

The Roots of Environmental Awareness in 19th-century America



Asher Durand, *Kindred Spirits*, 1849, Oil on canvas, 44" x 36".
Bentonville, Arkansas, Walton Family Foundation
Author William Cullen Bryant (left) and painter Thomas Cole (right)

America's population in 1800 was 94% rural and 6% urban, and by 1900, that ratio was 60%/40%. This demographic shift – and the reasons for that shift - had profound effects on evolving 19th-century concepts of the natural and built environments. In turn, these concepts influenced 19th-century intellectual thought, literature, religious attitudes, social conditions, educational models, economic issues, political attitudes, and artistic expressions. Understanding evolving American 19th-century attitudes about the environment, explored in this class through multiple lenses [e.g. demographics; material culture; politics; society; art; architecture; religion; literature] offers new approaches to understanding 19th-century America and contributes to a better understanding of the evolution of environmental attitudes to the present day.

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