

THE END OF AN ERA

Examining Frederick Jackson Turner's Frontier Thesis
through the lens of Red Dead Redemption 2.

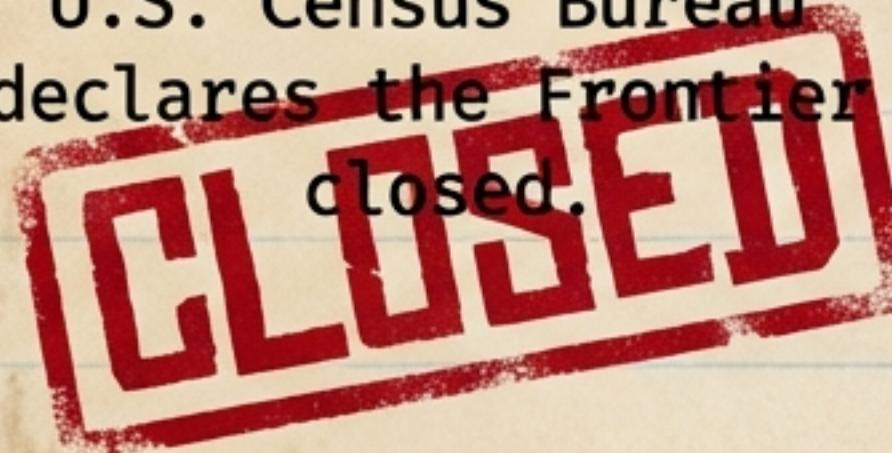


A study of the digital closure of the American West.

THE AUDIT OF HISTORY

1890

U.S. Census Bureau
declares the Frontier
closed.



1893

F.J. Turner publishes
“The Significance of
the Frontier”.

1899

The narrative of
Red Dead Redemption 2
begins.

The game takes place nine years after the Census Bureau closed the book on the frontier. It is not a story of the Wild West's peak, but of its period of flux.

“By 1899, the age of outlaws and gunslingers was at an end.” — RDR2 Opening Title



THESIS PILLAR I: THE SAFETY VALVE

Turner argued that the existence of “free land” drove American development.

This land acted as a psychological and sociological safety valve—a sanctuary where the discontented could escape social pressure and start anew.

KEY CONCEPT: CONTINUOUS RECESSION

Progress was defined by the frontier line constantly moving West. As long as there was space, there was freedom.

SIMULATION: THE CLAUSTROPHOBIA OF 1899

In the game, the Safety Valve has rusted shut. The Van der Linde gang attempts to utilize the frontier as an escape route, but they are geographically boxed in.

There is no 'continuous recession' available to them. Civilization has expanded from both coasts. The red 'X' marks do not represent expansion, but a frantic pacing within a shrinking cage. The map is no longer a sanctuary; it is a trap.



WANTED



FOR ANTI-AMERICAN ACTIVITIES

THE CULT OF THE OUTLAW

The frontier environment fostered “rugged individualism”—a democratic spirit defined by a distinct antipathy toward government control.

Dutch van der Linde is the avatar of this philosophy. The game utilizes a progressive interpretation of Turner’s thesis. The outlaws are not portrayed merely as criminals, but as the last practitioners of true American individualism fighting against corporate capitalism.

