



**SO FAR AND YET SO CLOSE: FRONTIER CATTLE RANCHING IN WESTERN PRAIRIE CANADA AND THE NORTHERN TERRITORY OF AUSTRALIA**  
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## THE SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

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Notwithstanding their differences in everything from climate and ecology to the size of their leases and their start-up costs, the big cattle operations in these two new hinterlands were strikingly similar in important respects. Along with the open range approach, the most obvious attribute they shared was the craft of the cowboy. As the industry unfolded in both places their respective labour forces developed almost identical skills simply because the jobs they had to perform were essentially the same. Where the range was “huge, and fenceless . . . the year’s mustering and branding” was “no simple task” on either end of the globe. Cattle were “scattered through a couple of thousand square miles of scrub and open timbered country,” and therefore each section needed to be “gone over again and again” during the summer season, each mob, or herd, “travelled to the nearest yard and branded.”<sup>1</sup> Every cowboy or stockman had his work to attend to, “but every one’s work was concerned with cattle.”<sup>2</sup> The men who tended the stock were predominantly young, and they were all able to spend a considerable part of their life riding the vast ranges. They could handle a rope, work on calves with branding iron and knife, and, while glued to the back of a rugged and fast moving horse, cut out semiferal steers “culling each mob of its prime bullocks” and then droving or trailing them off to market.<sup>3</sup>

The following description of a day’s activities during muster in the Tableland region indicates a communal effort just like that utilized by ranchers on the North American continent. The trail boss



ROUNDUP CREW, COCHRANE AREA ALBERTA, CA. 1890. GLENBOW ARCHIVES, CALGARY, NA-2084-66.

gave his orders for strategic gathering of the far scattered mobs. Some of the party sent out to the right, others to the left, a few more up and down the various creeks and all in due time concentrating with their mustered stock to a certain cattle camp where the “cutting out” or drafting on horses, would take place. With the exception of the small horse paddock at the homestead, there were practically no fences. . . . So it might be that attending the musterings of “Lake Nash” there would be stockmen from other stations far and near – from “Headingly,” “Austral Downs,” “Avon Downs,” and “Rocklands” – all taking the opportunity to collect their wandered cattle. After the midday lunch, the active work of “cutting out” would commence. Special horses were kept solely for this purpose. They were animals, frequently, possessing exceptional adaptability for the work. These steeds, cat-like

in their activity, would wheel around as on a pivot, baulking all efforts of the drafted beast to return to the mob. An unusually wild and speedy young bullock would frequently test the camp horse's cleverness at every point – turning, twisting, propping – sometimes charging, but the horse, like lightning, meeting and countering every move, till at last the defeated steer joined the small drafted mob.<sup>4</sup>

When that part of the process was completed it was time for “the drive to the branding yards and there the breaking away of scores of big calves, the chasing, rounding up and final yarding at sundown.”

At that point Territorial practices diverged slightly from those used in North America. Once the calves were corralled with their mothers, it was usual in Canada and throughout the American plains for cowboys to rope them from horseback and hold them by wrapping or “dallying” the rope around the saddle horn. Men on foot would then wrestle the young animals to the ground and perform the necessary operation(s):

The scene is one of the greatest confusion. The ropers, spurring and checking the fierce little horses, drag the calves up so quickly that a dozen men can hardly hold them; the men with the irons, blackened with soot, run to and fro; the calf-wrestlers, grimy with blood, dust, and sweat, work like beavers; while with the voice of a stentor the tallyman shouts out the number and sex of each calf. The dust rises in clouds, and the shouts, cheers, curses, and laughter of the men unite with the lowing of the cows and the frantic bleating of the roped calves to make a perfect babel.<sup>5</sup>

The Australian stockmen did not normally rope from the saddle.<sup>6</sup> When gathering the cattle they carried a stock whip instead of a “lasso,” or “lariat,” which was longer than the heavier, more compact “quirt” the early Texan cowboys had carried. The stockmen would crack their whip over the heads of the cattle as they rode along behind them to encourage them to keep moving. When they had the cattle penned up they would use one of two methods to treat the calves: either a man would simply walk among them, cast a rope over their heads one at a time and with the help



CHARLIE RUSSELL PAINTING OF MEN ROPING CATTLE ON THE OPEN RANGE. “THE HERD QUITTER,” (WIKIMEDIA COMMONS, [HTTP://COMMONS.WIKIMEDIA.ORG/WIKI/FILE:HERDQUIT.JPG](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:HerdQuit.jpg)).

of a couple of his fellow stockmen, throw them to the ground;<sup>7</sup> or the men would chase several calves into a long narrow log chute or “race” they had previously constructed and operate on them through the rails.<sup>8</sup>

There were some trivial differences of dress as well. For instance, down under riders wore the traditional Australian “cabbage-tree” hat instead of the somewhat broader rimmed cowboy hat or sombrero and, often, knee-high English-style riding boots rather than what was known as the cowboy boot in North America.<sup>9</sup>

The open range system not only made *nearly* all the same skills of the cowboy and conventions of the range necessary in these two regions, it also helped to provide for the development of a similar way of life. It enabled a rugged, largely masculine culture and fostered a rather cavalier attitude among ranchers, station managers, and stock hands towards the law and what were considered civilized standards of behaviour. In making that point, this chapter will signal what is not widely recognized – that this was economically destructive, primarily because it subjected the roaming cattle to the constant depredations of thieves.<sup>10</sup> It would be

difficult to determine in which country rustling, or as the Australians called it, “duffing,” was the more destructive, because in the frontier setting so much that was illegal went undetected and unrecorded.

