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STS.036 Technology and Nature in American History  
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## STS.036

### Reading questions for Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis* (Chapter 2: Rails and Water), and Stilgoe, *Metropolitan Corridor* (Chapter 7: Depot)

#### Cronon

- What is the distinction Cronon makes between “first nature” and “second nature”? (56-57)
- What was Chicago’s worst “natural disadvantage,” and how did the city try to deal with it? (58-59)
- What were the effects of the opening of the Illinois and Michigan Canal in 1848? (64-65)
- In his discussion of the building of the Galena and Chicago Union Railroad, what does Cronon mean when he says that “first and second nature reinforced each other”? (66-67)
- How did Chicago become the “interior metropolis of the continent”? (67-70)
- What were the metaphors of natural advantage and supernatural advantage that boosters commonly used to talk about the railroad? What does Cronon conclude about the effect of these metaphors? (72-73)
- What does Cronon mean when he says that the railroad “became the chief device for introducing a new capitalist logic to the geography of the Great West”? (81)
- Why would railroads intentionally set rates that would lose them money? (85) How did fixed costs influence this rate-setting logic?
- How did Lake Michigan influence railroad rate structures and the regional economy? (86-89)
- Why did railroads west of Chicago have higher shipping costs than those east of Chicago? (89-90)
- How does Cronon finally explain the economic success of Chicago? (90-91)

#### Stilgoe

- What does Stilgoe mean by the “double nature of the American small-town railroad operation”? (195)
- What were the roles of the station agent? (198)
- According to Stilgoe, what is so significant about the standardized depot design of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century? (202-03)
- How did the depot function as an “information funnel”? (203-09)
- What are the ethnic and class dimensions of the depot and the surrounding built environment? (211-15)
- What effect did mail-order shopping and consumer culture have on the built environment of the metropolitan corridor, according to Stilgoe? (215-16)
- What does Stilgoe mean when he describes the literary representation of the small-town depot as that of a “liminal zone”? (218)