

Living Like a Wolf: Predation and Production in the Montana-Alberta Borderlands

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David A. Chang, Susan D. Jones

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Dedication

Dedicated to the memory of Walter Clifford Lienemann, Jr., 1921-2010.

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Introduction:

Living Like a Wolf

What does it mean to live like a wolf? In 1870, Peter Koch used the phrase to express the realities of his life in northern Montana Territory. Working as a “wolfer”—someone who killed wolves using poisoned animal carcasses as bait—Koch reflected on the predatory nature of his labor and its relation to western conquest. Contrasting his work with the wolf-trapping done by bounty hunters at his childhood home in Louisiana, Koch observed that Montana was “not civilized enough for putting a prize on their scalps, but [wolf] skin is worth \$2.00 here and probably more in the states.” From his bivouac on the Musselshell River, Koch saw himself in an unconquered province that revealed ambiguities between predators and producers. To be successful at wolfing, he reasoned, “a man has to live pretty much like a wolf, if he’s in the business.”¹ More than just a metaphor for savagery, predation was itself a means of production and a mode of livelihood.

In tense proximity to Koch’s colonial outpost, Blackfoot hunters on the northwestern plains also held rich predatory traditions that linked their own histories as meat-eaters with the lives of nonhuman carnivores, particularly wolves. When later Indian Office administrators from the United States and Canada denounced the Blackfoot as predacious killers, they were prejudiced but not entirely incorrect, for many Blackfoot themselves strove to live like wolves, the most vicious animal of the Anglo-American bestiary. They maintained that they learned to hunt bison through an empathetic relationship with wolves—they followed and observed wolves, and tried to

¹ Peter Koch to his uncle, January 21, 1870 in “Letters from the Musselshell, 1869-1870,” ed. Carl B. Cone, *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 37, no. 4 (1946): 313-337; 322.

insert themselves as wolves into pre-existing bison-wolf interactions. They “performed wolf” in their ceremonies and in the field. They left meat as offerings for wolves and other carnivores at their kill sites. The Blackfoot developed sophisticated modes of kinship that transcended white understandings of the separation between human and animal.² Of course, these practices were entirely misapprehended by Indian Office personnel. Even hardened Indian agents commented on the Blackfoot’s wolfishness with incredulity, one claiming, for instance, that they were “nearer to barbarians than anything I have ever seen.”³ Predator-prey relationships formed the foundations of indigenous and colonial economies and the places they increasingly shared in the Montana-Alberta borderlands. But the meanings of predation varied wildly across the region’s shifting cultural divides.

From a biological standpoint, predation is simply the process of one organism killing and feeding off the body of another. But within the ongoing history of colonialism, predation is more laden with metaphor. Predator-prey relationships stand in as a natural language to describe a wide variety of exploitative social relations, from the intimate to the macro-economic, from broad debates over capitalism to discussions about meat on the kitchen table. Disabused of race, gender, and other categories as biological languages in our supposedly postmodern age, we nevertheless embrace predation as a lowest common denominator of normative discourse. Investigating the history of predator-prey interactions and their relationship to the conquest of the

² For a good overview of ethno-historical research related to Blackfoot bison hunting, see Russell Lawrence Barsh and Chantelle Marlors, “Driving Bison and Blackfoot Science,” *Human Ecology* 31:4 (December 2003): 571-93.

³ Report of Inspector Thomas, “Inspection of Blackfeet agency and charges against Agent Allen,” Oct 10, 1885 (5017), in United States Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), *Reports of the Inspection of the Field Jurisdictions of the Office of Indian Affairs, 1873-1900* (Washington, D.C.: National Archives Microfilm Publications) M1070, Reel 2.

Montana-Alberta borderlands, this dissertation offers a preliminary account of how that happened.

Within the sixty years after Peter Koch penned his metaphor, predation and production emerged as opposable categories of labor during the Anglo-American conquest and colonization of the Montana-Alberta borderlands. “Living like a wolf” transformed from a metaphor that denoted the complex realities of a life sustained by death into an image of destruction that maligned the labors of wolves, indigenous people, and others who worked on the supposed edges of colonial capitalism. The confinement of the Blackfoot and the expansion of the livestock industry hinged on the rise of a colonial political ecology that denigrated predation in order to frame its own labors as productive. This process first occurred alongside the regional replacement of bison with domesticated cattle, a transformation aided by the development of wolf bounty-killing programs. While private and public authorities in the United States and Canada worked to eradicate wolves from the borderlands, by the early 1900s they also sought to purge its native peoples of their so-called “predatory” behaviors through campaigns of assimilation and citizenship that reordered indigenous patterns of work, food, and livelihood. By the 1920s, the borderland’s reinvention by conservationists as a “wild” landscape for tourists and western enthusiasts relied on these conceptions of predation to anchor the region’s historical narratives.

Wolves have long complicated the meanings of predation and production along the Northern Rockies front-country. This dissertation tries to make sense of how predator-prey relationships guided colonial transformations in labor and landscape from the late 1860s through the early 1930s. It argues that a dissociation of predation from

production helped institute three major colonial processes during this era: the Anglo-American conquest of the Blackfoot nations that straddle the forty-ninth parallel, the growth of the region's livestock industry, and the emergence of popular movements to conserve wildlife and other nonhuman embodiments of historical memory. By separating and redefining predators from producers, these dissociations transformed the borderlands by criminalizing the subsistence labors of the region's colonized subjects as predatory, while legitimating the exploitative work of capitalism and colonization as productive. My research contends that interactions between wolves and people played a key role in the formation of predation and production as categories of legitimate and illegitimate labor, suggesting that animals like wolves are not only historical agents in a physical sense, but also social beings whose interactions with people have helped author the historical concept of agency itself. My research also tries to enrich discussions of the borderland's environmental, political, and social histories by contextualizing the cultural history of Anglo-American predator-prey relationships alongside the intellectual history of Blackfoot understandings of nonhuman personhood and human-animal difference. Above all, this dissertation seeks to show how predation and production are not biological categories, but historical concepts rooted in the structures and contingencies of western conquest.

Environmental History and the Value Theory of Labor

By tracing predation and production as means of representing human and animal labor, my goal is to illustrate how the ecological relationships that underlie human livelihoods have been contested as legitimate and illegitimate modes of labor and value

creation. Rather than trying to identify particular historical actors as either predators or producers, this dissertation seeks instead to determine how predation and production are idioms that represent the creation of value; how they are historical ideas that have ordered and determined what kinds of expended energy have counted for labor. Following the insights of Diane Elson, Georg Simmel, Gayatri Spivak, and others, my dissertation proposes that the field of environmental history can ask questions related to a “value-theory of labor” in addition to those which investigate environmental interactions based on more conventional labor-theories of value. Environmental history has dealt with capitalism by deploying labor-theories of value to ask questions about the history of nonhuman sources of value within capitalist modes of production. My approach instead emphasizes the role of human-nonhuman interactions in representations of what counts as value under capitalism.⁴

Twenty years ago, Richard White implored environmental historians to “look to work” as a means of bridging their field’s complicated relationship with telling environmental history while practicing contemporary environmental politics. Naming one of his more provocative essays from the bumper sticker of a logger’s pickup truck—“Are you an environmentalist, or do you work for a living?”—White encouraged environmental historians to frame their studies around the hybrid landscapes (both natural and cultural) produced through the forces of human labor and nonhuman agency. This approach offered an alternative to the declensionist tales of environmental degradation that had dominated environmental history during the 1970s

⁴ See Diane Elson, “A Value Theory of Labor,” in Diane Elson, ed., *Value: The Representation of Labour in Capitalism* (1979), 115-180; Georg Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money* [1900], trans. David Frisby and Tom Bottomore, (London: Routledge, 1990); and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Scattered Speculations on the Question of Value,” *Diacritics* 15(4), 1985: 73-93.

and 1980s, a period when the new field had coalesced alongside the broader expansion of the environmental movement. Writing as an environmentalist himself, White critiqued the movement's lack of self-awareness with labor: "Environmentalists so often seem self-righteous, privileged, and arrogant," he claimed, "because they so readily consent to identifying nature with play... making it by definition a place where leisured humans come only to visit and not to work, stay or live."⁵ Environmental historians needed to address labor-value in addition to leisure-value. They had to "place humans back in nature," as William Cronon put it, to show how interactions between nature and culture produced environments worthy of care and preservation beyond the troubled idea of an untrammelled wilderness.⁶ Within the field of environmental history, the legacy of these discussions from the mid-1990s established a lasting move toward the study of hybrid landscapes; toward narratives that considered nature as a mutual production of human labor and nonhuman agency.

Utilizing this hybrid approach, the field of environmental history expanded the labor-theory of value to encompass the actions of both human and nonhuman agents as inputs and sources of value. The latest generation of environmental historians has made marvelous progress explicating the historical foundations of such hybrid landscapes: Idaho potato fields, copper mines, the Rhone River Valley, the list goes on.⁷ However,

⁵ Richard White, "Are You an Environmentalist or Do You Work for a Living?": Work and Nature," in *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, ed. William Cronon (New York: W.W. Norton, 1995): 171-185; 173. See also White, *The Organic Machine: The Remaking of the Columbia River* (New York: MacMillan, 1996); and Richard White, "From Wilderness to Hybrid Landscapes: The Cultural Turn in Environmental History," *Historian* 2004, 66(3): 557-564.

⁶ See William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness: Or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," *Environmental History* 1(1), 1996: 7-28.

⁷ See Mark Fiege, *Irrigated Eden: The Making of an Agricultural Landscape in the American West* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000); Timothy LeCain, *Mass Destruction: The Men and Giant Mines that Wired America and Scarred the Planet* (Rutgers University Press, 2009); and Sara Pritchard,

Cronon's classic, *Nature's Metropolis* might still offer the pithiest statement of the revised labor-theory of value resting at the core of environmental history. Signaling the limitations of traditional Marxian understandings of the origins of capital solely in the hands of human laborers, Cronon reasoned, "the labor theory of value cannot by itself explain the astonishing accumulation of capital that accompanied Chicago's growth." Only by exploring the nonhuman origins of value could historians correctly understand the accumulation of capital as a process of consuming first nature (soil, trees) in order to produce second nature (grain, lumber, capital). In creating these products of second nature, "Human labor may have been critical," explained Cronon, "but much of the value in such commodities came directly from first, not second, nature."⁸ Emphasizing the inherent values of so-called first nature, Cronon and other environmental historians expanded the traditional labor-theory of value by incorporating the histories of capitalism's nonhuman inputs of production.

But the lines between labor and leisure, and between first and second nature were, and are, not so clear. The imperfection of these categories was something that White, Cronon, and others recognized, but their commitments toward reintegrating nature and culture through "work"—through a labor-theory of value—meant that their studies did relatively little to question the intellectual histories of the very categories of work, action, labor, leisure, and agency that constituted the language on which their studies relied. By tracing the cultural history of predation and production as concepts

Confluence: The Nature of Technology and the Remaking of the 1880s Rhine (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011).

⁸ Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1991), 149.

generated within a hybrid landscape of human and nonhuman agents, this dissertation examines the broader intellectual history of labor and its relationship to colonialism.

In developing a “value-theory” of labor, this dissertation tries to synthesize a methodological approach that blends the tools of environmental history with those of cultural geography. It remains indebted to environmental history’s contributions to the concepts of hybrid landscape and nonhuman agency. It investigates the powers that human and nonhuman agents exert in transforming landscapes. But it also investigates landscape not just as a location, but also as a way of seeing. As Don Mitchell has described the North American West, a type of landscape “so freighted with political meaning that the real places on which those images have been built scarcely seem to matter.”⁹ As representational idioms of labor and value creation, predation and production were two important modes through which Anglo-American and Blackfoot people devised new cultural geographies in the borderlands during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. But those geographies, however, were more than just human ways of seeing. The landscape’s “political meanings,” its cultural contents, were themselves descended from the region’s hybrid environments, where the inhuman howls of wolves at a kill, or the alienated pain of a frostbit limb burned their own lights into man’s cultural retinas.

The Northern Rockies’ gray wolf controversy makes it clear that wolves and other nonhuman animals make significant contributions to perceptions of the region’s political ecology. Subsumed as part of the broader culture wars that mark borderland politics, the “problem with wolves,” as the conservationist Hank Fischer has observed,

⁹ Don Mitchell, “Writing the Western: New Western History’s Encounter with Landscape” *Ecumene* 5(1), January 1998: 7-29; 13.

is indeed that “they are reflective of people’s attitudes and often a substitute for other issues.”¹⁰ The actions of wolves are complicit in everyday cultural renderings of value. Regardless of political outlook, stock-growers throughout Montana and Alberta spend enormous amounts of time, money, and physical effort raising cattle, sheep, and other domestic animals only to discover wolves killing them. And the manner in which wolves kill seems, to modern eyes, far more gruesome than the death dealt by the slaughterhouse’s captive-bolt pistol. Wolves hamstringing their quarry, run it to painful exhaustion, and sometimes eat it while it still breathes. Wolves’ own behaviors and affectations are at least partly to blame for their common Anglo-American representation as vicious creatures, as both Barry Lopez and Jon Coleman have convincingly explored.¹¹

Wolves also exert themselves as economic actors in ways that reverberate into the borderland’s cultural geographies. Although wolf “depredations” happen infrequently, the tight margins on which stock-growers have often operated made them significant financial burdens. Today, in a neoliberal era dominated by elusive fluctuations in credit, climate, and commodity prices, it is usually tempting to blame wolves for both tangible and intangible losses. As a member of the successful coalition that reintroduced wolves to Yellowstone during the 1990s, Fischer coordinated a program that reimbursed ranchers in Montana for the market price of livestock lost to wolves. “I’m in the business,” he once stated, “[where] I pay a rancher 80 cents a pound for lamb, and then I go into the store and look at it and it’s \$6.99 a pound. It

¹⁰ Montana. Wildlife Division. “Predator Management in Montana, Symposium Proceedings,” January 8, 2000. Billings, MT. (Helena: Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, 2000), 57.

¹¹ See Jon Coleman, *Vicious: Wolves and Men in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005); and Barry Lopez, *Of Wolves and Men* (New York: Scribner’s, 1978).

really does make one feel like there's some pretty fierce predators out there."¹²

Through their interactions with humans and other animals, wolves have revealed what it means to be predator in a larger economic sense. They have served as historical agents not just through their raw physical actions, but also on a broader cultural plain.

By shifting focus from a labor-theory of value to a value-theory of labor, this dissertation explores the hybrid origins of labor and its representations in addition to the origins of value. Central to this approach are the insights of Gayatri Spivak, Georg Simmel, and Diane Elson, philosophers who have examined value as a cultural negotiation rather than as an inherent property.¹³ Although broadly remembered as Marxian thinkers, these scholars differed from their Marxist contemporaries by interrogating value itself as an historical concept, rather than as a discrete product of antagonisms between labor and capital. Spivak offers a particularly provocative picture of the battle over value and its representation. Looking at the conventional labor-theory of value's transformation of exchange value into money, and money's subsequent transformation into capital, she suggests that indeterminacies reside at each of these representational moments. The reproduction of capital relies on a messy cultural politics that delimits the boundaries of what kind of labor counts as valuable, or even counts as labor at all.¹⁴

During the late-nineteenth century, predation and production emerged as representational systems for labor and value in the Montana-Alberta borderlands. Take,

¹² Montana. Wildlife Division. "Predator Management in Montana, Symposium Proceedings," January 8, 2000. Billings, MT. (Helena: Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, 2000), 57.

¹³ See Elson, "A Value Theory of Labor"; Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money* [1900]; and Spivak, "Scattered Speculations on the Question of Value."

¹⁴ Spivak, "Scattered Speculations on the Question of Value," 78.

for example, the reproduction of capital within the bodies of open-range cattle during the 1880s. Owners of this animal capital only imperfectly owned their capital while it stowed away in the flesh and tallow of the cattle themselves. Freezing against barbed wire in the winter, starving on denuded, overstocked rangelands, each and every steer failed to shepherd itself as a sacred bearer of exchange value. As their bankers rudely discovered, cattlemen were dismayed to find at the end of their round-ups that the “book value” of their herds vastly exceeded the actual capital still embodied by their surviving animals. Capital disappeared alongside the lifeblood of its animal conveyor. Faced with the various threats that wolves, weather, and other forces posed to the gestation and realization of their embodied capital, cattlemen struggled in the realm of politics and in the realm of daily human-animal relationships to define the pathways through which those values could be transformed and represented.

Under these circumstances, making money for the stock-grower was less about performing “productive labor,” at least in the material senses understood by conventional political economists (both liberal-capitalist and Marxist), and instead more about performing the role of producer. This performance began by subsuming the animal labor of fattened beef cattle under the productive efforts of stock-growers, a representational move that hinged on the identification of predators, such as wolves, and the stock-grower’s role in eliminating them. The essential characteristic of a predator was its potential to capture and disperse the value trapped within a beef’s body before its transformation into capital. Killing predators such as wolves was therefore part of a larger matter of defining the legitimate course that value could take within a capitalist political ecology.

Taking a value-theory of labor as its starting point, this dissertation investigates predation and production as historical understandings of labor that have framed the negotiation and representation of value. In doing so, it proposes an additional goal to environmental history and the study of nonhuman historical agency; discovering the ways that nonhuman actors have worked not only physically, but also culturally as creative agents that have structured the material and representational flows of value through the borderlands. Studying the nonhuman complexities of these historical exchanges reveals that value is a problem of distribution as well as origination.

Animal Studies and the History of Nonhuman Agency

Over the last twenty years, the interdisciplinary field of animal studies has coalesced around the task of determining how animals are “members of society,” as Harriet Ritvo has put it.¹⁵ This dissertation works toward that broader goal, but it also emphasizes the importance of human-animal difference. Animals are undoubtedly historical agents, both in material and cultural senses, but since historians can’t get into animal minds, the extension of human faculties to animals is problematic.¹⁶ For environmental historians, this can throw the usefulness of the concept of agency into question. I agree with Linda Nash, who writes that, for environmental historians, when it comes to agency, “social history is not our model.”¹⁷ The challenge is no longer to uncover the social outcomes of nonhuman agency, a possibility explored by the field’s expanded labor-theory of value, but to chart the history of the idea of agency itself; to

¹⁵ Harriet Ritvo, “On the Animal Turn,” *Daedalus* 136(4), 2007: 118-123; 118.

¹⁶ Arguably, historians can’t get into the minds of humans either.

¹⁷ Linda Nash, “The Agency of Nature or the Nature of Agency?” *Environmental History* 10:1, (January 2005): 67-69; 69.

work out Timothy Mitchell's suggestion that "agency, like capital, is a technical body, is something made."¹⁸ This dissertation offers a preliminary account of how human and nonhuman agency have developed as objects of historical thinking. It does so by tracing the cultural histories of Anglo-American and Blackfoot understandings of predation and production, ideas that emerged throughout interactions of people with wolves, cattle, and other animals.

Applying a value-theory of labor approach to the intellectual history of animal agency is useful because it reorients historical questions to consider how animal labor has been concealed and subsumed under the category of human labor. One reason why environmental historians have needed to expand the labor theory of value in recent years to encompass animal labor is because the theory's modern origins designated labor as a characteristic unique to humans. Over the following chapters, this dissertation shows how this played out historically in the Montana-Alberta borderlands. It argues that modern-colonial dissociations of predation from production bear responsibility for the disappearance of the concept of animal labor, which was subsumed under modern-colonial notions of human labor through political and cultural transformations that designated labor as productive and human, predation as unproductive and animalistic. This argument expands on Mitchell's observation that the denial of historical agency to nonhumans was a "techno-political" phenomenon that played an essential role in colonialism's self-justifications throughout the modern world. As Mitchell has explained in his history of colonial Egypt, "overlooking the mixed way things happen, indeed producing the effect of neatly separate realms of

¹⁸ Timothy Mitchell, *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 53.

reason and the real world, ideas and their objects, the human and the nonhuman, was how power was coming to work in Egypt, and in the twentieth century in general.”¹⁹ In the Montana-Alberta borderlands, colonial authority relied on its power to humanize producers and animalize predators, a possibility that hinged on the establishment of normative definitions of labor that excluded animals.

This argument also resonates with the work of Blackfoot scholars, such as Betty Bastien, who have identified colonialism as a process of replacing a Blackfoot ontology of human-nonhuman kinship with a western Cartesian ontology of thought-world separation. Bastien writes that colonialism is accomplished “by redefining identity, self, and humanness as abstractions” rather than as Blackfoot realities of “natural alliances” and nonhuman personhood.

...this process changes the consciousness of tribal peoples as it changes the world in which they live. It has created unprecedented conditions of dependency by virtue of the destruction of kinship alliances and the emergence of isolated, individualistic selves.²⁰

As chapters three and four indicate, the U.S. Office of Indian Affairs’ (OIA) attempts to assimilate the Blackfeet to Anglo-American standards of labor and land tenure was one important way that Bastien’s process worked out on the ground. Through the circumscription of Blackfeet hunting practices and the privatization of Blackfeet land through allotment, the OIA tried to dissociate human-nonhuman kinship relations that were previously vital to Blackfeet modes of livelihood. By indicting Blackfeet hunting, for instance, as a predatory leisure, rather than a productive labor, the OIA consolidated its control over what work constituted legitimate labor. Chapter four, however, pushes

¹⁹ Mitchell, *Rule of Experts*, 52.

²⁰ Betty Bastien, *Blackfoot Ways of Knowing: The Worldview of the Siksikaitstapi* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2004), 27.

back against Bastien's notion that colonialism succeeded in the destruction of Blackfoot kinship alliances. Tracing the history of the Blackfeet's Progressive-era agricultural association, the Piegan Farming and Livestock Association (PFLA), the chapter reveals how the Blackfeet negotiated the individualizing imperatives of allotment and capitalism by reinterpreting their social relations with the nonhuman world through a rejection of open-range cattle ranching and a turn toward subsistence farming.

While this dissertation goes to great lengths to reveal how colonialism relied on dissociating predation from production in order to subsume animal labor under the category of human labor, it also demonstrates that this colonial project was incomplete. The Montana-Alberta borderlands remained an animated place, even within the brains of Anglo-American colonizers. The colonial fiction of a productive society could not function without the existence, both literal and figurative, of a predatory economy. So predators like wolves—and the unassimilated Blackfoot—still mattered deeply to a twentieth-century modernity fabricated on their extermination. Chapter two describes this process in literal terms: the “predatory” frauds of bounty-hunting wolfers who attempted to establish their own wolf-ranching operations, raising wolves as livestock to kill for bounty payments. Chapter five examines how eastern wildlife conservationists and western businesspeople found the figurative reproduction of a predatory landscape useful for framing their own self-interests as national interests. Thanks largely to the conservation movement's popular deployment of predator-producer discourse, the distinction between predation and production had become an intrinsic concept of western identity and the historical memory of conquest by the 1920s. Throughout North America, production itself could no longer be understood without reference to

predation, a concept that synthesized modern understandings of human-animal difference alongside the distinctions between legitimate and illegitimate labor made under capitalism and colonialism.

Colonialism, Western History, and the History of the U.S.-Canadian Borderlands

In straddling both the forty-ninth parallel and the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, this dissertation spans two great divides of traditional western historiography. It is therefore indebted to recent scholarship that has cleared this terrain by examining the transnational history of the northwestern plains, as well as the historical continuity of nineteenth-century colonial relationships into the twentieth.

Rather than focusing on the significance of the national boundary between the United States and Canada, this dissertation is more concerned with the borderlands between native and settler societies under the process of colonialism. In some respects, this process-based mode of historical interpretation is perhaps more akin to dated “frontier” histories than it is to the comparative studies which characterize the bulk of northern borderlands historiography. In emphasizing the relative similarities of the Anglo-American nations that colonized the Montana-Alberta borderlands, I do not wish to elide differences in U.S. and Canadian history, and throughout this dissertation I have taken a comparative approach to my analysis where it has seemed useful. However, my main focus is on tracing the histories of predation, production, and conquest as cultural categories that largely transcended differences in Anglo-American concepts of nationhood.

In contrast to other regions of the North American West, historians have long conceptualized events in the Northern Rockies and northwestern plains as constituting a kind of transnational history, though not for the same reasons advocated more recently by scholars of transnational history. Traditional histories of the borderlands supported national creation-myths that remain regionally prevalent in Montana and southern Alberta to the present-day.²¹ For Americans, this regional myth holds a distorted Turnerian spin. American adventurers hustled whiskey, evaded U.S. marshals, and fought Indians, opening the land to free enterprise, democratic settlement and improvement. As Paul Sharp others have explained, the reason violence often marked this stage of settlement was not due to complicated social negotiations or struggles for power, but because of the colorful individuals themselves.²² The Canadian regional myth constitutes an opposite tale, that of the Northwest Mounted Police and their

²¹ See Peter S. Morris, "Regional Ideas and the Montana-Alberta Borderlands," *Geographical Review* 89(4), 1999.

Hugh Dempsey's otherwise excellent work tends to extirpate Canadians of any guilt in the plundering of the plains. His latest account of the whiskey trade, while exhaustively researched and informative, again argues that American whiskey traders were monolithically terrible and that the Northwest Mounted Police (NWMP) rescued western Canada in Hugh A. Dempsey, *Firewater: The Impact of the Whisky Trade on the Blackfoot Nation* (Saskatoon: Fifth House Publishers, 2002). Andrew Graybill's comparison of the NWMP and the Texas Rangers provides a more even-handed interpretation of the Mounties' imperial agenda. See Andrew Graybill, "Instruments of Incorporation: Rangers, Mounties and the North American Frontier, 1875-1910" (Princeton University, 2003). On the American side, Paul Sharp's classic study also presents readers with a double-narrative of two opposing national expansions. Illustrated with rowdy line-art drawings by Charlie Russell, Sharp's interpretation does much to entrench the idea of an American rough-and-tumble frontier west. See Paul F. Sharp, *Whoop-up Country: The Canadian American West, 1865-1885* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1955). However, during Sharp's noteworthy career, he also implored historians to "avoid the unfortunate tendency in western American history of emphasizing the sensational, the transitory, the erratic and the pathological." See Paul F. Sharp, "The Northern Great Plains: A Study in Canadian-American Regionalism," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 39, no. 1 (1952), 61-76; 76. Given the Whoop-up country's name, its abundant liquor, its menagerie of animal furs, and its diseases, Sharp's directive is impossible to follow. Not to be forgotten is Wallace Stegner, who wrote a history of this borderland region earlier and more eloquently than most, and in a way that masterfully (and unfortunately) hardened the ill-conceived myths of Canadian restraint and American ruthlessness. See Wallace Stegner, *Wolf Willow* (New York: Penguin, 1955).

²² See Paul F. Sharp, *Whoop-up Country: The Canadian-American West, 1865-1885* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1955); and Sharp, "The Northern Great Plains: A Study in Canadian-American Regionalism," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 39(1), 1952: 61-76.

establishment of law and order. The heroic Mounties according to Hugh Dempsey, kept “a stiff upper-lip,” and labored under a “duty to carry the flag of Empire and Queen into the Wilderness.” That one full tenth of the force deserted in the first mile of their 900-mile march across the plains was cause for celebration; “the Mounted Police were glad to weed out the weaklings before the trek was underway.”²³ Despite these popular images, in terms of their economies, social coercion and violence, U.S. and Canadian histories in the Whoop-up country share more similarities than differences.

The last decade has witnessed a number of major reinterpretations of the northern borderland’s transnational histories. Operating under the assumption that “nations are made at their borders,” as Sheila McManus has put it, these works have demonstrated how the American and Canadian nation-making projects relied on federal efforts to cordon off western space. McManus has focused her analysis on the federal policies that sought to harden the international border by imposing unequivocal categories of race and gender on Indians and homesteaders.²⁴ Sterling Evans and Andrew Graybill have taken this approach one step further by examining the history of the northern borderlands in comparative perspective with the U.S.-Mexico borderlands.²⁵

Somewhat in contrast to this historiography of a “hard border,” Beth LaDow has argued that the northern borderlands is marked by more fluidity and permeability of

²³ Hugh A. Dempsey, “The “Thin Red Line” in the Canadian West,” *American West* 7(1), 1970: 24-30; 24 and 26.

²⁴ Sheila McManus, *Line Which Separates: Race, Gender, and the Making of the Alberta-Montana Borderlands* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005).

²⁵ See Sterling Evans, ed. *The Borderlands of the American and Canadian Wests: Essays on the History of the Forty-Ninth Parallel* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006); and Andrew Graybill, *Policing the Great Plains: Rangers, Mounties, and the North American Frontier, 1875-1910* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007).

social categories. Rehearsing the tale of Sitting Bull's flight to Canada, for instance, LaDow has emphasized the significant porosity of the northern border. The "medicine line," she argues "came into being and then quickly faded from memory, in a story that turned out to be less about borders and nations than about the land itself."²⁶ Regardless of their differences over the significance of the forty-ninth parallel, northern borderlands historians tend to agree that the land itself has worked against the border to unite the northwestern plains.

Nature and Conquest

Predation remains a vital concept to the supposed "unconquest" of the borderlands that has accompanied the region's development as a colonial province. Conjuring anti-productive, nonhuman forces, metaphors of predation have provided a natural language to describe the borderlands since its moment of colonial genesis in the 1860s. Even as recently as this winter, an advertising campaign by the Montana State Tourism Board adapted a memorable epigram from the esteemed Montana historian K. Ross Toole to convince readers of *Backpacker* magazine to book their trips to the Big Sky state. In bold print, the ad declared: "So formidable a land that in a sense it was never conquered at all."²⁷

The land and the sky have played crucial roles in the material subconscious of borderlands historiography. Some of the most direct and beautiful articulations of these nonhuman forces are probably found in Wallace Stegner's *Wolf Willow*, which has now

²⁶ Beth LaDow, *The Medicine Line: Life and Death on a North American Borderland* (New York: Routledge, 2001), xviii.

