

Things to think about: William Cronon, Changes in the Land

What does Cronon see as the agendas, sources, and difficulties of environmental history?

What value did Thoreau attach to "wildness" in landscape? How did he define "wildness"? How did his valuation and definition differ from those of the earliest English settlers of New England?

Why does Cronon warn against the "post hoc ergo propter hoc" fallacy on page 9?

What does Cronon mean by human communities that are "inside nature" on page 15?

What were the consequences of the tendency of early English explorers and settlers to perceive the New England landscape in terms of marketable commodities?

In what sense did the English settlers consider the Indians as beggars living in the rich New England landscape? What were the environmental implications of English and Indian notions of wealth and poverty?

How did the Indians of southern and northern New England differ in their relationship to the environment?

What (if any) connection existed between the repeated forest burning of the southern New England Indians and the maintenance of a "natural" ecosystem?

Why were English fixed settlements incompatible with Indian migratory settlements?

How was this concrete incompatibility reflected on the abstract level of legal theory?

How did English and Indian ideas about the ownership of land reflect distinctive relationships to the environment?

What was the impact of shifting power relations among New England Indian groups (the result of depopulation following the introduction of European diseases) on wild animal populations?

How did the disappearance of the New England beaver population aid English agricultural settlement?

What were the ecological and economic effects of the English settlers' profligate clearing of the New England forests?

What is the difference between "deforestation" and "the progress of cultivation" on page 126? Whose point of view is expressed by each term?

What was the relation between livestock husbandry and colonial patterns of land use?
Between livestock husbandry and changing distribution frequencies of wild plant species?

Why does Cronon worry about providing an analysis that is too "unicausal" on page 161?

To what extent were the Indians agents as well as victims of the changes Cronon describes?

What is the difference between "yield" and "loot" to which Cronon alludes on the last page?

Cronon's study of ecological transformation in New England has several main foci: fur-bearing animals, forests, the introduction of domestic and especially grazing animals, and the consequences of European notions of property and commodity. How did each of these figure in this transformation? Can you think of any other foci that Cronon might have considered?

In what ways might an ecological history of New England be extended further?

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