

Reiger, John F., *American Sportsmen And The Origins of Conservation*, (Winchester Press 1975, New York).

One does not pick up a book from Winchester Press expecting a castigation of hunting and fishing, and John Reiger's "*American Sportsmen end the Origins of Conservation*" is no exception, Fortunately Reiger readily acknowledges his bias in his introductory chapter when he reveals he is a sportsman which, according to him releases himself from the prejudice which historians, he maintains, have manifested to that group in the past.

"*American Sportsmen end the Origins of Conservation*" is a concise 140 page analysis of the impact of sportsmen (particularly George Bird Grinnell) on the conservation movement in the United States in the late 1800's and early twentieth century.

Dividing the book into the discussion of the role of sportsmen in three areas of Conservation (wildlife, timberlands and national parks), Reiger explodes the myth that no conservation movement existed until the twentieth century and proves that most of those ornithologists, scientists or nature lovers which historians have labeled as conservationists at the turn of the century could just as easily have been categorized as sportsmen. To Reiger, it was the sportsman's care for wildlife and his concern transferring over into the forests that caused the development of the national park and reserve concept and the enforcement of rules within these systems.

Basing the need for the book on the increasingly unjustified attacks on sportsmen, (most notably hunters), that they are killers not conservers, Reiger gives the coup de grace to all so-called animal lovers by carefully peeling away the skin of hypocrisy which he says covers their beliefs by suggesting that those who abhor killing game (the same people he notes who are eating beef) eliminate the eating of all animal, fish or fowl — a point well stated.

Having conveyed to the reader his dislike of having to justify his existence as a hunter, Reiger then proceeds to take the reader on an interestingly well-written history of the origins of Conservation, and brings forth numerous factors which influenced the movement. He notes that Conservation in the United States, like Europe, grew out of an upper class effort, similar to several sporting activities in this regard. Similarly, the impact of the hunting and fishing club, transferred from European to American soil with its code of the sportsman is emphasized. Of particular interest in this latter aspect, is the attempt by sportsmen to change the attitude of the American people toward the harvesting of game.

Using exhaustive research, Reiger shows that this change

in attitude from a careless, unconcerned public to that of an empathetic citizenry bent on saving wildlife and wilderness was attributable to the efforts of sportsmen's periodicals, especially "*Field and Stream*" under the editorship of George Bird Grinnell. These periodicals helped to mold an American Sportsman's code of conduct which defined the true sportsman as one who performed proper etiquette in the field, gave game a sporting chance, and possessed an aesthetic appreciation of the whole context of the sport that included a commitment to its perpetuation. Reiger further shows that the arousal by a substantial segment of the population to concern for the forests was not the dwindling of forests as some have maintained, but the disappearance of game, fish, birds, and mammals. Additionally, Reiger notes that when game stocks depleted, it was the rich hunter and fisherman who set up private reserves ensuring their continuation.

Reiger further relates as others have (Betts), the role which industrialization has played in the advancement and decline of hunting and fishing and brings out the point that while the ability of sportsmen to travel to new hunting and fishing areas increased, so too did the ability of their adversaries—the commercial hunting and fishing companies, thus depleting the stocks even more.

Reiger also shows the enormous obstacles which confronted the passage of the first conservation legislation and reveals that a utilitarian approach was necessary for public acceptance, together with the backing of a prominent figurehead (Theodore Roosevelt). With respect to Theodore Roosevelt, another myth is erased by Reiger as he shows that it was largely George Bird Grinnell who instilled in Roosevelt the attitude of Conservation long before Roosevelt's espousal of them.

In addition to the well documented text, Reiger's book includes a sixty page picture album at the end which contains further tidbits of information not found in the main body, followed by an outstanding bibliography of almost forty pages pertaining to the topic, but not necessarily included in the study—a gold mine for the future researcher.

While John Reiger's work can stand on its own as an outstanding piece of historical research, it falls short, in this author's opinion, of what I understand to be his primary goal as set out in the introduction—that being to change the public's attitude toward sportsmen, primarily hunters. What his work accomplishes in attitude change concerns the origins of Conservation and acceptance of the role of sportsmen at that time. It does nothing to sway the public's opinion toward today's sportsmen. To that end, Reiger has only scratched the surface of the sportsman's contribution in this area. If Reiger desires to change public attitudes today, and I believe he does judging

from his introduction, then further studies must point out what effect sportsmen clubs such as "Ducks Unlimited" have had and are having on conservation of wildlife today.

Similarly, if attitudes are to change, investigations are needed to determine where these negative attitudes by the public toward sportsmen (hunters) were obtained. In his introduction, Reiger notes that the hunter is a specific group that can be focused on and attacked; however, he never delves into why this has occurred. Similarly Reiger never acknowledges the fact that there have been and are individual so-called sportsmen who do kill merely for the sport of killing and who have possibly influenced the public into lumping all sportsmen into this category. To this effect, what impact has the NRA had on the American public's attitude toward sportsmen? This group it appears was never mentioned in the study although it is possible they played no role whatsoever.

Another distraction which might affect the reader, especially if he/she is a sport historian, is the use of the ambiguous term, "Sportsmen". It should be noted that the lack of a definition for this term and others like it is not uncommon in the study of sport history; however, it is of concern to those heavily involved in the study of sport. In all fairness to the author, parameters and definitions were established for the term conservation.

Finally, some statements by Reiger are not totally backed up. For example — the destiny of virtually all wild creatures is death by starvation, disease, or predation. Again, if the author wishes to change attitudes on this subject, reinforcement for such statements must come from others.

Aside from these minor points of discussion, John Reiger's *"American Sportsmen and the Origins of Conservation"* is an outstanding, well written documentation of the contributions of sportsmen to the conservation movement. For the sport historian interested in obtaining a viewpoint that differs with the traditional studies of the past, the book is a must.

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