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also asking myriad questions about women in the West. Abigail's mutiny may have had to wait two hundred years, but scholars who decided that western women deserved their share of attention have launched a splendid insurrection. And if Turner the historian would have been puzzled, Turner the human being surely would have approved.

## African American History and the Frontier Thesis

### Margaret Washington

"Each age finds it necessary to reconsider at least some portions of the past, from points of view furnished by new conditions which reveal the influence and significance of forces not adequately known by the historians of the previous generation."<sup>1</sup>

Frederick Jackson Turner and other historians of the Progressive Era, such as Arthur M. Schlesinger, Sr., and Charles Beard, found no place for race or gender in their perspectives on American history. To these historians, even slavery and Reconstruction were important primarily because of their impact on white America and white institutions. Schlesinger ignored black history in his writings but served on the Council of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History and encouraged his black students, Rayford Logan and John Hope Franklin, who chose black history topics. In his scholarship, Charles Beard dismissed egalitarian and humanistic principles in regard to the Fourteenth Amendment, interpreting it merely as a conspiratorial move to promote and protect corporations; yet according to Richard Hofstadter, Beard boasted of a liberal Quaker heritage, a grandfather who harbored fugitive slaves, and a father who challenged racial prejudice. On the other hand, Turner came from unreconstructed Jacksonian stock (his father was named Andrew Jackson

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<sup>1</sup> Frederick Jackson Turner, "Social Forces in American History," *American Historical Review*, 16 (Jan. 1911), 225.

Turner). Turner's biographer, Ray Allen Billington, noted that Turner borrowed the prejudice and bigotry as well as the idealism of the West. He viewed immigrants of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century as "a menace to traditional values and institutions," shared contemporary prejudices against Jews, and on at least two occasions stated that the Fifteenth Amendment's guarantee of black franchise was unwise.<sup>2</sup> The Progressive Era was, in the words of contemporary journalist and activist Ray Stannard Baker, "for whites only." Nevertheless, progressive historians introduced a school of thought based upon economic and political conflict, and Turner's insistence that American distinctiveness derived from a pattern of sociological processes related to westward expansion was central to this paradigm.

In his 1893 address, "The Significance of the Frontier," Turner viewed American expansionism as a movement of social development, from colonial times to 1890, with white Americans successively advancing into "free land," establishing "superior" institutions, and spreading "civilization," via democracy, economic power, and individual freedom. According to Turner, as the nation moved west, each region—the Atlantic frontier, the Indian trader's frontier, the rancher's frontier, the farmer's frontier, and frontier army posts—introduced its unique characteristics and contributed largely to the making of the "American character." Strong, motivated, self-reliant settlers took advantage of the frontier's unlimited opportunities and thrust themselves to the top of society. "Rugged individualism" and "free land," which provided a "safety valve," were nurturing and regenerative forces that successive waves of white settlers experienced.<sup>3</sup>

Neither Turner's message nor his historical vision of American expansion were original. Scholars like Richard Slotkin have pointed out that Turner articulated a long-accepted myth. Insofar as myth-making aims to create and control a national reality, to operate as a source of power, the frontier myth succeeded for many years. Through acting out and retelling over generations, the myth came to

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<sup>2</sup> August Meier and Elliott M. Rudwick, *Black History and the Historical Profession, 1915-1980* (Urbana 1986) 3, 46, 90, 117, 129; Richard Hofstadter, *The Progressive Historians: Turner, Beard, Parkington* (New York 1970), 61-63, 167-170; Ray Allen Billington, *Frederick Jackson Turner: Historian, Scholar, Teacher* (New York 1973), 436-437.

<sup>3</sup> Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," in Everett E. Edwards, ed., *The Early Writings of Frederick Jackson Turner, With a List of All His Works* (Madison, Wisc. 1938), 185-229.

embody virtues that defined its participants as heroes. As Slotkin illustrates, the "frontier psychology" began when Anglo-Americans met Indians, and was perpetuated through violent confrontation justified through sacred, social, and psychological rationalizations, as well as economic and political expediency. Myth became not only perceived reality but scholarly, historical truth. Myth also became intricately tied to ideology.<sup>4</sup> Although Slotkin is concerned with much more than the place of race in the "national character," he understands how racial character was imbedded in the mythologization of American history, and its extension to the "frontier psychology."

