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History as High Adventure*

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THIS is the seventy-second presidential address delivered before the American Historical Association. The previous seventy-one were prepared by seventy persons. Naturally, as the game proceeds, the selection of a subject becomes increasingly difficult because the firstcomers harvested the tallest grain, leaving to us later ones the gleaning of well-mown fields. The presidents have dealt with the usefulness of history, with the facts, the fallacies, the vagaries, the science, the philosophy, the content, and with the individuals who support the great man theory; they have examined imagination, faith, freedom, distinction, religion, and even truth. He who scans these contributions feels that there is little left to say on the more serious aspects of history. In fact he finds in what has already been said a good deal of repetition and a considerable amount of contradiction.

Two rifts I have been able to detect in this cloud of learning, two opportunities not yet pre-empted. The first is in the field of humor. Judging by the published addresses, one must conclude that historians are deadly serious

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when called upon to give testimony of their stewardship. There is, so far as I have been able to find, scarcely a glimmer of humor, hardly a particle of wit, and rarely a suggestion of an exuberant spirit in the whole collection. The historian, reading these addresses seventy-five years hence, will see that presidents had much learning, some wisdom, and no fun at all. Since I am not qualified, either by nature or by inclination, to fill this gap with a little laughter, I leave that joyous task to a bolder successor.

The second opening, the one I shall enter, lies in the field of personal experience, of adventure into the wilderness of the past, that wild country wherein one can be lost for days or weeks or months, in exploration as exciting as any known to argonauts or conquistadores; and the lovely feature about this delirious experience is that the historical explorer moves among the dangers and hardships with complete immunity until finally he comes out in print, in point-blank range of the critics. It does seem strange that the historians have been so unwilling to relate their personal experience in historical exploration. They have tended to hide themselves in anonymity, to be impersonal, to give a blueprint of their fragment of truth rather than the enthralling tale of how it was chased, cornered, and captured. What I tell here makes no claim to objectivity. It is designed to be as subjective and revealing as I can make it, and yet have within as much truth as one can afford when talking about himself.

Here I need to warn those young historians who flock to these meetings, apparently in the hope that they will gain some clue to getting forward in this profession. They are likely to think that the man who is president may reveal the secret of how he got there. Presidents in their turn seem to be influenced by what is expected of them, and so they give something of their philosophy of history which more often than not exhibits how they felt after they got there. While I, as some of my predecessors have done, am talking tonight out of at least one side of my mouth to these young historians, I would tell them, and I want to tell them with emphasis, that if they aspire to occupy this place, they should listen attentively to my story, make notes on my education, graduate record, and college career, and then be extremely careful to avoid following the example of one who has done nearly everything wrong. Seeing what I have done, they will know what not to do.

My presence here is one of the most improbable accidents in the history of the profession. I am here in defiance of geography, regionalism, and history. My background is southern, both my parents being from Mississippi; my home is west of the Big River, and my field of study has been the plebian field of Western America. All my degrees are from a state university, the
one in which I teach. I have never taught anywhere else except temporarily.
I am one of the few persons who did not have to leave home to get a job. I
am an example of institutional inbreeding which frightens all universities
save the two that practice it most, Harvard and Oxford.

Of my seventy-two presidential predecessors, seventy were American
citizens, one Canadian, and one French. Of the seventy Americans, sixty­
three came from the northern states, two from the South, and five from
the West. Patrick Henry’s grandson, the seventh president, was elected
from Virginia in 1891. I am the only person ever elected while a teacher
in a southern institution. Two presidents were born west of the Mississippi
River, but I am the only one of them elected to the office while a resident
teacher west of the river.

Though California has furnished five presidents, all of them were trans­
planted from the East save one who was from England. So if any young
man here is ambitious to be president, he should shun the South and avoid
the West. The ambitious designer of a charted career should bear in mind
that two states, New York and Massachusetts, have furnished thirty-six
presidents, one-half of the total, and that the percentage will increase.

I could tell a great deal about my predecessors, that the average age is
sixty-three, that two were in their eighties, thirteen in their seventies, thirty­
two in their sixties, and two, Jameson and Turner, in their forties. The
office has been held by such distinguished people as presidents and ambas­
sadors and by natives of England, Scotland, France, Canada, Scandinavia,
and Russia.

