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Crimes Against Nature: Squatters, Poachers, Thieves, and the Hidden History of American Conservation

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Crimes Against Nature: Squatters, Poachers, Thieves, and the Hidden History of American Conservation by Karl Jacoby (University of California Press; 352 pages; 2014)

“The earth is fast becoming an unfit home for its noblest inhabitant, and another era of equal human crime and human improvidence . . . would reduce it to such a condition of impoverished productiveness, of shattered surface, of climatic excess, as to threaten the depravation, barbarism, and perhaps even extinction of the species.” This quote, by George Perkins Marsh, a diplomat from Vermont, represents the spreading realization many Americans have always had; if nature and natural resources are not preserved or protected somehow, they will eventually cease to exist. These ideas have been taken seriously throughout the years. The New York legislature began the first efforts in America to conserve nature by attempting to protect the Adirondack Mountains. Over the years, other states began attempting to conserve as well, and eventually Yellowstone, America’s first national park, was formed. However, as highlighted by Karl Jacoby in his book, *Crimes Against Nature*, these efforts have also had negative impacts.

Karl Jacoby creates an informative piece that guides the reader through a detailed account of the history of conservation in the United States. Specifically, Jacoby describes the implementation of three national parks—the Adirondack Mountains, Yellowstone National Park, and the Grand Canyon. Jacoby describes the history of the creation of these national parks through events that he himself witnessed, as well as through accounts of others who witnessed the creation of these parks firsthand. What is unique about this book is that the main focus remains on the inhabitants of each of the three areas, and how many lives were impacted through regulations, bans, and attempts to move these people elsewhere.

It is clear that Jacoby wrote this book in order to bring the negative aspects of conservation to light. It does not appear that Jacoby disagrees with the formation of national parks; however, he does not use this book to focus on the benefits or successes of conservation. This book tells the story of those whose lives were negatively impacted by the government’s conservation efforts. Jacoby tells the tale of those who were forcefully removed from the conservationists’ targeted areas. He also describes the plight of those who relied on the land to support themselves and make a living. Some of these people were labeled as poachers, and even jailed for their actions.

Jacoby includes direct quotations from many of the people involved in the conservation. The quotes provide the reader with the sense that many of the people involved in enforcing the conservation lacked sympathy for the inhabitants who were forced to leave and cease use of the land, regardless if the use was necessary for their survival. Jacoby also includes several photographs depicting some of the individuals who were involved in enforcing the conversation, as well as some of the inhabitants who were negatively impacted by the formation of these parks. Also included in this book are maps revealing locations and boundaries of some of the reserves that were created, as well as tables showing the decreasing population of inhabitants in particular, newly formed reserves.

Jacoby’s book describes another side of land conservation that may be easily overlooked by many. His prose, quotes, use of photos and maps, and overall organization make the book easy to follow and understand. It is not necessary for the

reader to be familiar with natural resources, national parks, or the history of the United States in order to understand and learn valuable information from *Crimes Against Nature*. Although Jacoby focuses on the destruction of inhabitants' homes and the forced removal of inhabitants from lands that they occupied for many years, he manages to describe these historical events in a way that is inoffensive. He does not direct any blame and does not deny the fact that conservation is very important and beneficial. Jacoby simply provides a unique perspective on the history of conservation. This is a book that any reader can learn from, including readers who are knowledgeable about conservation and national parks.

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