CHAPTER XIII

"UNNECESSARY SAVAGERIES": MASCULINITY AND THE KILLING OF WILD ANIMALS

It has always seemed to me, that the butcher's attitude is nobler than the hunter's. The hunter owns to a thrill of rapture as his bullet pierces the heart of the unconscious fowl, or his knife tears the throat of the frightened doe. We may at least say of the butcher that he is indifferent.

-Minnie Maddern Fiske

During the first four decades of organized animal protection (1865-1900), humane advocates, focused on the mistreatment of domestic creatures, rarely addressed the killing of wild animals. While few if any of the major first generation leaders were hunters, they admitted the necessity of hunting, and rarely criticized it. Animal advocates were neither particularly enthusiastic nor prescient about the extension of the humane ethic to the plight of wild animals.

This changed when Theodore Roosevelt became president in 1901. Not only did Roosevelt's hunting trips receive significant public attention, but he had also incorporated hunting into an articulated philosophy of the strenuous life, embracing the killing of animals for sport as a positive good. This conflicted with the humanitarian conviction that it was both unethical and demoralizing to take pleasure in the death and suffering of any being. An anti-hunting ideology emerged and coalesced in response to Roosevelt's celebration of hunting. Humane advocates challenged the practice within the context of a broad debate over masculine character and example in the Progressive era. They attacked
Roosevelt's hunting trips by arguing that his blood lust set a bad example for America's youth.

Kindness, Strenuousity, and the Masculine Ideal

For humane societies, kindness to animals both drew upon and reinforced a nineteenth-century bourgeois model of male character that emphasized gentle virtue and self-restraint. During the Progressive era, that standard of masculinity was questioned and reshaped in light of anxiety that a routinized modern industrial order and women's increased influence in the public sphere had produced an effete society. Roosevelt's celebration of manliness was not merely a mythopoetic exaltation of a lost "strenuousity." It was a revitalization strategy centered on the reconfiguration of bourgeois masculinity in a rapidly changing world. The expanding commercial economy created a burgeoning new middle class, whose work life was structured in ways that denied its male members the sort of self-reliant independence and status that had characterized manhood in earlier decades. Moreover, as the new century dawned, women began to challenge male power and identity in the realm of politics and public life. Increasingly denied the comfort and security of a masculine workplace, middle class

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men sought instead to reassure themselves of their manliness through the pursuit of leisure activities that affirmed and enhanced their masculine identities.  

Once, life had been routinely strenuous, but this would not be true much longer, unless assertive steps were taken. In an urbanizing, industrializing America, its shores swelling with new immigrants, its social composition altered, its native-born citizens rendered flabby and complacent by increasingly “corporate” lifestyles, the national character seemed to be at stake. America’s domestic security and international stature demanded a strong, vigorous, combative identity. The survival and fitness of a disciplined leadership class, and a population endowed with comparable virtues, were essential. Roosevelt and others relied on the strenuous life to accomplish that purpose. Strength of body, in the man as well as the nation, was equated with strength of character. Roosevelt became the greatest proponent and the very embodiment of the doctrine of the strenuous life as an antidote to the “overcivilization” characteristic of the nation’s new urban industrial society. Both his personal experiences and his historical inquiries led

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him to prize the wilderness experience. Having lived in the American West and observed its integration into the nation, he had personally experienced the closing of the frontier.\(^3\)

Even William James, whose anti-imperialist position placed him at odds with Roosevelt and other proponents of an assertive strategy for shoring up America’s national and international prospects, proposed the cultivation of manly vigor as "a moral equivalent" of war. Reciting the "horrors" of a world without strenuousness—"a world of clerks and teachers, of co-education and zoophilia"—James endorsed "the central essence of this feeling" that "human life with no use for hardihood would be contemptible."

Another author suggested that the "feminizing influence of women teachers on manners and morals" was cultivating a "lady-like attitude toward life."\(^4\)

James, Roosevelt, and other proponents of a new masculinity were thus responding to the threat of a "masculine domesticity," a gendered contradiction they considered to have been wrought by women’s sway. The boy who lived in both spheres, the domestic (female) and the public (male), was socialized by feminine values, including the kindness-to-animals ethic, and developed into the feminized man. Champions of strenuousity believed that the genteel and domesticated male who emerged from this process was a danger to the nation.\(^5\)

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By the time Roosevelt assumed the presidency, the humane movement had been active for 35 years. Firmly rooted in the industrial cities of the Northeast, its overwhelming focus was on domestic animals, particularly the urban draft horse. However, while some of the movement's principal leaders were men, it was dominated by women, and, even without an anti-hunting component, advocates of the strenuous life saw it a font of feminized values and a potential source of American enfeeblement. Animal protectionists viewed youth as the critical audience for the flow of their ideas and values, and the ethic of kindness was easily incorporated into the spiritual and moral lessons of the domestic environment. Moreover, the humane movement had its own program for youthful development, centering on the education of the young through Bands of Mercy.⁶

The cultivation of the manly boy was the necessary remedy. Just as humanitarians hoped to restrain the energies of the disorderly, impetuous boy and render him a proper model of bourgeois manhood, advocates of the strenuous life now sought to take those same raw energies and enhance them, in an effort to save the boy from the blight of feminized socialization, to make him physically fit and socially and politically assertive.⁷

Thus, the 1890s spawned a new interest in military training, athleticism, and discipline and an intense idealization of manly vigor. The militarization of education was part of an effort to counter the feminization of the classroom, which had become a special