²⁷ As of April 13th, 2011, an online version of this advertisement viewable at <http://wintermt.com/Ski_Areas_and_Resorts/>.

influenced several generations of northern borderlands scholars and, somewhat accidentally, placed environmental history at the heart of the field. First published in 1955, this recollection of Stegner's childhood portrayed the borderland's nonhuman nature as a complex and comedic malevolence that drove his family from the land. Describing winters so cold that they froze one's words before they were heard, and spring melts that thawed out frozen speech in a cacophonous chatter, Stegner maintained a sense of humor in narrating a nature that "had the force in history... that a defeat in war has upon a nation."²⁸ Following the collapse of his family's borderland wheat farm, Stegner's father shot himself in 1920. Stegner responded to this fatal desperation by devoting much of his literary and political career to celebrating the awesome power of the West's nonhuman forces, seeking out a particular type of wilderness, perhaps as Cronon has described, with "a presence irreducibly nonhuman, something profoundly Other than yourself."²⁹

Wolves have and still do play a prominent role in this ironic celebration of the region's legacy of conquest (and unconquest). For many individuals in the northern borderlands, past and present, wolves' location on the edge of civilization has worked as a stand-in for their own feelings of social marginalization. Jody Emel, for instance, a self-described eco-feminist, writes that "wolves are symbols of resistance. These animals are metaphors for oppositional ways of thinking and feeling."³⁰ When people in the Northern Rockies look for wolves (and seldom see them), they're hoping to catch

²⁸ Wallace Stegner, *Wolf Willow: A History, a Story, and a Memory of the Last Plains Frontier* (New York: Viking, 1962[1955]), 137.

²⁹ Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness," 8.

³⁰ Jody Emel, "Are You Man Enough, Big and Bad Enough? Wolf Eradication in the U.S.," in Jennifer Wolch and Emel, eds. *Animal Geographies: Place, Politics, and Identity in the Nature-Culture Borderlands* (London: Verso, 1998), 91-118; 112.

a glimpse of this landscape's recalcitrant past, expecting to hear some defiant lupine dialogue—the cunning, violence, and wildness that has both nurtured and bloodied the region's dominant historical narratives.

But wolves are more than animal totems of predation. With lives of their own, wolves are themselves historical agents and inadvertent co-creators of the landscapes and stories that animate the controversies over their own continued existence. Wolves and humans live within a complex history of interactions that have transformed material ecologies and cultural ones, searing a mixture of predation, conquest, and history into the center of western environmental politics. In order to understand these relationships, we need to investigate representations of wolves alongside considerations of the lives of wolves themselves and how they have shaped the larger-than-human history of this northern borderlands region.

Chapter one of this dissertation, titled “Wolves and Whiskey,” provides historical background on the world of the borderlands during the 1860s and 1870s. It argues that during this era both Blackfoot and Anglo-American concepts of predation and production were relatively fluid, informed by empathetic understandings of human and nonhuman predators. Chapter two, “Beasts of Bounty,” traces the dissociation of predation and production in the context of the wolf bounty-hunting from the 1880s through the 1910s. Chapters three and four, “Making Meat” and “The Place that Feeds You,” focus on American attempts to subordinate Blackfoot land and labor through the implementation of a reservation livestock industry and land allotment. They also document Blackfoot resistance and accommodations to these colonial efforts. Chapter five, “Unnatural Hungers,” argues that colonial dissociations between predation and

production structured the historical narratives that established the borderlands sites as worthy of wildlife conservation.

By investigating the historical role of predation in both justifying and contesting conquest and colonialism, this dissertation addresses broader ethical and philosophical questions lying at the heart of controversies over the exploitation of human and non-human life. I hope that tracing predation's cultural history can help lead toward more honest evaluations of our human footprints on the world. Maybe it can help us past the foolish question of whether we should or should not "prey" on living beings (as if we had the choice), and instead encourage us to consider how we can most respectfully and equitably sustain ourselves on the lives of others.

Chapter 1:

Wolves and Whiskey

During the 1860s and 1870s, the Montana-Alberta borderland's emergence as a landscape of predation was both a cultural and material development of its history of conquest. For Anglo-American wolfers and whiskey traders, the region was indeed a "happy hunting ground," where they could indulge in enterprises deemed predatory by the colonial governments of both the United States and Canada. And the ecological effects of the whiskey, bison robe, and wolf pelt trades actually created an environment disproportionately populated by predators, especially wolves, whose opportunistic population dynamics thrived on the region's abundance of carrion. In the midst of these socio-ecological transformations, predation became the pariah of the American and Canadian nation-states, both of which sought to enact colonial visions of agricultural settlement and production on the northwestern plains. Purging the land of predators, both human and animal, became the mantra for federal officials north and south of the international boundary. The consequences of this project fell most harshly on the Blackfoot, whose hunting traditions were circumscribed by the U.S. Army and the North-West Mounted Police, and who, by the end of the 1870s, were confined to the Blackfeet Reservation in Montana, and the Blood, Piegan, and Blackfoot Reserves in Alberta. It also fell on the fledgling Fort Benton merchants who made their fortunes plying whiskey, guns, and other goods to the Blackfoot in exchange for products of the hunt, a population of white men derided as an anathema to civilized settlement.

Whiskey has flowed briskly through the bloodstream of this region's historiography. More than any other aspect of the borderland's history, the so-called

Whoop-up country's liquor traffic of the 1860s and 1870s summons images of the North-West Mounted Police, the Blackfoot's acquiescence to Treaty Seven, bison extermination, and even innovations in steamboat technology. Located at the center of these and other historical transformations, whiskey has taken on a life of its own. For many historians, the spirit has become an agent of conquest more potent than individuals like Colonel Baker or Colonel McLeod. In doing so, whiskey has provided a solvent to remove human contingency from the borderland's colonial past, leaving the region's historiography in a state of contradiction. Although the colonization of the North American West has most often been understood as a narrative of disenchantment, where Anglo-American modernity replaced indigenous tradition, whiskey's emergence as the Whoop-up country's *deus ex machina* reveals that an unacknowledged animism pervaded the borderland's conquest and modernization. Viewed as an historical actor, whiskey contravenes a long-standing humanistic metaphysics that reserved historical agency for human actors.

Wolves, however, have not been granted a similar level of historical significance, though they too played important roles in structuring the borderland's histories and memories of predation and conquest. As carnivores, they feasted on the skinned tons of meat left naked on the plains, reproducing to unprecedented levels even as wolfers killed thousands of the animals for their pelts. Even after federal authorities subdued the supposedly predatory Blackfoot and whiskey traders as impediments to civilization, wolves remained as very real threats to the establishment of the region's livestock industry.

This chapter argues that the uneven acceptance of wolves and whiskey as historical agents demonstrates a defining, but overlooked feature of colonial conquest: the need for colonizers to disavow their predatory inclinations. Whiskey provided a means to this disavowal by dehumanizing the borderland's narrative of conquest, shifting blame for Blackfoot dispossession to the mysterious alchemy of spirituous liquor. Meanwhile, wolves thrived in this world supposedly wrought by whiskey. By the end of the 1870s, their increasing presence alone indicated the region's transformation into one of the colonial periphery's most predacious landscapes.

The chapter is subdivided into three sections. The first traces the historiography of borderland colonization and the role of the whiskey trade in diffusing blame for the region's violent colonial past. In the context of this historiography, the second section argues that the whiskey trade did not play as significant a role in destroying Blackfoot lifeways as previous historians have concluded, and that, in fact, rather than crippling the Blackfoot, it enabled a strong Blackfoot resistance to colonization, which is one reason why American and Canadian authorities sought its dismantlement. The third section explores the effects of the whiskey trade on wolves, and on wolves' role in establishing the borderlands as a predacious landscape. It also describes Blackfoot modes of human-animal kinship to explore an alternative way of understanding historical agency—not as a property of individual subjects, but as an idea embedded in broader historical narratives.

Whiskey and Borderland Historiography

On the morning of January 23rd, 1870, the U.S. Second Cavalry Regiment took firing positions on a bluff above the Marias River, a three-day ride into the heart of Montana's Blackfeet Reservation. Below the soldiers, along a bend gouged by the river's frozen flow of ice and mud, sprawled a Pikuni winter camp sheltering several hundred people from the brutal cold. Earlier that week, a dome of arctic air had spilled southward, dropping temperatures into the minus thirties. The troops had marched through the cold from Fort Shaw, on the reservation's southern boundary, where most of the force had arrived just days earlier from Fort Ellis, near the town of Bozeman, three hundred miles to the southeast. Summoned by orders from General Phil Sheridan, the regiment had journeyed across Montana undetected, travelling by night, resting by day, lighting no campfires. To boost morale and provide an illusion of warmth, Major Eugene Baker, their commanding officer, allegedly dispensed whiskey rations prior to the morning's assault.³¹

According to Baker's official report, his regiment took the camp by surprise and pounded it with rifle fire for a solid hour, shooting everything that moved. The first American casualty of the day was a trooper thrown from his horse as the regiment charged down the steep bluff and into the Pikuni camp, pulling down lodges and killing survivors. The second casualty was a soldier shot in the face as he entered a lodge to murder its occupants. By 11 o'clock that morning, Baker's surprise attack had killed 173 Pikunis and captured over one hundred prisoners, with the loss of two soldiers. Leaving behind one company of troops to guard the prisoners and to finish obliterating the camp—literally piling together all Blackfeet possessions and setting them ablaze—

³¹ Robert Ege, *Strike them Hard: Incident on the Marias, 23 Jan. 1870* (Bellevue, Nebraska: Old Army Press, 1970), 49.

Baker's regiment rode ten miles downriver to attack another band of Pikunis, one led by Mountain Chief, his original target. He arrived to find Mountain Chief's camp hastily evacuated. But rather than continue his pursuit, Baker led his troops back to Fort Shaw, satisfied with his indiscriminate assault.

The soldiers killed 173 and left the rest for dead; after burning the encampment, they discovered some of the prisoners had smallpox, and turned them out unprovisioned onto subarctic plain. Investigations and eyewitness reports confirmed that Major Baker and many of his troops were intoxicated. Earlier that winter, medical records from Baker's command at Fort Shaw indicated that between six and twelve percent of his soldiers were unfit for duty as a result of consistent drunkenness and severe hangovers. Baker himself was court-martialed two years later, after the so-called Battle of Poker Flats, a fight on the upper Yellowstone that he missed while drinking and playing cards in a tent with his lieutenants. He died of liver cirrhosis in 1885.³²

The official pretext for the assault was the murder of a white man, Malcolm Clarke, by his Pikuni nephew, Pete Owl Child. Clarke lived about forty miles north of Helena, and was well known by the Blackfeet and by white settlers. A former employee of the American Fur Company, Clarke married a Pikuni woman in the 1850s, an arrangement that had helped cement his success as a fur trader on the upper Missouri. His murder was the result of a long-standing family dispute over horses, but it occurred during a low-point in white-Blackfeet relations. Earlier that year, a group of white men had randomly murdered Mountain Chief's brother while he visited Fort Benton. Soon after, Mountain Chief ambushed and killed one of these men on the road

³² See M. John Lubetkin, *Jay Cook's Gamble: The Northern Pacific Railroad, the Sioux, and the Panic of 1873* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2006), 138-141; 147.

between Fort Benton and Helena. Most people in the region, white and Blackfoot, were uncomfortable with these two killings, but agreed that justice had been more or less served. Others began spreading rumors, however, that Mountain Chief was planning a larger series of attacks on white settlers, and the *Helena Herald* and other regional papers reported outlandish stories that he was also responsible for the mysterious death of John Bozeman near the Yellowstone River two years earlier.³³ To heighten the drama, Owl Child and his accomplices in the Clarke murder joined Mountain Chief's band in the fall.

But even if Baker's force had gotten it right and attacked Mountain Chief's band, the action still would have been criminally disproportionate. For Mountain Chief himself, along with his companions, were not openly hostile to the U.S. Army, or to the settlers of Montana Territory that the Second Cavalry was charged to protect. The murders of 1869 were private affairs and not open warfare, and were disdained by whites and Blackfoot alike. In December, General Alfred Sully, Montana's Superintendent of Indian Affairs, and Lieutenant William Pease, Blackfeet Indian Agent, convened a meeting with Pikuni and Kainah chiefs who agreed to release Owl Child into U.S. custody sometime during the winter. Mountain Chief was not present, but Heavy Runner was; and it was his band that Baker later attacked, Heavy Runner

³³ John Bozeman's death continues to be a mystery. However, Ege himself repeated the historical error that Mountain Chief murdered Bozeman. See Ege, *Strike Them Hard*, 13. The original account of this murder seems to have circulated around western newspapers shortly after the Baker massacre. For instance see "A Vigorous Defense of Col. Baker," *Arizona Miner*, April 30, 1870: "A traveler, writing to the *Omaha Herald*, from Whetstone Agency, dated the 12th ult., says: "You are not aware that this Mountain Chief, the leader of 600 lodges of Piegans (the fighting leader), was the murderer of the lamented Bozeman, on the Yellowstone, in the winter of 1867... These Blackfeet were living with the Crows at the time, and the Crow Indians reported the circumstance to the commanding officer at Fort Smith. I saw Bozeman's arms and horses in the hands of this immortalized thief and murderer..."

numbering among the dead, clutching a letter of good conduct endorsed weeks earlier by General Sully.

While Sully and Pease negotiated for the arrest of Owl Child, elsewhere the War Department made preparations for a winter strike against the Pikuni. Unconcerned by local details of the Clarke murder, Sheridan decided that a harsh reprisal against Mountain Chief, or some other suitable target, in his absence, would be the Army's best reaction to northern Montana's diplomatic complications. Unbeknownst to Sully's Helena office, Sheridan telegraphed Fort Shaw from his Chicago headquarters: "tell Baker to strike them hard."³⁴ Within several days, the Second Cavalry had fulfilled this mission, throwing Montana's Indian policy into disarray.

The Marias Massacre, or the Baker's Massacre as it's also known, is one of the least remembered atrocities of America's western conquest. Today, people are more likely to encounter the massacre in semi-fictional form—since it constitutes the tragic climax of James Welch's brilliant *Fools Crow*—than in actual historical work. Welch himself theorized that the massacre is often neglected by historians more eager to explore romantic events farther south: "it is dutifully noted in historical texts as a small paragraph or a footnote, while the author gets on the bigger and better things, such as the Battle of the Little Bighorn."³⁵ With the possible exception of Michael Ege's, *Tell Baker to Strike Them Hard*, an account of the massacre that Ege wrote following the context of his own experiences as an American soldier in Vietnam, nothing close to an

³⁴ See Ege, *Strike Them Hard*, 33.

³⁵ See James Welch, *Fools Crow* (New York: Penguin, 1986); James Welch and Paul Stekler, *Killing Custer: The Battle of Little Bighorn and the Fate of the Plains Indians* (New York: Penguin, 1995), 38.

academic monograph exists on the event.³⁶ Even Richard Slotkin mentions it only once during his canonical 400-page cultural history of violence in the late-nineteenth-century West.³⁷ It doesn't appear at all in the New Western History syntheses, not even in Patty Limerick's, *The Legacy of Conquest*, nor in Richard White's, "*It's All Your Misfortune and None of My Own*."³⁸ Aside from a lonely roadside marker erected on U.S. Highway 2 during the summer of 2008, miles away from the massacre's actual location, the event is invisible to tourists on their way to Glacier National Park. It took Welch and his friends several long hikes before they themselves found the massacre site in 1985. Today, the river flat on which the Pikunis camped in 1870 is swallowed up by water from the Tiber Dam, twenty miles downstream. It's a good example of Wallace Stegner's claim that, on the northwestern plains, "monuments did not survive their business life by more than a half hour."³⁹ It's an indication that memories of conquest lay hidden here in less obvious locations.

While I agree with Welch that one reason why the Marias massacre is "forgotten" is because it lies outside standard American narratives of the Indian Wars, ones that focus on conflicts over mining, homesteading, and romantic figures like Custer and Red Cloud, surely another reason is the whiskey trade. One common way to reconcile the borderland's colonial history is by placing the blame for Blackfoot exploitation on the Blackfoot themselves. Scholar after scholar accepts, as a foregone conclusion, the apocalyptic effects of liquor on Blackfoot society. Recycling the same

³⁶ Ege, *Strike Them Hard*.

³⁷ Richard Slotkin, *The Fatal Environment: The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization, 1800-1890* (New York: MacMillan, 1985).

³⁸ See Patricia Nelson Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (New York: Norton, 1987); and Richard White, "*It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own*": *A New History of the American West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991).

³⁹ Wallace Stegner, *Wolf Willow* (New York: Viking Press, 1962), 71.

anecdotes of drunken sprees where Blackfoot hunters traded away fortunes in bison robes for glasses of whiskey and then randomly murdered one other, these historians seem driven by an anti-historical sense that even without Major Baker or Treaty Seven, the Blackfoot headed inevitably toward self-destruction. This understanding is so entrenched that even Blackfoot historians rarely bother contesting it. A newly published four-volume collection of Blackfoot primary documents, sponsored by the Blackfeet Heritage Center in Browning, is literally silent on the topic.⁴⁰

The whiskey trade has been largely misunderstood by borderlands researchers who are often more interested in studying U.S.-Canadian relations than relations between Anglo-Americans and Blackfoot. Over the last two decades, historians of the North American West have retooled the significance of nation-states in their interpretations of the West's core meaning. Writing history within a taxonomy of nations, they argued, obscured a complicated legacy of social and cultural interaction and uneven economic development affecting the West to the present. Regionally focused approaches, like those of Patty Limerick and Richard White, have succeeded in establishing transnational narratives of the West that illuminate these stories and provide a standard for current scholarship. Environmental historians have focused similar attention on the complex social relations established by humans in the West based on their chosen methods of economic and cultural interaction with nature.⁴¹ Historians of the Montana-Alberta borderlands, however, while offering rich comparative histories of the border between Canada and the United States, have delved

⁴⁰ Adolf Hungry-Wolf, ed. *The Blackfoot Papers* (Blackfeet Heritage Center: Browning, MT, 2006).

⁴¹ See William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1991).

less substantially into the region's shared histories of colonization. The environmental history of the borderlands has been even more neglected, and work dealing with human-animal relationships does not exist.

The traditional history of the borderlands sought to explain the region's social conflicts as the result of competition between the allegedly different expansionist regimes of the United States and Canada.⁴² The basic plot delineated a race to populate the northern stretch of the so-called "Great American Desert," a story featuring primarily white actors whose concerns mirrored their national affiliations. According to the traditional story, following the decline of the Hudson's Bay and American Fur Companies in the late 1850s, American freebooters struck north onto the high plains straddling the Missouri and Saskatchewan Rivers, taking wolf pelts, bison robes, and trading liquor to the Blackfeet, Crow, Cree and Assiniboine on either side of the international boundary. The temptation of "empty land," these histories argued, explained the young American men's disregard for the political sovereignty of Canada. Since the authoritative Crown stifled the western development of Canada through its support of the monopolistic Hudson Bay Company, enterprising Americans naturally sought to civilize the wilderness howling at their shoulder, a phenomenon pithily described in Paul Sharp's work as "Manifest Destiny Looks North."⁴³ Canadians combated this lawless American invasion in two ways, first by sending out the Mounties to enforce justice, and second by encouraging the peaceful, agricultural settlement of their own eastern citizens. Meanwhile south of the border, American

⁴² Gerald Berry, *The Whoop-up Trail* (Edmonton: Applied Art Products, 1953); and Paul F. Sharp, *Whoop-up Country: The Canadian-American West, 1865-1885* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1955).

⁴³ Sharp, *Whoop-up Country*, 292-312.

racketeering went on unhindered by an increasing federal presence, and by the late 1870s, while the Mounties succeeded in establishing stability and law in their lands, Montana Territory, although growing wildly wealthy, still teetered on the edge of social disorder.

Far from transcending the grip of the nation-state on western history, these narratives instead supported nationalisms both north and south of the boundary line. For Americans, lawlessness in this northern borderland, known as the “Whoop-up Country,” backed up a frontier myth long associated with expansion. A vanguard of rough, but heroic pioneers blazed the Whoop-up Trail across the northwest plains, opening land to free enterprise, democratic settlement and improvement. That violence often marked this stage of settlement was due to the colorful character of these men themselves, and not from complicated social conflicts or struggles for power.

Interestingly, Paul Sharp’s noteworthy work upheld this frontier stereotype even while written to suppress it. Published in the *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* (predecessor of the *American Historical Review*), Sharp’s “Northern Great Plains: A Study in Canadian-American Regionalism” advocated for a place-centered western history that would resonate well with current transnationalists.⁴⁴ “Regional, rather than national studies,” he began, “promise a more complete understanding of our West.” Doing so “helps us avoid the unfortunate tendency in western American history of emphasizing the sensational, the transitory, the erratic and the pathological.”⁴⁵ Three years later, *Whoop-Up Country*, his treatise on the whiskey trade, emphasized all of

⁴⁴ Paul Sharp, “The Northern Great Plains: A Study in Canadian-American Regionalism,” *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 39(1), 1952.

⁴⁵ Sharp, “The Northern Great Plains,” 61.

these things. A spectacular account of colorful American characters hustling whiskey, this influential book, illustrated with rowdy line-art drawings by Charles Russell, has done much to entrench the idea of the exceptionally American, rough-and-tumble frontier West. To his credit, Sharp's excellent book complicated the motivations of many of its white actors, particularly with regard to the Cypress Hills Massacre, an incident traditionally conceived as a violent American foray into Saskatchewan. Sharp's portrayal implicated Canadians, revealing Canadian participation in the Indian massacre, and a weak-willed Canadian court unwilling to prosecute the murderers. Despite this added complexity, however, Sharp's emphasis on the illustrious stories of white frontiersmen covered up a deeper history of social struggle, ultimately recouping the larger western myth he strove to overturn.

On the Canadian side, the borderland's story often reprises the tale of the North-West Mounted Police and the establishment of law. With their border secure from southern rascality, western Canada began building a temperate society based on legal commerce, agriculture, and equitable relations with natives. Conveniently, frontier drunkenness, rape, murder and mayhem were crimes ascribed to American interlopers, honorable Canada's lawless brethren. While Paul Sharp's discussion of the Cypress Hills Massacre complicated the reality of Canadian lawfulness, the work of his Albertan counterparts instead whitewashed the history of the Mounties and extirpated Canadians of any guilt in the plundering of the high plains. Hugh Dempsey, for instance, worked within a broader commitment to represent Native American experience than did Sharp, especially concerning the Blackfeet, but his interpretation echoed the myth of a healthy relationship between Canadians and Indians, vilifying American whiskey traders.

These uniquely Canadian “protectors of the land and people” brought peace and smoothed the transition from “wilderness to civilization,” according to Dempsey. But just as events proceeded south of the border, by 1880 bison were obliterated from the Canadian plains, and Canada had confined their cherished “First Nations” to inadequate reservations where hundreds faced starvation.⁴⁶

Today, these national myths remain regionally prevalent throughout Canada and the U.S. The geographer Peter Morris has demonstrated their persistence through the spatial distribution of business and school names in north-central Montana and southwestern Alberta.⁴⁷ In Canada, “Chinook Country” has come to designate the foothills and plains south of Calgary, expressing the region’s mild winter climate compared to the rest of Canada. Many more businesses in Alberta carry “Chinook” in their names than in Montana, according to Morris. As moisture-heavy Pacific storms mass against the Rockies during winter and spring, warm and dry wind blasts down the eastern slopes hundreds of miles onto the plains, melting snowpack, exposing the sun, and raising temperatures 20 or 30 degrees in minutes. Of course, the same weather patterns occur in Montana. However, it was Albertan and not Montana boosters who marketed this advantage. Much like the American Sunbelt, over the twentieth century, “sunny, southwest Alberta,” daughter of the Chinook winds, drew thousands of immigrants from the eastern provinces. Today, Calgary ranks as the third-largest

⁴⁶ See Hugh A. Dempsey, *Firewater: The Impact of the Whisky Trade on the Blackfoot Nation* (Saskatoon: Fifth House, 2002); and Hugh A. Dempsey, “The “Thin Red Line” in the Canadian West,” *American West* 7(1) 1970.

⁴⁷ Peter S. Morris, “Regional Ideas and the Montana-Alberta Borderlands,” *Geographical Review* 89, no. 4 (1999), Peter S. Morris, “Whooping It up in Chinook Country: Regional Ideas and the Montana-Alberta Borderlands,” in *Annual Meeting of the Association of Pacific Coast Geographers* (Flagstaff, AZ: Department of Geography, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1998).

metropolis in Canada, while 250 miles south, Americans still perceive Great Falls as a northern outpost of civilization, emblematic of a wild, Charlie Russell past.

In short, historians have been quick to accept narratives of the whiskey trade penned by their predecessors, elaborating rather than challenging its two basic premises, that whiskey was responsible for the Blackfoot's cultural decimation, and that responses to the trade underscored basic similarities and differences between American and Canadian approaches to western colonization. For the most part, historians have focused on U.S.-Canadian relations rather than relations between Anglo-Americans and Indians. In telling these stories, they have also rehearsed a well-trod misunderstanding of predator-prey relationships, identifying the Blackfoot sometimes as predators, sometimes as prey, whiskey traders as unambiguous predators, and the colonial state and the settlers it represented as entities beyond any predatory calculation.

The Conquest of Blackfoot Country

In the fall of 1869, two white men traveled north across the forty-ninth parallel with a wagonload of whiskey and lever-action rifles. They did not know where, exactly, they had crossed the international boundary into Canada, but they did know that the place they built their trading post, at the confluence of the Oldman and St. Mary's Rivers, was far enough from Montana to avoid harassment by the U.S. Army. Over the winter, they struck a brisk trade with Pikuni and Kainah hunters who eagerly exchanged hundreds of bison robes for the new repeating guns. Whiskey proved a popular commodity too, as it had across the border, until earlier that summer when U.S. Marshals and Indian Affairs agents had broken up the illegal commerce. The next

spring, John J. Healy and Alfred B. Hamilton returned to Montana and sold their robes at Fort Benton, splitting a \$5,000 profit. For the next few years they ventured to the same location above the border, building a permanent log structure after their first burned to the ground, and increasing the scale of their trading operations, bankrolled after 1870 by Fort Benton's leading merchants. Unmolested by federal authorities, they traded whiskey freely. When asked for an update on business, Healy responded, "We're just whoopin' up on 'em!," an exclamation quickly recruited as the name for the trading post, Fort Whoop-up, as well as a nickname for the broad sweep of Blackfoot country, from the Missouri to the Saskatchewan Rivers.

The year 1870 marked the start of a commercial revolution on the high plains straddling the forty-ninth parallel. From Fort Benton, the highest navigable point on the Missouri River, industrially-produced goods began flowing northward across the international boundary, offering the three tribes of the Blackfoot Confederacy—the Pikuni, Kainah, and Siksika—unprecedented access to manufactured clothing, repeating rifles, canned food, and a host of other items, including whiskey, most notorious of them all. Blackfoot trade with whites, especially with white Americans, picked up substantially over the course of the next decade, and by the early 1880s, the commerce had generated a handful of fortunes across northern Montana. The merchant houses of T.C. Power and I.G. Baker benefitted the most from the trade, and consolidated their market power with dramatic expansions eastward, breaking apart the old fur monopolies of Hudson's Bay, St. Louis, and St. Paul in the process. With satellite offices in Chicago, Montreal, and New York, and with vertically integrated operations to streamline their flows of profits back to Fort Benton, the merchant houses helped

momentarily reverse Montana's usual arrangement under core-periphery relationships. Rather than a dusty frontier outpost, Fort Benton truly was "the world's innermost port"—the center of a global traffic in bison robes and wolf pelts.⁴⁸

The furs of these animals had superseded beaver skins in profitability by the late 1860s, a transformation based on a series of shifting political, ecological, and economic circumstances, along with changes in Victorian fashion sensibilities. In many parts of the Northern Rockies, especially drainages trapped heavily for export by the Hudson's Bay and American Fur Companies earlier in the century—the mountain streams west of Edmonton and southwest of Helena, respectively—beaver populations had plummeted to an historic nadir.

The Blackfoot were bison hunters first and warriors second, a reality that had frustrated Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) traders for nearly two centuries, ever since their first encounter with the powerful tribes in the 1690s. Even by the 1860s, the Blackfoot remained aloof to the HBC's requests for small-game furs, instead bringing hundreds of bison robes to HBC trading posts during years when they decided to come at all. Still reliant on canoe-and-portage routes through the Canadian Shield, the HBC could not efficiently transport these massive bales of furs. Moreover, the Blackfoot continually warred with the Cree and the Assiniboine, the HBC's prime suppliers of beaver.⁴⁹

Meanwhile, the 1860s also witnessed the near-collapse of St. Louis's American Fur Company (AFC), another heir to the beaver's early-nineteenth-century slaughter.

⁴⁸ See Joel Overholser, *Fort Benton: World's Innermost Port* (Big Sandy, Montana: Rettig Publishing, 1987).

⁴⁹ See Hungry-Wolf, ed. *The Blackfoot Papers*.

