

### **Varying Interpretations of “The West”**

After reading the statements below, use your knowledge of the post-Civil War period to complete the following questions.

“[W]e have in [United States history] a recurrence of the process of evolution in each western area reached in the process of expansion. 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. . . . In this advance, the frontier is the outer edge of the wave—the meeting point between savagery and civilization.”

Frederick Jackson Turner, historian,  
“The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” 1893

“[T]he history of the West is a study of a place undergoing conquest and never fully escaping its consequences. In these terms, it has distinctive features as well as features it shares with the histories of other parts of the nation and the planet. . . . Deemphasize the frontier and its supposed end, conceive of the West as a place and not a process, and Western American history has a new look. First, the American West was an important meeting ground, the point where Indian America, Latin America, Anglo-America, Afro-America, and Asia intersected. . . . Second, the workings of conquest tied these diverse groups into the same story. Happily or not, minorities and majorities occupied a common ground. Conquest basically involved the drawing of lines on a map, the definition and allocation of ownership (personal, tribal, corporate, state, federal, and international), and the evolution of land from matter to property.”

Patricia Nelson Limerick, historian,  
*The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West*, 1987

- a) Explain Turner’s point-of-view regarding the West.
- b) Explain Limerick’s point-of-view regarding the West.
- \*c) Briefly explain ONE major difference between Turner’s and Limerick’s interpretations
- \*d) Briefly explain how someone supporting Turner’s interpretation could use ONE piece of evidence from the period between 1865 and 1898 not directly mentioned in the excerpt.
- \*e) Briefly explain how someone supporting Limerick’s interpretation could use ONE piece of evidence from the period between 1865 and 1898 not directly mentioned in the excerpt.