



The Significance of the Frontier in American History

Frederick Jackson Turner

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2014 Reprint of 1894 Edition. Full facsimile of the original edition. The "Frontier Thesis" or "Turner Thesis," is the argument advanced by historian Frederick Jackson Turner in 1894 that American democracy was formed by the American Frontier. He stressed the process-the moving frontier line-and the impact it had on pioneers going through the process. He also stressed consequences of a ostensibly limitless frontier and that American democracy and egalitarianism were the principle results. In Turner's thesis the American frontier established liberty by releasing Americans from European mindsets and eroding old, dysfunctional customs. The frontier had no need for standing armies, established churches, aristocrats or nobles, nor for landed gentry who controlled most of the land and charged heavy rents. Frontier land was free for the taking. Turner first announced his thesis in a paper entitled "The Significance of the Frontier in American History", delivered to the American Historical Association in 1893 in Chicago. He won very wide acclaim among historians and intellectuals. Turner's emphasis on the importance of the frontier in shaping American character influenced the interpretation found in thousands of scholarly histories. By the time Turner died in 1932, 60% of the leading history departments in the U.S. were teaching courses in frontier history along Turnerian lines.

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