Ladies and Gentlemen: I am indeed honored to participate in such a momentous occasion as this. For a fruitful century the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters has stimulated the intellectual currents that elevated the state and its universities to an enviable spot in the hierarchy of the nation's harbingers of civilization. It has done so by refusing to succumb to the forces of specialization that increasingly departmentalize all knowledge today. As I have read over the fat volumes of Transactions of a generation ago, I have been struck by two things: the incomprehensible fortitude of those who endured hour after hour of learned discourse, and their good fortune in doing so. As they listened, half dozing perhaps, to papers on subjects far from their principal interest, they may well have been startled into rapt attention by a hypothesis, or a technique, or an idea that applied to their own research interest and that illuminated a hitherto dark corner. The Academy is to be commended to keeping alive the spirit of interdisciplinary investigation in a day when the knowledge explosion threatens to compartmentalize all learning.

It is for this reason that I want to talk with you tonight about Frederick Jackson Turner, a long-time member of the Academy, who more than any other historian of his day sought to popularize its ideals and utilize the approaches that it advocated. This, admittedly, is not the image of Turner in the popular mind. He is remembered, in Wisconsin, as the state's most distinguished contribution to the historical profession who trained a legion of students at Madison between 1889 and 1910 when he reluctantly left for Harvard because he believed that his resignation would awaken the regents to the dangers of their attacks on pure research. He is remembered nationally as the intellectual father of two theories. One, advanced in 1893 in his famed paper on "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," held that certain distinctive features of the American character could be traced to the three-centuries-long process that settled the continent; as opportunity in the form of free land and untapped natural resources altered behavioral patterns, men became more optimistic, inventive, mate-

* Doctor Billington delivered this address at the banquet of the fall gathering of the Academy held in Milwaukee, October 3, 1970.
rionalistic, nationalistic, and democratic than their fellows with no frontier experience. The other, the sectional hypothesis, occupied Turner for most of his life. As the frontier moved westward, he held, pioneers encountered and overran vast physiographic regions where differing natural conditions created differing modes of life. These ‘sections’ corresponded to European nations, and the history of the United States could be understood only by comprehending the manner in which national policy was decided by sectional conflict, interplay, and compromise. Turner devoted most of his life to a vain attempt to prove that hypothesis.

Turner’s stress on these two theories, linked with the immense popularity of the frontier thesis during the early years of the century, have created a popular impression of Turner as a propagandist who preached that one giant causal force shaped the nation’s past. Critics rose by the score during the depression-oriented 1930s and 1940s to brand him as a monocausationist who ignored more vital causal forces by his stress on the frontier, who glorified nationalism at a time when internationalism was necessary to prevent world chaos, who blinded the people to the problems bred of industrialization and urbanization by his stress on the rural past.

My purpose tonight is to challenge that distorted image and reveal Frederick Jackson Turner in his true light: as a historian whose views were so modern, whose techniques were so in advance of his times, whose conception of history was so broad, that he would feel as much at home in a meeting of the American Historical Association of today as he did in 1910. Above all I hope to demonstrate that he was a pioneer in the interdisciplinary approach to research, and that those who today explore those borderland areas in the social sciences could learn from his example.

Before plunging into that discussion, let me answer one necessary question: if Turner’s views were so modern, why has his reputation

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1 This general essay was first presented to the American Historical Association on July 12, 1893, at a meeting held in Chicago in connection with the World’s Columbian Exposition. It was repeated before the State Historical Society of Wisconsin on December 14, 1894. Its first printing was in the Proceedings of the Forty-First Annual Meeting of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin (Madison, 1894), 79–112; it was reprinted later that year in American Historical Association, Annual Report for the Year 1893 (Washington, 1894), 199–227. The essay has appeared dozens of times since then, in whole or in part, in every form from historical anthologies to expensively designed special books. It is perhaps most readily available in Frederick Jackson Turner, The Frontier in American History (New York, 1920), 1–38.

