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sweep across the South. We must be careful not to underestimate how creative such hybrid institutions can be. The perception of the miraculous nature of the camp meeting changed over time, of course, and it ultimately became a routinized revival instrument.

Turner, along with Mode and Sweet, led us to overvalue the role of the frontier. In reaction, we must not overvalue and isolate particular practices that were imported to the frontier. The historian's task is never to simplify the past but rather to see multiple causes and complex interactions. We have moved beyond the Turner thesis even though—truth be told—we still seldom employ definitional precision when we discuss the frontier. But Turner's ideas, and the counter-interpretations they have inspired, have caused a great outpouring of analytical effort to be focused on frontier religion. As a result, our understanding of the phenomenon has become far more sophisticated as we have learned how to contextualize what happened, for example, at Cane Ridge. History is largely the art of enhancing and enriching the number of connections we see between one event and others removed in time, geography, and domain. Frederick Jackson Turner, his disciples, and his critics together have widened the range of interpretative connections in the study of American religion.

## Frederick Jackson Turner Overlooked the Ladies

Glenda Riley

Like John Adams during the mid-1770s, Frederick Jackson Turner often failed to "remember the ladies." Although Turner was an observant and insightful historian, he overlooked the role of women in the United States' westward migration. In his path-breaking essay of 1893, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," as well as in later articles and books, Turner characterized America's expansionist phase as a male phenomenon.

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By ignoring women, Turner helped create a tunnel vision that his followers perpetuated in the area of study he loved—sectionalism and the American West. Instead of enlarging Turner's viewpoint to include such groups as women, they supported and repeated Turner's primary arguments. Eminent historian Carl Becker frequently maintained that the frontier was a process rather than a geographic place, that it inculcated individualism into Americans, and that idealism and freedom ever prevailed within its bounds. Frederic L. Paxson supported the continuing validity of Turner's ideas pretty much as he had originally stated them.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, Turner's ideas encouraged such social commentators as Herbert Croly to conclude that America's "virgin wilderness" made the United States a "Land of Promise," and such novelists as Hamlin Garland to proclaim "a faith in the open spaces." None of these Turnerian commentators considered the effects of wilderness and space on women.<sup>2</sup>

Why Turner ignored women and the results of that omission are seldom explored, but on this, the one-hundredth anniversary of Turner's famous address, both questions deserve examination. If we are to free ourselves totally from this oversight in Turner's thesis, it is necessary to understand his thinking rather than accept superficial explanations for his neglect of women. Probably the most common reason given for Turner's inattention to women is that his omission was typical of his times, that few people were sensitive to women's roles and contributions during the late 1800s and early 1900s. Perhaps John Adams, a man of the late eighteenth century, can be excused on such grounds, but Turner, a man of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, should not get off so easily.

How could a man hailed as an astute observer and critical thinker turn a blind eye to the significant changes women had experienced since John and Abigail Adams's day? Born in 1861 in Portage, Wisconsin, Turner lived during one of the most turbulent eras in American history. In Portage, he participated in the development of a western town, watching as men and women mold their own lives and contribute to the formation of the region and the nation. Between the time Turner left Portage in 1880 to seek a bachelor's degree in Madison and his death in

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<sup>1</sup> Carl Becker, "Kansas," in Guy Stanton Ford, ed., *Essays in American History Dedicated to Frederick Jackson Turner* (New York 1951), 85-111; Frederic L. Paxson, "A Generation of the Frontier Hypothesis, 1893-1932," *Pacific Historical Review*, 2 (Mar. 1933), 34-51.

<sup>2</sup> Herbert D. Croly, *The Promise of American Life* (New York 1909), 3-7; Hamlin Garland, "The Passing of the Frontier," *The Dial*, 64 (Oct. 4, 1919), 285.

1932 in Pasadena, California, he came into contact with thousands of students, worked as a journalist, served as a professor at the University of Wisconsin between 1889 and 1910 and at Harvard University between 1910 and 1924, and later as research associate at the Huntington Library.<sup>3</sup> Among numerous other events, during his seventy years Turner lived through the well-publicized rise in numbers of women in paid employment and the professions, the increasing momentum of the woman suffrage movement beginning in 1890 and triumphing in 1920, and the frequent debates regarding what were then known as the "woman question" and the "new" woman.

