

## Comment

"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." With this sentence, Frederick Jackson Turner closed his famous contribution, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," in the year 1893. He was then at the threshold of his career of great influence as an interpreter of United States history and as an inspiring teacher of younger men who were to teach and write. A hostile reviewer (Louis M. Hacker, in *The Nation*, July 26, 1933) of the volume of essays, *The Significance of Sections in American History*, says of the increasing influence of Turner: "Not only were Turner's own seminar students legion (he taught altogether for some thirty-four years) but his personal followers in turn scattered over the land to indoctrinate other vast numbers of eager scholars, thereby increasing the Turner host by geometric proportions." These "disciples" have labored dilligently with the result that libraries are stacked with "a vast pile of monographic studies and special investigations, all of them concerned with aspects of the settlement and institutional development of the American West."

It has been a very widely accepted view that men inspired by Turner have done well for the cause of American history—that their researches have resulted in an extensive and sound body of historical knowledge. Challenging directly the Turner "tradition" as "not only fictitious but also to a very large extent positively harmful," Hacker believes it scarcely an exaggeration to say that "the patient and obscure toiling of another long generation of American historical scholars will be required to destroy" the influence of the host who have written under the spell of Turner's mistaken interpretation of American history.

After stating the hypotheses of Turner *in re* the influence of frontier and sections, Hacker feels that there is little more to do. "Merely to mention these rather naive ideas as I have" he asserts, "is enough to refute them." Finding the task of refutation so easy, he proceeds to explain how Turner happened to start down the wrong road while at Johns Hopkins University writing a doctoral dissertation. Then we have the

critic's positive contribution of his survey of Turner's faulty work and unhappy influence in his final paragraph:

The historical growth of the United States, in short, was not unique; more in certain particulars and for a brief time, it was different from the European pattern largely because of the process of settlement. With settlement achieved—that is to say, the historic function of extensive agriculture performed, class (not sectional!) lines solidified, competitive capitalism converted into monopolistic capitalism under the guidance of the money power, and imperialism the ultimate destiny of the nation—the United States once again was returning to the main stream of European institutional development. Only by a study of the origins and growth of American capitalism and imperialism can we obtain insight into the nature and complexity of the problems confronting us today. And I am prepared to submit that perhaps the chief reason for the absence of this proper understanding was the futile hunt for a unique "American Spirit" which Frederick Jackson Turner began forty years ago and in which he involved most of America's historical scholars from that time until now.

With the contentions of the passage just quoted, aside from those of the last sentence, "disciples" of Turner will not take issue seriously. That the last sentence is sheer nonsense is being demonstrated and will continue to be demonstrated by the aid which is being given and will continue to be given during the years to come by the Turner host in the attempts to understand and solve the problems of capitalism and imperialism. Turner said at the beginning that the frontier had disappeared. He said truthfully many times that the vast area of the United States with all the sectional forces at work had not become a group of nations after the pattern of Europe. He saw and understood the growth of capitalism, the menace of developing classes, and the trend toward imperialism. He gave many warnings that the rugged individualism of the frontier was playing havoc with American democracy when carried into big business without regulation by the Hills, Harrimans, and Morgans. He indulged a hope to the end of his life that Americans, having passed through a period in which American institutions had developed in the presence of a frontier zone that constantly shifted westward, would be able to draw lessons and inspiration from their historical experiences that would aid them in avoiding the pitfalls into which Europe had fallen. The "disciples" of Turner have their shoulders to the wheel and they will not fail to continue to play a part in the

historical investigations necessary to understand the problems of today and tomorrow.

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The "Home Letters of George W. Julian" which appeared in the June issue of this magazine proved interesting to numerous readers. Miss Louise Phelps Kellogg of the Wisconsin State Historical Society pronounced them "delightful." She was kind enough to furnish some information about Charles Durkee whose name appeared in the Julians letters. Footnote 29, p. 138 (June issue) erroneously assigned Mr. Durkee to Vermont. Though he was born in the Green Mountain State, he migrated to Wisconsin, and was, as Miss Kellogg explains, a Representative and later a Free Soil Senator from that state. Footnote 29 of our last number should read: "Wife of Charles Durkee, a Free Soiler, who was a Representative from Wisconsin and later United States Senator from that state."

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The fifteenth Annual Indian History Conference will be held at the Claypool Hotel in Indianapolis on Friday and Saturday, December 8 and 9. This Conference is one of the best established of the various annual meetings held in the state. Every year the Society of Indiana Pioneers, The Indiana Historical Society and the Indiana Historical Bureau co-operate to produce a successful Conference. The forenoon session of Saturday is regularly given over to the History and Social Science Section of the Indiana State Teachers Association. Invariably, at several of the varied sessions, papers of high merit are presented. What with breakfasts, luncheons, dinners, addresses and historical papers, the two days are looked forward to with great interest. All sessions are open to the public. Few who have ever been present at previous Conferences will want to miss the meeting of the present year, and many who have not attended in the past will find pleasure and profit in attending the coming Conference.

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interested in a fruit farm. His home, "Edgewood," is a short distance from Goshen, Indiana. Dr. Louis A. Warren is Director of Historical Research, Lincoln National Life Foundation, Fort Wayne, Indiana, who has gathered much material on the life of Lincoln and who has carried on an extensive investigation of Lincoln's ancestors. Louis J. Bailey is Director of the Indiana State Library, Indianapolis, Indiana.