2 Turner published a number of essays embodying his theories on sectionalism. Most important among these are those entitled "Sections and Nation," Yale Review, XII (October, 1922), 1–21, and "The Significance of the Section in American History," Wisconsin Magazine of History, VIII (March, 1925), 235–250. Both were reprinted in Turner, The Significance of Sections in American History (New York, 1922).

been so tarnished since his death in 1932? The answer, I suspect, can be found in the popularity of his frontier thesis. Repeatedly through his lifetime he was called upon to speak or write about the frontier; this was the subject expected of Turner when he was demanded for a commencement address, enlisted for the annual Phi Beta Kappa banquet, or seduced into writing a lucrative article for the *Atlantic Monthly*. Yet he had, after the turn of the century, abandoned research on the frontier to begin his sectional studies or to venture briefly into the field of diplomatic history. The lectures or essays composed under those circumstances simply expanded ideas that he had already voiced, substituting extravagant rhetoric for proof. When unshackled by factual information, as he was on such occasions, he was inclined to succumb to oversimplification and overstatement, substituting the bludgeon for the rapier, and writing with the unrestrained prose of the poet rather than the exactly defined words of the historian. These are the essays, collected in two published volumes, that aroused the ire of his critics and gave them evidence of his traitorism to the standards of his profession.4

Let me give you an example of the way in which he dug his own grave by these practices. Turner was to teach on the west coast during the summer of 1914, and had agreed to give the commencement address at the University of Washington on “The West and American Ideals”—a topic broad enough to cover anything he might possibly want to say when he began composing his remarks. Unhappily, he had little time for that composition. He intended to prepare a polished oration before leaving Cambridge, but Turner was a natural procrastinator, and the round of oral graduate examinations, the ocean of end-of-term blue books, the need of a hurried trip to Washington for a committee meeting, and the chaos involved in moving their residence from one house to another allowed the spring to pass with nothing done.5 He left Boston on June 4, intending to make some progress during the week allotted to Madison, but that was ill-advised, for his daughter Dorothy was marrying John Main that week, and between wedding plans and old friends no work was done. Turner arrived in Seattle on June 15 or 16 with his commencement address still to be prepared—an

4 Turner’s two published volumes of essays, referred to in the footnotes above, were his *Frontier in American History* (1920), and *The Significance of Sections in American History* (1922), the latter published after his death.

address scheduled for delivery on June 17. To compound his problems the packet of notes that he had hastily assembled had disappeared, so that he must depend on his memory even for the quotations.

The result was predictable—an address that marvelously paraded most of the clichés of frontier history. The pioneer “knew not where he was going but he was on his way, cheerful, optimistic, busy and buoyant.” He was “an opportunist rather than a dealer in general ideas,” but possessed “a courageous determination to break new paths, indifference to the dogma that because an institution or a condition exists, it must remain.” American democracy, Turner told his audience, “was born of no theorist’s dream; it was not carried in the Sarah Constant to Virginia nor in the Mayflower to Plymouth. It came out of the American forest, and it gained new strength each time it touched a new frontier.” In one hastily prepared essay Turner had provided fuel that was to keep his critics happy for two decades.

In his own behalf, it must be said that he was less than proud of the fantasies that he invented on that occasion. “I am still moving by reflex action after my poor commencement address,” he wrote a friend two days later, and added that he felt as a man might who relaxes in the electric chair after the first shock. His one solace was that the crying babies in the audience of 2,500 drowned out most of his words. “Always,” he advised a friend, “take along a supply of babies when you preach.” These bantering words hid a genuine humiliation. At first he refused to allow the lecture to be published—“it was written to be spoken,” he explained—but when the editor of the Washington Historical Quarterly persisted, he succumbed. Only when he saw it in print did he recognize the many errors of fact and theory of which he was guilty. Preserved among his papers is a printed copy filled with corrections, adorned with frequent marginal notes, and bear-

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6 Turner, “Memorandum,” in Harvard Commission on Western History Correspondence, Harvard University Archives, Widener Library, Harvard University, Box 5, Folder: Turner, F. J. Hereafter referred to as “HC on WH Corr.” The story of the Commission, which was financed by Mrs. Hooper to purchase books and manuscripts in western history for the Harvard University Libraries, is told in the introduction to Ray A. Billington, ed., “Dear Lady”: The Letters of Frederick Jackson Turner and Alice Forbes Perkins Hooper (San Marino, Calif., 1970).