Even before Turner, white Americans firmly believed in the culture of distinctiveness, which was, in turn, fueled by "frontier psychology." Turner was more than a product of his time. He was the griot for a tradition that in important ways continues within the fabric of American cultural and historical perceptions. Frontier psychology sustained Manifest Destiny, capitalism, and Social Darwinism; it supported violence against the "other," expansionism outside American borders, and racial exclusivity. This is demonstrated historically each time the nation goes to war. Moreover, "frontier psychology" has helped to define American historiography, sometimes pseudo-history, and also its political culture, which is why for historians like Turner certain participants in the American frontier experience remained invisible.

Moving beyond Frederick Jackson Turner involves observing the frontier more as a metaphor, and less as an actual evocation of "national character." Billington once noted that Turner offered no tangible or convincing evidence to support his thesis. The true significance of Turner's sweeping generalizations, exaggerations, and romanticizations, wrote Billington, was their challenging assertions.<sup>5</sup> There is much to challenge.

What impact did Frederick Jackson Turner's highly regarded 1893 address on democracy, the West, and the significance of the frontier have on the black experience? From Turner's perspective the answer is none. He makes no mention of blacks, and their role in frontier development probably never crossed his mind. But despite Turner's omissions, and regardless of the raw racism of the West, the

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<sup>4</sup> Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier 1600-1860* (Middletown, Conn. 1973), 3-24, *passim*; Slotkin, *The Fatal Environment: The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization, 1800-1890* (New York 1985), 3-80.

<sup>5</sup> Billington, *Frederick Jackson Turner*, 129-131.

frontier held experiential possibilities for African Americans that are revealed in their writings. Moreover, current historiographical trends illustrate that for African Americans the frontier concept had a broader meaning than the Turner thesis implied, broader even than that perceived by later historians who wrote specifically on the black West.

In 1902, Richard R. Wright, Jr., noted that the black presence and participation in the western experience began even before that of Anglo-Americans. Wright wrote a carefully documented article for the *American Anthropologist* on blacks who lived and labored in South America and New Spain one hundred years before Jamestown. His "Negro Companions of the Spanish Explorers" was ignored until 1969, when it finally was reprinted.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, some blacks participating in the United States' westward migration documented first hand their experiences in frontier society. For example, James P. Beckwourth (1798-1866), Missouri-born explorer, trader, scout, and trapper, dictated an autobiography of his adventures and exploits. First published in 1856, his account was reissued in 1931 with a racist, bombastic introduction by cultural historian Bernard De Voto, who reduced Beckwourth's account to mere legend. Yet eyewitnesses to Beckwourth's ventures insisted that he was "the most famous Indian fighter of his generation." Beckwourth also found the first successful pass (which still bears his name) through the Sierra Nevadas to the Sacramento Valley gold fields. Self-trained frontier historian Francis Parkman thought Beckwourth "a fellow of bad character—a compound of white and black blood," and considered his narrative "false." Undoubtedly Parkman could not countenance an African American performing the deeds attributed to Beckwourth, whose courage and audacity astonished even Native Americans. Had he been white, Beckwourth would appear in textbooks as a western archetypical hero—one who helped define the "national character." Most western heroes from Daniel Boone to Kit Carson and Wyatt Earp imbibe legend and quasi-mythology yet still become part of our history. But Beckwourth was worse than "other." He was of mixed racial ancestry, and this relegated him to a "hybrid" status, which prompted Parkman to label Beckwourth a "bad" character.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Richard R. Wright, "Negro Companions of the Spanish Explorers," in August Meier and Elliott Rudwick, eds., *The Making of Black America* (2 vols., New York 1969), I, 25-33.

