IN THE last issue of this Magazine an irreverent question was asked, and therewith a possibility was broached that ought to disturb all confident interpreters of the American past. Perhaps this language is too strong. For the editorial was mildness itself, and on the surface all that it seemed to ask was this: what happened to Philadelphia while New England was flowering?

To a Bostonian, or to other convinced adherents of the New England tradition of historical interpretation, the answers to this question have normally been simple, uncomplimentary . . . and likely as not in the neighborhood of the most profound observation that, as usual, Philadelphia must have been asleep. Astonishingly enough, however, the author of the editorial failed to endorse this obvious truth. Instead, ever so quietly and ever so gently, he hinted that two other explanations might just possibly be worth analysis.

In a concluding sentence the matter was thus teasingly summed up: perhaps the Boston of 1820-1860 was made to excel in cultural achievement, and Philadelphia to lag behind, "by the simple device of defining culture in terms of those things in which Boston excelled."

This is by way of proposing, first of all, that at least a part of New England's preeminence, in the period under discussion, was due to accident: specifically to the accident that her own one-sided development of culture happened to appeal to Americans in general. In the second place, it suggests that an even larger part of New England's fame has been the work, not of the New Englanders of that day at all, but of the partisan teachers and interpreters who have followed after, and who have seen to it that their own rather narrow and provincial version of the American past has become the accepted text not only in New England but in many other parts of the country. In a word, a local spirit has been at work. A sectional bias has captured—and twisted—whole segments of our national history. Perhaps we ought to overhaul our books, look our historians over again.

It needs no canny Yankee to spot the menace hidden in such innocent suggestions—nor any unusual imagination to follow the editor when he cites the two parallel possibilities of a Southern tradition and a Middle Western slant, each presumably governing in certain other areas of our national historiography. Yet can such charges fairly be proved? And if some sectionalism be detected, have we done anything more than locate the emphasis, call attention to the accent, mark an omission or two? The problem seems decidedly worth investigation, and not in the New England sanctuary alone.

It happens that for some time past, although in a different connection, the present writer has been examining the "frontier hypothesis" of Frederick Jackson Turner. And a more apt illustration of the historiographic phenomenon hinted at by Professor Shryock it would be hard to find. As a matter of fact, to anticipate my exposition, once that famous interpretation is looked at from the meridian of Missouri, more than sectional prejudice appears to be wrong with it.

Turner's theory of American development, as the reader will recall, was first advanced in a paper (since become classic) called
"The Significance of the Frontier in American History," which the young Wisconsin professor read before the American Historical Association at Chicago in 1893. The essential thesis was that the one great formative factor in the development of the American people had been the influence of the "frontier." When Turner's paper was first read, we are told, no upheaval was immediately noticeable. Then slowly, and after a while faster and faster, the ideas contained in that epochal pronouncement made their way. Meanwhile Professor Turner repeated and elaborated his hypothesis in a series of additional speeches and papers on the "frontier," the Ohio valley and the West. These thirteen "frontier essays" contributed powerfully to the edification and stimulation of his colleagues in the profession; and by the time the papers were published together in 1920, they could claim a nationwide influence and a whole army of faithful followers. Even in the East, Turner's environmental interpretation conquered the "germ theory" of Herbert Baxter Adams, and in part displaced the older New England traditions. In fact it may without argument be allowed that neither before nor since has any single historian, or so slight a body of published work, so obviously influenced the thinking habits of American historians. It is further agreed that Turner's personality and Turner's hypothesis have continued in an extraordinary degree to dominate and define the school of historical philosophy that he thus founded.

More recently the claim has even been advanced that so brilliant was Turner's inspiration, and so perfect its application to the whole of the American past, that no one has been able to find serious fault with it. Though admittedly originating with a man from Wisconsin, and developed most actively in the great central valley of the continent, the "frontier hypothesis" is said to be even now our most national and most satisfactory explanation. As Everett E. Edwards expressed this thought five years ago: "Although our present social and economic structure bears little resemblance to that of the 1890's, historians continue to proclaim the validity of Turner's historical interpretation . . . , or by failure confess inability to supplement it fundamentally or to weaken it by criticism." In the same place were quoted the even stronger remarks of Professor Paxson:

After a generation of general currency, the Turner hypothesis stands today as easily to be accepted as it was when launched. . . . When it is used as its framer framed it, it is as useful a guide as it ever was. The advance of historical scholarship since 1893 has brought to light an abundance of facts that Turner never saw. But . . . in so few cases do they appear to contradict him that we are entitled to suppose that those who distrusted his soundness were never able to find the facts to warrant their distrust; and we may perhaps account for the weakness of the straggling attacks upon his hypothesis by the inherent weakness of the case against it.

Such claims are so extreme as to illustrate, better than most commentators could, the partisan and, in part, sectional bias of the more convinced of the “frontier historians,” and the need to apply to their body of doctrine the most searching and sceptical attention. This precaution is the more necessary because the investigation will demonstrate the curious but oft-controverted fact that for much of the sectionalism Turner himself was originally and directly responsible.

There is also a second and more serious reason for overhauling the Turnerian interpretation. Under the surface, but decidedly to the disturbance of a smooth and plausible argument, certain paradoxes or inconsistencies have begun to make themselves felt. Apparently this defect likewise must be traced, less to the misuse of a sound logic by inexpert pupils, than directly to Turner’s original pronouncements. In fact it is really astonishing and puzzling to discover how much of sectionalism and how much of downright contradiction and confusion the famous and fundamental “frontier hypothesis” has always contained.

How are such serious charges conceivable, in view of the overwhelming and continued acceptance of Turner’s views by the historical profession? Can such defects be reconciled with the influence that Turner’s theory has commanded? The thing is difficult, yet perhaps a partial explanation is at hand. Perhaps the two major faults may be surmised to have supported or in part concealed each other; in the sense that the sectional appeal made Middle Westerners uncritical, and the internal contradictions made it possible to avoid Eastern or Southern accusations of sectional bias. Perhaps, also, Turner’s essays have appealed to certain additional emotions or convictions widely cherished by Americans in general, whatever their locus or previous affiliation? Suppose, for example, an appeal to
some broader provincialism, say to a rising nationalist sentiment, and a skillful exploitation of this appeal. This explanation will not be insisted on prematurely. But is it not possible that the "influence of the frontier"—like the "flowering of New England"—was originally genuine enough but of modest and limited size, and that it was later, at a favorable moment in our emotional development, exaggerated and magnified into a legend? However all that may be, one proposition seems inescapable: the essays of Frederick Jackson Turner have had such an influence, and still support so large a part of the "frontier hypothesis," that they call for the most comprehensive, objective and critical analysis. This promised scrutiny will now be undertaken.