7 Turner to Max Farrand, October 26, 1914. HEH TU Box 22.


9 Turner to Roger Pierce, June 19, 1914. HC on WH Corr., Box 9, Folder: In Re A. B. Hubbert.


11 Ibid. A warm, sunny day attracted a larger crowd than Turner had anticipated—or wanted. Seattle Sun, June 17, 1914.

ing beside the more extravagant statements the underlined words: "Too strong."\textsuperscript{13}

I do not want to suggest that all of Turner’s later papers on the frontier were as inadequately prepared as this; I do maintain that the true Turner can be found not in warmed-over versions of a theory that no longer concerned him but in the research papers and letters to fellow historians where he expressed his real views on the nature and meaning of historical research. If we focus on this evidence we reveal a scholar who stood head and shoulders above his own generation in concepts, purpose, and methodology. Above all, Turner emerges as a pioneer in the interdisciplinary approach for which the Academy stands, and which is proving so valuable among the social sciences today.

This viewpoint was a product of his training, his intellectual environment, and his whole concept of history. His training under Professor William Francis Allen at the University of Wisconsin pointed him in the right direction. Allen, a mediaevalist, was interested to an unusual degree in the impact of social conflicts, economic forces, and cultural factors in shaping the civilization of the Middle Ages; he taught his young disciple that society was an evolving organism responding to a variety of pressures that must be investigated for complete understanding.\textsuperscript{14} As Turner turned his own attention to studies of the American frontier he recognized the wisdom of his master. Alterations in the traits of intruding ethnic groups under the impact of frontier opportunity could be appraised only after the physical environment was properly understood. This meant mastering geography and geology; in 1898, when a young professor at Madison, Turner enrolled in a course on the physiography of the United States given by his friend and neighbor, Charles H. Van Hise.\textsuperscript{15} This proved immensely valuable in his studies; what was more logical than to assume that the study of economics, or government, or sociology, would be equally revealing.

\textsuperscript{13} Turner listed some of his errors in writing to his good friend Max Farrand (including the statement that George Washington was born in South Carolina), then added: "There are other reasons why it lacks the perfection which is the dream of the wise and the good." Turner to Farrand, October 26, 1914. HEH TU Box 22. A printed copy of the address, with Turner’s marginal comments, is in HEH TU File Drawer 15B, Folder: Commencement Address. University of Washington.

\textsuperscript{14} The only adequate biography of Professor Allen is Owen P. Stearns, “William Francis Allen: Wisconsin’s First Historian,” Unpublished Masters Thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1935. Mr. Stearns has kindly allowed me to use the well-researched dissertation. Turner frequently commented on his debt to Allen. For a typical example see Turner to Merle Curti, August 8, 1928. HEH TU Box 29.

\textsuperscript{15} The University of Wisconsin undergraduate newspaper, The Daily Cardinal, October 4, 1898, described the lecture course that attracted Turner. The careful lecture notes that he took during the course, all dated October and November, 1898, are scattered through his papers at the Huntington Library. They may be found in HEH TU File Drawer 12C, Folder: Van Hise Course; File Drawer 14D, Folder: Lecture. Physical Geography; and File Drawer 15A, Folder: Notes on Van Hise’s Lectures.
This early training inclined Turner toward the interdisciplinary approach to history, but I like to believe that his resolutions were strengthened by the intellectual environment of Wisconsin provided by the Academy of Sciences, Arts, and Letters. He was elected a member in 1887, when still a graduate student, probably under the sponsorship of Professor Allen who was president that year. From that day until his death in 1932 he served actively, presenting two of his important research papers for the first time at meetings in 1895 and 1896, commenting frequently at other sessions, persuading his students to present their findings in a series of papers at the annual gatherings, and acting as vice-president for the letters section in 1896. We will never know the ideas planted in his mind or the flashes of inspiration that occurred as he listened to endless papers on the whole range of scholarly inquiry. Did Humphrey J. Desmond, a political scientist, turn Turner’s interests to sectionalism when in 1888 he reported on “The Sectional Feature of American Politics?” Did T. C. Chamberlin and Charles H. Van Hise stir the young historian’s curiosity as they gave their numerous reports on geology, and turn him toward the geographic investigation that underlay his frontier and sectional concepts? Did he suddenly awaken when listening in 1892 to E. A. Birge explain “Weissman’s [sic] Theory of Heredity,” to the knowledge that nearly all biologists believed in the inheritance of acquired characteristics, and thus see how traits stemming from the frontier environment could be passed on to future generations? Those are unanswerable questions, but there seems no question that Turner’s immersion in the interdisciplinary atmosphere of the Wisconsin Academy helped broaden his interests to the everlasting benefit of historical scholarship.

