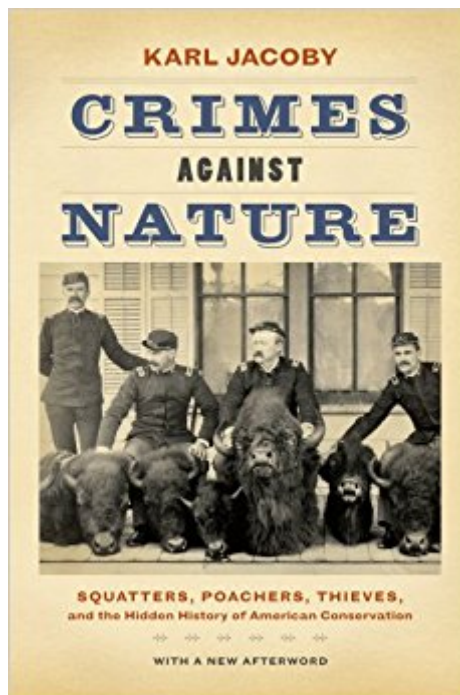




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# Crimes Against Nature: Squatters, Poachers, Thieves, And The Hidden History Of American Conservation



## Synopsis

Crimes against Nature reveals the hidden history behind three of the nation's first parklands: the Adirondacks, Yellowstone, and the Grand Canyon. Focusing on conservation's impact on local inhabitants, Karl Jacoby traces the effect of criminalizing such traditional practices as hunting, fishing, foraging, and timber cutting in the newly created parks. Jacoby reassesses the nature of these "crimes" and provides a rich portrait of rural people and their relationship with the natural world in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"A well-conceived, solidly researched, and clearly written work with important conclusions but even richer possibilities. Anyone interested in environmental history or the contributions it can make to other fields in our discipline ought to read it. Anyone interested in important questions and methods in environmental history has to study it carefully."--Thomas Dunlap, *Reviews in American History* -- Review

"This insightful and lucid book combines social with environmental history, enriching both. . . . Timely, eloquent, and provocative, *Crimes against Nature* illuminates contemporary struggles, especially in the West, over our environment."#151;Alan Taylor, author of *William Cooper's Town*  
"A compelling new interpretation of early conservation history in the United States. . . . Powerfully argued and beautifully written, this book could hardly be more relevant to the environmental

challenges we face today."#151;William Cronon, author of *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* "What a powerful and yet subtle tale of the fraught encounter between the conservationists' desire to 'engineer' wilderness with the property regime of the modern state and the unique, local, 'moral ecologies' of those who resisted! Rarely has this level of originality, close reasoning, and historical texture been brought into such harmony while preserving the whiff of lived experience."#151;James C. Scott, author of *Seeing Like a State*

Historians of early American conservation often tell a tale of good and evil. Wresting control of the land from the "backward rural populace" (p. 2), the federal government did us all a big favor—so the story goes. But in *Crimes against Nature*, Karl Jacoby rewrites this same narrative with purposeful, jarring ambivalence. The strictures that resulted from public lands creation, in reality, wreaked havoc on local economies and ways of life. From Jacoby's perspective at the margins of society, the narrative of conservation becomes one of colonial conquest with the expansion of the nation-state, but more notably in the rise of global capitalism. As such, preservation required imposition, and simplification equated to violence. *Crimes* portrays three epicenters of conservation around the turn of the twentieth century: the Adirondacks, Yellowstone, and the Grand Canyon. In overlapping but somewhat dissimilar ways, each locale experienced drastic transformations in property rights, modes of production and consumption, and degree of interaction with the outside world. In Upstate New York, for example, state forestry officials conducted experiments in restricted land usage at the expense of white settlers. Recent arrivals themselves, locals had developed in just a few generations a complex "moral ecology" (3) defined by restrained subsistence practices and informal social surveillance. Top-down change thus disrupted an otherwise harmonious community and ushered in alien values of public consumption and private profit. Likewise in Wyoming and Arizona, Jacoby recasts the narrative in terms of class. It is important to note, however, that while the author does not ignore racial difference, he subsumes it under differing visions of appropriate land usage. In all three geographical instances, the arrival of outsiders impacted both Native and Euro-Americans in various ways, united by a common thread of disempowerment. *Crimes against Nature* is an invigorating and necessary amendment to the lopsided historiography of conservationist politics. Indeed, Jacoby has done us all a favor by foregrounding power dynamics in environmental history, and historians would do well to take note.

Works

I think the book is a great story about the excesses of ignorant intruders should make exceptionalists reconsider some of the bad acts in forming the USA

Excellent review of the back side of conservation history

Good Read

"Conservation" seems like a completely positive word--e.g., we want to preserve nature for future generations. I remember how in awe I was when I saw the Grand Canyon for the first time. But after reading Jacoby's book, I feel like I have a whole new perspective. Not that I don't agree that protecting the environment shouldn't be a high priority--for example, I think the idea of drilling into the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge for oil when we have all these people driving these gas-guzzling SUVs is the height of idiocy. But this book shows that there were some human costs to creating the park--the Indians and poor white people who already lived on the land that became parks. I didn't realize that they had the U.S. army patrolling and occupying the Grand Canyon to keep people out--although I do remember thinking that the Forest rangers' uniforms (and Smoky the Bear!) were very militaristic. Basically, what became parks were already living entities that had people living in and exploiting their natural resources and changing the environment. So now I realize when I see the Grand Canyon, it's not as if it's in a time warp, completely untouched for centuries. I plan to keep traveling and visiting more parts--esp out west, and this book has definitely deepened my understanding of our National Park system!

Crimes Against Nature is written by one of America's foremost new thinkers on the environment. Karl Jacoby's book has all the beauty and intellectual force his lectures are famous for. This book gives a startlingly new perspective on just how we've created our national parks. In doing so, he makes us rethink what we consider our proudest achievements - and at what cost we've achieved them. Five stars.

If you find the filtered news provided by generic channels incomplete, this book will fill part of the void. It's an interesting read and the information therein is unbiased and verifiable. Any aficionado or even student of history should appreciate this one.

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