As with the HBC, they were forced to accept the Blackfoot's insistence on trading bison robes, a commodity the AFC, initially, did not particularly want. But armed with steamboat navigation of the upper Missouri River, by the late 1830s the AFC had come to the trading table, eager to ship Blackfoot bison robes downriver to its St. Louis entrepot. From its post at Fort Union, at the junction of the Missouri and Yellowstone Rivers, just east of the present-day Montana-North Dakota border, the AFC dominated the fur trade of the northern plains. But although profitable, the Blackfoot bison robe trade was not great enough to offset the AFC's losses on other furs. Moreover, the firm lacked the capital necessary to expand its business with the Blackfoot by supplying more trade goods. By 1865, a number of competing firms working out of the town that had sprung up around the AFC's Blackfoot trading post, Fort Benton, had eroded AFC profits to the point where the company decided to sell its post on the upper Missouri. They found a willing buyer in the Northwest Fur Company, headquartered in St. Paul, Minnesota, which similarly suffered from competition, selling out to I.G. Baker by the end of the decade.⁵⁰

Throughout the middle of the nineteenth-century, the Blackfoot drove a hard bargain from these firms, demanding sophisticated items like rifles, finished clothing, saddles, and metal ware. Because it was ruled illegal in both the United States and the Dominion of Canada, liquor played a minor role in the Blackfoot trade until the late 1860s, when independent Fort Benton traders, operating with less judicial oversight than the large firms, began trading whiskey from small, decentralized posts scattered across northern Montana. Contrary to popular understanding, however, the Blackfoot

⁵⁰ See Sharp, *Whoop-up Country*, 33-35.

were already well acquainted with liquor by this period. The HBC had periodically dispatched rations of rum as ceremonial trading gifts to the Blackfoot since the eighteenth century. In the 1830s, the AFC had also smuggled a large still northwest from St. Louis, transporting and reassembling it at Fort Union. The still churned out trade whiskey for several years before its discovery by a U.S. Army officer on his travels across the plains. Faced with the possible revocation of its trading license, the AFC destroyed the massive still while claiming it was reserved solely for the use of AFC personnel. Thomas Hart Benton, however, U.S. Senator from Missouri, St. Louis business magnate, and board member of the AFC, facilitated a settlement whereby the AFC merely paid a fine for its transgression, and continued its business. The AFC named its trading post with the Blackfoot, Fort Benton, in honor of this senator who saved the firm from the wrath of U.S. commerce and Indian office laws.⁵¹

By 1870 the Blackfoot had become well versed with whiskey and its intoxicating effects, having traded for it in relatively lesser quantities for at least two generations. Also by this time, whiskey was also neither incompatible nor unprecedented with or within Blackfoot cultural practices. Liquor had long played a significant role in the gift giving practices that often accompanied trade with the HBC and the AFC. Furthermore, although it is unlikely the Blackfoot had access to alcoholic drink before their encounters with white traders, they did have significant tribal experience with other intoxicating substances, especially body-purging teas. Sometimes, the Blackfoot consumed these teas in large, dangerous quantities during

⁵¹ See Ege, *Strike Them Hard*, 4.

ceremonies in which participants would try to out-drink one another before getting ill.⁵²

The incorporation of whiskey into these ceremonies was more a change in means than ends.

Another prominent consumer of whiskey during these years was the U.S. Army. Beset with boredom, incorrigible officers, cold winters, and easy access to alcohol, U.S. Army soldiers in the Whoop-up country drank themselves into a stupor. Charged with maintaining the peace by prosecuting Indian liquor violations, the soldiers themselves drank heavily, including their officers. Medical records from Fort Shaw indicate that in the winter of 1869-1870, soldiers reported “unfit for duty” averaged from six to twelve percent each week. Since other categories existed for illness and injury, it is reasonable to assume a substantial number of troops were consistently drunk or hung-over. Several explicit entries in the casualty listings reference liquor as a factor in death. In one instance, “Private Patrick Stanton, 13th Infantry,” the surgeon recorded, “was found dead March 4th, 1870 some three miles above the Post. He had wandered off the evening before while intoxicated and perished from exposure.”⁵³

Evidence from military and business records indicate that whiskey traders struck a brisk business not only with the Blackfoot, but also with U.S. troops. In 1871, the commanding colonel at Fort Shaw demanded that nearby trader Joseph McKnight stop selling liquor to the soldiers. The text of the reprimand dictated that McKnight stop selling “larger quantities than by the drink, to be taken at the bar, except upon written

⁵² Clark Wissler, “The Social Life of the Blackfoot Indians,” *Anthropological Papers of the Museum of Natural History* 7:1 (1911): 459.

⁵³ Surgeon’s Field Book. *Fort Shaw Surgeon’s Office Records*, SC 1407, MHS.

permission of the Post Commander.”⁵⁴ A pragmatist, McKnight switched to beer in order to satisfy this directive and still satiate the soldiers. In the interim, however, he continued to sell bottles of whiskey in private transactions to both soldiers and officers who forged special dispensation permits. McKnight kept these amusing slips of paper, which survive in his business books.

Evidence like these slips would have been important to maintain, since the year before McKnight’s arrival, the fort’s commanding officer arrested Walter Cooper, a trader who was caught trucking kegs of whiskey right outside Fort Shaw. Colonel Reeve confiscated Cooper’s horses, wagon and whiskey, and imprisoned him overnight in the fort’s jail. Fortunately for Cooper, Fort Benton whiskey interests ran the law in northern Montana. As one Army officer lamented, “there is a community of interest among the capitalists here that enables them to combine and have most things their own way in many respects.”⁵⁵ During Cooper’s trial, the county prosecutor failed to show up on Colonel Reeve’s behalf, and the jury refused to indict Cooper on any charges. Cooper’s attorneys immediately fired back with a personal lawsuit against Reeve, and also a suit against the US Army for wrongful imprisonment.⁵⁶

Local suspicion and hostility towards federal authorities flared in many other ways as well. The majority of white Fort Bentonites had emigrated from the southern and border states during the Civil War. Many were Democrats, some were deserted soldiers, and most opposed the authoritarian and militaristic policies established by

⁵⁴ *J.H. McKnight & Co.*, Box 4, Folder 2, MHS.

⁵⁵ Senate Executive Document No. 8, 41st Congress, 3rd Session, “Army Posts, Dept. of Dakota,” 7, Serial 1440. In Sharp, *Whoop-up Country*, 218.

⁵⁶ Executive Document 57, “Ex-Colonel J.V.D. Reeve,” ed. 2nd Session 42nd Congress (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1872). Like Peter Koch, in the early 1870s Cooper left the Whoop-up country and settled in Bozeman, opening a store. Today, Cooper Park sits at the corner of Eighth Avenue and Koch Street.

eastern governments in the 1860s and 1870s to control western settlement and Indian affairs.⁵⁷ The Conrad brothers, I.G. Baker's lieutenants in the liquor trade, were former members of "Mosby's Raiders," a paramilitary guerilla force that fought General Sheridan's cavalry in Northern Virginia during the closing days of the Civil War. It was not surprising, then, that Fort Benton's participants shunned federal and territorial authority and traded whiskey freely. Hostile anti-authoritarianism in the Whoop-up country played itself out in interesting ways. As early as 1867, tensions between the Blackfoot and Sun River ranchers had convinced Acting Governor George Meagher to organize a militia. Coming from the mining and ranch land of southern Montana Territory, Meagher probably did not expect the hostile greeting he received at Fort Benton. In July, shortly after arriving to pick up a shipment of rifles and ammunition sent upriver by steamboat, Meagher mysteriously drowned.⁵⁸

Earlier that year, tension mounted between Fort Benton's merchants and the US government after soldiers seized one of I.G. Baker's wagon-trains moving whiskey across the Blackfeet Reservation. The US Secretary of Interior chided Baker, informing him that "the laws...are undoubtedly in force within the territory in which the Indian title has not been extinguished." Baker boldly responded: "if Hon. Secy. Of the Interior believed [this], he has been derelict in duty, in not driving the thirty thousand settlers of Montana from the homes they are unlawfully holding on Indian lands."⁵⁹ At first glance, this is an odd statement coming from a wealthy entrepreneur in the late-

⁵⁷ Stanley R. Davison and Dale Tash, "Confederate Backwash in Montana Territory," in Michael P. Malone and Richard Roeder, ed., *The Montana Past: An Anthology* (Missoula: University of Montana Press, 1969), 111-120.

⁵⁸ John Lepley, *Blackfoot Fur Trade on the Upper Missouri* (Missoula: Pictorial Histories Publishing Company, 2004), 246.

⁵⁹ Michael Foley, *An Historical Analysis of the Administration of the Blackfeet Indian Reservation by the United States, 1855-1950's* (Indian Claims Commission; Docket Number 279-D), 23-24.

nineteenth-century West. However, the success of Baker's merchant operation rested on the Blackfoot's ability to hunt bison over the huge expanses of the northwestern plains. Baker opposed federal presence in the Whoop-up country not only because it prosecuted his illegal trade, but because it also threatened to remove Blackfoot labor, a crucial element of his enterprise.

In this manner, antagonism between Fort Benton merchants and the US government worked to postpone white settlement. While the Blackfoot fought off white intrusion on their homeland, I.G. Baker and T.C. Power battled expansionist federal agents in local and national courts. Unlike elsewhere in the west, local white business in the Whoop-up country was not complicit with government attempts at Indian removal.

But this trade in whiskey and bison robes left a harmful mark on the Blackfoot, as numerous scholars have pointed out. The unbalanced terms of this trade reoriented Blackfoot labor towards market production, accelerating their annual kill of bison that destroyed traditional Blackfoot subsistence and impoverished the tribe.⁶⁰ Moreover, this economy of whiskey and bison robes operated in similar ways to the late-nineteenth-century meat industry.⁶¹ Like the meatpacking elite of Chicago, Benton's merchant class harnessed the natural wealth of its northern hinterland for industrial

⁶⁰ This also follows Isenberg's and Flores's arguments that market hunting hastened the destruction of the bison, but that Indian nineteenth-century subsistence hunting was also probably unsustainable. In the Whoop-up country, killing bison for the market rested almost exclusively in the hands of the Blackfoot; white hunters played a miniscule role in the extermination of the northern herds compared with the more familiar history of the southern and central plains. See Dan Flores, "Bison Ecology and Bison Diplomacy: The Southern Plains from 1800-1850," in *A Sense of the American West*, ed. James Sherow (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998), Isenberg, *The Destruction of the Bison*.

⁶¹ The chapter, "Annihilating Space: Meat," in Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* offers a provocative glimpse of this industry's significance and widening geography in the late-nineteenth century.

demand through layers of intermediary labor and technology that hid environmental and social costs from alienated consumers. Unsurprisingly, contemporary Bentonites referred to their city as the “Chicago of the Plains.”⁶²

Whiskey played an important role because it helped reorient the Blackfoot social structures that dictated restraint over hunting practices. The Blackfoots’ remarkable recalcitrance to trade had impressed and angered white traders throughout the early-nineteenth century. By the 1850s, however, the Blackfoot slowly integrated into a white market economy, trading robes with Fort Benton’s American Fur Company (AFC) and the British Hudson Bay Company (HBC). During this early period of trade, the Blackfoot considered bison hunting to be mainly a communal effort. The hides and tongues of dead bison belonged to the hunter if he desired to keep them, but the meat and other remains were distributed amongst the tribe.

To female labor fell the unenviable task of skinning and butchering. While the Blackfoot traded in communal groups with the HBC and AFC at their centralized posts, the decentralized whiskey traders from Fort Benton who superseded them by the early 1870s catered more to smaller groups of Blackfoot hunters and their immediate families. Thus, Blackfoot hunting gradually changed in orientation from an activity of larger bands to one of smaller family units. Some historians claim this transformation was evident in changing patterns of marriage. Men started marrying a greater number

⁶² Fort Benton *Record*, December 15, 1876, cited in Sharp, *Whoop-up Country: The Canadian American West, 1865-1885*, 157.

of wives, and by the late-nineteenth century, the average age of brides had dropped from around 18 to as low as 10 years old.⁶³

It is also worth considering how transformations in bison disease ecology during the 1870s intensified pandemics among the Blackfoot. By the 1870s, horses and livestock had likely transmitted brucellosis to the northwest bison herds.⁶⁴ Undiagnosed until the early-twentieth century, this Old World bacterial disease can cause miscarriage in pregnant women who have not developed immunity. Transmitted to humans through the inhalation of bacteria from infected animal tissue, Blackfoot women probably contracted the disease during their daily gutting, skinning and fleshing of bison robes.⁶⁵ Although clearly overshadowed by the devastation of smallpox, brucellosis was a daily source of misery on the plains that historians have largely overlooked.

The inebriating effects of whiskey created relatively little hardship and grief for the Blackfoot. Rather, the cumulative ecological and social effects of the whiskey trade itself wreaked havoc. Although drunken spats and alcohol poisoning undoubtedly killed some men and women, disease and the destruction of subsistence dwarfed these episodes in importance.

By the early 1870s, the Blackfoot had beaten back the Cree and the Assiniboine in the north, opening further hunting ground towards the east. Part of their success was due to their close connection with Fort Benton traders, who illegally traded hundreds of

⁶³ Isenberg, *Destruction of the Bison*, 100. Isenberg cites Edward Denig, *Five Indian Tribes of the Upper Missouri: Sioux, Arikaras, Assiniboines, Crees, Crows*, ed. John C. Ewers (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1961), 153 and Oscar Lewis, *The Effects of White Contact Upon Blackfoot Culture with Special Reference to the Role of the Fur Trade* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1942), 38-40, 50.

⁶⁴ Flores, "Bison Ecology and Bison Diplomacy," 77.

⁶⁵ Yousuf Khan, Manuel Mah, and Ziad Memish, "Brucellosis in Pregnant Women," *Clinical Infectious Diseases* 32, 1172-1177.

state-of-the-art repeating rifles to their Blackfoot allies. In 1870, two bands of Pikuni and Kainah camped near Fort Whoop-up routed 600 Cree and Assiniboine warriors, killing nearly half of the larger force with a steady barrage of accurate rifle fire.⁶⁶ In this way, the whiskey-trade years marked a brief expansion of Blackfoot territory in the early 1870s.

The whiskey trade thus contributed toward the destruction of the bison, but also opened new ecological niches. Likewise, the trade's economic benefits fell unevenly. In transferring wealth from bison to Fort Benton merchants, risk, ruin, and death reverberated back down the line affecting whiskey traders and the Blackfoot. While the Blackfoot bore the brunt of these disasters, the whiskey trade also afforded the Blackfoot a brief expansionary moment.

Other research has noted that participation in the bison-robe market altered Blackfoot subsistence and food relationships in more subtle ways. Like other Plains people—the Arapaho, Crow, and Lakota, for instance—the Blackfoot's martial culture was driven by the introduction of horses and rifles in the late-eighteenth century. In the case of the Blackfoot, horses became a form currency for fulfilling social obligations. Not only were horses essential tools of war, but often they were also war's object, and successful warriors accumulated fortunes in the animals that they leveraged for political power within their extra-familial bands. As research by David Nugent has demonstrated, such wealth in horses altered Blackfoot social hierarchies in the early-nineteenth century, allowing for the emergence of smaller-sized bands that were dominated by one or two extremely wealthy band chiefs, and on whom most other band

⁶⁶ Hugh Dempsey, *A Blackfoot Winter Count* (Calgary: The Glenbow Foundation, 1965), 15.

members were economically dependent. The distribution of meat from the hunt, however, while centralized under the control of band chiefs, remained largely egalitarian.⁶⁷

Wolves and Blackfoot Ways of Being

The Blackfeet's heavy diet of animal flesh played a large role in Anglo-American estimates of their barbarism. Other than seasonal harvests of berries and wild turnips, in good times the Blackfeet ate meat—and always that of mammals, rarely fish. Bison, of course, were the Blackfeet's traditional source of food. Before the introduction of horses and rifles in the late-eighteenth century, Blackfoot hunters chased bison on foot, cooperatively driving small herds of the animals over cliffs, or sometimes into corrals, where they could be speared. Ethno-historical and archeological evidence both suggest that these Blackfoot hunters managed the location of bison herds through a practice of rotationally burning prairie grasses, a form of husbandry somewhat more sophisticated than the open-range techniques adopted by Montana cattlemen in the late-nineteenth century, a system characterized by cattle historian Terry Jordan as one of “profound neglect.”⁶⁸ The Blackfoot did not merely wander the plains as bison nomads, as so many historians have mistaken, but instead kept the animals close by managing certain locales—particularly those near the *pissskans*, or “buffalo jumps”—as optimal bison habitats.

⁶⁷ David Nugent, “Property Relations, Production Relations, and Inequality: Anthropology, Political Economy, and the Blackfeet,” *American Ethnologist* Vol. 20, No. 2 (May, 1993), 336-362.

⁶⁸ Terry G. Jordan-Bychkov, “Does the Border Matter? Cattle Ranching and the Forty-ninth Parallel,” in Sterling Evans, ed. *The Borderlands of the American and Canadian Wests: Essays on Regional History of the Forty-ninth Parallel* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), 107-116; 113.

In the wake of postcolonial scholarship, it has become somewhat of an academic commonplace to assert the essential humanity of indigenous people. For most Canadian and American whites in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, notions of racial difference were structured around an abstract taxonomy of traits that converged indigeneity with animality.⁶⁹ As a result, while western scholarship has recently retaken-up the question of what it means to be animal, “colonized peoples,” writes Linda Tuhiwai Smith, “have been compelled to define what it means to be human because there is a deep understanding of what it has meant to be considered not fully human, to be savage.”⁷⁰ Defining the human in contrast to the animal, however, is an impossible mission for Blackfoot ontology; in fact, the animalization of Blackfoot people as savage was symptomatic of a larger colonial project to dissociate traditional Blackfoot understandings of human and animal kinship.

Within Blackfoot ontology, basic categories of human and animal held a much different significance than the racial taxonomy maintained by colonial society. Like many other indigenous cultures in North America, the Blackfoot historically understand their collective identity on the basis of kinship rather than race. But kinship in its usual sense of heredity also insufficiently grasps the exact nature of Blackfoot social ties, which included kinship relations between individual human and non-human persons. Constituted more by impermanent alliances than by immutable lines of sexual descent, kinship within the so-called Blackfoot Confederacy never sparked the creation of a discrete political body, but was instead a way of comprehending one’s relations with

⁶⁹ See Nigel Rothfels, *Savages and Beasts*

⁷⁰ Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (New York: Zed Books, 2006[1999]), 9 and 11.

human and non-human others. The Niitsitapi—or the “real people”—as the Blackfoot called themselves as a collective, included various non-human animals along with human ones. To be “real” was, in these terms, a matter of relationship rather than of purity. The real people were real precisely because of their interspecies kinship, not because they thought of themselves as the only real people in a world filled with inferior, animal-like others.

In Blackfoot country, then, Blackfoot people generally agreed that they were animals; or, at least, that they were not *not* animals. Abilities to hold social relations with nonhuman animals were understood as sources of power, rather than evidences of stalled human evolution. Take for example, the interesting case of the Wolf-man, as related by a Blackfoot storyteller to George Bird Grinnell in the 1890s: A man finds himself trapped in a pit, but is rescued by a wolf, coyote, badger, and fox. Realigned with these creatures, with whom he can suddenly communicate, the Wolf-man goes on to help these carnivores steal meat from traps, although he retains his human form. For a time, the Wolf-man lives like a wolf, but he is still a man. When he is caught stealing meat, his former human kin recognize him, and so the wolf-man rejoins his former human alliance.⁷¹

The temporarily mutability of a human marker like language in this story, and its exchange for other powers, confounds a colonial taxonomy that abstracts communication as a intra-species property rather than a practice of interspecies engagement. In this sense, human-animal difference, according to Blackfoot understandings, does not exist as an abstract separation, but is established through lived

⁷¹ “The Wolf Man,” in George Bird Grinnell, *Blackfoot Lodge Tales* (New York: Scribner’s, 1920) 78-80.

relationships between human and nonhuman persons. Difference is forged through the process of trying to become animal, to adopt nonhuman powers, to exist within alliances of humans and animals. It is a process best understood, within western philosophy, perhaps, as a relationship of mimesis and alterity—the maintenance of difference through mimicry—as Michael Taussig, Rane Willerslev, and other anthropologists have explored. Willerslev, in particular, develops this idea in his brilliant ethnography of Yukaghir hunters in northeastern Siberia. Yukaghir hunters dress with elk-skin leggings to facilitate the hunt by resembling the sound of elk moving through the undergrowth, what Willerslev sees as an act of mimesis—of mimicking elk. But despite this elk-like behavior, Yukaghir hunters do not believe they actually *become* elk, or that they actually become “animals,” as any number of other anthropologists, operating in colonial paradigms had asserted. Rather, “what defines power in the Yukaghir world,” Willerslev argues, “is the ability *not* to confuse analogy with identity... the borderland where self and other are both identical and different, alike yet not the same.”⁷² Although different in their specific practices, Blackfoot and Yukaghir understandings of human-animal identities are similar in that their difference as humans is consummated through acts of engagement, through attempts to become animal. Thus while the Blackfoot are not animal, their concept of natural alliance means that to be human, they are also not *not* animal.

Blackfoot scholars such as Betty Bastien have identified colonization as an attempt to replace this ontology of natural alliance, as she calls it, rooted in practice, experience, and geography, with a western taxonomic ontology that reduces kinship to

⁷² Rane Willerslev, *Soul Hunters: Hunting, Animism, and Personhood Among the Siberian Yukaghirs* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 190.

heredity. She writes that, under these circumstances, colonization is accomplished “by redefining identity, self, and humanness as abstractions, instead of defining them through the specific lived realities of natural alliances.”⁷³ The resulting destruction works out in a twofold process: first, by dissociating Blackfoot connections to the nonhuman environment, and second, by instituting a western model of autonomous selfhood that undermines Blackfoot obligations to community.

This first challenge, it seems, of Bastien’s colonialism to Blackfoot natural alliances played out in the near physical destruction of the northwestern plains’ bison herds, a process complete by the end of the 1870s. With the destruction of the bison, the Blackfoot lost not only a means of subsistence and a means of trade, but more significantly, a way of establishing relations with nonhuman others. Without identity-forming relations with bison and other animals, notions of Blackfoot kinship were cut adrift. Furthermore, with the eventual establishment of reservation geographies, and allotment and enrollment procedures in the United States and Canada, western genealogical understandings of kinship strained natural alliances as a politically expedient form of collective Blackfoot identity. This move to a genealogical model also cemented an abstract dissociation of Blackfoot people from Blackfoot land. And it presented, as it still does, what Tim Ingold identifies as a “stark choice” of the colonial-genealogical paradigm: “Either we grant indigenous peoples their historicity, in which case their existence is disconnected from the land, or we allow that their lives are embedded in the land, in which case their historicity is collapsed into an imaginary

⁷³ Betty Bastien, *Blackfoot Ways of Knowing: The Worldview of the Siksikaitisitapi* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2004), 27.

point of origin... Land and history, in short, figure as mutually exclusive alternatives.”⁷⁴

The dismantling of Blackfoot natural alliances in the 1870s, both culturally and materially, led to this “stark choice.” It rendered Blackfoot historicity in the form of a genealogical kinship that either dissociated Blackfoot people from their environment and removed them from the land, or else positioned them, as Tuhiwai Smith might put it: as savages, as timeless, un-evolved animals.

The dissociation of natural alliances also enabled the second challenge of Bastien’s colonialism, the institution of autonomous selves at the core of Blackfoot identity. As she postulates it, the Canadian government (along with the U.S. government) sought to accomplish this transformation through assimilation policies like boarding schools and rations systems (and, of course, allotment in the U.S. case) that worked to replace tribal obligations with a sense of capitalistic individualism. This replacement has, according to Bastien, “created unprecedented conditions of dependency... the Third World conditions in which many Aboriginal people find themselves in Canada.”⁷⁵

A crucial problem with this replacement, one that Bastien does not bother to address, is that autonomous selfhood was, if not already impossible under systems of modern capitalism, certainly less possible for the Blackfoot as a result of the colonial status in which the Canadian and U.S. states maintained them.

Moreover, autonomy itself became a marker of human-animal difference under modern capitalism. One of the most interesting of these is Timothy Mitchell’s

⁷⁴ Tim Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment: Essays in Livelihood, Dwelling, and Skill* (London: Routledge, 2000), 139.

⁷⁵ Bastien, 27.

conclusion that “human agency, like capital, is a technical body, is something made.”

In his study of British colonialism in Egypt, Mitchell finds that denying historical agency to nonhumans played an essential role in capitalism’s ideological justification:

Overlooking the mixed way things happen, indeed producing the effect of neatly separate realms of reason and the real world, ideas and their objects, the human and the nonhuman, was how power was coming to work in Egypt, and in the twentieth century in general.⁷⁶

As in Bastien’s formulation, Mitchell locates dissociation at the core of colonial power, but also at the center of its unraveling. In Egypt, the focus of Mitchell’s study, associations between humans and nonhumans, relationships imperfectly understood and controlled by the colonial state, led to periodic crises, famines, and malarial epidemics. Attending to this often unacknowledged milieu of socio-ecological catastrophe requires us to think outside the discrete category of human selfhood and agency, beyond the autonomous selfhood imposed, according to Bastien, by colonization.

Bastien is right that colonialism was an attempt to uproot natural alliances, but it was also an attempt to naturalize new circulations of energy and value, both in cultural discourses, and across the material landscape.

With the Whoop-up country’s bison herds left slaughtered and skinned on the plains, wolves proliferated. Their abundance laid the foundation for “wolfing,” a method of poisoning wolves by baiting carcasses with strychnine. After spreading these baits over a wide swath of prairie, wolfers rode out to collect their kill every few days, sometimes returning with dozens of dead wolves. Once back at their base, usually a crude shack on a river bottom built to accommodate two to four men, the wolfers

⁷⁶ Timothy Mitchell, *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 53, 52.

performed the gory labor of gutting and skinning. Compared with the small whiskey traders, wolfers could earn surprisingly good money for their efforts after selling the pelts downriver in Fort Benton, although major risks also accompanied their endeavor. As in the robe trade, however, the main profitability of wolf pelts rested in their freight and distribution within an international market system, and T.C. Power and I.G. Baker were the primary beneficiaries. Unlike the whiskey enterprise, though, the profound devastation wrought by wolfers did not lead to a local spirit of mutualism between these bands of white men and the Blackfoot. On the contrary, reciprocal bouts of violence erupted between these two factions, greatly complicating local politics and bringing the whiskey trade to an abrupt end.

In 1870, approximately 22,500 wolves and 450,000 bison thrived in the Whoop-up country.⁷⁷ However, the immense bison slaughter provided an unprecedented food source for wolves. With access to good nutrition, female wolves can breed a year earlier and mother twice as many pups.⁷⁸ Wolves' remarkable numbers and their adaptability impressed human observers throughout the 1870s. Learning to follow the sound of gunfire, wolves surrounded hunters and waited for their opportunity to

⁷⁷ Because of a complicated population dynamics and poor historical sources, estimating these populations is difficult. In his study of the entire North American plains, Isenberg estimates that 1.5 million wolves attended approximately 30 million bison during the early-nineteenth century peak bison population. See Isenberg, *Destruction of the Bison*, 27. In 1887, William Hornaday estimated that the 1870 bison population north of the Platte River ranged around 1.5 million animals. See William Hornaday, *The Extermination of the America Bison, with a sketch of its discovery and life history* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1887), 504. Given this figure and the proportions stated by Isenberg, the number of plains wolves north of the Platte in 1870 might have been something like 75,000. Working backwards from Overholser's record of robe shipments from 1870 to 1882, and Flores's conservative estimate of a three percent net annual bison increase on the Southern plains, an 1870 bison population figure for the Whoop-up country comes in just shy of a reasonable 450,000. See Flores, "Bison Ecology and Bison Diplomacy," 74 and Overholser, *Fort Benton*, 31-32. Applying Isenberg's bison/wolf ratio, I develop a baseline 1870 figure for wolves in the Whoop-up country at 22,500.

⁷⁸ Hank Fischer, *Wolf Wars: The Remarkable Inside Story of the Reintroduction of Wolves to Yellowstone* (Helena: Falcon, 2005), 14.

scavenge fresh meat. In the late 1870s, Dan McGowan reported that he had “never seen gray wolves so numerous as now. When we are skinning and cutting up the buffalo they form a circle around us and wait impatiently. As we move away,” he continued, “they rush in to fight over the offal. Many wild fights are witnessed but ammunition is scarce and we refrain from shooting.”⁷⁹ Under these circumstances, wolves became easy prey for trappers.

Not only did the slaughter of bison increase wolf reproduction rates, but through their annual kills, wolfers also reduced any overpopulation pressures that might otherwise face huge wolf populations. Recent studies throughout Canada and the United States have concluded that wolf reproduction rates reach easily into the range of 200 to 400 percent following extensive population die-offs, and that wolf populations can sustain annual human-caused mortality rates anywhere from thirty-five to around seventy-four percent.⁸⁰ Thus, the combined ecological effects of increased bison mortality *and* wolf mortality surged wolf populations to incredible levels. Even if wolfers managed to completely wipe out a local range of wolves, in-migration and increased reproductive rates would quickly reestablish the population. Estimating from T.C. Power & Co. shipping files, between 1871 and 1875 wolfers killed around 34,000 wolves in the Whoop-up country.⁸¹ This level of mortality would have been easily sustained by wolf populations, but also probably high enough to stimulate increased

⁷⁹ Dan McGowan, *Animals of the Canadian Rockies* (Dodd, Mead & Co., 1936), 28. Cited in Stanley Young, *The Wolves of North America* (New York: Dover Publications, 1944), 116.

⁸⁰ Todd K. Fuller, L. David Mech, and Jean Fitts Cochrane, “Wolf Population Dynamics,” in *Wolves: Behavior, Ecology and Conservation* eds. L. David Mech and Luigi Boitani (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 182-185.

⁸¹ Bills of Lading for Steamers, 1869-1876, *T.C. Power & Co. Papers*, Box 289, MHS.

reproduction. Wolfing, then, did not serve to control predator populations, but instead increased wolf numbers.

