DARK CLOUDS AND SILVER LININGS: THE EFFECT OF THE FRONTIER EXPERIENCE ON TWENTIETH-CENTURY AMERICA*

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On February 21st this year, a new president of Czechoslovakia, Vaclav Havel, addressed the United States Congress. His nation, as we are all aware, is but one of several that are in the process of throwing off the Communist yoke. Again and again during these stirring times their new leadership has spoken of the United States and democracy, and their desire to go the western--primarily the United States'--way. Havel's comments about democracy were a little different from what we might have expected. "As long as people are people," he stated, "democracy in the full sense of the word, will always be no more than an ideal." He said "it can be approached as one would the horizon in ways that may be better or worse, but it can never be fully attained." And he added that people in the United States are lucky, for we "have been approaching democracy uninterruptedly for more than two hundred years, and [our] journey toward the horizon has never been disrupted by a totalitarian system." Towards the end of his speech, this playwright intellectual added a more sobering note. He suggested "that we still don't know how to put morality ahead of politics, science, and economics. We are still incapable," he said, "of understanding that the only genuine backbone of all our actions, if they are to be moral, is responsibility."[1]

We will have our own interpretations of what he was saying, but to me he was pointing up the fact that even though we have striven for democracy for more than two hundred years without disruption by a totalitarian system, we still have problems. These difficulties make democracy an ideal, always on the horizon, but never attained. We still have a failure of morality and responsibility. Possibly being mere mortals, we always will have such failures. But, Havel seemed to say, we can try, can't we? Clearly, Havel believes that we have come further than any other nation down the road towards this ideal he calls democracy, but he suggests that we still have a distance to go, lessons to learn.

A few weeks later I picked up the April, 1990, issue of *Harper's* magazine which has two photographs of Czechs in western garb, or at least western garb as they think it should be. One picture is of two individuals dressed as frontiersmen, the other of three Czechs garbed as Indians are

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supposed to have been attired. The caption states that Czechs have a seventy-year tradition of hiking in the woods dressed in frontier garb. And it struck me that the democracy of the United States, so admired over there is really the image of democracy, and the land, and the people of the nineteenth century frontier in North America. Remarkably, to this day, the frontier experience is still equated with the United States, with unrestrained liberty in the broadest sense of the word.

And yet, the United States has not had a frontier for a century, this year, 1990, being the centennial of the year in which Henry Gannett, Superintendent of the Census, stated that there "can hardly be said to be a frontier line remaining." Yet, like the afterglow of a western sunset, the frontier continues in not just the United States, but in the world psyche as a living remembrance, a golden age which refuses to tarnish with time. It remains as a hazy, imprecise image of a land of liberty, plenty, and opportunity; a place where dreams are fulfilled. I suspect that much of the adulation for that mystic abode continues because, as Havel said, our democracy has been unbroken by tyranny for more than two hundred years, and much of the frontier experience continued right on into the twentieth century. After all, a single date, 1890, did not end our frontier in terms of its effect upon the national character, our government and psyche; one date did not change our image of what and who we are. It seems appropriate, then, in this centennial year of the frontier's official end, to ask what is left of the United State's frontier experience. And of what is left, what is good and what is bad--what attributes constitute dark clouds, and which ones are silver linings for us in the twentieth century.

Just in case some of you have not been exposed to Frederick Jackson Turner and the Turner thesis, so-called, allow me to fill you in briefly. Both the date (1890) and the Director of the Census's statement about the end of the frontier, might have passed unnoticed had it not been for a young history professor at the University of Wisconsin, Frederick Jackson Turner. On the hot, sultry evening of July 12, 1893, he appeared before a small audience of historians assembled at the World's Columbian Exhibition in Chicago, and delivered his paper on "The Significance of the Frontier in American History". So determined was he to give an excellent presentation that he had made the supreme sacrifice and turned down the opportunity to attend Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show that afternoon.[2]

Four lengthy papers preceded his on that hot evening without air conditioning. From the open windows of the Art Institute where the meeting was held, one could perhaps hear the merry sounds of a calliope and observe the dazzling glow rising from the White City with its abundance of electric lights. When Turner's time came those attending the meeting must have been as comatose as freshmen in an 8:00 a.m. history class. Ray Allen Billington,