Finally, and probably most important, Turner was nudged toward an interdisciplinary approach by his own concept of the nature of

17 Turner read his paper on “State Making in the West” before the Academy in 1885, and another on “The Projected French Expedition of George Rogers Clark Against Louisiana in 1793” in 1896. Ibid., XI, 1896–1897 (Madison, 1898), 549. The first of his student’s papers before the society was delivered in 1891 when Turner himself read an essay by Kate A. Everest on “Early Lutheran Immigration to Wisconsin,” Ibid., VIII, 1888–1891 (Madison, 1892), 415. Others were presented at irregular intervals during the remainder of Turner’s stay at Wisconsin. Notice of his activities on committees and as vice-president are in Ibid., VIII, 1888–1891 (Madison, 1892), 415, and XI, 1896–1897 (Madison, 1898), 256. The Daily Cardinal, January 6, 1897, also noted his elevation to the vice-presidency of the letters section.
18 Ibid., VIII, 1888–1891 (Madison 1892), 1–10. A printed copy of this essay, heavily underlined and annotated by Turner, is in HbH TU File Drawer 14E, Folder: Sectional Feature in American Politics.
19 Charles H. Van Hise’s evening address in 1893 on “The Evolution of the North American Continent” would certainly attract Turner’s interest. T. C. Chamberlin was a constant reader of geological papers before the Academy at this time. Ibid., X, 1894–1895 (Madison, 1895), 582.
20 Ibid., IX, 1893 (Madison, 1893), viii.
history. He was, above all else, no monocausationist, as his critics have branded him. More than most men of his generation—or today—he recognized the complexity of human behavior and the variety of forces motivating every action. "In truth," he told an audience early in his career, "there is no single key to American history. In history, as in science, we are learning that a complex result is the outcome of the interplay of many forces. Simple explanations fail to meet the case." 21 This remained Turner’s credo; through his lifetime his quest was not for the force underlying an event, but for all forces. Early in his academic career he read the germinal essay by T. C. Chamberlin on "The Method of the Multiple Working Hypothesis," first published in 1897, and from that day on applied to historical studies the techniques Chamberlin used in geology. 22 Turner’s method was to postulate every possible explanation for any happening, then test each successively with all available evidence. Only in this way, he believed, could the historian escape what he called "the warping influence of partiality for a simple theory." 23

Before showing you how Turner applied that belief, let me digress to ask one obvious question. Should a historian wedded to the concept of the multiple hypothesis and aware that the complexity of human behavior precluded simple explanation, have devoted his life to proving the influence of the frontier and section on past behavior? Did he consider them more important than other forces: the class struggle, slavery, constitutional interpretation, or many more? Of course he did not. "I do not," he explained to Carl Becker in 1925, "think of myself as primarily either a western historian, or a human geographer. I have stressed those two factors, because it seemed to me that they had been neglected, but fundamentally I have been interested in the inter-relations of economics, politics, sociology, culture in general, with the geographic factors, in

21 Turner, "The Development of American Society," The [Illinois] Alumni Quarterly, II (July, 1908), 120-121. He used almost these words in a Phi Beta Kappa lecture at the University of Nebraska in 1907. The manuscript of this lecture is in H E HE, TU Box 55. Edward E. Dale, "Memories of Frederick Jackson Turner," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XXX (December, 1943), 355-356 remembered that he employed virtually the same phrase when lecturing to a class some years later.

22 Thomas C. Chamberlin, "The Method of Multiple Working Hypotheses," Journal of Geology, V (November–December, 1897), 837-848. Chamberlin first read the paper at a meeting of the Society of Western Naturalists in 1889, and Turner may well have learned of it at that time. Many years later he wrote one of his students: "I, as you perhaps recall, valued Chamberlin’s paper on the Multiple Hypothesis, which I have aimed to apply to history as he did to geology." Turner to Merle Curti, August 8, 1928. H E HH TU Box 39. Wilbur R. Jacobs, "Turner’s Methodology: Multiple Working Hypotheses or Ruling Theory?" Journal of American History, LV (March, 1968), 853-868, argues that Turner never correctly applied the methodology advocated by Chamberlin, but that he treated his frontier and sectional hypotheses as ruling theories that were true instead of postulates to be tested.

explaining the United States of to-day." This was common sense. Each man must specialize, and the mere fact of specialization does not mean that he assigns greater influence to his field of special interest than any other.