Four circumstances were key to allowing an unruly lifestyle to take hold in the two regions: the relative weakness of legal authority, gender imbalance, the coming together of disparate racial-cultural groups, and unfenced ranges.<sup>11</sup> All of these were, to a considerable degree, man-made, or at least man-controlled, and in that sense, a reflection of social rather than what might be called natural forces. An examination of their impact thus allows the historian to illustrate the importance of the social environment in moulding human conduct on the frontier. Ever since Henry Reynolds in 1981 provided evidence of Anglo brutality towards Australian Aborigines, frontier scholars have tended to argue about whether or not it happened rather than explaining it.<sup>12</sup> The present chapter indirectly supports the Reynolds side in the course of shedding light on why the bloodletting was widespread, but it also indicates that brazen racism and cold-heartedness were only part of the story. The frontier encouraged people to violate so-called legal and moral “standards” in numerous ways. Consequently, the expansion of what James Belich has termed the “Anglo-world” was bound to be a relatively unruly affair almost everywhere during the early settlement period, with or without racial strife.<sup>13</sup>

To say as much is not to insist that western Canadian and northern Australian societies were *necessarily* less law abiding and orderly than any specific other societies. Nor is it to suggest that one of them was less so than the other. It is merely to indicate that a large percentage of the people had a tendency to ignore legal rules and traditional moral values, and that can, to a significant extent, be attributed to social forces associated with the frontier. The first of the above-mentioned circumstances – the weakness of legal authority – was primarily the product of a sparse population base. When the number of people inhabiting remote areas was still comparatively small, tax revenues were meagre and governments were loath to invest much in them financially. For that reason, they tended to call on a handful of under-equipped lawmen to exercise some control over huge tracts of land while at the same time fulfilling numerous other functions besides keeping the peace. In Alberta and Assiniboia, on average about 500 men patrolled nearly 500,000 square miles for most of the period between 1874 and 1914, while at the same time constructing their own

living facilities, hauling firewood, feeding and caring for their mounts, protecting the civilian population from prairie fires and winter blizzards, and providing state services normally offered by specialized agencies in more mature societies. These included delivering mail, collecting weather data, and providing medical aid.

While Australia's Northern Territory was under the administrative control of South Australia, the government seems constantly to have been aware of the need to keep costs down. One result was that from 1874 to 1910 the entire 515,733 square miles of the Territory had a police force that at its peak numbered a mere 48 men.<sup>14</sup> True, the official non-Native population was never more than a fraction of that of western Canada. Still the Northern Territory police, like their counterparts on the northern Great Plains, had a substantial Native population to contend with and also hundreds of thousands of widely scattered cattle, horses, and sheep to try to protect from human predation. As sheep numbers dropped from 100,000 to half that number from the late 1880s onward, cattle numbers rose from 200,000 to well over 600,000, and horses from 8,000 to 24,500.<sup>15</sup> The South Australian censuses of 1891 and 1901 *estimated* that there were 21,000 and 23,000 Aborigines respectively in the Northern Territory. They said nothing of the offspring of Native–non-Native unions.<sup>16</sup>

The supervisors at the major police headquarters at Palmerston (later Port Darwin) and Borroloola, on the McArthur River about thirty miles inland from the Gulf of Carpentaria, commonly lamented the dearth of good men as well as deficiencies of everything from magistrates to jails and weapons.<sup>17</sup> "It is quite impossible" for us to do our work "efficiently unless there is a reinforcement of another constable and a couple of extra [Native] trackers," the chief at Borroloola wrote in 1888. He then complained bitterly about the general state of his unit's weaponry. It was "most unfair to constables stationed here where not only the . . . [Natives], but some of the white population were ready to take life without compunction, to palm off upon them any sort of old and indifferent firearms. Two mails ago I sent my revolver to Palmerston, asking that I might have a reliable one returned in place of it, and I was surprised to find . . . that instead of a good revolver arriving I was allotted one of those already at the station." All of these guns "except one" were "useless" and the one that was not useless was "most unreliable as it frequently misses fire." He

claimed that on a recent patrol he had actually been obliged to borrow a revolver from one of the other men in order to defend himself.<sup>18</sup>

The Australian “troopers” were also required to perform a great number of duties over and above keeping order and defending the law.<sup>19</sup> In the beginning they too built and maintained their own stations, living quarters, and stockyards and saw to the care and feeding of their mounts; and as time passed they manned a bewildering assortment of official positions. They regularly served as clerks of the courts; bailiffs and assistant bailiffs; clerks of the licensing bench; registrars of births, deaths, and marriages; registrars of dogs; commissioners for affidavits; labour bureau agents; insurers of miner’s rights; fisheries inspectors; insurers of Aboriginal rations; brand inspectors; stock inspectors; slaughterhouse inspectors; inspectors of public houses; Rabbit Act inspectors;<sup>20</sup> public vaccinators; jailers; Crown lands rangers; electoral registrars; and destitute department officers. William R. Wilson concludes that police force members’ lives were uneventful and even tedious for much of the time.<sup>21</sup> That may well have been because they were too often preoccupied with routine administrative duties to patrol the cattle ranges or track down criminals. Time and again, local residents accused them of acting more like civil bureaucrats than police officers. “Can you inform me if the Police Force of the Northern Territory do any duty at all?” one asked. “Here we are with five or six great hulking fellows lolling about, doing nothing, and day after day the inhabitants are losing their property without the slightest check being attempted.”<sup>22</sup>

Gender imbalance was a fact of life in both of these frontier communities. On the northern Great Plains of North America, single young men, most of whom worked on the cattle ranches, outnumbered women in general by a ratio of around two to one and they spent the vast majority of their time without any female company.<sup>23</sup> As such they were subject to what Professor Belich calls “crew culture.” They could work hard and co-operate closely when on the job but, equally, they drank heavily and tended to be excessive and raucous in their recreation.<sup>24</sup> As a Montanan put it, “when paid their habit was to immediately ride off” to the nearest town or city “and spend all they had on drinking and gambling and having a right good time. They returned after every dollar had been squandered and started piling up for the next orgy.”<sup>25</sup> “Crew culture,” according to Belich, also inspired them to assume the right to make their own decisions

about which of society's rules were and were not to be obeyed.<sup>26</sup> In simplistic terms, when single young men greatly outnumber the married (or marrying) type in any society they are inclined to establish a culture based on the satisfaction of basic animal urges. They compete with each other on the most fundamental levels and they seek sexual satisfaction and unrestrained entertainment in various forms of nightlife. That, and certainly the weakness of enforcement, gave the young frontiersmen the tendency to ignore virtually any regulations respecting alcohol. In western Canada liquor was prohibited except by special permit until 1892. Sam Steele, the commanding police officer at Calgary, went through the motions of trying to impose this but he had no illusions about how successful he was. "The officers and men hated this detestable duty," he said, because it

gave them much trouble and gleams of unpopularity. We soon learned that compulsion will not make people sober. . . . The prohibition law made more drunkards than if there had been an open bar and free drinks at every street corner. Liquor was brought in . . . by every conceivable trick. Egg shells were emptied of their contents and alcohol substituted; tin imitations of the Holy Bible were filled with intoxicants and sold on the trains; metal kegs filled with alcohol came concealed in the centre of barrels of kerosene, and mince-meat soaked in brandy and peaches prepared in the same manner were common.<sup>27</sup>

