in point is where ownership by a few necessitated the tenancy of many.²³ Tenants paid the taxes on land being held for resale at a later time. Capital improvements on such farmlands were minimal. The result was, again, the overall slowing of regional development.

As mentioned previously, it was in the creation of urban settlements that the speculator-promoter was most active and had a most lasting effect. The stories of Chicago, Washington, Seattle, and San Francisco cannot be told without reference to the aggressive promotion of these places by land dealers. In like manner, hundreds of towns and lesser cities were created as promotional developments. The promoter's first key gamble was his choice of a location for his town. Although the odds were as much as ten to one against him, the town promoter was aggressive in disseminating sales information, sometimes on a global scale, and in obtaining necessary transportation access. The railroads, therefore, often had a life-and-death control over budding urban places where water transport was not handy.²⁴ Railroad owners exerted this control by promoting or starving a town as they felt the need or by starting alternative towns of their own. Indeed, some entire town populations relocated due to the railroad's control of local regional destinies.

Another urban promotional technique involved competition for county seats, state universities, or other such means of assured population and income. This would often result in

²¹ William D. Pattison. *Beginnings of the American Rectangular Land Survey System, 1784-1800* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1957) and Norman Thrower, *Original Survey and Land Subdivision: A Comparative Study of the Form and Effect of Contrasting Cadastral Surveys* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1966).

²² Gates, "Role of the Land Speculator," p. 316 and Bowman, *Pioneer Fringe*.

²³ Gates, "Land Policy." This study gives specific examples in Iowa that effectively illustrate the same effect elsewhere.

²⁴ Examples of railroad activities as they affected town growth are in D. G. Holtgrieve, "The Effects of the Railroads on Small Town Population Changes: Linn County, Oregon," *Yearbook*, Association of Pacific Coast Geographers (1973), pp. 87-102. See also Leslie F. Decker, "The Great Speculation: An Interpretation of Mid-Continent Pioneering," in *The Frontier in American Development*, ed. D. M. Ellis (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University, 1965), pp. 337-80.

the development of one community into a “central place” while its competitors languished. It is interesting to speculate on how some urban regional networks would have evolved if it not been for certain whims, political decisions, or bribes by nineteenth century town promoters.

Transportation companies, particularly railroads, also could use their grant lands to the disadvantage of the small farmer. What Frank Norris described in *The Octopus* may have been unique to California, but throughout most of the nineteenth century far western railroads were able to encourage their own subsidiary companies into large-scale farming, lumbering, teamstering, and banking to the disadvantage of small operations. Critical evaluations of such practices are still inconsistent among economic historians, but implications for regional development should not be ignored.²⁵

Speculation by timber companies has also had an enormous effect on landscapes. Lands in the lake states, the gulf states and Arkansas, and in the Pacific coast states were open to entry by speculators with available warrants and scrip at depreciated prices due to passage of the homestead acts; in addition, fraudulent “dummy” entries were possible under the Timber and Stone Act of 1878.²⁶ Some of the largest claims on record were entered to acquire hundreds of thousands of the choicest land in the redwood districts of California. Similar cases of speculation can be cited with respect to mineral lands and, to a lesser extent, grazing lands. The result was land erosion due to lumbering and overgrazing on a scale that only federal funds and 60 years of intensive management have been able to reverse.

Cultural impacts of land speculation in America are often less visual than overgrazed range or timber-cleared mountains, but are nonetheless important. For example, the acculturation of the Spanish Southwest and California was in part accelerated by squatters on Mexican land grants.²⁷ As with “Spanish grants” in the Louisiana Territory, the political and legal entanglements of American occupation invited fraud and villainy. “In all the new states of the Union, land monopolization has gone on at an alarming rate,” wrote Henry George, “but in none of them as fast as in California, and in none of them, perhaps, are the evil effects so manifest.”²⁸ The combination of land development promotions, railroad activities, and gold rush-induced immigration made conditions difficult to cope with for the Golden State’s population by the 1880s. Grant lands were sub-divided for taxes or legal fees, and the Spanish-speaking population was at a considerable disadvantage in competing with Yankee business tradition and practice.²⁹

Interestingly enough, some former Mexican lands were held intact after they were purchased by Americans. These lands were not the object of speculation but were converted into estates of the very rich and powerful. However, most of these estates were parceled into smaller units and sold in the twentieth century as housing tracts.

Other cases of cultural conflict as the result of speculative activities are seen in various transactions with Indians. The procedure was essentially the same in dealing with most tribes. After a treaty was signed, tribal organizations fell easy prey to wily land agents who sought out a

²⁵ See, for example, Albert Fishlow, *American Railroads and the Transformation of the Ante-Bellum Economy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University 1965) and Robert Fogal, *Railroads and Economic Growth: Essays in Economic History* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins Press, 1967).

²⁶ Hibbard, *History of Public Land Policies*, pp. 466-68 and Gates, “Homestead Law,” p. 667.