Moreover, in his personal life Turner spent a great deal of time with women and regarded them with affection and esteem. Turner credited his mother, Mary Hanford Turner, a former schoolteacher, with helping develop his fondness for books and ideas. Later, Turner doted on his wife, Caroline Mae Sherwood, and their three children. In 1897, for example, Turner inquired about the social possibilities for Mae should he accept an appointment at Princeton University.<sup>4</sup> Turner was a devoted family man, who never fully recovered from the deaths in 1899 of his five-year-old daughter, Mae Sherwood, and his seven-year old son, Jackson Allen. According to a friend, his children's deaths "tinctured" Turner's life until its end.<sup>5</sup> After this tragedy, Turner increasingly centered his personal life on Mae and the surviving daughter, Dorothy. In 1905, Turner rejected historian Max Farrand's suggestion that he take a leave-of-absence for a month each year to research and write; he feared such a practice would create a "nomadic life" for his family, and he was unwilling to leave them behind. He added that "a man owes something to his family as well as to scholarship."<sup>6</sup>

Not only did Turner include women in virtually all aspects of his personal life, but he welcomed them into his classroom. Just as he sent daughter Dorothy to college, he also encouraged women students who sought him out. Louise Phelps Kellogg recalled that she participated in both the first "West" class that Turner offered and his seminar. Like the men in the seminar, she and the one other female student worked in "comradeship" with Turner. In 1938, Kellogg, who for more than

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<sup>3</sup> For a detailed account of Turner's life and work see Ray Allen Billington, *Frederick Jackson Turner: Historian, Scholar, Teacher* (New York 1973).

<sup>4</sup> Turner to Woodrow Wilson, Nov. 8, 1896, in Wilbur R. Jacobs, ed., *The Historical World of Frederick Jackson Turner, With Selections From His Correspondence* (New Haven, Conn. 1968) 27-28.

<sup>5</sup> Quoted *ibid.*, 12.

<sup>6</sup> Turner to Max Farrand, June 23, 1905, *ibid.*, 35, 37.

forty years served as editor, lecturer, and author at the Wisconsin Historical Society, declared that Turner "had a greater influence in reshaping American historiography than any other of his generation."<sup>7</sup> Turner too had kind words for his women students. He not only expressed pride in Kellogg's achievements, but likewise took credit for training others such as Helen Blair, who in 1911 dedicated to Turner her *Indian Tribes of the Upper Mississippi Valley*.<sup>8</sup>

Turner also counted women among his many friends. In 1908, he regaled Farrand with an account of a month he and his family spent in the Maine woods camping and boating with several other men and women.<sup>9</sup> Then, during his Harvard years, Turner formed a fast friendship with a Bostonian, Alice Forbes Perkins Hooper, a socialite, philanthropist, and suffragist who shared Turner's passion for the American West. Beginning in 1910, Hooper and Turner visited, corresponded, and tried to build a collection of western history source materials at Harvard. As their friendship grew, Hooper began to call Turner "Historicus." In 1915, Hooper wrote to Turner that "you and all you stand for are a great asset in my garden of friends." In 1931, Hooper again mentioned that she regarded their "comfortable" friendship as one of her most important resources. Turner, who addressed Hooper as "Dear Lady," returned her esteem. In 1915, he assured her that, "you are the best thing I have discovered in New England," and in 1930, "How much I value and appreciate you!"<sup>10</sup>

Obviously, Turner was attuned to women and aware of their concerns. Yet he persistently overlooked women, their roles, and their contributions in his scholarship. When Turner did mention women, he portrayed them as simply part of the family unit. As men pushed their families westward, Turner explained, "daughters walked beside

<sup>7</sup> Louise Phelps Kellogg, "The Passing of a Great Teacher: Frederick Jackson Turner," *Historical Outlook*, 23 (Oct. 1932), 270-272; Kellogg, "Preface," in Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Early Writings of Frederick Jackson Turner*, ed. Fulmer Mood (Madison, Wisc. 1938), ix.

