

The Influence of the Frontier

Frederick Jackson Turner

- American historian
- Important essay: “The Significance of the Frontier in American History”
- Argued that the frontier was the chief influence in shaping a distinctive American way of life

Influence

- 1. Social Equality.** The frontier offered free or cheap land, so that no person had to work for another. The individual's survival and progress on the frontier depended on the ability to hunt, fight and farm. Frontier conditions prevented the rise of class distinctions and promoted the idea of equality. The West judged people not by ancestors, race, religion or national origin, but by deeds.

2. Growth of Political Democracy.

Frontier settlers believed in political equality, hated special privilege and insisted government carry out the wishes of the people.

The West **originated such democratic reforms** as universal manhood suffrage, woman suffrage, direct election of Senators, and the secret ballot.

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3. Economic Independence

The frontier reduced America's dependence upon Europe by

- a. Providing raw materials and foodstuffs for the industrial cities,
- b. Providing a market for goods manufactured in the East, and
- c. Serving as a place for investment of surplus capital;

4. Safety Valve for Factory Workers.

Knowing that workers could leave their jobs and migrate westward, employers in the east offered good wages and working conditions.