Apology is offered that limitations of space will make it impossible to treat the whole of the argument in one essay, and that the mass of laudatory and rather generalized literature on the subject will force a concentration on the weaknesses of the Turner hypothesis that may seem meticulous and at times painfully blunt. The critique that follows may even appear to able and devoted followers of Professor Turner not merely blunt, but positively unfriendly. If so, let it be clear wherein the heresy lies. This is to be no personal attack on a man for whom the writer (though an Easterner) has long entertained a genuine admiration. No more is this analysis directed against Turner as a teacher, nor against Turner's writings as a whole. The nature and influence of "sections" are not (here) in question. His general work on The United States, 1830-1850 is not to be examined. Much less does this essay pretend to demolish the writings of men who studied under Turner, or the published work of the so-called "frontier school." The study is not even directed against the proposition that Turner's theory in its day was of great value, or against the thought that the American wilderness must indeed have been of some influence in shaping the course of American development.

What is to be proposed is simply this: that Turner's views on the "frontier," as stated in his first great essay and repeated and elaborated in the later essays (the whole collected under the title The Frontier in American History, Holt, 1920), are no longer a safe guide to the student. For these views are sectional, they are emo-
tional, and they are positively illogical. It is an ungrateful thing
to have to attack the historical scholarship of so great and charming
a man, especially when he is no longer here to defend himself. But
how much confusion, contradiction and improbability this portion of
his writings contains, it is time someone made unmistakably plain. 8

Let us begin our scrutiny, therefore, by asking a very obvious and
simple question: what was it that Turner meant when, in his essays,
he wrote the word “frontier”?

I. WHAT THE “FRONTIER” WAS

First of all, the term “frontier” seems to have symbolized for
Turner an anthropogeographic situation of a special and highly
significant sort. This situation he defined in relatively direct terms:

it was the place where physical environment and human population
met.

What kind of physical environment, and what kind of population?
Primarily, the environment or “nature” of Turner’s essays was a
savage, untamed nature, raw and rough. As Turner often repeated,
in Europe the word frontier meant a political and military bound-
ary, but in North America it meant the wilderness (p. 283). The
insistence on the roughness and hostility of nature is strong:

“Into this vast shaggy continent of ours poured the first feeble tide
of European settlement,” he once wrote (p. 267); and again and
again the words savagery and wilderness seem to have been the only
terms truly expressive of what he had in mind (p. 3). The second
characteristic of this “nature” followed as a matter of course: it was
an empty land, a surface not only raw but unsettled. In the third
place, topographically speaking, it would be found to have both
physical arteries and recognizable boundary lines (p. 9); in the
fourth, the successive wildernesses or geographic regions had some

8 No novelty can be claimed for most of the criticisms about to be offered, save only
that they are the product of a more comprehensive and detailed restudy of the essays
than most historians seem to have found the opportunity for. On large parts of this
essay I have had the advantage of critical readings by Professor Carl Bridenbaugh
of Brown University, by Professors Leonard W. Labaree and Ralph H. Gabriel of
Yale University, and by the editor of this magazine. The responsibility for the views
expressed, of course, remains entirely my own. Page references are to The Frontier in
additional features worth noticing. What were these features of the empty wilderness regions on which Turner insisted? The emphasis was not always the same. But generally there were mentioned, in the order of significance here given: (a) the woods, the great American forest; (b) the mountains, with the Alleghenies apparently far more important than the Rockies; (c) finally, the resources, with farm land in the place of honor, and with the other vegetable, animal, mineral or underground resources coming in for late or far less frequent attention.

Before passing beyond this first pedestrian catalogue, one observation is unavoidable. It concerns the neglected aspects of the "nature" with which Turner professed to be concerned. What of the American climate and climate belts? Might not the weather, also, have been a factor, with its daily and seasonal changes, its temperatures and varying humidity? If the emphasis was to be on farm land, ought not the length of growing seasons to have figured? A careful reading of the thirteen essays demonstrates that it did not.⁴ Again, the waters of America appear to have suffered an almost equal neglect. The great arterial rivers seemed to Turner important, and on occasion he also mentioned the Great Lakes, but of the oceans, seas, gulfs, harbors, estuaries or swamps, not a word. In similar fashion, the animals of the continent figured in their involuntary capacity as fur, but in no other discoverable way. The diseases of the Ohio and Mississippi region did not seem worthy of remark. The crops, wild or cultivated, were largely passed over without study. Only the wildness and savagery of the continent was made unmistakably emphatic and clear.

Proceeding now to the population that was exposed to this environment, and that in combination with it was declared to have produced the "frontier," the reader finds that it was of a peculiar and clearly marked variety. To begin with, it was that population which was always to be found on the fringe of settlement (p. 41) and pushing against the "frontier line." As Turner phrased the proposal of the census reports, the frontier line was the outer "margin of that settlement which has a density of two or more to the square mile" (p. 3). Accordingly, the population in question was sparse,

⁴ One exception—a reference to humidity—may be found on p. 329.
it was composed of first-comers, it resided "at the hither edge of free land" and in itself it represented "the meeting point between savagery and civilization."

How was this population composed? Apparently, much as one would expect, of a variety of elements. First there were the Indians, although to Turner these prior occupants of a land denominated "empty" were to be regarded rather as one more savage obstacle than as a constituent element in frontier society. Next to be listed, of course, were the hunters and the furtraders. Then there were the cattlemen and ranchers, then the more numerous and important pioneers, who first scratched the soil, girdled the trees, and gathered in their unrotated crops. Next were to be found the more substantial farmers, who formed rural communities on the basis of genuine clearing and an intensive agriculture, and so passed gradually out of a subsistence stage of economy to trade and commercial life. Eventually factories sprang up, cities grew, and an industrial society arrived.

Turner was inclined to accept the thought that the settlement of the American wildernesses recapitulated, as it were, the whole story of civilization: that the evolution of this land without a history showed in succession all the stages in the rise of man, up from the most primitive barbarism and on to the most advanced civilization. "The United States lies like a huge page in the history of society. Line by line as we read this continental page from West to East we find the record of social evolution." And Turner proceeded to the enumeration above attempted (see pps. 11, 12, 16, 149, etc.). If American historians would only look, they could discover this truth for themselves, for each of the regions of the United States had known just such an evolution. In the older areas one

5 To the Indians it was granted only that they were "a consolidating agent" and had had the grace to pass on the trails suggested by nature to the first settlers for "traces" and roads.

6 A reference to missions among the Indians may be found on page 79, but in general the frontier preacher is absent from Turner's essays.

