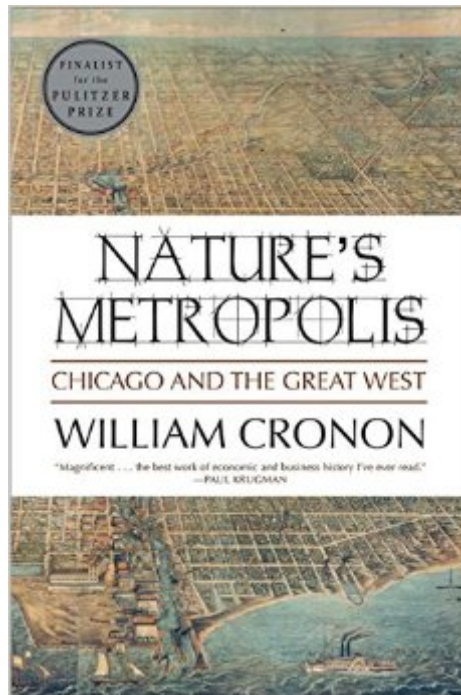


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Nature's Metropolis: Chicago And The Great West



Synopsis

"Magnificent... the best work of economic and business history I've ever read." — Paul Krugman
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.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"Nature's Metropolis" is first, and foremost a narrative about the rise of Chicago in the 19th century. Being very similar in tone to the author's first book "Changes in the Land" (1983). Cronon seeks to establish in "Nature's Metropolis" that any understanding of the American west can not truly be comprehended unless one looks at the dominant role that Chicago played in ordering the landscape between the Great Lakes and the Rocky Mountains. By arguing that the two (city and countryside) are linked, Cronon is directly refuting the Frontier Thesis of Fredrick Jackson Turner - which held that the frontier (countryside) existed in isolation of the city. This is then the major premise of the book; that human actions are very much determined by the landscape. In building his case Cronon presents some excellent case studies of the Rail+Canal, wheat, forestry and meat packing industries in Chicago, and how they helped to turn the city into a first-rank metropolitan centre. Chapter #3 on wheat is especially interesting as Cronon describes how the Board of Trade

revolutionized the exchange of grain by turning the physical crop into an abstract commodity that could be easily traded amongst merchants, traders and farmers. Central to this was of course the implementation of a standardized grading system. A final note, one of the more intriguing aspects of the book was Cronon's use of the terms "first" and "second nature". These are two concepts which he explains in the preface are derived from Hegelian and Marxist interpretations of nature - yet he does not give the reader too much more of an insight.

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