

## WILLIAM CRONON BIOGRAPHY

**William Cronon** studies and writes about North American environmental history.

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 finalists for the Pulitzer Prize in History; 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. It includes his well-known essay, "The Trouble with Wilderness: or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature."

In 2016, Cronon developed a lecture course on "The Making of the American Landscape" (an homage to the classic 1955 book by W. G. Hoskins on *The Making of the English Landscape*), which he designed as the foundation for a major book surveying landscape change in the United States since pre-colonial times while also teaching how to "read" landscape for evidence of historical change. This project will serve as a macro-scale companion to the micro-scale history of Portage, Wisconsin, from the end of the last Ice Age down to the present, on which Cronon has been working for many years. It explores how people's sense of place is shaped by the stories they tell about their homes, their lives, and the landscapes they inhabit.

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 [rhymes with "Silas"] Research Professor at UW-Madison, the university's most distinguished chaired professorship. When he retired from UW-Madison in December 2020, his position became Emeritus.

Cronon has been President of the American Society for Environmental History, and served from 1994-2014 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. Cronon chaired UW-Madison's Lakeshore Nature Preserve Committee from 2004-2007, leading its first-ever strategic planning process and leading the team that created its prize-winning website. He is a founding faculty associate of UW-Madison's Center for Culture, History, and Environment (CHE), created in 2006, and served as its Director from 2007-11 and again from 2013-16. He has been a member of the Governing Council of The Wilderness Society since 1995 (winning the Society's highest civilian honor, the Robert Marshall Award, in 2014), and was a member of the National Board of the Trust for Public Land from 2003-2020. He served as President of the American Historical Association during 2012.

Born September 11, 1954, in New Haven, Connecticut, Cronon received his BA (1976) from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He holds an MA (1979), MPhil (1980), and PhD (1990) from Yale, and a DPhil (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; in 1999 was elected a member of the American Philosophical Society and in 2006 was elected a Fellow of the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters as well as the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. He has received lifetime achievement awards from the Midwestern History Association, the Society of American Historians, and the American Society for Environmental History.

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