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American Exceptionalism or Atlantic Unity?

Frederick Jackson Turner and the Enduring Problem of
American Historiography




KEVIN JON FERNLUND

The Problem: Europe and the History of America

In 1892 the United States celebrated the four hundredth anniversary of Christopher Columbus's discovery of lands west of Europe, on the far side of the Atlantic Ocean. To mark this historic occasion, and to showcase the nation's tremendous industrial progress, the city of Chicago hosted the World's Columbian Exposition. Chicago won the honor after competing with other major U.S. cities, including New York. Owing to delays, the opening of the exposition was pushed back to 1893. This grand event was ideally timed to provide the country's nascent historical profession with the opportunity to demonstrate its value to the world. The American Historical Association (AHA) was founded only a few years prior in 1884, and incorporated by the U.S. Congress in 1889. During these first years, according to William A. Dunning, later president of the AHA (1913),

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it was a “matter of widespread comment in historical circles that there had never been produced a comprehensive history of the United States” from the European “Christopher Columbus” to the American “Grover Cleveland.”¹ The first great—and enduring—historiographical problem faced by American historians, including Frederick Jackson Turner, was how to write history that synthesized two things, Europe and America, which many took to be antithetical to one another, despite their obviously and profoundly intertwined histories.²

Two years after the AHA’s incorporation, Frederick Jackson Turner (1861–1932) envisioned a bold purpose and program for history. Turner was one of the country’s new professional historians; he turned out, also, to be one of its very best. Turner hailed from Portage, Wisconsin, and had secured a professorship at the University of Wisconsin in Madison. Turner’s father, Andrew Jackson Turner, was a newspaperman and a rock-ribbed Republican. The political views of his son were more complicated. He tended to vote against whichever party, Democrat or Republican, seemed at the moment to represent the bigger threat to the country.³ Turner was a PhD in history—one of a small but growing number of such trained specialists in the country. He took his doctorate in 1890 from Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland. Johns Hopkins was, as historian and past AHA president Arthur Link pointed out in 1985, the “first modern research-oriented university in the United States.”⁴ The institution was founded on the nation’s centenary and, six years later in 1882, had produced its first history PhDs.

The doctorate in philosophy, or PhD, was borrowed from German higher education. The degree came to include the requirement that the candidate write and publicly defend a dissertation, a work of original scholarship based on archival research, supported by a heavy scholarly apparatus—extensive notes and bibliography. The candidate, then, was not only to demonstrate a mastery of the relevant scholarship, an expectation dating back to the Middle Ages and the founding of the first universities, but was also expected, after the European Enlightenment, to advance knowledge. Higher education should not only *prepare* civilization for progress—a goal of the Enlightenment—the PhD degree should also allow one to *make* and be a part of that progress, a crucial corollary inspired by the Industrial Revolution of the nineteenth century. Moreover, the impact of the PhD in history was twofold. It changed the way knowledge was produced, certainly. But it also changed how the producers of knowledge were produced.⁵ The seminar at Johns Hopkins, for instance, was designed to encourage students to learn not only the methods and techniques for writing history but to develop new ones as well. Modern historians studied change and studied ways to make their study of the past more scientific. Content and method, in other words, were considered equally important.⁶



Frederick Jackson Turner, circa 1892.
Photograph courtesy Wisconsin
Historical Society, image no. 28393.

Turner's dissertation, which was directed by Herbert Baxter Adams (who took his PhD in history from Heidelberg University in Germany in 1876), was entitled the "Character and Influence of the Indian Trade in Wisconsin: The Study of the Trading Post as an Institution." Trained in the European manner, Turner went on to write a number of brilliant essays, including "The Significance of History," which was published in 1891 in the *Wisconsin Journal of Education*. The young professor from America's Middle West declared: "History . . . is to be taken in no narrow sense. It is more than past literature, more than past politics, more than past economics. It is the self-consciousness of humanity—humanity's effort to understand itself through the study of its past. Therefore it is not confined to books; the subject is to be studied, not books simply. History has a unity and continuity; the present needs the past to explain it; and local history must be read as part of world history."⁷ The clarity of Turner's conception of history was ahead of his time. What is even more remarkable is that much of Turner's subsequent scholarship met these high standards—but not at first.

Although Turner proved capable of articulating a cosmopolitan vision of history, he was also deeply shaped by his own times and by a strong provincial reaction to the work and ideas of his contemporaries, above all to Herbert Baxter Adams's germ theory and institutional approach, Achille Loria's landed theory of profit and economic determinism, and to Hermann Eduard von Holst's monocausality. Turner's most famous essay, "The Significance of the Frontier in



American History,” the timing of which was prompted by the 1892 Columbus anniversary, was a reaction—and a largely negative reaction at that—to Adams and especially Von Holst as much as it was a proactive summon to the new profession he aspired to lead. The First World War (1914–1918) and President Woodrow Wilson’s world leadership and internationalism, however, elicited in Turner a very different response in which he returned to his original principles. His sectional thesis was not a transition from frontier to region, to the blind alleys of American southern or western history. On the contrary, Turner’s sectionalism was a framework for writing an international history in which the “unity and continuity” of Europe and the United States could be explored; in which “local history” could indeed be read as part of “world history.”

The Institutionalism of Herbert Baxter Adams: Germs and Great Men

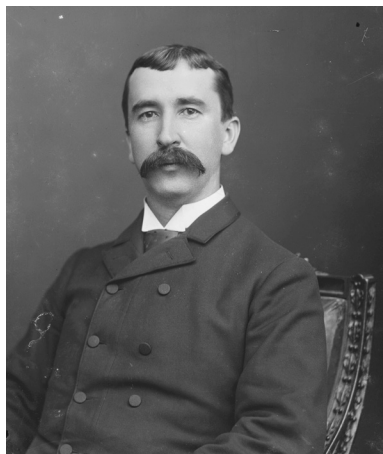
According to Adams, American history grew directly, like a plant from a seed, out of European history. This idea contained the possibility of Turner’s “unity and continuity.” In his *The Germanic Origin of New England Towns* (1882), Adams wrote: “The town and village life of New England is as truly the reproduction of Old English types as those again are reproductions of the village community system of the ancient Germans.” Moreover, Adams looked to Germany’s ancient forests, the Oldenwald and Black Forest, for the origin of American liberty and democracy. According to his research:

In such forests liberty was nurtured. Here dwelt the people Rome never could conquer. In these wild retreats the ancient Teutons met in council upon tribal matters of war and peace. Upon forest hill-tops they worshipped Wodan . . . in forest valleys they talked over, in village-moot, the lowly affairs of husbandry and the management of their common fields. Here were planted the seeds of Parliamentary Self-Government, of Commons and Congresses. Here lay the germs of religious reformations and of popular revolutions, the ideas which have formed Germany and Holland, England and New England, the United States in the broadest sense of that old German institution.⁸

Adams rejected the notion that these ideas could have been the product of the American environment, citing the discredited biological theory of spontaneous generation. Adams declared, “It is just as improbable that free local institutions should spring up without a germ along American shores as that English wheat should have grown here without planting.”⁹ To Adams, institutions were the key to writing a theoretical and disciplined history, for they served as a category of analysis that could be identified, defined, and traced back to antiquity as well as



Professor H. B. Adams, Johns Hopkins University. Photograph courtesy Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Digital Collection, digital image no. cwpbh-03589.



across space. Incidentally, Frederic Seebohm, a contemporary English economic historian, agreed, but differed on the germ. In *The English Village Community*, which was published in 1883, a year after Adams's essay had appeared, Seebohm convincingly argued the roots of this institution were not in the German mark but in the Roman villa, which called into question the Teutonist belief that a community of free men had preceded the English manor of lord and serf.¹⁰

In the excitement of the Columbian quadricentennial, Adams turned from institutional history to biography—from germs to great men. He and Henry Wood, also of Johns Hopkins, collaborated on the article, "Columbus and His Discovery of America." Connecting Columbus to Chicago, the professors wrote: "Columbus went to Portugal in 1472, at the age of 25. He went as young men now go to Chicago and the west. Lisbon was a city of enterprise and bold endeavor."¹¹ They fully acknowledged the controversies surrounding Columbus since he had been brought back to Spain in chains. Adams and Wood duly addressed the charges of cruelty, piracy, and sea-roving; that the admiral was supposedly little more than a glorified kidnapper and slave-trader. And, above all, that Columbus had blundered in his main objective: finding Cipango (Japan) or a route thereto.¹²

The case against Columbus would be relitigated in 1992 on the occasion of the five hundredth anniversary of Columbus's discovery of America. In fact, the damning documents, and much else besides, were at that time being collected in an extensive, thirteen volume, 5,343-page compendium, called the *Repertorium Columbianum*, which took eighteen years to edit, from 1986 to 2004, and was sponsored by the Medieval and Renaissance Center at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). With the publication of the final volume,



Christopher Columbus, 1840. Marble sculpture by John Gott; courtesy St. Louis Mercantile Library, University of Missouri–St. Louis.

the general editor and UCLA history professor, Geoffrey Symcox, issued a warning to prospective readers. Symcox reconfirmed that the man who emerged from this vast sea of documents was indeed an extraordinary mariner, a point long assumed and one ably demonstrated by the Harvard historian and rear admiral in the U.S. Naval Reserve, Samuel Eliot Morison.¹³ Otherwise, he is “not your grandfather’s Columbus.” According to Symcox: “The fact that Columbus brought slavery, enormous exploitation or devastating diseases to the Americas used to be seen as a minor detail—if it was recognized at all—in light of his role as the great bringer of white man’s civilization to the benighted idolatrous American continent. But to historians today this information is very important. It changes our whole view of the enterprise.”¹⁴ Adams and Wood, who were, after all, essentially institutionalists, did not think to hold Columbus personally responsible for the spread of diseases, such as smallpox, from the Old World to the New; or the other way around, as was likely the case with syphilis.

The germ theory of disease was coincident with the germ theory of history (Louis Pasteur’s famous fermentation experiments were conducted in the 1860s). But this former theory was only beginning to explain the spread of disease in history. In fact, it was in 1894, one year after Turner delivered his paper in Chicago, that the Swiss bacteriologist Alexander Yersin discovered the bacillus of the Bubonic Plague.¹⁵ Moreover, the historiographical shift in treating microbes as agents of history, no less than humans, did not occur until the 1970s with the publication of Alfred Crosby’s *The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492* (1972) and William McNeill’s *Plagues and Peoples* (1976). On the one hand, Adams and Wood fully acknowledged Columbus’s



trade in slaves, although they asked, “Are we men of the nineteenth century so far removed from the [Webster-Ashburton Treaty] in 1842[,] which stopped the slave trade[,] that we can talk reproachfully of it in the fifteenth century?”¹⁶

What impressed them were not Columbus’s faults, failures, and lethal legacies, but his leadership qualities—including courage and purpose—his achievements, and, especially, the admiral’s importance in American history, which they saw in epochal terms: “The passage of Christopher Columbus across the western sea, bearing the weight of Christendom and European civilization, opened the way for the greatest migration in history, for the steady march of enlightened nations toward civil and religious liberty.”¹⁷ Although Adams had dwelled earlier on America’s Germanic roots, in this instance he and Wood focused on the nation’s classical Greek heritage, which, through the agency of Columbus, was delivered to the New World. They lectured: “Greek history foreshadowed the history of Europe, which is simply a greater Hellas, as America is an imperial and transatlantic Magna Graecia. Nothing of Greece doth fade but suffers a sea-change into something rich and strange. All our modern discoveries, colonization, politics, art, education, civilization, Christendom, the Oikoumené, the great globe itself, are simply Greek ideas enlarged by historic processes of development.”¹⁸ The professors regarded their own civilization as good, capable of correction, and, indeed, ever improving, as the Webster-Ashburton Treaty clearly demonstrated. The transit of that civilization to the Americas was a seminal event. In their graph of human progress, the line connecting the dots between 1492 and 1892, curved sharply upward.