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province of humane societies, the Women’s Christian Temperance Union, and related reform groups. The heroic virtues would be preserved and cultivated in such pursuits as football, boxing, ranching, hunting, and—when necessary—war. The nation would witness no greater advocate of the fighting virtues than Roosevelt.8

The preservation and promotion of hunting guaranteed one bulwark against the spread of effeminacy and degeneration, for it was one of the remaining channels for the expression and fulfillment of “rough” masculinity. No longer necessary as a utilitarian pursuit, no longer sanctioned as a commercial activity, hunting would be recast as an emblem of American democracy and a true American sport. What better way to establish connection with the ethos and character of the frontiersman, or to indulge and embrace a primitive masculinity?9 The conservation of land and wildlife in wilderness preserves was a vital part of this project, for it was essential to retain and perpetuate a theater for testing oneself in and against nature. Roosevelt was at the center of the debate over whether hunting was culturally atavistic or ennobling, and there was no doubt where he stood. “In hunting,” he wrote, “the finding and killing of the game is after all but a part of the whole. ... The chase is among the best of all national pastimes; it cultivates that vigorous manliness for the lack of which in a nation, as in an individual, the possession of no other qualities can possibly atone.”10

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8 On manliness and the military ideal, see Rotundo, American Manhood, 232-37.
9 On the valuation of primitive masculinity and “passion,” see Rotundo, American Manhood, 227-32.
Roosevelt and the humanitarians were at odds in their conceptions of civilization and primitivism in the twentieth century. For Roosevelt, the primitivism to be stemmed, and shed, was that associated with the immigrants flowing into the United States from the undeveloped nations of Europe. The civilization to be tempered and mediated was that encompassed by the new urban industrial society. He turned to nature and to the rugged ethic of the frontier as the solution to the challenge of preserving American character. In his formulation, civilization, rational and restrained though it must be, required a primitive and competitive core.\textsuperscript{11}

Humane advocates, for their part, saw the frontier ethos and such associated activities as hunting as the last vestiges of primitivism. These were values to be eliminated, not preserved, and their suppression was a major element of the humanitarian program of reform. An ongoing social evolution based on ever-increasing kindness would be the only tempering that American civilization required. Hunting for subsistence and survival was one thing; the investment of hunting with high spiritual purpose was quite another.

“The Residuum of the Barbarian”: Presidential Example and National Character

Nowhere was the threat Roosevelt posed to humane values more discussed than in the pages of Our Dumb Animals, the journal of the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (MSPCA) and the principal news organ of the humane movement. MSPCA founder George Angell was a passionate and energetic, if undeniably eccentric, defender of animals. Well into his eighties, and alarmed at military expenditure and the forceful projection of American power overseas, Angell was, in the very broadest sense, opposed to Roosevelt’s presidency and all that it stood for.¹²

Once Roosevelt assumed the presidency, anti-hunting items—previously rare—proliferated in the pages of Our Dumb Animals. In developing his attack on killing for sport, Angell published narratives and testimonies of hunters’ “Damascus conversions” and redemptions, the autobiographies of slaughtered and orphaned animals, commendations of farmers who did not permit animals to be killed on their property, and opinion pieces that assailed hunting.¹³

Throughout Roosevelt’s presidency, but especially during his second term, Roosevelt was a regular subject of criticism in Our Dumb Animals. On a virtually

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¹² Indeed, Angell was the sort of man Roosevelt had criticized in “The Strenuous Life,” when he wrote of “the overcivilized . . . [who] . . . shrink from seeing the nation undertake its new duties: shrink from seeing us build a navy and an army adequate to our needs; shrink from seeing us do our share of the world’s work.” See Theodore Roosevelt, “The Strenuous Life,” in The Strenuous Life: Essays and Addresses (St. Clair Shores, Michigan: Scholarly Press, 1970), 1-2.

monthly basis, Angell assailed the president's hunting, his enthusiasm for rough sports, the Rough Rider mythos, the administration's foreign and military policies, and the general belligerency of spirit which seemed to have afflicted the nation under Roosevelt's leadership. The president's example was highly offensive to Angell's vision of a world in which all schoolchildren would learn the lessons of kindness to animals as a natural precursor to universal peace and understanding.\textsuperscript{14}

Angell's comments on the international pretensions of Roosevelt and other leaders signaled what Anthony Rotundo has called a "generational cleavage" focused on imperialism. This was an extended argument between men of the Civil War generation and their successors, in which such martial ideals as manliness, athleticism, military preparedness, and hunting were all implicated.\textsuperscript{15} For certain Americans, Roosevelt's advocacy of military training for youth was a threat to the nation.\textsuperscript{16} Just as some viewed Roosevelt as the quintessence of the strenuous life to which all should aspire, others viewed the president as the personal embodiment of a malaise that afflicted the nation. For humane advocates, this led inevitably back to youthful male character. Angell explicitly linked the president's hunting with a reported increase in shootings nationwide, and with recorded acts of youthful depravity, such as the gunning down of five cows by three Maine boys, and worried that Roosevelt's example would inspire hundreds of


\textsuperscript{15} Rotundo, \textit{American Manhood}, 235.