7 Professor Shryock has noted the interesting resemblance of this hypothesis to a certain biological doctrine. Its origins, of course, must be considerably older. As early as 1831, Alexis de Tocqueville carried the idea with him to Buffalo and the Northwest, only to become convinced that the facts of settlement in that region utterly contradicted this poetic notion. In the Ohio valley, later, the Frenchman found the theory somewhat more plausible.
had but to dig down through the antecedent social strata; out on the frontier one could watch the procession actually on the march. As Turner so ably phrased it (pp. 11-12): "What now is a manufacturing State was in an earlier decade an area of intensive farming. Earlier yet it had been a wheat area, and still earlier the range had attracted the cattle-breeder.... Each passed in successive waves across the continent. Stand at Cumberland Gap and watch the procession of civilization, marching single file—the Buffalo following the trail to the salt springs, the Indian, the fur-trader and hunter, the cattle-raiser, the pioneer farmer—and the frontier has passed by. Stand at South Pass in the Rockies a century later and see the same procession with wider intervals between...."

Were all the populations and occupational classes above named to be considered as part and parcel of that sparse group of frontiersmen pushing against the hither edge of free land? Obviously not. Turner hesitated to describe his "frontier" too narrowly—"the term is an elastic one, and for our purposes does not need sharp definition" (p. 3). Yet common sense required the elimination of the manufacturer and banker; and the intensive farmer with his commercial economy hardly qualified any better as a dweller in so savage and sparsely populated a region. As Turner himself decreed, from his watching post at Cumberland Gap, once the pioneer farmer (the man of the log cabin and the unrotated crop) had come and moved on, "the frontier has passed by."

With the wilderness and its people now defined, we reach the third characteristic of Turner's "frontier," namely, that it was a moving and a changing zone. For if it was clear that the sparse population pressing against the wilderness contained several occupational groups, it was equally obvious that these groups were not all present at the same time. They succeeded each other, in fact they almost pursued each other toward the West. Turner quoted the statement of an early observer that the settlement of the West was accomplished not in a mass movement but in waves. The observer in question specified three waves: the hunter-pioneer wave, a second or intensive farmer-trader wave,
and the wave of industrial enterprise (pp. 19–21). The first of these three waves even corresponded very closely to Turner's "frontier population." Accordingly, it might be fair to describe the distinct groups making up that population as the successive ripples of the first master-wave of settlement (p. 3). And it followed that each new region came to know the same series of occupational groups, and an almost standard process of settlement. Almost every region served first as a hunting ground. Next came the grazers—whether it meant the cow pens of the Carolina Piedmont or the ranches of the Texas plains, the process was much the same. Finally, the pioneer scratch-farmers filtered in. Each new region recapitulated, therefore, the experience of the older region next to the East; and often the steps were repeated several times within each geographic region, as the successive groups moved in, settled, and moved on again.

For society, obviously, as for the region, the business of settling the wilderness meant a repeated performance. And so fast moved the waves that the very individuals themselves often repeated their experience. The furtrapper, when overtaken, rarely settled down, but moved on again after the disappearing game. The pioneer farmer, knowing only his primitive business and craving solitude, would sell out his half-cleared acres and "break for the high timber." Or, if he was caught by the second master-wave and slipped back into more civilized ways, his sons would go on to try again the girdled-tree, log-cabin business in some new purchase farther West, where nature was raw once more and the population hardly surpassed two to the square mile.

This process, extended across the whole continent and prolonged through an extended stretch of time, came to have a decided influence on the people participating. According to Turner it molded their characters and shaped their institutions. Thus, by a sort of internal compulsion, the frontier became not just a place with a distinctive population but a social process with consequences for the whole of American development: a social process as a result of which the settlers and immigrants from across the Atlantic became transformed into something new and different and non-European, in fact into Americans! This frontier transformation was realized through a set of striking operations which will be analyzed in their proper
place; but the result of these processes, in any case, was the creation of a new people and a new civilization—the American. To Turner, the things that are different are what make us no longer Europeans but Americans. Again, according to Turner, these differences were primarily the product of the frontier area and the frontier experience. To put it in another way, why study the frontier? Because it was the frontier, more than any influence or influences, that made us American. The decisive statements in the matter were (pp. 3–4):

“The frontier is the line of most rapid and effective Americanization.”

“The advance of the frontier has meant a steady movement away from the influence of Europe, a steady growth of independence on American lines. And to study this advance, the men who grew up under these conditions, and the political, economic, and social results of it, is to study the really American part of our history.”

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The recapitulation of Turner’s written descriptions of the frontier is now complete, and comments are in order. These will be made as brief and clear as the nature of Turner’s interpretations will allow.

First of all, the contents of the physical environment need careful appraisal. It has already been suggested that Turner’s portrait of “nature” was as remarkable for its omissions as for its highlights. Was it not more than a little strange that the weather and climate of the North American continent should be considered of no account? And how justify an emphasis so one-sided as to result in the neglect of so many other important features of the physical environment?

In defense, it might be observed that Turner composed his first essay in 1893; in other words, before Semple, Huntington, and others had explored the manifold aspects of “nature” and suggested the wide range of its possible influences. Yet this defense falls when it is realized that later essays followed from Turner’s pen without his giving evidence of any greater interest or awareness. Furthermore, these essays were gathered together for republication in 1920, when once again an opportunity offered, most particularly in the

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8 For repetitions and elaborations of this unshatterable conviction over the twenty-seven years that followed its first formulation, see the other essays (pp. 206, 281–2) and the Preface of 1920. The patriotic, nationalistic flavor of Turner’s theories will receive attention later.
Preface. That he then inserted no notes or afterthoughts, no corrections and no explanations, is truly astonishing. One does not have to agree entirely with Huntington to regret such omissions. In any case, also, the main and essential point remains: for the student of American history today these famous essays are, in the particulars named, seriously deficient.

A second necessary observation concerns the features of the natural environment to which Turner in his essays did pay some attention. And here the charge has to be one of over-emphasizing the "free-land" aspect of the frontier, and of exaggerating the uniformity of the frontier experience. Let it be conceded at once that in his work on "sections" Turner later repudiated some of this exaggeration, at least by implication. Let it also be conceded that he possessed a fine sense of geography, and a feeling for the topographical variations within each of the regions he studied. His use of maps is famous. In his later essays he also showed some appreciation of mineral resources. He spoke of "the vast open spaces, the imperial resources of the great interior" (p. 179); he noticed an unevenness in the attraction of areas of unequal riches (pp. 16–18); in a disillusioned glance at the Middle West of more recent days he allowed himself to concede that it might be a case of "New England in the presence of natural gas" (p. 232); finally, in several of his essays dealing with similar, more recent developments throughout the West he found brief space for the soil, for lead and gold, for coal and for minerals in general (pp. 129, 177–8, 341, etc.). "But nature's revelations are progressive," Turner averred, and essentially it was the first experience that counted. Other resources than farming soil were but the accidental or sub-surface variations in what was labelled a common and repeated frontier experience.