<sup>7</sup> T. D. Bonner, ed., *The Life and Adventures of James P. Beckwourth, Mountaineer,*

James Williams, another transplanted black southerner, escaped Maryland slavery in 1838 at age thirteen. Williams worked with the underground railroad in Pennsylvania, kept a fruit stand, and fought slave catchers in Boston before sailing for San Francisco in 1853. Settling in Sacramento, the resourceful Walker engaged in various business enterprises, continued his abolitionist activities through the famous Sacramento court case of fugitive Archy Lee, and traveled from coast to coast several times. Williams's West was filled with run-aways, their heroic allies, and slaveholders forever on their heels. Williams also commented on exclusionary measures passed against the Chinese, the poor treatment of local Indians, the establishment of black institutions, and African American participation in the gold fields. Unlike Beckwourth, Williams wrote and published his own narrative. Though a little known work, there seems to be little question about its authenticity. Williams offers vivid descriptions and insights into life in the West for African Americans.<sup>8</sup>

Black women such as Hanna Anderson Ropes, a Massachusetts woman who settled in Kansas in 1855, left accounts of their western experiences. Ropes, like most frontierwomen black or white, focused on home and family. For black frontierwomen, isolation and alienation from a community and from social functions exacerbated by racial barriers. Not all were primarily homemakers. Slave-born Biddy Mason walked from Mississippi to Missouri and then to San Bernardino with her three children. A nurse and midwife, "Grandmother Mason" was noted for works of charity and racial uplift. The first African Methodist Episcopal Church in Los Angeles was organized in her home. Mason became wealthy in California through real estate ventures and dictated a work of her life and times. Similarly, other black women kept diaries which today remain largely unexamined in various western state historical societies.<sup>9</sup> These and other primary

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*Scout, and Pioneer, and Chief of the Crow Nation of Indians* (1856; rep., New York 1931); W. Sherman Savage, *Blacks in the West* (Westport, Conn. 1976), 71-74; Meier and Rudwick, *Black History*, 3. For a discussion of attitudes toward mixed racial ancestry see George M. Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914* (New York 1971).

<sup>8</sup> James Williams, *Life and Adventures of James Williams, A Fugitive Slave, with a Full Description of the Underground Railroad* (San Francisco 1873).

<sup>9</sup> Glenda Riley, "American Daughters: Black Women in the West," *Montana: The Magazine of Western History*, 38 (Spring 1988), 14-27; Lawrence B. de Graaf, "Race, Sex, and Region: Black Women in the American West, 1850-1920," *Pacific Historical Review*, 49 (May 1980), 285-313; Savage, *Blacks in the West*, 14, 135.

sources still afford historians an opportunity write the African Americans' role into histories of the West.

It is important to remember, on this one-hundredth anniversary of his frontier thesis, that Frederick Jackson Turner's vision of the West has been democratized, at least partly pluralized, and greatly stripped of its mythology. Turner and his followers need not have looked far to uncover black participation in the frontier experience. Even during his own lifetime, Turner's exclusion of blacks quietly was being revised by African American historians.

In 1919, Delilah Beasley, a black amateur California historian wrote *Negro Trailblazers of California*. Although she lacked formal training, Beasley's approach was professional. She searched California records at the Bancroft Library in Berkeley, examined the state archives in Sacramento, explored newspapers, land, hospital, and poor-farm records. She investigated assembly and senate journals, legal reports and state statutes. Although some of Beasley's historical judgments were problematic, her self-published book was sound enough for later scholars to rely upon.<sup>10</sup>

While progressive and consensus historians in white institutions ignored the black frontier experience, scholars publishing in the *Journal of Negro History*, *Negro History Bulletin*, and with Carter G. Woodson's Associated Publishers wrote prolifically about African American presence in the West. Beasley's 1918 article, "Slavery in California" documented important but little-known information about slavery in the American West. Additionally, Beasley was perhaps the first person to write on black women in the West. Kenneth Wiggins Porter's pioneering articles on black participation in fur trading, the Seminole Wars, black-Indian relations, and the trans-Mississippi black experience also were published in the *Journal of Negro History* over a period of several decades. In 1971 a collection of Porter's most important articles was published in one volume. His contribution to the scholarship about blacks in the West remains unmatched. Porter was not only informative but analytical and critical in his approach to the frontier experience. W. Sherman Savage, whose remarkable academic career spanned nearly fifty years, also researched extensively on the black frontier experience. Like Porter, most of Savage's work was published in the *Journal of Negro History* and he too lived to see his scholarship recognized by the historical profession. In 1976 Savage published *Blacks in the West*, a culmination of decades of research that included

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<sup>10</sup> Delilah L. Beasley, *The Negro Trail Blazers of California* (Los Angeles, 1919).