Young male North-West Mounted Policemen were known to drink heavily in those days. The diary of Sergeant S.J. Clarke, now in the Glenbow Archives in Calgary, provides glimpses of drunken members becoming unruly at social gatherings or getting into brawls with the locals or entertaining a lady of the night at headquarters.<sup>28</sup> On the Northern Territory frontier, gender ratios were even further out of balance than on the Great Plains. Males outnumber females "34 to 1 according to [the] last census," one of the police chiefs noted in 1883.<sup>29</sup> This changed over the years, but slowly. In 1910 there were still more than seven times as many males among the colonists as females.<sup>30</sup> These men too tended to be a rugged lot. "The population of the" Victoria River "district consists of station managers, cattle duffers, horse thieves, wild and woolly stockmen, and

outlaws,” a visitor commented. “A man is almost out of the pale of the law” here “and it may well be called ‘NO Man’s Land.’ Unless [the] offence is murder the authorities will not trouble to look for him; and he may remain for years wandering about the country.”<sup>31</sup> Not surprisingly, single young male Australians were every bit as indulgent as their North American counterparts. George Byng Scott, the Government Resident during the 1870s, believed that an excessive lifestyle was simply part of the local culture from the beginning, even in his own bureaucratic workforce at Darwin. “I soon learned that I had undertaken a task that was not easily to be managed,” he later remembered; “I found that many” of these men “were quick to drink and that they considered their only mission in life was to ‘eat, drink and be merry,’ do no work and plunder the Government whenever they had the chance of so doing.” This attitude, he believed, permeated society: “there were about 1700 Europeans in the Territory” at that time “and drinking and gambling was carried on to a considerable extent.”<sup>32</sup> Canadian entrepreneurs produced a portion of their own liquor in illegal stills. Fred Ings tells of the time when a keg of home brew was found near the cook tent during a roundup, saying, “That was a wild and hilarious branding and calves that year wore their brands at all angles.”<sup>33</sup> Because the northern Australian frontier lacked a rapid transportation connection to existing metropolises it was in a sense more isolated than those in western North America. Consequently, the Australians seem to have relied on an even higher percentage of home-grown liquor, which they generally referred to as “sly grog.” It flowed throughout the Territory from the remotest of the gold camps, which had sprung to life with the arrival of Chinese miners starting in 1874, to the far reaches of the cattle stations. In 1889 a settler urged the magistrate stationed at Borrooloola “to let the constable in charge of the police . . . know [about] the illicit trade [that is] being carried on, and the injuries the settlers are sustaining” as a result. The trade “is gradually getting worse,” he warned, “instead of better.”<sup>34</sup>

Opium use also proliferated in Australia. There the Chinese were by far the largest non-Native ethnic group throughout the frontier period, and the tendency of white commentators was to blame this on them.<sup>35</sup> Reports of opium circulating through their enclaves appeared in numerous newspaper articles and in at least one rather scathing government document.<sup>36</sup> Cattle station managers also turned to opium to build up

their labour force. Because there were so few Europeans, the stations badly needed cheap Aboriginal labour to work their herds and maintain their infrastructure. The drug was used rather universally to attract them. I “refused to give it to the blacks for a long time,” one northern Queensland manager claimed. Unfortunately “my best boys left me and were employed by my neighbors who gave them opium regularly in spite of my repeated letters to them begging them to desist from the practice on the commonsense plea that if the blacks knew they could not get . . . [it] the craving would cease.” He stated that he now felt compelled to take up the practice of providing opium himself.<sup>37</sup> The drug appeared on both sides of the western Canadian/American border.<sup>38</sup> However, its availability and impact do not seem to have been great, possibly because geographically its principal land of origin, China, was more distant.

On both frontiers, consumption of intoxicants went hand-in-glove with gambling. Casinos operated in the larger urban centres of western Canada offering poker and roulette, and, informally, individuals were inclined to lay bets with one another on everything from blackjack to horse racing.<sup>39</sup> What was reputed to be the “greatest blackjack game ever played” on the Canadian plains took place in the late 1890s in High River between two men named Iken and Todd. After the game, Iken was forced to turn over land that Todd later sold for forty thousand dollars.<sup>40</sup> Rightly or wrongly, Chinese entrepreneurs were blamed for much of the illicit Northern Territory betting business. As gold mining began to wind down in the 1880s and 1890s many Chinese settlers established market gardens and engaged in various forms of honest commerce.<sup>41</sup> However, according to local lore at least, some made their living by setting up covert rooms wherever they could in which the traditional Chinese game of fan-tan was played. One thing seems clear – all newcomer races participated. “Under the laws here, which they laugh at,” the gamers “flourish amazingly, and the low-lived ruffians and swindlers can be seen lying about all day, doing no honest work for a living, smoking opium, and fattening on the spoils of their victims,” a local resident fumed. “Lotteries are carried on openly, and Europeans patronize them” too, “notwithstanding the fact that the odds against getting the smallest prize are fully 14 to 1.”<sup>42</sup> Some feared that gambling was destroying an entire generation and severely hurting the local economy. “The youth – and in many instances those who hold high positions,” the same person insisted, were “fostering, aiding, and abetting

a most monstrous system of swindling the unwary victims out of their hard earned money.” The writer was sure “that many have lost money, which ought to have been paid to their storekeeper, their boot maker, and their laundress, in defraying what they term ‘debts of honour.’”<sup>43</sup>

One illegal pastime single young men in the Territory engaged in even more, relative to population size, than their North American counterparts was the hiring of sex workers.<sup>44</sup> To be sure, the sex trade thrived in the latter region too. In North America, prostitutes quickly recognized the high demand for their services in a predominantly male society and scores of them “followed the trail herds.” They came out West from centres such as Omaha, Chicago, and St. Paul and, as Char Smith’s work indicates, they tended to move back and forth across the international border as they saw fit.<sup>45</sup> Many travelled regularly between Miles City, Great Falls, Lethbridge, and Calgary to meet the cowboys arriving with the annual supply of slaughter cattle for shipment to Eastern markets. Their business flourished and some of the madams who conducted it flourished as well.<sup>46</sup> Lizzie House operated a series of extravagant bordellos in Calgary with furnishings that are supposed to have equalled those of the best houses in the East.<sup>47</sup> Carrie McLean, better known as “Cowboy Jack,” started her career as a prostitute in Montana and then moved on to operate her own establishments north of the line. In Lethbridge, Alberta, she had “an imposing two-story house with a horse trough in front where drunken cowboys frequently dumped their frolicking pals.”<sup>48</sup>

