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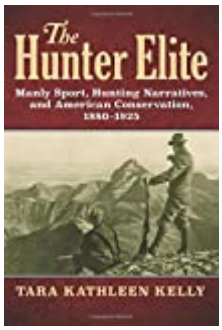
Tara Kathleen Kelly. *The Hunter Elite: Manly Sport, Hunting Narratives, and American Conservation, 1880-1925.* Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2018. 360 pp. $55.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-7006-2587-1.



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Since the mid-1970s, environmental historians of the United States have become increasingly attentive to the role sport hunters played in the Progressive conservation movement. Whereas earlier histories of environmental politics during this era had primarily focused on the technocratic utilitarianism of Gifford Pinchot and the romantic preservationism of John Muir, foundational studies by John F. Reiger and Thomas R. Dunlap showed how elite big-game hunters and their private clubs successfully lobbied for closed shooting seasons, bans on commercial hunting, and the creation of numerous wildlife refuges and national parks. More recently, historians have explored how this "sportsmen's program" of conservation laws, in the interest of preserving game for future hunters, largely reflected upper-class interests. Louis Warren's *The Hunter's Game: Poachers and Conservationists in Twentieth-Century America* (1997), Karl Jacoby's *Crimes against Nature: Squatters, Poachers, Thieves, and the Hidden History of American Conservation* (2001), and Scott Giltner's *Hunting and Fishing in the New South: Black Labor and White Leisure after the Civil War* (2008), for example, have used the lens of social history to investigate the ways protective game laws criminalized the hunting and subsistence practices of working-class whites, European immigrants, indigenous people, and African Americans. But how did this exclusive group of wealthy recreational hunters manage to achieve widespread public support for their particular brand of class-based conservation in the first place?

The answer, according to Tara Kathleen Kelly, lies in the changing cultural meaning of sport hunting. In *The Hunter Elite: Manly Sport, Hunting Narratives, and American Conservation, 1880-1925*, Kelly charts the emergence of a new and unique form of leisure hunting—the "still hunt," or "the stalk"—that gained popularity among East Coast elites during the Gilded Age. Sportsmen who took part in this time-consuming method of pursuit developed a set of hunting ethics that gave game a fair chance of escape ("the fair chase") and reconstituted the hunt as a site for the development and display of moral character. In the pro-

cess of bagging a trophy, middle- and upper-class hunters could demonstrate self-restraint, patience, and willpower, which, in their view, differentiated them from the commercialism and "pot-hunting" of less affluent marksmen. The performance of ethical sportsmanship also took place in print, where stalking narratives penned by members of what Kelly terms "the hunter elite" appeared in best-selling books, recreational magazines, and general audience periodicals like *Scribner's, Collier's,* and *Harper's Weekly*. When populations of North American wildlife declined precipitously at the end of the nineteenth century, sportsmen enthusiastically embraced conservation, leveraging their national media platforms to rally public support for game laws and wilderness preservation. This combination of political power and media influence, Kelly argues, "gave [the hunter elite] a voice with which no other single group of hunters could compete" (p. 247).

The Hunter Elite is divided into three parts. Part 1, "Tales of the Sportsmen-Hunter," explores how social, economic, and technological changes at the end of the nineteenth century transformed recreational hunting and gave rise to the American still-hunting narrative. In the years before and immediately after the Civil War, well-to-do northeasterners largely regarded hunting as a vacation activity that offered social opportunities for the display of elite status and wealth. But by the early 1880s, prominent American sportsmen increasingly began to associate big-game hunting with values derived from the Protestant work ethic, namely, "the primacy of the will" and the "manly virtues" of temperance, discipline, and self-control. Kelly attributes this shift in meaning to changes in the American economy that took place during the Second Industrial Revolution. Corporatization and the growth of salaried jobs made it difficult for middle-class men to cultivate manliness in the workplace, and among the upper class, money was no longer a reliable identifier of patrician background. Sportsmen responded to these cultural anxieties by formulating an ethical code that outlined what, when, and how game should be pursued, differentiating them from both lower-class market and subsistence hunters and other (less virtuous) wealthy men. The rapid expansion of railroad and steamship travel during the latter half of the century also made remote hunting grounds more accessible, further contributing to the appeal of the still hunt.

Sportsmen could demonstrate manly character in the field, but many of them also chose to convert their experiences into published stories, books, and travelogues. In 1882, New Jersey lawyer Theodore S. Van Dyke published a collection of hunting narratives titled ***The Still-Hunter***, which sparked the creation of a new American literary genre that centered on the moral significance of the stalk. The narratives produced by the hunter elite did not follow a set formula or design; Kelly argues they are better described as a "discourse" that encompassed five principle themes: the redefinition of hunting as productive, strenuous work (rather than leisure), the promotion of ethical sportsmanship, invocations of the frontier or pioneer past, an emphasis on the contributions of hunting to natural history, and virtuous manliness. As the publishing industry grew in the late nineteenth century, the owners and editors of major publishing companies, middle-class periodicals, and recreational magazines turned stalking narratives into profitable commodities that attracted a wide readership. East Coast publishing elites were often sportsmen themselves who joined one another on hunting trips and claimed membership in exclusive organizations like the Boone and Crockett Club, founded in 1887 by Theodore Roosevelt and George Bird Grinnell, editor of ***Forest and Stream***. In the last chapter of part 1, Kelly profiles Caspar Whitney, the editor of ***Outing*** magazine and author of numerous hunting books, whose career "dissolv[ed] the barriers between hunt and narrative, product and producer" (p. 102). Through their deep connections to the publishing industry, the sportsmen-writers were able to effectively shape the ways that recreational hunting was presented to the public.

