

## W. Turrentine Jackson (1915-2000)



William Turrentine “Turpie” Jackson was the fifteenth President of the Western History Association. Jackson, a highly respected social, economic, and policy historian, served the WHA as president from 1976 to 1977. Jackson was born in Ruston, Louisiana but was reared in El Paso, Texas. He earned a B.A. at Texas Western College in 1935, and a Ph.D. in history, under the supervision of eminent historian Walter Prescott Webb, at the University of Texas at Austin in 1940. After completing his Ph.D., Jackson taught at eight different universities in eleven years. In 1951 he took a position at the University of California, Davis, where he would remain until his retirement in 1985.

Jackson distinguished himself as a scholar of American Western history and California history. His primary contribution to American history was his paradigm-shifting assertion that the West hosted unique advances that helped shape modern America. He argued that the region was not established by so-called rugged individuals, but by government assessors, beneficiaries of federal subsidies, and

venture capitalists.

Jackson was also an innovator in public history. He worked with Pacific Gas & Electric, the city of Sacramento, the state of California, and Wells Fargo Bank, for whom he served as a consultant for 20 years. In 1982, Jackson established JRP Historical Consultants, a public history firm that continues to flourish.

He wrote three award-winning books, including *Wagon Roads West* (1952), *Treasure Hill: Portrait of a Silver Mining Camp* (1963), and *The Enterprising Scot: Investors in the American West after 1873* (1968). Not only was he a highly decorated scholar, he was a visionary. In “A Brief Message for the Young and/or Ambitious: Comparative Frontiers as a Field for Investigation,” his 1977 WHA presidential address, Jackson called for the study of the borderlands in an effort to connect the West with Latin America and more generally with global history. W. Turrentine Jackson redefined what it meant to be a historian, and helped inspire future generations of scholars to view history through increasingly diverse and comparative lenses.

W. Turrentine Jackson died on May 28, 2000 in Davis, California. Annual awards in his honor are given by both the Pacific Coast Branch of the American Historical Association and the Western History Association.

### Sources:

“W. Turrentine ‘Turpie’ Jackson; History Professor,” *Los Angeles Times* (June 1, 2000): <http://articles.latimes.com/2000/jun/01/local/me-36264>; “William Turrentine Jackson, History: Davis,” <http://texts.cdlib.org/view?docId=hb1r29n709&doc.view=frames&chunk.id=div00027&toc.depth=1&toc.id=>. Calisphere, University of California Libraries, California Digital Library.

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