<sup>8</sup> Turner to Constance Lindsay Skinner, Mar. 15, 1922, in Jacobs, ed., *Historical World of Turner*, 59.

<sup>9</sup> Turner to Max Farrand, Sept. 27, 1908, *ibid.*, 40-43.

<sup>10</sup> Ray Allen Billington, ed., "Dear Lady": *The Letters of Frederick Jackson Turner and Alice Forbes Perkins Hooper, 1910-1932* (San Marino, Cal. 1970), 70, 27, 428. Billington also argued that Turner was a "good" and "sensitive" man in "Frederick Jackson Turner: The Image and the Man," *Western Historical Quarterly*, 3 (Apr. 1972), 137-152.



Figure 5. Turner's Seminar at Wisconsin.

Source: State Historical Society of Wisconsin.

the mother, who rode on the horse."<sup>11</sup> And in 1897, Turner noted that while successful western entrepreneurs sought political influence and sent their sons to college, their wives and daughters made "extensive visits to Europe."<sup>12</sup> Nearly all Turner's historical actors were male, wore hunting shirts, brandished weapons, and wielded axes. "Before long," Turner wrote of his male pioneer, "he has gone to planting Indian corn and plowing with a sharp stick; he shouts the war cry and takes the scalp in orthodox Indian fashion."<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Wilbur R. Jacobs, ed., *Frederick Jackson Turner's Legacy: Unpublished Writings in American History* (1965; rep., Lincoln, Neb. 1977), 154.

<sup>12</sup> Frederick Jackson Turner, "Dominant Forces in Western Life," *Atlantic Monthly*, 79 (Apr. 1987), 439.

<sup>13</sup> Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," *American Historical Association Annual Report for the Year 1893* (Washington, D.C. 1894), 201.

Reconciling Turner's sensitive and affectionate personal treatment of women with his neglectful and even patronizing treatment of them in his scholarly writing requires more than the lame excuse that few people in Turner's day paid much attention to women. Rather, this essay maintains that Turner neglected women in his scholarship for four major reasons. The easiest to identify is that Turner studied, taught, and made friends in a largely male enclave where his oversight never was challenged.<sup>14</sup> He discussed his ideas with such people as his good friend Woodrow Wilson, who as a political scientist and aspiring politician believed in the evolution of institutions and emphasized the need for strong (male) national leadership to bind together the sections of the United States.<sup>15</sup> Such others as southern historian Ulrich Bonnell Phillips, once a colleague of Turner's at the University of Wisconsin and a lifelong friend, declared that Turner's portraits of frontier society manifested "brilliance in analysis and perfection in phrase." No modifications or additions to Turner's thought seemed necessary to the men of his profession.<sup>16</sup>

A second reason for Turner's dismissal of women was his tendency to draw heavily on earlier writers, all of whom overlooked women. Although his supporters, especially his student Carl Becker, maintained that Turner's thesis was a "novel doctrine," critics have pointed out that Turner borrowed from a number of other writers.<sup>17</sup> Among these was Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who believed that a return to nature would improve society (meaning men); when he commented on women, Rousseau maintained that they existed to serve and care for men. Others included James Fenimore Cooper, who elevated the habits of his pioneer folk-heroes, primarily males, to a historical force and Ralph Waldo Emerson who, as early as 1844,

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<sup>14</sup> See, for example, the listing of leaders in the American Historical Association in Clarence Winthrop Bowen, "Congress of American Scholars," *Harper's Weekly*, 8 (Dec. 25, 1909), 24-25.

<sup>15</sup> Quoted in E. David Cronon, "Woodrow Wilson, Frederick Jackson Turner, and the State Historical Society of Wisconsin," *Wisconsin Magazine of History*, 71 (Summer 1988), 296. See also Woodrow Wilson, "The Making of a Nation," *Atlantic Monthly*, 80 (July 1897), 1-14; Wendell H. Stephenson, ed., "The Influence of Woodrow Wilson on Frederick Jackson Turner," *Agricultural History*, 19 (Oct. 1945), 249-253; and George C. Osborn, "Woodrow Wilson and Frederick Jackson Turner," *New Jersey Historical Society Proceedings*, 74 (July 1956), 208-229.