\textsuperscript{16} Predictably, Angell traced Roosevelt's militarism to his youthful socialization. See George T. Angell, "If President Roosevelt." \textit{ODA} 39 (May 1907), 185; and idem, "The Rough Riders' Regiment," \textit{ODA} 41 (June 1908), 4.
thousands of American boys to begin hunting. A comparable level of distress attended the destruction of small wildlife by boys armed with sling shots and “air guns,” which advocates repeatedly criticized and placed before their readers as part of the argument that “hunting tends to brutalize the boy.” Our Dumb Animals regularly published accounts of the dangers posed by boys who used airguns and rubber catapults to destroy songbirds. Boys permitted to act in this way were, a writer for the San Francisco Bulletin suggested, “cultivating a bloodthirsty, savage spirit which tends later in life to swell the crop of wife-beaters and murderers.”

Despite his disdain, Angell and other contributors to Our Dumb Animals became rhetorically possessed by the concept of “the strenuous life,” and, in time, the MSPCA founder would even appropriate the idiom in the service of his Band of Mercy ideal. In restating its purposes from time to time, he expressed a facetious challenge to the president to throw his energy and influence into the work of the Bands. Nor did he fail to note those acts of kindness attributed to the president, such as his rescuing of kittens while out riding in Washington. Angell confidently proclaimed the president’s opposition to tail docking of horses, and commended Roosevelt for adopting a stray dog. Such acknowledgement extended to the president’s foreign policy as well; Angell

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19 George T. Angell, “The President Merciful,” ODA 35 (Jan. 1903), 90; and idem, “The President’s Dog,” ODA 34 (Nov. 1901), 78.
complimented the president for his decision to ship humanitarian relief to China, and congratulated him for his efforts to bring about peace between Russia and Japan.20

Roosevelt’s first major hunting trip as president gained national attention—and a lasting legacy—when he invoked the code of sportsmanship in refusing to shoot a bear during a six-day hunt near Smedes, Mississippi in November 1902. The party found beasts of the forests scarce, but finally a bear was harassed, subdued by the dogs, and tethered after killing one of them. Roosevelt declined to shoot the animal on these terms, and ordered it dispatched with a knife instead. This incident sparked the teddy bear craze, and led to the appropriation of the bear as a symbol of Roosevelt’s 1904 presidential campaign.21

Angell refrained from comment himself but reprinted a highly critical account of the episode from the New York Times, which called into question Roosevelt’s order to put the bear “out of his misery” with a knife: “Times have changed, and opinions with them. The hunter needs some sort of an excuse nowadays, and really there doesn’t seem to have been much excuse for the killing of this ‘lean black bear.’”22

20 George T. Angell, ODA 39 (Feb. 1907), 144; and idem, “President Roosevelt,” ODA 38 (Sept. 1905), 50.


In attacking Roosevelt’s hunting, Angell diverged uncharacteristically from the accustomed pattern of American humane advocates emulating British precedents. The management of England’s Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA)—dominated by an aristocratic elite that preserved hunting as one of its exempt privileges—fought off attempts by socialist humanitarians like Ernest Bell, Henry Salt, and George Bernard Shaw to promulgate an anti-bloodsport platform within the organization. In fact, the RSPCA journal published an account of President Roosevelt, commending him as a man who “shoots always as a sportsman, and has done much to protect the animals of [his] country.”

Such distinctions seem to have mattered little to American animal protectionists, and certainly not to Angell. On the occasion of Roosevelt’s April 1905 bear hunt in Colorado, Angell wasted no words about the president’s sportsmanship when the rumor surfaced that Roosevelt had shot a bear turned out of its cage only minutes before his arrival. If the account were true, Angell opined, then the president had done what, “under the laws of Massachusetts, would be punishable by a fine of two hundred and fifty dollars and a year’s imprisonment.” That very month, Our Dumb Animals carried a bitterly satirical poem, “Our Strenuous Hunter,” which scored the President as an ignorant and insatiable killer who conflated prairie dogs with wolves, rabbits with lions, and coyotes with elephants.

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24 “Our Strenuous Hunter,” ODA 37 (Apr. 1905), 153; and George T. Angell, “President Roosevelt Has Shot a Bear,” ODA 37 (May 1905), 162.
Angell also reproduced an opinion piece highly critical of Roosevelt’s adventure, and an editorial comment concerning expenses relating to the trip. One editorial chided Roosevelt for recklessness while recapitulating many of Angell’s own indictments. “The country is in suspense all the time while the strenuous, fearless, reckless man is out heeding ‘the call of the wild.’ He has no business to be out on a wanton killing expedition, anyhow. His taste is the residuum of the barbarian in a highly civilized man,” the writer asserted. “It is not one whit more respectable than a child’s pulling the wings off from flies, or a boy killing songbirds. . . . It is the old, aboriginal, savage instinct, and worse, and more out of place in a civilized, cultivated man than in a naked cave man.”

Another editorial, from the New York Sun, went further, suggesting that many sportsmen were coming to regret and deplore the slaughter of animals. The article predicted the demise of hunting and credited the humane societies with “having helped to turn men’s thoughts to the cruelty of such sport.” The editorialist further noted, “It is remarkable how widely this tenderness of feeling has extended. The subject of making a pastime of hunting and shooting animals is never brought up . . . without drawing out many letters. . . . They come, too, in most part, from men by whom such an exhibition of sentiment would have been regarded many years ago as a confession of effeminacy.”

25 “President Roosevelt,” and George T. Angell, “Our President’s Travelling Expenses,” ODA 38 (June 1905), 2.

