FREDERICK JACKSON TURNER’S FRONTIER THESIS 1893
The Closing of the Frontier

- 1890 - No frontier left in the country
- 1893 - Frederick Jackson Turner: The Frontier Thesis
- The Frontier had been a safety valve and had helped shape American National Character
- Fear that closed frontier would cause problems
Turner Thesis (1893)

Frederick Jackson Turner’s Frontier Thesis

- History professor, Univ. of Wisconsin
- **Thesis**: frontier experience and westward expansion had stimulated individualism, nationalism, and democracy
- Suggested “frontier” had alleviated social and economic problems of an industrial society
According to a bulletin from the Superintendent of the U.S. Census in 1890, the frontier had “closed”

Turner says the closing of the frontier symbolized a great historic moment
Why?

- Frontier had required immigrants and transplants to become a composite nationality as they struggled together
- Frontier promised all relative economic equality
- Frontier required strength, practicality, ingenuity and optimism
- Frontier sometimes required cooperation
- What will the closing of the frontier mean to America?
Controversies

- West had never been the empty frontier of FJT’s thesis
- If there had been a frontier, it wasn’t actually closed now
- Not many discontented urban Easterners had moved to the West in bad times
However ...

- *Was there a psychological benefit in knowing the “frontier” was an option?*
Others Say …

- The reverse was true — the city was a safety valve or outlet for rural discontent.

- Instead of individualism, innovation and democratic renewal, the frontier brought at least as much conservatism, inheritance, and continuity.

- There was no distinctive western environment — different areas/different feel.
Unlike Turner’s West, bravery and success coexist with oppression, greed, and failure (ghost towns, Indian Reservations, poor barrios, barren landscapes).

That the New Western Historians omit an important part of the western experience – the romance.