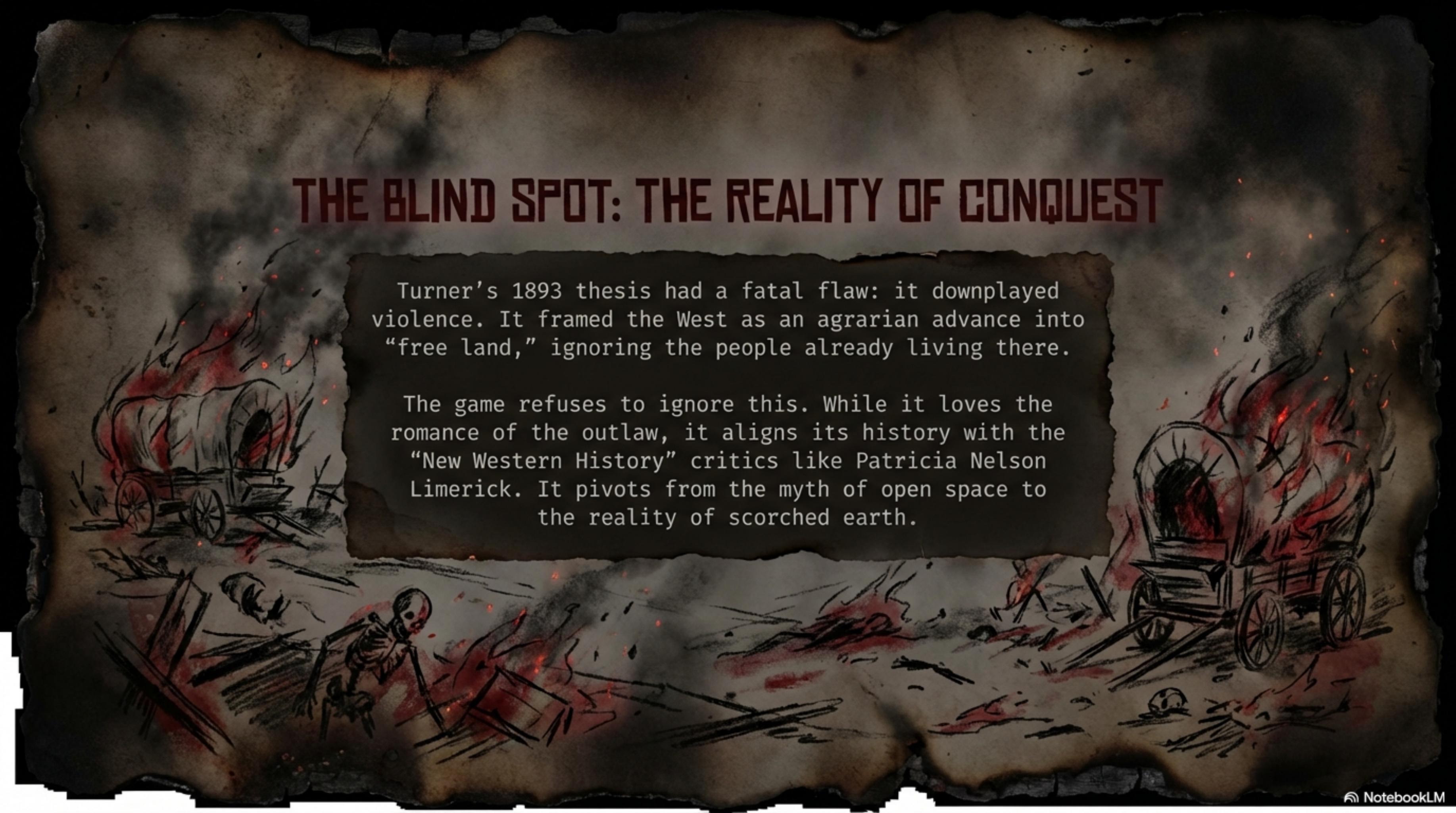
THESIS PILLAR III: COMPOSITE NATIONALITY

Turner claimed the frontier crucible stripped Europeans of their old identities, forging a new “composite nationality.” The game simulates this through the gang’s demographics.

The gang functions as a microcosm of this “melting pot.” They are a multicultural family unit, bound not by race or origin, but by the shared frontier experience. They are united by their exclusion from the “Civilized” world.



THE BLIND SPOT: THE REALITY OF CONQUEST



Turner's 1893 thesis had a fatal flaw: it downplayed violence. It framed the West as an agrarian advance into "free land," ignoring the people already living there.

The game refuses to ignore this. While it loves the romance of the outlaw, it aligns its history with the "New Western History" critics like Patricia Nelson Limerick. It pivots from the myth of open space to the reality of scorched earth.

HOW THE WEST WAS WON

RDR2 portrays the 'closing' not as a passive evolution, but as an active conquest.

The game emphasizes that the stability of 1899 was purchased through military violence and the dispossession of Native Americans. The 'peace' that civilization brings is shown to be built on the bones of the 'savagery' it extinguished.

ASSETS SEIZED

Strongbow Jones	Chiwacoa	Tulalip	13	7
Pisgah	Comox	"	11	5
Fork	Hatuey	"	"	"
Fayet	Nez	"	"	"
Ami	Aboriginal	"	1	20
John	"	"	6	12
Mos	"	"	7 19	"
Baker	Townsend	"	3 25	"
Price	Monoc	"	1	"
Garrison	Monoc	"	3	"



THE HISTORICAL PASTICHE



Red Dead Redemption 2 is a functional simulation of a complex historiographical argument. It seduces the player with Turner's romantic myth of freedom, only to crush them with the historical reality of its destruction.

It is a digital elegy for the Frontier Thesis—a playground where we can briefly live in the 'safety valve' before the inevitable weight of history closes it forever.

1899

The West is closed.

