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ZASLOW, Morris, “The Frontier Hypothesis in Recent
Historiography”

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REVUE DES REVUES

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The author, Mr. M. Zaslow, B.A., B.Educ., of Toronto, reminds us that nineteenth-century historical works, such as Parkman's *The French and English in America* (written between 1841 and 1892), had been interested "chiefly in producing vivid, exciting narratives of conflicts, wars, and adventures." But in 1893, Professor Frederick Jackson Turner of the University of Wisconsin read a paper before the American Historical Association entitled "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," which "was to overthrow the romantic view of the west, to usher in a new

era of historical writing and research, and altogether to prove a landmark in American historiography... Turner considered that the frontier had provided the experience and helped to evolve the institutions which made, and have continued to make, the United States what it is to-day."

Turning to Canada, Mr. Zaslow says that recent authors "seem to favour three general interpretations of Canadian development, two of them related to the frontier hypothesis. The most direct application was that put forth by Professor Sage in 1928 which treated North American expansion as a single great movement which ignored the international boundary line." For example, the Ohio Valley was "a battleground between the Quebec fur trading frontier and the colonial American agricultural frontier."

"The second is an environmental view of Canadian development... its most eloquent advocate being Professor Lower," who modifies the frontier thesis by also crediting "tradition, past experience, and imported ideas with influencing decisively the course of Canadian history." Thus, for example, there is a great difference between a New England Yankee and a French Canadian.²

"The third view of Canadian development is the opposite of the frontier hypothesis... It is that of Professor Creighton's *Commercial Empire of the St. Lawrence* (1937) and his *Dominion of the North* (1944), both of which regard the central thread of Canadian history as the attempt of the St. Lawrence metropolitan area to reach out for wider and wider economic domain."

There has been a certain amount of controversy about New France, but the modern interpretation "has changed significantly as a result of the frontier theory." Professor A.L. Burt in 1940,³ and also both Professors Lower and Creighton, "depict New France as a colony being slowly influenced by its environment in a democratic direction."

Although the frontier hypothesis has been modified by the special circumstances of the Canadian situation, such as the different cultural background of the French Canadian, nevertheless it "seems destined to leave its mark upon the writing of the future."

After mentioning attempts to apply the frontier hypothesis to Russian, Latin American, and Medieval history, Mr. Zaslow concludes that there is almost general acceptance "of Turner's description of the social effect of the frontier environment. In recent works the original thesis has been broadened out into an environmental theory which takes account of the

1. SAGE, W.N. "Some Aspects of the Frontier in Canadian History." (*Canadian Historical Association Report*, 1928).

2. LOWER, A.R.M. "The Origins of Democracy in Canada" (*Canadian Historical Association Report*, 1930, 70); and *Colony to Nation* (Toronto, 1946), 47-9.

3. BURT, A.L. "The Frontier in the History of New France" (*Canadian Historical Association Report*, 1940, 99).

frontier as merely a single of national development, and which also considers the political and cultural characteristics of the societies that came into contact with the frontier."

Gordon O. ROTHNEY