In one completely unguarded moment, Turner made an admission that undercut his whole work when he wrote of the opening of the

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9 See "A Comparison of Differing Versions of 'The Significance of the Frontier'" in The Early Writings of Frederick Jackson Turner (University of Wisconsin Press, 1938). The second paragraph of this friendly summary states: "The significant thing, perhaps, is that they [the changes in later reprints of the essay] were no more numerous—that in 1920 the essay Turner had written nearly thirty years earlier could still stand, in essentially its original form, as the expression of his mature scholarship." *Vice versa*, might it not be suggested that his later frontier essays hardly manifest the growth one would expect to find?
Dakotas by the railroads and added: “the opportunity for economic and political fortunes in such rapidly growing communities attracted multitudes of Americans whom the cheap land alone would not have tempted” (p. 145). But generally and emphatically Turner insisted that “the fundamental fact in regard to this new society was its relation to land” (p. 211) and attention to subduing it. In fact, in the matter of free land his emphasis was so decided, narrow and emphatic, that the conscientious reader is led to ask whether it was the wilderness as wilderness, or the continent as free land, that Turner really regarded as “mastering” the colonist (p. 4)? The difference, particularly in the matter of consequences, may fairly be said to be worth noticing.

The following disturbing questions also suggest themselves: Was the land, even the unsettled Indian or squatter land, really free? Again, was the man who bought or stole free land, and so bound himself to continuous struggle with the shaggy forest, automatically himself a freer man than his neighbors left behind? Finally, and most important, what about the other freedoms: for instance, free fish, free coal, free speech or free religion?

Of the population that exposed itself to the influences of the natural environment above mentioned, less need perhaps be asked. The Indian who taught Americans so much of the arts of war and of the benefits of cohesion, who contributed to our language and transportation, and who when all is said and done gave Americans a half of their plant agriculture, has obviously been inadequately treated. On the other hand, did not Turner’s analysis of the frontier population tend to require too much of the remaining groups? Did Americanization really come to the nation through the hunters, the cattlemen, and the lonely pioneers—who alone found free land or faced the wilderness in all its primitive hostility? This question as to whether the traits of character, denominated by Turner to be American, really were born on the frontier will have to await the later analysis of “frontier influences.” But meanwhile it is not too much to wonder whether cattle kingdoms gave us our democracy, or fur-trading our faith in man. Could it have been the scattering pioneers who specialized in social cooperation? Yet, if not, what has happened

In another place (pp. 96–97) he stated that the free land system of Georgia had produced not agricultural democracy but great estates!
to Turner's "frontier" as place and as population? Once again the student stumbles on a problem to which the essays supply at best an ambiguous answer.\textsuperscript{11}

The last observations suggest that perhaps the word "frontier" has been too narrowly understood, and so carry the student directly to the problem of Turner's definition. On re-examination it becomes plain that the term "frontier" can, and in Turner's essays does, vary in meaning. Now it is a line, marked by forts against the Indians. Now it becomes a zone of settlement behind that line. Again (as when the hunters and grazers are considered) the zone spreads into an area on both sides of that line. Yet turn the page and "frontier" has become a term referring to density of population. Thus far the variations in the assigned meaning—however astonishing—may still seem possible. They need not be mutually destructive, and they may be very useful.

When, however, the word "frontier" connotes process, and in particular the transforming social process that stamps on Europeans "American" traits of character, a point of danger has been reached. For once the assumption as to the Americanizing influence of the "frontier" is accepted, it tends to follow that any area where these qualities are found partakes, to the degree noticed, of the "frontier." By a kind of inverse reasoning it further becomes possible, whenever a distinctive and acceptable characteristic is detected in the American people, to attribute the same to the beneficent influence of the "frontier," \textit{without a fresh examination} to determine whether such an attribution is at all reasonable.\textsuperscript{12} By this double extension, the "frontier" as territory may come to absorb the large and densely populated areas, while at the same time the "frontier" as cause begins to father the oddest and most incompatible consequences.

Such, in any case, proves to have been the sequence of persuasion in Turner's essays. For apparently it did not disturb him in the least

\textsuperscript{11} A good statement of this paradox may be found in Avery Craven, "The 'Turner Thesis' and the South," \textit{The Journal of Southern History, V} (August, 1939), 295. I cannot agree with Professor Craven, however, when he suggests that it is "obvious" that Turner didn't mean what he wrote, and that such "crosscurrents" should be ignored.

\textsuperscript{12} Note once again the hint of an alliance between the "frontier hypothesis" and our buoyant nationalism. For Turner's later failure to revise or check his youthful guesses by a disinterested resort to the evidence, see his essays generally, and \textit{The Early Writings of Frederick Jackson Turner}, cited above.
to stretch the meaning of the word "frontier" to cover regions that knew only a mild and exploited natural environment, in periods long after the disappearance of the frontiersmen.18 So long as the region under discussion was not Eastern, it seemed to qualify. As early as his first famous essay, for example, he announced that "the true point of view in the history of this nation is not the Atlantic coast, it is the great West" (p. 3): not the frontier (the reader will note) but the whole great West. The frontier, Turner thought, produced American democracy. Yet it could not escape notice that democracy was strong in the well-settled states of the Ohio Valley, long after the trappers and the pioneers had disappeared. Hence, once again, an assimilation: "This, at least, is clear: American democracy is fundamentally the outcome of the experiences of the American people in dealing with the West" (p. 266). Again, anything beyond the barrier of the Middle Atlantic States, or anything beyond the Allegheny Mountains, seemed to qualify (pp. 27–29). Only too evidently, once fully launched Turner gave full play to his sectional loyalties. In part he saw what he was doing, and tried to correct the disproportion by lending his formula to other areas at earlier points in their development. More generally he managed to justify the performance (to himself as to so many of his later followers) by elevating his home province to the post of capital to the nation.14

Once embarked on this argument, also, even a state of mind or a stage in cultural development became sufficient to Turner's philosophic purposes, as when he wrote that "the West, at bottom, is a form of society, rather than an area" (p. 205). The West (like the frontier) was the gate of escape from the bondage of the past; the frontier (like the West) was the place of many sects (p. 95). Sometimes it seemed that the West stood for the frontier made perfect, and

18 Social inertia or momentum may help account for slow Americanization in the colonial period, and for some seeming discrepancies of date between cause and effect thereafter. However, the historian of the frontier will be well advised to use this "explanation" with caution. A moment's reflection on its implications for the Middle Western period of 1800–1850 will suggest that this weapon has two edges.

14 How Turner came to rebel against the New England traditions and the somewhat younger "germ theory" of Herbert Baxter Adams at Johns Hopkins has been beautifully set forth. At best, however, the explanation justifies Turner and the timeliness of his original contribution, rather than the present accuracy or future value of this same "frontier hypothesis."
again and again the Middle West became the obvious center of this newly revealed Utopia: "with the entrance of the American pioneer into the Forest of the Middle West, a new era was born" (p. 133).

It does not take a careful reader long to perceive that what had started as a limited area, with a sparse and peculiar population, had soon turned, under the alchemy of Turner's imagination, into the vaguest of poetic concepts: a state of (middle) westwardness and optimism.