When I pointed out to my wife that 90 per cent of the presidents were
from the North and suggested that she should be very proud that at last the
South had also been recognized, she replied with one of those marvelous
flashes of misunderstanding, “I know—they have decided to integrate!”

Since I promised a human story, I will refrain from statistics. It would
be highly gratifying if I could say that from a very early age I wanted to
be a historian, and that I bent every effort to this purpose. Nothing could be
further from the truth. Actually I have never been ambitious in the profes­
sion as witnessed by the fact that I have a poor record of attendance at the
national meetings, have served on no committees, written few book reviews,
and have never submitted an article to either of the national journals, al­
though a former presidential address was published. This indifference illus­
brates two points: first, that I never expected national recognition; second,
that I have followed my own interest, acquiring in the process severe penal­
ties and an occasional reward.
What I wanted to be was a writer, and I wanted to write, not for the few but for the many, never for the specialist who doesn’t read much anyway. I wanted to write so that people could understand me; I wanted to persuade them, lure them along from sentence to paragraph, make them see patterns of truth in the kaleidoscope of the past, exercise upon them the marvelous magic of words as conveyors of thought. With this ambition to write I entered college, very late and with little preparation, and here my past caught up with me. I convinced several English professors that I could not punctuate, and they convinced me that I could not write. For years I did not touch pen to paper.

In my junior year I registered for a course called institutional history, taught by a Canadian-born and European-trained scholar, Lindley Miller Keasbey. What he taught was not history, nor economics, nor anthropology, nor philosophy, but a good deal of all these and more. He swept me off my feet, gave me a method of thinking and a point of view which has entered into all that I have done. His patterns were clear, concise, and exciting. I took all his courses and decided that I would become a teacher of institutional history, beginning in the high schools. But when I surveyed the field, as a wiser person would have done earlier, I found that there was no such thing as institutional history anywhere except in the University of Texas. Then I learned that this man was so unorthodox that he was not welcomed to teach in any standard department. To provide a place for him, the authorities allowed him to set up an independent department, and his former colleagues were dismayed when their best students flocked to him by the hundreds. The authorities finally solved that problem and restored harmony by firing him. And there I was, a specialist in a nonexistent field of learning.

But on the record institutional history does look like history, enough like it to fool one school board. Thus I became a history teacher with only two elementary courses in the subject. Now, since I was making a living teaching history, I decided it would be wise to learn something about it, and I began taking advanced courses, and finally took the B.A. degree at about the age most take the Ph.D. In the meantime I had made something of a reputation as a high school teacher of history, and had written an article on the subject, and that made me an expert. In 1918 I was invited to come to the University of Texas to conduct a course in the teaching of history so that it would not be given by a methodologist.

The time had come to start work on the M.A. It was necessary to choose a subject, and here good fortune attended me. A series of Mexican revolutions had made the Texas border a turbulent place; James E. Ferguson as
governor had made all Texas turbulent. Ferguson increased the Ranger force, and the Rangers went to the border to commit crimes almost as numerous and quite as heinous as those of Pancho Villa's bandits. These crimes were exposed in a legislative investigation led by J. T. Canales. The exposure made exciting headlines in all the papers. I read those headlines and asked myself an important question: Has anyone written the history of the Texas Rangers? The answer was no. I chose that subject and was off on the first lap of the great adventure, to write the history of the oldest institution of its kind in the world. The story led west, to the frontier, to vicarious adventure of the body, and to real adventure of the mind. Though I was not aware of it then, I had found my field.

Trailing the Texas Rangers, who in turn had trailed the ancestors of some of the best people in Texas, was a combination of drudgery and fun. It was my first work with sources, the faded letters and reports of a handful of men standing between the people and their enemies, men better with a gun than with a pen. Though the records were abundant, I did not stop with the records. Like Parkman I went to all the places where things had happened. I sought out the old men, still living then, who had fought Comanches and Apaches, killed Sam Bass at Round Rock, and broken up deadly feuds inherited from the more deadly reconstruction. With a captain and a private I visited every Ranger camp on the Mexican border where there were still elements of danger; I carried a commission and had the exhilarating experience of wearing a Colt revolver in places where it might have been useful. At night by the campfires I listened to the tales told by men who could talk without notes.