The second section, "Fellow Travelers," analyzes the role that women and British hunters played in the formation of the sportsmen-hunter discourse. Although the majority of hunting narratives were written by native-born, white, Protestant men, books and articles composed by female hunters calling themselves "Modern Dianas" were also popular. Women hunter-writers were able to achieve publishing success, Kelly contends, because the discourse of the hunter elite—despite employing the rhetoric of nineteenth-century manliness—was not based in a rejection of femininity but in the development of character traits, values, and behaviors that were not exclusive to men. "The opposite of the true sportsman," Kelly points out, "was not a woman but rather a brute, a creature, the game hog, and female hunters could also reject associations with such a beast" (p. 149). Female hunters elided discussions of manliness in their narratives but upheld the virtues of the still hunt, drawing similar connections to sportsmanship, restraint, and willpower. In contrast, British big-game hunters were excluded from the sportsman-hunter discourse and their methods were often depicted as unsportsmanlike. British hunting narratives predated the American still-hunting genre by several decades, but unlike the narratives of the hunter elite, British writers explicitly linked sport hunting to imperialism, violence, and war. When American sportsmen began traveling to colonial outposts in Africa and South Asia more frequently at the turn of the century to hunt big game, they came into greater contact with British hunters in the field. In their published accounts and travelogues, US hunter-writers used encounters with British sportsmen abroad to highlight national differences and affirm the moral superiority of American sportsmanship.

In part 3, "Discourse and Consequences," Kelly examines the social, economic, and political effects of the hunter elite's practices and ideology. The first chapter explores how the rise of international hunting tourism fostered the creation of local "guide economies" catering to the needs of visiting big-game hunters. Like their European counterparts, well-off American sportsmen often hired trackers, gunbearers, servants, and porters to ensure a successful expedition. As the demand for skilled and reliable guides grew, guide work became a licensed and regulated profession. "Guides ... understood themselves as employees," Kelly ex-

plains; "to them, the hunt and the trophy were commodities bought and paid for" (p. 205). In their narratives, sportsmen praised guides who were especially trustworthy or adept at their jobs, but because the moral significance of the stalk was predicated on the expertise of the individual hunter, not a dependence on outside help, many hunter-writers downplayed the guide's role. The final two chapters analyze the relationship between the hunter elite and the conservation movement. In response to declining supplies of game, sportsmen took up the conservation cause at the very end of the nineteenth century. Hunter-writers linked wildlife preservation to the ideals of ethical sportsmanship, manly self-restraint, and patriotism already present in the discourse, and on the lobbying front, used their elite political connections and considerable influence in the national press to help enact federal game legislation and establish forest reserves and national parks. Despite longstanding public opposition to game laws in the United States dating back to the colonial era, the hunter elite's agenda prevailed because they effectively redefined the parameters of the debate to reflect Progressive-Era political concerns. In the eyes of sport hunting advocates, game laws were not "class legislation" that aimed to restrict the hunting activities of the poor and working class but safeguards in a contentious battle against "selfish private interests"—timber barons, mining companies, and commercial hunters—who valued short-term profits over the public good (p. 247). Ironically though, through their strident efforts to preserve game for future generations of recreational hunters, the hunter elite ended up severely limiting their own ability to participate in the stalk. By the 1920s, Kelly writes, "the sportsmen-hunters had helped to legislate their own hunting out of existence" (p. 264).

The Hunter Elite is an impressive and provocative study that makes several notable contributions to the current historiography. First, sportsmen and their narratives are afforded a much greater degree of nuance in Kelly's text than in previous works. Elite big-game hunters were a complex group whose values and practices shifted over time. As Kelly reveals in chapter 1, prior to the 1880s American sportsmen frequently partook in the methods of professional market hunters—such as "jacklighting" (shining a light on game at night to blind them), "snowcrusting" (pursuing game in the snow on snowshoes), or hounding (pursuing game with dogs)—unlike their more ethically minded successors. Secondly, familiar figures in the history of big-game hunting, particularly Theodore Roosevelt, are placed into better historical context. Roosevelt, who has often served as the quintessential representative of American-style sport hunting in many accounts, played an influential role in incorporating the wilderness myth, manliness, and "the strenuous life" into the sportsmen-hunter discourse, but when his narratives are compared to the hundreds of other hunting narratives published during the period, the connections he drew to imperialism and war are anomalous. Roosevelt's exceptional status (his obscene kill counts aroused the ire of his contemporaries) drives home one of Kelly's central points: that the turn-of-the-century sportsmen-writers explicitly disavowed any association between their form of hunting and violence, military training, or atavism. For the hunter elite, the stalk was a ritual activity for the cultivation and performance of manly character, not a celebration of the kill. While some reviewers have noted occasional shifts between past and present tense in Kelly's prose, this is common in literary studies and does not detract from the book's achievements. *The Hunter Elite* will be of interest to historians studying hunting, publishing, and conservation during the Progressive Era, as well as scholars of gender, leisure, media, and environmental politics.

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