Webb Is Expert On Colt .45, vs West

By FRANK DENT

The Texas historian who is closely identified with the theory of the Colt revolver's importance in Western history is a visiting professor at Rice this semester—Dr. Walter Prescott Webb.

"Too Simple"

Concerning his theory of the revolver, Dr. Webb said "Don't play this up by itself; it makes history look too simple."

For Dr. Webb, a professor at Texas University, the uniqueness of the history of the American West must be traced to many factors, of which the role of the revolver is only one. These factors are best understood in contrast to those which influenced history of the eastern U.S. For Dr. Webb, the contrast between the eastern and western U.S. is best seen at the "institutional fault line." Across this line the old solutions to life's practical problems were no longer valid. It marked a change in technique of living from the humid, timbered east to the semi-arid, barren plains of the west.

Rail Fences vs. Barbed Wire

This contrast is seen in many ways: the log cabin of the East as opposed to the dugouts of the West, rail fences as opposed to barbed wire, Dallas as opposed to Ft. Worth, and the West's different need for a different weapon.

On the Western plains, the Easterner's long rifle was unsuited for fighting the new breed of horse Indians. The long rifle not only required two feet firmly planted, it also required a support for the long barrel. Then, too, there was only one shot to fend off the many arrows of the Indians.

Six Shots For Indians

Thus, when the revolver was invented by Samuel Colt, the Texas Rangers were quick to see its usefulness to the West. The six shots, or twelve, if one carried two revolvers, were an adequate match for the Western Indians. The pioneers could then chase the Indians and expand easily into new territory.

Degrees from SMU to Oxford

At the University of Texas, most of Dr. Webb's classes are graduate courses. He has been there since 1918, including his undergraduate and graduate years. Dr. Webb has received honorary degrees from SMU, Chicago and Oxford. He has recently been appointed by Lyndon Johnson as consultant on irrigation and water conservation.

At Oxford, Dr. Webb held the Harmsworth Chair of American History for a year where he noted that English University students, a select three percent, were "not too interested in American History."

Dr. Webb is the author of various books on the American West, among them The Great Frontier and The Texas Rangers.

His stay at Rice so far has "confirmed the impression of the Institute." He says that the Rice graduates at Texas have always been of high quality. "The selective process certainly shows up," said Dr. Webb.