Though the desire to write had been suppressed, it had not been killed. One day I sat down and wrote an article sketching the early history of the Texas Rangers, and for the first time an editor paid me the compliment of writing a check in my favor. This was a landmark, the beginning of a long and happy relationship between me and editors. In retrospect I wondered what had enabled me to break the barrier separating academic people from paying editors. Why had my early efforts been rejected? What new element had entered which enabled me to persuade an editor to write a check? The difference was that now I had something to say; I had learned intimately about one segment of life. The subject I had found in my own front yard was one that I could understand as I could never understand such exotic, to me, topics as the French Revolution or Renaissance art. The way led west.

It was during these same years that the oil boom broke in West Texas.
It began in my home town of Ranger, a village of one thousand which became a brawling mass of ten thousand in six months. Law and order broke down, the criminal element rushed in to gamble, murder, and rob. Then the Rangers came to run out the criminals and restore local government to the demoralized citizens. This was a formula repeated in town after town as the boom spread. The genuine boom was followed by a bogus one, run by speculators who floated stock promotions to fleece the gullible public.

One of these bogus companies with headquarters in Fort Worth founded a magazine and decided to do a series of articles on the services the Texas Rangers had rendered in cleaning up the oil towns. The editor addressed a letter to the University asking who was qualified to write the story. The letter found its way to my desk, and I began to tell the story of my Rangers at two cents a word. This pleasant arrangement was interrupted by a United States marshal and judge who had quaint ideas about the uses of the mail.

Though I did not realize it at the time, as I tell this story Texas does seem to have been an exciting place. I shall always be grateful to this crooked oil company because in writing articles for it I stumbled on one of the few original ideas I ever had. As a matter of fact up until that time I had never had one.

This idea came to me on a dark winter night when a heavy rain was rattling on the roof of the small back room where I was trying to write an article for the oil magazine. By this time I knew a great deal about the Texas Rangers, their dependence on horses, and their love for the Colt revolver; I knew the nature of their enemies, primarily the Comanches, and I knew the kind of society they represented and defended. I was ready for that moment of synthesis which comes after long hours of aimless research to give understanding and animation to inert knowledge. What I saw that night was that when Stephen F. Austin brought his colonists to Texas, he brought them to the edge of one environment, the eastern woodland, and to the border of another environment, the Great Plains. The Texas Rangers were called into existence and kept in existence primarily to defend the settlements against Indians on horseback, Indians equipped with weapons that could be used on horseback. These Texans, fresh from the forests, had no such weapons, for theirs had been developed in the woods and were not suitable for horsemen. While the conflict between the Rangers and the Comanches was at its height, Samuel Colt invented the revolver, the ideal weapon for a man on horseback. It took a year to gather the proof of what I knew that night, and I sensed that something very important happened when the American people emerged from the woodland and undertook to
live on the plains. In that transition the Texans were the forerunners, the Rangers the spearhead of the advance, and the revolver an adaptation to the needs of a new situation.

The excitement of that moment was probably the greatest creative sensation I have ever known. With the roar of the rain in my ears, I went to the front of the house to tell the most sympathetic listener I have known that I had come upon something really important, that I was no longer an imitator, parroting what I read or what some professor had said. This idea that something important happened when the Americans came out of the woods and undertook to live on the plains freed me from authority, and set me out on an independent course of inquiry. One question I asked over and over, of myself and of others: What else happened? What other changes took place in the manner of living when thousands of westbound people emerged from a humid, broken woodland to live on the level, semiarid plains where there was never enough water and practically no wood? This question attended me in all my reading, and led straight to the books I needed. In this chase the Texas Rangers, formerly so exciting, became dull and prosaic fellows, and I cast them aside to follow the new trail that still led west. The teaching of Keasbey came back in full force as I studied the western environment and tried to find its effects on human beings.

Though I had picked up the M.A. degree in transit, I still lacked the accursed Ph.D. The pressure to get it was gentle, for that was a tolerant age, but it was there, and I was advised to go elsewhere for graduate work. This is wise advice for most people, but it came near being fatal for me. I was already too old, and what is more, I now had an idea of my own which made others—to my teeming mind at that moment—seem of secondary importance. My adviser, Frederic Duncalf, wrote to Professor Turner about a scholarship at Harvard, but Turner replied saying I was too old and should not try Harvard. I shall always be grateful to Turner for this favor and for reasons that will be apparent later. Chicago was less discriminating, and I was fortunate in going where no one offered a course in western history.