significant information on African American women in the West.<sup>11</sup>

Prior to the Civil Rights era, few historians outside the small orbit of African American scholars noted that the frontier experience was a factor in African American life and history. And it is unfortunate that scholars of the West like Porter and Savage remained in relative obscurity until white historians revived and gave credibility to the subject. These earlier scholars were pioneers in the truest sense, laboring in selfless isolation and experiencing ostracism from the established profession. The latecomers, while expanding on earlier studies, also relied heavily on previous groundbreaking scholarship. General recognition of the black frontier experience as an integral part of the American past was a product of the 1960s and 1970s. Books such as *The Negro Cowboys* by Philip Durham and Everett L. Jones, *The Buffalo Soldiers* by William H. Leckie, and *The Black West* by William Loren Katz, presented full treatments of the frontier from a black perspective. Despite the somewhat superficial and popular orientation of these works, they began a new historiography and synthetic treatment among scholars who had previously ignored the black West. Rudolph Lapp's study on blacks in gold rush California and Monroe Billington's work on New Mexico's buffalo soldiers offer specialized treatments of black participation in specific areas of western development and enhance our knowledge of the collective experience of blacks in the frontier.<sup>12</sup>

Perhaps even more significant are works such as Juliet E. K. Walker's *Free Frank* that offer an individual, in-depth, and diverse presentation of the frontier experience of African Americans. Land speculators, entrepreneurs, ranchers, and other settlers were central to Turner's West, that he maintained spread "democracy," "republican government," and "community." Walker's *Free Frank* chronicles just such an experience. Free Frank (1777-1854) was active in three successive westward movements between the American Revolution and the Civil War. This slave-born African American was a product of the South Carolina piedmont frontier. He moved to the Kentucky

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<sup>11</sup> Delilah L. Beasley, "Slavery in California," *Journal of Negro History*, 3 (Jan. 1918), 33-44; Kenneth Wiggins Porter, *The Negro on the American Frontier* (New York 1971); Savage, *Blacks in the West*, *passim*.

<sup>12</sup> Durham and Jones, *The Negro Cowboys* (New York 1965); Leckie, *The Buffalo Soldiers, A Narrative of the Negro Cavalry in the West* (Norman, Okla. 1967); Katz, *The Black West* (1971; 2nd ed., Garden City, N.Y. 1973); Lapp, *Blacks in Gold Rush California* (New Haven 1977); Billington, *New Mexico's Buffalo Soldiers, 1866-1900* (Niwot, Colo. 1991).



Pennyroyal frontier, purchased his wife's and his own freedom, and speculated in frontier land. In 1830 Free Frank joined the westward movement and settled in Pike County, Illinois, establishing in 1836 the town of New Philadelphia. He remained there and continued attempting to purchase relatives until his death in 1854.<sup>13</sup>

The founding of New Philadelphia by this free black pioneer was a response to the internal improvement boom created by construction of the Illinois and Michigan Canal, and apparently not motivated by racial separatism. But Walker believes that Free Frank's entrepreneurial activities also captured the mood of antebellum African Americans who reacted to the American Colonization Society's movement, the socioeconomic plight of urban blacks, and to virulent racism. Blacks such as Martin Delaney and Reverend Lewis Woodson proposed that instead of Africa, African Americans take advantage of land opportunities in the West through either individual farmsteads or colonies of farmers.<sup>14</sup>

Free Frank was not the only black to establish an antebellum town. But according to Walker, although undoubtedly sensitive to race issues, the black proprietor's town was integrated and became part of Pike County's plans for developing a community. By 1850 New Philadelphia had become an established agricultural center with a "wheelwright, cabinet-making, and two shoemaking shops, the blacksmith shop, a general store, a stagecoach stand, and a post office." It was, in short, a typical and flourishing frontier market town.<sup>15</sup>

New Philadelphia and its founder offer a collective perspective on how the American western towns were shaped and their significance in the development of Illinois from a frontier state to a major industrial and agricultural center. As Walker notes, Free Frank, "a man of uncommon drive and determination, would have had historical significance, even had he not been black and formerly slave."<sup>16</sup> Frank's impressive achievements, and those of other black pioneers in the West, not only belie Turner's "whites only" approach to frontier settlement, but reveal how blacks challenged racism, exclusionary "black codes," and discriminatory land-claiming practices.