26 The article was reproduced as “Killing as a Sport; Indications of Increasing Sensibility Even Among Sportsmen,” ODA 37 (Jan. 1905), 108.
In fact, a captive bear was waiting for release when Roosevelt, who received a special license from the governor of Colorado to kill any animal he wanted, arrived in the Rocky Mountain town of Newcastle. Town boosters had proposed to receive the president with a procession including a tame bear, “to be let loose and turned into the woods for the President to shoot.” The Colorado Humane Society, however, intervened and called off the planned bear chase, “saying the fierce animal only had been in captivity a short time and might gobble up a few children before Roosevelt caught up with it.”

Ultimately, Roosevelt killed four wild bears on the 25-day trip, recording the details in an essay included in Outdoor Pastimes. Reacting to Angell’s intense criticism of the president’s trip, the superintendent of schools for the District of Columbia excluded Our Dumb Animals from the public school system for a few months during the latter half of 1905.

Humane advocates continually dwelled upon the power of the president’s example. In “A Little Talk of and To the President,” an essay for the New York American, the poet Ella Wheeler Wilcox underscored the links between cruelty to animals and violent human crime. “Noblesse oblige, Mr. Roosevelt,” Wilcox wrote. “Your example is doing much to nullify all the efforts of the humane societies all over our land. And whether you believe it or not, you are unconsciously helping to increase crime and cruelty in America. The Christian Socialist G. D. Herron went further, giving


28 Theodore Roosevelt, Outdoor Pastimes of an American Hunter (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1905), 68-99; ODA 38 (Aug. 1905), 34; George T. Angell, “President Roosevelt,” ODA 39 (Aug. 1906), 42; and ODA 40 (Mar. 1908), 162. For details of the hunt that did take place, see Schullery, Bear Hunter’s Century, 149-55.
an entire lecture on Roosevelt's depravity, in which he called him a symbol of the cultural retrogression that threatened social reform. "He is the embodiment of man's return to the brute," Herron suggested, "the living announcement that man will again seek relief from the sickness of society in the bonds of an imposing savagery."\textsuperscript{29}

If his enthusiasm for hunting was a prominent element in Roosevelt's public reputation, this had been largely his own doing. In chronicling his hunting adventures, his ranching exploits in the Badlands, and his embrace and celebration of frontier life, Roosevelt made himself an apostle of the moral and spiritual uplift that hard-fought existence, manly physical pursuits, and self-reliance could bring. His three books on these experiences were well-received best sellers.\textsuperscript{30}

Some of Roosevelt's trips, burdened by the presence of numerous journalists, officials and others, became "fiascoes," as one biographer has put it. Roosevelt was aware of public discomfort over his hunting, and was careful to cast it in the best possible light of sportsmanship, scientific endeavor and ennobling spirit. In the wake of the Mississippi farce, Roosevelt worried about the personal humiliation and political embarrassment of failure to kill a bear on his next hunt, and admitted concern about the scrutiny his hunting had garnered, even as he planned an upcoming bear hunt in


Colorado. "I am really at a loss to make up my mind whether it would be possible to take a hunt without having people join us in a way that will interfere with the hunting and without having so much silly and brutal newspaper talk," he wrote a friend. 31

Not only did Roosevelt take that Colorado trip, he went bear hunting a third time two years later. In the final hunt, in November 1907 in the Louisiana canebrakes, Roosevelt secured the services of the same guide, Holt Collier, former slave and Confederate soldier, who had guided him five years before in Mississippi. 32 The New York Times offered a pragmatic analysis:

[While] not ourselves ready to condemn hunting... yet we recognize the fact that the killing of animals for sport is a little out of date, and that the people whom it severely shocks justify their dislike for such sport by arguments not entirely compounded of sentimentalism. The number of those who can read accounts of the slaughter of animals is steadily decreasing, while the number of those whom such stories offend is getting bigger and bigger every day. ... Whatever may be thought of that fact, fact it is, and statesmen who are also politicians will ignore it at some danger to the attainment of their ambitions. 33

A Missouri editorial was harsher. "Here is a man who stands for the key-stone of the arch of our civilization, expressed in the crystallization of our community relations as a nation, who has not an equal in the animal kingdom for an over-bearing, cruel, savage attitude toward beings weaker than himself," the writer noted. "He kills and find pleasure in it, a pleasure as primitive but by no means as excusable as that of the savage who mutilates the body of his vanquished foe in the observance of a religious rite." The 1907


32 Details of the hunt are to be found in Schullery, Bear Hunter's Century, 219-26, and in Roosevelt's Jan. 1908 Scribner's Magazine article, repr. in Schullery, ed., American Bears, 155-69.

trip also drew the attention and ire of another severe critic, Mark Twain, who satirized the President in an unpublished short story written for the amusement of his personal secretary.  

There is no evidence that Roosevelt ever addressed himself to, let alone retaliated against, Angell’s specific criticism. However, he did respond to humanitarian reproach in general, in Outdoor Pastimes, and he spared no words in his caricature of critics:

“There is no need to exercise much patience with men who protest against field sports, unless they are logical vegetarians of the flabbiest Hindoo type. If no deer or rabbits were killed, no crops could be cultivated. If it is morally right to kill an animal to eat its body, then it is morally right to kill to preserve its head.” There was even more at stake, he reminded his readers, for “[no] nation facing the unhealthy softening and relaxation of fibre which tend to accompany civilization can afford to neglect anything that will develop hardihood, resolution, and the scorn of discomfort and danger.”