In Chicago on the evening of 12 July 1893, Turner read his own Columbian-inspired paper at the AHA’s ninth annual meeting and, in so doing, qualified Adams’s germ theory. The AHA that year was part of the Auxiliary Congress of the Columbian Exposition. The AHA met in Chicago’s new Art Institute, which was built in the classical Beaux-Arts style by the Boston architectural firm Shepley, Rutan and Coolidge and located at Michigan Avenue and Adams Street on the lakefront south of the Chicago River. “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” which was published later that same year in the *Proceedings of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin*, became one of the most influential essays in the field of American history.¹⁹ In it, the young historian laid out his famous frontier thesis. It should be noted that in several important respects, Turner was in full agreement with his mentor, Adams, on the historical significance of the Genoese mariner. In that stone temple of European architectural splendor, Turner told his audience:

Since the days when the fleet of Columbus sailed into the waters of the New World, America has been another name for opportunity, and the people of the United States have taken their tone from the incessant



Art Institute, Chicago, Illinois, 1900. Photograph courtesy Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Digital Collection, digital image no. det-4a07938.

expansion which has not only been open but has even been forced upon them. He would be a rash prophet who should assert that the expansive character of American life has now entirely ceased. Movement has been its dominant fact, and, unless this training has no effect upon a people, the American energy will continually demand a wider field for its exercise. But never again will such gifts of free land offer themselves.²⁰

To Turner, Columbus was a marker or symbol of a social force. To Adams, Columbus was a hero, a great man. He overcame the “organized forces of society, church, state, and university,” all of which had been arrayed against him.²¹ But despite the opposition of prelate, courtier, and learned doctor, Columbus still succeeded in discovering a new world. And the significance of this heroic achievement was seen in the example he set for posterity. Adams and Wood wrote: “In the fields of science and religion, in art and letters, in civil and social reform, in the improvement of great peoples and in the elevation of mankind, there are still new worlds of discovery and conquest. The heavens above and the earth beneath and even the depths of the great sea are full of fresh materials for observation and research. . . . As Aeneas said to his companions, ‘It is not too late to seek another world.’”²²

Reflecting on four hundred years of American history, Turner and Adams emphasized different things. Adams saw Columbus as a symbolic bridge between



World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago, Illinois, 1893. Photograph courtesy Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Digital Collection, digital image no. ppsmsca-31678.

Europe and America and as a worthy example for Western humanity to follow; Adams thus emphasized continuity as well as culture. Turner, on the other hand, viewed Columbus as a figure representing America's break from Europe and who marked the beginning of a defining chapter in American history—one now concluded. Columbus and those men who followed him took advantage of America's "free gifts." So for Turner, this story was one of far-reaching change in which the environment, a set of factors external to the culture of Americans, figured large. These differences appeared sharply in how each man viewed the ancient Greeks in their essays commemorating Columbus. Where Adams turned to the Greek philosophers and their ideas, Turner turned to the Greek pioneers and their experience (throughout his career, Turner always judged historical actors by what they did rather than by what they thought; his was a history of doing, of action). This is the peroration of Turner's essay on the frontier: "What the Mediterranean Sea was to the Greeks, breaking the bond of custom, offering new experiences, calling out new institutions and activities, that, and more, the ever retreating frontier has been to the United States directly, and to the nations of Europe more remotely. And now, four centuries from the discovery of America, at the end of a hundred years of life under the Constitution, the frontier has gone, and with its going has closed the first period of American



history.”²³ One of Turner’s biographers, Ray Allen Billington, rightly called the Chicago paper nothing less than a “declaration of independence for American historiography.”²⁴

Achille Loria: The Specter of Capitalism Is Haunting the Greater West

Turner and Adams both believed Columbus ushered in a new era of opportunity. But whereas Adams looked forward to a future bright with the possibilities of new knowledge, of the discoveries of new worlds, of progress, Turner offered a decidedly more pessimistic view of what lay ahead. His frontier was not a metaphor but a real, moving line; a line whose westward advance was traceable on a map. And, as of 1890, according to Robert Percival Porter, the superintendent of the U.S. census, the frontier phase of American history was over. Turner used the term frontier in its demographic sense, an area with a population density of less than two people per square mile; but when he spoke of the frontier as “free land,” he did so as an economist. He borrowed the concept of free land from Achille Loria’s landed theory of profit. Loria was an Italian political economist at the University of Siena who studied American history as a way to understand Europe’s better. In Loria’s assessment,

So long as there is free land which can be cultivated without capital, profit is impossible; for there is no laborer who will work at the will of the capitalist while he can establish himself on his own account upon land without value, . . . If in this economic phase capital desires to gain a profit at whatever cost, it can do so only by reducing the laborer to slavery, suppressing by means of violence and chains the free land to which labor owes its strength and liberty. . . . Profit, then, is only the corollary of the lack of free land, which takes away from the laborer all option and establishes economic servitude.²⁵

Loria’s economic determinism, which had the virtue of explaining the history of America’s southern and western frontiers, assumed that America’s present stage of economic development offered insight into Europe’s lost past. In Turner’s words, Loria has: “urged the study of [America’s] colonial life as an aid in understanding the stages of European development, affirming that colonial settlement is for economic science what the mountain is for geology, bringing to light primitive stratifications. ‘America,’ he says, ‘has the key to the historical enigma which Europe has sought for centuries in vain, and the land which has no history reveals luminously the course of universal history.’ There is much truth in this.”²⁶

Historians of American history and anthropologists of indigenous America both thought the Americas would eventually furnish the Rosetta Stones that




would help decipher the hieroglyphics of mankind's past. America deserved to be studied because it possessed universal significance. From this perspective, the frontier was a stage of development in universal history, not a colorful and passing phase unique to American history.

Loria's ideas influenced many American scholars, including Turner's contemporary, Lindley Miller Keasbey.²⁷ Keasbey took his PhD at Columbia University in 1890, and later translated into English Loria's *The Economic Foundations of Society* (1899). In 1905 Keasbey left Bryn Mawr in Pennsylvania for the University of Texas where he would meet Walter Prescott Webb, a student who would later author, *The Great Plains* (1931). Keasbey's turn to activism eventually cost him his university job. In the meantime, he taught his students the human past should be read the same way a geologist reads the earth's history, vertically, one layer of rock at a time. Keasbey's stratigraphy, which he taught to Webb, consisted of layers of geology, flora and fauna, prehistoric and historic cultures, formal institutions as well as popular attitudes.²⁸ Webb became the father of western regional history, although after the Second World War he, like Turner before him, eventually adopted a much broader and more cosmopolitan view of the past, as evidenced in the publication of his book, *The Great Frontier* (1951). Of note, world historian Arnold J. Toynbee introduced the book's re-publication in 1964.²⁹

Following Loria's ideas to their logical conclusion, Turner feared the economic dislocations and class struggles that had so troubled Europe would eventually come to America. This specter would come *first* to the older, more economically developed eastern region of the country, and later to the newer, less advanced, western part. In fact, when Turner read his paper in Chicago, the Panic of 1893 had already started two months prior in May, triggered by the bankruptcy of the Philadelphia and Reading Railroad. Following the enormous economic expansion of the 1880s, the United States was entering the worst contraction in its history. When Turner said that the impending crisis could be postponed, if a "wider field" were found to exercise "American energy," he was speaking to the nation's growing sense of urgency.

One may speculate about what Turner meant by a "wider field." His "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" seemed to complement perfectly Alfred Thayer Mahan's widely regarded book on the "influence of sea power upon history," which was published in 1890. In a piece written that same year for the *Atlantic Monthly*, Captain Mahan, who served as the second president of the Naval War College (founded six years before in Newport, Rhode Island), prophesized: "Whether they will or no, Americans must now begin to look outward. . . . The tendency will be maintained and increased by the growth of the European colonies in the Pacific, by the advancing civilization of Japan, and by the rapid peopling of our Pacific States with men who have all the aggressive



spirit of the advanced line of national progress. Nowhere does a vigorous foreign policy find more favor than among the people west of the Rocky Mountains.³⁰ When the future U.S. president Theodore Roosevelt spoke of America's wider field of action, there was no question he, like Mahan, was talking about the world. A mutual friend of Mahan and Turner, Roosevelt loved clipper ships and covered wagons in equal measure. He believed that if Americans were to be a "really great people," they must "strive in good faith to play a great part in the world." And, like Turner, Roosevelt's histories were ones of action, of doing, not of rumination.³¹

Darwinism Goes West

If Turner differed with Adams over the relative importance of environment and culture, he was in complete agreement with his Johns Hopkins professor on the organic, evolutionary nature of social change. But Turner only agreed up to a point: America's Atlantic edge. The biology of Charles Darwin, the great English naturalist, had cast a long shadow over history and the social sciences. James Ford Rhodes, an industrialist and later historian (as well as president of the AHA in 1899), wrote that the publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species* in 1859 marked the dividing line between the old history and the new scientific history. Even so, Rhodes observed that Herodotus, Thucydides, and Gibbon were still regarded in Europe and the United States as the greatest historians.³² Rhodes explained Darwin's enormous influence on Clio's profession: "Evolution, heredity, environment, have become household words, and their application to history has influenced everyone who has had to trace the development of a people, the growth of an institution, or the establishment of a cause. Other scientific theories and methods have affected physical science as potently, but no one has entered so vitally into the study of man."³³ Turner's frontier hypothesis was a case in point. The Wisconsin professor had fully embraced a social-evolutionary approach. He orated in Chicago:

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. It begins with the Indian and the hunter; it goes on to tell of the disintegration of savagery by the entrance of the trader, the pathfinder of civilization; we read the annals of the pastoral stage in ranch life; the exploitation of the soil by the raising of unrotated crops of corn and wheat in sparsely settled farming communities; the intensive culture of the denser farm settlement; and finally the manufacturing organization with city and factory system.³⁴



The idea that society was an evolving organism was not new, of course. The idea dated back to the eighteenth century.³⁵ In the highly influential work, *Ancient Society* (1877), the American lawyer, businessman, and anthropologist Lewis Henry Morgan proposed three stages of cultural evolution: 1) savagery; 2) barbarism; and 3) civilization.³⁶ Turner explicitly elaborated on the evolutionary scheme set forth in Loria's *Analisi della Proprieta Capitalisa* (1889).³⁷ The president of Brown University, Elisha Andrews, reviewed Loria's book for the December 1890 issue of the *Political Science Quarterly*. Italy, Andrews declared, has produced some of the "best economic literature," and Loria's book, which was part historical and part theoretical, was a "masterpiece." In short, it was the *crème de la crème*. Andrews said the book reminded him "in many ways of Marx's *Kapital*," as it provided a history of "profits" based on three stages of economic development: 1) slavery; 2) serfdom; and 3) wages.³⁸ Marx and Loria did share a similar historical framework, but it was Loria's theory of landed profits that provided Turner a way to explain the absence of class conflict in American history, and European historians the missing link in their own economic history. However, unless the U.S. economy could continue to grow, Turner darkly implied in Chicago, America's future would come to resemble Europe's conflicted and war-torn past.