<sup>16</sup> Ulrich Bonnell Phillips, "The Traits and Contributions of Frederick Jackson Turner," *Agricultural History*, 19 (Jan. 1945), 21-23.

<sup>17</sup> Carl Becker, review of Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History*, in *The Nation*, 3 (Nov. 10, 1920), 536.

emphasized the West's Americanizing influence in his lecture, "The Young American," also meaning men. After the Civil War, journalist E. L. Godkin also wrote only of men when he pointed to "frontier life" as the distinguishing feature of American society and commented on the frontier's relation to the "democratic tide." So did Italian social philosopher Achille Loria, who developed a "free land" theory of history from whom Turner borrowed a central feature of his frontier thesis.<sup>18</sup> Because Turner knew of the work of these men as well as Francis Parkman and Theodore Roosevelt, his emphasis on the West was far from unique; indeed, the West had been a symbol of American thought, and of American nationalism, since the early nineteenth century.<sup>19</sup>

Turner's reliance on earlier views of the American West naturally led him to adopt traditional ideas regarding women. By borrowing from writers ranging from Rousseau to Loria, Turner absorbed social constructs that not only subsumed women under the generic category "men," but also viewed women as non-actors. Therefore, although Turner argued that historians should view the past through present concerns, the contemporary significance of such issues as women's rights and roles escaped him.<sup>20</sup> At least partly because he absorbed older interpretations of women as passive beings who were secondary in the overall scheme, he selected nationalism and American character, meaning male character, as the dominant issues through which to view the past.

Already at a disadvantage regarding the importance of women in history, Turner suffered a third limitation: a decided fascination with political and economic explanations. Although Turner claimed that his experience as a journalist, especially the years he spent under the tutelage of his editor father, Andrew Jackson Turner, gave him a sense of reality and forced him to see "the connections of many fac-

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<sup>18</sup> Lewis Mumford, "The Romanticism of the Pioneer," in *The Golden Day: A Study in American Experience and Culture* (New York 1926), 47-81; Herman Clarence Nixon, "Precursors of Turner in the Interpretation of the American Frontier," *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 28 (Jan. 1929), 83-89; Lee Benson, "The Historical Background of Turner's Frontier Essay," *Agricultural History*, 25 (Apr. 1951), 59-82.

<sup>19</sup> John Opie, "Frederick Jackson Turner, the Old West, and the Formation of a National Mythology," *Environmental Review*, 5 (Summer 1981), 79-91; Vernon E. Mattson, "West as Myth," *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences*, 24 (Jan. 1988), 9-12.

<sup>20</sup> See Frederick Jackson Turner, "Social Forces in American History," *American Historical Review*, 16 (Jan. 1911), 217-233, for his definition of current issues and forces through which to study the past.



tors with the purely political," he in fact developed a political view of history.<sup>21</sup> According to Martin Ridge, "Turner expressed himself with the imagery of a poet and speculated about the past with the language of a seer" yet "at heart . . . believed in economic and political history."<sup>22</sup>

After all, Turner did his Ph.D. work in international law, principles of economics, church history, and the history of politics and economic thought. He taught political and constitutional history at Madison. In 1891 he announced a new course titled "Economic and Social [meaning social forces rather than groups of people] History of the United States."<sup>23</sup> Finally, Turner's mentor, Professor William Francis Allen, had studied the Roman empire from the standpoint of its economic expansion and political institutions. Clearly, few influences in his training or professional life pushed Turner toward a scholarly consideration of women or any other specific social group. Instead, when innovative impulses struck, Turner suggested as additional research topics agriculture, public lands, and urban development.<sup>24</sup>

Finally, Turner considered himself a scientific historian who sought knowledge of causal dynamics and larger explanations rather than the deeds and achievements of individuals or of such groups of people as women.<sup>25</sup> Unlike gifted "lay" historians such as Francis Parkman, Theodore Roosevelt, and James Ford Rhodes, who emphasized individual agency and specific episodes, Turner and his graduate-school-trained colleagues focused upon processes. As early as 1887-1888, while still working on his master's degree, Turner wrote that he preferred to deal with historical materials from a "ge-

<sup>21</sup> Turner to Merle Curti, Aug. 8, 1928, in Jacobs, ed., *Historical World of Turner*, 7.