Stereotyped as dumb and uneducated by historians, and generally reviled as poor and uneducated men by the northern plains' merchants and ranchers, a surprising number of Montana's early bourgeoisie actually got started by killing wolves as recent immigrants. Wolfers could, and often did make modest sums of money that they could later parlay into other enterprises. In 1867, Charlie Rowe reported that some friends who wolfed near the Milk River "got hides worth \$2,000 or \$3,000 in few months and did not work hard or steady."⁸² Oscar Brackett's telling reminiscence depicts the transitory and offhand flavor of wolfing. "I got tired of Cutting Wood," he complained,

So I and Archey McMurdy [and] Bill Hook took our Poneys, packed them with supplies & started up Sunday Crick. We was going to make our fortune poisoning Wolves... We did not get many Wolves about a hundred big ones. The two Johnson & one Jackson with two others got fifteen hundred Wolves that winter, they took big Circles and put out lots of poison, Wolves at that time went in big Bands & followed the Buffaloo up. It was common thing to poison 40 or 50 at one bate. We got 34 All at one time... I stade at the Cabbain until the river broke up. McMurday & Hook went up the River have never seen them since.⁸³

If the other wolfing party came away with 1,500 pelts, they could probably sell their winter's labor for at least 3,000 dollars, or 600 dollars per person. As for Brackett, he probably made less than seventy dollars that winter. In comparison, George Clendinnen paid Peter Koch seventy-five dollars a month to take charge of his trading post on the fork of the Missouri and the Musselshell Rivers in 1869. By contrast, most wolfers achieved mixed financial results. Koch wrote his uncle explaining that in winter, Musselshell was the "dullest of dull places, where nothing at all is going on.

⁸² Summary of Charles Rowe Stories, "Wolves," *Overholser Vertical File*, MAM.

⁸³ *Oscar H. Brackett Reminiscence*, pages 0B4-0B5, MHS.

Everybody has gone out wolfing.” He also observed that “there are very few men here that save anything. All the summer they do little or nothing besides drinking whiskey and gambling and when winter comes, they are generally in debt so deeply for whiskey and provisions, that it takes half the winter to get clear of that.”⁸⁴

In addition to whiskey, wolfers consumed strychnine in great quantities, sprinkling its deadly granules on their bait’s tongue, sliced-apart rump, and spilled entrails. This chemical, isolated and concentrated into a mass-produced, granular form, wreaked absolute death on the plains and laid waste to life in such a manner that outraged the Blackfoot. It was not simply the wanton destruction of wolves that enraged the Blackfoot, but rather the wider swath of death and destruction that wolf baits spread across their hunting ground. Strychnine-laced baits killed wolves, but also immense numbers of other plains scavengers, including coyotes, foxes, birds and domesticated dogs. The death of countless dogs particularly irritated the Blackfoot. Furthermore, the spastic, toxic vomit these poor creatures heaped upon the earth during their final moments poisoned grass and killed horses and bison.⁸⁵

The hostility that developed between wolfers and Blackfoot led to increasingly brutal reprisals. Blackfoot routinely attacked and killed small groups of wolfers, who trespassed on their hunting ground. Occasionally, wolfers took the upper hand in these engagements, but more often the Blackfoot outnumbered and, armed with the latest repeating rifles, usually outgunned the wolfers. In 1872, Thomas Hardwick, a former Confederate soldier and prolific murderer in the Whoop-up country, led a group of 16 wolfers near the Sweetgrass Hills. When approached by a band of peaceful

⁸⁴ Peter Koch in “Letters from the Musselshell,” ed. Cone, 322, 327, 316.

⁸⁵ Flores, “Bison Ecology and Bison Diplomacy,” 78.

Assiniboine, Hardwick and his followers suddenly opened fire, killing four of them.

The next spring, while bringing pelts to Fort Benton, a Blackfoot raiding party surprised Hardwick's group and stole their horses. Chasing the thieves around the plains with no success, Hardwick's frustrated group attacked Assiniboines again, this time surprising a band camped outside a whiskey trading post in the Cypress Hills run by a well-know trader Abel Farwell. Farwell and his Crow wife tried to prevent the slaughter, but barely escaped murder themselves. The wolfers killed over 30 people and demolished the camp.

Animosity also flared between the wolfers and the whiskey traders, the source of the Blackfoot's powerful weaponry. Prior to the Cypress Hills massacre, a wolver named John Evans put together a band of wolfers to deliver an ultimatum to John Healy at Fort Whoop-up, demanding that he stop trading guns and ammunition to the Blackfoot. Healy discovered the scheme in advance and greeted Evans' arrival with a loaded cannon.⁸⁶

Conclusion:

If nobody got drunk, the East Coast would be awful crowded by this time.
-Charles M. Russell⁸⁷

Across the border from Alberta, "Russell Country" sprawls over twenty million acres of Montana grasslands, about seventeen million of which the Blackfeet sold to the United States in 1887. This massive land cession never did absorb its fair share of east-coast émigrés; although it is over three times larger than New Jersey, eight-and-a-half

⁸⁶ Sharp, *Whoop-up Country*, 52.

⁸⁷ Charles M. Russell, "Whiskey," in *Montana Margins: A State Anthology*, ed. Joseph Kinsey Howard (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1946), 378-381; 380.

million fewer people live there. But Charlie Russell's dissolute theory of westward migration still explains a lot about the historiography of this landscape that bears his name. Its dispossession has long been linked with the whiskey trade, a trans-border commerce that transformed the Blackfoot into "ragged mendicants," as one esteemed historian has described it.⁸⁸ For many, it seems that the Blackfoot would not have been confined and impoverished were it not for the pernicious influence of firewater. Although alcohol has been controversial in many other encounters between white and native people, the exotic toxin seems to have soaked Blackfoot society more deeply, drenching it with a scale of death and destitution almost on par with epidemic diseases like smallpox. Between 1870 and 1875, hundreds, perhaps even thousands of Blackfoot died through their contacts with whiskey, as Hugh Dempsey, Margaret Kennedy, Paul Sharp, and other historians have emphasized.⁸⁹ Maybe if nobody got drunk, the east coast *would* be more crowded; or at least the conquest of Blackfoot lands might have stalled out farther east.

Although whiskey has played a vital role in many histories told about the Montana-Alberta borderlands, wolves instead appear as window dressing. They are common as metaphors and images of the western landscape's predacious environs, but less often considered as historical subjects of analysis in their own right. Take, for example, "Wolves at the Wagon-Train," a line-drawing sketched by Russell in the early 1900s, and published as the frontispiece of historian Paul Sharp's 1955 classic, *Whoop-*

⁸⁸ See Dempsey, *Firewater*.

⁸⁹ See Dempsey, *Firewater*; Sharp, *Whoop-up Country*; and Kennedy, *The Whiskey Trade of the Northwestern Plains*.

up Country (See Illustration 1).⁹⁰ It is unclear why the train is circled, or what its wagons carry; maybe whiskey traders, maybe wolfers, maybe something more benign? Three wolves observe the vague scene from a distance, their tails somewhat agitated. If they are the harbingers of destruction, over whose flesh are they salivating? Who is the predator and who is the prey?

The history of the Montana-Alberta borderlands is largely a history of trying to work out this difference. In identifying predators, the colonial state disavowed its own predatory intentions, and historians of the Montana-Alberta borderlands have mostly followed this model. This chapter has argued that it is not so much that historians have actually thought of whiskey as possessing powers of historical agency, but that this conception has developed within the broader historiography's tendency to disavow the predacious past of Anglo-American conquest. Likewise, this chapter explores that the centrality of predation to framing this history has elided a much more complicated history of the categories of predator and prey. For instance, wolves were much more than simply predators—as fur-bearers, they were not only obstacles to the production of beef, but also themselves a means of production. Chapter Two, a history of wolf bounty hunting, will develop this point more fully.

⁹⁰ In Sharp, *Whoop-up Country*.



Illustration 1: "Wolves at the Wagon-Train," Charles M. Russell

Chapter 2:

Beasts of Bounty

During the forty-year rise and fall of the northwestern plains' open-range stock industry, "wolfing" was big business on the Montana-Alberta range. By the 1870s, this regional term came to designate the human labors of trapping, poisoning, or otherwise killing wolves throughout what is now northern Montana and southern Alberta. Originally hunted for their furs, which trimmed fashionable Victorian jackets, wolves later became bountied animals for their depredations on Montanan, Albertan, and Blackfoot cattle herds. Government agencies, agricultural associations, and large stock growers offered between two and a hundred dollars a piece for wolves' so-called "scalps," incentives that led to the deaths of hundreds of thousand of the animals in Montana and Alberta alone, from the 1880s to the 1920s. This labor of extermination fell mostly to the poor, the unemployed, or the colonized. Animalized themselves as predators, wolfers stalked and killed wolves to re-engineer the range for the needs of colonialists and capitalists, labor that further pushed wolfers toward the margins of colonial society.

This chapter traces the transformation of wolfing during this period, roughly 1880 to 1920, from its origins in the late industrial fur trade to its professionalization and marginalization under the yoke of the livestock industry and the bounty system. Unlike other histories of wolf eradication, I do not suggest that wolfing was the straightforward result of Anglo-American prejudice against the animals from time immemorial, nor that wolves and stock-raisers faced an inevitable conflict that justified, and continues to justify, the removal of one or the other. Instead, I argue that the

practices and consequences of wolfing in the Montana-Alberta borderlands unfolded within a specific colonial project of consolidating Anglo-American claims to the land on the basis of designating differences between productive and predatory forms of labor. The image of the open-range Anglo-American cattleman epitomized the first form; taming the northwestern plains, producing and reproducing value through the protective husbanding of domestic stock, mostly beef cattle. Of course, this image was an illusion. Until the widespread adoption of sustainable mixed-farming and winter haying in the early-twentieth century, the range cattle business on the northwestern plains destroyed more fortunes than it created. But the illusion stuck, and by the 1890s, the range cowboy had become synonymous with production on the plains, a development that relied on the co-creation of predators.

Wolves and wolfers—along with Blackfoot, Basques, and others that I discuss further in subsequent chapters—embodied this predatory figuration. According to colonial representations and material experiences of labor and value, these alleged predators skulked along the range's wild frontiers, seizing sustenance from the borderland's legitimate producers and improvers. Wolves proved particularly troublesome, because as nonhumans, they were not so easily subjected to domination through colonization's political economies of race and class. Their otherness exceeded the settler states' colonial equipage. Although the colonial elite could mandate wolves' extermination, they could never effectively chasten wolves into the service of capital accumulation. Moreover, profiting from killing wolves under the bounty laws required a disavowal of conventional production. In contrast to the protective, productive labors of ranching as figured by colonial authorities, wolfing involved instead a metamorphic

“becoming-wolf,” an overt participation in a predatory economy of stalking and killing, an occupation increasingly left to those on the colonial margins.

In this sense, the practice of wolfing was about more than simply eradicating predators from the landscape; it was also a means of representing labor and value as processes of *production* rather than *predation*. With this distinction, productive labor represented forms of generative violence deemed legitimate by colonial authorities, activities like the transformation of cattle into beef, while other efforts that created value through destruction, like the labors of wolves or horse thieves, represented predatory non-labors condemned by a powerful trio of cattlemen, industrialists, and the colonial state. In other words, essentialist notions of labor as an input to production developed alongside a disavowal of predation as a form of labor—a means to purge exploitation out from the mantle of production. In the Montana-Alberta borderlands, this occurred historically in the context of the late-colonial livestock boom, a period when enterprising cattlemen sought to displace the predacious ambivalence of their own productive behaviors in order to legitimate their claims to the Whoop-up country’s valuable landscapes. Colonizers justified their seizure and exploitation of life, land, and labor on the basis of their representations of predation and production. By distinguishing the lines that separated production from predation, the practices and consequences of wolfing supported and subverted both of those categories.

This chapter investigates this history through an analysis of the human-animal relations of wolfing as they developed in the borderlands. It is organized into two main sections: a discussion of the gradual “animalization” and social marginalization of wolfers as they increased their mimetic engagement with predators, and a comparative

analysis of the institutionalization of bounty systems in Montana and Alberta.

Together, these discussions reveal not just a labor history of wolfing, but also the history of labor as a concept in the borderlands—how it emerged from relations between humans, animals, and colonial authorities in their various attempts to capture and represent value on the northwestern plains.

In the borderlands, the idea of labor in its modern sense developed from colonial attempts to dissociate predation from production, and to rearrange, both materially and ideologically, sources of value to spring forth from the human rather than the nonhuman realm. Although this history of labor as a category transcends the history of wolfing in the borderlands, wolfing provides a useful, and perhaps necessary, starting point. The establishment of production and predation as antagonistic expressions of value was not a simple process orchestrated cleanly by the cattle industry and colonial statecraft, rather, it was worked out in the daily interactions between animals and humans, especially encounters between wolves and wolfers, cattle and cattlemen. These interactions muddied the borders between human and animal, but this was a process that served not to level perceptions of difference between the two, but instead to amplify them at finer gradients. Encountering their stock animals as persons, for instance, cattlemen—even large industrial growers—held physical and emotional bonds with the animals that transgressed normative understandings of high-modernist selfhood. Even more revealing were cattlemen and wolfers' personal interactions with wolves, beasts of bounty in multiple senses, animals that were both obstacles and means to realizing value. Stock-raisers loathed them as vicious, anthropomorphic murderers, while many wolfers recognized wolves as old friends, especially in the case of wolfers who raised

wolf pups in captivity. These everyday intimacies constituted an animated world where the lines between human and nonhuman fluctuated, but still retained their potency. In their attempts to solidify the modern category of the human self as a white, productive individual, stock-growers and the capitalist state sought to redefine predation as animalistic. Caught within cultural anxieties over production and predation, humanity and animality, wolfers drifted toward the margins of colonial society throughout the conquest of the Montana-Alberta borderlands, their status as producers growing suspect within the context of their mimetic relations with wolves.

Cultural distinctions between predation and production arose from the human-animal interactions of wolves, wolfers, cattle, and cattlemen, and this distinction deeply structured the colonial borderlands' social and environmental patterns of exploitation. By the 1920s, colonial authorities in Montana had articulated and institutionalized procedures for identifying and destroying predators—those humans and animals whose labors did not conform to the colonial economy's preferred representations of value. In Alberta, the institutionalization of a predator-producer binary was more ambiguous. This chapter grounds the development of these bounty systems in the environmental, cultural, and labor histories of wolfing, while the next two chapters explore wolf-human interaction and the predator-producer binary's historical effects first in relation to (anti-)colonial politics of Blackfoot sovereignty, and second in the emerging twentieth-century science of wildlife conservation.

Living Like a Wolfer

Wolfers' interactions with wolves were intimate and mimetic. Killing wolves required a "becoming wolf," but it also required the maintenance of human identity, a social problem that wolfers struggled to resolve from the 1860s through the early 1920s. The technologies of wolf bounties were more complicated than steel traps, strychnine, and .30-30s; they included new modes of encounter, communication, and interpretation with wolves and other nonhuman beings. Like so many other physical metabolisms in the borderlands, the wolfer's trade blurred production and predation. Predator eradication was less a function of a "war on wolves" as much as a broader set of political, cultural, and ecological interdependencies, all relied upon by colonial authorities who sought to transform the borderlands, physically and culturally, into a site for modern capitalist production.

In the late 1860s, wolfers earned their derogatory nickname for the seemingly unsavory and predacious manners in which they lived and worked. These notions even extended to allegations that uncouth wolfers "fried their batter cakes in wolf fat."⁹¹ Reviled, generally, as poor and uneducated by the northern plains' merchants and ranchers, a surprising number of Montana and Alberta's early bourgeoisie actually got their start killing wolves as recent immigrants. Peter Koch, for example, founder of Montana State University, and one of Montana's leading Gilded Age aristocrats, wolfed for several years along the Musselshell River before moving southwest to the Gallatin Valley. Koch described his own life as a wolfer with the provocative statement: "A

⁹¹ An homage to Feuerbach's transformative materialism—"you are what you eat." R.C. Henry, "Gray Wolves and Buffaloes," *True West*, (April 1972): 53-55; 54.

man has to live pretty much like a wolf, if he's in the business."⁹² This meant living like a predator, living off a violent form of production at odds with colonial society's preferred self-conceptions and representations of value.

While Koch managed to transcend his humble beginnings and establish himself as an explorer, farmer, and banker, most other wolfers, especially those who wolfed after the mid-1870s, had fewer opportunities. In the 1870s, many people from diverse backgrounds did wolfing work. By the 1880s and 1890s, its field of practitioners narrowed to the poor and mostly unpropertied. By the early 1900s, some bounty payments in Alberta were made only to Indians, and after another decade the work became federalized. Over time, wolfers drifted toward the margins of colonial society. These moves hinged on specific understandings of value and its origins, first on a trajectory of redefining labor as a solely human activity, and then on restricting the meaning of legitimate human labor to productive (and protective), rather than predatory forms of value creation. In the process, cattlemen elided their own predatory actions as well as the productive actions of animals, wolfers, and others deemed "animal-like." Cattlemen animalized predators and humanized producers through their attempts to determine the form and practice of productive labor. The mimetic ability to "live like a wolf" was crucial to effectively killing wolves, but it was also a major obstacle to wolfers' legitimization of their labors, and even their claims to a full human identity under the colonial borderland's predator-prey hierarchies of race, class, and species. This first section of Chapter 2 demonstrates how wolfers' indeterminate status as humans originated in their material and cultural relationships with wolves.

⁹² Peter Koch to his uncle, January 21, 1870 in "Letters from the Musselshell, 1869-1870," ed. Carl B. Cone, *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 37, no. 4 (1946): 313-337; 322.

In the 1860s and 1870s, when wolfers killed wolves for pelts rather than bounties, wolfing could hardly be described as either “hunting” or “trapping.” The practice involved shooting a large animal, like a bison, elk, or later on an old beef bull, that wolfers poisoned with strychnine. According to Henry Riviere, each bait required about four ounces of the poison. After procuring a bait animal, wolfers rolled it onto its back and disemboweled it, slicing open the belly in a wide oval. With the organs and digestive tract removed, wolfers dumped strychnine granules into the bait animal’s body cavity, called the “tub,” where they slathered the poison with the animal’s blood and chunks of its heart, liver and other tissues. Then they scattered the blood and toxic morsels all around the body, killed another bait animal and repeated the process. After the spreading several of these baits over a wide swath of prairie, wolfers rode out to collect their kill every few days, sometimes returning with dozens of dead wolves. In the process of this poisoning, wolfers also killed hundreds of other plains scavengers—coyotes, fox, magpies, cats and dogs—in what has to be one of the most odious and destructive methods of “production” ever unleashed on the northern plains.⁹³

Wolfers who baited and poisoned wolves held different relations with wolves than those who wolfed later and used different techniques. Unlike other methods of capturing wolves indirectly, like trapping them with leg-hold traps, baiting did not often require a great deal of care and attention to covering up one’s human trace. When Koch maintained that these strychnine wolfers “lived like wolves,” he meant so in a metaphorical sense more than a metamorphical sense that developed increasingly from the 1890s onward, as wolfers began to perfect new tactics of stalking and denning

⁹³ H.A. Riviere, “65 Years Wolver, 1884-1956,” *Canadian Cattlemen Unpublished Manuscripts*, Stockmen’s Memorial Foundation, Cochrane, Alberta (SMF), 4.

wolves. The actions of baiting and poisoning were undoubtedly dirty and dangerous, they also required a steady stomach and, likely, a general disdain for living creatures, and these were all characteristics that immigrants like Koch would have associated with wolves.

The expansion of the beef industry onto the northern plains precipitated this major transformation. In 1883, the Montana Territorial Legislature passed a bounty law on wolves and coyotes at the behest of the Montana Stock Growers' Association that dramatically altered the scale and the practices of wolf killing. These laws lasted until the 1920s, when the U.S. Bureau of Biological Survey began federalizing the labors of predator eradication. Meanwhile a host of other agencies and associations paid wolfers to kill wolves on public and private lands throughout Montana and Alberta. In Canada, neither the Northwest Territories nor Alberta ever had a long-lasting provincial bounty bill in effect, however, the Western Stock Growers' Association, as well as dozens of large crown land-leasing cattle outfits established their own bounty systems during the 1880s, many of which continued well into the 1960s. The last bounty bills in Montana were ended in 1962.⁹⁴

Amidst this long history of attempts to eradicate wolves from the Montana-Alberta range, predators, both human and non-human, became animalized. What came to essentialize the category of the human in the borderlands was productive labor, a mode of production framed in relation to capitalized stock-growing, and framed in distinction to the predatory non-labors of wolves, wolfers, and others who skulked on the margins of colonial society.

⁹⁴ J. Mitchell and K. Greer, "Predators," in Thomas Mussehl and F.W. Howell, *Game Management in Montana* (Helena: Montana Fish and Game Department, 1971), 207-214.

During the bounty period, new wolfing practices emerged that helped legitimate this cultural transformation. Whereas before, wolfing had been a seasonal engagement, a temporary occupation for the upwardly-mobile, by the mid 1880s, this labor of extermination fell mostly to the poor, the unemployed, or the colonized. Animalized themselves as predators, wolfers stalked and killed wolves to re-engineer the range for the needs of cattlemen, a re-engineering that only further pushed wolfers toward the margins of colonial society.

At an 1888 meeting of the Montana Stock Growers' Association (MSGA), Power reported that wolves killed about one-third of his calves each spring.⁹⁵ Clearly, his brisk two-decade long business in wolf pelts, in which his firm alone shipped between ten- and fifteen-thousand pelts per year, had done little to control wolves and their numbers, who transitioned from eating skinned bison to livestock, an abundant source of predator-naïve food. Although wolf depredations were certainly exaggerated out of political necessity, as Edward Curnow has argued, in the 1880s wolves certainly killed cattle in large enough numbers to be an economic and emotional concern for inexperienced cattlemen casting thousands of cattle out toward premature death at the eager fangs of lupine predators.⁹⁶

Power, along with Pierre Wibaux and other MSGA members, continued to advocate for the use of poisons, even proposing that, in the absence of any more suitable game animals to use for bait, cowhands on spring and fall roundups be required to kill "all old bulls and worthless ponies... for the purpose of poisoning wolves and

⁹⁵Montana Stock Growers' Association Executive Committee Meeting, April 17, 1888, Miles City, Montana, *Minutes of the Montana Stock Growers' Association*, MC 45, vol. 8, 178, MHS.

⁹⁶Edward M. Curnow, "The History of the Eradication of the Wolf in Montana," M.A. Thesis, Missoula, University of Montana, 1969, 88.

coyotes.”⁹⁷ But by the 1880s, poisoning was not as predictably efficient. This was likely a problem of predator-naïveté. One Canadian wolfer, George Nelson, explained that “when the slaughter of livestock by wolves is at its peak, it is difficult to trap one of the marauders. They have plenty of fresh meat; they needn’t prowl around old carcasses for their meals. Leave that to the coyotes!”⁹⁸ By the early 1880s, with the near-annihilation of bison and the importation of hundreds of thousands of cattle, the borderland’s predator-prey ecology had transformed so drastically that stockmen needed to develop new wolfing techniques.

Seeking to establish themselves as producers rather than predators, cattlemen generally sought to avoid visceral acts of killing. Wolfing was also a time-consuming activity, and for cattlemen, one better suited as an incidental project when riding on the range rather than a full-time occupation. Trapping and denning—without carbon monoxide—also required considerable time, along with skills and experience not easily mastered by amateurs. According to H.G. Pallister’s history of the Alberta cattle industry, “ranchers had to take where the wolfers left off,”⁹⁹ but many ranchers themselves did not wolf, or at least did not do the dirty work of digging out dens or setting traps, preferring to simply shoot, and mostly miss, long-range targets of opportunity.

On this score, shooting wolves was generally ineffective. Learning to stay out of rifle range, wolves frustrated many ranchers by lurking hundred of yards away. One Montana cowboy, T.B. Long, recalled that “it was very seldom that any of these wily

⁹⁷ Montana Stock Growers’ Association Meeting, April 18, 1888, Miles City, Montana, *Minutes*, MC 45, 187, MHS.

⁹⁸ George Nelson, “Trapping Wolves,” *Canadian Cattlemen*, (June 1944), 26.

⁹⁹ H.G. Pallister, “Smoke from the Branding Fire,” *Alberta Beef*, August 1997: 40-43; 40.

killers were shot with a rifle... They are just too smart to let one get close enough for a good shot. I have shot at a number of them, but I don't think I ever hit one.”¹⁰⁰

Wolves' frequent nocturnal activity presented another challenge for would-be shooters. H.A. Riviere remembered a friend of his, Charley Vale, who ranched near the Porcupine Hill in southern Alberta, whose home ranch was often visited by wolves under cover of darkness. One night they chased his dogs into the house, who woke him up, and hustled him out of bed with a loaded weapon. “He had picked up his rifle,” according to Riviere, “and though he saw shadowy forms about the corrals, he also knew enough not to shoot at any unknown thing just because he thought it moved, so he just fired a few shots in the air and went back to bed.”¹⁰¹ Gerald Hughes, who grew up in the Judith Basin, recollected a similar experience to an interviewer who asked about Snowdrift, the infamous white wolf who killed dozens of cattle throughout the Upper Missouri Valley, and was one of the last wolves to be bountied in the state of Montana. Figuring out Snowdrift's general night-time pattern, Hughes' father set up a blind on top of a hay rack near his herd: “Along midnight came the old white wolf,” Hughes recalled, “Pa fired off several shots in the dark, but he couldn't see very good, so he didn't get him—just scared him good. But the bastard never come back.”¹⁰² And even under the best circumstances when ranchers had a clean shot at a wolf, hitting one was never a sure thing. Running low along cover, wolves presented small, moving targets seldom closer than a hundred yards, which were almost impossible for average marksmen to consistently hit until the introduction of flatter-shooting cartridges such as

¹⁰⁰ Philip Long, *Seventy Years a Cowboy* (Billings: Cypress Books, 1976), 338.

¹⁰¹ Riviere, 9.

¹⁰² Gerald Hughes, in Sherm Ewing, *The Range*, 198.

the .270 during the 1920s. Instead, firing heavier calibers with less accurate trajectories, wolfers and cattlemen from the 1880s through the 1920s needed considerable practice to hit wolves and coyotes from long distances.

More effective wolfing innovations were developed by an emerging class of full-time professionals. Stricken by a lack of suitable bait animals following the near-annihilation of native ruminants, wolfers largely abandoned strychnine poisoning, which had served them well prior to the 1880s. In its place, wolfers began a combination of trapping, shooting, and denning wolves, all of which was time-consuming, sometimes frustrating work. Ewen Cameron, an early rancher, writer, and the husband of the prominent photographer Evelyn Cameron, described one wolver, “named Maurice Barret, who follows on horseback any fresh-found wolf-track in the snow, never hesitating to camp on the trail at dark should no ranch house be available. The hunted animal, unable to baffle or shake off so relentless a pursuer, at last seeks the asylum of despair in a badland cave, whence it is relentlessly smoked out and shot.”¹⁰³ According to Cameron, Barret was much like a wolf himself, a characteristic increasingly associated with wolfers toward the end of the nineteenth century. For the bulk of stock-raisers, tenacity and adaptability, along with bloodthirstiness, represented the mimetic requirements of wolfers to their quarry.

Of all the tactics wolfers developed in the 1880s, denning was usually the most effective. Conducted during the spring, wolfers located dens by following mother wolves gathering food for their pups. Tracking them back to their dens, wolfers had to seal the exits closed with dirt, and then kill the den’s occupants. Wolfers could

¹⁰³ Ewen Cameron, “Wolves in Montana,” *Evelyn Cameron and Ewen Cameron Papers*, MC 226, Box 6, Folder 15, 1-2, MHS.

accomplish this a number of ways, depending on whether any grown wolves were present. If an angry mother wolf lie cornered in the den, then wolfers would take the time to dig out the den until they had a clear shot with a firearm. Otherwise, wolfers could often just crawl into the den and pull the pups out one-by-one. In the mountains, dens were difficult to locate, but out on the plains, wolves seem to have located their dens mostly in large cut banks along rivers and streams. In these circumstances, denning was an extremely effective method of locally-eradicating wolves, although it rarely accounted for adult wolves, and it was also likely that the breeding pair would birth a new litter, or that new wolves would take over the pair's former range. Despite this limitation, denning seems to have caught on at least by the late 1890s, when the State of Montana began paying separate bounties for wolf pups at a lower rate than adult wolves.¹⁰⁴

Besides just representing the wild and untamable, wolves provided frightening reminders of the ambiguity of human dominion over companion species relationships. Vivian Ellis, who grew up on ranches near both the Smith River in Montana and the Cypress Hills in Saskatchewan, recalled being scared of wolves as a youngster, even though she knew they rarely attacked people. "One night a wolf killed a colt," she remembered, "Dad had thought it would be safe enough that close to the house, but it wasn't. We heard the dogs barking and Dad got his gun and went out, but it was so black that night that you couldn't see anything, and all he could do was shoot into the air. No wonder I was so frightened."¹⁰⁵ Wolves prowled the fatal perimeters of

¹⁰⁴ State of Montana, Laws, Resolutions and Memorials, 6th Regular Session, 1899, Substitute for House Bill No. 33.

¹⁰⁵ Sherm Ewing, Interview with Vivian Ellis, 1988. SMF, 3.

domestic spaces, not only killing cattle, but also shattering colonists' illusions of mastery over their animal property.

This cultural activity was part of a wider attempt to dissociate the everyday violence of stock-growing from its more protective, productive labors. John Coleman is right to point out that "in the course of becoming the most dominant predator on the continent, Euro-Americans often conceived of themselves as prey."¹⁰⁶ Throughout their colonial endeavors on the northern plains, American and Canadian settlers were quick to develop a defensive outlook, to view themselves as the ones under the siege of predatory violence, rather than the ones perpetrating it. Custer's Last Stand is an good example of this colonial inversion of violence, as Richard Slotkin and other scholars have so thoroughly demonstrated.¹⁰⁷

But more significantly, the livestock industry picked up this ethos of defense and used it to transfer ideologies and discourses of labor, reproduction, race, gender, and animality. In accordance with a notion of just defense, and an understanding of the labor of livestock production as the labor of protection, a cult of masculinity developed in wolf-killing, but one limited to the destruction of wolves in so-called "self-defense." While wolfing for profit was predatory, animalistic, and ambiguously gendered, killing a wolf in the heat of defending one's animal property, or even one's self or human family, became an enigmatically masculine act.

