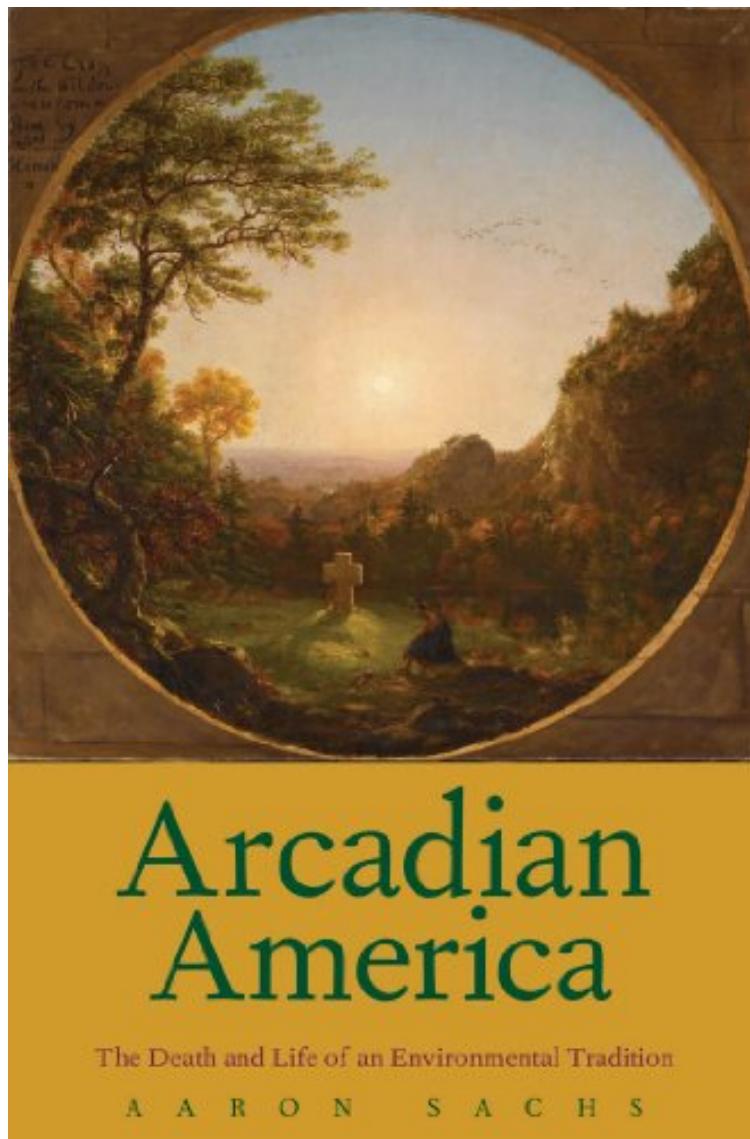


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Arcadian America: The Death and Life of an Environmental Tradition (New Directions in Narrative History)

Aaron Sachs

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Aaron Sachs : Arcadian America: The Death and Life of an Environmental Tradition (New Directions in Narrative History) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Arcadian America: The Death and Life of an Environmental Tradition (New Directions in Narrative History):

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. The author crafts beautiful sentences and paragraphs and has a lot of

important ...By winterlightThis is a strange but thoroughly enjoyable book. The author crafts beautiful sentences and paragraphs and has a lot of important things to say about how Americans understood, represented, and altered the landscapes across which they moved in the nineteenth century. This book also explores the ways in which the trauma of the Civil War left a heavy imprint of the memories of the Americans who survived it. Writing something new about iconic figures such as Jefferson, Thoreau, or Whitman is not an easy task, and yet I think the author has a firm grasp of their personalities and how they understood their personal relationships with Nature. This book also introduced me to some new historical figures such as Horace Cleveland, the landscape architect responsible for the magnificent park system in Minneapolis and the author of a gem of an essay titled "The Influence of Parks on the Character of Children." Fans of Richard Louv and other proponents of unstructured outdoor play will feel a strong affinity for Cleveland and others like him. It's hard to say how much of an authorial presence belongs in a work of history, but I found myself struggling with a few passages that seemed staged or self-indulgent. I suppose all history is at some level autobiography, but this book travels a mighty long way in that direction. I also was surprised that the author made no mention of Keith Thomas' "Man and the Natural World: Changing Attitudes in England, 1500-1800." To be sure, that work covers a different time and place, but the prose is crisp and a model for writing about shifting mentalities, particularly changing attitudes toward nature. Nineteenth-century American authors were greatly influenced by English authors and English ways, and I believe that's especially true of New England's authors. Thomas' book would have helped the author more fully illuminate these continuities including that vision of Arcadia's demise as tragedy rather than progress.3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. The use of our environment as seen through art and literatureBy FreddieFits well with the ongoing debates about land use in our country. The author leads you through writings and works of art from Emerson to Cole. Meanwhile professional designers like Olmsted and Downing are making decisions which would affect future generations in major American cities.

Perhaps America's best environmental idea was not the national park but the garden cemetery, a use of space that quickly gained popularity in the mid-nineteenth century. Such spaces of repose brought key elements of the countryside into rapidly expanding cities, making nature accessible to all and serving to remind visitors of the natural cycles of life. In this unique interdisciplinary blend of historical narrative, cultural criticism, and poignant memoir, Aaron Sachs argues that American cemeteries embody a forgotten landscape tradition that has much to teach us in our current moment of environmental crisis.

“A book of great ambition that is charting a changing consciousness on the American scene as articulated through classic literature, the built environment, war, art, and invention. . . . Powerful and evocative.” Jonathan Holloway, Yale University