Turner's biographer, suggests that Turner probably cut his paper short, the condition of his audience being as it must have been. (Although Billington adds that "they were a hardy lot.") Regardless of the situation at its delivery, the thesis aroused interest and was soon well-known among historians.[3]

For those not well acquainted with the Turner thesis, he states that "up to our own day [1890] American History has been in large degree the history of the colonization of the Great West." And he goes on to emphasize that "an area of free land, its continuous recession, and the advance of American settlement westward, explain American development." Eighteen-ninety, he says, marks the closing of a great historic movement in United States history.[4]

Since 1893 historians have subjected Turner's thesis to microscopic analysis.[5] Beginning in about 1933 his critics began making headway against his arguments. Possibly the complexities of life in the United States since then--depression and wars, the nation's urbanization and foreign affairs, the distancing in time from the frontier--have assisted in relegating Turner's thesis to secondary importance in the interpretation of United States History. Certainly the number of courses on the Westward Movement has declined in our colleges, and some United States History texts barely mention either turner or Westward Expansion. One wonders if their authors ever heard of the frontier. Just as macho men don't eat quiche, sophisticated historians apparently no longer read Turner.

I think this is unpardonable. Let me begin my argument this way: It is a historical fact that there was an advancing frontier in North America from at least 1763 until 1890. Certainly such a massive folk movement, spanning one hundred twenty-seven years and nearly four generations, impressed its participants. Certainly such a movement had a lasting influence extending far into the future. And so, legitimately, we ask what character traits did it impress upon the people? What effects did it have upon government? Why has the frontier experience been so venerated? And more: How did it affect the way other peoples looked upon us?

If these are valid questions, then certainly the frontier thesis warrants our continued study. Obviously in analyzing the frontier experience one can take as many aspects of human life as there are directions of the compass. I am going to concentrate today on five aspects which I consider predominant, being fully aware of the importance of others. Three constitute silver linings; two are dark clouds. I believe materialism is one, liberty--call it freedom if you wish--is a second prevailing element of the frontier mystique; and a third is egalitarianism: these are silver linings. License is a fourth, and, grouped together, bigotry, racism, and cruelty a fifth: these two constitute dark clouds.

At the risk of being damned for heresy I would like first to modernize some of Turner's terminology. In doing so I am not changing the meaning, but rather, I am adjusting it to the climate of opinion of the late twentieth century.

Turner emphasized the existence of an area of free land, and its continuous recession. Indeed, I believe he was correct--that *was* the frontier--but now it comes through as a narrow view. I would prefer to describe the frontier as an area where liberty and free land fused to offer the greatest opportunity for materialistic advance anywhere in the world. True, the pioneers wanted land, but why?--to till the soil, build homes, make improvements--in short, to better their well-being on this earth. It has been said that the pioneer was not really mercenary or selfish--all he wanted was the land adjoining his!

Turner also has been criticized, and rightfully so, for his failure sufficiently to consider the heterogeneous humanity made up of tavern owners, general storekeepers, millers, blacksmiths, bankers, lawyers, doctors, preachers, stagecoach operators (later railroaders), draymen, day laborers and employees, and still others besides farmers who accompanied the push into the new country. Were not these people also searching for the One Big Chance, for material betterment?

Along with their quest for worldly improvement went their love of an intangible known as liberty, or freedom, an equally acceptable word. It can only be understood by comparison with the conditions endured by many of the peoples of Europe, the Orient and Latin America even to the present. It was freedom from taxation (by and large), freedom of speech and press, freedom of religion, freedom from landlords, from permanent indebtedness, from enforced tithing for a church, freedom from a social system hoary with age, freedom from military service, and freedom from an unpredictable but often capricious, bullying, government. Early on, in 1792, Hector St. John de Crevecoeur in his *Letters from an American Farmer* stated it quite well: in America man's labor produced through his self-interest was retained by him "without any part being claimed, either by a despotic prince, a rich abbot, or a mighty lord." Come to America he urged "Ye poor Europeans, ye, who sweat and work for the great, . . . ye, who only breathe the air of nature because it cannot be withheld from you . . ."[6]

Seventy or eighty years later the same thoughts were echoed in a song that Andrew Carnegie remembered from his childhood in Dunfermline, Scotland:

> To the West, to the West, to the land of the free,
> Where the mighty Missouri rolls down to the sea;
> Where a man is a man if he's willing to toil,
> And the humblest may gather the fruits of the soil;
> Where the children are blessings and he who has most
> Has aid for his fortune and riches to boast.
> Where the young may exalt and the aged may rest,
> Away, far away, to the land of the West.[7]

The combination of a frontier in a temperate zone, viewed as a veritable Garden of Eden, a frontier whose only challenges to settlement were a few aborigines and the restraints imposed by a virgin land, contested by crude nineteenth century technology and transportation (both of which were revolutionized on the frontier, for indeed necessity is the mother of invention) *plus* incredible freedom from all restrictions--that combination should have resulted and in fact did result in an explosion of human energy, ingenuity, and physical advancement on the west-moving frontier.

Turner emphasized the new man (and woman) created by this combination of opportunity in a weak or even nonexistent society. In an oft-quoted part of his essay he said, "to the frontier the American intellect owes its striking characteristics. That coarseness and strength combined with acuteness and inquisitiveness; that practical, inventive turn of mind, quick to find expedients; that masterful grasp of *material* [my italics] things, lacking in the artistic but powerful to effect great ends; that restless, nervous energy; that dominant individualism, working for good and evil, and withal that buoyance and exuberance which comes with freedom--these [he said] are traits of the frontier." Was he not saying that these are the traits of men and women in a new country open to settlement without any restrictions from an old society?

And something else: it created a Happy Republic.[8] Surely the enjoyment of life has to be considered in any study of the United States' frontier.

It was freedom amidst abundance that created this new man. Turner's settlers met the challenge by attacking the frontier as if a civilization had to be built from howling wilderness in less than a lifetime. All was bustle and hurry. "All the passionate eagerness, all the strenuous effort of the Westerns is directed towards the material development of the country," wrote James Bryce in *The American Commonwealth.* "This is their daily and nightly thought . . . . Time seems too short for whatever they have to do . . . . One feels as if caught and whirled along in a foaming stream, chafing against its banks, such is the passion of these men to accomplish in their own lifetimes what in the past it took centuries to effect."[9] All at once a man (or woman--there were a lot of very independent women out there) might practice law, be a realtor, farmer, mill owner, stagecoach operator, money lender, or miner. If blessed with good health, reasonable intelligence, some education, industry, and ambition, the frontier was their oyster--a scrumptious one indeed. With exuberance and the qualities Turner listed--restless, nervous energy, dominant individualism, and a grasp for material things--they developed the characteristics of the personality called American. Haste was one manifestation of this; risk was another: they took chances. They skimmed the cream off one part of the New Country and

went on to a new frontier to do it all over again.

And oh! The chances they took--not just financial ones, but chances involving their very lives! Rudyard Kipling remarked on this while riding a train from California into Oregon. The train crossed trestles "something over a hundred feet high and looking like a collection of match-sticks," he wrote. He was told that they "last five or six years, then get out of repair and a train goes through 'em, or else a forest fire eats 'em up." The danger did not phase Kipling's fellow passengers. Another volunteered, "I remember when a hog [got caught 'neath the cow-catcher] and wrecked an excursion train and killed sixty people." The frontierperson apparently gazed out the window, completely at ease. "Guess the engineer will look out, though," he commented. The young Englishman concluded that there was rather too much guessing in the United States. "As one of [the local passengers] put it forcefully," Kipling observed, "We guess a trestle will stand forever and we guess that we can patch up a washout on the track, and we guess the road's clear, and sometimes we guess ourselves into the depot, and sometimes we guess ourselves into Hell!"[10]

It was a wild Garden of Eden open to an exhilarated, industrious, free people. Images of their lives; images of the free land on the cutting edge of a democracy that itself had avoided a lapse into tyranny, spread throughout the world on through the twentieth century. In spite of frontier's end and diminishing abundance that had to be divided among an ever increasing populace, the mystique of the frontier, of the new country, remained a symbol of hope throughout the world. Today, a full century after frontier's end, that mystique continues.