The trade was even more deeply ingrained in Australia, at least relative to the population, mainly because newcomer women were even scarcer there, relative to the overall population.<sup>49</sup> Quite a number of the first prostitutes came from China on the heels of the gold miners, and from Japan to service Japanese pearl divers who arrived on the shores of the Northern Territory in the 1880s.<sup>50</sup> Some white women also got into the business, but by far the greatest supply of sex providers eventually came from local Aboriginal groups. The existence of Native prostitution did not, of course, make Australia extraordinary. In both Alberta and across the line in Montana, individual tribes set up teepees near urban centres specifically for that purpose.<sup>51</sup> One official estimated, however, that “in the settled districts” of northern Australia the “greater portion of the aboriginal women” had been drawn into the business.<sup>52</sup> “Since their association with European and other nations, besides their own savage habits

they have acquired vices and contracted diseases imported by the colonists previously quite unknown to them.” On both continents, Native male entrepreneurs played a central role in bringing the two cultures together. One northern Great Plains cattleman remembered that “one old fellow offered me his wife, for twenty-two dollars . . . not to keep . . . just a temporary arrangement . . . Most of the Indian tribes was doing a regular business of that kind with the white men, and some of them, especially the Crows and Sioux, had got so low they would offer you their wives. But the way they did it in most of the camps,” they had women who were “just like sporting women among the whites.”<sup>53</sup> If newspaper accounts can be accepted, the immense demand in the Northern Territory encouraged both Natives and whites to turn the business into the crudest of human auctions. At one event, which was apparently held each year, Aboriginal groups “from the Adelaide and Alligator rivers” appeared on the outskirts of Palmerston. The following morning the men would do what they could “to vend their merchandise.” They would display it “in lots of twenty and thirty” and when “a European” stopped they would offer the “old women . . . at sixpence” and others at “one and two shillings.” They demanded the highest amounts “for quite young children under ten years of age.”<sup>54</sup> Of course, individual European men directly engaged Native females, as well. In Australia they tended to do so by getting them addicted to intoxicants. The Inspector of Police in Palmerston opined that female Aborigines would “do anything for grog”; and that prostitution “is so greatly on the increase can only be attributed to the leniency with which . . . it is viewed and treated by the magistrates.”<sup>55</sup>

Native sex providers who stayed temporarily with individual men for some form of payment were not always exploited on either continent. They could, in fact, attain a degree of power, as they were able to make certain demands for their services, which they could withdraw. They were also able to bring income, often in the form of food or supplies, to their kinship groups.<sup>56</sup> However, in Australia many European men took Aboriginal women from the local population by the force of their firearms and, in essence, enslaved them. Male Aborigines did not take this lightly, and time after time bloodshed ensued. In his book *Frontier Justice*, Tony Roberts explains that a Native man was likely to follow a white man who had stolen his mate, spear him, and take her back.<sup>57</sup> What the white men learned to do, therefore, was simply to shoot the male beforehand. Many

of the Native Australian women were, like their North American counterparts, eventually abandoned when European women became available.<sup>58</sup> “A very large number of the white population of this town keep a black lubra” [Aboriginal woman], the Deputy Protector of Aborigines reported in 1884. “Nearly everyone coming from Queensland has a young black girl with them and in some instances they have been turned adrift to get back to the place from where they were taken the best way they can.”<sup>59</sup>

A Palmerston resident pointed to one of the consequences of Native-newcomer fraternization that does not seem to have been prevalent in the North American West – infanticide. “The lubras almost invariably destroy their half-caste offspring.” He claimed to know for sure of five newborn babies that had been murdered by “their mothers and other female relatives.”<sup>60</sup> In 1883 the Acting Government Resident asserted in his annual report that “the almost total absence of half-caste children” strongly suggested that “the progeny” of inter-racial fraternization was being “put aside as soon as born.”<sup>61</sup> Ann McGrath explains that this was, to a degree, because mixed-race children “posed a problem for Aboriginal communities, who interpreted the strange hue” of their skin “as signifying deformity or evil spirits that could harm their world.”<sup>62</sup> It may well be that extraction methods used to take Aboriginal females from their kinship groups also made many of these children less acceptable to both Europeans and Natives than they were in North America.<sup>63</sup> Scholars Silvia Van Kirk<sup>64</sup> and Jennifer Brown<sup>65</sup> have demonstrated that, in the Canadian West, Indian women originally agreed to mixed marriages during the century of the fur trade prior to 1870, in part because there were certain important strategic and/or material advantages to be gained. These women became real partners to their white husbands, who depended on them in order to adapt to life in the wilderness and to forge much-needed commercial links with local tribes. The pattern was much the same in the United States, and a tradition of union based on some degree of mutual esteem was established. Only a little too optimistically, Montana rancher E.C. “Teddy Blue” Abbott once recalled that “every white man I ever knew that was married to an Indian . . . thought the world of them.”<sup>66</sup> These women may generally not have been as prized as white women later on but, exceptions aside, during the early frontier period they were considered, and they considered themselves, respectable. Therefore, mixed-race children, though they unquestionably faced prejudices, could

be integrated into Indian communities or educated and assimilated into the white world, or else they settled on the land in cultural enclaves to live both a ranching and hunting-and-gathering existence.<sup>67</sup> In Australia, on the other hand, the huge gender imbalance created a greater sense of urgency from the beginning for the attainment of sex-providers and, torn by force or addiction from their home society, these women lived with little status or power. Consequently, “half-caste” children in general were more likely to be seen as a symbol of disgrace. How widespread this practice of infanticide has been debated of late.<sup>68</sup> However, in 1911 there was a total of only 58 “half-castes” in the Territory and 3,310 whites and Asians.<sup>69</sup> Eventually most became part of the pastoral proletariat on the cattle stations, living and working in the region where they had been born. Others lived in a semi-settled condition in the bush, accepted neither by whites nor blacks.<sup>70</sup>

As stated above, the taking of Aboriginal women was an important reason for numerous attacks on colonists. Undoubtedly the fact that in Australia, as in both Canada and the United States, white society took up the practice of institutionalizing Native children for the purpose of assimilation also *eventually* provoked resentment.<sup>71</sup> That Aborigines were concerned as well about incursions into their homeland is evinced by the fact that some of them began assailing the newcomers well before any significant numbers of them had actually settled in the Northern Territory and committed these egregious acts.<sup>72</sup> One of the first attacks occurred in 1870. Arthur Ashwin, who helped drive stock north from South Australia that year, later remembered that at one point when he and the other drovers were resting on the trail an Aboriginal man walked into their midst. Ashwin was leery and tried to keep an eye on him. However, when he was tying his horse to some bushes the man smashed his club down on the skull of John Milner, the brother of the expedition’s leader, so hard that he died instantly, one of his eyes popping out of his head.<sup>73</sup>