“Nature-Fakers” and the Humane Ethic

Roosevelt’s hunting was implicated, indirectly, in a colorful controversy over nature writing. During the period 1903-1908, at first behind the scenes but ultimately at center stage, Roosevelt waged battle against the group he dubbed “the nature fakers,” a school of nature writers whose sentimental approach and factual errancy offended him.

34 “President Roosevelt,” Weltmer’s Magazine, Nevada, Mo., repr. in ODA 39 (Mar. 1907), 152; and William Merriam Gibson, Theodore Roosevelt Among the Humorists: W.D. Howells, Mark Twain, and Mr. Dooley (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1989), 25. Twain detested cruelty to animals, and made it the theme of several works. Two of his short works, A Dog’s Tale (New York: Harper and Bros., 1903) and A Horse’s Tale (New York: Harper and Bros., 1907), focus on cruelty to animals, one on vivisection and the other on bullfighting.

35 Roosevelt, Outdoor Pastimes, 337.
Roosevelt’s attack on William Long, and his attempt to “certify” the reputable natural history writers of the nation according to his own standards, focused on the alleged manufacture of such incidents as animals performing surgery, the details of predator kills, and other anecdotes that strained credulity. Roosevelt’s hunting was sternly criticized as part of the ad hominem exchange that ensued. 36

Roosevelt was far more energetic in going after the nature fakers than he was in going after humane critics, and there are several possible explanations for this. First, John Burroughs, the President’s favorite nature writer, was raging mad at the “sham naturalists,” and asked Roosevelt to become involved. Second, nature fakery was an intellectually attractive debate, which focused on animal consciousness, instinct, evolution, and the particular details of killing, all subjects of interest to him. It was also the case, as Roosevelt once intimated, that at the precise moment of his public entry into the controversy he had felt himself keenly in need of “some diversion.” Even so, reluctant to use the prestige and office of the presidency to attack anyone, he followed the dispute for several years before becoming involved, and, when he did so, he tried to accomplish his purposes indirectly, through an interview with Edward B. Clark. 37

It is worth noting that the nature fakers’ focus on individual animals and their doings, their focus on animal altruism, and their anthropomorphic tendencies carried an implicit threat to the hunter-naturalist who sought to combine the killing of animals with

36 The story of the controversy is engagingly told by Lutts, The Nature Fakers. There are other details in John Burroughs, Camping and Tramping With Roosevelt (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1907). Also see Roosevelt's dedicatory preface to Burroughs in Outdoor Pastimes.

a scientific appreciation for them. Such sentimentalizing approaches have often inspired lines of thought that place people at odds with both hunting and with wildlife management policies that endorse it. The vast audiences and enormous popularity of the nature popularizers, as less hostile observers called them, made them a potent cultural threat to the ideology of the hunter-conservationist.

Although their direct interactions appear to have been limited, there were links between the nature fakers and the humane movement. Without doubt, attributions of animal altruism, and related stories of animals lamenting their dead, were well received in humane circles. It was hardly coincidental that the Boston publishing house of Edwin Ginn, stalwart of the American Peace Society, published both humane tracts and some of the contested nature writings.38

More importantly, Roosevelt, on the one hand, and many humanitarians and nature fakers, on the other, were at odds in their interpretations of evolutionary doctrine and in their constructions of nature and the non-human inhabitants of the natural world. They disagreed in fundamental ways about the proper way to encounter and experience nature, and about human obligations to non-human animals.39 Roosevelt had endorsed a particular conception of Darwinian thought in his embrace of the savage virtues. The pursuit of Darwinistic struggle, in the wilderness, along the frontier, or in the


39 While not all of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century nature popularizers and animal protectionists had endorsed Darwinism's claim that humans and animals shared a common origin (neither Long nor British anti-vivisectionist Frances Power Cobbe had), many did reflect upon its implications for the human-animal relationship.
international arena, was an essential element in the conservation and enhancement of
America’s virile strength. Some retention of the primitive was necessary to guard against
overcivilization and to ensure the survival of the fittest society.\textsuperscript{40}

Humanitarians, on the other hand, like nature popularizers, sought to cultivate a
sense of kinship and intimacy with animals, and regarded more beneficent and non-
vio\-lent interactions with them as a hallmark of human advancement. They drew very
different conclusions from Darwinism. In 1905, the author of one letter to a
Massachusetts newspaper not only assailed “the manliness of Roosevelt’s hunting,” but
went further. The writer also laid out a very modern ecological understanding of the
practice, citing “the danger of having whole species exterminated” and the lesson of
Darwin that “all life is one, all a spark of the Infinite Life.” John Kimball’s letter
invoked a new critique of hunting that would grow in importance, and articulated a new
and different ethic of kindness, one informed by Darwin, a modern concomitant to the
older ethic based on sentiment and Christian stewardship.\textsuperscript{41}

\textsuperscript{40} See Nash, \textit{Wilderness and the American Mind}, 149-53; and Rotundo, \textit{American Manhood}, 227-
32, for discussions of the popularity of identification with the primitive and savage passions. For
Darwinism’s relationship to the doctrine of the strenuous life, see Bederman, \textit{Manliness and Civilization},
184-86.