For Turner, then, the United States was the product of two combining forces—one environmental, the other social-evolutionary. And Turner's frontier was the point where these forces intersected to produce a powerful nationalizing force. In fact, as the United States moved westward, this social evolution repeated itself with the opening of each new frontier. Significantly, according to Turner, America's social evolution was separate from, if comparable to, Europe's. Indeed, it appeared to be entirely self-contained and compartmentalized within the political boundaries of the U.S. nation-state. It was cartographic as much as it was cultural. America may or may not be exceptional, but Turner's interpretation of American history certainly was. In 1893, moreover, Turner's environmentalism was continent-wide, limited to no particular frontier, region, or niche. He wrote:

Civilization in America has followed the arteries made by geology, pouring an ever richer tide through them, until at last the slender paths of aboriginal intercourse have been broadened and interwoven into the complex mazes of modern commercial lines; the wilderness has been interpenetrated by lines of civilization growing ever more numerous. It is like the steady growth of a complex nervous system for the originally simple, inert continent. If one would understand why we are to-day one nation, rather than a collection of isolated states, he must study this



economic and social consolidation of the country. In this progress from savage conditions lie topics for the evolutionist.³⁹

Turner's frontier, it should be added, was unqualifiedly ordinary. The historian William A. Dunning of Columbia University captured this distinctive aspect of frontier history. In an essay for the AHA on the first generation of American historiography, Dunning observed:

The history of pioneering from the Appalachians to the Pacific, and its part in building up the nation, could have never been thought of or wrought out by anyone who saw history as primarily the achievements of great men, engaged in the grand manner, in sublime episodes, of political and military strife. The westward expansion of the American people consisted in the achievements of average men, dominated for the most part by commonplace motives, doing ordinary every-day duties, with merely primitive instruments.⁴⁰

In Turner's stage theory of evolution, ordinary men and their everyday activities, rather than "Great Men" and their mighty deeds, were the center of the story. It was a history of humankind, not the individual, and its adaptation to a new continent. Turner's history, in short, was a social, democratic, and environmental history. The American West was won, as he would put it, by a home-grown, popular power.

The other side of Turner's environmentalism, which was unabashedly nationalistic, was that it was free of the racial bias or Anglo Saxonism characteristic of so many of his colleagues, for example, his mentor, Adams, and philosopher and historian John Fiske, the "high priest of American evolution."⁴¹ Fiske lived in Cambridge, Massachusetts, but lectured at Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri. Like Adams, Fiske saw a racial unity going back through time from the peoples of New England to their English forebears, and then from these English forebears to their Anglo Saxon forebears, and, again, from these Anglo Saxon forebears to their Germanic forebears. From this genetic perspective, Dunning wryly noted, a sensible periodization of colonial America might commence in "476 A.D.," with the fall of the Roman Empire, and end in 1776 A.D., 1,300 years later, with America's Declaration of Independence from British rule.⁴² The common denominators of this Anglo Saxonism were race and an enduring passion for liberty.

Turner's family was English, and he could trace his own ancestors back to their arrival in Scituate, Massachusetts, in 1624. But Turner was impressed far more by America's "composite nationality," than by succeeding generations of German germs. From "early colonial times," Turner wrote, immigrants were






“Americanized” in the “crucible of the frontier.” In this process, they were “liberated, and fused into a mixed race.” This new type was “English in neither nationality nor characteristics.”⁴³ The frontier experience, after all, is what turned Europeans into Americans. When Turner spoke of race, he seemed to mean really “culture,” a pattern of collective behavior that could be defined and measured. Turner thought in terms of cultures, nationalities, and types defined by actions, or outward behavior that could be described and measured, typical of that group or that stage of development rather than in the more subjective terms of group or individual identity. For instance, he famously contrasted “savagery” with “civilization.” When he refers elsewhere to the “race question,” he explains, “It is plain that if the English constitution were put into French hands it would operate differently. Race affects politics.”⁴⁴ Interestingly, the idea that the frontier was a broad Americanizing force, or crucible, stood at direct odds with that of ethno-cultural persistence, but the latter idea would prove central to Turner’s subsequent theory of sectionalism.

The Hegelianism of Hermann Eduard von Holst

In Chicago, Turner complained that “too exclusive attention has been paid by institutional students to Germanic origins, too little to the American factors.”⁴⁵ But Turner was no less critical of historians who, like Hermann Eduard von Holst, made the U.S. slavery struggle so “exclusive an object of attention.” However, unlike Adams, Turner criticized Von Holst by name, as he did James Ford Rhodes. Von Holst received his PhD at Heidelberg University, as had Herbert Baxter Adams and, like Adams, he was a confirmed, if selective, institutionalist. Von Holst’s exclusive concern was America’s peculiar institution—slavery. The first volume of Von Holst’s massive eight-volume work, *The Constitutional and Political History of the United States*, appeared in 1876 (the last one was published in 1892), and this work vaulted him to the top of his profession as a German Alexis de Tocqueville.⁴⁶ Daniel Coit Gilman, the president of Johns Hopkins University, offered Von Holst a professorship, not once but twice, in 1879 and 1880, as did Clark University, but Von Holst declined. The eminent professor did finally leave his academic post at the University of Freiburg in 1892, when he accepted an offer from Pres. William Rainey Harper to become the chair of the History Department at the newly founded University of Chicago, where classes began in October 1892.⁴⁷ If Von Holst could not be brought to Johns Hopkins in person, he was on campus nevertheless in spirit. Von Holst’s portrait, along with those of the Englishmen Edward A. Freeman and Lord Bryce as well as the American George Bancroft, hung on the third floor of the university library, where Adams held his history seminar, which Turner attended as a doctoral



student.⁴⁸ From this wall of honor and historiography, the Freiburg professor stared down at the student Turner.

In 1936 the Princeton historian and presidential consultant, Eric F. Goldman (who took his PhD in history at Johns Hopkins at the age of twenty-two), called Von Holst the “Plumed Knight of American Historiography,” for his moral advocacy and crusading zeal. Goldman also noted that Von Holst was a prodigious researcher and a “pioneer in tapping the wealth of congressional records.”⁴⁹ Von Holst was indeed a methodological innovator. He was also a Hegelian, an absolute idealist, referring in his history to the “Times-Spirit” (or *Zeitgeist*). He believed the Civil War was an “irrepressible conflict” between the North and the South because the United States was founded on a powerful contradiction of ideas—freedom and slavery. In 1883, on a visit to Oberlin College in northern Ohio, he lectured that this political controversy could only have been solved “by the sword.”⁵⁰ He added, “What I have but studied in dusty documents is with many of you a chapter of your own life, of which no line can ever be obliterated from memory, because it has been written in your hearts with blood and with tears.”⁵¹

To Von Holst, history was philosophy; it was *Ideengeschichte*.⁵² For instance, in the fourth volume of the *Constitutional History*, which dealt with the Compromise of 1850 and the Kansas-Nebraska Bill, he wrote: “Can the south, relying upon laws which it has had passed by an artificial and forced interpretation of the constitution and with the help of a subservient minority of northern politicians, bid defiance in the long run, to the moral consciousness of the majority of the people backed by the moral consciousness of the leading civilized nations, that is to the Times-Spirit?”⁵³ It is very hard to argue with the Times-Spirit. In the 1870s and 1880s, no one really tried. Looking back at this period in 1917, Dunning observed: “Von Holst’s conclusions, especially his vivid portrayal of the raw head and bloody bones of a slavocracy that served as his *diabolus ex machina*, made a strong appeal to influential northern sentiment, and his translated work had a vogue that entitles it to a place in American historiography.”⁵⁴

Dunning’s reaction to Von Holst’s “violent prejudices,” incidentally, takes on additional historiographical interest given that a later generation of scholars would criticize Dunning’s own work on Southern Reconstruction for its biases and racial prejudice, namely, for its assumption of African American incapacity. Indeed, historians of the “Dunning school” came to be regarded as sophisticated apologists for racial segregation. But it needs to be added, as historiographer John Higham observed, “Dunning held no brief for the lawless tactics of southern whites in regaining power.” It was Dunning’s “Olympian aloofness,” his lack of obvious northern bias, so marked in Von Holst, which attracted southerners to “flock” to him at Columbia University.⁵⁵



In 1876 with the appearance of Von Holst's first volume of *The Constitutional History*, worthies no less than Henry Adams and Henry Cabot Lodge offered their considerable opinion of it in the *North American Review*: "Such a work was greatly needed, and it is mortifying to be obliged to confess that we know of no American who could have done it equally well. . . . This book deserves to be and will doubtless become the recognized handbook for all serious students of American history."⁵⁶ Two years later, Herbert Baxter Adams noted in a letter to Von Holst that his work was recognized among scholars to be the "most critical," but also the "most impartial" and "thoroughly scientific" of its kind.⁵⁷ Goldman noted that Von Holst's "slavocentric" history was "widely accepted as objective," a fact that "merely indicates the extent to which the framework of his mind resembled that of his contemporaries."⁵⁸

In 1892 the star of this German giant began to dim at the very same time Von Holst completed his magnum opus and moved to the United States to assume his position at the University of Chicago. Two years prior in a long review for the *Political Science Quarterly*, Von Holst's former doctoral student, Alfred Bushnell Hart, wrote a careful, evenhanded review of the sixth volume of Von Holst's *Constitutional History*, which had just appeared. In the end, Hart, who taught at Harvard and became president of the AHA in 1909 and president of the American Political Science Association in 1912, frankly acknowledged that Von Holst exercised a "strong bias: he thinks slavery wrong and sympathizes with its opponents; he exults not only in the triumphs of the champions of freedom, but also over the mistakes and errors of the friends of slavery." If this were an explicitly morality-driven, judgment-laden history, Hart concluded, in the end, this volume should nevertheless make "Americans more proud of a nation which has had the moral force to free itself of an immoral institution."⁵⁹

Unlike Hart, Turner felt no restraint of a former relationship and wrote a blistering review, which he wisely did not publish, of Von Holst's *The Constitutional History*, noting at one point that the historical record, properly packed with relevant statistics, actually shows "physics" prevails over "metaphysics"—that history prevails over Hegel.⁶⁰ Basically, Turner accused Von Holst of writing American history precisely backward. The animosity Turner held for Von Holst was not based on some personal or professional clash between the two men. Turner's antagonism toward Von Holst was entirely a disagreement over ideas. But Turner's feelings were intense, nonetheless, and even bordered on contempt. Turner referred to Von Holst's "acid pen," his "oratorical and dogmatic temperament," his numerous "failures" and "errors" (he made lists of them), and his tone. For the architect of perhaps the best case for American exceptionalism, one can well imagine Turner's reaction to Von Holst's cutting criticism: "Americans frequently fall into dangerous error, and flatter



themselves, that heaven governs them by laws altogether peculiar to themselves and their country.”⁶¹

In one draft, Turner made a very unusual ad hominem attack: “The natural critical bent of [Von Holst’s] mind has perhaps been emphasized by the fact that he has long been a sufferer from chronic indigestion.” Turner thought better of submitting this article for publication. But Turner’s most damning and substantive criticism was that Von Holst “assumes a national sovereignty from the beginning” of his history. Turner wrote that, to Von Holst, “American history is primarily the struggle of the slavery interest allied with State Sovereignty against the Nation.” Turner continued: the question of “State Sovereignty,” according to Von Holst, “was settled by the Constitution of 1787.” Moreover, Turner contended that Von Holst believed the “evidences of particularism were therefore to be chastised as indications of the perversity and lack of logic of American statesmen who were absurdly inconsistent in not accepting their own work.”⁶²