Turner, then, was committed to the use of the multiple hypothesis, and to the belief that no single key unlocked the secret of the past. Equally important was his realization that history was more than the "past politics" current in the 1890s; it was more too than the colorful narratives spun from the pens of the Francis Parkmans and the William H. Prescotts of that day. History, to Turner, was "a study of the social forces which caused and modified the political events, institutions, and ideas of the period." Enough time had been wasted by nineteenth century scholars tracing the surface manifestations of political behavior. The time had come to probe below the surface, and analyze the underlying forces—economic, social, and cultural—that found ultimate expression in politics. "Behind institutions," he wrote in his famous 1893 essay, "behind constitutional forms, and modifications, lie the vital forces that call these organs into life and shape them to meet changing conditions." This was his declaration of independence. His investigations would be focused on "the changes in the economic and social life of the people," as he put it, "that . . . ultimately create and modify organs of public action." No mere narrative, no superficial survey of political behavior would do. His area of study was society as a whole, not its leaders. "The important point," he told the well-known sociologist Albion W. Small in 1904, "is to get more sociology into history and more history into sociology."

This view of history doomed Turner to a lifetime of perpetual learning—and shamefully little writing. He had marked out for himself an impossible assignment; to understand human behavior in all its manifestations he must become a master of many disciplines, and a slave to none. He must use the tools of the economist, the sociologist, the demographer, the geographer, and the political scientist. At the same time he must remain true to his own dis-

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24 Turner to Carl Becker, October 3, 1925. Carl Becker Papers, Cornell University Library. Hereafter referred to as: "Becker Papers, Cornell."
27 In 1921 Turner wrote a publisher who had tried vainly for a generation to persuade him to write a textbook: "It is in narrative history that I am least experienced or (I fear) competent . . . My strength, or weakness, lies in interpretation, correlation, elucidation of large tendencies to bring out new points of view . . . I am not a good saga-man." Turner to Lincoln MacVeagh of Henry Holt & Company, April 5, 1921. Henry Holt & Company Archives, Firestone Library, Princeton University.
cipline and avoid the traps of other social scientists who were all too ready to lay down rules of human conduct. "The human soul," he wrote in 1904, "is too complex, human society too full of vital energy and incessant change, to enable us to pluck out the heart of its mystery—to reduce it to the lines of an exact science or to state human development in terms of an equation." Historians had made that mistake in the past, and their chronicles were strewn with the wrecks of "known and acknowledged truths." Now they must utilize their breadth of experience, and with it temper their findings as they used the tools of other social scientists. To fail to do so would be to abandon the field to others less well equipped to ferret out the truth. "History," he wrote in 1914, "had a right to deal with large mass statistics, tendencies, etc., as well as the event and the individual psychology. I dislike to yield good territory to sociologists, political scientists, etc., on which the historian may raise good crops."

More than any other historian of his generation, Turner succeeded in preserving that territory for his fellow craftsmen. At times he was a lone voice crying in the wilderness, but always he was an evangelist preaching a vital message with the fervor of conviction. As early as 1901 he urged on the students in the Division of Economics, Political Science and History the belief that "the various branches of our work are related," and cautioned them against letting the branches of social science drift apart unduly. He drove home the message even more strongly when addressing a historical gathering at the St. Louis World's Fair three years later, their most serious problem was "how to apportion the field of American history itself among the social sciences." This meant calling into cooperation sciences and methods hitherto little used. "Data drawn from the studies of literature and art, politics, economics, sociology, psychology, biology, and physiography all must be used," he told his listeners. "The method of the statistician as well as that of the critic of evidence is absolutely essential. There has been too little cooperation of these sciences, and the result is that great fields have been neglected." Once more in 1910 Turner made this plea the central theme of his presidential address before the American Historical Association. Just as geologists were using chemistry, mathe-

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31 Turner to George Lincoln Burr, September 5, 1914. George Lincoln Burr Papers, Cornell University Library.
matics, botany and zoology to understand the dynamics of the inorganic earth, he warned, so must historians master the essential tools of the social sciences to unravel the skeins of the past.34 This was a unique plea; Turner was the first president of this influential body to urge interdisciplinary techniques.