Whatever the reason, incidents of this sort occurred over and over again. In 1892 the *Northern Territory Times and Gazette* reported that Aborigines murdered W.S. Scott, the manager of Willeroo station in the Victoria River district. Scott had left the station to gather cattle. He had stopped to eat at McClure Creek, on the Victoria road, at which time a number of “blacks came up in a mob” and began chasing his horses away. Scott sent Rollo, his stock hand, out after the horses. When

Rollo returned to the camp, he found Scott's lifeless body with several spears stuck in it. There was also a gash in Scott's forehead, thought to be a "tomahawk" wound.<sup>74</sup> The newspapers obviously did nothing to cool animosities when relating such incidents. In 1905 the *Northern Territory Times and Gazette* recounted that an Alligator River Native, Tommy, had "suddenly picked up a rifle and fired two shots" into a white worker named Frost on Victoria River Downs.<sup>75</sup> Frost did not die outright, the report noted, but "lingered on in his agony until the following night – for the most part of this time lying in the solitary camp wounded and alone except for the presence" of a dead Native child whom Tommy had also supposedly killed. After the shootings, Tommy "coolly saddled and mounted a horse, and taking with him a rifle and a plentiful supply of ammunition, deliberately rode out" to find two white workers named Edwards and Benning. When he found them, he shot Edwards "killing him instantly" and then set off in pursuit of the fleeing Benning. "An exciting chase ensued" during which "the black murderer . . . fired six or seven shots at the flying whiteman." Luckily for Benning, he "had the better horse," and managed to get away.<sup>76</sup>

Aborigines were apparently every bit as antagonistic towards the Chinese as they were towards Europeans. Possibly animosity originally developed when the Asians first came to the Northern Territory and monopolized some of the waterholes for panning gold.<sup>77</sup> Some contemporaries also believed that Chinese men did what they could to get Native women dependent on narcotics and into prostitution.<sup>78</sup> Many attacks were dramatically reported in the newspapers. On 10 June 1882, a party of Aborigines overwhelmed four Chinese travelling in a horse-drawn dray on "the main road between Rum Jungle and the Banyan." They first killed the driver and one of the passengers by hitting them over the head with "waddys."<sup>79</sup> Then they chased down the other two Chinese as they made a run for it and "knocked" them "about their heads and faces" nearly cutting them "to pieces."<sup>80</sup> Aboriginal groups were also hostile towards fellow countrymen who worked on the cattle runs. Managers on the runs often brought in indigenous stock hands and labourers from distant regions, hoping to make it less convenient for them to return to their people or to plot with them to attack the stations. Local Aboriginal groups saw the outsiders as enemy collaborators and, when occasions presented themselves, they took their revenge. One night some of the Natives enticed

two of the workers from the Springvale run to accompany them on a journey. The next morning the manager, Alfred Giles, organized a search party and tracked them down. He was “horrified to find” his workers “lying dead in a deserted camp of the wild blacks. Both had been speared and their heads battered in while they were asleep.”<sup>81</sup>

Roberts concludes that in the region of the Northern Territory adjacent to the Gulf of Carpentaria inter-racial violence was perpetrated far more by whites than blacks.<sup>82</sup> In 1883 the Acting Government Resident, G.R. McMinn, offered the same view when speaking of the entire Territory, writing, “It is a well known fact” that the Natives “are not always the first aggressors.”<sup>83</sup> Interestingly, however, very little was written in the police or Government Resident reports or in the *Northern Territory Times* about this or the appalling way in which Aborigines were treated generally.<sup>84</sup> But when Natives committed homicides, the police often went to considerable trouble and expense to track them down.<sup>85</sup> The punishments were usually life in prison or execution. On occasion, to make a point, officials took the supposed transgressors to the place where their crimes had been committed and executed them “in the presence of their different tribes.”<sup>86</sup> The most effective deterrent, however, was quasi-vigilante summary justice in which settlers banded together with or without the police to travel into the areas where violence against whites had taken place and massacre any Natives, often including women and children, that could be found. In 1881 Duncan Campbell, the head stockman of Elsey station, died after being speared. Enraged white settlers indiscriminately took revenge, decimating the local Yangman and Mangari people.<sup>87</sup> A resident in the Alice Springs area described an event which indicates that genocide was an acceptable objective to many colonists. “We made a tidy mob . . . about twenty all told,” he said, “eight or nine cattlemen, some of the chaps from the Overland Telegraph [Company] an’ a mob of police. The ‘nigs’ . . . poor devils . . . [We] rounded ’em up on that razorback hill over there . . . We ran a cordon round the hill an’ peppered ’em” with bullets “until there wasn’t a ‘nig’ showing . . . there must have been 150 or 170 of ’em on that hill and I reckon that few of ’em got away . . . But what could we do? We had to live up here. That was the trouble of it.”<sup>88</sup> Gordon Buchanan also expressed support for vigilante justice when recounting his family’s history on the Wave Hill station in the Victoria River district.<sup>89</sup> In 1890 the *Adelaide Register* commented: “Many of the actions which were taken

against the blacks were . . . taken with the object of exterminating them, and especially the men. If a squatter kept cattle, and there were blacks on his run, either the blacks or the cattle had to go.”<sup>90</sup> The involvement of the police in the episode near Alice Springs, along with the many indiscretions of officer William Henry Willshire, who was tried for murdering two Aborigines at the Tempe Downs station, is evidence that the overall weakness of legal authority in the Territory gave even the men designated to enforce the law a sense of release from traditional legal proscriptions.<sup>91</sup> Here they were, they believed, in extraordinarily nasty circumstances that required extraordinary measures.<sup>92</sup> Paul Foelsche, the commanding officer at Port Essington, evidently felt this way: “I wish the government would authorize me to deal out summarily punishment to these tribes,” he wrote in 1880 after hearing rumours that some local Aborigines had killed two white squatters, cooked them over a fire, and eaten them.<sup>93</sup>