And so, at liberty in a new country with a wide open frontier, people in the United States set about in a frenzy creating their new utopia. Originally, the land being vacant (save for the Indians), governmentless and societyless, a strain of strong egalitarianism entered frontier life. The concept that one man was as good as another (and one woman just as good as another woman) was all-pervading. It bothered those who considered themselves "better," those who knew that life's realities denied equality; that all people might begin equal but they would not all end equal. Those who knew protested, but to little avail.

Hugh Henry Brackenridge was one of those who demurred. His Quixotic novel, *Modern Chivalry,* (one volume of which was the first book published west of the Appalachians) satirically described the situation. Captain John Farrago and his man, an Irish bog-trotting immigrant named Teague Oregan (not an ancestor, so far as is known, of any modern politicians) travel about the United States including the frontier regions, the Captain, figuratively speaking, fighting windmills. *Modern Chivalry* is not good literature, but it has significance for social historians because of the adventures of its main characters, Captain Farrago and his man. The Captain is kept busy keeping

Teague on the straight and narrow. For example, at one crossroads settlement a political rally is taking place. Imagine the Captain's astonishment when he realizes the orator on the stump is none other than Teague, running for public office. The Captain cut in:

> . . . "this servant of mine is but a bog-trotter," he protested. "He is totally ignorant of the great principles of legislation. . . You are surely carrying the matter too far, in thinking to make a senator of this hostler . . . to set those hands which have been lately employed in currying my horse, to the draughting [of] bills, and preparing business for the house."

The people scowled; they resented the Captain's interference. "This young man may be your servant, or another man's servant," they said, "but if we choose to make him a delegate, what is that to you? He may not yet be skilled in the matter, but there is a good day a-coming. We will impower him, and it is better to trust a plain man like him, than one of your high flyers, that will make laws to suit their own purposes."

No doubt about it, Oregan would have been elected had the Captain not drawn him aside and presented his man with good arguments against running for office. "Let it never be said, that you quitted an honest livelihood, the taking care of my horse, to follow the new fangled whims of the times, and to be a statesman," the Captain lectured him On another occasion Teague was nominated to membership in the American Philosophical Society.[11]

Hugh Brackenridge was running against the tide. Although he believed in democracy, he was aware of its pitfalls and tried to demonstrate its dangers by creating illustrative incidents involving a retired Captain and his illiterate man as they made their way through the new country. The lessons had no effect.

Materialism, liberty, egalitarianism: these concepts permeated the minds of people in the United States throughout the frontier period. Its believers included Andrew Jackson, that rough-cut aristocrat with his hardly humble home, the Hermitage, in Nashville. Jackson, you will recall, vetoed the Bank Bill in 1832. "There are no necessary evils in government," he wrote in his veto message. "Its evils exist only in its abuses. If it would confine itself to equal protection, and, as Heaven does its rains, shower its favors alike upon the high and the low, the rich and the poor, it would be an unqualified blessing."[12]

Visitors to the new country commented on the loose class lines, on the democratic attitude (with a small "d") and the local idea that anyone was as good as anyone else. Mrs. Frances Trollope, who was here in the late 1820s, was amazed at the number of generals, colonels, and majors aboard the

steamboat she had boarded. She soon discovered that this was a common American way of greeting strangers even though they may have never been in the military. When the buxom Mrs. Trollope arrived in Cincinnati and set up housekeeping, she had to "get help," as she wrote, "for it is more than petty treason to the Republic, to call a free citizen a 'servant'."[13]

Throughout the nineteenth century this egalitarianism characterized the United States, and it was one of the lasting incentives that enticed other peoples to come here. The concept of an equality in which the mayor said good morning to you and tipped his hat, the priest may have called you "my son" or "my child" but dared not give political or secular advice, was emphasized again and again in the "American Letters" sent back to the "Old Country" by its immigrated sons and daughters.

