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978-0-521-73633-6 - Beyond Nations: Evolving Homelands in the North Atlantic World, 1400-2000

John R. Chavez

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BEYOND NATIONS
EVOLVING HOMELANDS IN THE
NORTH ATLANTIC WORLD, 1400–2000

Beyond Nations traces the evolution of “peripheral” ethnic homelands around the North Atlantic, from before transoceanic contact to their current standing in the world political system. For example, “Megumaage,” homeland of the Micmac is transformed into the French colony of Acadia, then into the British colony of Nova Scotia, and subsequently into the present Canadian province. John R. Chávez tracks the role of colonialism in the transformation of such lands, but especially the part played by federalism in moving beyond the national, ethnic, and racial conflicts resulting from imperialism.

Significantly, Chávez gives attention to the effects of these processes on the individual mind, arguing that historically federalism has permitted the individual to sustain and balance varying ethnic loyalties regionally, nationally, and globally. *Beyond Nations* concludes with a discussion of an evolving global imagination that takes into account migrations, borderlands, and transnational communities in an increasingly postcolonial and postnational world.

John R. Chávez is currently Professor of History at Southern Methodist University. He is the author of *The Lost Land: The Chicano Image of the Southwest* (1984), which earned him a Pulitzer Prize nomination. Among his other works are *Memories and Migrations: Mapping Boricua and Chicana Histories* (2008), which he coedited with Vicki Ruiz, and *Eastside Landmark: A History of the East Los Angeles Community Union* (1998).

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

*A Lori, mi querida esposa,
La madre de nuestra familia cósmica*

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Los primeros . . . de esta provincia de Tlaxcala . . . porblaron sin defensa ni resistencia alguna, porque hallaron estas tierras inhabitadas y despobladas.

Y estando . . . en su quieta paz . . . llegaron los Chichimecas sediciosos y crueles con la sedienta ambición, últimos pobladores y conquistadores de esta provincia.

– Muñoz Camargo

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1400-2000

John R. Chavez

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

CONTENTS

<i>List of Illustrations</i>	page viii
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xi
<i>Preface</i>	xiii
Introduction: Images of Concentric Community	i
1. Native American Images of Community	14
2. Visions of Homeland in Europe and Africa	39
3. Designs for Transatlantic Empire	66
4. Envisioning Nations	95
5. Conceiving Federations	125
6. Imperial Designs Revived	154
7. Postcolonial Visions	184
8. Supranational Conceptions	213
Conclusion: Postnational Visions – Imagined Federations	245
<i>List of Works Cited</i>	255
<i>Index</i>	281

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-73633-6 - Beyond Nations: Evolving Homelands in the North Atlantic World, 1400-2000

John R. Chavez

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Figures

- | | | |
|----|---|----------------|
| 1. | A View of Bassa Cove in Liberia, Mid-Nineteenth Century | <i>page xv</i> |
| 2. | Castillo de San Cristobal (1783), Boulevard Norzagaray, San Juan, Puerto Rico | 247 |

Maps

- | | | |
|--------|--|-----|
| 1.1. | Some Peoples around the North Atlantic | 3 |
| 1.1.1. | Megumaage or Migmagi, Homeland of the Micmac | 16 |
| 1.2. | The Aztec Empire with Present Mexican State Lines in the Background, and Inset of Early Tlaxcala | 34 |
| 2.1. | The Traditional Provinces of Ireland | 42 |
| 2.2. | The Core of the Basque Country with Sancho the Great's Kingdom, c. 1032-3, in the Background | 52 |
| 3.1. | The Almoravid Empire, c. 1100, with the Canary Islands and Senegambia | 70 |
| 3.2. | The Present Caribbean with Inset of Provinces of Quisqueya | 75 |
| 4.1. | The Longhouse of the Hodenosaunee, Seventeenth Century | 100 |
| 4.2. | The Present Departments of Brittany | 105 |
| 5.1. | Traditional and Later Cherokee Homelands | 136 |
| 5.2. | Northeastern Mexico, c. 1830 | 139 |

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-73633-6 - Beyond Nations: Evolving Homelands in the North Atlantic World,
1400-2000

John R. Chavez

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

ix

6.1. Indigenous Lands of Sierra Leone and Colonial Settlements of Liberia, c. 1850	156
6.2. Pre-Colonial States of Senegal, c. 1850	157
7.1. Northwest Africa, c. 1900	186
7.2. Acadia, Nova Scotia by the Early Eighteenth Century	206
8.1. Tejano Southwest Texas, 2000	230
8.2. Nunavut, Nunavik, and Quebec, 2000	233
C.1. The Economic Community of West African States	250

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-73633-6 - Beyond Nations: Evolving Homelands in the North Atlantic World,
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John R. Chavez