<sup>22</sup> Martin Ridge, "The American West: From Frontier to Region," *The New Mexico Historical Review*, 64 (Apr. 1989), 129. See also Murray Kane, "Some Considerations on the Frontier Concept of Frederick Jackson Turner," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 27 (Dec. 1940), 379-400, who maintains that Turner was an economic historian.

<sup>23</sup> Fulmer Mood, "Turner's Formative Period," in Mood, ed., *Writings of Turner*, 20, 35.

<sup>24</sup> Turner to Arthur M. Schlesinger, Apr. 18, 1922, in Jacobs, ed., *World of Turner*, 155.

<sup>25</sup> William Cronon, "Turner's First Stand: The Significance of Significance in American History," in Richard W. Etulain, ed., *Writing Western History: Essays on Major Western Historians* (Albuquerque 1991), 73-101.

netic standpoint," pursuing over-arching topics rather than individuals or types of people.<sup>26</sup>

Turner hoped to identify the origins of institutions, or what he called the "social foundations" of American history, while avoiding chronology, narrative, and even specific institutional studies. As one of his admirers noted, Turner was an "interpreter" and thus always "impatient of narrative for its own sake."<sup>27</sup> In his search for wider contexts, for organizing principles, for the universal rather than the particular, Turner studied masses of people, types rather than individuals, *the* people rather than people themselves.

As his thought developed, Turner thus defined frontier in a way that made it a series of processes. In 1896, for example, Turner described the West as a "form" of society and a "constructive force" rather than a geographic area.<sup>28</sup> In 1906, he wrote of "institutions," "conditions," and "interests."<sup>29</sup> Two years later, he declared that "the story of individual leaders, and narrative of events sank into insignificance" in the face of the migration of people and development of society.<sup>30</sup> And in 1911, he spoke of "forces," "currents," and "movements."<sup>31</sup>

Turner's own words made clear that his view of history had little room for such specific groups as women. As Carl Becker explained, Turner assumed that "commonplace people, acting in commonplace ways . . . determine the social process." According to Becker, Turner was an expositor who was interested in larger forces than individuals.<sup>32</sup> This approach made people little more than categories—Indians, settlers, immigrants, farmers, or the "hunter type."<sup>33</sup> Women simply inhabited each of the various categories. Therefore, even when Turner studied such rich and revealing sources as census records, rather than seize upon numbers of marriages, children, and

<sup>26</sup> Mood, "Turner's Formative Period," 12.

<sup>27</sup> Joseph Schafer, "Turner's Early Writings," *Wisconsin Magazine of History*, 22 (Dec. 1938), 217.

<sup>28</sup> Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Problem of the West," *Atlantic Monthly*, 78 (Sept. 1896), 289.

<sup>29</sup> Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Colonization of the West, 1820-1830," *American Historical Review*, 11 (Jan. 1906), 303-327.

<sup>30</sup> Jacobs, ed., *Turner's Legacy*, 170.

<sup>31</sup> Frederick Jackson Turner, "Social Forces in American History," *American Historical Review*, 16 (Jan. 1911), 217-233.

<sup>32</sup> Carl Becker, *Everyman His Own Historian: Essays on History and Politics* (New York 1935), 214.

<sup>33</sup> Jacobs, ed., *Turner's Legacy*, 153-155.

gainfully employed females as useful data, he concentrated upon population density and voting statistics.

As a result of these four limiting influences on his thought, Turner became a major myth-maker of the scholarly world.<sup>34</sup> He was aware of some of his biases; in opening lectures he often apologized for the need to make generalizations in the face of conflicting or non-existent evidence, observers' prejudices, and distorting contemporary values.<sup>35</sup> Still, he failed to note his omission of women and continued to disseminate masculine generalizations regarding the American West. Proudly, Turner passed on a male-dominated West to generations of scholars. One of his favorite boasts was that he had not only originated the course "History of the West," but had trained "a considerable portion" of its instructors.<sup>36</sup>

Turner's narrow perspective helped perpetuate a lack of historical knowledge concerning women in the American West, a vacuum that popular culture happily filled throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Long bereft of guidance from historians, a sizeable number of writers, artists, and performers invented mythologized western women. Because no women existed in the historian's West, shapers of popular culture supplied interpretations that fell into two types: images based upon traditional beliefs regarding American women and those derived from more modern conceptions of women.