Moreover, Turner practiced what he preached, and used a variety of disciplines so successfully that his students and friends sometimes wondered if he had deserted his own cause. One of his Harvard undergraduates mirrored this confusion when he was heard to say that what Turner was doing in the classroom was all right, "but it wasn't history."35 When a colleague accused him of being more of a sociologist than historian, Turner answered: "It is the subject that I am interested in, and I don't particularly care what name I bear."36 Nor did he, so long as his unquenchable thirst for knowledge could be satisfied. The quest for the truth about the past mattered to him; the tools used in unearthing that truth did not. "I sometimes wonder," he told Carl Becker late in his life, "if after all I have not been simply, rather blindly, trying to explain America to myself instead of writing history! or writing agriculture, or geography, or diplomacy, or economics, land transportation, etc., or literature, or religion."37 So he had, but he had still been studying history. For history to Turner was, as he once put it, "a complex of the social sciences." It could be made understandable only if the watertight compartments in which they had been divided could be broken down, and the One-ness of the subject brought home to investigators.38

He labored to break down those compartments, just as he tried to persuade other historians to do so. When, early in his career, he joined the editorial board of the American Historical Review his first step was to urge the acceptance of more articles that lay "on the border-land between history and its neighbors."39 A lifetime later when in his twilight years he was asked to advise the Huntington Library on its book-buying policies, he pointed out that history was no longer a placer-mining form of narrative collecting, "but involves the use of wide agencies more like the chemical laboratories, dredging process, geological experts, quartz crushers, etc. The library extended into economic, social, literary, political, religious sources becomes necessary to the modern type of historian of

35 Turner to Merle Curti, August 8, 1928. HEH TU Box 39.
36 Turner to Luther L. Bernard, November 24, 1928. HEH TU Box 40.
38 Turner to Carl Becker, December 1, 1925. Becker Papers, Cornell.
the evolution of civilization." Few men have clung so tenaciously to a belief as did Turner in the virtues of interdisciplinary studies, and few have both preached and practiced a cause so devotedly.

His own contribution to the breaking of line-fences between disciplines led him principally into the field of geography, for this was the allied subject that promised the greatest help in understanding American sectionalism. This was a complex problem; to what degree did varying physiographic features in each region—South east, Southwest, New England, North Central States, and the like—alter the behavioral patterns of the intruding stocks? Were the differences in economic, social, political, and cultural behavior that distinguished New England from the North Central States, or the Southeast from the Southwest due more to environmental forces or to the persistence of ethnic behavioral patterns among the settlers? This was the basic problem in the study of sectionalism, and that to which Turner devoted most of his research between 1905 and his death in 1932.

It could be solved only by devising a completely new research technique, build on methods of both geographers and statisticians. This involved the drawing of maps that would correlate physiographic features with political, social, economic, and cultural behavior. Some that he devised revealed the physiographic basis of society; they showed on a county-by-county basis the nature of soils, land values, agricultural yields, value of farm produce, and extent of improvements. Others depicted patterns of social behavior, illuminating degrees of illiteracy, levels of education, church preferences, and various cultural attainments. A third set of maps illustrated voting patterns, showing which counties were consistently Whig or Democratic, and which showed slight political allegiance. By comparing these maps, Turner was able to show to his own satisfaction that there was a direct relationship between geographic conditions and political or economic behavior. Thus he could demonstrate that areas of poor soil, high illiteracy rate, and evangelical sects in the pre-Civil War era were inclined to vote Democratic; that western counties changed their attitude on the tariff from free trade to protectionism with a change in crop emphasis from corn to wool growing; and that counties with agricultural surpluses for export were those principally supporting government-financed internal improvements.

40 Turner to Max Farrand, March 8, 1927. HEN.1 TU Box 36.
41 Dozens of Turner’s manuscript maps are preserved in the Turner Papers at the Huntington Library. A few of the most important were published in his last book, completed by friends after his death, The United States, 1820–1860: The Nation and Its Sections (New York, 1935). Turner was convinced of the value of his maps, and of their use in various social-study disciplines. “I really think,” he wrote in 1925, “the maps which exhibit the correlation between physical geography (especially topography and soils), land values in 1850, illiteracy, party politics, and culture have a real merit in the line of showing the interdependence of the social studies.” Turner to Carl Becker, October 3, 1925. Becker Papers. Cornell.
Today's student of statistical cartography or statistics is inclined to look at the dozens of maps so laboriously produced by Turner with a mixture of amused tolerance and contempt, for we now know that they woefully failed to accomplish their purpose. His misfortune was twofold: he lived before statisticians devised the sophisticated techniques that would endow his masses of data with significant meaning, and he was so wedded to the use of maps that he failed to take advantage of more useable means of achieving the correlations that he sought. Neither he nor his students made any serious effort to master the devices that might have solved their problems: mathematical correlations, sampling, time-series trending, and the use of punched cards for storing and sorting data. Instead Turner's faith was in a device that did not lend itself to the complex correlations that he required. As he crowded on the necessary information the result was an undecipherable maze of colors, symbols, lines, and numbers, so jumbled and crowded that they meant nothing. Even when kept simple the visual comparison of two or more maps to identify correlations was almost impossible unless the correlation was so high that it could not be missed. Today's statistical techniques allow the type of analysis that Turner sought, but not through the maps on which he pinned his faith.42