In the matter of the use of the word "frontier," Turner himself insisted—as was noted above—that "the term is an elastic one." But had not all useful definition disappeared entirely before Turner reached many of his triumphant conclusions? In any case, how ascertain the effects of the "frontier" when one no longer knew what the symbolic word meant? Wasn't it a little unreasonable to expect the identical qualities in fur-traders and well-to-do farmers? Or to find the same tendencies in pioneers fleeing into the wilderness as were observable in the growing emporia of Louisville and Cincinnati? Again, why mourn the census of 1890 if the Middle West still remained? And why talk about the separation from the Atlantic seaboard, if contact with a savage wilderness was the prime requisite? One is even led to wonder whether Turner by any chance used the words "individualism," "democracy," and "pioneer"15 with an equal elasticity, not to say carelessness. But at the moment it is enough to ask once again: could areas and populations so different produce the same effects?

Now that we have restated and reviewed what Turner said the "frontier" really was, it looks a little as if Turner himself had found the concept wanting: too sparse an area to influence the whole population, to frail a peg to hang his whole list of Americanisms on. Accordingly, he had equated "frontier" with the whole West, and with the conquest of the continent.

These points need no further laboring, save only that we should mark once again how Turner, as he weakened his intellectual argument by including too many phenomena under the one term "frontier," at the same time made his definitions almost irresistibly appealing to the American heart. On the one hand he championed the plain

15 For an impressive abuse of the "pioneer" concept, see pp. 287–288. "Individualism" and "democracy" will be dealt with in the third section below.
man of the Middle West. But it should not escape us that his appeal went further than that. To a people noted for their materialism, their romantic sentiment, their cultural timorousness, and their isolationist patriotism, he offered the epic and soothing legend of the great “Frontier.”

That contradictions and weaknesses could be overlooked under such circumstances is after all not so much to be wondered at.

II. HOW THE “FRONTIER” ACTED

Laying aside our study of what the “frontier” was, it is now useful to ask two further questions of Professor Turner’s essays: first, how (that is, by what means) did the frontier act on the frontier populations? And secondly, with what immediate personal consequences?

According to Turner the frontier influence tended, everywhere and at all times, to produce novelty in the form of new men, new institutions and new ideas—again with the further effect of modifying the men and institutions left behind on the sea-coast and in the countries of origin. Which is to repeat that the frontier took Europeans and made them into Americans, with consequences of import even for those who remained European.

By what process or set of operations were those changes accomplished? Very curiously, Turner’s essays are obscure on this point. Yet hints scattered here and there are perhaps explicit enough to warrant the statement that the all-important transformation between frontier exposure and American result was achieved in three different ways.

The first process was that of starting over, which was accomplished in a series of smaller steps: (a) by abandoning old—and essentially European—ways; (b) by returning to nature and to the simplest existence; and finally (c) by reconstructing society afresh, in the course of which reconstruction new ideas and new institutions were invented, new ways adopted, and an American society created. At first “the wilderness masters the colonist,” Turner asserted (p. 4). “American social development has been continually beginning over again on the frontier” (p. 2). Essentially, the West was a region whose condition resulted “from the application of older institutions and ideas to the transforming influences of free land. By this application, a new en-
environment is suddenly entered, freedom of opportunity is opened, the cake of custom is broken, and new activities, new lines of growth, new institutions and new ideas, are brought into existence” (p. 205).

In cases where the inherited ideals and the traditional customs were too deeply ingrained in a settler-group to be obliterated, even by a howling wilderness, a different process took place. The old ways were modified, rather than abandoned, under the exposure to a new environment. In other words, this type of change was partial, and the Americanization consisted in deviation rather than in pure invention. Yet Turner was reluctant to allow that his irresistible force might have met some immovable object in the character of a particular population. In general, inherited peculiarities melted away before wilderness conditions. The Old West, Turner suggested, “diminished the importance of the town as a colonizing unit, even in New England” (p. 125).

The third means of Americanization, indicated in Turner's essays, was Americanization by mixture. Dissimilar men and institutions being brought into the same empty frontier zone, a sort of melting-pot process inevitably ensued. In any case, the result was a society differing from any (and from all) of its component factors. In the West, Turner pointed out, cross-fertilization was constantly going on (p. 29). And if fusion was not perfect, nevertheless the most obdurate racial strains tended to lose themselves in the flood of migrating families (pp. 249–251). “In the crucible of the frontier the immigrants were Americanized, liberated, and fused into a mixed race, English in neither nationality nor characteristics” (p. 23).

One further proposition was advanced by Turner to explain the magnitude of the transformation accomplished in these three ways by the frontier (pp. 19–21). Observers had noticed, and Turner insisted, that for numberless individuals, as most certainly for American society as a whole, the frontier experience was a repeated experience. Over and over again the pioneer moved. A German family landing in colonial Pennsylvania might later move down the Shenandoah. The New Englanders in Michigan had come, not straight from Massachusetts, but in three jumps: first to Vermont, then to western New York, finally to Pontiac. Naturally, such repetition could not
but strengthen the influence of the frontier, and each of the three processes—mixing, modifying, and starting over—were by renewed application intensified in power and in effect. The explanation seemed to Turner fully adequate to account for the results claimed.

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By way of criticism it may be noted that the emphasis of the essays was apparently laid on the first process—the transformation by beginning over again. The reader almost gets the impression that the second and third explanations were offered only as a concession, only when reflection or discussion made it all too obvious that there never had been any real abandonment of many traits and institutions. Again, in passing, the question may be asked: were melting-pots and new environments to be found only at the hither edge of free land? Were they even confined to the West as a whole? Was there, by contrast, no population movement within the East? And no social blending? In a word, did the forest, or the Middle West, or all the unoccupied lands of the continent, have any monopoly—or even control the preponderant supply—of such disturbing and renovating forces? Yet, if not, what has happened to the unique rock-crushing and cement-mixing powers claimed for this Americanizing frontier?

The additional question then arises: whether our settlers, even on the real frontier, ever abandoned their ways and institutions completely, and—if so—whether the re-creation of society produced novelties in any substantial number? But this last problem is so fundamental and so very difficult that it may be a long time before the pertinent evidence can be gathered and fairly assessed.

Meanwhile, it is more illuminating and at least as pertinent to recall that Turner’s essays were intensely concerned with the personal results of exposure to the wilderness. For the frontier experience was supposed to have produced the most thorough-going changes in human nature, as well as in society. Not merely did it break down old group arrangements and generate new institutions, particularly in the political and economic fields; fundamentally and first of all it affected the emotions. A man was influenced in his attitude toward himself and toward his neighbor, toward God and toward nature,
toward government domestic or foreign. And it was his new attitudes, very naturally and very largely, that then determined his social development. Such at least was Turner's conviction; and he went into the matter with optimistic elaboration. Postponing, therefore, for another occasion the "Americanization" of our social institutions (the last part of the process), I proceed in this third section to a methodical restatement of how the frontier is supposed to have shaped American character.