On the one hand, writers, artists, and film-makers who resisted changes in women's status usually thought of western women as inferior beings in need of protection. In their view, western women often fell victim to harsh climate, hard work, or the supposed "rape, pillage, and burn" mentality of Native Americans. Dime novels especially portrayed western women as delicate creatures in need of rescue, but thousands of others pursued a similar theme. In 1892, Emmeline Fuller's *Left by the Indians*, a saga of torture imposed upon defenseless white women, gained best-seller status.<sup>37</sup> From novelist

<sup>34</sup> Lee Benson, "The Historian as Mythmaker: Turner and the Closed Frontier," in David M. Ellis, ed., *The Frontier in American Development: Essays in Honor of Paul Wallace Gates* (Ithaca 1969), 3-19; Opie, "Frederick Jackson Turner," 79-91. For Turner's rhetorical powers, see Ronald H. Carpenter, "Wisconsin's Rhetorical Historian, Frederick Jackson Turner: A Review Essay," *Wisconsin Magazine of History*, 68 (Spring 1985), 199-203.

<sup>35</sup> Jacobs, ed., *Turner's Legacy*, 81.

<sup>36</sup> Turner to Constance Lindsay Skinner, Mar. 15, 1922, in Jacobs, ed., *Historical World of Turner*, 57.

<sup>37</sup> Emmeline Fuller, *Left by the Indians: Story of My Life* (Mount Vernon, Iowa 1892).

Hamlin Garland's despondent "Pioneer Mother" to artist W. D. Koerner's woeful "Madonna of the Prairie" to Hollywood's female flowers, popular culture replaced Turner's invisible women with vulnerable ones.

On the other hand, image-makers who supported and even applauded changes in women's status generally promoted active images of western women: the cowgirl, shooter, heroine, and survivor. The very summer that Frederick Jackson Turner delivered his now-famous address on the grounds of the World Fair in Chicago, Buffalo Bill Cody's Wild West played outside its gates. Literally under Turner's nose, Annie Oakley—the archetypal representation of the hardy and competent western woman—performed astounding feats with rifles and pistols, while cowgirls, among others, circled the arena on horseback and thrilled the audience with a variety of stunts. Unlike Turner, Cody realized that women had helped develop the West and he understood that females in his audiences wanted to learn about such women. Thus, Turner's and other historians' default enhanced Cody's opportunity to attract crowds to his particular version of western women.

Writers also supplied the public with strong and daring western women. From Ned Buntline to Prentiss Ingraham, dime novelists increasingly exchanged female victims for heroines. Then, in 1927 social commentator Ellsworth Huntington did what Turner had not done: he connected the West to the superiority of American women. Writing in *The Nation*, Huntington argued that American women were brave, bold, competent, ambitious, and even unique because of the nation's "pioneer period." The frontier had weeded out the weak and had stimulated surviving women to great achievements. Huntington even took his version of the frontier thesis one step farther than Turner; because of women's "more sensitive nervous organization," the frontier had influenced women *more* than men.<sup>38</sup>

Clearly, popular culture supplied questionable assumptions and suppositions to fill the void that Turner and other professional historians created. Purveyors of popular culture also failed to apply scholarly analysis and rigor to such larger questions as the significance of westward expansion to women; the effect of the frontier on women; whether the West provided a safety-valve for women, as Turner argued it had for men; or how Turner's frontier could have been demo-

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<sup>38</sup> Ellsworth Huntington, "Why the American Woman is Unique," *The Nation*, 125 (Aug. 3, 1927), 105-107.

cratic when it denied the female segment of its population the right to vote and hold office.<sup>39</sup> But so long as the field lay uncontested by scholars, popularizers enjoyed a relatively free hand.