It so permeates thought in the United States that it hardly seems necessary to play upon it, but let me remind you of its longevity. A novel published in the twentieth century was based upon this theme of equality. Its title is *Ruggles of Red Gap,* and was written by a now forgotten fictioneer named Harry Lyon Wilson. In the motion picture version Charles Laughton played the part of Ruggles, an English valet. The story may be presented very briefly: A couple of affluent westerners vacationing in Paris get into a draw poker game with an English nobleman and one of them wins his valet, Ruggles. Ruggles accepts his fate and, as a valet, crosses the Atlantic and ends up with his master in Red Gap, a western community. As he observes more and more of the United States, Ruggles becomes increasingly unhappy as a valet. The high point of the motion picture is when Ruggles, after an argument with his master, gives his master a good swift kick in the pants![14]

Shocking! But personalities released from the bondage of European and eastern United States culture, class, and society--free in an abundant land--changed fast. They welcomed the egalitarianism. They grasped the opportunities. They did take chances. They were wasteful. And certainly they were too busy for, shall we say, the amenities of life. To put it bluntly, visitors found their social graces revolting.

Charles Dickens, Mrs. Frances Trollope, Rudyard Kipling, and the fictional valet Ruggles, to mention a very few of many, commented critically upon manners in the United States. Dining habits especially shocked them: "They eat unheard-of quantities of corn bread," wrote Dickens, "(almost as good for the digestion as a kneaded pincushion) . . . suck their knives and forks meditatively until they have decided what to take next; then pull them out of their mouths; put them in the dish, help themselves; and fall to work again . . . ."[15] Mrs. Frances Trollope criticized "the voracious rapidity with which the viands were seized and devoured; . . . the frightful manner of feeding with their knives, till the whole blade seemed to enter the mouth; and the more

frightful manner of cleaning the teeth afterwards with a pocket knife . . . ."[16] Almost sixty years later, in 1889, Rudyard Kipling commented on the same theme: "An American," he wrote, "has no meals. He stuffs for ten minutes thrice a day."[17] Slightly facetiously might we ask, is the fast-food drive-through a descendant of our frontier eating habits? And if so, does this constitute a dark cloud or a silver lining?

Elsewhere Mrs. Trollope wrote about United States citizens' "loathful spitting." This disturbed one newspaper editor, who replied to the lady's complaints in verse:

> Mrs. Trollope is comendably bitter
> Against the filthy American spitter
> For spitting his juice all about:
> While the English, they (for so it is writ)
> Disgustingly in their handkerchief spit
> Thus leaving a case of some doubt,
>
> Which, gentle reader, I beg you will sit on,
> And fairly judge 'tween the Yankee and Briton
> So render your verdict, I pray:
> Whether, to weigh its merits to a tittle,
> You think it better to POCKET the spittle,
> Or freely to *spit* it away?[18]

I believe that the concept of an egalitarian society is good. Clearly it has continued well into the twentieth century in spite of the existence of great wealth in the hands of the few. Implicit in all this, of course, lies opportunity, and opportunity means the chance to get ahead (or fall behind) in United States society. Downward mobility is represented by the fact that today none of the Vanderbilts are still listed among America's four hundred wealthiest families, and upward mobility is clearly present when a man can still start a company in his garage that grows to be Apple Computers. Today there may be less egalitarianism in the United States. We have a permanent urban underclass. That constitutes a dark cloud, something lacking in the days of the frontier. But in balance, as a lasting frontier quality, egalitarianism has been one of the silver linings left over from the era.

Exuberance, ingenuity, and hard work were all positive attributes stemming from materialism, liberty, and egalitarianism. But liberty on the frontier often meant license--the fourth dominant quality of the frontier--and that was not so good. Here are some examples of license of the frontier.

Georgia's legislature, as you all know, allowed itself to be bribed

almost to the last member in land matters generally known as the Yazoo Land Frauds--bribed not once, but twice, first in 1789 and again in 1795. The first time it sold twenty-five million acres for less than one cent an acre; when these grandiose schemes fell through, Georgia in 1795 again sold many of the same lands plus more--about thirty-five million acres--for less than a cent and a half an acre. Of course, there *was* a reaction: on February 13, 1796, the legislature declared the sale null and void, and two days later members marched to the front of the capitol where they ripped the pages involving the Yazoo grants from the Journal and destroyed them "by fire from heaven," a sunglass.[19]

A generation later Joseph G. Baldwin, author of *The Flush Times of Alabama and Mississippi,* wrote of heading from his native Virginia for the Old Southwest, to a town in which "about a third of [the citizens] were single gentlemen who had come out on the vague errand of seeking their fortune, or the more definite one of seeking somebody else's . . . " He was there just prior to Jackson's Specie Circular and the Panic of 1837. It was a land boom. Paper fortunes were being made and lost almost by the hour, and legitimacy had almost disappeared. "Larceny," he wrote, "grew not only respectable, but genteel . . . Swindling was raised to the dignity of the fine arts . . . "[20]