Around 1900, for instance, a pack of wolves allegedly attacked George Lane, owner of the Bar U ranch south of Calgary. In a desperate fight, immortalized on

¹⁰⁶ Jon Coleman, *Vicious: Wolves and Men in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 10.

¹⁰⁷ Richard Slotkin, *The Fatal Environment: The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization, 1800-1890* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, [1998], Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, [1998]).

canvas by Charlie Russell, Lane slew the pack of wolves with six shots from his revolver. The tall tale, never entirely dispelled, grew into a foundational myth for the stock industry in southern Alberta. Depicted as a self-less hero, battling the predatory environment around him, the story, the painting, and now the sculpture, installed at the Bar U Ranch National Historic Site—and a matter of serious contemporary controversy between ranchers and animal rights activists in southern Alberta—all obscured the stock industry's predation on beef cattle by emphasizing instead its protection of livestock against other predators. Lane's encounter with the wolves was not merely the mimetic violence of two species of predator battling over prey, as Cameron interpreted the wolfer's hunt, but was instead an act of violence elevated, justified, and humanized in the name of self-defense. In this sense, it was the form of violent engagement, rather than its end result, that determined its value. This practice of engagement was a means to maintain the difference between predator and protector beyond the weak tools offered by metaphor and language, notions like predator and protector, that quickly broke apart in the context of defending livestock only to postpone their slaughter.

As the nineteenth-century merged into the twentieth, the form of labor rather than the function of labor came to dominate institutionalization of human-animal boundaries in the Montana-Alberta borderlands. Commenting on the influence of Darwinism, and the emerging acceptance of the materialist understanding of humans-as-animals in the early-twentieth century, Jackson Lears has argued that “the new version of the ascent of man required distinction from the beasts on cultural rather than spiritual grounds: release from bent-backed toil; deflection of the gaze upward, away

from the muck of biological existence.”¹⁰⁸ This was certainly the case with the stock industry’s attempts to dissociate itself with the mimetic violence of wolfing.

Distinguishing man from beast hinged on delineating predation from production; not just in physical terms, but also through various representations of being and creating.

The social stakes of “living like a wolf” increased dramatically from the 1880s through the 1920s. The necessities of colonial production required disenchanted human-animal interactions constituted by commodity relationships, but the effective cultivation of animal capital on the northwestern plains, in both lupine and bovine forms, still demanded the engagement of animals as persons. These contradictory modes of interaction threw a wrench in standard calculations of value. In the absence of unassailable visions of human-animal difference, the colonial state was forced to adjudicate these biopolitical categories through the bounty program, and its institutionalization of production and predation.

Institutionalizing the Bounty

Both north and south of the international boundary, bounties on “problem animals” like wolves, coyotes, mountain lions, lynx, bobcats, bears, squirrels, prairie dogs, and crows proliferated from the 1880s until the 1920s. But the burdens of these bounties fell hardest on wolves, the traditional arch-nemeses of Anglo-American cattlemen. By the mid-1920s, wolfers had effectively eradicated wolves south of the forty-ninth parallel, as well as most of southern Alberta. Bounties on wolves were often higher than on other animals, and often exceeded market prices for cattle and horses. In

¹⁰⁸ Jackson Lears, *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 172.

1916, Walter Huckvale, one-time president of Canada's Western Stock Growers' Association (WSGA), privately offered an astonishing \$100 bounty on wolves in southeastern Alberta. More reasonable WSGA members offered bounties in the neighborhood of \$30 to \$50.¹⁰⁹ The public bounties offered by state, provincial, and territorial authorities provided somewhat less incentive to kill wolves, but were still lucrative. Over a forty-year period, Montana's vaunted bounty system fluctuated between one and eight dollars per wolf, plenty to account for the deaths of 111,545 wolves and 886,367 coyotes by then end of 1927.¹¹⁰ Thanks to bounties like these, wolf-killing blossomed into its own industry, an adjunct but necessary component of livestock production in the borderlands.

The Montana Territorial Legislature passed its first wolf bounty law in 1883, offering one dollar for the full skin of each slain wolf presented to a county officer and vouched by two witnesses. Along with wolves, the bounty law provided fifty cents for coyotes, and condemned bears and mountain lions for eight dollars each.¹¹¹ Montana's bounty law would have a long career, despite suffering from fraud, inefficiency, and weak political backing. It was created during the so-called "cowboy legislature," alongside a slew of anti-rustling measures proposed during the 1883 session, and it arrived at the height of the cattlemen's power. Over the next forty years, their influence

¹⁰⁹ Western Stock Growers' Association Meeting, May 11th, 1916, Macleod, Alberta. *Western Stock Growers' Association Papers*, M2452, Box 1 Folder 2, 29, The Glenbow Library and Archives, Calgary, Alberta (GLA).

¹¹⁰ These figures come from tabulating thousands of bounty entries in the *Montana State Bounty Certificate Record*, RS 59, Vols. 16-42, Montana Historical Society, Helena, Montana (MHS). Special thanks to Rich Aarstad and Jeff Malcomson for hefting each sixty-pound volume in and out of the basement.

¹¹¹ Thirteenth Legislative Assembly, Montana Territory, *Laws, Resolutions, and Memorials of the Territory of Montana*, Sections 657-659, Article III, Chapter XXVI, Fifth Division (Helena: George Boos, 1883), 109-110.

faded as mining and industrial farming transformed the state's political landscape. Just a scant few years after its establishment, the law came under siege, and stock growers reluctantly added squirrels and prairie dogs to Montana's bounty law in order to appease farmers who grumbled over the bill's neglect to address crop-raiding animals. The bounty laws were expensive, and in 1887, after bleeding out two-thirds of its entire annual budget to encourage the slaughter of native fauna, the territorial legislature repealed the laws altogether. Not until two years after statehood, in 1891, did another workable bounty law emerge, but this state law lived well into the twentieth century.

North of the border, the Northwest Territories, in partnership with the Western Stock Growers' Association, established a wolf bounty law in 1897. This program was a political disaster, and after it ran out of funds in 1902, it was never revived by Alberta's provincial government. Even less politically-connected to Edmonton than Montana cattlemen were to Helena, southern Alberta's stockgrowers lobbied year-after-year for a new bounty law without success. Intent on developing most of Alberta's prairies and parklands into grain farms, the early provincial government found little political advantage in helping southern cattlemen with public money, particularly since so many stockmen ran herds on land leased from the crown, and held reputations as either British remittance men, or rogue cowboys and ex-whiskey traders from the states.¹¹²

But despite a lack of government assistance, Albertans, like Montanans, also killed their fair share of wolves under private bounty arrangements. Due to a paucity of records, coming up with exact numbers of wolves killed under these private

¹¹² *Western Stock Growers' Association Papers*, M2452, Box 1, Folder 3, GLA.

arrangements is impossible, but a variety of sources reveal an extensive system of labor created by public and private bounties. In short, in the Whoop-up country, wolfing like stock-raising, was an industry in its own right. Not only did wolfing have deep regional roots, but from the 1880s to the 1920s it also structured new forms of labor relations, triggered technological innovations, new financial markets, and redefined modern-colonial understandings of human and animal, predator and prey.

The transformation of wolf bounties in Montana from a desirable program for ranchers into an expected function of government worked out in more subtle ways as well. Even the seemingly simple task of defining what constituted a wolf became the necessary biopolitical role of the state. In 1893, two years after the State Legislature enacted its first bounty law, the Legislature revised its payments to award five dollars for an adult wolf, but only two dollars for a pup.¹¹³ Since nobody actually specified the difference between an adult and a pup, this ruling created a bureaucratic nightmare. Not until 1899 did the Legislature revise the law to state the difference in unequivocal terms: pups were pups only until November 1st; after that they counted as adults.¹¹⁴ But this was still problematic, since wolfers could simply den out pups and keep them alive until after November 1st to earn a one-hundred-fifty percent raise on their bounty claim. Finally, in 1913, the State Examiner stipulated a more sensible ruling, defining an adult wolf by standardized measurements of its length, height, ear, nose, and head sizes.¹¹⁵

¹¹³ Second Legislative Assembly, State of Montana, *Laws, Resolutions, and Memorials of the State of Montana* (Helena: Journal Publishing Co., 1893), 38-39.

¹¹⁴ Sixth Legislative Assembly, State of Montana, *Laws, Resolutions, and Memorials of the State of Montana* (Helena: Independent Publishing Co., 1899), 100-103.

¹¹⁵ "Length from point of nose to root of tail, four feet; length of tail one foot one inch; height of ear four inches; breadth of ear three inches; from point of nose to end of skull, eleven and one-half inches; from eye to point of nose, four inches," as stated in Hawkins to Rosebud County Sheriff, W.M. Moses, Sept. 13th, 1913. *Montana State Board of Examiners Records*, RS 196, Box 2, MHS.

The State of Montana also faced the necessity of developing a fraud-proof system of verifying that bountied animals had not already been bountied before. In 1909, the Bureau of Biological Survey circulated a pamphlet to state authorities advising them of the multitude of fraudulent possibilities for trafficking dead predators across state lines to receive multiple bounties. Written by the noted government wolf hunter Vernon Bailey, the circular argued that, “the common practice of paying bounty on scalps alone, or in some cases merely the ears, is dangerous as even an expert can not always positively identify such fragments.”¹¹⁶ Montana did not really have this problem, as its bounty laws required claimants to present the entire skin of the animal for inspection to a county inspector, who would punch the skin and return it to the claimant. But later in the 1910s, Montana revised its policy to require only the heads of wolves and coyotes for bounty certificates, which would remain in the possession of county authorities and be destroyed monthly.¹¹⁷

Montana’s bounty laws were also never very well funded, which led to unexpected and complicated problems. Government appropriations funded both the territorial bounty and the original state bounty, but in 1899 the Legislature established a special annual tax assessed on livestock in order to fund bounty claims. This tax was negligible, averaging around four mills per head, or four-tenths of one cent; a large stock-grower with 2,500 cattle would pay about ten dollars, only enough to fund the bounties on two wolves, but significantly cheaper than hiring a professional wolfer and paying them wages. This bounty fund provided an enormous subsidy to ranchers and

¹¹⁶ Vernon Bailey, “United States Department of Agriculture, Bureau of Biological Survey—Circular No. 69: Key to Animals on which Wolf and coyote Bounties are Often Paid,” (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1909).

¹¹⁷ Sixth Legislative Assembly, *Laws, Resolutions, and Memorials of the State of Montana*, 100-103.

wolfers. In 1899 alone, wolfers bountied 23,575 wolves, which would have required assessments on over thirty million head of cattle.¹¹⁸ The annual shortfall usually left the bounty fund around \$100,000 behind, which amounted to around a four-year delay for the payment of bounty claims. The State Treasurer's office only received the assessment money once a year, and did their best to apply it as far as possible.¹¹⁹

This budgetary shortfall was an obvious source of discontent for wolfers, who sent hundreds of letters to the Montana State Board of Examiners demanding payment. "I would like to call your attention to my Bounty Claim," wrote one claimant named Sam Davis, "Its about time I received it. It is over 4 years since I sent it to you!" In response to these queries, the Examiners' office tried to remain as good-humored as possible: "relative to your Bounty Claim, I beg to advise you that same will not be reached for payment for about one year yet. Am sorry that I cannot at this time aid you in the slaughter of more coyotes."¹²⁰ This five-year delay in payments provided a nice subsidy for the stock industry, which was not required to substantially increase its assessments in order to pay the bounty fund forward.

Instead, local banks and other speculators picked up the slack by cashing many wolfers' bounty certificates for varying cuts of the payments. Guaranteed by the State Treasury, these were safe debts to purchase, and it appears that no claims were left unpaid, despite the lengthy delays. But risk on the bounty certificates would have been determined by the unpredictable length of the repayment cycle, which was in turn

¹¹⁸ *Montana Bounty Certificate Record*, Vol. 23, 1899, MHS.

¹¹⁹ Hawkins to Harold M. Norris, Jan. 13, 1915, *Montana Board of Examiners Records*, RS 196, Box 2, MHS.

¹²⁰ Sam Davis to Hawkins, February 24, 1914, and Hawkins to Davis, February 26, 1914, *Montana Board of Examiners Records*, RS 196, Box 2, MHS.

driven by annual revenue from the livestock assessment, the number of predatory animals bountied, and the bounty rates on different predators, which tended to change every few years, and generally increased above the rate of inflation until the 1920s. From 1901 to 1914, for instance, the bounty rate on adult wolves rose three-fold, from five to fifteen dollars.¹²¹ During the same period, the livestock assessment remained comparatively steady, but the number of wolves bountied actually decreased by around two-thirds.¹²² All these considerations might have complicated bankers' fee calculations on the bounty claims. Then again, most wolfers needed their money sooner than the government could pay, and grudgingly paid any reasonable fee to the bankers in order to get their cash.

This transformation of wolves into money relied on a partnership of colonial government with private finance. Montana's bounty system presumably existed as a corollary to the livestock industry's reproduction of capital through animal bodies. Both killing wolves and providing incentives for others to kill wolves was, by the early-twentieth century, increasingly understood to be a service rendered by the government, at federal and state levels, for the benefit of Montana stock-growers who sought to monopolize their own productions and representations of animal capital—beef cattle consumed by the stockyards of Chicago and Kansas City; not cows and calves hamstrung and consumed by the northwestern plain's nonhuman predators. But the State of Montana could not assure and administer this result without also providing the basis for another economy of animal capital, the capture and slaughter of predatory

¹²¹ Seventh Legislative Assembly, State of Montana, *Laws, Resolutions, and Memorials of the State of Montana* (Helena: State Publishing Co., 1901), 129-130.

¹²² *Montana Bounty Certificate Record*, Vols. 25-39, MHS.

animals for bounty, greased and financed by the state's private banks. Wolfing developed into a profitable business; too profitable, in fact, to wholly serve the interests of stock-growers. For wolfers, along with bankers who served them, a permanent "war on wolves" was preferable to wolves' wholesale extermination.

Under these circumstances, "fraud" was fairly prevalent in Montana's bounty system. In many instances, fraud cases were a matter of contested definitions. There were always gray areas where wolfers, bankers, and others tried to squeeze extra booty from the wolf bounty. In 1918, for instance, a northern Montana merchant named T.J. Troy was trading for wolf and coyote pelts with the Cree and Blackfoot on the Rocky Boys' Reservation, and then submitting bounties on the furs. Of course, this was illegal; the law required all bounty claimants, along with a county bounty inspector and two witnesses, to certify that they had personally killed the animals. The Board of Examiners prosecuted Troy for fraud, but he got off the hook thanks to endorsements by his friends E.J. Broadwater and Walter Brown, both prominent stockmen from powerful families in Montana state politics. Broadwater and Brown wrote letters to the State Livestock Commissioner asking his support in Troy's case, arguing that Troy merely misunderstood the procedure for transferring bounty certificates, and that he really intended to submit the claims on behalf of his Indian clients. "I would appreciate it very much," wrote Brown, "if you would let Mr. Troy's claims go as he is doing good work in helping the Indians to catch those animals."¹²³ Fortunately for Troy, this turned out to be a suitable defense.

¹²³ See Broadwater to D.W. Raymond, Secretary of the Montana State Livestock Commission, July 1, 1918, and Walter Brown to Raymond, June 24, 1918, *Montana State Board of Examiners Records*, RS 196, Box 2.

The most common of these was to engage in a sort of “wolf ranching,” either raising pups in captivity until they were large enough to bounty as adults, or simply finding dens and annually killing only the pups, rather than the den’s pair of breeding adults. Ewen Cameron considered this strategy part of a wolfer’s illicit existence as predatory animals. Wolfers’ mimetic abilities extended dangerously to this “well known trick,” he explained, “of liberating she-wolves to multiply for the bounty.”¹²⁴ According to the *Helena Daily Herald*, even county commissioners got a piece of this action:

The late lamented Legislature passed a bounty law fixing the price to be paid for the scalps of wolves and coyotes at \$3 each. Since the enactment of the law a number of cowboys have resigned from the range and gone into the bounty business for there is more in it. But these gentlemen are discounted by Commissioner Barton of Choteau County, who, according to the River Press, has purchased from a Cree Indian a she-wolf and litter of nineteen pups that were captured alive. According to the River Press, “it is the intention of Mr. Barton to kill the animals and secure a bounty on the scalps.” The deal will be a profitable one no doubt and could be made still more profitable if the thrifty commissioner would kill only the pups, secure a mate for the she-wolf and go into the breeding business. If she is as prolific at all times as with the litter in question there is money in it.¹²⁵

In Alberta, H.A. Riviere recalled a similar situation with the Nakoda: “When the wolves were doing a lot of damage, some of the big outfits put bounties on wolves. The Stoney Indians knew all the dens, and raided them yearly, but took great care to leave the old ones unmolested. They figured that 5 or 6 cubs at 10 dollars a head, beat \$10 for 1 female.”¹²⁶ As Riviere’s reminiscence suggests, authorities were fairly powerless to prevent the development of this shadow livestock industry where wolfers raised predators merely to bring them in for bounty payments. And when Nakoda wolfers did

¹²⁴ Cameron, “Wolves in Montana,” MHS, 1-2.

¹²⁵ “Foundation for a Wolf Farm,” April 4, 1895, *Helena Daily Herald*.

¹²⁶ Riviere, 5.

this, as Riviere alleged, not only did they earn good money, but they created a source of animal capital both within and outside the boundaries of the colonial borderland's political ecology.

In contrast to Montana, the institutionalization of bounty laws in Alberta never really occurred, due in part to a lack of government support, but also due to an ineffective bounty infrastructure set-up by Canada's Western Stock Growers' Association. For generations, Canadians have experienced the complaints and frustrations of ranchers in the prairie provinces grieving over their lack of support from Edmonton, Regina, Winnipeg, and Ottawa. A robust historiography of stock-growing in the Canadian West underpins this populist sentiment, contending that, unlike in the U.S. West, Canadian governments stood in the way of ranching interests, favoring Indians, farmers, miners, or environmentalists' claims to the land. Recently, historians like Warren Elofson have countered this thesis, arguing that crime, inexperience, environmental hazards, and unfavorable markets stunted western Canada's cattle boom, rather than political indifference.¹²⁷ While Elofson's contentions are accurate and well-documented, and provide a landmark intervention in the history of Canadian stock-growing, I find that neither his nor previous narratives adequately explain the failure of Alberta's cattlemen to eradicate wolves. It is undoubtedly true that Alberta's remote, wild places helped shelter wolves from dogs, traps, and bullets. Likewise, an impermanent and under-funded system of private and public bounties provided less incentive for full-time wolfers in Alberta than in Montana. But the failure to solidify bounty institutions in Alberta developed alongside Canadian stock-growers' relative

¹²⁷ Warren Elofson, *Cowboys, Gentlemen, and Cattle Thieves* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000).

failure to institutionalize their own representations of labor and value as the dominant visions of production north of the forty-ninth parallel. As such, Canadian stock-growers could not sufficiently transform their states' colonial prerogatives to ones synonymous with their own.

One of the Alberta bounty system's main problems was its lack of central administration. Prior to the 1896 establishment of the WSGA, stock-growers on the Canadian plains were not organized in any formal association that pressed for uniform bounty legislation across the territory. Instead, large stock-growing families like the Cochranes, Hatfields, and others, employed their own full-time wolfers or else placed private bounties on wolves and coyotes killed on their own property. Although some of these bounties were quite large, which made wolfing a lucrative proposition, the inconsistency and impermanence of these private bounties crippled efforts to control wolf populations. Hired wolfers were effective at controlling local populations of predators at the home ranches, and perhaps also in open-range country during spring and fall round-ups, but their geographical confinement limited the extensiveness of wolfing operations compared to those south of the border. In 1897, one of the WSGA's first unified actions was to place a public bounty on wolves, ten dollars on adults and two dollars on pups. Even so, unlike the Montana's well-developed bounty laws, the WSGA's bounty agreement did not include any specific procedures to streamline the effectiveness of bounty hunting. Rather than designating traveling bounty inspectors by county or district, as was the custom in Montana, the WSGA required wolfers to travel to one of three locations in the territory to cash their claim, either Calgary, Macleod, or

Maple Creek.¹²⁸ This probably streamlined WSGA paperwork, but it handicapped the establishment of a standard regional bounty system. Rather than wolfing for the WSGA bounty, which was less than most private bounties and could require traveling up to two- or three-hundred miles, wolfers continued to work for independent cattlemen and their bounties. The WSGA recognized this problem, but over the next few years, several motions to expand their bounty operations to Pincher Creek and Medicine Hat failed.¹²⁹

The WSGA bounty was also chronically under-funded, and no financial apparatus developed to pick up the slack, as it had in Montana. The 1897 bounty had been instated with only \$1000, and was to be funded only by WSGA member dues.¹³⁰ Sometime shortly after, the Territorial government agreed to match the bounty fund, and in 1900 the WSGA raised its bounty rates to \$15 on adults and \$5 on pups.¹³¹ This generous payment increase was the beginning of the end for the WSGA's bounty operation. In 1902, the association wrote the Territorial government expressing that "the wolf bounty appropriation was not sufficient to meet the claims during the year" and requested a larger territorial appropriation.¹³² A year earlier, the WSGA also suggested that twenty-five percent of revenue from Dominion grazing leases in the Northwest Territories be returned to ranchers in the form of a permanent appropriation to the wolf bounty fund.¹³³ With neither the Territorial nor Dominion governments cooperating with the WSGA's demands, the bounty fund went insolvent. By May of

¹²⁸ Minutes of Western Stock Growers' Association, April 1897, *Western Stock Grower's Association*, M 2452, Box 1, Folder 3, GLA.

¹²⁹ Minutes of the WSGA, August 1897, *WSGA*, Box 1, Folder 3, 30, GLA.

¹³⁰ Minutes of the WSGA, April 1897, *WSGA*, Box 1, Folder 3, 22-24, GLA.

¹³¹ Minutes of the WSGA, September 1900, *WSGA*, Box 1, Folder 3, 98, GLA.

¹³² Minutes of the WSGA, April 1902, *WSGA*, Box 1, Folder 3, 127, GLA.

¹³³ Minutes of the WSGA, April 1901, *WSGA*, Box 1, Folder 3, 108, GLA.

1908, the fund had long been exhausted and the bounty operations suspended. Even worse, the WSGA had only \$50.46 in its entire association accounts. The best they could do was petition the new Provincial government of Alberta to re-instate the bounty, which they did without success.¹³⁴

The WSGA bounty was also crippled by what seemed to be an increasingly lack of interest in wolfing above the forty-ninth parallel. While the Montana bounty helped create an unequivocal class of wolfers who worked at their occupations full-time, the WSGA's poor incentives did not generate a sustained ambition to kill wolves and other predators. In fact, it appears that many of the WSGA's bounties were claimed by its own members. In 1900, after placing a bounty on coyotes in addition to wolves, the WSGA went so far as to ban members from collecting any more bounties, partly in an effort to encourage others to take up the task, and also partly an effort to avoid bankruptcy by paying fewer claims. Members' "interest in dead coyotes should be sufficient reward for them to kill coyotes at all opportunities," the decision stated. Later on in the meeting, the association passed another motion to pay the bounty only "to Indians and Half breeds."¹³⁵

For these reasons, among others, the Alberta bounty's failure was linked to the wider political context of the province, and its institutionalization of a different colonial vision of production than ranching—dry land farming. By the Province's establishment in 1905, dry land agriculture had emerged as the dominant paradigm in Canada's western politics, and the open-range cattlemen, with their vast, thirty-year crown leases, represented a recognizable impediment to the ordered colonization and settlement of the

¹³⁴ Minutes of the WSGA, May 1908, *WSGA*, Box 1, Folder 3, 188, GLA.

¹³⁵ Minutes of the WSGA, May 1916, *WSGA*, Box 1, Folder 2, 27-28, GLA.

wild rose country. While the cattle industry, centered in Macleod, continued to dominant the southern third of the province, the seat of state power resided nearly four-hundred miles north, in metropolitan Edmonton, surrounded by farmers in and around the wetter Saskatchewan valley. Under these circumstances, even well-intentioned efforts to assist borderlands stock-growers by the Provincial government missed their mark. After intense lobbying by the WSGA, finally around 1913, the Alberta Department of Interior appropriated \$3,000 to re-establish the wolf bounty. But this program turned out to be short-lived, and of virtually no benefit to southern stock-growers. According to Walter Huckvale, “owing to the hardupness of nearly all farmers in the early part of last year a lot of them had gone out in the North and had killed so many wolves that they exhausted the bounty. We in the South never got a piece of it.” This was an explanation confirmed by Duncan Marshall, the Alberta Secretary of the Interior, who was unable to lobby for additional money to cover the southern portion of the province.¹³⁶

WSGA members did their best to drum up interest in the bounty with other organizations, but to little avail. In 1915, George Lane chaired a meeting in which the association mulled over arguments it could use to convince small stock-owners and mixed-farmers—by no means its traditional members—to join the association, pay membership dues, and support another wolf bounty. They developed a two-fold pitch. First, they expressed “the necessity of keeping wolves down.” Huckvale and others claimed that wolf depredations hit small stock-growers especially hard, since even minor losses to their stock animals could utterly destroy their business. But small

¹³⁶ Ibid, 27-28.

growers and mixed-farmers who tended their animals close to their farms, using a more Midwestern-style of ranching, did not face the same trouble with wolves as large operators who let their herds run amok across the range.¹³⁷ The needs of small-holders were rather different. As one WSGA member put it, describing the incompatibility of their association with the desires of others, “We have to demonstrate that we are some value as an association, look after transportation facilities and concern ourselves with the interests of the producer, otherwise he is not going to follow or join us.”¹³⁸ In Alberta, the cattlemen had failed to wholly institutionalize themselves as producers, partly through their failure to identify and objectify predators. In one of their final requests to reinstate a government wolf bounty, the best the WSGA could muster was a feeble assertion that wolf eradication was a public good; re-establishing the bounty, they argued, would “[relieve] to an extent, the public spirited men who have done so much for the general public in this way.”¹³⁹

The institutionalization of bounty laws developed unevenly across the borderlands. While the State of Montana created a long-term system, Albertans struggled to replicate this system in the north. Undoubtedly, wolfing served the interests of livestock producers, but practices like wolf farming also held subversive possibilities. By opening an entrepreneurial space for indigenous people, poor whites, and others at the margins of colonial society, wolfing provided an alternative to outright proletarianization. And the scale of its state- and corporate-sponsored violence reflected ambivalently on the colonial livestock regime, begging the question: if stock

¹³⁷ Minutes of the WSGA, 1915, *WSGA*, Box 1, Folder 3, 236 and 240, GLA.

¹³⁸ Minutes of the WSGA, May 1916, 14-15.

¹³⁹ *Ibid*, 14-15.

producers weren't also predators, then why not? In Montana, the state bounty system settled this question by identifying predators and casting them outside the boundaries of legitimate production. In Alberta, this lasted as a more ambiguous problem.

Predator Control and Ontologies of Labor and Value

In a strictly economic sense, wolf bounties did not provide the livestock industry with the returns it expected. In Montana, forty years of bounty laws had helped reduce wolf populations to a nearly imperceptible level, however, this did not save the state's cattle industry from periodic cycles of crisis, including the post-war bust in 1919 and 1920 that all but demolished the state's large operators. Likewise, Alberta's extensive network of private bounty arrangements failed to avert the devastation of Canada's open-range cattle industry. Although the dominant form of stock-production until the early-twentieth century, large-scale ranching was already obsolete in Alberta by the 1890s; the 1910s witnessed its death-knell.¹⁴⁰ By this time, with or without government support, open-range cattle ranching in the borderlands faced substantial headwinds. With more and more land fenced, homesteaded, or under private ownership, successfully grazing cattle required more expense and attention than ever before. In addition, new taxes and fees accompanied the leasing of federal, state, and provincial lands for grazing purposes, and running cattle on these typically higher-elevation refuges brought livestock into closer proximity with the few dozens of wolves who survived the bounty programs, along with other stock-killing predators like mountain lions and grizzly bears. In many respects, the bounty laws so vehemently supported by

¹⁴⁰ See Elofson, *Cowboys, Gentlemen, and Cattle Thieves*.

the borderlands' large stock-growers were an abject failure. With great expense and effort, stock-growers managed to remove wolves from vast portions of prime grazing land, only to lose much of that land to the termination of crown leases, an influx of dry farmers, and numerous bankruptcies. And in the process, stock-growers established regulatory bureaucracies that many cattlemen, both north and south of the border, would soon identify as major obstacles blocking the success of their own operations.

What the wolf bounty programs did accomplish, however, was a reorientation of the borderlands' modern ontologies of labor and value. In the context of wolfing and the livestock industry, insecurities over the protection and predation of livestock generated new understandings of labor, value, and human-animal difference during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century colonization of the Canadian-American West. In order to secure their status as *producers*, human beings focused on creating value, stock-growers on the ranges of Montana and Alberta had to designate *predators*—both human and non-human—that siphoned value away from its intended final forms.

In this sense, predator control was more than just a matter of protecting livestock, it was also battle to represent value in a manner that justified the violence and exploitation contained within the colonial borderland's open-range cattle industry. Wolfing was means to “add value” to the metabolic relations of cattle and cattlemen without necessarily creating any tangible economic gains for cattlemen. What the human-animal relations of wolfing generated instead were new understandings of labor and value that naturalized the folkways and political ecologies of the stock industry. Both north and south of the forty-ninth parallel, stockmen mobilized the overwhelming

cultural acceptance of their images and behaviors to frame predator control as a debate within the business, rather than a debate concerning wider circulations of value, its origins, and more democratic alternatives to their distribution. If only ambiguously successful economically, wolf bounty programs proved decisive in rendering alternative representations of value as predatory and illegitimate—outside the scope of the colonial borderland’s new capitalist social forms.