Given the much smaller newcomer population in Australia, the level of racial violence appears disproportionately high even compared to that in the American West, where it was considerable. In western Canada, the most celebrated Indian killing was the infamous Cypress Hills massacre of 1873, in which a number of American “wolfers,” Canadian traders and Metis, shot up an Assiniboine camp, killing at least twenty men, women, and children.<sup>94</sup> Thereafter, the North-West Mounted Police were able to reduce this type of violence by settling indigenous tribes on reserves where they were separated from settler communities.<sup>95</sup> In a 2004 article, Andrew Graybill argues that the police do not deserve the praise some historians have heaped on them for taking a humane or civilized approach. Their objective was to cut the Native people off from their traditional food staple, the bison, thereby preventing them “from interfering with the white migration and the establishment” of Euro-Canadian “military and political authority.” Ultimately this subjected the Cree and Blackfoot to the same life of poverty and starvation that many of the American Indians faced.<sup>96</sup> A very recent study, *Clearing the Plains; Disease, Politics of Starvation and the Loss of Aboriginal Life* by James Daschuk, as its title suggests, takes that argument to some of its logical conclusions.<sup>97</sup>

It might be pointed out too that even after the establishment of the reserve system in Alberta and Assiniboia, racial conflict did at times result in bloodshed. In 1896 Almighty Voice, a Cree, shot Sergeant Colebrooke of the Mounties. He then killed another four policemen before being

captured after a long manhunt and executed.<sup>98</sup> On 10 February 1897 Charcoal, a member of the Blood tribe, was hanged for shooting Sergeant A.B. Wild of the North-West Mounted Police. Charcoal had previously murdered a fellow tribesman and shot and severely wounded a white farm agent.<sup>99</sup> At the Blackfoot reserve east of Calgary, in 1894, a tribesman killed a white official who had denied his dying son an extra ration of meat. “A posse” of infuriated and trigger-happy citizens led by some police tracked the man down and cornered him on a hillside. After his arm was shot nearly off, the police ordered that he be taken alive. Nonetheless, an overzealous volunteer fired one last round, killing the man instantly.<sup>100</sup>

It is thus evident that Native–non-Native violence happened all too often in these early societies. While this speaks to the influence of the frontier environment, we (and Australian scholars in particular) should be mindful that, in one important respect, it was also an Old World phenomenon. Many people of Anglo descent were firm believers in a social Darwinist philosophy, which in its most basic form insisted that the strong and intelligent in human society were meant to flourish and prosper and the mentally and physically less capable to falter and die out. This they considered a natural, providentially ordained, evolutionary process by which the entire human species had, and would continue to be, improved.<sup>101</sup> The social Darwinist philosophy was enlisted in particular in the fight against humane intervention on behalf of the poor in Great Britain. Ultimately, however, it lost much of its appeal in domestic affairs as compassionate members of the rising middle classes saw to the passing of more and more legislation to control working conditions in factories and mines, and to build schools for ordinary people and prisons and asylums aimed at rehabilitation. But eventually men like Walter Bagehot recast social Darwinism as a pillar of imperialism.<sup>102</sup> Essentially, they insisted that it was the strong races, i.e. the British, who were destined to achieve greatness at the expense of backward and feeble races. Over and over again, leaders from various walks of life advanced this theory in print and in speech. On 31 March 1897 Colonial Secretary Joseph Chamberlain, an avowed champion of imperialism, voiced it with much acclaim when speaking to the Royal Colonial Institute. By colonizing people in the far corners of the globe, he said, “we are fulfilling what I believe to be our national mission, and we are finding scope for the exercise of those faculties and qualities which have made of us a great governing

race.” Unmistakably, he was prepared to accept the death and destruction of local populations in this process. “No doubt, in the first instance, when . . . conquests have been made, there has been bloodshed, there has been loss of life” among indigenous peoples, “but it must be remembered that that is the condition of the mission we have to fulfill. It seems to me that the tendency of the time is to throw all power into the hands of the greater empires, the minor kingdoms – those which are non-progressive – seem to be destined to fall into a secondary and subordinate place.” Chamberlain’s objective was to rule the world basically at any cost. “No empire,” he said, must “ever surpass” us “in area, in population, in wealth, or in the diversity of . . . resources.”<sup>103</sup>

As British, Australian, Canadian, and American Anglos set about the task of colonization in the outback of Australia or the opening ranges on the northern Great Plains, they felt they had a sacred mission to “carry the flag of Empire into the unknown open spaces” of remote lands.<sup>104</sup> This allowed them to be contemptuous of local populations and devoid of empathy. People like Mary Inderwick on the North Fork ranch near Pincher Creek, Alberta, could with clear conscience argue that the sooner the “backward” tribes with which she had come in contact became extinct the better it would be for them and for humanity.<sup>105</sup> Similarly, in a letter to the *Northern Territory Times*, a concerned Australian could assert that Aboriginal peoples “must move before the tide of civilization, or . . . even, as every man will crush a snake under his heel, so must the hand of every man be raised against . . . inhuman monsters, whose cowardly and murderous nature renders them unfit to live.”<sup>106</sup> The frontier changed the racism many people of European descent carried with them primarily in the sense that it gave them evidence that they felt confirmed their presumptions of superiority.<sup>107</sup>

Of course, frontier conflict was not always racial in nature. European men who lived and worked on the ranches and stations commonly carried revolvers and/or rifles and sometimes they turned them against each other. However, they were less likely to do so in Australia than in the Canadian West.<sup>108</sup> The reason for this is simply that the European population was much smaller there and spread out so thinly across the huge expanse of the Territory’s pastoral regions.<sup>109</sup> On the northern Great Plains, cowboy-instigated gun violence often erupted when crew culture got out of hand – that is, when armed young men, their passions fuelled with

copious amounts of liquor, competed in bars, often for women, whom they greatly outnumbered. Sometimes this form of violence transcended national borders. One night a group of British, Canadian, and American cowboys working in Alberta rode into a Montana tavern. "After the boys had several drinks they proceeded to shoot up the saloon."<sup>110</sup> Canadian historians have tended to ignore this type of disorder in their communities. However, if one looks closely one finds numerous incidents of it. "Blazing away with a pistol, whenever a man gets drunk, whether it be in the hands of a policeman or a citizen is getting monotonous," a reporter in Fort Macleod, Alberta, complained in 1886.<sup>111</sup> Canadian barroom shoot-outs could at times be as bloody as any in Montana or Wyoming or Texas. In the summer of 1900 David Warnock, the onsite manager of the Walrond ranch, told his boss about an episode involving their cowhand Tom Miles. Miles was thought to be dead "from the effects of his wound" and some "Pincher Creek men" had "been killed."<sup>112</sup> Five or so months later Warnock reported, "Miles is back looking very well and quite recovered . . . He made a narrow escape of sharing Morden and Carr's fate, the bullet missing his spine by less than one inch."<sup>113</sup>