This latter-day criticism should not blind us to the undisputed fact that in his own time Turner's methods were accepted as irreplaceable and his findings hailed as revolutionary by both geographers and statisticians. His services were sought as speaker at professional associations of geographers,43 and when he did consent in 1914 to deliver a paper at a joint meeting of the Association of American Geographers and the American Geographical Society on "Geographical Influences in American Political History," his talk was hailed as one of the most stimulating ever given and by far the hit of the program. "Your work," he was assured by a leading geographer, Isaiah Bowman, "is so sympathetic with respect to geographic factors that it is a pity that we do not see more of you and hear a paper every year."44 The high regard in which Turner was held by practitioners of this discipline was shown when

42 Richard Jensen of Washington University has graciously allowed me to use his unpublished paper on "The Development of Quantitative Historiography in America." This excellent essay, together with the same author's study of "American Election Analysis: A Case History of Methodological Innovation and Diffusion," in Seymour M. Lipset, ed., Politics and the Social Sciences (New York, 1969), provide the best criticism of Turner's mapping techniques, yet assign him his proper place as a pioneer in the use of statistical methodology.

43 Ralph S. Tarr to Turner, May 25, 1911. HEH TU Box 16. Turner has written "NO" at the top of this letter. He had, however, participated in two conferences at meetings of the American Historical Association in 1907 and 1908 on "The Relation of Geography to History." Reports of these meetings are in the Annual Report of the American Historical Association for 1907 (Washington, 1908), I, 45-48, and the Annual Report of the American Historical Association for 1908 (Washington, 1909, I, 61.

44 Isaiah Bowman to Turner, April 7, 1914. HEH TU Box 21.
he was elected a member of the Association of American Geographers—an honor restricted to one hundred scholars who made the most significant contributions—and chosen a fellow of the American Geographical Society. His passing in 1932 was mourned as sincerely by geographers as by historians. "Professor Turner," wrote the editor of the Geographical Review, "was a rare combination of historical originality with geographical insight. His death is a loss no less severe to American geography than to the study of American history." Clearly Turner had broken the line-fence between two of the social-science disciplines as no one had in the past.

Despite the criticism of modern sceptics who scorn his statistical techniques, he was also viewed by statisticians of its own generation as the outstanding pioneer in applying their discipline in the field of history. When the American Statistical Association celebrated its seventy-fifth birthday in 1913, the one historian invited to participate was Turner, who was asked to give a paper on "The Importance and Service of Statistics to History." "No one," the president of the association assured him, "is better qualified to speak on this subject from the view of the historian than you are." A decade later when a team of scholars began preparation of a book on the inter-relationship of the social sciences, they turned naturally to Turner for the chapter on the relationship between history and statistics. Turner declined both of these invitations, for he was too deeply involved in his sectional studies to be interrupted, but the point remains: his own generation viewed him as the outstanding disciple of the use of statistical methods in historical research.

That Turner pioneered in blending historical, geographic, and statistical techniques even his enemies must concede; they insist, however, that despite his lip service to interdisciplinary studies he virtually ignored the other social sciences. Economists in particular have castigated him for distorting the past by refusing to recognize the significance of class conflicts and economic growth. If Turner is to be judged solely on the basis of his published works this charge seems warranted, for he wrote little and largely of a rural America in which economic forces played a lesser role than in the industrialized-urbanized twentieth century. But if we examine his unpublished essays, and read his letters of advice to friends, it becomes clear that he was no less aware of their impor-

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45 Isaiah Bowman to Turner, March 1, 1915. HEH TU Box 25. Turner’s certificates of membership in the two associations are in HEH TU Box 58.
46 Geographical Review, XXII (July, 1932), 499.
47 John Koren to Turner, November 18, 1913. HEH TU Box 20A.
48 William F. Ogburn to Turner, December 15, 1924. HEH TU Box 33. Turner sent his "regrets" to both of these proposals.
tance than later economic historians who built their whole interpretation of the American past on an economic foundation.