III. EFFECTS OF THE "FRONTIER" ON PERSONAL ATTITUDES

On one occasion Turner enumerated the intellectual products of frontier life as "that coarseness and strength combined with acuteness and inquisitiveness; that practical, inventive turn of mind, quick to find expedients; that masterful grasp of material things, lacking in the artistic but powerful to effect great ends; that restless, nervous energy; that dominant individualism, working for good and for evil, and withal that buoyancy and exuberance which comes with freedom..." (p. 37). The statement has become classic, and illuminates Turner's own imaginative and exuberant mood. Yet his summary is not complete, and in orderliness of presentation it leaves a good deal to be desired. A more analytical catalogue seems, therefore, in order. This may be begun by reiterating that Turner's "frontier" affected men's attitudes, first of all toward themselves and toward all human-kind.

The most obvious thing about the frontiersman's view of himself and of his place in the scheme of things was what Turner described as his individualism. The frontiersman of North America developed a supreme self-reliance. He was independent in thought and act; he believed himself capable for all emergencies; he had faith in himself and an unlimited confidence in the future. Let his neighbors also look out for themselves: the West was a free field of competition. "He honored the man whose eye was the quickest and whose grasp was the strongest in this contest: 'it was everyone for himself' " (p. 153). If, momentarily, some stranger proved to be the better man, the field was wide and his own chance would surely come. There was enough for all. In fact, the future could be nothing less than magnificent. "While his horizon was still bounded by the clearing that his ax had made, the pioneer dreamed of continental conquests... His vision
saw beyond the dank swamp at the edge of the great lake to the lofty buildings of a mighty city" (p. 153). "The West caught the vision of the nation's continental destiny" (p. 213).

With such optimism, such faith in the economic future of the country, it was not to be wondered at that the settlers saw a chance "to rise to a higher plane of existence" (p. 154), and by their own unaided efforts. Every man could do it. "The self-made man was the Western man's ideal, was the kind of man that all men might become. Out of his wilderness experience, out of the freedom of his opportunities, he fashioned a formula for social regeneration, the freedom of the individual to seek his own" (p. 213).

Thus far, the individualism of the pioneer might be labelled optimistic and positive. Yet this individualism had its strong negative side as well. If the frontiersman was self-reliant, he was also impatient: impatient of restraint, suspicious of government, restless under authority. Anything that tied him down or controlled his actions aroused active resentment. He wanted to throw off the shackles of the eastern aristocrats, of Europe, of his own past even—and be free. Civilization itself choked him. Not cultivation or the dead hand should rob the squatter of his new-won sovereignty. Intolerant of education and tradition, he distrusted all forms of order and restraint. Under his hands a complex institution was soon reduced to the family unit; society itself became atomic (pp. 30–33, 63–65, 140, 211–212).

A second major characteristic of the frontier populations—their democratic attitude—seemed to Turner at least as noticeable as their optimistic or impatient individualism, and probably even more important. How could the settlers be independent, and socially cooperative, at one and the same time? Far from recognizing a contradiction here, Turner felt that the one was essentially a direct product of the other. For if a man respected himself, he also respected men in general. He believed not simply in himself but in the ideal of personal development for mankind as a whole; social discipline and aristocratic traditions alone were to be avoided: the frontier and the absence of government would allow each of his neighbors "to grow to the full measure of his own capacity" (p. 268). All of them hated monopoly, aristocracy, privilege. Each Westerner had faith in the plain man, tolerated equality of suffrage with his neighbor, and could cooperate gladly toward the realization of a common liberty and a
mutual welfare (p. 274-5). Thus it was that these pioneer individualists would come together in friendly neighborliness to vote, or to raise a dwelling, or to shuck the corn. And in this wise might it truly be said that "the frontier individualism has from the beginning promoted democracy" (p. 30).

On the democratic and tolerant neighborliness of Americans (as Westerners) Turner insisted over and over again. Frontier areas were inimical to slavery, and were also the sites of equalitarian rebellion against other forms of monopoly (pp. 117-122, 257). "Certain it is that the strength of democratic movements has lain chiefly in the regions of the pioneer" (p. 274). Conversely, of course, American democracy could not have had eastern or European origins. And in his essay on "The West and American Ideals," Turner nailed his convictions to the mast: "American democracy was born of no theorist's dream; it was not carried in the Sarah Constant to Virginia, nor in the Mayflower to Plymouth. It came out of the American forest, and it gained new strength each time it touched a new frontier..." (p. 293). On no other aspect of Americanism was Turner more insistent, or more certain of the explanation (see pp. 216, 247, 267, 273, 306).

To recapitulate: The reconciliation between individualism and democracy was simple because the vast possibilities of the frontier made our democracy one of "mobile ascending individuals" (p. 203). Under the spell of the open spaces, the early Appalachian pioneer became an idealist. "He dreamed dreams and beheld visions. He had faith in man, hope for democracy, belief in America's destiny, unbounded confidence in his ability to make his dreams come true" (p. 214). With the later Mississippians, the story was still, and more confidently, the same: "The 'Men of the Western Waters' broke with the old order of things, ... and proclaimed the ideal of democracy" (p. 183).

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To attempt a critical analysis of the two concepts "individualism" and "democracy," within these brief limits, would betray a confidence in one's powers and an optimism as to the intentions of Providence almost "Western" in character—to say nothing of the disrespect for authority that such a course would indicate. Certainly, to
question the genuineness of "frontier individualism," or to cast doubt on the ancestry of democracy, must be recognized as rank lèse-Americanism.

Nevertheless, one or two observations may be offered. And if thereby any questions of fact or interpretation are raised, let the same be regarded not as attempts at conclusive judgments but rather as possibilities for the consideration of historical investigators.

In the first place, then, let it be observed that Turner nowhere exactly defines his two master words. Accordingly, each reader is forced to make his own translation. The problem at once arises: did Turner, by "democracy," mean to include under that heading all aspects of democracy? For example, did "democracy" mean a leveling, anti-privilege tendency that is sometimes called equalitarianism; or did the word mean freedom of first opportunity, whatever the ultimate inequality of rewards because of unequal talent or luck? If the emphasis was to be on equality and security, was it economic, or political, or social levelling that the frontier fostered? And what about the classes whose legal and political inferiority was so definitely maintained? Did pioneer women, for example, achieve the vote? In other words, did all frontier regions, or all the frontier periods, pronounce the democratic credo in the same way, or come even close to laying the accent on the same syllables? Furthermore, if not, was there a common denominator which today can be detected and attributed to the influence of the wilderness experience? No doubt there must have been. But whether it should be understood in Turner's vague and shifting terms seems much less

16 The case of Wyoming Territory seems a frail support for the frontier explanation, when the indifference of the Middle West is taken into account. In addition, the student of woman suffrage discovers that the idea seems originally to have been imported from England, not invented in the woods. The crusade was then apparently organized as a by-product of the anti-slavery movement, and it reached national success as a part of the drive to win the war in 1918.