To get rich quickly, to acquire land, to be one's own boss, to pay few taxes--these were incentives enough for immigrants to sell the ancestral plot, or leave the plot owned by the landlord, and take steerage for America; or to leave a settled eastern state for an unsettled territory to the West--out on the frontier. That one must be shrewd or be fleeced, that the New Country was dangerous by the very fact of its unbridled freedom, its license, was an accepted risk. However, it can hardly be considered a positive attribute of the frontier experience. Where was Havel's morality and responsibility?

Where there was little government and great potential for wealth, the free individuals who were there made the most of it. Every will-o'-the-wisp promotion found its takers. Probably the greatest example of such license in the history of the western part of the United States was the Great Diamond Hoax of 1872. In fact, after that caper, people in the United States were never again quite so naive.

Two prospectors, Philip Arnold and John Slack, having sold a mining claim for $50,000 or so, then discussed ways of parlaying that sum into a half million dollars or more. They decided to salt some diamonds in a remote part of the West, start rumors, and see what happened. They journeyed by way of Halifax, Nova Scotia, to the low countries, purchased an estimated $30,000 worth of rough-cut diamonds and a few rubies, returned to the West, and in a remote, wind-swept part of extreme northwest Colorado, salted the diamonds.

Shortly thereafter, on a foggy morning in San Francisco, dressed as prospectors, they awaited the opening of a bank. When it opened they entered

and asked to rent a safe deposit box. Arnold and Slack understood human nature. When the clerk asked if nuggets were within the small leather pouch, they swore him to secrecy and showed him diamonds. The transaction performed, the two men then disappeared. They let time and psychology work for them.

And it did. In due time the two men reappeared and discovered, just as they had figured, that the whole financial section of the Bay City was excited over the rumored diamond find and was searching for them. Very carefully they identified themselves, conferred with some of the wealthiest high fliers in San Francisco, actually took them by train and horseback to the diamond fields, and sold their claim for $600,000 cash. The New York and San Francisco Mining and Commercial Company was organized; among its Board of Trustees was General George B. McClellan, of Civil War fame. Meanwhile, Arnold and Slack had disappeared. Fortunately Clarence King, a geologist heading a government survey of the 40th parallel, discovered the diamond fields and exposed the hoax.[21]

These examples--the Yazoo Frauds, chicanery during the Flush Times, and the diamond hoax--point up the license which was all too common. There are many other examples: ranchers grazing stock on the public domain as if it were their own property; fraud committed under the Homestead Act and the Desert Land Act; timber barons marching sailors to the proper places of registry and purchase, paying them as little as a bottle of whiskey for fifty or a hundred acres of prime timberland; the almost unbelievable exploitation of Indian tribes by unscrupulous Indian traders. Where was the morality? Where the responsibility?

Liberty clearly has its limitations, but there were few deterrents to it during the frontier experience. Government--federal, territorial (which was really the same thing), and state--always lagged behind settlement and exploitation on the frontier. As a result law enforcement was lax if evident at all, and all manner of civil and criminal violations took place. To hate government, unless it gave land away or furnished a military post to bring specie into a frontier area, was almost a given on the frontier. As James Bryce noted, "horse-stealing and insults to women are the two unpardonable offenses; all others are often suffered to go unpunished."[22] And we paid for it in many ways.

It may be that our love of weak government is a holdover from the frontier. If so, some deep thinking needs to be done. When the public has decided the duties of government, then that government should react by carrying out those duties with promptness, vigor, and fairness. But this was not so during the frontier period, and to a degree it is not so today. Result? The Savings and Loan losses, the revelations at the Department of Housing and

Urban Development, the scandal involving generic drugs. License is the point--loose or absent crime control on the frontier, continued loose or absent enforcement today. If the present situation is a holdover from the frontier experience, then it is one of the black clouds continuing from that experience.