At the end of twelve months I returned to Texas, ill, deep in debt, and without the degree. I would have preferred to omit this adventure, but the academic grapevine has carried the story, somewhat distorted, far and wide, and I dare not ignore it completely. There should be a moral here, but the only one I can find is this: Don't take an original idea into a graduate school.

The trip back to Texas after a long absence is one I shall not forget. At St. Louis I boarded the San Antonio car of the Texas Special where I heard again familiar voices of people I never knew talking in familiar accents of
cotton, cattle, and oil. I was already home.

I brought home some stout resolutions: (1) I would never listen to another academic lecture if I could help it; (2) I would recoup my finances; (3) I would henceforth follow my own intellectual interests at whatever cost; (4) I would write history as I saw it from Texas, and not as it appeared in some distant center of learning. Thanks to the tolerance of my department, I did not have to listen to any more academic lectures. I recouped my finances by participating in a series of highly successful textbooks, a wonderful antidote for academic anemia. Then I turned from textbooks and a small fortune to write history as I saw it from Texas. The road led west, and I now knew I had something to say.

A few people have asked why I remained in Texas, as if that were something needing explanation. The obvious answer should be clear from what has been said. The real answer is that I was bound to Texas by many ties. All the sources I needed were there, and those for the Texas Rangers existed nowhere else. Also the key to understanding the American West up to 1875 was there. It was in Texas that the Anglo-Americans first tackled the problem of living on the plains; it was there that they made the first adjustments, such as learning how to fight on horseback and how to handle cattle from horses. The processes of this adjustment that I was slowly discovering could be perceived more clearly from the south end of the plains corridor than from any other vantage point. And of course when I returned to Texas without the degree I was not in a favorable position to be considered elsewhere. My situation was like that of Mr. George B. Dealey, who began work as an errand boy in a Texas newspaper office and wound up later as owner of what became a truly great newspaper. “Why, Mr. Dealey,” an admirer asked, “did you happen to stay in Texas?” “The answer is very simple,” Mr. Dealey said. “No one offered me a job.”

Without design, I was now on the way to becoming a western historian. I was excellently prepared because I had never had a course in that field, and therefore could view it without preconceived notions or borrowed points of view. With an instinct for the possible, I had stumbled into the least complex area of the United States where there were no industries as in the North, no special institutions as in the South, no battlefields nor statesmen, and only local politics. Practically all the records were in English so that the language requirements were negligible.

Slight as the demands were, I was ill prepared to meet them. My idea of the compelling unity of the American West had now become an obsession. That unity was exemplified in the geology, the geography, the climate, vege-
tation, animal life and Indian life, all background forces operating with
telling effect on those people who in the nineteenth century crawled out of
the salubrious eastern woodland to live in this harsh land. To the problem
of understanding this Western environment in all its aspects, I applied the
technique learned from Keasbey. This technique consisted of taking an en-
vironment, in this case the Great Plains, as a unit, and superimposing layer
after layer of its components with geology as the foundation and the latest
human culture, literature, as the final product, the flower growing out of
the compost of human effort and physical forces. There was a compelling
logic in the plan for him who would follow it, but to plough through such
unknown fields as geology, climatology, botany, and anthropology to arrive
finally at the sixteenth century—when men began to make a record of their
puny efforts, many failures and few successes—in order to write the heroic
and tragic history of the American West, was no small task. But it was high
adventure. I have never worked so hard or with such exaltation as in those
days when I carved out of the books piece after piece and found that they
all fit together to form a harmonious pattern which I knew beforehand was
there.

Yes, this was the easy field. No matter how hard I worked, I was still a
western historian. No one understood the trouble or the fun I was having in
relating the many fields to my topic. In commenting one day to a colleague
in a more scholarly division of history, I said: “Never have I felt so keenly
the need of an education. The fact that I didn’t get one is most unfortunate!”

“Yes,” he said, “but think how lucky you were in getting into a field
where you don’t need it!”