In 1886, Albion W. Small (from whom Turner took a sociology course at Johns Hopkins) wrote a sharply critical review of Von Holst’s *Constitutional History* for the *Baptist Quarterly Review*. In a note to himself, Turner intended to quote this passage from Small’s review:

When the issue between state-sovereignty and nationality shall have been investigated by the generation to which the controversy is not politics, but history, the view to which von Holst is a pervert will be repudiated as emptying our national experience of its profoundest meaning. If according to this myth, American nationality sprung full-grown into life, the century whose politics von Holst professes to interpret was a period of disgraceful retrogression. If our unity was a kind of political immaculate conception, then indeed we plunged from purity into a national debauch that lasted nine decades.⁶³

Turner could not have been more in agreement. The colonies, Turner explained, by declaring independence: “destroyed the only organization that served as an effective central authority. In the revolution and the confederation state sovereignty was triumphant and was guarded as the very palladium of individual liberty. . . . The states were conceived as sovereign in respect to all powers not delegated, the nation sovereign in respect to limited powers assigned to it.”⁶⁴


Von Holst, in other words, had wrongly inverted the relationship between the states and the nation. From the view in Madison, Wisconsin, American history was essentially the story of how power between the states and Washington shifted from the former to the latter. Turner used an organic metaphor to describe this change over time, which could have come right from the pen of Herbert Baxter Adams: “National sentiment and power was a plant of slow





growth.”⁶⁵ This point was at direct odds with Von Holst’s notion of American history, which dictated the Constitution to the Civil War was a story of decline and irrepressible conflict.⁶⁶ Moreover, Von Holst entirely missed the significance of the intermediate period—he derided it as the “Reign of Jackson”—a time, he believed, when a cynical politician gained the support of the masses by exploiting the Constitution’s latent theory of popular sovereignty. The son of Andrew Jackson Turner strongly disagreed with this view of history. The rise of the common man during the Jacksonian period was, according to Frederick Jackson Turner, the result of the expansion of settlement into the free lands of the West.⁶⁷ The western states, in short, expanded the franchise to attract new settlers. The spread of universal manhood suffrage on the frontier forced the older states, in turn, to liberalize their own election laws. The westward movement, therefore, promoted democracy and, Turner added, affected the slavery question. On this point he quoted his friend, and future U.S. president, Woodrow Wilson. “The question was not,” Wilson said, an “issue of morals simply, made up between the New England conscience and the South. It was a question made up, in fact, between the South and the West. It was men whom Lincoln represented, and not the anti-slavery societies, that pushed the question to a settlement. The New England conscience would have worked *in vacuo* if there had been no territories and no intense and expanding western life.”⁶⁸ It is well worth remembering here that the first volume of Von Holst’s *Constitutional History* appeared after 1871, following the wars of Abraham Lincoln to preserve the Union and of Otto von Bismarck to unite the German Reich. The triumph of unitary sovereignty in Germany was the historical standard by which Von Holst evaluated and, as Turner showed, misapprehended America’s national experiment.⁶⁹

Turner’s nationalism was the lens through which he examined history and this perspective gave his frontier hypothesis much of its power. His reactions to Adams and to Von Holst sharpened his arguments so much that it is all but impossible to read Turner and not to see a forceful and intelligent repudiation of their views on every page of his frontier essay. Historiography often operates like physics: for every action there is an opposite and equal reaction. In the case of Adams, Turner’s reaction was selective. On the one hand, Turner agreed with Adams’s essentially progressive interpretation of history. On the other hand, he stressed American factors over European origins. As he put it: “[American democracy] offers few warnings and few examples to European democracy for it was born from conditions that can never be possible to Europe. It was a democracy that came not from the political theorist’s dreams of the primitive German forest. It came stark and strong and full of life from the American forest.”⁷⁰ Turner’s response to Von Holst, however, was unsparing and total. He



countered Von Holst's dialectical idealism with a cultural or social evolution in which institutions became more complex over time. After compiling a long list of Von Holst's failures, Turner let loose this charge: "These misapprehensions and omissions vitiated his whole conception of democracy, for they show it was the product of the existence of free land, and that it grew as the country marched toward the west. The rise of this democracy was no lapse of the people from aristocratic virtue to be scolded at. It was the rise of the people to economic and consequently to political power and self-consciousness."⁷¹

It is hard to overestimate the impact of Von Holst's scholarship on American historiography. The German's direct influence on Turner is alone evidence enough. But one could go much further and argue that the frontier school of western history and the Dunning school of southern history, for that matter, both owe their origins in no small degree to a reaction to Von Holst's U.S. history, with its strong northern bias. In an essay on the U.S. presidency for *Scribner's Magazine*, James Ford Rhodes commented that the antislavery view of history, which Von Holst did so much to champion, accounts for why Thomas Jefferson was celebrated for the Louisiana Purchase, which expanded freedom, but John Tyler and James K. Polk receive little or no praise from historians for acquiring the domains of California, New Mexico, or Texas, since the Mexican War extended slavery. Additionally, "it seems hardly probable," Rhodes predicted in 1903, on the centennial of the Louisiana Purchase, "that this sentiment will be changed in any time that we can forecast."⁷² Rhodes was right about Tyler and Polk but wrong about Jefferson. The anti-triumphalists have all but replaced the triumphalists so that few historians today find much about the Louisiana Purchase to celebrate, basically seeing it as an episode—perhaps only slightly less sordid than others—of American imperialism. In his book, *Habits of Empire: A History of American Expansion* (2008), past Western History Association (WHA) president Walter Nugent dismissed Jefferson's country-building, continent-changing diplomacy with the remark: "Blind luck played a greater role in the Louisiana Purchase than in any other major acquisition."⁷³

Turner, however, subordinated Von Holst's antislavery views to western expansion. This process, Turner maintained, was significant for two reasons: 1) it gave birth to a unique American democracy; and 2) it produced sectional tensions and eventually a war over the extension of slavery into the territories. Turner's second point was absolutely fundamental: the frontier was crucial to undoing slavery where it existed. The Great West, in other words, saved the Atlantic coast. Ten years after Turner gave his address in Chicago, Rhodes saw the matter this way: "There is an undoubted tendency in the younger historical students to look upon the expansion of the country as the important consideration, and the slavery question as incidental."⁷⁴ On this major trend, Rhodes



shared with his readers that Von Holst “thought this changing historical sentiment entirely natural, but he felt sure that in the end men would come around to the antislavery view, of which he was so powerful an advocate.”⁷⁵

In 1904, a year after Rhodes’s recollection appeared in print, Von Holst died after a long illness. In the long term, Von Holst appears to have been right. The connection Turner made between slavery, westward expansion, rising sectional tensions, and the Civil War is considered a basic insight into American history. But since the modern civil rights movements of the 1960s, historians have become increasingly focused on the struggle for freedom, in particular racial freedom, in American history. Since the 1980s, the study of this struggle has been extended to western history. This is how past WHA president Elliott West describes this historiographical reset: the New Western historian tries to shift the “discussion of race and racism into the West, which needed the attention, and away from the South, which had hogged it for so long.”⁷⁶

However, in the short term Von Holst could not have been more wrong. From 1893 to 1945, the frontier school dominated the writing of American history. Instead of an American history that synthesized European and American history, which was glimpsed by the founders of the AHA, Turner’s nationalistic, frontier-centered history diverted the profession from this original and important historiographical project. The result was an American history disconnected from Europe or, for that matter, from anything else. It was a history that apparently came into being *ex nihilo* and existed *in vacuo*.

This was the conclusion the “Committee of Seven” reached in its report, “The Study of History in Schools” in 1898. The committee was appointed by the AHA and chaired by Andrew C. McLaughlin of the University of Michigan. The other members were Herbert Baxter Adams, George L. Fox, Albert Bushnell Hart, Charles Homer Haskins, Henry Morse Stephens, and Lucy Maynard Salmon. The members studied how history was taught in the United States and Canada as well as in Europe, especially Germany, France, and England. The report was of a very high order and remains valuable. One of its most important contributions was made by Salmon of Vassar College. She would author the famous essay, “History in a Back Yard” (1912).⁷⁷ Salmon spent the summer of 1897 studying educational problems in Germany and German Switzerland and shared the findings with her colleagues in a paper read in Cleveland, Ohio, at the AHA’s annual meeting in December. They were also attached to the AHA report.⁷⁸

Salmon used what she learned in Europe to discuss the teaching of U.S. history in America. Her bold report set the stage for a larger debate about historical meaning and context. Salmon found the argument “spurious” that history should be taught to instill patriotism. She observed that if the study of the American Revolution is to teach this love of country both in England



and in America, then “one nation or the other must be illogical;” likewise, she noted, “if the Northern and the Southern states of America should use the facts of the civil war to promote either a national or a sectional patriotism of this character,” then “those facts would have to be perverted.” She was no less concerned about American history being the only history subject taught in the curriculum. Salmon believed such exclusive study “gives but a warped, narrow, circumscribed view of history; it is history detached from its natural foundation—European history; it is history suspended in mid-air; it is history that has no natural beginning apart from its connection with European history.”⁷⁹ It had been only five years since Turner delivered his frontier thesis, making a powerful case for American exceptionalism. But as Salmon’s trenchant points make clear, the recommendation of the AHA’s Committee of Seven to teach European as well as American history in schools where this was not the practice was more than an argument for more history courses. It was also a historiographical challenge to Turner’s view of U.S. history as a separate, self-contained unit of study.

Two years after the Committee of Seven released its report Turner requested a leave of absence from the University of Wisconsin for the academic year 1900–1901. Turner, who had spent his career thinking about how the United States was different from Europe, made plans for an extended visit to Europe, a place which until now he had strangely not visited. There were also painful, personal reasons for leaving Madison. Two of his three children passed away unexpectedly in 1899—his five-year-old daughter, Mae, succumbed to diphtheria and his seven-year-old son, Jackson, died from a ruptured appendix. Turner understandably wanted to get away with his wife, Mae, and his only surviving daughter, Dorothy.⁸⁰

Turner deliberately avoided London, Paris, Amsterdam, Berlin, Vienna, and other centers of European power and culture in order to stay in Switzerland and northern Italy. He did so, Billington explains, because Turner felt these places in central Europe “contrasted most violently with the United States,” and, Turner hoped, these “contrasts would sharpen his awareness of the distinctive features of American life.” And, according to plan, Turner visited the villages and high mountain pastures of the Swiss Alps, explored the vineyards and orchards of the Rhône Valley, and pedaled his bike down miles of country roads in Italy. This was a delightful and charming tour, to be sure. But it offered Turner a highly selective view of contemporary Europe, then the center of world power. Billington found that Turner learned three things about Europe: 1) Europe’s countryside was more compact; 2) the sense of tradition in Europe was stronger; and 3) Europeans possessed a greater aesthetic appreciation. Turner concluded that his more crass and materialistic countrymen at home had much to learn from



Europeans but, on balance, he preferred America's future-directed thinking, its newness, its abundance, and its opportunity—legacies, in short, of the frontier.

It is quite striking that the historian who did more than any other to set American history apart from Europe's had never been to Europe until his visit in 1900. By that time the frontier thesis had already secured his reputation. Thus, the great advocate of American exceptionalism had known firsthand only one side of the Atlantic equation. And when Turner did finally go to Europe, he limited himself to its rural, if not the most bucolic and picturesque, areas. Especially curious is that he did not explore Victorian London, which at the turn of the century was the world's center of democracy, capitalism, science, technology, industry, and culture. Indeed, this city was the central nervous system of an empire on which the sun never set. But after Turner's voyage across the Atlantic, he evidently spent only several days in London before striking out for the Low Countries and, from there, the Swiss Confederation. His year abroad was pleasant, even somnolent. His thinking was unperturbed, and it remained unperturbed long after his return to the United States as well as after his move to Harvard University in 1910. And then the war came.