Inebriated young Australians seldom gathered together in large numbers, and they mostly avoided this type of bloodshed.<sup>114</sup> It speaks to the overarching influence of the social environment, however, that in the uncommon instances when they did gather in fairly large numbers, the results could be about the same. Borrooloola was the gateway between the north end of the Northern Territory and Queensland to the east. When law enforcement was still very weak, men heading one way or the other sometimes "flocked in" and the transient population skyrocketed. The town could then become "quite as wild and lawless" as any raw frontier community. During the day "respectable inhabitants had to watch drunken men practicing with rifle and revolver . . . in the township streets." At night the occasional "drunken brawl ended in a free fight. Knives were drawn, shots exchanged, sometimes without much danger, at other times with the loss of a life or two."<sup>115</sup>

If the Australians were less likely to get involved in gun violence than their North American counterparts, they did not lag behind them in arguably the most rampant crime, and for the pastoral operations the most damaging. That was cattle and horse rustling. It proliferated because, along with the inadequacies of legal deterrent, the young stock hands had a habit

of blowing their wages on alcohol and sex and were constantly tempted by literally thousands of poorly supervised herds that regularly wandered miles from their home range. To many men who considered turning to crime, it was doubly tempting that a substantial number of the animals, including newborn calves and colts and the stock of careless owners, were unbranded. Much has been written about the waves of rustling that struck the Montana grazing industry in the 1880s and 1890s and of the vigilante organization known as “Stuart’s stranglers” that formed under the leadership of rancher Granville Stuart and, both with and without support of a sheriff or two, either shot any thieves it found or hanged them from the nearest cottonwood tree.<sup>116</sup> Much less well known is that the rustling problem might have been even worse in Assiniboia and Alberta, as rustlers fearful of vigilante justice commonly migrated north where due process of the law in the hands of the North-West Mounted Police was much less efficient. “Cattle and horse stealing are the crimes I believe to be most prevalent, and they are most difficult to detect,” reported Police Superintendent Sanders just after the turn of the century. He knew that a whole list of men – white, Native, and other – had just recently been prosecuted for the crime. Julius Young of Cardston had been sentenced to four years for stealing horses; Fred Brouillette had been charged with stealing a horse from a member of the Peigan Tribe; Joe Vare had been convicted for stealing a colt; Hugh Brewer, of the Blood Tribe, had been sentenced to three years in jail for stealing horses from the Brown ranch; and “a halfbreed Indian who stole four horses from a Blood named Chief Moon, and who had taken these animals to the Cochrane ranch where he had a job hauling logs, was given two years” in jail.<sup>117</sup> The most famous of the men who worked back and forth across the international border were in the Dutch Henry gang. In 1900 Henry and his cohorts joined forces with the rival Nelson-Jones gang and set up headquarters in Assiniboia.<sup>118</sup> Together they were a formidable force. In June 1900 the *Macleod Gazette* reported that Jones and Nelson alone had “stolen over 300 head of horses and thousands of cattle from the northern [Montana] ranges all of which” had been “driven into Canada and disposed of.”<sup>119</sup>

The ranges in northern Australia were as open as those in North America and the cattle and horses, a percentage there too unmarked, roamed just as freely.<sup>120</sup> Consequently, “duffing” became a major problem. In 1886 an editorial in the *Northern Territory Times* held out hope that at



CANADIAN COWBOY WITH SIX-SHOOTER. TOM GRAHAM ON HORSE, HIGH RIVER AREA, ALBERTA, [CA. 1893]. GLENBOW ARCHIVES, CALGARY, NA-237-20.

last something was being done to deal with the criminal element near the town of Katherine. Policemen had finally been sent there, it stated, “and not before they were wanted. It is to be hoped they will check the cattle killing and horse stealing scoundrels.”<sup>121</sup> All over the Territory the crime continued to proliferate, however, and the police themselves commonly acknowledged their inability to control it with the limited resources at their disposal. “There are a number of horse and cattle stealers . . . camped on the border of Queensland and this colony,” the chief at Borrooloola reported in 1888, “and I have no doubt that they will now start” operating “on a larger scale as they have no other means of living.”<sup>122</sup> The chief knew that Aborigines undertook a large percentage of the duffing in the Northern Territory.<sup>123</sup> He insisted, however, that white perpetrators were themselves a bane to the cattle industry. “To successfully cope with the savage blacks of this district” as well as the “savage and lawless whites”

it would be necessary, he said, to bring in another constable as soon as possible as he, himself, had to see to the imposition of customs duties and, therefore, was usually confined to the town. He also wanted a magistrate appointed within or near the town. Since he had come to Borroloola he had “had very little assistance except from the Native trackers,” and he had “been placed in a most unsatisfactory position . . . there being no magistrate nearer than the Limmen Bight” some 150 miles to the north. Less than a year later the succeeding chief at the same station insisted that the road between the two centres “is now generally used by the reputed horse and cattle stealers, and I believe it is selected by them because the police stations are a great distance from each other.”<sup>124</sup>

While some of the white Australian duffers likely also started out as stock hands and then were tempted into a life of crime, others apparently were criminals from the beginning. In 1896 a frustrated squatter at Auvergne station on the Victoria River described such men in intricate detail. In his mind they were wandering vagabonds who emerged first with the gold fields. They considered legal sanctions largely irrelevant, and they tended to play loosely with all forms of other people’s property. “A few years ago” when gold was discovered in Kimberly, Western Australia, “men went there from every quarter, and got there either by fair or by foul means; several got there . . . by coming to this station and stealing from 60 to 100 head of horses.” Now, however, Wandi Goldfield in the Northern Territory was apparently more productive and “many of these horse-stealing and cattle killing scoundrels” were reappearing.<sup>125</sup> Three had recently come to his station claiming to be destitute and hungry. He felt sorry for them and gave them supplies, including a large amount of beef. After they slipped away without warning he decided to follow them. “The first night they camped eight miles from the station at a large lagoon and here willfully and wantonly shot a young bullock for no other motive . . . than to see the poor brute drop dead.” Further along their trail the man found the lifeless body of a second animal. The duffers had taken “about 100 lbs. of beef” from it, “salted” the meat “on some green branches close by and left . . . about 700 lbs, to rot in the sun.” The squatter used the occasion to take the standard swipe at the police for their inability to protect the cattle herds. “These sorts of criminal actions do not occur where there is police protection provided. All that we want now is for the Government to decline to take our rents and then we will know that they completely

ignore our existence.” He also suggested the need for vigilante justice. If proper protection “be denied me,” he fumed, “then I certainly think the least the Government can do is to give the law-abiding subject full permission to deal with these horse stealing scoundrels and cattle killing assassins the way he thinks best.”<sup>126</sup>