In two respects I was indeed lucky. (1) In the Great Plains I had chosen
an environment simple in structure whose force was so compelling as to
influence profoundly whatever touched it. The trail was plain, and the tech­
nique learned from Keasbey was applicable. (2) I was also lucky in that I was
examining for meaning a familiar land which I had known as a child. A
friend asked me once when I began preparation to write The Great Plains.
I answered that I began at the age of four when my father left the humid
East and set his family down in West Texas, in the very edge of the open,
arid country which stretched north and west farther than a boy could
imagine. There I touched the hem of the garment of the real frontier; there
I tasted alkali. I was not the first man, or boy; but the first men, Indian
fighters, buffalo hunters, trail-drivers, half-reformed outlaws, and Oklahoma
boomers were all around, full of memories and eloquent in relating them to
small boys. There I saw the crops burned by drought, eaten by grasshoppers,
and destroyed by hail. I felt the searing winds come furnace-hot from the
desert to destroy in a day the hopes of a year, and I saw a trail herd blinded
and crazy from thirst completely out of control of horse-weary cowboys
with faces so drawn they looked like death masks. In the hard-packed yard
and on the encircling red-stone hills was the geology, in the pasture the
desert botany and all the wild animals of the plains save the buffalo. The
Indians, the fierce Comanches, had so recently departed, leaving memories
so vivid and tales so harrowing that their red ghosts, lurking in every mott
and hollow, drove me home all prickly with fear when I ventured too far.
The whole Great Plains was there in microcosm, and the book I wrote was
but an extension and explanation of what I had known firsthand in mini­
ture, in a sense an autobiography with scholarly trimmings.

_The Great Plains_ was published in 1931, and no more need be said about
it except that it has never been revised, never will be revised by me, never
has been imitated, and I am told by the publisher it never will go out of
print. I came out of the experience of writing it—doing something in my
own way—with a sense of power that comes to him who has made a long
journey for a purpose, overcome the hardships, and returned to tell with
appropriate exaggeration what to him is an important tale.

I was forty-three years old and still without the degree. There was noth­
ing to do but turn back to the Texas Rangers which had been thrown aside
in the excitement of exploring the Great Plains. At this stage Dr. Eugene C.
Barker suggested that I use _The Great Plains_ as a dissertation and take the
degree at the University of Texas. I objected because I thought more of the
book than that; it was not a dissertation, and I doubt the subject would have
been accepted by any discreet department in the country.¹ Too big.

It was necessary to go through some mumbo jumbo to satisfy the regula­
tions, but this was done with proper decorum and the degree was given to
me a year later. I did not earn it. I have sat on many doctoral committees,
al­
ways spiritually very near to the cornered candidate, and I have never sat
on one where I could have passed the examination. I have, as my colleagues

¹ Apparently Turner had a little trouble in making his Wisconsin subject palatable to the
Johns Hopkins professors. Fulmer Mood, after stating that Herbert Baxter Adams directed
Turner's dissertation, says: “Adams did not think that the West had institutions worthy of
study, but he permitted the young man from Wisconsin to follow his own bent. Institutional
history . . . was the style at Johns Hopkins, and Turner wrote . . . on the trading post as an
institution. He was able to demonstrate in learned fashion, and perhaps with . . . tongue in
. . . cheek, that the trading post could be followed back into Phoenician and Roman times.”
Fulmer Mood, “Turner's Formative Period,” _The Early Writings of Frederick Jackson Turner_
(Madison, Wis., 1938), 20.

Dr. Mood is a little unfair to Adams. He accepted the widest variety of subjects in his
seminar, including Charles Howard Shinn's _Land Laws of Mining Districts_ (Baltimore, Md.,
1884), but all had to be treated as institutions.
know, I am sure, been a push-over for people who have trouble answering silly questions.

_The Texas Rangers_ was published in 1935, eighteen years after I started it. The writing of a book is an act of resolution. At some stage the author must say: "No more research. I will not be lured away by new material. I will write this damned thing now." What led me to this resolution and held me to the task was the realization that 1935 would mark the hundredth anniversary of the Texas Rangers, and the next year Texas would celebrate with fanfare and much false history the centennial of its independence.