President Woodrow Wilson: The Great War and Internationalism

The First World War changed Turner. The war was, as the diplomat and historian George F. Kennan later observed, "not only in itself a great tragedy of immeasurable dimensions, but one that lay at the heart of the subsequent misfortunes of the century."⁸¹ Initially, Wilson, acutely aware of the nation's large immigrant populations originating in the very nations now at war, called on his fellow Americans to be neutral "in thought, as well as action."⁸² But bombarded almost daily with news from European capitals and battlefields, a few American historians began to rethink the relationship of European and American history. The hermetic seal, which frontier historians had wrapped around American historiography, was about to be broken. And it was Turner, of all people, who would lead the way. In a world of burgeoning cities, industrial economies, steam engines, electric lights, and great empires, the gritty experience of the pioneer farmer already seemed remote and increasingly irrelevant—although in the early twentieth century, despite the earlier "closing" of the frontier, there was no reduction in homesteading in the United States or Canada's prairie provinces. In fact, the Enlarged Homestead Act was not passed until 1909, nineteen years after the supposed "closing" of the frontier.

The war united Europe and the United States in a common cause, namely, to make the world safe for democracy. This noble alliance was captured in the famous line attributed to Gen. John J. Pershing, leader of the American



President Woodrow Wilson
Photograph by Harry M. Rhoads;
courtesy Western History/Genealogy
Department, Denver Public Library



Expeditionary Forces. Upon Pershing's arrival in Paris in 1917, his aide, Col. Charles E. Stanton, declared: "Lafayette, we are here!"⁸³ The circle, started in the late eighteenth century, had been fully rounded in the early twentieth. But this world cause would have to be reconciled with American exceptionalism; universalism with particularism. Turner dutifully joined that crusade (he helped organize the National Board for Historical Service in 1917) and met this challenge.⁸⁴ Furthermore, his sectional thesis brought within reach, but did not yet grasp, what his frontier school had pushed away: a comprehensive history of the United States from Columbus to Cleveland—now Woodrow Wilson.⁸⁵

Since their time together at Johns Hopkins, Wilson and Turner had long been friends. The two first met in Baltimore in the idyllic spring of 1889, when Turner was a graduate student and Wilson a visiting professor at Johns Hopkins. As Billington reports, they both stayed at Miss Ashton's comfortable boardinghouse on McCulloh Street. Fort McHenry, famous for Francis Scott Key's tattered and fluttering flag, was located only four miles away. That very year, in fact, Key's hymn, "The Star-Spangled Banner," became the official song of loyalty for the U.S. Navy; years later, in 1916, it became the national anthem by President Wilson's executive order, which was upheld by a joint resolution of Congress in 1931, and signed into law by Herbert Hoover. In this dawning of the American empire, Wilson the southerner and Turner the westerner talked history over cider and doughnuts at Miss Ashton's or on long walks down the streets of old Baltimore.

Wilson, an "unreconstructed" southerner, once declared the South was "the only place in the country, the only place in the world, where nothing has to be explained to me"; Turner, who carried a chip of Wisconsin wood on his shoulder, believed the West's role in the nation's development had been ignored, and was determined to change that fact.⁸⁶ Turner also became close friends with






another of Miss Ashton's boarders, Charles Homer Haskins, a graduate student in history at Johns Hopkins and a brilliant medievalist from Meadville in northwestern Pennsylvania. Written in the classic Johns Hopkins manner, Haskin's institutional history, *The Rise of the Universities* (1923), remains to this day a popular text in Western Civilization courses. Haskins also became good friends with Wilson. Later, Haskins was among the advisors whom President Wilson took with him to the Paris Peace Conference in 1919.⁸⁷

Wilson's ardent sectional feelings were not unusual. Nor was it unusual that he learned to subsume those sectional feelings within a broader American patriotism. In the post-Civil War period, many a southerner had managed to do the same. What was remarkable about Wilson was that this "unreconstructed southerner" from Virginia would become, as a result of the First World War, one of the twentieth century's first internationalists. In Wilson's second Inaugural Address (5 March 1917), he declared that Americans were "provincials no longer."⁸⁸ He discovered there was something greater than the United States that could command his loyalty. Perhaps it was Wilson's very sectionalism, his attachment to place, this grounding, which allowed him to transcend his nationalism and embrace firmly the idea of a future world governed by a League of Nations.⁸⁹

In contrast to Wilson, Turner's ardent sectionalism, specifically his strong ties to the Middle West, was more unusual. It was more unusual yet that he was able to turn this sectional sentiment into a well-articulated thesis, a history supported by reams of statistical data correlated and cartographically expressed in a series of innovative maps. But not before he advanced his ingenuous frontier hypothesis in 1893, turning American history around by reversing the significance of the northern and southern Atlantic coast with the Great West. It was a feat of imagination and scholarship without parallel in American historiography. But whereas Turner's American frontier was a nationalizing force, turning Europeans into Americans, Turner's American section was where Europeans, such as the German Americans in Wisconsin, or other groups—Native Americans, African Americans, Hispanic Americans, Asian Americans—might retain their culture and identity. Thus, the frontier seemed to explain the nation's cultural uniformity, whereas the sectional hypothesis suggested the underlying reason for America's striking cultural diversity.

Moreover, the existence of a patchwork of North American sections resembled the patchwork of European nations. The differences between the two did not become fully apparent to Turner until the Great War, when the inward-looking nationalist from the Middle West began to see the world in a new, more cosmopolitan light. This is when he realized how to write a comprehensive history of the United States, beginning with Columbus. His sectional idea pointed



the way to a Euro-American history, but one limited to the United States, just as the founders of the AHA had discussed in the 1880s. It was a remarkable achievement.

Students of American western historiography, such as Michael C. Steiner, have argued that while Turner's frontier thesis has received the most attention from scholars and the general public, it was his sectional thesis that pointed the way to modern regionalism, and then to post-regionalism.⁹⁰ According to this interpretation of American historiography, Walter Prescott Webb's *The Great Plains* (1931) and James C. Malin's grassland studies, to pick only two of a number of important regional studies, marked the turning point in the transition from frontier to region. In 1961 this historiographical shift was formalized with the founding of the WHA. The original mission of the WHA—to promote the study of the North American West—was explicitly regional.⁹¹

But there is a crucial difference between sectionalism and regionalism. A region suggests autochthony, or a land and people apart. A region is separate. It exists unto itself and should be understood on its own terms. A section, on the other hand, cannot exist independently. The significance of the section is that it is part of a larger whole. And for Turner that whole was the United States, which was where the "faint image" of the Old World could be seen. Turner was not a regional historian, as useful as his work later proved to regionalists. He was not a historian of western America, as important as his work was to western historiography. Turner was an American historian whose sectional framework could potentially unite European and American history into a single narrative. And Turner's sectional thesis did not replace his frontier idea but complemented the earlier concept while ignoring the contradictions. He continued to call the frontier an important factor in American development. It was the meeting point, after all, between two peoples, Euro-Americans and Native Americans, whose respective communities were at very different stages of social development, defined by social scientist Ian Morris as a "community's ability to get things done" in relation to one another.⁹² And the frontier was also a stage of American social development, not a place or region, except in a relational and temporary sense. A section, on the other hand, was a defined place, where space and culture intersected, such as New England, the Middle West, the Far West, or the South, all of which arose from the "facts of physical geography and the regional settlement of different peoples and types."⁹³

In 1893 Turner was pessimistic about America's future because of the recent closing of the frontier. Now, with the war, he realized what had set America apart was not the frontier but its constitution, which had been drafted in 1787, at the height of the European Enlightenment and when America's great frontier movement was barely in its infancy. The document had provided the



blueprint for a federation, which would manage conflict—except when it failed to do so, as was the case with the Civil War—between its existing and future sections. Turner wrote the first draft of these ideas in November 1918, the month the war in Europe ended. The paper was intended for President Wilson, who left for Paris the following month. Entitled “International Political Parties in a Durable League of Nations,” Turner’s “abstract of suggestions” were, as he said, “derived from the study of the history of American sectionalism and the geography of American political parties.” Turner wanted, in short, to inform Wilson on what bearing “the American experience” had on “the problems of a League of Nations.”⁹⁴

Turner noted, “We have given evidence that immigrants from all nations of the world can live together peacefully under a single government that does justice.” After briefly concluding that the new league should have a “Legislative body, with substantial, but at first limited, functions, as well as a Court, or Council of Nations,” Turner came to the point. The success of the league, he believed, would hinge on “the operation of international political parties in connection with such a Legislature.” As he put it: “It is important to call attention to the *significance of the American national political parties, operating upon the whole Union, not confined to a single section. The last tie that snapped before the Civil War, was the party tie.* This has, perhaps, in its working, been the *most effective single political institution for the prevention of sectional disunion*” [the emphasis is Turner’s]. To create an international party system, Turner suggested utilizing the “existing body of internationalism.” This body included radical political parties such as the “International, the I.W.W., Socialists generally,” but also “the opposite tendencies seen in international business combinations, scientific and educational international organizations, and conservative forces generally.”⁹⁵

Turner observed that “the class struggle, so called, is in fact not a national but an international struggle.” And while one “recoils from any suggestion of adding a party loyalty international in its appeal to the loyalty to the individual nation,” if a League of Nations was going to be viable, there would have to be some “diminution of the national feeling” and some “cultivation of international loyalty.” Turner further advised Wilson, “Since the Bolsheviki serpent will creep in under whatever fence be attempted . . . [m]ay it not be safer to give him a job of international legislation rather than leave him to strike dark corners, and with no sense of responsibility?” Turner’s solution to the past problems of international politics, which he based on the lessons of American history, was to propose the creation of a new system of international, or rather supra- or trans-national, politics.⁹⁶

These ideas were produced in response to urgent demands of peace. But Turner did not abandon them in the postwar years. On the contrary, he further



refined and elaborated them in two important essays: "Sections and Nation," which was published in *The Yale Review* in 1922. And, three years later, after he retired from Harvard and returned briefly to Madison, *The Magazine of Wisconsin History* published his "The Significance of the Section in American History."⁹⁷ His title choice was clearly intended to draw a comparison to, and suggest an equivalency in importance with, his previous essay on the frontier. In language that could have been crafted by Woodrow Wilson, Turner moralized and instructed his readers:

The significance of the section in American history is that it is the faint image of a European nation and that we need to reexamine our history in light of this fact. Our politics and our society have been shaped by sectional complexity and interplay not unlike what goes on between European nations. . . . We have furnished to Europe the example of a continental federation of sections over an area equal to Europe itself, and by substituting discussion and concession and compromised legislation for force, we have shown the possibility of international political parties, international legislative bodies, and international peace.⁹⁸

To Turner, the explanation of the world war required the same response as had the closing of the frontier: a new interpretation of the past. But this time Turner, the provincial- turned-cosmopolitan historian, came much closer to adhering to his own dicta, which he articulated in 1891. History, Turner said at the beginning of his career, has a "unity and a continuity" and "local history must be read as part of world history." To put it another way, just as Billington called Turner's frontier thesis a declaration of independence for American historiography, we may see that Turner's sectional thesis served as a new declaration of interdependence for American and European historiography. Turner had discovered American history in large part by distinguishing it from Europe's. Now he and a growing number of other postwar historians were discovering ways to relate, or reconcile, the histories of these two "sister continents," as he later called them; to reattach American history, to use Salmon's words, to its "natural foundation—European history." But in the end, Turner's work on this point was as suggestive as it was incomplete.⁹⁹

The original and fundamental problem of American historiography remained and, for that matter, remains. American history is still unmoored and adrift. But Turner's sectional thesis was a significant step in the right direction. It was never as influential, however, as his national frontier thesis. And far from leading to a broader international historiography, the sectional essay, ironically enough, became a foundation piece for a narrower regional study, namely American western history. This field of study, which in recent decades has attracted




a remarkably talented group of scholars, is no less detached from its natural foundations—American as well as European history—as was the old frontier school of Turner’s day.