\textsuperscript{41} John C. Kimball, “No Sympathy with Bear Killing,” in ODA 38 (Aug. 1905), 35; George T.
Angell, “President Roosevelt and the \textit{Springfield Republican},” ODA 41 (Sept. 1908), 52; and idem, “The
\textit{Springfield Republican}—Another Result of Cattle-Ranch, Rough-Rider, Rooseveltian Doings,” ODA 4
(Jan. 1909), 116. Angell shared the newspaper’s hostility toward Roosevelt’s foreign policy. The
\textit{Springfield Republican} had published criticisms of sport hunting as early as 1902; see the excerpt of a letter
sent to the paper by Charles Eliot Norton in “Autumn’s Days of Slaughter,” ODA 35 (Dec. 1902), 76.
“The Traveling Humane Society” and the
Roosevelts’ African Safari

In March 1908, during the final year of the Roosevelt presidency, Angell admonished a Massachusetts man who planned to set his tame bear “Teddy” loose for the pleasure of hunters that he would be liable to a fine of $250 and a year’s imprisonment. In the last year of his own life, Angell, 85, proclaimed his contentment with the fact that, after his long years of propagandizing editorialists and publishers, “a large number of those papers are at present coming to the same opinions which we have entertained in regard to the fitness of Theodore Roosevelt to be president of the United States and a pattern for the youth of our country.”

As Angell saw his life’s adventure coming to a close, Roosevelt was preparing for the greatest adventure of his life. Angell died on March 16, 1909, just one week before Roosevelt’s post-presidential African safari began. Scrutiny and criticism of the former President did not fade, however, with the demise of one persistent critic or with Roosevelt’s removal to Africa. Other humanitarians carried on, including one whose own celebrity gave her an opportunity to challenge hunting that was available to few persons. Minnie Maddern Fiske (1865-1932), the leading stage actress of the early twentieth century, became a vigorous critic of the Roosevelt expedition, carrying forward some elements of Angell’s indictment but adding others. Fiske frequently held press conferences or issued statements in support of the local humane societies in the communities in which she played. Public criticism was the only effective way to

challenge sport hunting in the Progressive era, since political and legislative actions to stop or limit non-market hunting were entirely impossible. Hunters, as the first to pay any attention to the regulation of wildlife populations, had structured the entire legal, political, and administrative apparatus in each state to prevent interference by any non-enthusiasts.43

Fiske criticized Roosevelt’s conduct within the framework of Progressive era notions about character-building. The feminized locus of criticism, implicit in George Angell’s role as the man who often spoke for a movement of women, became explicit in Fiske’s very public and widely publicized attacks. Her indictment of Roosevelt’s conduct typified the increased efforts by Progressive era women to challenge and reorder the conduct of men. Like contemporaneous campaigns for temperance, sexual purity, and reform and elimination of objectionable pursuits like boxing and fraternal orders, Fiske’s campaign involved more than just the transgression of the public sphere. It involved the projection of women’s views about the proper conduct of men into the public sphere.44

Fiske, sometimes called “the traveling humane society,” had been active in humane work for many years already, and was the most prominent advocate for animals

43 The domination of wildlife management law and policy by hunters is documented in Thomas A. Lund, American Wildlife Law (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980); James A. Tober, Who Owns the Wildlife? The Political Economy of Conservation in Nineteenth-Century America (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981); and John F. Reiger, American Sportsmen and the Origins of Conservation (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1986). These works differ in approach, but all tend to credit the sportsman with a role in “animal protection.” However, these celebrations of sportsmen’s work uniformly fail to acknowledge the exclusions that have prevented citizens who do not support consumptive uses from serving within or influencing the administrative mechanisms that govern the fate of wildlife in the United States. This has impeded the development of a full range of protectionist perspectives in wildlife policy.

44 Rotundo, American Manhood, 252-53.
in the United States. She played critical roles in publicizing the campaigns against plumage, fur, and the steel leghold trap, and for the relief of starving and freezing cattle on the western ranges in winter. Fiske's company did a benefit performance in Boston at the Copley Square Hotel for the Millenium Guild, the first American organization with an explicit animal rights philosophy. She printed at her own expense a translated Swedish tract, "A Horse's Prayer to Mankind," distributed in logging camps in Wisconsin and elsewhere where horses were being employed in great numbers. An interviewer once entered Fiske's hotel suite in Pittsburgh to find her presiding over a flock of pigeons who were feeding on crumbs that she had spread on the floor near an open window.\(^{45}\)

Fiske had actually played before Roosevelt in Washington in 1906. Her manager, Frank Carlos Griffith, relaying the President's congratulations on the play "The New York Idea," suggested that the approval would have been warmer had she not so often sniped at him about his hunting habits. "Fallacious!" Fiske replied. "A President can't take a vacation from being President. Every time he goes hunting, millions of American boys go hunting, or want to. He can't expect to set a bad example, and vacation in peace."\(^{46}\)

The East African safari was an undertaking of quasi-military proportions, comprising the Roosevelts, father and son, Smithsonian staff members, a few white


\(^{46}\) Binns, Mrs. Fiske, 178. Griffith devoted a chapter to Fiske's concern for animals in Mrs. Fiske (New York: Neale Publishing Co., 1912).
hunters, several dozen native soldiers, and over 250 porters. This troupe carried the equipment required for specimen preservation, Roosevelt’s ‘traveling library’ of small leather-bound classics, and the normal outfit required for such an adventure. Roosevelt practiced for the trip by shooting at targets and studying casts of animal heads. Insisting upon his right to privacy once out of office, he took steps to ensure it. 47