Suffering from a series of economic and environmental disasters throughout the early-twentieth century, what allowed the stock industry to persist in the Montana-Alberta borderlands was precisely its ability to *represent* value, not just its ability to produce value. In this respect, I agree with Donna Haraway’s “suspicion... that we might nurture responsibility with and for other animals better by plumbing the category of labor more than the category of rights, with its inevitable preoccupation with similarity, analogy, calculation, and honorary membership in the expanded abstraction of the Human.”¹⁴¹ But rather than turning merely toward colonial fantasies of hybridity, wherein companion species of humans and animals create common bonds and reproduce shared worlds, we need to grapple with predation as an historical idea that dissociates animal from human labor and provides justifications for the continuation and naturalization of colonial conquest. The difference between predation and production is one of the most basic and least understood distinctions underlying modern conceptions of labor and value, and its development was rooted in the process of remaking regional ecologies to suit colonial asymmetries.

¹⁴¹ Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 72.

Using the human-animal history of wolfing to track labor and value as historical categories is helpful for at least two reasons. First, it demonstrates the limitations of most Marxist and postcolonial theories in grappling with the human and nonhuman natures of colonial exploitation. By deploying the labor-theory of value in terms of normative calculations that provide “proof” of exploitation, these theories are at best redundant, telling us what we already know—that colonialism is exploitative—and at worst, they construct an illusion that value is created solely through the labors of oppressed human beings; a misreading of *Capital* that Marx himself diagnosed as fallacy.¹⁴² Second, the realization that labor and value, as commonly understood, are themselves historical social forms opens the possibility of salvaging, renovating, or developing alternative understandings of production and creativity other than those which serve the interests of continued colonial domination. Granted, this might be a naïve project in our times and spaces of neo-liberal, global profiteering, but it is nevertheless helpful on more local scales, educating us in our comprehensions of our past and present relationships with human and non-human others, not least of which our mixed histories of dealing with “stock-killing” predators.

In a polemical history of the exploitation of Cheyenne labor during the nineteenth century, the prominent anthropologist John H. Moore writes: “let us not be fooled into believing that the fur trade had anything to do with the exploitation of buffalos... as far as I know, neither beaver nor buffalo have contributed any labor at all to the U.S. economy. The [robes] traded east were valuable for one reason only; because thousands of Indian people had worked for millions of hours to produce

¹⁴² See Karl Marx, “Critique of the Gotha Program,” 1875, in Robert Tucker, ed., *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2nd ed. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1978): 525-541; 526.

them.”¹⁴³ While I am sympathetic with Moore’s political sentiment—that for the Cheyenne, colonialism led to the outright theft of their land and labor—I disagree that the historical backdrop of the Cheyennes’ labors in and with non-human nature is this satisfyingly simple. In order to do justice to the complicated history and legacy of native labor, we need to attend not just to the labor-theory of value—who, what, how, where labor is produced—but also develop an understanding of how both labor and value were represented and objectified; how they precipitated into forms that supported colonization. In particular, we need to historicize the difference between predation and production, hazy notions that have obscured deeper relationships between life, reproduction, and exploitation. This is the focus of the following chapters.

¹⁴³ John Moore, “Cheyenne Work in the History of U.S. Capitalism,” in Littlefield and Knack, *Native Americans and Wage Labor*, 122-143; 141.

Chapter 3:

Making Meat

In the fall of 1909, Henry Horn was hunting geese when he discovered a group of cattle thieves hiding livestock in the brush near Badger Creek, on the Blackfeet Reservation. With his shotgun ready, Horn rode down to investigate, but a pair of warning shots convinced him to turn around. Rather than risk his life to get a good look at the thieves, Horn put his head down and rode to Browning, where he alerted the tribal police and the Blackfeet's Office of Indian Affairs Agent, Clarence A. Churchill. Within the next few months, Churchill was fired; a result both of his inability to prevent cattle theft, and of a malicious petition signed by various white residents of Browning, who claimed that Churchill tried to seduce the wife of the Agency physician. Early in 1910, he was replaced by Arthur McFtridge, a former boarding school superintendent on the Rosebud Reservation, who promised an end to cattle "depredations" and the transformation of the Blackfeet Reservation into a productive landscape.¹⁴⁴

This was an empty promise, both because the OIA did not follow through on their plans, and because the Blackfeet resisted their efforts. As portly and pompous as his name might suggest, McFtridge sought to rule the Blackfeet Reservation as a vast cattle kingdom, a project he shared with his predecessors dating back to the 1870s. In the wake of the Great Northern Railroad, homesteaders, and the cruel winter of 1906, the Blackfeet Reservation was all that remained of the open range in northern Montana, a land long-celebrated for its free grass. By 1910, neighboring white ranchers were

¹⁴⁴ Hana Samek, *The Blackfoot Confederacy: A Comparative Study of Canadian and U.S. Indian Policy* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press), 51. For the story of Henry Horn, see *Annual Report of the Blackfeet Agency*, Nov. 12, 1909, in *TW-ICC*, Box 2, Folder 4.

paying \$1.50 a head to agency personnel for the privilege of grazing their cattle on the Blackfeet's tribally-owned grasslands. Still living by their industry's obsolescent rhythms, they turned their stock loose to fatten and propagate across the boundless plain. But under the modified Allotment Act of March 1st, 1907, this world would gradually come to an end. The reservation's allotment into private property had begun, and would be mostly complete by 1913, leaving only a 600,000-acre un-allotted corner to serve as open rangeland.

McFatrige was emboldened to end the open range's traditional mistress—cattle rustling. Harkening back to the old-time vigilante groups that had terrorized Montana from the 1860s to the 1880s, McFatrige organized the Blackfeet Stock Protective Association, and charged it with protecting the reservation's animal property. With a contempt for legal process unusual by federal standards, but typical by Montana standards, McFatrige deputized the BSPA's white and Blackfeet members, granting them the authority to summarily arrest and jail any individual caught stealing or killing cattle on the reservation. Forty-three men paid five dollars each for this power. McFatrige himself anxiously wrote his superiors in Washington, D.C., begging for the approval to grant this authority. Despite its auspicious start, the BSPA would not amount to much, other than a bullying organization for the reservation's budding cattlemen.

Like Montana's wolf bounty laws, and like the bounty laws promulgated in Canada by the Western Stock Growers' Association, the BSPA's short-lived vigilante uprising against cattle rustlers reflected stock growers' desires to regulate the legitimacy of the labors of hunting and husbanding, more than its actual effectiveness in

eliminating fraud and theft. As such, it was a means to harness representations of predator and producer to justify the particular flow of value from cattle to their owners as much as it was intended to make sure that this flow actually did occur. This emphasis on regulating forms of labor, rather than measuring labor in simple terms of subsistence and provision, also mirrored the Office of Indian Affairs' wider approach to labor and assimilation policy on the Blackfoot Reservation. The OIA hoped to transform the Blackfeet from "idle tramps," as Senator Charles Dawes had described them in 1885, into sturdy, individual cattle growers, albeit not ones independent, but rather dependent on markets controlled by a regional white elite. This was the essence of colonialism—the ruling class's disavowal of its own predatory inclinations through the adjudication of legitimate labor and non-labor.

Assimilation policy on the Blackfoot Reservation was foremost oriented toward subordinating Blackfoot land and labor into northern Montana's capitalist livestock industry. This not only required policing the reservation, but also changing what the Blackfeet ate, along with how they made that food. Transformations in Blackfoot ways of making meat played a pivotal role in these policies of settlement and assimilation during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. During these years, the lives of many Blackfoot people transitioned from hunting to wage-earning, and making meat changed from a fairly direct process of killing animals and eating them into a complex alchemy of animal capital, private property, and market exchange, where regional white elites ate most of the choice cuts. Subordinating Blackfoot land and labor were critical steps in turning the borderlands into a cattle grower's paradise, and taking command of Blackfoot ways of making meat offered the key to achieving these goals.

Establishing and negotiating the contradictions of capitalist enterprise was yet another goal of assimilation policy on the Blackfeet Reservation. At the heart of these contradictions was a tension over valuations of labor as communal or individual. Concealing the contributions of human and nonhuman others within the “self-making” of individual capitalists offered a major advantage to colonialism’s discourse of production. By casting the work of raising cattle as productive, and the labors of hunting bison and other game as predatory and non-productive, the Office of Indian Affairs sought to subordinate Blackfeet practices of making meat to conform with the growth of a regional capitalism based on beef. Subsuming the nonhuman labors of livestock under the labor of individual stockgrowers also required a disavowal of animal labor, a process that worked out on the Blackfeet Reservation through OIA attempts to dismantle Blackfeet practices of nonhuman personhood and human-animal kinship. But in seeking to disenchant and de-animate the nonhuman origins of value in their representations of labor, the reservation’s capitalist stock growers nevertheless relied on animal labor, and were forced to recognize this dependence in their day-to-day operations. While this chapter examines OIA efforts to de-animate Blackfeet ways of making meat, the next chapter demonstrates how the Blackfeet accommodated their own understandings of labor and human-nonhuman relationships to OIA prerogatives. Despite colonial efforts to displace these concepts, animistic relationships pervaded capitalism’s expansion across the Blackfeet Reservation.

In both the United States and Canada, the circumscription of reservation hunting practices quickly gave way to ration-ticketing systems that encouraged “productive” labor—not subsistence labor, but labor that benefited the federal agency, labor that

could be exchanged indirectly for life's necessities. Following an historiographical synopsis, this chapter investigates the history of the Blackfeet Reservation's agency slaughterhouse. By using the slaughterhouse to regulate access to meat, the U.S. Office of Indian Affairs believed they could transform the Blackfeet from hunters to herders; from barbaric predators preying on the plains' ownerless stocks of animal capital, to civilized producers subject to Anglo-American standards of labor, property, and land tenure.

Food and Native Labor: An Historiographical Analysis

American Indian historians have long argued that the dispossession of native land occurred alongside an often less-visible exploitation of native labor.¹⁴⁵ But most historical narratives in the United States and Canada continue to stress the importance of political relations between Indians and non-Indians while paying relatively less attention to Indians' histories as workers.¹⁴⁶ This general lapse, as many historians and critics have pointed out, likely stems from a long-standing scholarly infatuation with native "tradition" at the expense of studying the practicalities of everyday Indian life.¹⁴⁷ Likewise, Indian workers have been difficult to shoehorn into the particular social-historical paradigm of labor history, which has been dominated by workplace,

¹⁴⁵ See Phil Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2004), Alexandra Harmon, *Indians in the Making* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), and Peter Iverson, *When Indians Became Cowboys* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994).

¹⁴⁶ For example, in the classic new-left labor history, David Montgomery, *The Fall of the House of Labor: The Workplace, the State, and American Labor Activism, 1865-1925* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), a quick scan of the index reveals that "native American" refers not to American Indians, but to white Protestant bigots who harassed immigrant factory workers in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.

¹⁴⁷ Alice Littlefield and Martha Knack, "Native American Labor: Retrieving History, Rethinking Theory," in *Native Americans and Wage Labor: Ethnohistorical Perspectives*, ed. Littlefield and Knack (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1996), 3-44; 3.

organizational, and urban neighborhood studies. Even in the sympathetic realm of Marxist theory, too many historians have approached topics like the late-industrial fur trade on the northern plains as a transitory episode, a moment of primitive accumulation, rather than an evolving system of semi-waged labor under modern capitalism. In doing so, they have rehearsed a well-worn colonial discourse that considers native labors like hunting as a form of predation, rather than form of production. Predation, in this sense, representing a mode of work outside the boundaries of capitalism, and therefore of little contribution to broader political economy.

This chapter suggests that understandings of labor and race, of creation and value, were intimately twinned with an intellectual separation of production from predation, and that colonialism in the borderlands relied on misinterpreting Blackfoot labor as predatory. In other words, Blackfoot dispossession was justified and legitimated through a colonial re-imagination of Blackfoot labor as predation, and therefore an unrecognized and illegitimate mode of creating value from “first-natural” ecological resources, such as converting plants and animals into food.

Food is critical to how people understand value in terms of predator-prey relationships, but historians are only beginning to understand the many ways in which foodways have been used as tools for colonial control. There is a long tradition of research, of course, on the history of agriculture, markets, and nutrition, most notably in the works of French *Annales* scholars. More recently, however, other scholars have begun to approach food as a multi-dimensional set of cultural, material, and environmental practices vital to conceptions and experiences of identity, health, and

place.¹⁴⁸ Authors have even begun to show how foods can reverse the traditional relations of imperial power, as colonial subjects influence the foods of the metropolis.¹⁴⁹ Food sets major stakes within colonial struggles—in addition to setting life's conditions of possibility, control over food dictates meanings to life itself.

Given the field of American Indian history's significant contributions in theorizing colonialism and imperialism, it is surprising that more authors have not considered such colonial tensions over food. In seeking to trace the various vehicles of colonization in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century North American West, for instance, historians in the U.S. and Canada have brilliantly illuminated the histories of boarding schools, allotment, and citizenship, but have mostly overlooked the central place of foodways in federal Indian policies.¹⁵⁰ As a result, our understandings of the roles played by food in federal attempts to transform Native Americans into colonial subjects remain obscure. But the colonial necessity of feeding people while dispossessing them of their land and labor makes the historical study of colonial food transformations crucial to our comprehensions of colonization's political economies and

¹⁴⁸ Jack Goody, *Cooking, Cuisine and Class: A Study in Comparative Sociology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), Sidney Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (New York: Penguin, 1985); Jeffrey Pilcher, *Que Viva Los Tamales: Food and the Making of Mexican Identity* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998); Richard Wilk, *Home Cooking in the Global Village: Caribbean Food from Buccaneers to Ecotourists* (New York: Berg Publishers, 2006).

¹⁴⁹ E. M. Collingham, *Imperial Bodies: The Physical Experience of the Raj, c. 1800-1947* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001); Marcy Norton, *Sacred Gifts, Profane Pleasures: A History of Tobacco and Chocolate in the Atlantic World* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008).

¹⁵⁰ A few notable examples of these works are Brenda Child, *Boarding School Seasons: American Indian Families, 1900-1940* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), Philip Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2004), and Kristin Ruppel, *Unearthing Indian Land: Living with the Legacies of Allotment* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2008).

Some examples specific to the Blackfoot include Sheila McManus, *The Line Which Separates: Race, Gender, and the Making of the Alberta-Montana Borderlands* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), W. Keith Regular, *Neighbours and Networks: The Blood Tribe in the Southern Alberta Economy, 1884-1939* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2009), Paul Rosier, *Rebirth of the Blackfeet Nation, 1912-1954* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), and Hana Samek, *The Blackfoot Confederacy: A Comparative Study of Canadian and U.S. Indian Policy* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press).

ecologies. After all, Richard Pratt's infamous order to "kill the Indian and save the man," the goal of assimilation stated by the founder of the Carlisle Board School, required some kind of metabolic alchemy.¹⁵¹

This is not to make the false claim that food, in a very general sense, is never mentioned in American Indian histories, but that explicit attempts to historicize Anglo-Americans' colonization of indigenous foodways have generally not been undertaken. Scholarship on food colonialism and American Indians has followed the older tendencies to approach food simply as interchangeable calories, and not as larger practices of production, distribution, consumption, and reproduction. Take the vast literature on reservation agriculture, for instance, which focuses on the varying degrees to which Indians have negotiated the establishment of Anglo-American forms of farming and stock-raising on their lands. While this literature sometimes traces the transformation of food production in indigenous communities, it rarely considers concomitant changes in indigenous eating practices.¹⁵²

To some extent, this focus on production over consumption might reflect the fact that today Native North American food maintains a relatively low visibility in mass American and Canadian food culture. Unlike various culinary imports from Southeast Asia, Central America, and other regions of the colonized world, one is unlikely to find any Blackfoot cuisine served on the cosmopolitan tables of Calgary, Bozeman, and

¹⁵¹ From Official Report of the Nineteenth Annual Conference of Charities and Correction (1892), 46–59. Reprinted in Richard H. Pratt, "The Advantages of Mingling Indians with Whites," *Americanizing the American Indians: Writings by the "Friends of the Indian," 1880–1900* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), 260–271.

¹⁵² For an example of this literature on cattle, see Peter Iverson, *When Indians Became Cowboys: Native Peoples and Cattle Ranching in the American West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994). For an example specific to the Blackfeet, see Thomas Wessel, "Agent of Acculturation: Farming on the Northern Plains Reservations," in *Agricultural History* Vol. 60, No. 2 (Spring 1986), 233–245.

Missoula, or, for that matter, New York City. Even the Smithsonian's restaurant at the National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, D.C.—the Mitsitam Native Foods Café, which offers museum-goers a selection of indigenous foods grouped by iconic culture areas—serves fries and a simple “Campfire Buffalo Burger” to stand in for the Plains Indians' mysterious cuisines. Not surprisingly, this is one of the restaurant's more popular offerings.¹⁵³

An academic infatuation with Indians and liquor has also contributed toward a neglect of the larger history of native foodways and food colonialism. Commendable works such as Peter Mancall's *Deadly Medicine*, for instance, trace the role of drink in lubricating uneven trade and destabilizing native society, but without contextualizing liquor within the broader transformations that affected indigenous eating practices during turbulent periods of social and environmental change.¹⁵⁴ At its most harmless, this emphasis on alcohol merely ignores other aspects of native foodways, but at its worst, it perpetuates the long-standing myth that drunk Indians are themselves to blame for their dispossession. It has allowed historians to explain away complex histories of colonization as simple drunken spats, particularly in the case of the Blackfoot, who participated in significant whiskey traffic from the 1860s onward. While whiskey certainly worked as an agent of historical change, it operated within fluid systems of food distribution and consumption that require more historical attention. Although a liquid, whiskey is itself a food—made from barely, corn, rye, and other grains. As

¹⁵³ As of March 2010, Mitsitam's menu is online at the following web address: http://www.nmai.si.edu/visitor/files/2009winter_menu.pdf

¹⁵⁴ Peter Mancall, *Deadly Medicine: Indians and Alcohol in Early America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995).

Charlie Russell put it, “whiskey has been blamed for lots it didn’t do,” an observation that rings true in the historiographies of American Indians and food colonialism.¹⁵⁵

Environmental and cultural historians of hunting and colonialism have also overlooked the significance of indigenous foodways in their recent histories, which are situated primarily as critiques of conservationists’ attempts to remove indigenous people from protected landscapes. This literature argues that European colonization sought to transform indigenous hunters into “poachers,” as Edward Steinhart’s recent book on Kenyan National Parks has explored, and that colonization has also transcribed traditional white social hierarchies of hunting onto colonial landscapes, as John MacKenzie’s *Empire of Nature* has demonstrated.¹⁵⁶ In North America, this historiographic genre is best represented by Karl Jacoby’s excellent work on poachers and the “hidden history of American conservation,” focused on the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century circumscription of subsistence hunting in the Adirondacks and in Yellowstone and Grand Canyon National Parks. In the specific case of the Blackfeet, Mark David Spence has investigated this process in the early history of Glacier National Park, arguing that removing the Blackfeet as hunters while maintaining them as native performers served the critical function of establishing Glacier as a wilderness landscape in the minds of American tourists.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁵ Charles M. Russell, “Whiskey,” in *Montana Margins: A State Anthology*, ed. Joseph Kinsey Howard (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1946), 378.

¹⁵⁶ John MacKenzie, *The Empire of Nature: Hunting, Conservation, and British Imperialism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), and Edward Steinhart, *Black Poachers, White Hunters: A Social History of Hunting in Colonial Kenya* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2006).

¹⁵⁷ Mark David Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness: Indian Removal and the Making of the National Parks* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), and Karl Jacoby, *Crimes Against Nature: Squatters, Poachers, Thieves, and the Hidden History of American Conservation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

To a certain extent this literature on parks and poaching overlooks the obvious; that the circumscription of subsistence hunting was a process that streamlined colonial control over native land and labor. An earlier generation of British social Marxists got this much right, despite their relative failure to complicate theories of resistance. Douglas Hay, E.P. Thompson, and Eric Wolf all described the criminalization of subsistence hunting practices under processes of enclosure and colonization as important moments of the primitive accumulation of indigenous and working-class means of production.¹⁵⁸ In other words, capital relied on criminalizing traditional modes of sustenance in order to force people to sell their labor for wages. In the case of North America, Richard Slotkin has brilliantly explored corresponding bourgeois fears of industrial workers “going native” with a defiance of wage work in his analysis of late-nineteenth-century labor unrest and the Plains Indian Wars.¹⁵⁹ But although these authors have identified the elimination of traditional subsistence as a necessity for the subordination of labor, they too have neglected to study corresponding transformations in foodways that accompanied the shaping of modern capitalism.

Other historians have considered the emergence of markets in remaking regional and global food networks and altering human relationships to foods in the late-nineteenth century. In the colonial context, Mike Davis’s *Late Victorian Holocausts* discusses the horrific consequences of indigenous peoples’ alienations from their traditional foodways in the face of uncontrollable fluctuations in global weather and

¹⁵⁸ Douglas Hay, “Poaching and the Game Laws on Cannock Chase,” in *Albion’s Fatal Tree: Crime and Society in Eighteenth-Century England* (New York: Pantheon, 1975), 189-254, E.P. Thompson, *Whigs and Hunters: The Origin of the Black Act* (New York: Pantheon, 1975), and Eric Wolf, *Europe and the People Without History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

¹⁵⁹ Richard Slotkin, *The Fatal Environment: The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization, 1800-1890* (New York: MacMillan, 1985).

finance. William Cronon's magisterial chapters on Chicago's grain exchange and packinghouses reveals how food industrialists harnessed the power of railroads, refrigeration, banks, and futures markets to politicize paths of distribution that farmers, ranchers, and consumers had previously understood as natural systems. Both of these authors implicate late-nineteenth-century food history within the broader consolidation of capitalist core-periphery relationships.¹⁶⁰

Historians have also considered the rise of the slaughterhouse within these global developments as a metropolitan story of modernization and industrialism, but rarely colonialism. By the late-nineteenth century, slaughterhouses generally provided three things: an economy of scale favoring large packers, cheap meat for consumers in the imperial metropolis, and the increased alienation of meat from its animal origins. The Chicago packing-houses exemplified this first transformation, using their production volume to drive down meat prices and run distant competitors out of business. As Swift, Armour, and other firms shipped tons of packaged beef on refrigerated rail cars across North America and eventually the world, they cemented the dominance of a centralized, industrial mode of animal slaughter.¹⁶¹

This industrial slaughter benefited consumers in the imperial core at the expense of those eating meat in the hinterlands. For example, meat supplies in New York City increased over the mid to late-nineteenth century, as its voracious market for beef sucked cattle away from the American West, Western Canada, and even Northern

¹⁶⁰ William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1992), and Mike Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts: El Niño Famines and the Making of the Third World* (London: Verso, 2001).

¹⁶¹ Roger Horowitz, *Putting Meat on the American Table: Taste, Technology, Transformation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006).

Mexico.¹⁶² Like other food commodities, meat was no longer consumed where it was produced, but rather where distant markets dictated. Moreover, deluges of refrigerated beef from vertically-integrated metropolitan packers wiped out regional enterprises attempting to supply local markets, like California's Miller and Lux.¹⁶³ By the end of the nineteenth-century, few meat-eating people lived beyond the impact of these global transformations, including the Blackfeet.

Intellectual currents on labor, technology, and control have also colored slaughterhouse historiography, which has sought to describe how slaughterhouses have enabled the domination, de-skilling, and alienation of human labor in the midst of animal disassembly.¹⁶⁴ Often, these studies connect to broader critiques of industrial capitalism, though these criticisms are sometimes ignored by the reading public's fascination with the industry's hidden viscera—the “shit in the meat,” as Eric Schlosser puts it.¹⁶⁵ In this sense, slaughterhouses are peculiar institutions of the late-nineteenth century. Often envisioned with progressive ideals in mind, once constructed they faced the ire of progressive reformers. Noëlie Vialles's classic ethnography of French abattoirs argues that slaughterhouses allowed officials to “monitor operations, in order to progressively eliminate acts of violence, and monitor the quality and the marketing of meat, in order to prevent fraud.” Vialles concludes that the paradoxes embodied by

¹⁶² Roger Horowitz, Jeffrey Pilcher, and Sydney Watts, “Meat for the Multitudes: Market Culture in Paris, New York City, and Mexico City over the Long Nineteenth Century,” *American Historical Review* 109, (October 2004): 1055-1083.

¹⁶³ David Igler, *Industrial Cowboys: Miller and Lux and the Transformation of the Far West, 1850-1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

¹⁶⁴ For a recent survey of this literature see Paula Lee Young, ed. *Meat, Modernity, and the Rise of the Slaughterhouse* (Durham: University of New Hampshire Press, 2008). David Igler, *Industrial Cowboys: Miller & Lux and the Transformation of the Far West, 1850-1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001) tells this story in San Francisco.

¹⁶⁵ See Eric Schlosser, *Fast Food Nation* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2001).

slaughterhouses emerge from modern desires for non-violent killing, the “vegetalization” of meat, a process reflected by the word *abattoir* itself—from the verb *abattre*, originally a forester’s term “to fell trees.”¹⁶⁶ The technology of slaughterhouses not only served objectives of sanitation and efficiency, but also legitimated its labors of violence by dividing killing into a set of mechanical processes. Although the Blackfeet Agency slaughterhouse was by no means a large industrial facility, it shared the slaughterhouse’s common modern goal of purging predation—the violence of killing—from the production of meat.

Ultimately, progressive advocates of the late-nineteenth century slaughterhouse saw value in the institution’s ability to alienate meat from its animal origins, to transmute animate flesh into inert calories. This development occurred within a broader process of disenchantment that accompanied capitalism’s expansion across the colonial world. But despite these efforts, meat remained a fundamentally animal creation, and nowhere was this more difficult to obscure, perhaps, than in Blackfoot Country, an ocean of sun and grass where thousands of the slaughterhouse’s vegetized beef cattle first took root. On the Blackfeet Reservation, the slaughterhouse’s mission to confine and sanitize killing extended beyond the colonial metropole, and played a key role in federal attempts to colonize the Blackfeet through a transformation of their foodways, particularly their ways of making and eating meat.

Bison and Blackfeet Foodways

¹⁶⁶ Noëlie Vialles, *Animal to Edible*, trans. J.A. Underwood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994 [1987]), 22-23.

On the Blackfoot Reservation, the first major obstacle to the slaughterhouse's civilizing mission was the Blackfeet's long commitment to interacting with animals as persons, including those, like bison, that they ate. Blackfoot people on the Northern Plains held a rich hunting tradition that linked their own history as meat-eaters with the lives of nonhuman carnivores, particularly wolves. When Indian Office administrators denounced the Blackfeet as predacious killers, they were not entirely off the mark, for many Blackfeet themselves strove to live like wolves, the most vicious animal of the Anglo-American bestiary. In fact, Blackfoot today maintain that they learned to hunt bison through an empathetic relationship with wolves—they followed and observed wolves, and tried to insert themselves as wolves into pre-existing bison-wolf interactions. They “performed wolf” both in their ceremonies and in the field. They left meat as offerings for wolves and other carnivores at their kill sites.¹⁶⁷ In doing so, the Blackfoot developed sophisticated modes of kinship that spanned white understandings of the separation between human and animal. Of course, these practices were entirely misapprehended by Indian Office personnel. Even hardened Indian agents commented on the Blackfeet's wolfishness with incredulity, one claiming, for instance, that they were “nearer to barbarians than anything I have ever seen.”¹⁶⁸

The Blackfeet's heavy diet of animal flesh played a large role in these barbaric estimations. Other than seasonal harvests of berries and wild turnips, in good times the Blackfeet ate meat—and nearly always that of mammals. Bison, of course, were the

¹⁶⁷ For a good overview of work related to these Blackfoot methods, see Russell Lawrence Barsh and Chantelle Marlor, “Driving Bison and Blackfoot Science,” *Human Ecology* 31:4 (December 2003): 571-93.

¹⁶⁸ Report of Inspector Thomas, “Inspection of Blackfeet agency and charges against Agent Allen,” Oct 10, 1885 (5017), in United States Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), *Reports of the Inspection of the Field Jurisdictions of the Office of Indian Affairs, 1873-1900* (Washington, D.C.: National Archives Microfilm Publications) M1070, Reel 2.

Blackfeet's traditional source of food. Before the introduction of horses and rifles in the late-eighteenth century, Blackfoot hunters chased bison on foot, cooperatively driving small herds of the animals over cliffs, or sometimes into corrals, where they could be speared. Ethno-historical and archeological evidence both suggest that these Blackfoot hunters managed the location of bison herds through a practice of rotationally burning prairie grasses. The Blackfoot did not merely wander the plains following bison, as historians have sometimes misunderstood, but instead kept the animals close by managing certain locales—particularly those near *pisskans*, or “buffalo jumps”—as optimal bison habitats.

Rather than “cooking” meat in the usual Anglo-American sense, the Blackfoot relied instead on the Northern Plains' abundant wind and sun to prepare bison flesh for consumption, most often slicing meat into thin strips for drying. In addition to eating bison's lean flesh, the Blackfeet developed sophisticated techniques that rendered the animal's blood, tallow, bones, and entrails into edible and preservable foods.