The Solution: A History of the Transatlantic West

In the postwar years, there were two false starts toward a solution to the AHA’s problem: the Western Civilization course and Herbert E. Bolton’s *Epic of a Greater America*. The first “Western Civilization” course, called “Contemporary Civilization in the West” or “CC,” was offered by Columbia University in 1919. It grew out of an interdisciplinary war issues course that met an obvious and urgent need. The American philosopher Irwin Edman (who was a sophomore at Columbia in 1914) recalls that “Up to the autumn of 1914 Europe seemed to most American college students a solar system away.” However, with the war, “European history ceased to be the anthropology and archaeology of distant peoples who spoke remote languages. It became as alive as yesterday’s events; it was what explained today’s news.”¹⁰⁰ Still, as the teacher and scholar Gilbert D. Allardyce has pointed out, “Western Civ did not come into existence fully assembled, nor was it conceived in one swoop at Columbia in 1919. Rather, the course and the concept came together piece by piece, not by grand design but as a makeshift response” to the effects of the “academic revolution,” that is, the shift from “the classical curriculum of the old liberal arts colleges” to the “specialized programs of the modern university.”¹⁰¹ However, by the middle of the century, the Western Civilization course had acquired a brilliant coherence. Eric R. Wolf, an anthropologist and author of *Europe and the People without History* (1982), remembered that “Many of us even grew up believing this West has a genealogy, according to which ancient Greece begat Rome, Rome begat Christian Europe, Christian Europe begat the Renaissance, the Renaissance the Enlightenment, the Enlightenment political democracy and the industrial revolution. Industry, crossed with democracy, in turn yielded the United States, embodying the rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”¹⁰²

The civilizational approach appeared to solve the AHA’s original historiographical problem. In theory, civilization was a unit of analysis that could encompass both Europe and America. However, in practice the Western Civilization course was, according to Wisconsin historian and African specialist Phillip D. Curtin, American history “pushed back through time.” It was pushed “back to the colonial period on this continent, then back to Europe, and still further back to the Western Middle Ages, Rome, Greece, and the ancient civilizations of the Near East.”¹⁰³ And because of this focus on the United States,





the Western Civilization course all but ignored Latin America, a region, as its name patently suggests, that was as profoundly impacted by Europe, and perhaps more so, than the English-speaking countries in North America.

Herbert Bolton, one of Turner's friends and a former student, addressed this national tunnel vision which, if anything, was even more constricted in the first decades of the twentieth century. Bolton served as president of the AHA in 1932, the same year Turner died. Bolton developed a new category of historical analysis, the "Spanish Borderlands," which took its place alongside those of "frontier," "section," and "region."¹⁰⁴ The Borderlands comprised a broad area that ran from Florida to California. These lands were ruled for centuries by Spain, in certain regions only nominally, but belonged now to the United States. Turner's sections and the Spanish Borderlands were not mutually exclusive, but Turner's American frontier was a concept that clashed with Bolton's Borderlands, creating an impossible historiographical muddle.

In the presidential address that he gave in Toronto, Bolton sought to transcend his Borderlands with what he called the "Epic of Greater America." Bolton's thesis was that the history of the Western Hemisphere possesses an essential unity, which could be traced back to Columbus, but remains obscured by the historical profession's division of the Western Hemisphere into the "Saxon countries" in the North and the "Latin countries" in the South. Bolton argued this unity between the two was clearly revealed by the Great War. "Every nation," he said, "had to answer the question of participation or neutrality. . . . It is a significant thing that all America, from the north pole to the south pole, was either on the same side of the great struggle or remained neutral. There was emphatic Western Hemisphere solidarity."¹⁰⁵ AHA president and wartime ambassador to Spain, Carlton J. H. Hayes (1882–1964), delivered the presidential address—"The American Frontier—Frontier of What?"—to the AHA's annual meeting, held in Washington, D.C., on 27 December 1945. With the benefit of hindsight, Hayes looked back on Bolton's 1932 concept of "hemispheric solidarity" or Pan-Americanism and called it for what it was, a "shift of isolationism from the nation to the hemisphere."¹⁰⁶

But Bolton was right. The hemisphere did possess an essential underlying unity: the political, economic, intellectual, and moral culture of Western civilization.¹⁰⁷ But he was wrong in thinking this culture only joined the nations of the Western Hemisphere. The unity and continuity of Western culture included Europe as well as the Americas. His "Epic of a Greater America," unlike his concept of the Spanish Borderlands, had little if no impact on the writing or teaching of history.¹⁰⁸ Had Bolton proposed an "Epic of the Greater West," we could speculate that it might have been more successful. The Western Civilization course was national in purpose and thus largely ignored Latin America. Bolton's




Greater America was hemispheric in scope; it had the virtue of including Latin as well as Anglo America. But it left out Europe—a glaring omission.

The AHA was founded in 1884 and the problem of the new profession was how to write a comprehensive history of the United States, from Columbus to Cleveland. In retrospect the solution seems obvious: narrate Europe's successful expansion into North America, if not the entire Americas, and analyze how this transatlantic process drove Western civilization's social evolution in Europe and America. It would have concluded with America's Cleveland and his contemporaries, such as Canada's John Alexander MacDonald, Mexico's Porfirio Díaz, Great Britain's William Ewart Gladstone and Benjamin Disraeli, and Spain's Práxedes Mateo Sagasta. Instead, Frederick Jackson Turner, a young and ambitious historian, came before his peers with a very different solution, one that divorced U.S. history from its European origins and treated it in isolation from its Anglo and Latin American neighbors. Turner's West was not a civilization but the frontier of a single American nation. In 1893, within these procrustean parameters, Turner argued that Europeans became Americans, a new people under the sun, when they moved west and transformed the continent's primitive frontiers into complex societies. However, Turner saw the time was not far off when America would catch up with the rest of the West. This outcome worried him. As America's social evolution became indistinguishable from Europe's, he feared the United States would lose much of what had made it exceptional in world history.¹⁰⁹ In short, Turner was unable to square the emotion of his nationalist sentiment with the logic of his social science.¹¹⁰

When the United States entered the First World War in 1917 to defend Western civilization, Turner's dichotomy of American and European history seemed all but irrelevant to the great issues of the day, and irrelevant it was. This point was made even more obvious in the ensuing years, as the United States eventually traded places with Europe as the West's new core and defender, when it signed the North Atlantic Treaty (1949).¹¹¹ Since Turner's day, there have been numerous calls for a new American history. But what the history profession really needs, more so now than it did in the 1880s, is a history that unifies the story of the West in North America with the story of the West in Europe. Such a history would debunk national mythologies, but not the importance of national history. Further, it would provide the framework for pursuing a better explanation for Western integration. Such a history might shed light on the West's fate.

The five key Western transatlantic nations, Spain and England and their colonial offspring in the New World—Canada, United States of America, and Mexico—all share the same dynamic civilization. In fact, the civilization of the West became dynamic in large part because of the very transatlantic econ-



omy these countries did so much to create. Indeed, according to the Human Development Index (HDI) of the United Nations (UN), by 2012 the rankings of four of these five nations had all but converged at a level of “very high human development”—the United Kingdom: .875, Spain: .885, the United States: .937, Canada: .911. At .775, Mexico is ranked at the next highest level—“high human development”—and is thus behind the others, but, in the *longue durée*, it was not always so.¹¹² And despite a terrible drug war, Mexico is making significant economic progress, thanks in no small part to the benefits of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) between Mexico, the United States, and Canada, which was signed in 1992 and went into effect in 1994.

According to Carla A. Hills, co-chair of the Council on Foreign Relations and former U.S. Trade Representative, “NAFTA ignited an explosion of cross-border activity. Every day, nearly \$2 billion in goods and services cross the United States’ northern border and roughly \$1 billion worth cross its southern border.” And according to Luis Videgaray, the current Mexican Secretary of Finance in the administration of Pres. Enrique Peña Nieto, trade between the United States and Mexico has “multiplied seven fold” since NAFTA went into effect twenty years ago. What is driving integration in North America today, Videgaray contends, is not immigration—in fact, “net migration” from Mexico to the United States is “zero.” “Integration” is being driven, he says, by market forces that free trade has unleashed, including “financial flows” and the formation of international “supply chains.” Videgaray added that this positive state of affairs is “happening whether it is liked or not by our governments.”¹¹³

It was Ronald Reagan who first envisioned a market common to Mexico, United States of America, and Canada, countries with “long-standing heritages of free government.” He proposed the idea in his 1979 announcement for presidential candidacy.¹¹⁴ Reagan thought it would take a century to create this market. It took only thirteen years. Moreover, in the Human Development Report for 2011, the UN predicted—according to the “base case” scenario—that as early as 2030 there will be a convergence in the development status of Mexico (HDI of .923), the United States (HDI of .973), and Canada (HDI of .989).¹¹⁵ During the 1980s, Mexico’s “La Década Perdida” (“The Lost Decade”), such a possibility seemed very remote. In 1980 (according to data available in 2012), the HDI ranking of Mexico was .598, the United States was .825, and Canada was .843.¹¹⁶ Today, one would not be too much of a “rash prophet,” to use Turner’s term, to assert that the manifest destiny of the West in North America is a social parity between its Anglo and Latin variants. Furthermore, if the recent history of the West in Europe is any guide, it is not too rash to assert the likelihood that there will not only be greater political unity between the three nations of NAFTA but between North America and Europe as well.¹¹⁷



The Maastricht Treaty, which created the European Union (EU) and articulated the convergence criteria for its member states, was signed in 1992, twenty-two years ago and five hundred years after Columbus discovered the New World. Since then, Mexico and Canada have each signed economic and political agreements with Europe, and on 8 July 2013, the United States and the EU began negotiations to reach a new Atlantic accord on free trade.¹¹⁸ The EU's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is worth \$17 trillion and the NAFTA economies of the United States, Mexico, and Canada are worth over \$19 trillion. A transatlantic union of the economies of Europe and North America—the capital and labor of nearly a billion people—would make up over half of the world's GDP and would have geopolitical consequences of the first order. The story of the integration of the West in Europe and in North America over the past century—from 1914 to 2014—points to ever greater Atlantic unity as well as to a solution to the enduring problem of American historiography.¹¹⁹

Notes

1. William A. Dunning, "A Generation of American Historiography," *Annual Report of the American Historical Association* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1917), 353.

2. Daniel J. Boorstin, "America and the Image of Europe," in *America and the Image of Europe: Reflections on American Thought* (New York: Meridian Books, 1960), 21–22. In this insightful essay, Boorstin argues that in American thought there was an historic polarity, or antithesis, between the idea of America, which was associated with all things good in the world—freedom, abundance, opportunity—and the idea of Europe, which was synonymous with corruption, class, cramped living, and conflict. This polarity began to breakdown between 1914 and 1945 with the two World Wars. Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis (1893) is a perfect example of the old polarity; his sectional thesis (1925), on the other hand, was an attempt to reconcile the Old and New Worlds. During the interwar period, some critics and self-imposed exiles "inverted" the old polarity, finding in European culture, for instance, what America was perceived to lack. Boorstin saw the short-lived isolationism of the 1930s not as a reaction to the disillusionment of the First World War but as a return to the old polarity, the first of a number of subsequent reversions.

