Themes for BrANCA

1. What does focusing on territory as a keyword gain that using other analytical terms and categories--property, sovereignty, space, culture, community--doesn’t encompass? Relatedly, what are links among conceptions of territory and other ideas? For example, are territorial groupings an alternative or supplement to Benedict Anderson’s “imagined communities” and “print capitalism”? Are they an instantiation of those phenomena?
2. If we look over the long nineteenth century, what continuities and divergences do we observe in conceptions of territory?
3. How does turning to questions of territory enhance our understanding of that perennial concern of American constitutional history, federalism? Or the perennial concern of American historiography and cultural studies, nationhood? Or the perennial concerns of American politics, citizenship and empire?
4. By focusing on “territory,” we join legal historians and political scientists who attend to U.S. methods of legally organizing space. But what of “borderlands”? The concept of spaces not wholly organized or multiply organized has been crucial to improving our understanding of both the limits of national frames and the perspectives and experiences of people at the margins, especially Natives and Hispanics. Of course, the studies increasingly teach, indigenous groups and others also stress organized space. Are territory and borderlands in tension? Need they be? How do we build upon existing points of convergence to bridge this seeming divide?
5. What was/is territory? To what extent is it a modern observers’ keyword in understanding 19th-century America, to what extent was it a 19th-century-American word for living and describing their own experience, and to what extent was it a 19-century-American concept that lacked a name? More specifically, what do we learn by bringing a modern analytic frame of territory to bear on 19th-century America? How did 19-century Americans use the term? How did they understand the clusters of concerns that we today group under the heading of territory? Was territory fundamental to 19th-c America? Is it fundamental to modern understandings thereof? (Maybe just rephrasing #1, supra.)
6. What did territory do? In what ways was it an expansion of jurisdiction and power, as contrasted with a limit on such things? Was it primarily local, national, international, transnational, intracultural, or intercultural? What privileges and responsibilities did territory imply for individuals and groups? Who was included/excluded by territory? How did that reinforce or undermine inclusions/exclusions based on wealth, race, gender, or religion, for example? How did territory separate North American groups from, and integrate them with, Europeans, the rest of the world, and one another? (Related to #4.)
7. When 19th-Americans contested territorial claims, to what extent did they rely on law, justice, and/or history? How did 19-c Americans express territory? How did they imply it? When 19-c Americans assumed territorial claims as solid or natural, what were they assuming, on what basis, and with what consequences? (Related to #4.)
8. What were the legal entities: “U.S. territories”? How did they work? What did they represent? What were their alternatives? How did they change over time? (Related to #2.)
9. Where did the concept of “U.S. territories” fall into the American constitutional scheme? When is was it a self-evident term? When was it contested and in what ways? What do changes in meanings of the term tell us about meanings of the United States Constitution?