Over time, of course, a number of historians began to recognize weaknesses in Turner's thesis and the limitations it imposed upon others. For instance, historian Charles Beard judged Turner's thesis as "too broad and sweeping" and noted the absence of organized labor in Turner's analysis.<sup>40</sup> Others called for consideration of Native Americans, Hispanics, African Americans, Germans and other immigrants, and such religious groups as Catholics, Mormons, and Presbyterians. Still others noticed the absence of urban history, of regional geographical analysis, and of comparisons between the American West and other frontiers.<sup>41</sup> In 1964, historian David Potter indicted Turner for assuming that "the characteristics of American men are the characteristics of the American people, and that since women are people, the characteristics of the American people are the characteristics of American women."<sup>42</sup> Here at last Potter had revealed the lack of women and asked for their inclusion in studies of regionalism and the West.

In the meantime, a few scholars, such as Mary Hargreaves and T.A. Larson, began to study western women and pose questions concerning their lives.<sup>43</sup> During the mid-1970s, this growing interest in western women erupted in a series of conference papers, articles, and books. No longer content to allow popular culture to fabricate the

<sup>39</sup> Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier," 221.

<sup>40</sup> Charles Beard's reviews of Turner's, *The Frontier in American History*, in *The New Republic*, 79 (Feb. 16, 1921), 349-350, and "The Frontier in American History," *ibid.*, 97 (Feb. 1939), 359-362.

<sup>41</sup> For an overview of the fate of Turner's thesis after his death see Howard R. Lamar, "Frederick Jackson Turner," in Marcus Cunliffe and Robin W. Winks, eds., *Pastmasters: Some Essays on American Historians* (New York 1969), 74-109.

<sup>42</sup> David M. Potter, "American Women and the American Character," in John A. Hague, ed., *American Character and Culture: Some Twentieth Century Perspectives* (Deland, Fla. 1964), 66. See also David M. Potter, *People of Plenty: Economic Abundance and the American Character* (Chicago, 1954), 206. Another leading historian who changed his mind about the Turner thesis was John D. Hicks, "Our Pioneer Heritage: A Reconsideration," *Prairie Schooner*, 30 (Winter 1956), 359-361.

<sup>43</sup> Mary W. M. Hargreaves, "Homesteading and Homemaking on the Plains: A Review," *Agricultural History*, 47 (Apr. 1973), 156-163; Hargreaves, "Women in the Agricultural Settlement of the Northern Plains," *Agricultural History*, 50 (Jan. 1976), 5-16; T.A. Larson, "Dolls, Vassals, and Drudges—Pioneer Women in the West," *Western Historical Quarterly*, 3 (Jan. 1972), 5-16; Larson, "Women's Role in the American West," *Montana: The Magazine of Western History*, 24 (July 1974), 2-11.

lives of western women, a growing number of scholarly historians rejected Turner's male-oriented view of the West and began to write women into western history. Partly as a result of New Left criticism of historical scholarship in general, and partly due to the emergence of the contemporary feminist movement, historians of women began the long process of reconstructing the history of women in the West. Historians in both East and West soon devised a three-fold mission: to add women to the historical West, to revise popular culture images, and to develop sophisticated scholarship regarding western women.<sup>44</sup>

