

The frontier in american history book review samples

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The Frontier in American History by Frederick Jackson Turner is a book that advances the frontier proposition in the American history. This book was first published in the year 1921. The book follows the essay by Turner titled "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" in 1893 and subsequently presented to the American History Association in Chicago, Illinois the same year. The essay was reprinted many times and was subsequently assimilated in The Frontier in American History as the first chapter (Turner 7). The book basically presents the frontier thesis that postulates how the ideology of the frontier molded the characteristics and the being of the American nation (Limerick 697). The book provides information regarding the manner in which the frontier influenced the American history and the reason America is the way it is at present. Turner considers the past in a bid to prove his assertions. He achieves this aspect through observing human interests with the frontier and the way the expansion to the west of the United States altered the views of the people regarding their cultures.

The book points out that the frontier was the most significant aspect in the history of American West and the subsequent progress of its society. He refers various times to the Americanization process. To Turner the frontier is the borderline between civilization and savagery. It is also the most effective and swift way towards achieving Americanization. What Turner refers to as Americanization is a twofold alteration of the social order. The first is the exposure of the Europeans by the primitive characteristics that they have to encounter in the western region. The other perspective is the people reconstructing a new society by transforming the savages into civilized persons and not based on European civilization but an American form of

civilization. According to the book, this form of civilization is not based on a plural society where the immigrants are incorporated in the American societies, Americanized, enlightened, and merged into a diversified society. The book was written during the period when the supremacy of the whites over the non-whites was almost at the peak. The European dogmas were established an ethnic class, and racial hierarchy that was based on absolute organic laws that reflected the best scientific theories of the time. Consequently, the book reflects a time when the larger political societies were undergoing transformation from a blend of conflicts to prudently assembled myths based on cultural identities. In these realms and territories there were those that benefitted from the new engagements such as those who could freely identify with the myths that defined the national culture. Accordingly there were others who had to assume subservient places within the society. Such positions were often alienated and marked as 'other'. The book begins by considering the observation of the Superintendent of the Census that it was no longer plausible to establish a frontier distinction on a census map. This confirms Turner's argument that a great era was to end soon. His suggestion that all free land would come to an end indicates the end of the theory by David Ricardo regarding economic rent and not what a reader may construe the phrase to demonstrate ordinarily. Consequently, the narrative of the dislodgment of the Indians, the taking up their lands, and the extension of the foreign authority from the center of the region seem to represent a repetitive narrative. According to the book, the immigrants whether from the New England, the South, or other regions that entered the region formed a new society in a basic setting. This was a form of wilderness

and away from an organized society that would reproduce the process by which people would then progress through all necessary stages to attain civilization (Lavender 175). The situations in the frontier where the settlers could no longer apply the conventional rules and habits or rely on hierarchies they had to drop their cultures and disregard their ideologies regarding society and governance. Consequently, the book provides that such settlers could then restructure and adjust the institutions that were in existence to fit the new circumstances. From the foregoing, it is apparent that the process of rebuilding new cultures required inordinate emphasis on the efforts on individual determinations, survival, as well as democratic progressions. According to *The Frontier in American History* the people in the frontier adjudged individuals by reference to their deeds and their personalities. It is notable from the book that it implements the interpretation of Thomas Jefferson regarding the meaning of a democratic society. The Jefferson's approach suggested that political independence and the land ownership were always interrelated (Sheehan 272). The portrayal of the frontier by Turner in the book shows that the frontier developed a pervasive landowning population. This kind of population differed from the European-designed peasants that had assured renaissance through democratic institutions as the frontier extended to the Western regions. From the book, it is also clear that as the frontier expanded, the entrenchment of the egalitarian and democratic values was instantaneous and also persistent after settlement. According to the author, the practice of democracy in the frontier influenced other parts including the eastern parts and even in Europe. Through its emphasis on the residual effects of the democratic institutions, the book

queries about aspects that would nurture democratic institutions.

Turner's thesis has been appreciated in the historical perspectives for years.

However, the thesis that Turner advances has not always been without opposition. The validity of Turner's thesis has been challenged several times as some scholars believed that there were myriad of things that shaped the American culture and the contemporary American society other than the frontier. Adversaries of the Turner thesis acknowledged other aspects that influenced the development of the American nation. As such, the antagonists who are opposed Turners thesis by arguing that the new western history that characterizes the west of America is a place rather than a process of determinate expansion. As such, the opponents opine that the westernization of America did not end with the frontier but that the process continuous to date (Horn 56). Some scholars and historians also challenge the frontier thesis by arguing that the western cities such as Louisville, Cincinnati, and Pittsburgh were the facilitators of the western expansion and not the farmer pioneers. Further, some scholars opine that contrary to the book's assertions people who moved to the west never changed their cultures (Holliday 11).

Recent opponents of the frontier thesis argue that it ignores the input of the womenfolk as an important catalyst of the western expansion. In this regard, Glenda Riley states that the Turner's childhood and his context at the time he was writing his thesis influenced his thoughts that ignored the women. According to Riley, this led to the frontier thesis being an exclusively male-focused sensation (Riley 216). As such, the frontier's exclusion of the input of

the womenfolk has therefore become an aspect of contention among the new western historians.

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