

Ghosts of the Past, Hopes of the Future:
A Review of the Literature
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Human perception of the wild is changing. Once wilderness was something to be feared and hated, something to be conquered to prove one was powerful and superior to the natural world. Many animals found themselves subjected to humans' fear, hatred, and need for power, and the wolf, the embodiment of the wild in the minds of the Western world, carried the burden more than most. In the last few decades, however, this burden has been lifted. Driven to the edge of extinction in the United States, wolves have transformed from terrifying and vicious monsters into the beautiful and mysterious cousins of man's best friend in the minds of many Americans. This shift in perspective caused me to wonder how the wolf's situation has changed in America in the last few decades. The sources researched support preservation efforts of wolves in the United States, and many focus on educating the public about wolves and environmental conservation in general and provide background information on the history of and reasons behind wolf persecution in America (Cooke; Hampton; Lopez; Musiani; Reeb; "Teaching"; "Wolf Conservation"; "Wolf Haven").

Wolf Persecution

The history of the treatment of wolves in America is a terrible one (Hampton; Lopez; Musiani; Reeb; "Teaching"). Stephan Reeb touches on this history briefly, simply stating that "in the mid-1920s wolves were eliminated from Yellowstone [National Park], as they were across much of the West" (Reeb). The International Wolf Center's website, on its page dedicated to the history of the organization, also briefly alludes to wolf persecution, stating "the howl of the wolf sends shivers of fascination and love, or fear and distrust, up the backs of people around the world. Hardly anyone treats the wolf with indifference" ("Teaching"). Although these sources do not explicitly discuss the treatment of wolves in America, they help corroborate the statements of other sources-such as Bruce Hampton, Barry Lopez, and Marco Musiani - that focus on this topic.

Barry Lopez's essay "The Clamor of Justification" explores man's near extermination of the wolf in America in more detail, delving deep into the reasons behind people's fear of the wolf. According to Lopez, such fear stems from the connection men saw between wolves and the dangerous wilderness, wolves and the beast within themselves, wolves and the very essence of the devil. These associations were not always conscious, but were inherent in the religion and culture that dominated America in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Lopez provides many examples of the horrendous acts of destruction men performed against wolves, the most notable involving the torture inflicted upon them:

[T]he history of killing wolves shows far less restraint and far more perversity [than the history of killing other predators]. A lot of people didn't just kill wolves; they tortured them. They set wolves on fire and tore their jaws out and cut their Achilles tendons and turned dogs loose on them. They poisoned them with strychnine, arsenic, and cyanide, on such a scale that *millions* of other animals-raccoons, black-footed ferrets, red foxes, ravens, red-tailed hawks, eagles, ground squirrels, wolverines - were killed incidentally in the process. In the thick of the wolf fever they even poisoned themselves, and burned down their own property torching the woods to get rid of wolf havens. (269)

The intensity with which the torture was performed, according to Lopez, speaks to something deeper than simply a need to stop predators from preying on one's livestock, a common explanation for wolf killings. It shows how deep the psychological reasons behind wolf murders extended in the minds of the murderers.

Bruce Hampton also discusses the history of wolf persecutions in America. The first chapter of Hampton's book *The Great American Wolf* describes the death of the "most notorious wolf in the history of north America" (Hampton 2) in Custer, South Dakota. It goes on to state that the death of the Custer wolf in 1920 came at "the end of the longest, most relentless, and ruthless persecution one species has ever waged against another. Altogether it was a killing like there had never been before" (Hampton 6). Hampton writes,

It had begun in earnest three centuries earlier, directed against an animal--unlike the whale, buffalo, or passenger pigeon--not for the value of its hair, skin, or meat, but because that animal preyed upon other animals that humans desired for their own consumption. Along the way, the wolf became the object of a passionate, often irrational, sometimes brutal hatred that humans ordinarily reserve for members of their own kind. Hundreds of thousands of wolves were trapped, poisoned, shot, or dynamited in their dens, while some suffered deaths that had every visage of revenge. Caught alive and soaked with kerosene, wolves were set ablaze; others were scalped, had their mouths wired shut, or had their eyes pierced with branding irons before being released to starve to death. Still others were bound with ropes on their upper and lower jaws, tied to horses, and ripped apart. (6-7)

Hampton's description of the torture wolves endured by human hands closely mirrors that of Lopez; and his analysis of the reasons behind such torture, that the wolf became the "object of [man's] passionate, often irrational, sometimes brutal hatred," also shows how deeply rooted that hatred was in the minds of many wolf hunters, going beyond a simple rivalry over game.

Although Marco Musiani, too, describes the reasons behind wolf persecution in America, he focuses mainly on wolf predation on livestock and wild game and goes no further. He states that "wolves have been poisoned, trapped, snared, and shot from the ground and air" and that the "most successful strategy used to exterminate wolves has probably been the poisoning campaigns that involved personnel hired by government agencies" (Musiani). Although he does not analyze the reasons behind wolf killings past wolf predation on livestock and game, his description of the methods used to kill wolves agrees with the descriptions of Lopez and Hampton.

