SECOND PAPER:

(3-5 double-spaced pages; 5-6 pages for Honors undergrads and graduate students, due by the start of lecture, 2:30pm on Monday, November 23, except for Saturday sections, for whom it's due by 10:00pm on Wednesday, November 25)

Aldo Leopold's *A Sand County Almanac* has long been regarded as one of the great classics of American conservation and nature writing, profoundly influencing American environmental politics and ideas of nature since its publication in 1949. (For obvious reasons, it of course also has a special significance here in Wisconsin, including right here in Madison.)

Curiously, one might say that it has had at least two distinct lives as a text. The first came when it was originally published by Oxford University Press in 1949 and was enthusiastically embraced by relatively small numbers of already engaged conservationists interested especially in wildlife conservation and wilderness protection. The second started when it was reprinted as an inexpensive mass-market paperback by Ballantine Books in 1970 and was read by vastly larger numbers of people who were now calling themselves environmentalists and seeking to achieve a much wider transformation of society in the name of environmental protection.

As such, one could say that *A Sand County Almanac* is a striking example of the ways in which the history of a book must be understood not just relative to its ***author***, but relative to its changing ***audiences***.

In her wonderful book *Trace: Memory, History, Race, and the American Landscape*, the geologist and writer Lauret Savoy lists *A Sand County Almanac* as a book that profoundly moved her when she first encountered it as a ninth-grader in the 1970s, and says that she has still kept that well-worn volume (probably the Ballantine Books paperback) "within easy reach." In a moving passage, she writes:

> *A Sand County Almanac was published in the autumn of 1949, more than a year after Leopold's death. That his work was hailed as landmark or, in Wallace Stegner's words, "a famous, almost holy book in conservation circles," I knew nothing about. Nor did I know that this forester, wildlife manager, educator, conservation leader, and writer born in Iowa in 1887 was called by some a "prophet." What appealed to my fourteen-year-old sensibilities were the intimate images of land and seasons in place: an atom's recycling odyssey through time; the chickadee, "so small a bundle of large enthusiasms"; the crane's call "the trumpet in the orchestra of evolution." And my favorite passage, from "Song of the Gavilan":* [Savoy's next paragraph is a long quotation from Leopold]
>
> ***This song of the waters is audible to every ear, but there is other music in these hills, by no means audible to all. To hear even a few notes of it you must first live here for a long time, and you must know the speech of hills and rivers. Then on a still night, when the campfire is low and the Pleiades have climbed over rimrocks, sit quietly and listen for a wolf to howl, and think hard of everything you have seen and tried to understand. Then you may hear it—a vast pulsing harmony—its score inscribed on a thousand hills, its notes the lives and deaths of plants and animals, its rhythms spanning the seconds and the centuries.***

What also appealed was the seeming openness of this man's struggle to frame a personal truth. In "The Land Ethic," Aldo Leopold enlarged the boundaries of "community" to include "soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land." Though I couldn't find words then, his call for an extension of ethics to land relations seemed to express a sense of responsibility and reciprocity not yet embraced by this country but embedded in many Indigenous peoples' traditions of experience—that land is fully inhabited, intimate with immediate presence.

These ideas prompted new questions. If, as Mr. Leopold wrote, "obligations have no meaning without conscience, and the problem we face is the extension of the social conscience from people to land," then what part of this nation still lacked conscience broad enough to realize the internal change of mind and heart, to embrace "evolutionary possibility" and "ecological necessity"? Why was it that human relations in the United States I knew at age fourteen could be so cruel?

Other passages in A Sand County Almanac confused: "The erasure of a human subspecies is largely painless—to us—if we know little enough about it. A dead Chinaman is of little import to us whose awareness of things Chinese is bounded by an occasional dish of chow mein. We grieve only for what we know." Why not know "things Chinese"?

I couldn't understand why, in a book so concerned with America's past, the only reference to slavery, to human beings as property, was about ancient Greece.

What I wanted more than anything was to speak with Mr. Leopold. To ask him. I so feared that his "we" and "us" excluded me and other Americans with ancestral roots in Africa, Asia, or Native America. Only uncertainty and estrangement felt within my teenage reach.

Did Aldo Leopold consider me?

Savoy's words, written in 2015, suggest the ways in which each new generation needs to decide for itself whether a book written in the past remains relevant to readers in the present. *A Sand County Almanac* is a book that played a key role in American environmental politics during the second half of the 20th century by bridging the older conservation movement in which Leopold's own consciousness was forged with the later environmental movement that came to view him as a prophet. What should be its role today?

In light of the documents we have read about the environmental justice movement that has emerged since Lauret Savoy first read Leopold's book as a high school student in the 1970s, how would you assess the continuing relevance of *A Sand County Almanac* in 2020? Why was it so influential in the half century after its original publication in 1949? How would you explain the changing ways it has been read by conservationists and environmentalists? Then, using yourself and your fellow students as "documents" for your own and your generation's historical experience, think about your own reading of this book and the discussions you and your classmates have had about it this semester. Which parts of it still resonate today? Which parts of it are less resonant, or even downright objectionable? How would you analyze the historical contexts that help explain the ways your readings in 2020 differ from those of readers in the 1950s or the 1970s? Be as concrete and historical as you can in answering these questions.

In an essay of 3-5 pages (5-6 pages for Honors undergrads and grad students), using any documents we've read in the course that support your arguments, offer a ***historical*** interpretation of the ways in which your own reading of this book compares and contrasts with the ways conservationist readers experienced the book in the 1950s and environmentalist readers experienced it in the 1970s.