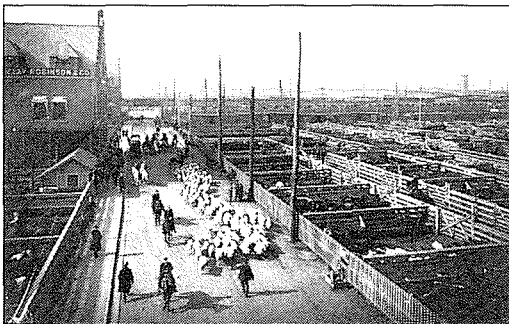


son stress the animal origins of human behavior. Degler believes that by dispensing with the ideology, we can discover a scientific, biological basis for human ethics without all the racism, sexism, and politicized eugenics of the old Social Darwinism. Degler seems not to notice that his own brand of Darwinism—with its elevated biology and moral analogies between people and animals—is an ideological construct, one to which other social scientists may fail to subscribe.

**NATURE'S METROPOLIS:** Chicago and the Great West. By William Cronon. Norton. 530 pp. \$27.50

At the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago, Frederick Jackson Turner delivered his influential paper on "The Closing of the Frontier in American History." By then, Chicago was already a giant, sprawling city of a million people, yet some older visitors to the Exposition could remember when the city was only a tiny trading post of a few dozen souls. What had made Chicago, practically in the middle of nowhere, grow so fast?

In *Nature's Metropolis*, Cronon, a Yale historian, provides an answer that, among other things, turns Turner's thesis on its head. Turner had depicted the peopling of the frontier as a movement of pioneers and homesteaders escaping an urbanized America in order to create an open society of democratic politics, unfettered economy, and rugged individualism. To the contrary, Cronon argues, the frontier was, in effect, a mirror-image of Chicago. Rural history and urban history are usually separate disciplines, but Cronon shows that from the Appalachians to the Sierra Nevadas there was a



single economic "ecosystem" and that Chicago and the hinterlands interacted to determine each other's growth.

If part of Cronon's story sounds familiar, in other ways he has written the strangest history of Chicago imaginable. One should not turn to *Nature's Metropolis* for any account of Chicago's labor struggles, ethnic conflicts, political machines, or social reformers. Cronon's heroes and villains are not Marshall Field, George Pullman, or Louis Sullivan, but movements of produce and goods. These largely impersonal commodity flows in grain, lumber, and meat tied city and country tightly together, so that to write of the two separately, Cronon says, amounts to "moral schizophrenia."

Cronon's original blend of economics and ecology is persuasive but perplexing. He intends his tales of Chicago's growth in the 19th century "as parables for our own lives as well," but if so, they seem parables without practical application. Because he has denied people their role as the agents of change, the problems he associates with growth—"threats of species extinction, unsustainable exploitation of natural resources, widespread destruction of habitat"—seem, after reading *Nature's Metropolis*, less amenable to solution than ever.

#### Arts & Letters

**A LIFE OF PICASSO:** Volume I, 1881–1906. By John Richardson. Random House. 548 pp. \$39.95

Ordinarily, a 550-page biography that brings its subject to the ripe age of 25 might seem to be running in slow-motion. But with regard to Picasso (1881–1973), as art historian Richardson demonstrates, the word "ordinary" does not apply. By age 25 Picasso had painted more celebrated pictures and worked through more styles than most artists do in a lifetime. The Blue period of *La Vie* (1903), the Rose period of *Boy with a Pipe* (1905), the Circus period of *Acrobat and Young Harlequin* (1905), and the classical monumental torsos such as *Two Nudes* (1906) all were in the past, and he was beginning the cubistic *Les Femmes d'Alger* (1906–07), which Richardson calls "the most innovative painting since Giotto."