3. Ray Allen Billington, *Frederick Jackson Turner: Historian, Scholar, Teacher* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 438–43.

4. Arthur S. Link, "The American Historical Association, 1884–1984," *American Historical Review* 90 (February 1985): 1.

5. Louis Menand, *The Marketplace of Ideas: Reform and Resistance in the American University* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2010), 157.

6. Walter Prescott Webb, "The Historical Seminar: Its Outer Shell and Its Inner Spirit," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 42 (June 1955): 16–18.

7. Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of History," *Wisconsin Journal of Education and Midland School Journal* 21 (November 1891): 256. In the past, historians, including Turner, did not distinguish the term "world" from "Europe." Europe was considered the wider world.

8. Paper read before the Harvard Historical Society, 9 May 1881. Herbert B. Adams, *The Germanic Origin of New England Towns* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Studies, 1882), 13. Turner's biographer, Ray Allen Billington, used the terms "evolutionary hypothesis" and "germ theory" interchangeably. For Billington's discussion of the rise of "scientific history" in the 1880s, see Billington, *Turner*, 64–66. Today's Atlantic history has resurrected Adams's narrative (minus the germs), which located the origins of American history in Europe. See *Atlantic History: A Critical Appraisal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 3, edited by the Johns Hopkins University historians Jack P. Greene and Philip D. Morgan. See also Bernard Bailyn, *Atlantic History: Concept and Contours* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005).

9. Adams, *The Germanic Origin of New England Towns*, 8.

10. John Higham, with Leonard Krieger and Felix Gilbert, *History* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1965), 161. For a more updated overview of American historiography, see Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The Objectivity Question and the American Historical Profession* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

11. Herbert B. Adams and Henry Wood, *Columbus and His Discovery of America* (Baltimore, Md.: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1892), 16.

12. *Ibid.* Adams and Wood turned to Henry Harrisse, at the time the "best American authority on Columbus," for a more generous interpretation of Columbus's great mistake. Harrisse, they wrote, had likened the "discovery by Columbus to the first detection of the planet Uranus by Le Verrier, the astronomer who announced that certain irregularities in the motion of Uranus were due to disturbing influences by some unknown body in the heavens. By following his suggestions, skilled observers found a new planet on the first of January 1847, and yet many of Le Verrier's original computations were found to be erroneous. So it was with the geographical calculations of Columbus" (*ibid.*, 26).

13. Samuel Eliot Morison's biography of Columbus, *Admiral of the Ocean Sea: A Life of Christopher Columbus* (Boston, Mass.: Little, Brown, 1942) was based, in part, on field research. He took the mariner's measure at sea and found, in retracing his voyages in a sail boat, that Columbus was not just a brave and daring explorer but a very skilled navigator as well.

14. Geoffrey Symcox, interview by Meg Sullivan, "Repertorium Columbianum' Makes Landfall," University of California Newsroom, 6 October 2010.

15. See David J. Bibel and T. H. Chen, "Diagnosis of Plague: An Analysis of the Yersin-Kitasato Controversy," *Bacteriology Reviews* 40 (September 1976): 633–51. Bibel and Chen conclude that Yersin and Shibasaburo Kitasato, the Japanese bacteriologist, independently discovered the same bacillus, *Yersinia pestis*.

16. Adams and Wood, *Columbus*, 27.

17. *Ibid.*, 8.

18. *Ibid.*, 10.

19. Billington, *Turner*, 126.

20. Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for 1893* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1894), 227.

21. Adams and Wood, *Columbus*, 39.

22. *Ibid.*

23. Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," 227.

24. Billington, *Turner*, 127. Turner has been the subject of numerous articles and a second, excellent biography by Allan G. Bogue, *Frederick Jackson Turner: Strange Roads Going Down* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998).

25. Achille Loria, "The Landed Theory of Profit," *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 6 (October 1891): 109.

26. Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," 207.

27. Lee Benson, "Achille Loria's Influence on American Economic Thought, Including His Contributions to the Frontier Hypothesis," *Agricultural History* 24 (July 1950): 190–96. According to Benson, "He who would understand Turner must first master Loria" (*ibid.*, 196).

28. Elliott West, "Walter Prescott Webb and the Search for the West," in *Writing Western History: Essays on Major Western Historians*, ed. Richard W. Etulain (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1991), 168–69.

29. Arnold Toynbee's challenge-and-response thesis in which civilizations rise if they are able to adapt to their environment ("the greater the challenge, the greater the stimulus") is essentially the same point Webb makes in his explanation of what happened when Anglo Americans encountered the challenging environment of the Great Plains. Their response was to invent new technologies: six-shooters, windmills, and barbed wire fences.

30. Capt. Alfred Thayer Mahan, "The United States Looking Outward," *Atlantic Monthly* (December 1890), reprinted in A. T. Mahan, *The Interest of America in Sea Power, Present and Future* (Boston, Mass.: Little, Brown, 1897), 21–22.

31. Theodore Roosevelt, *The Strenuous Life, Essays and Addresses* (New York: The Century Co., 1901), 6. The "Strenuous Life," was a speech given by New York governor Roosevelt in Chicago, Illinois, on 11 April 1899. See Roosevelt's multivolume history, *The Winning of the West* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1889–1896).

32. James Ford Rhodes, "History," *Annual Report of the American Historical Association* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1899), 49–50.

33. *Ibid.*, 49.

34. Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," 207.

35. See Marvin Harris, *The Rise of Anthropological Theory* (1968; repr., Walnut Creek, Calif.: AltaMira Press, 2001), 25–52. In Turner's day, as important as Lewis Henry Morgan was, the Englishman Herbert Spencer (1820–1903) was the giant of evolutionary theory.

36. Despite these different stages of development, Morgan contended that, "A common principle of intelligence meets us in the savage, in the barbarian, and in civilized man." See Lewis Henry Morgan, *Ancient Society* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1877), 553.

37. Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," 207–8.

38. Elisha Andrews, review of *Analisi della Proprieta Capitalisa* (1889), by Achille Loria, *Political Science Quarterly* 5 (December 1890): 717.

39. Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," 210.

40. Dunning, "A Generation of American Historiography," 351–52.

41. *Ibid.*, 350.

42. Ibid.
43. Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," 216.
44. Frederick Jackson Turner, "Dr. Von Holst's History of the United States," in *America's Great Frontiers and Sections: Frederick Jackson Turner's Unpublished Essays*, ed. Wilbur R. Jacobs, rev. ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1969), 92. Examining the internal evidence, Jacobs speculates that parts of Turner's review of Von Holst were written prior to 1890, other parts after 1893, "perhaps even as late as 1896" (ibid., 92).
45. Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," 201.
46. Dr. H. von Holst, *The Constitutional and Political History of the United States, Vol. 1: State Sovereignty and Slavery, 1755-1833*, trans. John J. Lalor and Alfred B. Mason (Chicago: Callaghan and Company, 1876).
47. Eric F. Goldman, "Hermann Eduard Von Holst: Plumed Knight of American Historiography," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 23 (March 1937): 514.
48. Billington, *Turner*, 62.
49. Goldman, "Hermann Eduard Von Holst," 528-29.
50. Dr. H. von Holst, "The Irrepressible Conflict," in *Bibliotheca Sacra*, ed. G. Frederick Wright, Judson Smith, and W. G. Ballatine (Oberlin, Ohio: E. J. Goodrich, 1884), 238.
51. Ibid., 233.
52. Jorg Nagler, "A Mediator Between Two Historical Worlds: Hermann Eduard von Holst and the University of Chicago," in *German Influences on Education in the United States to 1917*, ed. Henry Geitz, Jürgen Heideking, and Jürgen Herbst (Cambridge: Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, 1995), 267.
53. Dr. H. von Holst, *The Constitutional and Political History of the United States, Vol. 4: Compromise of 1850 and Kansas-Nebraska Bill, 1850-1854*, trans. John J. Lalor (Chicago: Callaghan and Company, 1885), 244.
54. Dunning, "A Generation of American Historiography," 349.
55. Higham, *History*, 167-68.
56. Quoted in Turner, "Dr. Von Holst's History of the United States," 85.
57. Goldman, "Hermann Eduard Von Holst," 519-20.
58. Ibid., 521.
59. Alfred Bushnell Hart, "Hermann Von Holst," *Political Science Quarterly* 5 (December 1890): 687.
60. Turner, "Dr. Von Holst's History of the United States," 96.
61. Quoted in Goldman, "Hermann Eduard Von Holst," 527.
62. Turner, "Dr. Von Holst's History of the United States," 94-95.
63. Ibid., 104.
64. Ibid., 103.
65. Ibid., 104.
66. Billington, *Turner*, 4. Turner's father was born in 1832 and was named in honor of President Andrew Jackson who was reelected that same year.
67. Turner, "Dr. Von Holst's History of the United States," 98-99.
68. Ibid., 97.
69. Nagler, "A Mediator Between Two Historical Worlds," 267.
70. Turner, "Dr. Von Holst's History of the United States," 100.
71. Ibid., 97.

72. James Ford Rhodes, "The Presidential Office," *Scribner's Magazine* (February 1903): 212.
73. Walter Nugent, *Habits of Empire: A History of American Expansion* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008), 71–72.
74. Rhodes, "The Presidential Office," 212.
75. *Ibid.*
76. Elliott West, *The Essential West: Collected Essays* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2012), 5. It should be pointed out that the New Western history of the 1980s and 1990s, no less than the "Old Western" history of the 1960s and 1970s, focused on the West as a region.
77. Lucy M. Salmon, "History in a Back Yard," reprinted in *History and the Texture of Modern Life: Selected Essays*, ed. Nicholas Adams and Bonnie G. Smith (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 76–84. Salmon used her modest outdoor refuge to meditate on the unity of history. This short piece has lost none of its pedagogical value.
78. Lucy M. Salmon, "Appendix II: The Study of History Below the Secondary Schools," in *The Study of History in Schools; Report to the American Historical Association by the Committee of Seven*, Andrew C. McLaughlin et al., (London: Macmillan, 1899), 158–72.
79. *Ibid.*, 160–63.
80. For details of Turner's trip to Europe, see Billington, *Turner*, 155–59.
81. George F. Kennan, foreword to *At a Century's Ending: Reflections, 1982–1995* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1996), 7–13.
82. Woodrow Wilson, "Message to Congress," 63rd Cong., 2d Sess., Senate Doc. No. 566 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1914), 3–4.
83. Col. Charles E. Stanton, a former student of the University of Santa Clara and aide to Gen. John J. Pershing, is the one who actually uttered the famous phrase in Paris on 4 July 1917. Gerald McKeivitt, *The University of Santa Clara: A History, 1851–1977* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1979), 181.
84. Novick, "Historians on the Home Front," chap. 5 in *That Noble Dream*, 111–32.
85. See William Diamond on the unearthing of Frederick Jackson Turner's manuscript, "American Sectionalism and World Organization" (1918). Diamond found the item in the Woodrow Wilson Papers and published it in the *American Historical Review* 47 (April 1942): 545–51. Turner's piece was written at the end of one world war and published at the beginning of another.
86. The trademark quote is from John Milton Cooper, Jr., *Woodrow Wilson, A Biography* (New York: Vintage, 2009), 24. Cooper added that, as a heartfelt southerner, Wilson identified with "a defeated; impoverished, disadvantaged region" (*ibid.*, 24). For the details and circumstances of Turner and Wilson's early friendship, see Billington, *Turner*, 75.
87. Billington, *Turner*, 70, 75–76.
88. *President Wilson's Great Speeches and Other History Making Documents* (Chicago: Stanton and Van Vliet Co., 1917), 168.
89. The Irish statesman and philosopher Edmund Burke (1729–1797) thought that, "To be attached to the subdivision, to love the little platoon we belong to in society, is the first principle (the germ, as it were) of public affections. It is the first link in the series by which we proceed towards a love of our country, and to mankind." See Edmund Burke,

"Reflections on the French Revolution," in *Select Works of Edmund Burke*, vol. 1 (London: Methuen and Co., 1905), 46.