Though it takes resolution to begin a book, it takes more to complete it. There are dark moments when the struggling author wonders why he began it, and if it is worth while anyway. There are times when he is lost in the dark forest of alternatives. He can’t go forward and he can’t go back. Fred Gipson, author of _Hound-Dog Man_, tells a story to illustrate this crisis as he experienced it. After World War I, a neighbor took a contract to drive 3,000 head of goats 150 miles through the hill country of Texas. The only help he could get was Fred, aged sixteen, and another boy aged thirteen. The day after the drive started, the autumn rains set in and continued for three weeks. A goat is a self-willed brute, essentially a desert animal, averse to the dousing effect of water and reluctant to travel in the rain. When 3,000 goats hump up and refuse to move except under prodding, it makes a problem for the man and two boys who have to move them. The rain had soaked the clothes, the bedding, put out the camp fires, and mildewed the food; it had made the soles come loose on the boys’ shoes so that they had to be tied on with binding twine and baling wire. Tempers wore thin. The smaller boy threw a stick at a humped-up goat and broke its leg. The boss, completely exhausted himself, lost his temper, and gave the boy the roughest tongue-lashing he had ever had. Fred said he can never forget the picture of abject misery this boy made as he stood, the rain running off his flop hat, his face distorted with anger and hurt, his tears as copious as the rain. When the boss was out of earshot, he made a futile gesture of despair and said, "Dammit, Fred, if I knew the way home, I’d quit." So would many an author.

But if one persists, both goats and books can be delivered. Since _The Texas Rangers_ was the only book about Texas that appeared in 1935, Paramount bought it for the Texas Centennial picture of 1936. Paramount made full use of the title, and little else. The picture was quite successful. I am not going to tell you what I got for it in the midst of the depression, but I will say this: what I got made the depression more tolerable.
My next adventure, *Divided We Stand*, published in 1937, guaranteed that I would never be called to a northern university. I knew this when I wrote it, but I was doing pretty well where I was. The book has been called a pamphlet, a philippic, and a good many other things. Because the people could read it and did, it was not objective. It was based on the simple device of dividing the country into three sections, the North, the South, and the West, and examining the distribution of the national wealth among them. It explained how, after the Civil War, the North, directed by the Republican party, seized economic control of the nation and maintained it through corporate monopoly. The result was that by 1930 the North, with 21 per cent of the territory and 57 per cent of the people, owned and controlled approximately 85 per cent of the nation’s wealth, although about 90 per cent of the natural resources were located in the South and West. (I thought of that in examining the distribution of the presidents of this Association. The North has had 90 per cent of the presidents and about the same proportion of nearly everything else.) The book in original form trod on the toes of a powerful monopoly of patents, and it in turn trod on my publisher, leading to expurgation in galley of all reference to this company and to its products, glass bottles. The book was quickly declared out of print on the ground that it did not sell.

But it had done its work. The Hartford Empire Company was hauled to Washington where I saw the same men who had dictated virtually what I should print about milk bottles quail before Thurmond Arnold’s young attorneys who gave an examination that Hartford Empire did not pass. The book was also a factor in causing Franklin D. Roosevelt to issue the report of 1938 and his sensational letter declaring the South the economic problem Number One of the nation, and expressing the determination to do something about what he called the imbalance.

Although declared out of print, the book would not die. The federal investigation of the Hartford Empire Company put all the records in the public domain. From these records I told the whole story and published the revised book myself. It is now in the fourth edition, has sold 15,000 copies, and is still in print. The original publisher is out of business. Recently I re-examined the distribution of the national wealth among the sections to find that between 1930 and 1950 the South and the West gained in every category of wealth and well-being, in some cases spectacularly; and the North, while still far in the lead, lost correspondingly. Now with the Giants and Dodgers in California, with the House and Senate led and this Association presided over by Texans, it would seem that the North is going the way of the Republican party.
The story of my fourth adventure in history is told in *The Great Frontier*, published in 1952. It, like *The Great Plains*, is based on a single idea, best expressed in the question: What effect did all the new lands discovered by Columbus and his associates around 1500 have on Western civilization during the following 450 years? What happened to 100,000,000 people shut up in the wedge of western Eurasia when they suddenly acquired title to six times the amount of land they had before, fresh land, thinly tenanted, loaded with resources too great to be comprehended? What did all this wealth and the act of appropriating it do to and for the 100,000,000 poverty-stricken people of Western Europe and their descendants?