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

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As a synthesis based on secondary and published primary sources, *Beyond Nations* rests heavily on the works of many authors from whom I have borrowed. My deepest hope is that my words will do them justice and spread their ideas ever more widely. My book also rests on information provided by national and international repositories, information now more readily accessible than ever; thus, for their assistance my thanks go out to the anonymous staffs of the many libraries I used online and through interlibrary loan. Of course, I still spent time between bookshelves at many public and private collections in the United States and abroad, but especially in California and Texas, states at opposite ends of my ethnic region, the Mexican American borderlands. Almost every summer I return to California State University, Los Angeles, my

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-73633-6 - Beyond Nations: Evolving Homelands in the North Atlantic World,
1400-2000

John R. Chavez

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

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Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-73633-6 - Beyond Nations: Evolving Homelands in the North Atlantic World,
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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

PREFACE

Born of an “Anglo” mother of Scotch-Irish-Cajun descent and a “Chicano” father of Indian-Spanish-African ancestry, my children are citizens of the United States, which clearly defines their legal status as “Americans.” But what are they ethnically? Mexican Americans? Hispanics? Euro-Americans? And where do they belong? Born in California and Texas, they seem to belong to the Southwest, but with roots running to Mexico, Spain, and Africa by way of myself, and to Canada, France, and Britain by way of their mother, my wife. Are they then more deeply children of the North Atlantic World? The answers to these questions might be reached objectively, through social science, but ultimately the questions are human, more readily answered subjectively. Within the broad margins of their history and culture, my son and daughter must discover and ultimately decide who they are and where they belong.

Naturally, being a father, I would like to offer some guidance. The present book, *Beyond Nations: Evolving Homelands in the North Atlantic World, 1400–2000*, should help my children find and construct their identities within local homelands and global communities, within distinct ethnicities, yet within a common humanity. For example, they might want to follow their maternal grandfather’s French ancestry, by way of the Acadians to Canada’s Atlantic Coast. Obliging, this book traces Megumaage, homeland of the Micmac nation, transformed into the French colony of Acadia, then to the British colony of Nova Scotia, and finally to the Canadian province of the latter name. But the book also tracks the evolution of other homelands and communities that made the North Atlantic World coherent historically; it tracks them

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John R. Chavez

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

xiv

PREFACE

from their sociopolitical positions prior to transoceanic contact to their current standing among the nations in which my children and the rest of us live.

Besides my family reasons for taking on this project, there were of course academic reasons as well. Along with other Chicano historians, I have consistently maintained that Mexican Americans deserved a history of themselves more comprehensive than traditional immigrant narratives. In my previous work, I have thus argued for recognition of their native ties to the southwestern United States, Mexico's lost northern borderlands – ties bound and severed through colonialism and empire. But these themes were clearly not unique to the Southwest, and I was interested in applying the lessons of Chicano historiography to a larger stage. I wished to examine certain theories and methods used in that field, particularly colonial thought, by illustrating them in narrative form to see how they applied on a global scale. According to this thought, colonialism (often conflated with “imperialism”) is the process through which many if not most peoples have confronted each other around the world. Colonial theorists argue that, through this process, one people for its own benefit dominates another, usually including the latter's land. Formal colonialism is the acknowledged governing system utilized by empires in the provinces, but it has deeper economic, cultural, and social processes. Because colonialism has played such an historic role in the evolution of the Atlantic World, *Beyond Nations* traces the role of imperialism in the development of homelands, but especially the part played by federalism in resolving the ethnic and national conflicts created by centuries of migration, conquest, and settlement. In the broadest sense federalism is a system in which autonomous units, usually local, regional, and national, share power. Historically, federalism has generally permitted individuals and ethnic groups to sustain and balance varying loyalties regionally, nationally, and even globally.

In terms of method, I attempt to tell history from the geographical fringes to reveal more about lesser known peoples and places on the edges of the mainstream. (See Figure 1.) My chapters highlight the homelands on the margins of central states (e.g., Ireland rather than England, Tlaxcala rather than the Aztec Empire). By comparing ethnic regions rather than national states, I further deemphasize the major countries of Europe and North America in the narrative in an effort to show that peoples have often had tighter emotional ties to such regions than to such states. Methodologically, I also attempt to clarify

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)



Figure 1. A View of Bassa Cove in Liberia, Mid-Nineteenth Century. Lithography by Lehman and Duval. Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

and elaborate colonial theory by illustrating it in narrative form, setting the stage geographically and following the processes and events chronologically.

Because of my personal Chicano perspective, *Beyond Nations* does touch on my ethnic group and its region, to examine how Mexican Americans fit among others in a larger world. However, my ultimate reason for writing this book is for my readers to recognize that even as we appreciate our diversity, we should value the ideas that have peacefully united peoples and places over time. After all, this is a book for future generations.