17 For an interesting study in this field—as well as for a partial confirmation of much that is being advanced here—see Avery Craven's article, already referred to. Professor Craven proposes that the Turner hypothesis has a larger application or illustration in the ante-bellum Southwest, especially among the whites, than ordinarily supposed. Slavery, however, seems to have been rendered more harsh and autocratic: "Talk of emancipation was seldom indulged in; the West gave the institution a new hold on the section" (p. 309).
certain. In any case, his thirteen essays offer assertion and warm appreciation: not definition and proof.

In similar fashion, the word “individualism” must sooner or later be put into some historical cyclotron, and broken down into its component elements. The operation will not be attempted here. Its necessity will merely be suggested by recalling an observation of Charles A. Beard, to the effect that on the particular frontier he had known there could be seen a lot of individuals, but little individualism. Another way of asking the same question would be to compare American individualism with French individualism of the more advanced type: that is, were our Westerners really scornful of public opinion? Or did they merely shrug off the social control of the East and the dead hand of the past, the while remaining vulnerable to the criticism of their fellow Westerners—still slaves as it were, but slaves to a tyranny of opinion that had become merely provincial? To persons who are acquainted abroad, it sometimes seems as if educated Frenchmen put more emphasis on independent judgment, and as if the rugged individualism which Turner celebrates had been considerably stronger on its economic than on its moral side. How account for the organizing and cooperative talents of the Americans consistently with any thoroughgoing moral or ideological individualism?

This brings us back again to our concept of “democracy,” and to the statement of a final query. Was not the democracy of Turner’s frontiersmen (as of Jefferson’s followers) sometimes in part the expression of no government at all, rather than of a new kind of government? Was it not more closely related to anarchy than to a clearly formulated science of politics? On the other hand, when—or to the extent that—a theory can be detected (this time with applications to Jefferson’s doctrine), did that theory really come out of the forest?

* * *

So much for the frontiersman’s attitudes toward himself and his neighbors. Let us now examine his attitudes toward that forest from which he derived so many benefits. If Westerners were optimistic

18 “Books that Changed Our Minds,” New Republic, LXXXVII (1 Feb., 1939), 359-62. This article represents one of the few comprehensive estimates of Turner’s work on the frontier.

19 The implications of this proposal seem of no inconsiderable interest.
and idealistic about man, and acted accordingly, what opinion or line of conduct did they adopt toward nature?

The question should undoubtedly be stated in the plural, for man’s reactions to the physical environment on the frontier were many and diverse. According to Turner, they ranged from a fierce destructive-ness to a benevolent exploitation for the better comfort of man, from crude materialism to the purest idealism. The effect on nature, and in particular on the raw wilderness, was almost always the same: a brutal destruction and conquest and waste, so that at the end of three generations these masters of a continent of supposedly limitless re-

sources found themselves driven to a policy of rueful conservation. For that half of the equation known as the frontier environment, the results of the presence of frontier populations have been so obvious as to make further comment superfluous. Turner, himself, regretted more than once the half unconscious, half wilful, but in any case all-
too-successful efforts of the settlers to destroy the very thing that made them different and peculiarly American. Let us pass directly, therefore, to the qualities that the ill-fated American environment once engendered but now, presumably, can no longer produce.

On the frontier populations, the first effect of the raw wilderness was to call out all man’s courageous and aggressive propensities. It was a sort of military training school “keeping alive the power of re-
sistance to aggression and developing the stalwart and rugged qualities of the frontiersmen” (pp. 15, 65, 211-214, 264).

In the second place, the populations concerned experienced a new access of energy, strength and ambition. Turner even went so far as to insist that the encounter with new conditions and new problems beyond the mountains acted as “a tonic to this stock” (p. 166). Their very ideals, such as democracy, “came stark and strong and full of life from the American forest” (p. 216). Among the Southerners “a greater energy and initiative appeared” (p. 139).

In his treatment of the wilderness, accordingly, this new feeling of confidence and power made the frontier individualist increasingly rough, ready and direct. In his battle with the trees he needed no assistance from the state, no skillful mustering of the forces or the science of society (p. 26). Here lay “such a wealth of opportunity that reflection and well-considered planning seemed wasted time” (p. 290). His own bare hands would make him master of all he sur-
Squatter though he might be, his was an immediate and intoxicating sovereignty (pp. 140, 272). Why even bother with the niceties of doing things, when primitive seizure worked so well? "That method was best which was most direct and effective. The backwoodsman was intolerant of men who split hairs, or scrupled over the method of reaching the right" (p. 254).

This suggests the growth of another characteristic in the "frontier mind": a disregard for niceties or distinctions, a carelessness as to means, even a direct contempt for ethical standards of any restraining sort. If ancestral precepts or legislative statutes stood in the way, brush them aside. In the pioneer the law once again became personalized. On the negative side, when a crime was committed, it was "more an offense against the victim than a violation of the law of the land," and lynch law or vigilantes were the obvious remedy (p. 212).

On the positive side, a man was entitled to what he could take. Thus the frontier bred into Americans coarseness, brutality, and many related forms of immorality. Turner generally and conspicuously "refrained from dwelling on the lawless characteristics of the frontier, because they are sufficiently well known"; yet even he felt it necessary to mention the spoils system and other political laxities, the indifference to business honor and the increase in financial dishonesty, finally also the gambler and desperado—"types of that line of scum that the waves of advancing civilization bore before them."20

The next group of characteristics derived from or emphasized by the frontier were of a different sort and might be classified altogether under the head instability: an instability that was physical and intellectual as well as emotional.

Physically, the Westerner was astonishingly nervous and restless. Turner thought the colonials had been phlegmatic (p. 37, note). If so, the contrast with the later pioneers was indeed sharp. For they were never still, never at peace, never content to take root and settle down (p. 211). They were ever moving westward, chasing the game, following the frontier to some new purchase beyond the horizon. Sometimes it seemed as if it were change itself that they loved. Sometimes it took the path of political unrest, as if superabundant energies were turning into agitation (p. 219).

Occasionally, there could be no question but that intellectual ad-

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20 Pp. 32–33. These few paragraphs, with one or two other references (out of a total of 359 pages), were all that Turner gave to this less cheerful topic.
venturousness had been aroused. For the Western settlers were full of curiosity, and visitors found them inquisitive to a degree. Under the stimulus of new problems at hand, and lured to discoveries just ahead, the Westerner sometimes became a Kiplingesque explorer, forever yearning after the unknown. In any case, a craving for novelty and a love of innovation got established in the blood of the American people (pp. 18, 37, 270–1, 306).