“Dupuyer,” for instance, best described as a kind of bacon made from the smoked fat of bison, quickly captured the palettes of French and Anglo-American fur traders, who eagerly acquired the food from the Blackfeet as a luxury substitute for their usual diet of pemmican. Making dupuyer was a fairly simple process; Blackfeet women—the traditional butchers—hung large chunks of otherwise inedible tallow from the poles of their lodges, allowing it to slowly smolder above the fire for a period of days to weeks. This process produced a light-weight, long-lasting food that Blackfeet war parties carried on distant campaigns against their Crow and Cree enemies. The Blackfeet also produced a kind of giant blood sausage, packing the large intestine with pooled blood,

fat, berries, and other ingredients, then slowly roasting it in a bath of hot ashes. Another Blackfoot delicacy was a fetal calf removed from its slaughtered mother and roasted whole in an earthen pit lined and covered with ashes and hot rocks. By the 1880s, these techniques were easily translated from the bodies of bison to those of beef cattle, disgusting those white observers grown used to those late-nineteenth-century standards of civilization—roasts and beef steaks.¹⁶⁹

In addition to eating bison, the Blackfoot utilized bison furs as an important trade item, from which they procured horses and rifles as well as food goods like tea, coffee, sugar, flour, and whiskey. These robes became significant commodities in the Northern Plains fur trade by the mid-nineteenth century, as demand grew for luxurious pelts to upholster Victorian sleighs and carriages. Bison robes differed from bison hides in that they were more than just tanned, leathery skins; they were intact pelts that included all the bison's hair. Supply for these robes was limited to bison herds on the northern half of the animal's range, where nineteenth-century observers claimed that their hair grew longer and thicker due to the winters' sub-zero temperatures. The skilled labor required for making these robes also limited their supply. In the case of the Blackfoot, women were responsible for this labor, and they spent hours stripping flesh and tissue from the robes, and rendering them into supple furs by smearing them with brains. In a detailed study of Cheyenne robe production, anthropologist John Moore has estimated that through this unwaged labor, Cheyennes alone put fifty million

¹⁶⁹ Wissler, "Material Culture of the Blackfoot Indians," *Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History* 7:1 (1910): 33.

dollars of capital into the hands of white merchants by the Civil War.¹⁷⁰ The scale of the Blackfoot trade was even larger, and by the 1860s, Fort Benton, located on the highest steamboat-navigable reach of the Missouri River, had blossomed into one of Montana Territory's most important towns, primarily as the entr pot of this robe trade. Between 1859 and 1884, when some of the last bison floated downriver, traders in this "world's innermost port" had shipped out over 760,000 bison robes, nearly all of which were produced by Blackfoot men and women.¹⁷¹

Because the robe trade brought a flood of whiskey to Blackfoot country, participation in this market has been widely blamed for the near-collapse of Blackfoot society in the early 1880s. A number of historians, including Hugh Dempsey and Paul Sharp, have focused on whiskey as a primary culprit of the Blackfoot's post-1860s decline.¹⁷² However, their arguments mostly overlook the primary finding of the anthropology of drink, that the effects of alcohol vary depending on social and cultural contexts.¹⁷³ Although Blackfeet men and women certainly traded bison robes for whiskey, and a rich body of anecdotal evidence indicates that intoxication contributed to impoverishment, injury, or death—just as it did in the case of white drinkers—

¹⁷⁰ John Moore, "Cheyenne Work in the History of U.S. Capitalism," in *Native Americans and Wage Labor: Ethnohistorical Perspectives*, ed. Alice Littlefield and Martha Knack (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1996), 122-140; 129-130.

¹⁷¹ Joel Overholser, *Fort Benton: World's Innermost Port* (Big Sandy, Montana: Rettig Publishing/Mountaineer Printing, 1987), 30-32.

¹⁷² When "food" does enter into discussions on Blackfoot history, it usually does so in the context of liquor and the flourishing whiskey and bison robe trade of the 1860s and 1870s. See Hugh Dempsey, *Firewater: The Impact of the Whisky Trade on the Blackfoot Nation* (Calgary: Fifth House Publishers, 2002); Margaret Kennedy, *The Whiskey Trade of the Northwestern Plains: A Multidisciplinary Study* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1997); and Paul Sharp, *Whoop-up Country: The Canadian-American West, 1865-1885* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1955).

¹⁷³ Dwight B. Heath, *Drinking Occasions: Comparative Perspectives on Alcohol and Culture* (Philadelphia: Brunner/Mazel, 2000); Thomas M. Wilson, ed., *Drinking Cultures: Alcohol and Identity* (Oxford: Berg, 2005).

blaming liquor for Blackfoot dispossession overlooks larger transformations in Blackfeet foodways from the mid-eighteenth century onward.

Other research has noted that participation in the bison-robe market altered Blackfoot subsistence and food relationships in more subtle ways. Like other Plains people—the Arapaho, Crow, and Lakota, for instance—the Blackfoot’s martial culture was driven by the introduction of horses and rifles in the late-eighteenth century. In the case of the Blackfoot, horses became a form of currency for fulfilling social obligations. Not only were horses essential tools of war, but often they were also war’s object, and successful warriors accumulated fortunes in the animals that they leveraged for political power within their extra-familial bands. As research by David Nugent has demonstrated, such wealth in horses altered Blackfoot social hierarchies in the early-nineteenth century, allowing for the emergence of smaller-sized bands that were dominated by one or two extremely wealthy band chiefs, and on whom most other band members were economically dependent. The distribution of meat from the hunt, however, while centralized under the control of band chiefs, remained largely egalitarian.¹⁷⁴

If an uneven trade that destroyed the Blackfoot’s traditional food source was not enough, a series of American and Canadian military campaigns during the 1870s forced the Blackfoot to restrict their movements and negotiate away their land base. In January of 1870, the U.S. Army murdered over 170 Blackfeet camped on the Marias River, as a reprisal for the deaths of two white ranchers killed the previous summer. In 1877, the Canadian government forced the Blackfoot to sign Treaty Seven, confining

¹⁷⁴ David Nugent, “Property Relations, Production Relations, and Inequality: Anthropology, Political Economy, and the Blackfeet,” *American Ethnologist* 20:2 (May, 1993): 336-362.

them to three reserves in southern Alberta. By the late 1870s, these colonial pressures, together with the rapid destruction of the bison, had unsettled Blackfoot foodways and left the Blackfeet on the brink of a subsistence crisis.

Beef Assimilation and the First Reservation Slaughterhouse

In the early 1880s, life on the Blackfeet reservation entered a forty-year period of almost incomprehensible destitution. History itself seemed to collapse under the burdens of poverty and hunger. Blackfeet elders stopped recording events in their winter counts, with the exception of listing the names of their many friends who died. One man named Elk-horn expressed his own disinterest in tracking the passing decades: “since our people were confined to the limits of the reservation, nothing else has happened worth remembering.”¹⁷⁵ Anthropologists who descended upon the Blackfeet tended to agree. They spent careers seeking to salvage the Blackfeet’s vanishing past, oblivious to its continued expressions in the present. Indian Office administrators, meanwhile, dealt daily with recurrences of the Blackfeet’s “lost traditions,” and few were more troubling than Blackfeet ways of making meat.

The origin, preparation, and consumption of meat provided constant reminders both of the problems that plagued the reservation, and of the problems that accompanied industrial capital’s expansion across the Northern Plains. On the Blackfeet reservation, meat provided a crucial means by which the Office of Indian Affairs (OIA) could work toward subordinating Blackfeet land and labor—two major goals of federal assimilation

¹⁷⁵ Clark Wissler, “The Social Life of the Blackfoot Indians,” *Anthropological Papers of the Museum of Natural History* 7(1), 45. Reprinted in Wissler, *A Blackfoot Source Book*, ed. David Hurst Thomas (New York: Garland Publishing, 1986).

policy. By regulating access to meat, the OIA believed they could transform the Blackfeet from hunters to herders, thereby confining the Blackfeet within their reservation boundaries and restructuring Blackfeet patterns of subsistence to conform with the institution of wage labor and capitalism in northern Montana. For the Blackfeet, the message was clear; they needed to give up hunting, they needed to either “work or starve.”¹⁷⁶

But colonizing the Blackfeet through their stomachs was a difficult ordeal, primarily because the Blackfeet refused to give up their old traditions. As government-issued beef cattle replaced the reservation’s vanishing herds of bison, the Blackfeet continued to make meat in much the same manner—by killing it when they were hungry. Moreover, they ate it raw, smoked, and sometimes baked whole in the earth. Civilizing the Blackfeet would require more than the mere replacement of one indigenous ungulate for a domestic Anglo-American animal, it would also require a revolution in the Blackfeet’s practices of killing and consuming.

The OIA sought to enforce this transformation through the construction of the Agency slaughterhouse, a building borne from the administration’s obsession with producing “clean meat.” Clean meat, however, was more than simply sanitary meat; it was meat that—like the Blackfeet themselves—had to be purged of its predatory history.¹⁷⁷ By providing a location to centralize and regulate the killing of beef cattle

¹⁷⁶ The Commissioner of Indian Affairs expressed this sentiment directly to Agent Allen in 1886. See J.D.C. Atkins to R.A. Allen, March 15, 1886, in “Blackfeet Indian Agency Correspondence—Miscellaneous Letters, 1884-1888,” Folder 59, Record Group 75: Rocky Mountain Region Federal Archives and Records Center, Denver, Colorado (FARC). Also cited in Hana Samek, *The Blackfoot Confederacy, 1880-1920: A Comparative Study of Canadian and U.S. Indian Policy* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1987), 60.

¹⁷⁷ I describe this process in more detail in Chapter One of my dissertation, which focuses on the history of Blackfoot labor in the wolf pelt and whiskey trades of the 1860s and 1870s.

behind closed doors, the slaughterhouse offered Agency administrators an effective way to dissociate this meat from its animal origins, a crucial step in cleansing its predacious past. Representing traditional Blackfeet meat-making labor as predatory, rather than productive, Agency administrators increased their discipline over those Blackfeet who continued to kill and eat cattle in the field. Not surprisingly, the slaughterhouse's completion in 1884—the same year as the passage of Montana's wolf bounty bill—coincided with an increase in the conviction of Blackfeet stock-killers. Thus, the Agency slaughterhouse was key not only for managing the daily production of meat, but for also de-legitimizing the Blackfeet's traditional male labors of hunting, as well as their traditionally female labors of butchering. In short, the slaughterhouse provided both the political and physical means to subordinate Blackfeet land and labor under capitalist production, while also offering regional cattlemen and Agency administrators a means to disavow their own predacious inclinations under the guise of a civilizing and sanitizing mission.

In 1884, the OIA built the reservation's first slaughterhouse, a central element of its civilizing strategy because of the way it confined and categorized the labor associated with killing animals to make meat. Located at the Badger Creek Agency, the facility measured 600 square feet, with a low-ceiling and drafty walls built of hewn logs. By enclosing the production of meat in such a space subject to the supervision of Indian Office administrators, the agency used the slaughterhouse to extend its control over the definition of legitimate labor on the reservation, a definition that no longer encompassed hunting. The OIA hoped that, for the average Blackfeet, making meat would become a process of exchange rather than a direct human-animal interaction,

thereby conforming to Anglo-American standards of wages and market consumption.

This assimilation project also corresponded with the broader expansion of capitalist stock-raising on the Northern Plains. Transforming the Blackfeet from hunters to herders would create a new market for cattle while also providing the rationale to confine the Blackfeet to a smaller reservation. In its subordination of Blackfeet labor, the agency slaughterhouse both reflected and enabled the pursuit of these goals.

At first, confining the Blackfeet came at a cost to the U.S. government. As part of the Blackfeet's treaty negotiations, the tribe had agreed to open their former lands south of the Missouri River to white settlement in 1865, in exchange for fifty-thousand dollars worth of annuity goods distributed over the next twenty years.¹⁷⁸ The exact kinds of goods were not specifically defined, but they originally included flour, coffee, and sugar, along with items of varying uselessness to the Blackfeet, like fishhooks.¹⁷⁹ Although these goods were originally distributed to all enrolled members of the tribe, in 1878 the OIA mandated the bureau-wide adherence to a new policy of making Indians exchange their labor for rations tickets, which could then be used by individuals to purchase annuity goods. By seeking to make the Blackfeet liable for their own subsistence through this form of semi-waged labor, the order underscored the OIA's goal to assimilate the Blackfeet, as well as its obligation to cut its expenditures, which had soared since the establishment of President Grant's "peace policy." Grant's strategy to avert violence between white settlers and Indians hinged on the prohibition of off-reservation hunting, which only increased native reliance on food rations.

¹⁷⁸ Ewers, *The Blackfeet*, 239-240.

¹⁷⁹ In general, the Blackfeet did not fish, despite living on some of the world's finest trout streams.

The OIA envisioned that eligible labor for Blackfoot ration tickets would include agricultural work performed at the agency farm, a pathetic field of frost-bitten vegetables and rotten potatoes. But the Blackfoot's agent, John Young, protested the order on the basis of its infeasibility, ultimately winning the reservation's exemption from the Commissioner of Indian Affairs. Not only was the cultivation of garden crops hopeless along most of the northern front-country, claimed Young, but most of his Indians simply refused to work.¹⁸⁰ Young suggested instead the establishment of an Agency cattle herd from which he could build a reservation stock industry modeled on the vast open-range cattle operations that had recently enveloped the rest of north-central Montana. According to Young's plan, the Blackfoot were to become cattlemen—they were to live off beef, and not just its calories, but its cash proceeds.

In 1879 the Office of Indian Affairs accepted Young's plan and issued the agency its first delivery of 56 animals, augmented with an additional herd of 500 cattle in 1880.¹⁸¹ The primary purpose of this herd was to develop a long-term stock industry on the reservation, not to serve as an emergency source of subsistence. Young estimated it would take until roughly 1885 before the herd grew large enough to sustain the Blackfoot's beef demands. Until that date, Young attempted to keep the herd off-limits from the tribe's daily needs, despite the obvious hunger among the Blackfoot.¹⁸² In promoting a reservation stock industry, the OIA imagined the agency herd as an

¹⁸⁰ John Young to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs (CIA), April 10, 1878, in *Thomas R. Wessel Indian Claims Commission Research Papers, 1855-1979*, Collection 2059, Box 17, Folder 5, Montana State University Special Collections, Bozeman, Montana (MSU).

¹⁸¹ Inspector Howard, "Inspection of the Blackfoot Agency," November 20, 1883 (4949), *Reports of Inspection, 1873-1900*, Reel 2.

¹⁸² Young to CIA, July 12, 1881, Box 17, Folder 8, *Wessel Papers*, MSU: "The stock cows furnished by the Department will not produce Beef, from its increase, for three or four years, and to prevent outrage and the destruction of the herd something must be done to supply sufficient food."

eventual source of cash income that would make the Blackfeet's annuity account self-supporting.¹⁸³ At the agency level, the cattle herd offered an opportunity to instruct the Blackfeet in a process of civilized production—a goal held in accordance with the OIA's broader policies of assimilation—that did not depend on raising crops across the reservation's cold and dry expanses. It offered a means to transform the Blackfeet from hunters to herders, from so-called predators to producers.

A lack of game in the early 1880s made the new cattle issue critical. During the summer and fall of 1882, Blackfoot hunters located only a few scattered herds of bison south of the Missouri River. Killing what they could, the hunters returned to their winter camps on their American and Canadian reservations. Short of meat, the Blackfoot survived the winter dependent on rations issued by their respective federal Indian agents, and on any agency cattle they surreptitiously slaughtered. In the spring of 1883, they had once again left for their hunts, but found almost no bison at all. Instead, they killed other game—elk, deer, antelope—along with a number of wandering cattle owned by white stock raisers.¹⁸⁴

Conditions on the reservation grew increasingly grim over the course of 1883. In July, OIA Inspector Samuel Benedict reported: “No where in my journeying have I seen a country so destitute of wild game, you will ride for miles without seeing even a bird, all animal life seems to have either abandoned the country, or has been sacrificed

¹⁸³ Samek, *The Blackfoot Confederacy*, provides an extensive discussion on the OIA's financial objectives in issuing stock cattle to the Blackfeet in order to scale back rations and cut federal Indian administration expenses.

¹⁸⁴ One of the last bison encountered by Blackfeet hunters was killed early in spring of 1883. See Young to CIA, May 14, 1883, Box 18, Folder 1, *Wessel Papers*, MSU.

to assuage the pangs of hungry men.”¹⁸⁵ Over the next few months, the hunger only increased. Despite Benedict’s pleas for the timely delivery of beef and flour rations owed to the Blackfeet for their recent land cession, freighters from Fort Benton, employed by former whiskey trader T. C. Power, failed to make the hundred-mile trip that summer and fall. By November, the arrival of snow and ice had made the deliveries impossible, and the Blackfeet, living on the remote, windswept backbone of North America, entered the winter months desperately short of food. The Blackfeet who survived did so on an official daily ration of a fifth pound of beef and a third pound of flour, a winter diet of less than 1,000 calories a day.¹⁸⁶

The pangs of starvation greatly interfered with the OIA’s plans to assimilate the Blackfeet through the cattle herd. In desperation, the Blackfeet, along with agency employees, began officially and unofficially slaughtering the agency herd for beef. By 1883, only 132 cattle out of the original issue of 556 remained alive; 704 were killed during one year alone.¹⁸⁷

In the midst of this destruction, Inspector C. H. Howard of the OIA visited the Badger Creek Agency and recommended the immediate construction of the slaughterhouse. Finished the following spring, the facility provided a means to more easily regulate the slaughter of agency cattle, and shortly after its completion, the unofficial killing of agency cattle grew increasingly criminalized. By the early 1890s, agency administrators had convicted so many Blackfeet of killing agency cattle—

¹⁸⁵ Inspector Benedict, July 26, 1883.

¹⁸⁶ H.A. Gillette, M.D., to CIA, letter enclosed in Inspector Howard, “Special Report on the Conditions of the Blackfeet Indians,” November 16, 1883 (4862), in BIA, *Reports of the Inspection of the Field Jurisdictions of the Office of Indian Affairs, 1873-1900 (Reports of Inspection, 1873-1900)*, Reel 2.

¹⁸⁷ Howard, “Special Report,” November 20, 1883.

animals owned, of course, on behalf of the tribe's enrolled members—that the incidents greatly decreased.¹⁸⁸

The convictions of Blackfeet accused of killing non-agency cattle also grew more serious. By the early 1880s, Montana's growing cattle enterprises sought a spatial fix to the over-accumulation and devaluation of beef by literally moving their capital to greener pastures—the under-grazed grasses of the Blackfeet Reservation. On the eve of the 1883 starvation winter, I. G. Baker moved 12,000 head of cattle onto the reservation's southern grasslands. Baker, a prominent Fort Benton merchant, was also responsible for fulfilling the agency's flour deliveries that winter, a task he failed to complete, exacerbating the Blackfeet's dire circumstances. Not surprisingly, the starving Blackfeet began killing his cattle, which were, after all, grazing illegally on their reservation. In response, an outraged Baker, along with other Bentonites who had lost cattle that winter, sent the Choteau County sheriff to the Blackfeet Agency, demanding the arrest of numerous Indians and agent Young, whom they had been indicted by grand jury. Young escaped arrest by handing over the Blackfeet suspects, who were taken off reservation to Fort Benton and imprisoned, quite illegally, in the territorial penitentiary.¹⁸⁹

The incarceration of these Blackfeet men amounted to the criminalization of traditional subsistence hunting. In the absence of other game, these hunters killed and

¹⁸⁸ Agent L.W. Cooke to CIA, "Monthly Report," October 1, 1893, Box 19, Folder 6, *Wessel Papers*, MSU.

¹⁸⁹ Young to CIA, May 14, 1883, Box 18, Folder 1; Young to T.C. Power, April 1, 1884, Box 18, Folder 2; and Young to CIA, "Monthly Report," May 1, 1883, Box 18, Folder 1, *Wessel Papers*, MSU. See also Benedict, July 26, 1883: "By what authority a county sheriff armed with a warrant issued by a territorial district party, enters upon an Indian reservation and makes Indian arrests, and even threatens to arrest the Agent, if he offers any opposition to his mode of procedure, I am unaware. Yet that is the practice in this portion of Montana."

ate Baker's range cattle, animals that wandered the reservation without Baker's supervision, but which he still owned as private property—not unlike the rabbits and deer of an English gentleman's warrens and woods. Even if the Indians were not actually killing cattle, their preferred mode of subsistence troubled the OIA and the regional cattle industry. After another catastrophic winter in 1886, for instance, when thousands of white-owned range cattle froze to death in northern Montana, hungry Blackfeet men left the reservation to search out the carrion. Salvaging this meat was a sensible proposition, but local cattlemen quickly devised a less sensible alternative. They hired skimmers to take as many hides as possible, leaving the meat to rot. Making meat was to be a process of wage labor, not subsistence scavenging.

Agent Young agreed. In the wake of the OIA's 1878 circular, which required all reservation Indians to perform labor in order to receive food rations, Young had protested to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs that instituting this reform on the Blackfeet reservation would prove impossible as long as Blackfeet men continued to hunt. He had long expressed his frustration with the Blackfeet men's seeming unwillingness to labor, "the men holding the notion that work is for women only and so long as hunting obtains subsistence it will take time, patience, and good example to introduce better ideas and practice."¹⁹⁰ The circumscription of subsistence hunting and scavenging forced the Blackfeet to work for wages, or, at least, rations tickets. Incorporating the slaughterhouse as a male space that required male labors of distribution was an important method by which subsequent agents undermined the male

¹⁹⁰ Young to CIA, April 10, 1878, Box 17, Folder 5, *Wessel Papers*, MSU.

hunting tradition. By establishing labor, rather than predation, as the essential input to making meat, OIA authorities could gender labor as male.

By the late 1880s, the first slaughterhouse had not only confined killing and meat production, but had also grown into a reservation institution for male wage labor. The agency hired Blackfeet slaughterers and butchers—paid an annual salary of \$500, mostly in rations tickets—to process about twenty cattle per week, an impressive number given the confines of the 600 square-foot facility. These slaughterers worked under the supervision of the agency farmer, usually a local white man hired for the job. To guard against stock losses, the agency also hired a handful of Blackfeet men to work as full-time herders, along with an Indian police force charged mainly with the task of arresting Blackfeet who continued to hunt their own beef. Remuneration for these jobs was less lucrative than that of the slaughterers, members of the tribal police force, for instance, received only extra rations tickets.¹⁹¹

Agency officials were at first quite pleased with Blackfeet workers at the slaughterhouse. The OIA approvingly reported that at Badger Creek, “beef is kept in better order than at any other agency.” Four years later, another inspection revealed that the “butchering was more neatly and cleanly done than at any other agency in the service, the cattle being killed the day before issue and hung up over night to allow all animal heat to escape. During the summer they have butchered twice a week, and in consequence have had good healthful beef during the hot weather.” The

¹⁹¹ Inspector Cisney, “Inspection of Blackfeet Agency,” March 25, 1890 (2103), BIA, *Reports of Inspection*, Reel 3.

slaughterhouse, it seemed, was cleaning up the Blackfeet's barbarism, and was leading them toward a civilized, healthy living.¹⁹²

By 1892, attempts to transform the Blackfeet Reservation into a grand cattle ranch also seemed to be paying off. Even though Indians on the reservation still faced chronic food shortages, the agency sold its first cattle on the Chicago beef market.¹⁹³ Although these animals were shipped off for slaughter elsewhere, the agency slaughterhouse had allowed the herd to grow. By establishing the slaughterhouse as the only legitimate location for killing beef, the agency consolidated their control over Blackfeet subsistence. The circumscription of Blackfeet hunting accompanied the first slaughterhouse's transformation of Blackfeet meat production. The reservation's second slaughterhouse would reorient meat's distribution and consumption.

Clean Meat and the Second Slaughterhouse

In 1895, the Blackfeet Agency moved to Browning, Montana, and here the OIA built a new slaughterhouse, as well as a separate butcher shop. The move reflected a growing concern for modern and sanitary methods for slaughter. Moreover, by spatially differentiating the work of killing in the slaughterhouse from the work of preparing meat in the butcher shop, the agency helped cleanse meat from its violent origins, a prerogative held in accordance with the OIA's assimilative goal of un-barbarizing the Blackfeet. Since butchering meat had long been a labor performed by Blackfeet

¹⁹² Howard, "Special Report," November 20, 1883; Inspector Barr, "Inspection of Blackfeet Agency," September 22, 1884 (4417); and Inspector Bannister, "Report of Blackfeet Agency," September 29, 1888 (4865), BIA, *Reports of Inspection*.

¹⁹³ Inspector Gardner, "Inspection Report on the Blackfeet Agency," May 20, 1892 (4372), BIA, *Reports of Inspection*, Reel 3.

women, much to the chagrin of their Indian agents, the regulation of butchery within the confines of the butcher shop allowed OIA administrators to further supervise the Blackfeet's assimilation toward Anglo-American standards of gender and labor.

In contrast to the early optimism, by the early 1890s, complaints had arisen regarding sanitation in the first slaughterhouse. Agents and inspectors commented that the old, hewn-log slaughterhouse was too small to accommodate the agency's needs, and that it lacked adequate facilities to dispose of the various animal wastes that accumulated during periods of intensive use amounting to around a thousand cattle per year.¹⁹⁴ Without pressurized hoses or concrete floors, removal of blood and organs from the log building presented a major challenge. Waged Blackfeet laborers, and sometimes prisoners in the agency jail, were faced with the task of maintaining a drainage ditch to carry away offal from the slaughterhouse.¹⁹⁵ Nevertheless, dried blood and rotten bits of flesh and guts supported a menagerie of insects and other creatures within the building's decaying timbered walls. One inspector remarked that the sheer amount of vermin sheltered in agency buildings would require a "sweeping fire to entirely exterminate." This wish was nearly granted in 1889, when a fire that erupted in the agency boarding school spread throughout the rest of the stockade, but ironically spared the slaughterhouse.¹⁹⁶ By 1893, the OIA insisted on its replacement, declaring that "new slaughterhouse is needed where cattle for issue can be slaughtered

¹⁹⁴ Cisney, "Inspection of Blackfeet Agency," March 25, 1890.

¹⁹⁵ Cooke to CIA, October 1, 1893.

¹⁹⁶ Baldwin to CIA, "Monthly Report," September 30, 1888, Box 18, Folder 6; Baldwin to CIA, "Monthly Report," February 28, 1888, Box 18, Folder 6, *Wessel Papers*, MSU.

by a scientific and civilized process.”¹⁹⁷ Sanitized slaughter was becoming a clear concern.

However, concerns over health and sanitation were still bound with perceptions of the Blackfeet as vicious predators. Dating back to his first recommendations for an agency slaughterhouse, Inspector Howard, for instance, found traditional Blackfeet methods of slaughter, their “old, degrading, and disgusting practices,” extremely disturbing, much more so than any other indigenous customs present on the reservation. Prior to its construction, the Blackfeet continued to kill and process cattle—to make meat—using many of their former bison hunting practices, revealing the Agency’s lack of progress in purging the Blackfeet of their seemingly predatory foodways. Rather than stunning and bleeding cattle, a method of slaughter standardized across most of Europe and North America by the late-nineteenth century, the Blackfeet instead ran the agency cattle before killing them, in which case the animals would bleed out more thoroughly through their mouths following a fatal wound to the heart or lungs. And after killing the animal, the Blackfeet would rotate it on its back, peel away its skin and hide, and disembowel and butcher it on the ground—always outside. According to traditional practice, they would consume raw marrow from the leg bones while quartering the animal, and also save its hooves, entrails, pooled-blood, and head meat.¹⁹⁸

The slaughterhouse was supposed to offer a major departure from these older practices, but by the 1890s it was clear that the fictions of humane treatment did not

¹⁹⁷ Inspector McCormick, “Report on Blackfeet Agency,” September 28, 1893 (7469), in BIA, *Reports of Inspection*, Reel 3.

¹⁹⁸ Wissler, “Material Culture of the Blackfoot Indians,” 41.

correspond to slaughterhouse realities. In 1893, a final inspector declared his outrage with the manner in which cattle were slaughtered at the agency. “At present, cattle are caught by casting a lasso around their necks,” declared the inspector, “and in a choking condition drawn by a windlass into the door of the slaughter house, where they are pounded over the head until they fall to the delight and amusement of the Indians.”¹⁹⁹ Not only confining killing, but now further moderating the form of that killing took became a major concern for the OIA’s assimilation project. Even with the slaughterhouse, the boundaries between meat, labor, and killing were not well-enough established.

Reconciling this ambivalence required a further separation of the labor of making meat from the non-labor—the “delight and amusement”—of hunting and killing, and this was accomplished at the new agency by the construction of a butcher shop. After slaughtering and quartering, edible parts of the carcass were transferred to the butcher shop, where they were refashioned into meat suitable for distribution as rations. This physical removal and remaking provided an additional layer in the dissociation of meat from its origins in the flesh of the agency herd. The butcher shop also provided an improvement in terms of the aesthetic quality of the finished meat. Prior to its construction, agency employees chopped the beef with axes, using two logs as a table. This differed little from traditional Blackfeet methods of cutting meat, and disgusted OIA inspectors reported that “by the time it is ready for issue, it is in a horribly mangled condition.”²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁹ McCormick, “Report on Blackfeet Agency,” September 28, 1893.

²⁰⁰ Cisney, “Inspection of Blackfeet Agency,” March 25, 1890.

But this problem transcended a mere point of aesthetics. The butcher shop, like the slaughterhouse before it, provided another facility from which to regulate the distribution of subsistence to the Blackfeet. In this case, however, the agency sought to regulate not just the distribution of healthful meat, but also the consumption of the “animal refuse” commonly eaten by the Blackfeet that OIA administrators deemed unhealthy. This was another problem that had accompanied the first slaughterhouse, and one that persisted, especially while the Blackfeet remained hungry and sought to utilize as much of their beef cattle as possible.

