

# Exploring the Western Frontier with the Records of Congress

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## Worksheet 1:

### Brainstorming about the Continuing Influence of the Frontier on America

Instructions:

1. List words in each category that suggest the continuing influence of the frontier on American culture. (See examples in parentheses.)

<b>Symbols</b> (covered wagon)	<b>Characters</b> (Sitting Bull)	<b>Words or phrases</b> (round up)	<b>Gender roles</b> (cowgirl)
<b>Law and government</b> (posse)	<b>The environment</b> (wide open spaces)	<b>Styles of clothing</b> (cowboy boots)	<b>Sports or activities</b> (rodeo)

2. Based on these charts, identify three ways that the frontier can be argued to have shaped America:

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## Worksheet 2: Decoding the Turner Thesis

“Thus American development has exhibited not merely advance along a single line, but a return to primitive conditions on a continually advancing frontier line, and a new development for that area. American social development has been continually beginning over again on the frontier. This perennial rebirth, this fluidity of American life, this expansion westward with its new opportunities, its continuous touch with the simplicity of primitive society, furnish the forces dominating American character. The true point of view in the history of this nation is not the Atlantic coast, it is the Great West.”

Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1935) <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/TURNER/> (last modified 9/30/1997).

1. Summarize the main point of the quote from historian Frederick Jackson Turner in one sentence.
2. In what specific ways does Turner see the frontier shaping American social development?
3. What four “forces” does Turner see the frontier contributing to the American character?
4. Does Turner think America shaped the frontier or that the frontier shaped America?
5. To what extent does his theory of the influence of the frontier correspond with your understanding of America’s development?
6. To what extent would you agree with his interpretation of the influence of the frontier on the American character?

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## Worksheet 3: Decoding Congressional Documents Relating to the Frontier

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Title of document: \_\_\_\_\_

Answer the questions below with your group about your assigned document. When answers must be inferred, state the evidence that supports your conclusion.

1. What kind of document is it? (newspaper, letter, bill, petition, etc.)
2. What is the date of the document?
3. Who is the author of the document? (Include name and position, if available)
4. What is the author's perspective on the issue he or she discusses?
5. For what audience was the document created?
6. From your document, what evidence do you see that suggests that the American people shaped the frontier?
7. What evidence suggests that the frontier shaped America?