Unlike Turner, many of these scholars also attempted to analyze the significance of the frontier for women and assess the effects of westward expansion upon women. But they did not arrive at the conclusions Turner would have reached even if he had remembered women. Given Turner's outlooks, he would have surely categorized women along racial and ethnic lines, just as he did men. Thus, Native American women would have been "Indians," the receivers of "civilization," while Anglo women would have been "Americans," part of the advancing inculcators of "civilization." Because Turner concluded that the frontier built Americans' strength and independence, he presumably would have believed that the frontier also strengthened and liberated American women, at least Anglo-American women. Turner suggested as much in a 1926 study of pioneers' children. In one page devoted to daughters of the pioneers, Turner mentioned such successful women as Chicago reformer Jane Addams and Wisconsin suffragist Carrie Chapman Catt; he also noted that of the twelve women selected in 1925 as "the greatest women of America," one-third were daughters of pioneer families.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Julie Roy Jeffrey, *Frontier Women: The Trans-Mississippi West, 1840-1880* (New York 1979); John Mack Faragher, *Women and Men on the Overland Trail* (New Haven 1979); Glenda Riley, "Images of the Frontierswomen: Iowa as a Case Study," *Western Historical Quarterly*, 8 (Apr. 1977), 189-202; Riley, *Frontierswomen: The Iowa Experience* (Ames 1981); Sandra L. Myres, *Westering Women and the Frontier Experience, 1800-1915* (Albuquerque 1982); Lillian Schlissel, *Women's Diaries of the Westward Journey* (New York 1982); Elizabeth Jameson, "Women as Workers, Women as Civilizers: True Womanhood in the American West," *Frontiers*, 7 (1984), 1-8; Susan Armitage, "Women and Men in Western History: A Stereotypical Vision," *Western Historical Quarterly*, 16 (Oct. 1985), 380-395; Paula Petrik, "The Gentle Tamers in Transition: Women in the Trans-Mississippi West," *Feminist Studies*, 11 (Fall 1985), 677-694.

<sup>45</sup> Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Children of the Pioneers," *Yale Review*, 15 (July 1926), 645-670.

Modern historians of women take a very different approach to western women, thus escaping what one historian has described as Turner's "mischievous" and "confining" influence.<sup>46</sup> While they consider dynamics, forces, and larger explanations, they also study groups and individuals. Consequently, they analyze the significance of the frontier and the effects of westward expansion on Native, Mexican, Anglo, African, and Asian American women; at the same time they recognize and respect individuality within those groups caused by social class, religion, age, education, marital status, and other factors.<sup>47</sup> Increasingly, historians of western women also maintain that they must study women before and after the advent of the frontier, that it formed only one part of western history.

Clearly, the revolution in women's status and recognition that Abigail Adams threatened in 1776 is well underway. Although John Adams ignored Abigail's counsel about including "the ladies" in the nation's new government and Frederick Jackson Turner evidently went unadvised on the matter of including them in western history, modern historians of western women agree with Abigail: the women must be remembered. These historians not only write women into the history of the West and revise popular images at every turn, but are

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<sup>46</sup> Michael P. Malone, "Beyond the Last Frontier: Toward a New Approach in Western American History," *Western Historical Quarterly*, 20 (Nov. 1989), 409-427.

<sup>47</sup> See, for example, Lawrence B. de Graaf, "Race, Sex, and Region: Black Women in the American West, 1850-1920," *Pacific Historical Review*, 49 (May 1980), 285-313; Yuji Ichioka, "Amerika Nadeshiko: Japanese Immigrant Women in the United States, 1900-1924," *ibid.*, 339-357; Mario T. Garcia, "The Chicana in American History: The Mexican Women of El Paso, 1880-1910—A Case Study," *ibid.*, 315-337; Jane Lecompte, "The Independent Women of Hispanic New Mexico, 1821-1846," *Western Historical Quarterly*, 12 (Jan. 1981), 17-35; Albert L. Hurtado, "Hardly a Farm House—A Kitchen Without Them: Indian and White Households on the California Borderland Frontier in 1860," *Western Historical Quarterly*, 13 (July 1982), 145-170; Vicki L. Ruiz, *Cannery Women, Cannery Lives: Mexican Women, Unionization, and the California Food Processing Industry, 1930-1950* (Albuquerque 1987); Sarah Deutsch, *No Separate Refuge: Culture, Class, and Gender on an Anglo-Hispanic Frontier in the American Southwest, 1880-1940* (New York 1987); Elizabeth Jameson, "Toward a Multicultural History of Women in the Western United States," *Signs*, 13 (Summer 1988), 761-791; Glenda Riley, "American Daughters: Black Women in the West," *Montana: The Magazine of Western History*, 38 (Spring 1988), 14-27; Frances R. Conly, "Martina Didn't Have a Covered Wagon: A Speculative Reconstruction," *The Californian*, 7 (Mar.-Aug. 1989), 4-54; and Antonia I. Castañeda, "Gender, Race, and Culture: Spanish-Mexican Women in the Historiography of Frontier California," *Frontiers*, 11 (1990), 8-20.

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.