



Leopold, Stegner, and the Foundation of a New Agrarianism

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In 2009, we will mark the centennial of two events in lives of two men who had a profound impact on the West and its rangelands. On February 18, 1909, author Wallace Stegner was born; and on July 2, Aldo Leopold stepped off a train in Albuquerque, fresh from Yale's famous forestry school, to report to duty as a ranger in newly minted Forest Service. In this paper I will investigate the influence of both men on the development of a new agrarianism for the 21st century. Prof. Eric Freyfogle describes agrarianism as reaching beyond food production and rural living to include a wide constellation of ideas, loyalties, sentiments and hopes. It is a temperament and a moral orientation as well as a suite of economic practices, all arising out of the insistent truth that people everywhere are part of the land community, just as dependent as other life on the land's fertility and just as shaped by its mysteries and possibilities. Today, as the cumulative effects of industrialism spread around the globe, more and more people are turning to a new type of agrarianism for hope. It is a familiar quest. Leopold devoted much of his life to a search for a "durable scale of values" - what we call "sustainability" today. His search was mirrored in Stegner's life-long quest to understand the tension between "boomers and stickers" in the American West. This search remains as relevant in the early 21st century as it was a century ago.

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