<sup>13</sup> Walker, *Free Frank: A Black Pioneer on the Antebellum Frontier* (Lexington, Ky. 1983), 1-6, 49-99, 154-160.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 112-118, 154-155; Vincent Harding, *There Is a River: The Black Struggle for Freedom in America* (New York 1981), 130-131.

<sup>15</sup> Walker, *Free Frank*, 145-146.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

Other towns, almost exclusively black, emerged in antebellum America and thereafter. They were, as Kenneth M. Hamilton observed, "an integral part of the frontier urban settlement process"—neither insignificant nor exceptional. Hamilton also maintained that black and white men establishing black towns such as New Philadelphia in Illinois, Nicodemus in Kansas, Mound Bayou in Mississippi, and Langston City in Oklahoma were driven by speculation and profit rather than by racial tensions.<sup>17</sup> But notwithstanding the motivations of speculators and others promoting black towns, settlers and their supporters had a different agenda. In most cases, black pioneers who settled these communities expressed a sense of nationalism and a desire to uplift themselves without the constraints of racism.

Yet, the frontier as a wellspring of democracy and a safety valve in a Turnerian sense did not apply to African Americans. If the West sometimes muted class status or caste, race-consciousness rarely abated—although in instances where the black population was small, and hence not threatening, as in Pike County, Illinois—African Americans might coexist with whites in relative peace. For Free Frank, the Illinois frontier provided a mechanism for economic opportunity that allowed him to secure a position of respect in Pike County and to begin the process of freeing his large family. And some free people of color found the West preferable to the East where racial exclusion was entrenched, and certainly to the South where they were little better off than slaves.

For African Americans, the frontier could provide an easing of racial tensions if not a true safety valve. The unsettling, undeveloped, solitary aspects of frontier existence appealed to a people who felt at bay because of slavery and racism. Hence African Americans established all-black towns, settled in sparsely populated regions of the West, lived among Indians, and established communities of slaves on the frontier. For African Americans, the frontier could mean autonomy and liberation, not because of the presence of American democracy, institutions, and civilization, but precisely because of their absence. Thus in an entirely different sense than Turner intended, the frontier, while not a safety valve, could be a metaphor for freedom for African Americans.

Peter H. Wood's *Black Majority*, a study of early Carolina, suggested a frontier theme for African Americans that scholars have ad-

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<sup>17</sup> Kenneth Hamilton, *Black Towns and Profit: Promotion and Development in the Trans-Appalachian West, 1877-1915* (Urbana 1991) 1-4, 152. For a different perspective, see Norman L. Crockett, *The Black Towns* (Lawrence, Kans. 1979).

dressed and expanded. Wood depicted the outpost colony of Carolina as a society where minimal social barriers existed prior to the successful widespread introduction of rice culture. Originally, external dangers, a diverse economy, and mutual dependence helped to provide a measure of autonomy for Africans in early Carolina. However, the large slave importations necessary for developing rice cultivation coupled with black assertion led to mounting white anxiety, creating a more firmly entrenched bondage system and repressive slave codes. As the South Carolina frontier was transformed into a settled region, black autonomy and initiative was stifled.<sup>18</sup>

Wood's implicit thesis involving the relationship of frontier conditions to black autonomy and liberation is an important frame of reference for two important new studies. As early as 1848 and 1858, writers had noted black presence in the Gulf of Mexico region and their alliance with the Seminoles. Daniel Usner's *Settlers, Indians and Slaves in a Frontier Economy* demonstrates how economics of the frontier encouraged "a network of cross-cultural interaction" and how slaves figured prominently in the Louisiana frontier as soldiers, traders, boatmen, artisans, interpreters, hunters, herders, and peddlers. Their open economic exchange, conducted with settlers and Indians, was viewed with anxiety because the activity encouraged black initiative and rebelliousness. The lower Mississippi Valley frontier afforded mechanisms for slave defiance, as African Americans took advantage of white dependency and shifting political and territorial boundaries. Black participation in a frontier economy continued through the 1760s. By then Spain and Britain, in order to consolidate political control of Louisiana and West Florida, enhanced economic productivity and promoted immigration of whites and slaves. These measures, as well as hostility from some Indian groups, checked black autonomy, and the frontier economy was replaced by cotton culture.<sup>19</sup>

Gwendolyn Hall's work on colonial Louisiana further demonstrates how the unsettling aspects of frontier existence could be liberating for African Americans. Hall depicts frontier interactions as a melange of white, black, and Indian clashes over independence, hegemony, and freedom. Indian resistance to land encroachments and African resistance to bondage placed colonial Louisiana on a precari-

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<sup>18</sup> Wood, *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1670 through the Stono Rebellion* (New York 1974), 95-130, 195-297.

