

*Nature's Metropolis* is economics, history, life, business, and national destiny, so brilliantly mingled and united that it is hard to tell what is economics and what is life, where business stops and ecology or national destiny takes over. That is, of course, the way things are; but it takes a master historian-writer to create a tableau so vividly alive, so marvelously interesting.

**Robert L. Heilbroner**

In this groundbreaking work, William Cronon gives us an environmental perspective on the history of nineteenth-century America. By exploring the ecological and economic changes that made Chicago America's most dynamic city and the Great West its hinterland, Mr. Cronon opens a new window onto our national past. This is the story of city and country becoming ever more tightly bound in a system so powerful that it reshaped the American landscape and transformed American culture. The world that emerged is our own.

The catalysts in this process of historical change are so familiar that we often take them for granted: railroads, grain elevators, lumber camps and log drives, stockyards, futures markets, and the traders, middlemen, speculators, drummers, and boosters who built Chicago's domain from the Appalachians to the Sierra Nevada. Familiar as they may be, these innovations in technology and organization combined to extraordinary effect. As agents of a voracious economy, they found their raw material in the rich ecosystems of the Great West—the rivers and lakes carved by retreating glaciers millennia before; the fertile soils of the tallgrass prairie; the immense white pines of the north woods; and the grasses and sedges of the high plains with their millions of bison. In a frenzy of development that spanned the period from before the Civil War to the start of the new century, Americans cut vast stands of white pine into lumber, displaced diverse prairie grasses with wheat, turned wheat into uniform grades of grain, reduced animals to refrigerated meat, and made these commodities the source of a powerful culture of buying and selling, of debt, credit, and spec-

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Jacket design by Mike McIver

**...a powerful book, strikingly original, a triumph of the historian's craft. It will surely become a classic in the literature about the American past.**

**John M. Blum, Yale University**

**William Cronon challenges many of the conventions of both urban and western history in this pathbreaking book, and does so with unusual intelligence and elegance. More important, he helps lay the groundwork for a vital new field of scholarship: the history of the natural environment and its relationship to human society.**

**Alan Brinkley, CUNY Graduate School**

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ulation. At the center of this new economic culture was Chicago, the gateway city to the Great West.

Americans have long had a name for areas undergoing fundamental change: the frontier. But the frontier Cronon describes is not the mythical one that has so long gripped the popular imagination—the westward-moving source of America's democratic politics, open society, unfettered economy, and rugged individualism, far removed from the corruptions of urban life. Instead, Cronon's frontier is a whirlwind of change with the metropolis at its very center.

Cronon does not ask us to hearken back to a time when people lived in harmony with nature. There is no easy moral here. But as we confront the ecological consequences of economic growth in our world, Cronon's history of Chicago and the Great West reminds us of our continuing responsibility to acknowledge the critical connections between our urban lives and the land that sustains us.

**WILLIAM CRONON** is associate professor of history at Yale University. Born in 1954, he was educated at the University of Wisconsin, Oxford University—where he earned a D.Phil. as a Rhodes scholar—and Yale University. He is the author of *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England* (awarded the Society of American Historians' Francis Parkman Prize) and the recipient of a MacArthur Fellowship.