



# To Pass On a Good Earth: The Life and Work of Carl O. Sauer

*Michael Williams*

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*To Pass On a Good Earth* is the candid and compelling new biography of one of the twentieth century's most distinctive and influential scholars. The legendary "Great God beyond the Sierras," Carl Ortwin Sauer is America's most famed geographer, an inspiration to both academics and poets, yet no book-length biography of him has existed until now.

This Missouri-born son of German immigrants contributed to many fields, with a versatility rare in his time and virtually unknown today. Sauer explored plant and animal domestication, the entry of Native Americans into the continent, their transformation of the land into prairies and cultivated fields, and subsequent European enterprise that fueled prosperity but also triggered environmental degradation and the loss of cultural diversity. Providing profound and invaluable insights into the human occupancy, cultivation--and often ruination--of the earth, Sauer revolutionized our understanding of the impact of European conquest of the New World.

Author and fellow geographer Michael Williams had access to Sauer's voluminous correspondence in the Bancroft Library at Berkeley and in family collections. Enlivened by these intimate letters to family and colleagues, *To Pass On a Good Earth* reveals the rare qualities of mind and heart that made Sauer one of America's most treasured--as well as troubled--intellectual pioneers. He brought both historical rigor and humanistic understanding to the burgeoning environmental movement and ceaselessly championed an ecumenical approach in an age of increasing specialization.



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