<sup>19</sup> Usner, *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves in a Frontier Exchange Economy: The Lower Mississippi Valley Before 1783* (Chapel Hill 1992), 81, 107-108, 278-280, 282-284.

ous footing. Black and Indian encounters intensified the problems facing French and later Spanish settlers trying to turn a profit. Occasional black-Indian alliance greatly alarmed the white settlers. As one official noted, "the greatest misfortune which could befall the colony and which would inevitably lead to its total loss would be the union between the Indian nations and the black slaves." Great pains were taken to encourage animosity between these two oppressed groups.<sup>20</sup>

More than solidarity with Indians, whose alliances vacillated, Africans viewed the uncharted frontier itself as a means to gain their freedom. Cypress swamps, woodlands, and waterways beyond the property lines of settlers became safe refuges for black fugitives. Africans moved skillfully along the waterways and set up their own "maroon" communities in the cypress swamps. According to Hall, "a network of cabins of runaway slaves arose behind plantations along the rivers and bayous. Arms and ammunition were stored in the cabins." Moreover, Louisiana marronage was a well-developed enterprise whose economic sustenance depended upon production and trade carried on illegally with white settlers. Maroons "cultivated crops, made articles of willow and reeds, hunted, fished, and frequented New Orleans to trade and gamble."<sup>21</sup>

These frontier maroon communities were organized in families. Hall finds that by 1780 the Louisiana frontier was dotted with maroon settlements. They surrounded the plantations and asserted control over strategically vital parts of Louisiana between the Mississippi River and New Orleans. Maroons were armed, had strong leadership, and maintained a frontier economy. Although these communities eventually declined with the passing of the frontier, Hall maintains that poor Louisiana whites owe their language and some cultural adaptations to the runaway slaves whose vernacular and economy they borrowed in the isolated countryside.<sup>22</sup>

One need not look only to Frederick Jackson Turner for analyses of the frontier meaning. No one knew more than blacks, what it meant to live on the margins of society, and often they preferred it that way. From the perspective of metaphor, the meaning of the frontier for African Americans goes beyond Turner's constricting inter-

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<sup>20</sup> Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana: The Development of Afro-Creole Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Baton Rouge 1992), 97-103.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 202-203.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 236.

pretation. Fugitive slaves—Free Frank, John Brown, Martin Delaney, and John Mercer Langston—are only a few who realized the importance of a frontier, of movement and expansionism in addressing black self-determination. For African American history, Turner's thesis is significant not only because he provided a challenge to his generation of black historians, but also because his historical blind spot encouraged future scholars of the black experience to employ Turner's own guidelines to reveal the flaws in his perspectives and go beyond his narrow parameters in defining the meaning of the frontier.

### Grasping for the Significance of the Turner Legacy: An Afterword

John Lauritz Larson

For one hundred years American historians have been writing under the influence of Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis, and if the force and character of Turner's legacy has changed over time, these centennial essays demonstrate Turner's enduring capacity to engage serious writers who dare to interpret American history. A century ago, in a hot Chicago lecture room, to an audience apparently unaware of its historic good fortune, Turner sketched out a conceptual framework and laid down interpretive challenges that have inspired, constrained, or bedeviled historians of the United States like no other single piece of scholarship. If Turner's disciples never succeeded in proving the master's many speculations, a legion of critics has yet to escape completely the terms of Turner's formulations. Historians shrink from declaring anything unique, but Turner's frontier thesis stands alone among a century's production of books, essays, and monographic studies all striving, in Turner's words, to "explain American development."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," in *Frontier and Section: Selected Essays of Frederick Jackson Turner*, ed. Ray Allen Billington (Englewood Cliffs, N.J. 1961), 37.