Roosevelt spent eleven months in the African interior, determined to bag the most formidable African animals: the elephant, rhinoceros, buffalo, leopard, and lion. By the end of the safari, he had personally slain 269 animals, including 9 lions, 13 rhinos, 8 elephants, 7 hippopotami, and 7 giraffes. Together, the Roosevelts, father and son, brought down 512 animals—17 lions, 20 rhinoceri, 9 giraffes, 47 gazelles, 8 hippopotami, 29 zebras, 9 hyenas, and a sampling of other creatures, including the bongo, the dik-dik, the kudu, the aardwolf, and the klipspringer. The total take of the safari exceeded 11,000 animals, comprising 4,857 mammals, 4,000 birds, 500 fishes, and 2,000 reptiles. Theodore recorded the circumstances of death of each animal he himself killed in his diary, diagramming the wounds inflicted. Reports and records emphasized that the animals were being killed according to the scientists’ specimen requirements or for feeding the party. In African Game Trails, Roosevelt characterized these kills as restrained. 48


Responding to the consistent publicity accorded the Roosevelt expedition, Fiske relentlessly denounced Roosevelt as an enemy of humanitarianism. Explaining her position, she wrote, "These concerns simply cannot stand exposure, and although I am not in the least a militant person, I am not in the least an aggressive person . . . I do believe that we must come out before the world in exposing these brutal, unnecessary savageries." Making good on this conviction, at a number of public appearances during the year that Roosevelt was in Africa, Fiske chastised the former president for his harmful impact on the moral character of youth.  

Chicago animal rights advocate J. Howard Moore also condemned the former president as a "megaphonic individual," "obsessed with a desire to kill." If it were not for public opinion, Moore asserted, "it wouldn't make much difference to him whether he exercised this savage instinct by slaying Spaniards or lions." Future generations of Americans, Moore predicted, would recognize such "bloody expeditions . . . as needless and barbaric."  

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Also joining in the furor was Roosevelt's old nemesis William Long, who added his own assessment of the president's manliness and character.\textsuperscript{51} Roosevelt answered such criticism in \textit{African Game Trails}, his account of the safari, published while he was still in Africa. Roosevelt had deplored many forms of unsportsmanlike conduct by hunters in previous writings. Articulating his own views of sportsmanlike hunting, in the aftermath of the African tour, he wrote, "Game butchery is as objectionable as any other form of wanton cruelty or barbarity, but to protest against all hunting of game is a sign of softness of head, not of soundness of heart." It was necessary to kill animals, and game laws had to based upon "certain facts that ought to be self-evident to everyone above the intellectual level of those well-meaning persons who apparently think that all shooting is wrong and that man could continue to exist if all wild animals were allowed to increase unchecked."\textsuperscript{52}

\textit{African Game Trails}, like Roosevelt's frontier and wilderness narratives, sought to fire men's imaginations about the excitement and virility of the hunt. His portrayal of the animals he pursued was quite unsympathetic; they were there to be conquered, and he never reflected in print upon the meaning of their deaths. Instead, he emphasized the ferocity and danger of the animals he hunted, as if to justify their deaths in the minds of

\textsuperscript{51} "Long Says Roosevelt is Neither a Naturalist nor a Sportsman: Doctor Declares Former President Has Never Killed Game Except When No Trouble Was Involved in Act," \textit{Chicago Inter-Ocean}, 12 June 1909, in Container 114. Fiske Papers.

\textsuperscript{52} Roosevelt, \textit{African Game Trails}, 14-15. For earlier deprecations of poor conduct by hunters, in such practices as crusting and jacking, see Roosevelt, \textit{Outdoor Pastimes}, 209-10, 336-37.
his readers. He described every shot he fired, and his prose was terse and dramatic. "I broke her neck with a single bullet," he wrote of one bear he shot in Colorado in 1905.53

While evidence of the symbolic import and cultural currency of Roosevelt's hunter identity was abundant throughout his presidency, it seems to have been especially rich by the time of his western political tour, undertaken in summer 1910 after his return from Africa. Numerous cartoons and journalistic references cast Roosevelt as a Nimrod, "slayer of lions, tamer of predatory trusts," who hunted crooks out of public life, and took aim at old guard Republican elephants who headed for the bush at the sight of him. The hunting theme flourished in pageantry, banquets, and other celebrations of his trip as well. In Fargo, North Dakota, Roosevelt watched from his own parade float as a double repeatedly enacted the shooting of bear and deer, stopping now and again to doff his hat to the cheering crowd. The Viking Room at Minneapolis' Radisson Hotel was converted to a jungle scene, with a wax and confectionary sculpture of Roosevelt and the lions and tigers of the African hunt.54

"Shoot with a Camera"

More than a few contemporary naturalists, no longer or never having been hunters, overlooked Roosevelt's hunting in deference to his achievements in conservation

53 The example is from Roosevelt, Outdoor Pastimes, 92. There are numerous comparable phrases in African Game Trails and other works.

and nature preservation. This was the case with John Burroughs, the President’s favorite naturalist. Another naturalist, the Rocky Mountain sage Enos Mills, once hired by Roosevelt as a forestry lecturer, made his position clear through indirection. At numerous public lectures on forests and the wilderness, Mills underscored his personal ambivalence about hunting, proclaimed his enthusiasm for exploring the wilds without firearms, and constructed an appeal for nature study based on the friendly, harmless character of the wilderness. Despite the fact that Roosevelt’s construction of fierce, predatory nature, fraught with danger, conflicted with his own depiction of an inviting, largely peaceful natural world, Mills credited his former boss with being “one of the best informed men of the age on most subjects, including nature.” However, Mills explained, “Teddy, like other hunters, does not understand the ‘character’ of animals.”