Racism is another trait that was certainly among us in the frontier age, and who would deny its continued existence? In the nineteenth century as well as in our own, it was often associated with violence. And it permeated life in the United States. Read *The Tall Tales of Davy Crockett,* which were almanacs sold cheaply and widely read in the late 1830s and 1840s, and you will be shocked at the cruelty imposed upon blacks in the so-called frontier stories and the derogatory descriptions of black people. Indians are referred to likewise as barely above the level of animals.[23] There is no need to elaborate upon this. But it should be pointed out that the Chinese in the West were treated with a similar cruelty. The so-called "Chinese Massacre" at Rock Springs, Wyoming Territory, in 1885 cost the lives of twenty-eight Chinese laborers, wounded fifteen others, caused several hundred other Chinese to leave town, and destroyed property valued at one hundred forty-seven thousand dollars. Federal troops from Fort D. A. Russell had to restore and maintain order.[24]

Or take the incident down at Bisbee, Arizona, in 1882, where a lynch mob hanged a Mexican who had been ejected from a saloon. At just about the moment of the execution three officials of the Copper Queen Mine (whose employees had taken justice into their own hands) arrived from New York. They reported to the home office that the savages who needed civilizing were not the local Indians but the mineworkers. They concluded that the lynching was partly due to boredom: the miners had nothing to do. Reacting, the board of directors sent the Reverend J. S. Pritchard to Bisbee with about 500 books to start a library, providing the miners with a much quieter and less violent form of recreation.[25]

By today's standards the frontier had a tough society, often brutal, bigoted, racist, and cruel; it was a society that accepted liberty as an absolute, which means that all kinds of non-violent as well as violent crimes took place, and in abundance. Baldwin in his *Flush Times* lists the chicanery as if it was an accepted part of the social and business scheme of things. When Rudyard Kipling first visited the United States he took passage on an eastbound Northern Pacific train. He was shocked at the treatment given to a passenger who did not have a ticket. The conductor "cross-buttocked him through a double plate glass window . . . . He was dropped at a wayside station, spurting blood at every hair," Kipling reported. "The conductor guessed he would die, and volunteered the information that there was no profit in monkeying with the Northern Pacific Railway." No one seemed to be particularly bothered, though they were all glad they had their tickets.[26]

Dark clouds and silver linings: Thinking in terms of a century--from 1890 until 1990, we have evolved into a more settled, regulated, peaceful nation--a less bigoted, less racist society--speaking of progress, not absolutes. The decade of 1890 began with the massacre of the Sioux at Wounded Knee. Two years later the Johnson County War in Wyoming took place, and totally separate, the Dalton's raid on Coffeyville, Kansas. Nothing like those happenings occurred in the decade of the 1980s. Civil Rights have advanced so far beyond where they were in 1890 that no one can dispute progress there; still, more progress is needed. Violence other than mob action is something else again: we do have a high crime rate and the drug phenomenon of the late twentieth century has the nation worried, but the frontier is not implicated in the drug problem. However, few can dispute the heritage of firearm ownership as something coming directly out of the frontier experience: a black cloud. And as for the bribery, extortion, blackmail, and fraud so characteristic of the frontier--much of that sort of thing is still with us.

What are the silver linings? Let us ask another question: What is it about the way of life in the United States that has made our country the envy of the rest of the world, that leads east European countries, even Russia, to begin emulating the United States? Liberty is clearly predominant, but certainly materialism is equal with it: they want a government and a system that will help them achieve a par with the democracies in terms of the material good things of life. The rest of the world watched in the nineteenth century as people in the United States marched westward to the Pacific, and the world's people admired what they witnessed. Today, a hundred years later, the people of the United States still retain that lust for life, that exuberance that can come only from incredible freedom. Other peoples are enthralled by this *joie de vivre,* this pursuit of happiness which, in the broadest meaning of the word *happiness*, attracted millions to the United States: to say and do, to achieve and reap the rewards of their own hard work.

