

The trouble with wilderness by william cronon

Literature



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The Trouble with Wilderness by William Cronon In his essay W. Cronon considers the notion and concept of wilderness from a different angle than we are usually accustomed to. He shows how the meaning of wilderness has undergone a significant change from being initially simple 'wasteland' to its present connotation of the place where a person can finally escape the modern world, the only place allegedly not touched by men.

However, is wilderness really what it seems to be now Or is this concept a modern world invention Cronon argues that it is. He shows how the priority was gradually shifted from utilizing the wasteland to preserving the wilderness. This transformation of thinking and attitude seems so astonishing that it's difficult to conceive of any visible reasons or sources for this. Cronon indicates the main ones, which are 'the sublime and the frontier'. The tenet of the sublime represents wilderness as an abode of supernatural, a place to which saints and mystics retreat in search of spiritual accomplishment, some territory where boundary between worldly and spiritual terrains is blurred. Thus wilderness acquires the quality of something special, rare, even sacred and is not just the space to be used for development and construction as it used to be thought of initially. Apart from the sublime, there's also the concept of the frontier - the feeling that the rescue from all troubles of civilization can be found far away from the latter, in wild lands. This is especially true for the American people, for whom wilderness also becomes a place of " national renewal, the quintessential location for experiencing what it meant to be an American". Preserving wilderness for them is, in a way, a matter of preserving their history, their past. The fast disappearing frontier is considered to offer the only natural, free and true way of living, on the other hand, modernity grows to represent <https://assignbuster.com/the-trouble-with-wilderness-by-william-cronon/>

all that's artificial, false and aggressive.

Later on, wilderness takes on another meaning and becomes place to get peace, rest and regain the calmness, lost in fast-pacing urban world.

Wilderness becomes a tourist attraction. And here W. Cronon indicates the paradox - now people are actually seeking something from what they initially wanted to get rid of! First, Americans wanted to cultivate and develop the wasteland and now they are calling it wilderness and longing for it as an escape from civilization so carefully built by them.

All these arguments are to show that the very concept of wilderness has very little natural in it. It is all connected with people; in fact, it is created by people for people as a response to some current needs of the society; it is pretty much artificial, Cronon insists, - " it is entirely the creation of the culture a product of the very history it seeks to deny". Thus, wilderness is interconnected and interrelated with civilization. Yet another proof for this statement is the fact that in order to create their wilderness Americans had to drive Indian tribes out of their homeland to suit the notion of wilderness as 'uninhabited', even if it was never this way before. Preserving the wilderness of the rain forest usually means protecting it from the activities of people who belong there.

The value of wilderness itself cannot be denied or questioned, however. It does connect spiritual sublime and primitive frontier; it is the authentic territory that can show us the world as it's supposed to be. But the meaning wilderness gets in thinking of many people as the place to escape the real world, the place that can solve their problems, or rather the place where these problems won't exist at all, is very disturbing and is a reason for the author to write this essay. Cronon is struggling with duality of the approach

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to modern environmental science as - first, he understands that it's wrong and often irresponsible to think that people and nature are separate as we are the part of it and very much dependable on eco-systems' balance, and second, he realizes that on the other hand, it's better to respect wilderness as something people haven't created, honor its being an independent world with its own ways and reasons for being as it is. At present, wilderness is acquiring the wrong meaning and its perception is flawed and we must try to find the correct approach, Cronin suggests.