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Review of *On Turner's Trail: 100 Years of Writing Western History* By Wilbur R. Jacobs

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On Turner's Trail: 100 Years of Writing Western History. By Wilbur R. Jacobs. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1994. Preface, black and white photographs, appendices, notes, bibliographical note, index. xviii + 342 pp. \$35.00.

When Frederick Jackson Turner retired, he took up residence at the Huntington Library in California. Turner left his papers to the Huntington, thus assuring that the Turner industry would flourish there. Wilbur Jacobs is among the resident senior scholars who have tended the flame. Jacobs is a long-time critic of Turner's imperialist celebrations of progress, dichotomous views of savagism and civilization, and anti-environmentalism. Turner ignored much of the development of social science in his own time and confused ruling theory with multiple working hypotheses. Jacobs repeats these criticisms in several contexts in the present volume, but champions Turner as a developer of the sectional hypothesis, forerunner of regionalism, champion of the safety-valve doctrine, a man of diverse

interests, an inspiring if sometimes ill-organized teacher, and an optimist. He does not explain why he admires the safety-valve hypothesis, and it is not altogether clear what should remain of Turner's optimistic celebration of American progress once its costs in racism, imperialism, sexism, and environmental destruction are duly noted.

Jacobs makes a better case for Turner as a networker than for Turner as an historian, and the most fascinating feature of his present work is his delineation of the Turnerian Old Boy Network. Wisconsin patronage got Turner into the doctoral program at Hopkins; Hopkins patronage got him back to Wisconsin and gave him a place on the 1893 centennial program from which he launched his frontier hypothesis. Once launched, the frontier thesis colonized the profession, with considerable help from Turner's students at Wisconsin and Harvard.

Notable among the disciples were Frederick Merk, Turner's chosen successor at Harvard, and Ray Billington, a more charismatic networker than Merk and a better writer of narrative than Turner. Billington's 1949 text so closely resembled Merk's notes that it took Merle Curti's diplomacy to persuade Merk not to sue. Jacobs argues that Turner's notes passed both to Merk and to Billington and that both got a lot out of them, perpetuating much of the Turnerian syllabus of errors. In 1974, Macmillan hired Jacobs to take terms like "savage" out of Billington's fourth edition. Founding father of the Western Historical Association, Billington furthered the perpetuation of "realwestern" history by welcoming wagonwheels "buffs" into the organization. Even the "new" western historians, including a woman and a vegetarian, learned more from Turner than their critics among the outraged "buffs" might allow.

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