Turner’s interest in economic forces and recognition of their importance in shaping human behavior can be traced to the very beginning of his career. As early as 1892 he urged that historians cease their preoccupation with politics and “interpret events from the economic point of view.”49 Until this was done, history would be superficial, and scholars would have no real understanding of the basic subsurface social and economic tides that determined political action. In adopting this point of view, Turner aligned himself with the little group of social scientists that included Lester Ward, Richard T. Ely, and John R. Commons who first recognized that modern society rested on an economic base, and that this must be understood before political actions could be understood. He saw too, as did John R. Commons, that they were linked with social and cultural forces, and that all operated together in human motivation.50

With this as a basic assumption, Turner would never ignore the role of economics in shaping human behavior, even though his focus on agrarian America left him little to say on the subject. When he concentrated, as he occasionally did, on a modern period, he recognized that even a Marxian interpretation had some validity. A final and very important phase of the nation’s growth, he told an audience in 1908, had been “the steady stratification of our society by the development of contesting social classes. It is hard to realize how recently it has become possible to use the words proletariat and capitalist classes in reference to American conditions.”51 In his seminars, too, he elaborated the idea of a continuous conflict between “the capitalist and the democratic pioneer” persisting from colonial times to the present.52 Even such a latter-day critic as Charles A. Beard paid tribute to Turner as a pioneer in exploring the field that he was to make his own. “Almost the only work in economic interpretation which has been done in the United States,” he wrote in 1913, “seems to have been inspired at the University of Wisconsin by Professor Turner.”53

At one point Turner did break with Beard and his school, and we know today that Beard was wrong and Turner right. He saw,

49 Turner, “The School of Economics, Political Science and History,” The Aegis, VI (April 5, 1892), 448.
50 For an intelligent appraisal of Turner's influence in this group of thinkers see George D. Blackwood, “Frederick Jackson Turner and John Rogers Commons—Complementary Thinkers,” Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XLI (December, 1954), 471–489.
52 Merle Curti to Turner, August 13, 1928, HEH TU Box 39.
53 Charles A. Beard, An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution of the United States (New York, 1913), 5–6.
as less perceptive scholars did not, that idealism played a role in human motivation, and that those tracing behavioral patterns solely to material desires were blind to the truth. Over and over again he protested to his friends, "I am not an economic determinist." This broad view led to a more sophisticated—and more complex—view of history than that of Beard and his followers, but no message that he preached was more important in leading to a correct understanding of the past. "I tried," he told a friend in 1928, "to keep the relations steadily in mind; but it isn't an easy job, and the effort is sometimes conducive to unwritten books!"

Frederick Jackson Turner, then, more than any historian of his generation, succeeded in merging history with geography, history with statistics, history with economics. Nor did his assault on compartmentalization end even there, for he was a welcome guest on programs of the American Sociological Association and a pioneer in introducing sociological methods into historical research. Franklin H. Giddings, one of the most eminent practitioners of that subject, in 1928 judged Turner to be "a sound sociologist, and a ground-breaking one of first rate importance." In the judgment of his peers, Turner stood head and shoulders above his fellow-historians in urging interdisciplinary studies, and in proving them essential in unraveling the secrets of the past. Avery Craven, a student of Turner and himself an eminent historian, summed up the judgment of his generation in his remarks at the funeral of his master. "He is claimed by the historians," Craven said, "and the sociologists and the geographers and yet he was more than any of these. He was a student of the whole field of the social sciences, and more than any other man ... saw the field as one and was able to integrate it." No historian could deserve a more appropriate epitaph than that.

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54 Turner to Andrew C. McLaughlin, May 29, 1915, HEH TU Box 24; Turner to Edgar E. Robinson, December 13, 1924, HEH TU Box 33; Turner to Archibald Henderson, January 29, 1930, HEH TU Box 43. On the margin of a term paper written by one of his students, Herman K. Murphy, Turner wrote: "History not all economic determinism." HEH TU Students' Papers (1).
55 Turner to Merle Curti, August 15, 1928. HEH TU Box 39.
56 Franklin H. Giddings to Merle Curti, August 20, 1928. HEH TU Box 39.