Most obvious, however, was the emotional instability of the men of the woods and the open spaces. They were enthusiastic and angry, buoyant and despairing, humorous and deadly earnest by turns—but always volatile and changeful of mood. This characteristic was visible in occasional but excessive outbursts of religious feeling. They responded to the more “emotional sects” and were found a fertile field by the “Baptists, Methodists and later Campbellites, as by Presbyterians” (p. 165). Most of all they responded to emotional leadership in politics, and followed Clay or Jackson with a blindness of loyalty and an abnegation of personal thinking altogether extraordinary in so independent-minded and self-reliant a population. Turner called this the “leadership” principle of Western democracy (pp. 165, 302, 344). If it looks a little like a paradox, at least there can be no questioning the emotionalism involved.

The reader comes now to the practical and materialistic qualities developed by the battle against the wilderness and by the long efforts to exploit the resources of nature. The struggle to survive in so raw an environment, according to Turner, emphasized the acuteness, the resourcefulness, and the inventive abilities in the human material (p. 37). Again, the vastness of the country developed in its conquerors a taste for bigness, a belief in quantity, and a very unusual administrative capacity. Thence both materialism and managerial talent (pp. 37, 259). The problems were so overwhelming, and the rewards so stupendous, that even individualism had to yield to the obvious advantage of organization. Accordingly, it should occasion no surprise, nor even too much regret, that in Ohio where yesterday the pioneer leaned on his ax, today the captain of industry sits enthroned. In any case, the materialism involved had been of a superior variety: “not the dull contented materialism of an old and fixed

21 As Professor Labaree points out, it is not at all clear how Turner reconciled this view with the history of the Great Awakening, and particularly with the reception of Whitefield in the more densely settled areas of the English colonies.
Finally, Turner saw in the frontier the source of American dreams and of most of what was valid in American idealism. "In spite of his rude, gross nature, this early Western man was an idealist withal (p. 214). "The very materialism that has been urged against the West was accompanied by ideals... It has been, and is, preeminently a region of ideals..." (p. 214). Turner devoted one whole essay to "The West and American Ideals," but his insistence went farther than that. Essay after essay returns to this proposition, paragraph after paragraph opens with the word "ideals," or with some confident echo of the heartening theme. To what ideals in particular did Turner refer? Primarily to beliefs or aspirations already mentioned: to the personal self-reliance, the economic optimism, and the political liberalism that so distinguished the West, especially in the Ohio and Upper Mississippi valleys. "The ideals of equality, freedom of opportunity, faith in the common man are deep rooted in all the Middle West" (p. 155). And what nourished the deep roots? "The ideals of the Middle West," answered Turner, "began in the log huts set in the midst of the forest a century ago" (p. 153).

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Once again a critical analysis is incumbent on American historians. In this case, unfortunately, even the most learned students of human nature as yet know so little about the motives of man, or the springs of his conduct, that no certainty or agreement can reasonably be expected. Moreover, it so happens that in this phase of his doctrine Turner once again managed to link his "frontier" with certain of the strongest traditions of the American people, as is sufficiently indicated by recalling that Americans have been almost fanatically proud of their freedom, their democracy, and their idealism. Furthermore Turner's explanation, in an age when the God of the Puritans no longer seemed to account for (or protect) American superiority, allowed historians and laity alike to continue to cling to the feeling that we were unique and chosen from among the nations. For a personal divinity, a natural force (the "frontier") had been substituted as source and justification. And to the support of his theory Turner
had thereby drafted the equally strong current of American nationalism.

Whether or not this explanation seems adequate, the fact is obvious that more than intellectual interest today supports this portion of the Turnerian theory: the emotions have become involved. Just as in the case of his definition of "frontier," Turner's celebration of the "frontiersman" and his peculiarly "American" qualities has appealed to prejudices both national and local. It follows that the historian must be tentative, yet somehow retain his freedom to dissent. Perhaps it might be fair to begin the testing of Turner's conclusions in this matter by the application of internal logic and ordinary common sense—developing the argument in the first instance at the level of amateur observation and recorded opinion that Turner himself used. If such an examination were to be undertaken, the following questions might usefully be asked.

First, was Turner's list of American traits an acceptable list, or should it be modified by addition or omission? For example, were not money-mindedness and faith in education—to mention but two other traits—strongly enough developed in the United States to qualify in any list of Americanisms?

A second approach would be that of asking whether all of the acceptable list of Americanisms did indeed, so far as common knowledge or special investigation enables us to judge, derive originally from a frontier experience or from the neighborhood or influence of a frontier area? For instance, was it the settlement of the Middle West, or even the bitter struggle against the stony soil of colonial New England, that engendered Yankee ingenuity? Patent Office statistics will hardly be found to support such a view. Again, were our managerial talents due entirely to the struggle against the wilderness? Or was not the opportunity for their exercise perhaps even greater in the area of manufactures and intensive farming? And what about origins? Bluntly, for Turner to treat economic individualism, or business abilities and materialism in general, without serious credit to the Commercial Revolution and the influence of European thought and capitalism, seems one-sided indeed.

In the third place, it ought to be asked whether the frontier did not perhaps produce qualities not emphasized in Turner's essays, and even positively reprobated by Americans in general? Among
those omitted will doubtless be discovered certain less admirable traits; but that ought not to prohibit the question. In fact, it seems a fair guess that this method of approach to the frontier will repay a temperate investigator, particularly along the line of establishing a more balanced interpretation.

A fourth test might be quite clearly of the comparative type: if American individualism had its roots in empty land, how account for French individualism, or even for the sturdy love of liberty sometimes celebrated as a trait of English character? As much could be asked of other "American" traits. In other words, even should the frontier be accepted as a definite source, historians might yet do well to consider the other possibilities, before making so dogmatic and exclusive an attribution.

Finally, Turner's frontier essays should be "controlled" by comparisons of a somewhat different sort: for instance, by the study of other populations and other frontiers. Were the habitants of Lower Canada affected as were the Virginians or Vermonters by the American wilderness? Evidence is already being marshalled to indicate that the Pennsylvania Germans, at least, were not.22 Again, a comparison of rural opportunities with urban opportunities would appear decidedly useful. And additional suggestions could as easily be made. Perhaps enough has been said already, however, to establish a substantial doubt, and to indicate that this section of Turner's theory likewise needs a most thorough and painstaking overhauling.

In summary it should be observed that a large quarter of the thirteen essays still remains unanalyzed, and that in any case, prior to trial, doubts must not be stretched into established proof. Notwithstanding, it would already seem reasonable to recognize that Turner's "frontier" was a hazy and a shifting concept, riddled with internal contradictions, overlaid with sectional bias, and saturated with nationalistic emotion. Partly because of such preoccupations, and partly because Turner appears never adequately to have checked his literary deductions by a fresh and disinterested resort to the evidence, his conclusions as to the character and influence of the "frontier" must now seriously be brought into question.

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22 See the illuminating studies by the editor of this magazine, as published in The Mississippi Valley Historical Review, The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography, and The Journal of Southern History, June, July, and August, 1939.