90. See Michael C. Steiner's two articles: "Frederick Jackson Turner and Western Regionalism" in *Writing Western History*, Etulain, 103–135; and "From Frontier to Region: Frederick Jackson Turner and the New Western History," *Pacific Historical Review* 64 (November 1995): 479–501. See also Richard W. Etulain's historiographical discussions in *Re-Imagining the Modern American West: A Century of Fiction, History, Art* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1996); Gerald D. Nash, *Creating the West: Historical Interpretations, 1890–1990* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1991), 3–158; Kerwin Lee Klein, "Reclaiming the F-Word, Or Being and Becoming Postwestern," *Pacific Historical Review* 65 (May 1996): 179–215; David M. Wrobel, "Beyond the Frontier-Region Dichotomy," *Pacific Historical Review* 65 (August 1996): 401–29; and Martin Ridge, "The Life of an Idea: The Significance of Frederick Jackson Turner's Frontier Thesis," *Montana, The Magazine of Western History* 41 (winter 1991): 2–13.

91. To ensure there was no confusion on this point, the first conference of the Western History Association (WHA), held in Santa Fe, New Mexico, in 1961, was called the "Santa Fe Conference on the History of Western America." See K. Ross Toole et al., eds., *Probing the American West: Papers from the Santa Fe Conference* (Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press, 1961). The study of Turner's American frontier, which was viewed as a process of Americanization and one source of the country's exceptionalism, was replaced by the study of the American West, a region whose significance was detached from the nation. Frontier historians, or "Turnerians," represented most notably by Ray Allen Billington, the first president of the WHA, nevertheless found a home in the new association. Yet they were a declining minority. Patricia Nelson Limerick, later president of the WHA, criticized Turner for what she saw was his focus on the white West, which produced a relatively brief and an awkwardly defensive revival of interest in Turner's frontier and sectional theses in the late 1980s and 1990s. On its semi-centennial in 2011, the WHA revised its mission to be the "home for the study of all aspects of North American Wests, frontiers, homelands, and borderlands." Diversity had replaced unity and the American West had been all but transmuted into a denationalized, deconstructed, and even de-bordered space; a kaleidoscope of various and changing multi-cultural entities. At least for now, it was also a category of analysis that ceased to be very categorical.

92. Ian Morris explains: "Measuring and comparing social development is not a method for passing judgment on different communities." Social development, he makes clear, is "a neutral analytical category; praising or blaming it is another altogether." In his study on the East and the West, Morris measures four traits: a community's ability to capture energy, its organizational capacity, its information processing, and its capacity to make war. Ian Morris, *Why the West Rules—for Now: The Patterns of History, and What They Reveal About the Future* (New York: Picador, 2010), 144–50.

93. See Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Section in American History," *The Wisconsin Magazine of History* 9 (March 1925): 255–80. For a recent popular history based on sectionalism, see Colin Woodward, *American Nations: A History of the Eleven Rival Regional Cultures of North America* (New York: Viking, 2011). Other scholarly works in the sectional tradition include Donald W. Meinig's *Imperial Texas: An Interpretive Essay in Cultural Geography* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1969);

and David Hackett Fischer's *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

94. Turner, "American Sectionalism and World Organization," 547.

95. *Ibid.*, 549–50.

96. *Ibid.*, 550.

97. Frederick Jackson Turner, "Sections and Nation," *The Yale Review* 12 (October 1922): 1–21.

98. Turner, "The Significance of the Section in American History," 279–80.

99. There were other proposals to connect American and European history. Columbia University's William R. Shepherd's articles on "European Expansion," which appeared in the *Political Science Quarterly* 32 (1919): 43–60, 210–25, 392–412, are still well worth reading. See also Dixon Ryan Fox's "Civilization in Transit," *American Historical Review* 32 (1927): 753–68.

100. Quote from Lawrence W. Levine, "Looking Eastward: The Career of Western Civ," in *The Opening of the American Mind: Canons, Culture, and History* (Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 1996), 54–55.

101. Gilbert D. Allardyce, "The Rise and Fall of the Western Civilization Course," *American Historical Review* 87 (June 1982): 697, 699.

102. Eric R. Wolf, *Europe and the People without History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 5.

103. Philip D. Curtin, *African History* (Washington, D.C.: Service Center for Teachers of History, American Historical Association, 1964), 1–2. Curtin's use of the term "world" here is interchangeable with that of "Western Civilization."

104. Albert L. Hurtado, "Bolton and Turner: The Borderlands and American Exceptionalism," *Western Historical Quarterly* 44 (spring 2013): 1, 4–20.

105. Annual Address of the President of the American Historical Association, delivered at Toronto, 28 December 1932. See Herbert E. Bolton, "The Epic of Greater America," *American Historical Review* 38 (April 1933): 448–74. See Arthur P. Whitaker, "The Origin of the Western Hemisphere Idea," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 98 (October 1954): 323–26.

106. Carlton J. H. Hayes, "The American Frontier—Frontier of What?" *American Historical Review* 50 (January 1946): 199–216.

107. North American writers have spilled rivers of ink pointing out the differences between English and Spanish civilization. For example, see Carlos Fuentes's celebration of Hispanic culture in *The Buried Mirror: Reflections on Spain and the New World* (Boston, Mass.: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1992); and Samuel P. Huntington's spirited defense of Anglo-Protestant culture in *Who Are We? The Challenges to America's National Identity* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004).

108. According to Lewis Hanke, Bolton's Pan-American thesis had "little impact." Lewis Hanke, ed., *Do the Americas have a Common History? A Critique of the Bolton Theory* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1964), 43. A more recent and provocative exception is Felipe Fernández-Armesto's *The Americas: A Hemispheric History* (New York: Modern Library, 2003). Atlantic historians, e.g., R. R. Palmer and Bernard Bailyn, see the existence of a coherent Atlantic world in the late eighteenth century, one which produced the American and French Revolutions. This world diverged from 1800 to the middle of the twentieth century. But beginning with the Atlantic Charter in 1941, it began to reconverge, this time under U.S. leadership.

109. Of course, the frontier is considered to be only one source of American exceptionalism. In 1998, the British historian and prolific writer Paul Johnson laid out “ten commandments” for writing American history. The second commandment was that “the United States is a God-fearing country, with all that that implies. It is the only major country in which a majority of citizens still participate voluntarily in an active religious life.” To Johnson, this is the “primary source of American exceptionalism.” Paul Johnson, “Writing a History of the American People,” American Enterprise Institute Online Newsletter, April 1998, <http://www.aei.org/article/society-and-culture/wriing-a-history-of-the-american-people> (accessed 18 December 2013). See also Huntington, “Religion and Christianity,” chap. 5 in *Who Are We?*, 81–106.

110. For a contemporary and stunningly lucid discussion of cultural evolution, see Robert Wright, *Nonzero: The Logic of Human Destiny* (New York: Vintage, 2000).

111. For a brilliant narrative of the West’s shifting cores and a history of world social development, see Morris, *Why the West Rules—For Now*, and the companion to that volume, *The Measure of Civilization: How Social Development Decides the Fate of Nations* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2013).

112. *The 2013 Human Development Report*—“The Rise of the South: Human Progress in a Diverse World” (United Nations Development Programme), Table 1, 144, <http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/global/hdr2013> (accessed 18 December 2013). The Human Development Index (HDI) is based on three indicators of individual wellbeing: life expectancy, education, and income. The index uses a scale of 0–1. The HDI report was started in 1990, one hundred years after the U.S. Census Bureau declared the frontier closed—Turner’s key marker of social development.

113. Carla A. Hills, “NAFTA’s Economic Upsides: The View from the United States,” *Foreign Affairs* 93 (January/February 2014), <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/140348/carla-a-hills/naftas-economic-upsides> (accessed 27 December 2013); and Luis Videgaray, Mexico’s Secretary of Finance, interview, *Charlie Rose*, PBS, WNET, New York, 10 February 2014. Many Democratic Party activists, labor unions, environmental groups, liberal advocacy groups, and anti-globalists would emphasize the downsides of the trilateral agreement.

114. “Ronald Reagan’s announcement for Presidential Candidacy November 13, 1979,” *The Public Papers of President Ronald W. Reagan*, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/reference/11.13.79.html> (accessed 21 February 2014). Ronald Reagan gave the speech in New York City and declared, “We live on a continent whose three countries possess the assets to make it the strongest, most prosperous and self-sufficient area on earth. It is no accident that this unmatched potential for progress and prosperity exists in three countries with such long-standing heritages of free government.”

115. Jana Asher and Beth Osborne Daponte, “A Hypothetical Cohort Model of Human Development,” *Human Development Research Paper 2010/40* (Human Development Report Office, United Nations Development Programme, September 2010), 40–41, http://www.rrojasdatabank.info/HDRP_2010_40.pdf (accessed 21 February 2014).

116. “The 2013 Human Development Report,” Table 2, 148, <http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/global/hdr2013> (accessed 18 December 2013).

117. See John Gillingham, *European Integration, 1950–2003: Superstate or New Market Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).



118. The trade agreement, which is under negotiation, is called the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP). The goal is to remove trade barriers and facilitate the buying and selling of goods and services between the European Union and the United States. In view of China's growing economic influence, the talks are also meant to ensure that it is the West which continues to set the standards in the global economy.

119. On the future of America and Europe, Robert Kagan for one sees divergence. Kagan wrote: "Europe is turning away from power . . . it is moving into a self-contained world of laws and rules and transnational negotiation and cooperation. It is entering a post-historical paradise of peace and relative prosperity, the realization of Immanuel Kant's 'perpetual peace.' Meanwhile, the United States remains mired in history, exercising power in an anarchic Hobbesian world where international laws and rules are unreliable, and where true security and the defense and promotion of a liberal order still depend on the possession and use of military might." Americans, in short, "are from Mars and Europeans are from Venus." This is how the image of Europe and America—Boorstin's old polarity referenced in the second endnote—appeared to Kagan in 2003, the year the United States invaded Iraq. See Robert Kagan, *Power and Paradise: America and Europe in the New World Order* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003), 3. Russia's illegal annexation of the Crimean Peninsula in 2014, however, strongly suggests that history continues to haunt Europe no less than it does the United States. For more on transatlantic unity, see Richard Rosecrance, *The Resurgence of the West: How a Transatlantic Union Can Prevent War and Restore the United States and Europe* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2013), 4–6, 89–92; and Andrew M. Dorman and Joyce P. Kaufman, eds., *The Future of Transatlantic Relations: Perceptions, Policy, and Practice* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011). In *The Narcissism of Minor Differences: How America and Europe are Alike* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), Peter Baldwin discusses the similarities between the two societies.