²⁷ Example of this effect may be found in P. H. Leonard, *The Decline of the Californios* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968).

²⁸ Henry George, *Our Land and Land Policy, National and State* (San Francisco, 1871), p. 13.

²⁹ W. W. Robinson, *Land in California* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1948) describes these events in full.

few selfish chiefs, bribed them into ceding the tribe's lands, and then forced the population to move westward.³⁰

Other miscellaneous effects of land speculation, many positive, were reclamation and landfill projects such as in Florida and California as a result of the swamp lands acts; the construction of roads, railroads, canals, and other public works projects; the creation of land grant colleges and universities; and the creation of a strong political conservation movement as a backlash against speculators' misuse of resources.

Some results of land speculation activities remain to be evaluated. For example, it is not yet known how much internal American migration was caused by the promises of land promoters or by such living conditions as tenancy that they brought about.³¹ Certainly mobility was a characteristic of pioneer settlers, many of whom sold their preemption claim or homestead at a profit as soon as title was obtained and moved westward to homestead again. In fact, this writer suggests that most homesteaders and other public land claimants were small-time speculators with full intentions of "selling out" for a profit as soon as possible.³² The Jeffersonian ideal of a homogeneous, settled agricultural population throughout the land was probably not shared by many prairie or western farmers, even if the idea was somewhat accepted in the East during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Some effects of the speculative process are noticeable only in a specific region but are worthy of consideration. Speculation in colonial New England caused differences in economic status or class as the number of newcomers to a town increased. A group of original proprietors controlled the undivided lands, later arrivals or "freemen" owned smaller fields granted to them, and laborers or "cottagers" built huts on unwanted land.³³ Political voice was reflected in this system also. In New England, but not exclusively there, Indian wars were started with wholesale land acquisition as the motive. In the Piedmont colonies (also elsewhere to a lesser extent) westward movement was retarded by confused surveys as a result of hurried speculative activity.³⁴ Over speculation also retarded the settlement and development of the Mohawk Valley in New York. Much of western New York and Pennsylvania was purchased by European speculators who, unlike American businessmen operating on a shoestring, developed the land with roads, stores, mills, and waterways. Here the speculative spirit promoted settlement rather than retarded it. The systematic colonization of Texas by Americans was one of the greatest speculative plans of all and resulted in Texas's independence and eventual acquisition by the United States. The story is one of impresarios building an empire from grants and sales on a grand scale that seems possible only in Texas.³⁵

As with the other historical-geographic processes described, the "land office business" is not finished. Today one out of eleven Californians has a real estate license, and there are almost a million real estate salespersons in the country.³⁶ A visit to parts of Arizona, Oregon, Florida, or

³⁰ Billington, *Westward Expansion*, p. 316.

³¹ Beginning studies in this area are: James B. Hedges, "Promotion of Immigration to the Pacific Northwest by the Railroads," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* (September 1928): 1-31 and Richard C. Overton, *Burlington West: A Colonization History of the Burlington Railroad* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 1941).

³² An examination of the manuscript censuses of 1850, 1860, 1870, and 1880 for selected parts of Oregon showed a turnover in population of over 40 percent per decade and over 95 percent for the total period.

³³ Billington, *Westward Expansion*, p. 70.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

³⁵ A geographic version of the Texas story is in D. W. Meinig's *Imperial Texas* (Austin, Tex.: University of Texas Press, 1969).

³⁶ Correspondence with the National Association of Real Estate Licensing and Law Officials, 1975.

Hawaii will convince the nonbeliever that speculation in land for a profit is far from extinct. A contemporary handbook on the subject exhorts, “unless someone repeals the law of supply and demand, productive agricultural land is one of the best long-range investments on the market.”³⁷

CONCLUSION

“A distinction of the United States,” historian John Caughey pointed out, “is its unmatched opportunity to build from the ground up a people and a nation.”³⁸ The participants had some choice in the techniques and processes that they would use in building this nation. Some of these processes have been suggested here in hopes of aiding in a national stocktaking by present citizens. Such a national self-examination may uncover road signs for further exploration of national developmental processes on either end of the time continuum, past or future.

Let it be noted, however, that the five processes presented here are incomplete, and by no means are all possible processes included. For example, the roles of the explorers, their routes, the physical wonders they discovered, and the social-political results of their findings have not been mentioned, even though exploration and discovery is certainly a geographic process. In like manner, more needs to be said about specific regional groups as they contributed to the “homogeneous” American personality of the 1970s as seen on the evening news.

Lastly, it remains for the processes of acculturation, subjugation of nature, urbanization, the quest for economic and cultural efficiency, and land-use decision making to be ranked in importance with reference to the future and for other processes to be identified as they become apparent to geographers or other students of the United States.

³⁷ Harold L. Oppenheimer, *Land Speculation* (Danville, Ill.: Interstate, 1972).

³⁸ John Caughey, “The Insignificance of the Frontier in American History,” *Western Historical Quarterly* (January 1974): 5-16.