For those thieves who wanted, sooner or later, to market their takings, the unmarked cattle were no doubt the safest ones to steal. However, some of the Australian criminals learned to use what cattlemen in the Canadian and American West dubbed the “running iron.” It was a short branding iron with a curved end on it that could be heated over a fire and then used to alter existing brands. In 1896 a Northern Territory outlaw named Jack Monaghan working near Turn Off was known to have changed the brand W22 on some horses belonging to William Osmond of Elsey Cattle Station to M33. Another man named Jim Campbell “got into trouble” for “altering the Victoria Downs cattle brand G10 to his brand (diamond eighty eight).”<sup>127</sup> The degree of sophistication such men developed in their illegal activities reflected the fact that they had become, in essence, professional criminals. Their “conviction . . . is very desirable,” one of the police supervisors noted, “as they will not work.”<sup>128</sup> Some ranchers on both ends of the world built up their herds principally by pilfering their neighbours’ cattle. On the American Great Plains this crime also sometimes crossed the international border. Newspaper reporter Leroy V. Kelly wrote that in August 1901 a Montana roundup “came over picking up strays, and one cow with the “WW” brand of William Wallace of Montana seemed very loath to leave Canadian herds and territory.” It escaped “from the American cowboys” and “dashed madly back into the ranks of the Canadian stock, where she found her calf just as widely, but more blindly, searching for her.” When the police investigated they discovered “that the cow also carried the “2PD” brand of a Canadian rancher named Henry Marshall.” Wallace was arrested, tried, and fined seventy-five dollars and costs.<sup>129</sup> Among the Northern Territory duffers, Martin Fleming, for one, was supposed to have accumulated several hundred head this way for his cattle station on the Daly River.<sup>130</sup>

There can be little doubt that Native depredations of the livestock herds was more costly to the first Australian graziers than to the Canadians. At one point the interviewee before the 1895 commission referred to this problem directly: the Natives “have been a very heavy cost to us.

With blacks it is not only what they kill, but they run your stock about," which causes stress and carcass shrinkage. "When I was at the Victoria Downs I came upon a camp a few days' old with between thirty and forty blacks' ovens . . . That meant that the number of blacks in the camp was about 100, and there were the remains of eight head of cattle that they had slaughtered a few days before."<sup>131</sup> He pointed out that this kind of slaughter often went on under the nose of the settlers. The camp he spoke of, he said, was only four miles from Gordon's Creek station. Reports of destruction came from all parts of the Territory. On the far eastern side along the coast of Carpentaria, a stockowner noted: "all through the wet season, the cattle were constantly attacked and killed. Down towards the coast, the salt water tribes made frequent successful raids, whilst the mountain blacks took heavy toll in the . . . valleys. A great number of the stock speared were eaten, many died from wounds, and some appeared to have been slaughtered for sport and devilment." The writer believed that "the worst trouble was with the small mobs of cattle which the natives cut off from the main herd. These little lots, scared to madness . . . would rush, floundering through the endless bog and slush. As they went on they got ever more and more split up and constantly attacked by fresh tribes." Even the few that survived were often lost, as they "would be scattered, so far as to be practically impossible to muster again."<sup>132</sup> Natives also killed cattle during the open range period in Canada as the animals wandered across lands that had once been occupied by their natural food staple, the buffalo. In the 1890s one ranch manager reported that "about twenty Blood Indians" were "under arrest for killing" a neighbour's cattle "to procure tongues for the Sun Dance."<sup>133</sup> Years later another told one of the police commanders that he had caught some Peigan Indians corralling one of his steers. "Had I not been short-handed," he said, "I would have sent for you and had the whole gang arrested. To allow these Indians to camp" out "for weeks at a time without . . . men to oversee them is I think a strong temptation to commit depredations on cattle and something will have to be done."<sup>134</sup> However, for the most part the damage was small – one or two cattle here and there. The Mounties not only did an efficient job of keeping the Indians on the reserves, they also quickly extinguished any attempts by white ranchers to exaggerate the costs or to take the law into their own hands. In the early 1880s George and Edward Maunsell put 103 cattle on the range on the Milk River Ridge. A half dozen or so other

ranchers followed suit. Within thirty days all but 56 of the Maunsells' cattle and a similarly large percentage of their neighbours' had disappeared. As soon as they became aware of their losses, they went to the local police. Indian Commissioner E. Dewdney, backed by Colonel James F. Macleod, the commanding officer at Fort Macleod, told them in no uncertain terms that attacks by ranchers on Indians would not be tolerated. Much of the loss of livestock, Dewdney told them, was undoubtedly due to cattle wandering back to Montana and of rustling by whites. "Can we shoot any Indians we find killing" our stock, one of the ranchers asked. Dewdney replied, "If you do you'll probably hang."<sup>135</sup> From that point on Native predation on the herds was mentioned from time to time in the police reports and the local newspapers, but the losses were normally light.<sup>136</sup>

How much cattle rustling added to the financial difficulties the cattlemen struggled with cannot be estimated. Widespread failure within the industry on both continents enables us to say one thing for sure, however – the cattlemen could ill-afford it. The evidence of livestock theft, like all the other forms of misconduct presented in this chapter, is, admittedly, anecdotal. It has to be. In expansive, under-policed communities where legal redress was often unattainable, a couple of hungry, out-of-work stock hands could, without witnesses, butcher a steer; or one man could siphon off a few calves from another man's herd and incorporate them into his own. Therefore, documents such as court records just do not tell anything like the whole story.<sup>137</sup> The historian is left with impressions gained from the newspapers, the existing correspondence of police and others, and the reminiscences of some of the people who experienced frontier life first hand. What these kinds of sources evince about the societies examined here is that they were anything but orderly and law abiding. Single young men found their own ways to deal with a shortage of nighttime entertainment facilities and a dearth of sexual partners, and, generally speaking, they broke laws with relative impunity when it suited their purposes. A disproportionate number of women were drawn into prostitution, illegal liquor circulated regularly through the land, gambling proliferated, and assault and murder were anything but rare. In that sociocultural setting it is not surprising that livestock commonly disappeared from the ranges without a trace. The fact that all the above forms of disorder and violence transpired in ranching societies in different hemispheres at precisely the same moment in their historical development illustrates the hand of

environmental forces over and above climate, ecology, and region. More than anything else, what encouraged people to evade or distort the conventions and rules of behaviour that had evolved over time in the worlds from which they had come was the frontier itself.