Slowly the thesis emerged, the boom hypothesis, around which the story was to be told. The Great Frontier precipitated a boom on the Metropolis, a boom of gigantic proportions which began when Columbus returned from his first voyage and accelerated until all the new lands had been appropriated. This boom accompanied the rise of modern civilization and attended the birth of a set of new institutions and ideas designed to service a booming society, chief among them modern democracy and capitalism and the idea of progress. The small booms we know, based on oil or gold or soil, burst when that on which they are based is depleted. They have all been temporary, and the period in which they existed has been considered abnormal. But this big boom, based on all the resources of the Great Frontier, lasted so long that it was considered normal and its institutions permanent. By about 1900 the Great Frontier, of which the American frontier was a fragment, began to close, and as it closed the idea of progress and the efficacy of democracy and capitalism were questioned, put in strain, and since 1914 these boom-born ideas and institutions have been fighting a defensive action. Unless we find some means to restore the boom, future historians may look back on the period from 1500 to 1950 as the Age of the Great Frontier, the most abnormal period in the history of mankind. So ran the argument.

Given the point of view of a Great Frontier set over against the Metropolis, many aspects of modern history fell into place, could be understood rather than remembered. Under the controlling idea, or thesis, many sub-theses emerged, such as the windfall theory of wealth, the relation of the Great Frontier to modern romantic literature as illustrated in Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner," the utopias, and such feats of imagination as *Gulliver's Travels*, *Defoe's Robinson Crusoe*, and Stevenson's *Treasure Island*, examples of what the Great Frontier did to the human imagination.

In the realm of economics I advanced the theory of the dual circulation of wealth, which, if true, might lead the economists to reexamine their subject
and data and their basic assumptions. The economists have thus far treated wealth as if it had but one motion, circulation from hand to hand among the people. Actually, since the discoveries if not before, wealth has had two motions. It circulates horizontally among the people, and in modern times it has moved vertically between the people and the sovereign, and the character of its vertical movement has had profound effects on modern institutions.

By the discoveries the sovereigns of Europe acquired title to all the lands of the Great Frontier. Unable to use so much land, these sovereigns began dispersing it to the people, letting it sift down in townships, leagues, and quarter sections, eventually to small people. This gigantic land dispersal went on constantly from 1600 to 1900, three booming centuries when wealth was moving vertically, from the sovereign downward to the people, making them economically independent and politically free. When the frontier closed, the sovereign had nothing more to give, and then he began the reverse process of taking, not from the frontier, but from some of the people in order to have something to give to others. In short, wealth began making a complete vertical circuit instead of flowing in one direction. This vertical circulation today supplements the horizontal circulation so precious to free enterprisers and keeps it going. If this idea of the dual movement of wealth is true—and it seems obvious once it is pointed out—it should, I thought, have far-reaching implications for the study of modern economics.

The journey through the Great Frontier was a mental adventure of the first magnitude. Many splendid vistas opened, and many things that were familiar took on new meaning. It was lonely there; many times I did not know which way to go, and I, like the boy driving the goats, would have been glad to go home.

As I look back on this program of work, I see in the four books a record of a mental adventure into an expanding world. The Texas Rangers was local, simple in structure, and involved little thought. The Great Plains was regional, based on a single idea. Divided We Stand was national. The Great Frontier was international, and, like The Great Plains, was the expansion of an idea. The common element in them all is the frontier, dominant in three and present in the fourth. Taken together they tell the story of the expansion of the mind from a hard-packed West Texas dooryard to the outer limits of the Western world.

When one writes of the West and the frontier, the question is sure to arise as to his relation to Frederick J. Turner. It is often said that Webb belongs to the Turner school. I would like to take this opportunity to state my
relation to Turner as I see it. No one respects Turner more than I, and no one is less patient with the critics who take exception to some detail in Turner and argue from this small base that his thesis is wrong. There are few so foolish as to say that the existence of a vast body of free land would not have some effects on the habits, customs, and institutions of those who had access to it. That is essentially what Turner said in his essay about the United States, and that is what I said in The Great Frontier about Western European civilization. Though my canvas was bigger than Turner’s, and my span of time a century longer, the thesis is the same. Turner looked at a fragment of the frontier; I tried to look at the whole thing. If Turner’s thesis is true, then mine is true; if his is a fallacy, then mine is also fallacious. Since Turner was first in time and I a generation later, I will probably always be counted as a part of the Turner school. And this I accept as an honor.