The great exception among naturalists who met Roosevelt’s approval was John Muir, who told Robert Underwood Johnson that he had pulled no punches with the President on their well-publicized trip to Yosemite, asking, “Mr. Roosevelt, when are you going to get beyond the boyishness of killing things? It seems to me it is all very well for a young fellow who has not formed his standards to rush out in the heat of youth and slaughter animals, but are you not getting far enough along to leave that off?” Roosevelt, as Johnson relates, replied, “Muir, I guess you are right.”

Indeed, increasing numbers of Americans shared Muir’s convictions. Numerous alternative ways of going “back to nature” arose during the Progressive era, and some of


these cast hunting in the most negative light. One of humanitarians’ most frequently proposed alternatives was photography. In 1913, Francis Rowley, Angell’s successor at the MSPCA, decried Roosevelt’s South American trip, which news reports had described as a science expedition that would entail the shipment home of over 1500 bird and mammal skins. “This destruction in the name of science,” Rowley wrote, “we do not believe in for a moment. Photographs of wild life brought back would show a much higher courage, a finer intelligence, a nobler spirit and at least a kind heart.” Under Rowley’s editorial authority, Our Dumb Animals published articles by reformed hunters, and stories about non-lethal means for studying animals. Above all, the magazine extolled the virtues of the camera and other “bloodless” instruments as a means of encountering wildlife. In April 1913, a naturalist augmented the well-established metaphorical slogan “Shoot with a Camera” with a feature on the mechanics of nature photography. The author confidently proclaimed the moral superiority of the camera over the rifle. In the consummation of our efforts to secure good photographs, he asserted, we not only enjoy “the gratification of success, the stimulating outdoor exercise, [and] a better knowledge of nature. . . . [We] soon lose that manless desire to kill every creature crossing our path.”


Conclusion

In 1906, writing to photographer Herbert K. Job, Roosevelt opined, "If we can only get the camera in place of the gun and have the sportsman sunk somewhat in the naturalist and lover of wild things, the next generation will see an immense change for the better in the life of our woods and waters."59 This wish for "submersion" was as close as Roosevelt would come to repudiation of the pastime he loved. In 1933, just fourteen years after Roosevelt's death, Eugene Swope, director of the Roosevelt Bird Sanctuary, responded to an inquiry about the apparent contradiction between Roosevelt's great love for nature and his devotion to hunting. It was clear to Swope that Roosevelt's accomplishments in conservation would not be enough to make him immune from reproach in the future. Noting the spread, "with unbelievable rapidity," of the Audubon movement and similar wildlife protection initiatives, in the first three decades of the twentieth century, Swope tried to make a case for Roosevelt's record in wildlife conservation at a time when the national mood was considerably more ambivalent toward hunting. Reminding his correspondent that Roosevelt's last adventure was "one of discovery in South America rather than a hunting trip," Swope asserted that "[h]ad Roosevelt lived ten years longer, I am convinced that he would have generally discouraged hunting, save in rare instances, and would have been active in restricting the sport."60


60 Eugene Swope to Helen Reed, May 1, 1933, in Theodore Roosevelt Collection. Harvard University Libraries, Cambridge, MA.
While dubious, Swope’s speculation suggests that Roosevelt’s view of hunting had been overtaken by a different sensibility. Roosevelt’s provocation to humane ideals revealed a deepening cultural fault line about the role of hunting in an urbanized America—a role that been more heavily contested in each succeeding decade. During the course of the twentieth century, alternative ways of encountering animals, an enhanced appreciation for their ecological roles, and a growing respect for their inherent value, all came together as part of the anti-hunting discourse that formed during the era of Roosevelt. Together with other trends related to urbanization and industrialization, they have undermined the position of sport hunting as an uncontested good and a morally defensible activity.

Even so, recreational hunting did not disappear. In rural areas, especially, it thrived throughout the twentieth century, despite the criticism of humane advocates, urbanites, environmentalists, and others. Their disapproval notwithstanding, millions of Americans headed into the woods to kill animals, swayed neither by arguments in favor of animals’ interests nor by those which underscored the reflexive impact of killing upon human character.

On the other hand, concern for wildlife has steadily increased during the past century, and come to occupy an important place on the humane agenda. Roosevelt’s

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61 It is from this perspective that one recent author addresses criticism of Roosevelt’s hunting. Paul Schullery cites a historian who wonders how “a man who loved animals as much as Roosevelt did could still enjoy killing them.” Using this example, Schullery treats the current charge of hunting’s immorality as an unfair ahistorical judgment, suggesting that modern readers simply do not understand the code of sportsmanship that bound hunters like Roosevelt, and the context in which he and other conservationists worked. Yet even Schullery concedes that such actions as shooting at hawks, eagles and small game merely for target practice, which Roosevelt did, are hard to reconcile with any sporting code. And Schullery ignores Roosevelt’s contemporary critics in making his judgment. Schullery, *American Bears*, 178-79, n16.
status, celebrity, and conspicuous enthusiasm created a context in which hunting and its relationship to the national character could be broadly debated. This gave humane advocates an unusual opportunity to introduce ethical, practical, ecological and other concerns about hunting into public discussion. The expression of anti-hunting sentiment was an extension of the ethic that they had been promulgating in relation to domestic animals for some decades, and their condemnations of hunting reflected the movement's shift toward regard for wild animals as morally considerable beings.