

WILLIAM CRONON BIOGRAPHY

WILLIAM CRONON studies American environmental history and the history of the American West.

Cronon's research seeks to understand the history of human interactions with the natural world: how we depend on the ecosystems around us to sustain our material lives, how we modify the landscapes in which we live and work, and how our ideas of nature shape our relationships with the world around us. His first book, Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England (1983), was a study of how the New England landscape changed as control of the region shifted from Indians to European colonists. In 1984, the work was awarded the Francis Parkman Prize of the Society of American Historians. In 1991, Cronon completed a book entitled Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West, which examines Chicago's relationship to its rural hinterland during the second half of the nineteenth century. In 1991, it was awarded the Chicago Tribune's Heartland Prize for the best literary work of non-fiction published during the preceding year; in 1992, it won the Bancroft Prize for the best work of American history published during the previous year, and was also one of three nominees for the Pulitzer Prize in History; and in 1993, it received the George Perkins Marsh Prize from the American Society for Environmental History and the Charles A. Weyerhaeuser Award from the Forest History Society for the best book of environmental and conservation history published during the preceding two years. In 1992, he co-edited Under an Open Sky: Rethinking America's Western Past, a collection of essays on the prospects of western and frontier history in American historiography. He then edited an influential collection of essays entitled Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature, examining the implication of different cultural ideas of nature for modern environmental problems, published by Norton in the fall of 1995. He is currently at work on a history of Portage, Wisconsin, that will explore how people's sense of place is shaped by the stories they tell about their homes, their lives, and the landscapes they inhabit. He is also completing a book entitled Saving Nature in Time: The Past and the Future of Environmentalism (based on the Wiles Lectures which he delivered at Queens University in Belfast, Northern Ireland, in May 2001) on the evolving relationship between environmental history and environmentalism, and what the two might learn from each other.

In July 1992, Cronon became the Frederick Jackson Turner Professor of History, Geography, and Environmental Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison after having served for more than a decade as a member of the Yale History Department. In 2003, he was also named Vilas Research Professor at UW-Madison, the university's most distinguished chaired professorship. He has been President of the American Society for Environmental History, and serves as general editor of the Weyerhaeuser Environmental Books Series for the University of Washington Press. During the spring of 1994, he organized and chaired a faculty research seminar on "Reinventing Nature" at the University of California's Humanities Research Institute in Irvine, California. In January, 1996, he became Director of the Honors Program for the College of Letters and Science at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, a post he held until 1998, and from 1997-2000 he served as the founding Faculty Director of the new Chadbourne Residential College at UW-Madison. He has served on the Governing Council of The Wilderness Society since 1995, and on the National Board of the Trust for Public Land since 2003.

Born September 11, 1954, in New Haven, Connecticut, Cronon received his B.A. (1976) from the University of Wisconsin, Madison. He holds an M.A. (1979), M.Phil. (1980), and Ph.D. (1990) from Yale, and a D.Phil. (1981) from Oxford University. Cronon has been a Rhodes Scholar, Danforth Fellow, Guggenheim Fellow, and MacArthur Fellow; has won prizes for his teaching at both Yale and Wisconsin; and in 1999 was elected a member of the American Philosophical Society.

February 2005