The question that may arise is this: Am I in the frontier school because Turner led me there or because I stumbled into it independently? I think I stumbled in. I cannot prove this, but I would like to submit the evidence of my assumption.

As already stated, I never had a course in western history. I never saw Turner. At the time I began writing The Great Plains I had never read the Turner essay and I refrained from reading it until I had completed the study. There is little in Turner’s writing to suggest that he anticipated the idea developed in The Great Plains. The frontier that he knew was east of the Mississippi.

If I did not follow Turner, whom did I follow? What is my intellectual heritage? You will recall that I have paid repeated tribute to Lindley Miller Keasbey, the talented professor of the nonexistent field of institutional history. It was Keasbey who gave me an understanding for and appreciation of the relationship between an environment and the civilization resting upon it; it was Keasbey who taught me, and many others, to begin with the geology or geography, and build upon this foundation the superstructure of the flora, fauna, and anthropology, arriving at last at the modern civilization growing out of this foundation. Turner did not proceed in that manner, but that is the way I proceeded in The Great Plains and less obviously in The Great Frontier.

But who is Keasbey? To answer that question, we must go back to the European thinkers who influenced Turner—and Keasbey. Prominent among them was an Italian economist, sociologist, and philosopher named Achille Loria (1857–1943) who wrote in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.
Loria's name is found in the Turner literature, and Turner quoted him in the 1893 essay.²

As an indication that Turner might have found some comfort in the Italian, I quote the following from Loria: "A tyranny ... is ... automatically regulated by the existence of free land, which of itself renders the exercise of true despotic government impossible so long as slavery is unheard of; for the subjects always have a way of avoiding oppression of the sovereign by abandoning him and setting up for themselves upon an unoccupied territory."³

The occasional reference to Loria in the literature caused me to look him up in the library. Imagine my surprise when I found that the English translation of one of Loria's most important books was done by Lindley Miller Keasbey of institutional history. If Loria influenced Turner, he most certainly influenced Keasbey, who influenced me more than any other man. If this is my line of descent, then I am on a collateral line from the European scholars through Keasbey rather than from those scholars by way of Turner.

A book dealing with an idea and its ramifications, with a thesis or interpretation, is more likely to be kicked around by the critics than one that sticks to the facts, and this may explain why nonventuresome historians, schooled in intellectual timidity, are so factual. Both The Great Plains and The Great Frontier are idea books, and each has received its share of critical attention. This is to be expected and as it should be. If an idea or interpretation cannot survive a critic, any critic, it is no good anyway. If the idea is sound, then the criticism advertises and spreads it. William E. Dodd told us once never to reply to a critic, and I have never voluntarily done so. The critic is entitled to his view and the author will waste his time trying to change it. The idea has its own destiny, and once launched it is independent of both author and critic.

In conclusion I want to pay tribute to a group not accustomed to receiving it. I refer to several generations of graduate students who have generously contributed their time, effort, and ingenuity in working out the details and ramifications of ideas presented to them in seminar. I have no

² Turner quotes from Loria's Analisi della proprietà capitalisti (2 vols., Turin, 1889), II, 15, as follows: "America has the key to the historical enigma which Europe has sought for centuries in vain, and the land which has no history reveals luminously the course of universal history." See Turner's footnote, page 207, in the 1893 essay, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," in American Historical Association, Annual Report, 1893 (Washington, D. C., 1894), 199-227.

³ The Economic Foundations of Society, tr. Keasbey (New York, 1899), 23. Loria published the first edition of this work in 1885. The above sentence is taken from the revised edition of 1899, the only one available to me.
notion of what they got from me, but I do know that I got a great deal from them, and they a great deal from one another.

They were good companions on some exciting intellectual excursions into the Great Plains and into the vastly greater frontier. Some of them will have their own story to tell and I trust they will have the courage to tell it as they see it, and never as they think I might want it told. I would rather liberate than bind them.

This exercise tonight comes at the end of my academic service. This address is the last act of an official character that I expect to perform, a sort of climax to a high adventure. Because my performance can bring no rewards and inflict no penalties, I have said what I wanted to say in the way that I wanted to say it. If what I have said is unorthodox, it is consistent with much that I have done. I do not recommend my course to others, but it seems in retrospect almost inevitable for me.

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