I ended my book, *The New Country,* by describing the Boone and Crockett Club exhibit at the Chicago World's Fair of 1892-93. It consisted of a settler's log cabin and a Conestoga wagon. Hard to believe, but already they were objects of curiosity even though tens of thousands alive at the time had experienced journeys in the wagons, and life in such a cabin. "And how many of the women stood there with thoughts that were a combination of the bitter and the sweet; and how many men said vocally, 'Those were great days!' and then under their breaths added, 'Didn't we have a helluva good time?'" Although one reviewer exclaimed "Shades of Theodore Roosevelt!" I remain convinced that the frontier really did offer that "Helluva good time."[27]

We cannot deny the dark clouds--selfishness, bigotry, waste, license, and lack of responsibility. We must struggle to elevate our ethics toward the

morality and responsibility Vaclav Havel emphasized. But the freedom, materialism--making man's sojourn on earth a little more comfortable--and egalitarianism, all of which are so envied by the rest of the world, were rooted in the frontier experience and are with us still; they constitute silver linings. If in the next century we can emphasize morality and responsibility and cancel out the frontier's dark clouds of license, bigotry, racism, and cruelty, then the United States' future is bright--incredibly bright. We shall remain a Happy Republic.

NOTES

[1]*New York Times,* 22 February 1990.

[2]Ray Allen Billington, *Frederick Jackson Turner: Historian, Scholar, Teacher* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 127; see also Wilbur R. Jacobs, *The Historical World of Frederick Jackson Turner* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), 1-5.

[3]For the reception of Turner's paper see Billington, 127-131; Jacobs, 1-5.

[4]Turner's essay may be found in a number of places. It is in *The Report of the American Historical Association for 1893,* 199-227, and in Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1920; 1927; 1958).

[5]Two bibliographical articles which enumerate much of the criticism are Gene M. Gressley, "The Turner Thesis--A Problem in Historiography," *Agricultural History,* 32 (October, 1958); and Walter Rundell, Jr., "Concepts of the 'Frontier' and the 'West'," *Arizona and the West,* 1 (Spring, 1959).

[6]Hector St. John de Crevecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer,* Introduction by Warren Barton Blake (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1957), 40, 56.

[7]Quoted in Samuel Eliot Morison and Henry Steele Commager, *The Growth of the American Republic,* 5th Edition. Two volumes (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962), 2: 258.

[8]This is a title given to a book edited and introduced by George E. Probst, *The Happy Republic: A Reader in Toqueville's America* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1962).

[9]James Bryce, *The American Commonwealth,* Two volumes (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1906), 2: 833, 837.

[10]Rudyard Kipling, *American Notes: Rudyard Kipling's West,* edited, with an Introduction by Arrell Morgan Gibson (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1981), 51-52.

[11]Hugh Henry Brackenridge, *Modern Chivalry,* edited with an Introduction, Chronology, and Bibliography by Claude M. Newlin (New York: American Book Company, 1937), 15-17, 23-27.

[12]James D. Richardson, *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1897* (Washington, 1897), 3: 590.

[13]Frances Trollope, *Domestic Manners of the Americans,* edited with an Introduction by Donald Smalley (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1960), 32, 52.

[14]Harry Leon Wilson, *Ruggles of Red Gap* (New York: Doubleday, 1915; New York: Washington Square Press, 1964).

[15]Charles Dickens, *American Notes,* Introduction by Christopher Lasch (Greenwich, CT: Fawcett Publications, 1961), 183.

[16]Trollope, *Domestic Manners,* 18-19.

[17]Kipling, *American Notes,* 30.

[18]Trollope, *Domestic Manners,* 340n.

[19]Thomas D. Clark and John W. Guice, *Frontiers in Conflict: The Old Southwest, 1795-1830* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1989), 69-80.

[20]Joseph G. Baldwin, *The Flush Times of Alabama and Mississippi,* Introduction by William A. Owens (New York: Sagamore Press, Inc., 1957), 36, 60-62.

[21]Richard A. Bartlett, *Great Surveys of the American West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1962, 1986), 187-205.

[22]Bryce, *American Commonwealth,* 832.

[23]*The Tall Tales of Davy Crockett: the Second Nashville Series of Crockett Almanacs, 1839-1841,* with an Introduction by Michael A. Lofaro (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1987).

[24]Gerald M. Adams, *The Post Near Cheyenne* (Boulder: Pruitt Publishing Co., 1989), 87.

[25]Pat Boettcher, "From Rope to Books: The Bisbee Library," *Arizona Librarian,* (Winter, 1969), 57-89.

[26]Kipling, *American Notes,* 76-77.

[27]Richard A. Bartlett, *The New Country: A Social History of the American Frontier* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974, 1976), 448.