Wolf Education

For thousands of years, the Western world painted a dark and terrible image of the wolf as a monster, an evil creature, soulless and depraved. With the coming of a more environmentally aware age, however, the desire to paint a new brighter and truer picture emerged. Today, every organization that strives for the protection and preservation of wolves around the world includes in their mission the task of educating the public on the real nature of the wolf (Cooke; "Teaching"; "Wolf Conservation"; "Wolf Haven").

The spread of accurate information regarding wolves helps gain support for conservation efforts (Cooke; Musiani; "Teaching"; "Wolf Conservation"; "Wolf Haven"). Marco Musiani notes that "most wolf-related fears were linked to misperceptions [about wolves]," and goes on to state "surveys ... demonstrated that higher levels of education were correlated with positive attitudes toward wolves. Thus wolf-specific education programs ... contribute to enhancing positive attitudes and result in higher tolerance for wolves in the landscape" (Musiani). Wolf preservation organizations take this to heart, including in their mission statements that they "[advance] the survival of wolf populations by teaching about wolves, their relationship to wild lands and the human role in their future" ("Teaching"); "[promote] wolf conservation through education" ("Wolf

Conservation"); and "[work] for wolf conservation by ... educating the public on the value of all wildlife" ("Wolf Haven").

The International Wolf Center's website, www.wolf.org, is itself dedicated to educating its visitors about wolves ("Teaching"). The website is home to numerous web pages containing a mountain of wolf facts, including information on subspecies, pack dynamics, diet, size, range, life span, and threats to survival. It discusses the differences between the two main types of wolves, grey and red; the subspecies that exist in each type; and the parts of the world each subspecies can be found in. The website includes a special section targeting children, educating the public from an early age. Other websites have similar education sections, some general, others specifically regarding the wolves in the organization's care ("Wolf Conservation"; "Wolf Haven").

Wolf Preservation

Today's preservation organizations do more than simply manage websites. Programs like the International Wolf Center, Wolf Conservation Center, and Wolf Haven International, in addition to providing educational information on wolves, strive to promote the protection and growth of wolf populations in America ("Teaching"; "Wolf Conservation"; "Wolf Haven"). The websites of these organizations provide their mission statements, goal, and activities.

The International Wolf Center's website focuses greatly on promoting education, but also provides a list of educational programs the organization offers; ways in which one can support the organization; links to wolves in the news; opportunities to visit the center; and information regarding its goals and history. The vision of the center states,

The International Wolf Center envisions a world in which populations of wolves thrive well distributed in many parts of their native range. A global system of designated wild lands supports abundant habitat and prey for wolves and other large carnivores Humans adopt an attitude of respect toward wolvesIn day-to-day life, humans accept coexistence with wolves. ("Teaching")

The organization strives to achieve this vision and uphold its four core values: wolves, integrity, educational excellence, and accurate information.

The Wolf Conservation Center's website offers visitation information; a news section featuring wolves in the news as well as center announcements; links to other educational websites about wolves and the environment in general; support and donation opportunities; information on the center's own wolf populations; the WCC blog; and the center's mission statement. The center is dedicated to wolf conservation, and it works to educate the public about wolves, supports the reintroduction of wolves into areas determined by the government, serves as a breeding and pre-release facility for endangered wolves, and studies natural wolf behavior by providing a habitat for captive wolves ("Wolf Conservation"). In an article about the center that appeared in *E - The Environmental Magazine*, Bronwyn Cooke reports that the center wants "visitors to leave ... with four messages Wolves in the wild are not dangerous, wolves play a vital role in the ecosystem, wolves are not pets and saving the world is the daily responsibility of all of us" (Cooke). The center's website also lists these educational goals.

Wolf Haven International's website also provides visitor information; support opportunities; educational information; news articles and organization announcements; and the organization's mission statement. The mission reads, "[Our] mission is working for wolf conservation by protecting our wild wolves; providing sanctuary for captive-born wolves; promoting wolf restoration in historic ranges; and educating the public on the value of all wildlife" ("Wolf Haven"). Wolf Haven International, like the International Wolf Center and the Wolf Conservation Center, is dedicated to the preservation of wolves and the conservation of their habitat.

Conclusion

The research here provides a wealth of information concerning the wolf's situation in America, both historically and currently. With the arrival of European settlers in America, destruction reigned. Today, however, environmental consciousness and compassion has taken over; and the horrors of the past, unforgettable though they remain, are gradually being replaced with respect and reverence for wolves through the efforts of conservation organizations. Hampton, in the epilogue to his book, summarizes the shift in human thought and perspective in recent decades:

The wolf, with its protracted history of oppression, was one of those parts of which humanity once desperately attempted to rid itself. Many conservationists remain haunted by this spectre of past persecution, a desire, as it were, for the blood of wolves. To them it represents a dark and altogether domineering side of human nature, one that is the antithesis of a more respectful view of the natural world and the life that shares this planet, a view not greatly dissimilar from that once embraced by many Native American cultures. (252)

As Hampton's words - along with the other sources researched - so eloquently imply, the future for wolves in America has not been this bright in centuries. Given such promise, it is time to turn our attention to the impact the growth of wolf populations in the central United States will have on related species, like the *canis latrans*, that have come to flourish in the wolf's absence.

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