Although the history of the reservation’s early slaughterhouses has been all but ignored by scholars of the Blackfeet, William Farr’s collection of reservation photographs includes two remarkable images of the facilities. In the first photograph, titled “Reaching for entrails,” a group of Blackfeet are crowded around the Badger Creek slaughterhouse peering through holes in the walls, one man reaching his arm through a gap in the timbers (see illustration 2). Trying to pull something from the building’s interior, the man’s image documents the combination of resourcefulness and desperation that characterized reservation life in the 1880s. This kind of “reaching for entrails” is exactly what the OIA intended to stop with the construction of the second slaughterhouse. Framed walls would exclude the grasping hands of hungry Indians from the slaughterhouse’s interior, where the byproducts of meat-making could be wholesomely eliminated. But as the next image indicates, “Agency slaughterhouse, 1905,” the second slaughterhouse was probably more effective at exclusion than sanitation. A portrait taken within the Browning slaughterhouse of two men—one white and one native—posed next to the skinned hindquarters of a steer lifted on a

metal hanger, it reveals only a mop and a bucket of water as a cleaning mechanism (see illustration 3).²⁰¹



Illustration 2: “Reaching for entrails at the agency slaughterhouse, 1887.”

²⁰¹ William Farr, *The Reservation Blackfeet*, 14-15, 52.



From Archives & Special Collections, Mansfield Library, The University of Montana-Missoula

Illustration 3: “Agency Slaughterhouse, 1905.”

For the OIA, clean meat was not necessarily anti-septic meat, but meat from appropriate parts of the animal that had been prepared in acceptable ways by acceptable people. The cuisine created from what many whites considered animal garbage shocked administrators. But further turning the stomachs of colonial administrators was the fact the Blackfeet women held a dominant role in the butchering and preparation of meat, and particularly in the cooking of these more questionable meals. OIA inspectors were horrified to learn that on days of cattle slaughter, “women and children [were] allowed to hover around and paddle in the blood and garbage ad libitum.” Once again, their concerns about Blackfeet modes of meat-making combined the sanitation question

of how to remove rubbish with the colonial question of how to properly manage Blackfeet civilization through their eating and labor practices.²⁰²

The solution the OIA developed was to exclude women from the slaughterhouse and butcher shop:

No women or children should be permitted about the place. A delegation of men from each village might be selected to receive such of the refuse as can, in any possible way, be converted into food. The police could be used to see to an equitable division of these "spoils." The meat should be kept clean. It is now in a disgracefully filthy condition.²⁰³

"Keeping the meat clean" entailed much more than properly bleeding, drying, and hanging animals; it also required setting boundaries on social space that forcibly transferred the distribution of meat from the female to the male domain.

Agency administrators also worked to institutionalize this transformation in a series of attempts to refashion Blackfeet women from butchers into bakers. The fundamental element at stake in this transformation was the Blackfeet diet, which had been long dominated by animal proteins, and which had no analog to bread. Instructing the Blackfeet on how to eat and bake bread became an obsession at the agency boarding school. In 1893, the Blackfeet agent successfully lobbied the OIA to construct an expanded bakery at the new Browning Agency. One of his main concerns was the ability of the agency bakery to produce enough quality bread.²⁰⁴ The OIA also

²⁰² Howard, "Special Report," November 20, 1883.

²⁰³ Howard, "Special Report," November 20, 1883.

²⁰⁴ Cooke, "Monthly Report," December 1, 1893.

attempted to supplement smaller beef rations with weekly issues of flour. Without access to other essential baking ingredients like yeast, or baking powder, most Blackfeet simply consumed the flour plain—likely in some kind of porridge—a circumstance that converted few Blackfeet to the white man’s favorite food.²⁰⁵

Although the second agency slaughterhouse first emerged from concerns over sanitation, its larger evolution grew from OIA urges to keep meat clean by disavowing its predacious origins, and by limiting female control over its preparation and consumption. By building a separate butcher shop, the agency added an additional layer of mystification between meat and its relation to animal flesh. The separation of slaughter and butchery also enabled more effective supervision over the circulation of animal byproducts that represented an important component of the Blackfeet diet. By restructuring Blackfeet foodways to suit the objectives of federal Indian assimilation, the slaughterhouse provided a key institution for colonial policy.

Conclusion

Meat’s relationships with colonization reveal connections between the dispossessions of Blackfeet land and labor. As a physical and cultural link between land, bodies, and work, meat adjudicated understandings of human and animal difference, of race, of gender, and of civilization and barbarism. Regulating access to meat provided the OIA an important means to transform the Blackfeet into colonial subjects.

²⁰⁵ Howard, “Special Report on Conditions of Blackfeet Indians,” November 16, 1883 (4862), in BIA, *Reports of Inspection*, Reel 2.

OIA attempts to subordinate and reform Blackfeet labor focused on transforming Blackfeet foodways. By 1895, the new slaughterhouse and butcher shop at the Browning Agency had instituted profound changes in the means by which the Blackfeet acquired their subsistence. Trading work for prepared meat dissociated from its animal origin had reoriented the process of making meat from a collaborative project of hunting and butchering bison to an individuated procedure of exchanging labor for beef. By putting hunting under siege, and by forcing a separation of “productive” labor from the predatory non-labor of hunting, the slaughterhouse provided the means by which the OIA could enforce its colonial dictum to either “work or starve.”

The agency slaughterhouses also fit into larger patterns of the late-nineteenth-century livestock industry. Like northern Mexico, the Central Plains, and other dry, grassy interiors of North America, cattle raised on the northern Rocky Mountain front mostly fed urban consumers. Until the 1890s, the Blackfeet Reservation was an exception to this rule. A longstanding hunting tradition, along with the demands of hunger, brought the Blackfeet to kill their cattle to satisfy their immediate needs, rather than the needs of a distant marketplace. The agency slaughterhouse proved instrumental in disciplining this aberration. By restructuring Blackfeet foodways, the agency’s slaughterhouses opened the way for the reservation’s integration as a beef production outpost within a global food system that channeled profits to large owners of animal capital.

Under the pressures of federal assimilation policy, food not only fueled labor, but it also helped determine what counted as labor. The transformation of the Blackfeet into colonial subjects relied, in part, on OIA authority over beef, which could not be

hunted, only rationed out or purchased. On the Blackfeet Reservation, beef compelled a new way of life alongside a new basis of subsistence.

The next chapter documents the acceleration of the reservation's cattle industry in the first decades of the twentieth century. Tensions over the source of value in the stock industry brought controversies over native labor and assimilation policy into sharp relief over land allotment. These cases reveal Blackfeet and white stockgrowers attempted to obscure value's broad, ecological origins in order to ascribe the benefits of human and nonhuman labor to themselves; but they also reveal how Blackfeet resistance to these notions limited their success. Federal officials and Agency personnel did their best to ignore on-the-ground realities affecting the success and failure of their reservation policies, and instead deployed a number of cultural expectations of the Blackfeet as predators in order to redouble their justifications for the reservation's continued colonial mismanagement. The OIA's assimilation policies sought to incorporate the Blackfeet as unequal participants in the borderland's broader cattle economy. These policies hinged on a discourse of predation and production that discipline Blackfeet deviations from Anglo-American notions of labor and land tenure.

Chapter 4:

The Place that Feeds You

The winter of 1919 blasted an exodus of settlers from the Northern Rockies front-country. A crippling drought had broken that November, but it was immediately followed by a series of eastward-rolling storms that cemented the range with a glaze of ice through April. Stockgrowers spent the winter miserably awaiting the deaths of their starving and freezing cattle. Those who could afford hay paid up to five times its usual price. Others simply loaded their underweight steers on railcars to Chicago, selling them at a loss. As the spring thaw commenced, the saturated beef market crashed when stockgrowers across the northern plains sold out their herds to cover enormous debts. Meanwhile, post-war price depressions in wheat and barley bankrupted the region's dry-land farms, already suffering from the ecological repercussions of bonanza agriculture. At the same moment that Europe's granaries recovered from the shock of total war, the high plains' fragile soils shuddered under aggressive bumper crops that had reduced entire fields to "a solid mat of Russian thistle," as Wallace Stegner remembered the fate of his own childhood homestead, just a few miles above the Montana border. Along with thousands of other settlers, Stegner's family fled the landscape they had desiccated; by the winter of 1920, few remained.²⁰⁶

These combined misfortunes of climate, commerce, and industrial agriculture ravaged the Blackfeet as well, but unlike their Anglo-American neighbors, the Blackfeet could not pick up and move their capital to greener pastures. Incorporated into the free market of twentieth-century agriculture under different legal conditions

²⁰⁶ Wallace Stegner, *Wolf Willow* (New York: Penguin Press, 2000 [1962]), 282-283.

than those of white homesteaders and stockgrowers, most Blackfeet could not sell their reservation land allotments until 1918, and only then with the approval of Office of Indian Affairs (OIA) administrators. These federal agents determined which individual Blackfeet were “competent” to own fee title to the hundreds of acres of land that the federal government held for them in trust since the reservation’s allotment in 1907. With few other options, most Blackfeet remained on the reservation and continued living day-to-day on OIA food rations, and on wildlife and cattle that they hunted.

The political ecology of the reservation changed dramatically in 1921, however, with the establishment of the Piegan Farming and Livestock Association (PFLA), a collection of 29 Blackfeet-led farming districts across the reservation, organized around the cooperative use of individual land allotments for the common goal of reservation food security. By 1923, the Blackfeet were raising enough chickens, pigs and cattle, and growing enough wheat, potatoes, and other vegetables through the PFLA to satisfy their own annual needs, as well as some market demand off the reservation. During a decade when industrial agriculture in Montana, Alberta, and Saskatchewan faced economic crises of unprecedented magnitude, the Blackfeet had organized an alternative agricultural community that sustained its members through an emphasis on the local production, distribution, and consumption of mixed food crops.

This local understanding of sustenance had long been an essential component of Blackfeet conceptions of home and territory. The Blackfoot word for territory, *áuasini*, translates into English as a combination of food and place, something like “the place that feeds you.” The word expressed broader Blackfoot knowledge of human-nonhuman kinship and relational selfhood; an acknowledgement that one does not

autonomously feed oneself, but necessarily relies on a wider set of social, animal, and environmental relations to acquire sustenance. It drew on Blackfoot understandings of selfhood that were unlike the production-focused individualism residing at the core of OIA assimilation policies during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.

Rather than forging an autonomous selfhood through a series of dualisms that abstracted persons from their environments, as colonial capitalism sought to effect, Blackfoot knowledge combined embedded selfhood within concepts of place. So too did production and consumption co-exist as inseparable processes. Value circulated and re-circulated throughout a world of kinship obligations held between human and nonhuman persons. These Blackfeet understandings revealed predation as a cultural concept specific to Anglo-American colonialism, an ontological structure that worked to determine the legitimacy of the individuated labors of abstracted selves. In contrast, according to Blackfeet indigenous knowledge there was predation and production were mutual concepts.²⁰⁷

The PFLA emerged as an expression of two decades' worth of organized Blackfeet resistance to OIA cattle leasing and allotment policy. The accommodations to colonialism worked out by the Blackfeet had hinged on mobilizing Blackfeet understandings of relational selfhood to work within the exigencies of modern colonial capitalism. In spite of criticism that depicted the PFLA, alternately, as both "old-fashioned" and "Bolshevistic," the project earned praise for establishing a level of food

²⁰⁷ I do not speak Blackfoot. For my reconstructions of Blackfoot words and concepts, including *áuasini*, I have relied mainly on two sources: Betty Bastien, *Blackfoot Ways of Knowing: The Worldview of the Siksikaitsitapi* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2004), 197-198, and C.C. Uhlenbeck, *An English-Blackfoot Vocabulary Based on Material from the Southern Peigans* (Amsterdam: Koninklijke Akademie van Wetenschappen te Amsterdam, 1930), 54.

security unheard of in Blackfeet country since the 1870s. Indeed, thanks to the PFLA's success in incubating Blackfeet notions of place within the exigencies of allotment and federal assimilation policy, by 1924 its Blackfeet members claimed that they had become "the most progressive tribe of Indians in the United States."²⁰⁸

With the PFLA, the Blackfeet were not simply "reviving tradition," but articulating a new vision of relational selfhood during the Progressive Era that drew on indigenous knowledge to understand individual livelihood in the modern world as a part of a cooperative enterprise that spanned the labor of human and nonhuman persons. Since the 1880s, the OIA had worked to divest the Blackfeet of their tribal obligations and assimilate them as individuated selves. This push ironically coincided with an historic moment in which the very model of autonomous selfhood capitulated under the tide of corporate-industrial capitalism, a transformation studied by historians such as James Livingston and Jackson Lears.²⁰⁹ Drawing on their own indigenous knowledge of kinship and selfhood, and on the lessons learned from their experience with modern agricultural, the Blackfeet were in a suitable position to address the challenges that drove so many of their white neighbors from the land. They realized, as well, that the cooperative use of their privatized land resources provided a meaningful way to develop economic independence and community sovereignty in an era when mass market forces reshaped social relationships throughout North America.

²⁰⁸ "Minutes of Meeting: Resolutions Committee," March 30, 1925, Record Group 75, CCF-1, File 27506-1923-BF-100, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), published in Paul Rosier, *Rebirth of the Blackfeet Nation, 1912-1954* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), 36.

²⁰⁹ See Jackson Lears, *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1995); and James Livingston, *Pragmatism and the Political Economy of Cultural Revolution, 1850-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994).

The previous chapter examined the role of the reservation's slaughterhouse as an institution through which the OIA attempted to subordinate Blackfoot labor and circumscribe hunting, procedures that hinged on Anglo-American visions of purging the Blackfeet of their predatory foodways. This chapter traces the evolution of Blackfoot relational selfhood in structuring Blackfoot resistance to OIA colonialism in the early twentieth century. Intra-tribal debates over OIA grazing leases and reservation cattle trespass led many Blackfeet increasingly to question Anglo-American standards of selfhood, labor, and value during the first decade of the 1900s. One of the leaders that emerged from these debates was Robert Hamilton, whose tireless campaign against the Allotment Act's surplus land sale provision succeeded with its repeal in 1919. Hamilton's focus on land as the basis for Blackfoot economic independence drew on a well-spring of Blackfoot notions of *áuasini* that informed the PFLA during the 1920s. As the capitalist dissociations of industrial agriculture collapsed around the post-war northern plains, the PFLA offered the Blackfeet an alternative means to reconfigure their world.

This history of the PFLA's successes, however, has been mostly overlooked, both in the historiographies of northern plains agriculture and of the Blackfeet. The PFLA's prioritization of self-reliance over commercial sale marks the organization as an imperfect fit in the industrial narrative of northern plains agriculture in the early-twentieth century, a history that has been well documented by historians of environment and technology such as Deborah Fitzgerald, Mark Fiege, and Rod Bantjes.²¹⁰ Yet

²¹⁰ See Rod Bantjes, *Improved Earth: Prairie Space as Modern Artefact, 1869-1944* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005); Mark Fiege, "The Weedy West: Mobile Nature, Boundaries, and Common Space in the Montana Landscape," *Western Historical Quarterly* Spring 2005: 22-47; and Deborah

despite its crucial departures from industrial, market-based agriculture, the PFLA bore certain similarities with the organized factory farms, weed control districts, and farmers' cooperatives that these and other historians have studied. Like other progressive-era agricultural associations, the PFLA responded to Montana's agricultural challenges in the 1920s by encouraging social cooperation. Far from developing in an isolated colonial vacuum, the PFLA emerged as part of a larger regional, national, and transnational trend toward the social reorganization of farming in the decade following the First World War.

To a large extent, historians of the Blackfeet have also neglected to make this point. John C. Ewers, himself an Indian Bureau employee, described the PFLA mainly as an overdue success of federal assimilation policy. "Learning to walk alone," as Ewers put it, the Blackfeet finally began unraveling the threads of dependency by the 1920s. Rather than marking a juncture in Blackfeet history that brought reservation food politics into transnational debates over the modern future of social and agricultural practices, Ewers identified the PFLA as mostly continuous with the spirit of Indian Office philanthropy as it had existed on the reservation since the 1880s. Paul Rosier has echoed this interpretation in his otherwise excellent history of twentieth-century Blackfeet tribal politics, understating the PFLA's significance in resituating the Blackfeet at the forefront of broader agricultural transformations. Thomas Wessel, historian for the Indian Claims Commission in the 1970s, focused on the longer-term consequences agricultural policy, has overlooked the momentary possibilities that the PFLA posed for the Blackfeet in the 1920s.

Fitzgerald, *Every Farm a Factory: The Industrial Ideal in American Agriculture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

This oversight is also due to the fact that ever since the industrialization of North American agriculture in the early-twentieth century, agricultural historians have been held in thrall to the logic of predation that has structured their subsequent understandings of what constitutes modern agriculture. As discussed in Chapter Two, this logic served to propel the cultural ascendance of industrial stock-raising in places like northern Montana and southern Alberta, both by fixing visions of productive labor to the humanized figure of the cattleman, and by animalizing the so-called predatory labors of wolves, Indians, and others. As Chapter Three explained, this logic also worked to circumscribe Blackfoot foodways on the reservation throughout the OIA's assimilation campaigns of the 1880s and 1890s; first by identifying Blackfoot ways of making meat as predatory, and then by dissociating meat from its animal origins—via the slaughterhouse—in attempts to make Blackfoot wage labor the basis for legitimate production. A similar process accompanied the industrialization of agriculture across the northern plains, particularly wheat farming. As the Farm Bureau, the Non-Partisan League, the State Extension Service, and other associational entities worked to bind industrial wheat production to the social core of national agriculture in the 1910s and 1920s, they did so in the various contexts of designating competing interests as both metaphorical and literal predators—in some cases banks and railroads, in other cases immigrants and squatters. During these years, the disavowal of one's own predatory inclinations proved key in establishing legitimate claims as a producer. Once cordoned off as an industry of production, aligned primarily with wheat monoculture, the category of northern plains agriculture remained, at best, mostly off limits from mixed-farming projects like the PFLA. And at worst, according to these conceptions, the

PFLA represented an unacceptable bricolage, a Bolshevistic anathema to the prevailing industrial order.

Cattle and Labor

By the early 1900s, the growth of the reservation cattle industry had begun to shatter Blackfoot political cohesion. For the next thirty years, battles between the reservation's pro-cattle and anti-cattle factions dominated debates over the future promises of Blackfoot national sovereignty and livelihood. Different understandings of predation, labor, and the origins of value lay at the center of these controversies. Different visions of land, cattle, and labor animated discussions of Blackfoot nationhood. Blackfoot cattlemen, with key support from the OIA, imagined the Blackfoot Reservation as a vast grazing reserve where individual Indian stockgrowers would base their economic independence on the market sale of beef cattle. Other Blackfoot objected to the privatization of the reservation's animal capital, and emphasized tribal obligations to community well-being over the accumulation of individual fortunes in beef. Blackfoot understandings of labor, kinship, human-animal personhood, and relational selfhood stood at the heart of these objections, while an ethos of pioneering individualism pervaded the reservation's cadre of cattlemen and their allies at agency headquarters.

The expansion of the cattle industry accentuated the class divisions that emerged on the reservation during the late 1800s. In 1902, an OIA survey revealed that only 572 Blackfoot out of a population of over 2,000 owned any cattle, while 47 owned over 100

head each.²¹¹ Intra-tribal divisions over cattle wracked Blackfeet politics during the early-twentieth century. With cattle ownership increasingly concentrated among a core elite of reservation stockgrowers near the agency headquarters in Browning, the OIA forged key alliances with Blackfeet ranchers in their efforts to privatize reservation landownership through the allotment process. However, opposition to allotment mounted primarily by non-cattle owning Blackfeet succeeded in halting the sale of so-called “surplus” unallotted land under the Blackfeet’s original allotment act. Opposition to allotment also provided the political mobilization necessary for the development of the Piegan Farming and Livestock Association, which advocated mixed subsistence agriculture as an alternative to a reservation export economy oriented around the sale of marketable beef cattle.

For the OIA, cattle remained the key for assimilating Blackfeet livelihood to Anglo-American standards of production and individualism, and for subordinating Blackfeet land and labor within Montana’s industrial livestock economy. Agent George Steell exemplified the OIA’s faith in the revolutionary power of cattle in remaking the Blackfeet: “The possession of cattle and the proper care and protection of this stock will make the man out of the Indian... the influence of the Chiefs and Medicine Men will disappear.”²¹² Individual ownership of cattle and the husbanding of those animals would purge the Blackfeet of their predatory inclinations and assimilate them into the American capitalist body politic.

²¹¹ Agent James Monteath to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, October 16, 1902, File 78824, Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Record Group 75, National Archives, Washington, D.C. Cited in Thomas R. Wessel, “Agriculture on the Reservations: The Case of the Blackfeet, 1885-1935,” *Journal of the West* 17 (October 1979): 18-23.

²¹² George Steell to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Feb 27, 1893, Record Group 75, Federal Records Center, Denver, Colorado. Cited Wessel, “Agriculture on the Reservations.”

But the successful establishment of a reservation cattle regime that benefited the Blackfeet, rather than the reservation's white neighbors, faced substantial obstacles. Foremost among the problems was livestock trespass. For decades, white cattlemen had trespassed sheep and cattle on the reservation, sometimes with hundreds or even thousands of head at a time. Since the reservation was largely unfenced, neighboring herders had little to fear from charges of trespass. If caught and confronted by the reservation's tribal police or its few line riders, the herders could usually get off by claiming their stock strayed onto the reservation by accident, at which point the Blackfeet were obliged to assist in rounding up and herding their stock back off the reservation. The lack of a suitable boundary fence made it difficult, if not impossible, to prove if a stock-raiser had herded animals onto the reservation unless they were caught in the act.

Even when trespassing cattlemen were prosecuted and OIA agents levied fines against the offender, the payments were rarely collected. The political will necessary to punish and prevent cattle trespass did not exist in Browning any more than it did in neighboring county jurisdictions. For instance, in 1892 Steell wrote a stern warning to the trespassing foreman of the Flowerree Cattle Company, notifying him that "I will be compelled to take steps towards collecting for the grazing of these cattle upon Indian lands. In the future you must see that your cattle do not infringe upon the rights of these Indians."²¹³ The fines were never collected, and Steell was himself convicted of cattle trespass a year later, when other employees at the agency reported that he brought his

²¹³ Steell to Herman Knoell, Flowerree and Lowery Cattle Co., August 6, 1892, in *Thomas R. Wessel Indian Claims Commission Research Papers, 1855-1979*, Collection 2059 (TW-ICC), Box 19, Folder 4: Montana State University Special Collections, Bozeman, Montana (MSU).

own private herd to graze in the agency enclosure.²¹⁴ Cattle trespass was widespread, difficult to control, and present even within the highest levels of reservation's bureaucracy.

Accepting the realities of reservation cattle trespass, the OIA began a policy of leasing portions of the Blackfeet Reservation to non-Blackfeet grazers in 1904, a proposition that at least garnered some income from the Montana cattlemen who continually turned stock loose on the reservation. The decision to lease the reservation also led the construction of a much-needed boundary fence, which was completed in time for the first lessees toward the end of 1904. Not surprisingly, the reservation round-up conducted that fall discovered a large number of off-reservation cattle of various ages that had been grazing on the reservation for quite some time, bearing the brands of prominent local stock-growers, many of whom signed on as the reservation's largest lessees. A report filed with an auditor from the Treasury Department in 1907, for instance, showed Dan Flowerree with 6,000 head of cattle on the Reservation, William Wallace, Jr. with 4,500, and the Sun River Stock and Land Co. with 1,500 cattle and 500 horses. These animals greatly outnumbered the Blackfeet's small tribal herd, as well as the private herds of the larger Blackfeet stock-growers. Less than a dozen Blackfeet ran herds larger than 100 head, and none owned more than 1,000 animals.²¹⁵

²¹⁴ See Inspector Gardner to CIA, May 14, 1892 (3527), in United States Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), *Reports of the Inspection of the Field Jurisdictions of the Office of Indian Affairs, 1873-1900* (Washington, D.C.: National Archives Microfilm Publications) M1070, Reel 3.

²¹⁵ Clarence Churchill to Auditor, U.S. Treasury Department, January 4, 1907, in *TW-ICC*, Box 2, Folder 4: MSU.

Although this leasing program generated revenue for the agency, it also created a number of problems. First, Blackfeet owners of private herds protested the presence of outside cattle grazing on reservation grass. They correctly alleged that the new leasing policy was a scheme to abandon the OIA's responsibility of managing tribal lands for the benefit of Blackfeet-owned cattle, in order to raise revenue for the agency at the expense of Blackfeet stockgrowers. They also protested the measure in light of the fact that they had been paying grazing taxes for their own private cattle to the agency since the 1890s. The leasing policy with outsiders left Blackfeet grazers without any real advantage as Blackfeet over the white cattlemen stocking their reservation with thousands of cattle.

Somewhere, they asserted, agency policy needed to change, and the largest Blackfeet cattlemen fought vociferously to end the grazing tax on private Blackfeet cattle, winning OIA agents to their side. To that end, they protested the sub-classification of reservation cattle that left their herds subject to taxation. Cattle issued to Blackfeet individuals by the OIA under treaty were branded "ID" for Indian Department, and were not subject to the tax, while "straight" cattle, those bought off-reservation by enrolled Blackfeet and given their individual brands were taxed. Beginning in 1904, all three Blackfeet agents during this era, J.Z. Dare, Churchill, and McFtridge simply refused to collect grazing taxes, which transformed into a hardened dispute with their Indian Office superiors. The spirit of the tax, claimed Blackfeet cattlemen and their agency allies, seemed to contravene the OIA's mission to assimilate the Blackfeet as capitalist stock-raisers. As McFtridge explained, "to me it appears to favor those who have obtained cattle through no exertion of their own, nor expenditure

of their personal funds, and puts a penalty on those who by industry and frugality have accumulated cattle which are not branded ID.” But the OIA rejected proposals to end both the “straight” tax and the outside leases on the basis that both generated much-needed revenue to pay for the agency’s routine operations.²¹⁶ OIA headquarters hewed to policy decisions that would make agency administration self-funding, at the expense of aiding “industrious” Blackfeet stockgrowers, an outlook that infuriated Blackfeet cattlemen as well as agency employees in Browning.

A second problem with the leasing program was how easily local stock growers could manipulate it. These cattlemen cooperated to bid grazing contracts with the agency down to the lowest amount possible—to the point where it was cheaper for white lessees to graze cattle on the reservation than for Blackfeet ranchers to graze their “straight” cattle. By 1908, grazing leases on the Blackfeet Reservation were significantly cheaper than on the Crow Reservation, where a similar program had been put in place. That year, the Blackfeet reservation’s highest bids came in at \$1.30 per head, a full 20 cents less than the grazing tax paid by Blackfeet ranchers on “straight” cattle. Agent Churchill seemed aware of this problem, but was unable to do much about it, short of refusing to lease to anyone. “It appears to me that this offer is a concocted scheme on the part of all former permittees,” he wrote to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, “procuring the maximum grazing for the minimum cost.”²¹⁷ The OIA offered no effective response. Rather than setting a standard price schedule for grazing leases,

²¹⁶ See J.Z. Dare to CIA, April 26, 1907, in *TW-ICC*, Box 2, Folder 2; James Sanders to CIA, September 3, 1908, in *TW-ICC*, Box 2, Folder 3; Churchill to CIA, April 23, 1909, in *TW-ICC*, Box 2, Folder 4; McFtridge to CIA, November 28, 1911, in *TW-ICC*, Box 3, Folder 2; and Abbot to Secretary of Interior, January 22, 1912, in *TW-ICC*, Box 3, Folder 3.

²¹⁷ Churchill to CIA, September 15, 1909, in *TW-ICC*, Box 2, Folder 4.

the OIA continued its policy of open-market bidding for Montana cattlemen, while subjecting Blackfeet stockgrowers to a static grazing tax on their own reservation.

Not surprisingly, lessees under the OIA's program also consistently cheated their leases by stocking the range with greater numbers of cattle than they were permitted. In 1906, Churchill reported his suspicion that there were around 10 to 15 percent more cattle on the reservation than officially reported. At that rate, lessees would have owed around an additional \$1,500 a year, enough to pay the salaries of four additional agency farmers or livestock supervisors. This trespass was difficult to confirm, however, because the agency let its lessees handle the bulk of the round-up labor. The lessees were responsible for reporting the number of cattle they grazed on the reservation, since agency personnel alone could not tackle alone the enormous task of the rounding up all the reservation's stock. With around 20,000 head officially grazing on the reservation by 1907, the great majority were owned by off-reservation lessees.²¹⁸

The geographic placement of these leases also posed a problem that would erupt in political division between pro-cattle and anti-cattle Blackfeet. The economic benefits of the leases were largely captured by the agency administration, while its environmental externalities fell on local groups of non-cattle-owning Blackfeet. Since the leases were organized by grazing districts, everyone on the reservation supposedly benefited from the revenue generated by the leases, but the ill-effects of the lessee's huge cattle herds were confined to local populations. Generally, the communities hardest hit by these circumstances were poorer, cattle-less Blackfeet living in the

²¹⁸ J.Z. Dare to Auditor, U.S. Treasury Department, January 4, 1907, in *TW-ICC*, Box 2, Folder 2.

southern and eastern portions of the reservation, rather than the relatively prosperous Blackfeet ranchers, clustered in and around Browning (see illustration 4). Blackfeet living on a denuded rangeland surrounded by thousands of white-owned livestock learned firsthand the aggravations of living near range cattle. The process of making beef on a grazing lease required the cosmic efforts of the sun and water, the metabolic efforts of grass and the cattle themselves, and the willingness of Blackfeet to suffer the social and ecological consequences of range degradation. The cattle leases left the Blackfeet with wrecked stream banks and piles of manure, while the profits from the sale of beef raised on the reservation went to off-reservation cattlemen and money from grazing leases filtering into the coffers of the Indian agent. By 1909, residents in the hardest hit districts complained bitterly about these injustices to agent Churchill, who passed their sentiments on to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs. The OIA nevertheless decided to continue the leasing program at least until the planned completion of the reservation's allotment, in 1912.²¹⁹

²¹⁹ Churchill to CIA, September 15, 1909, in *TW-ICC*, Box 2, Folder 4.

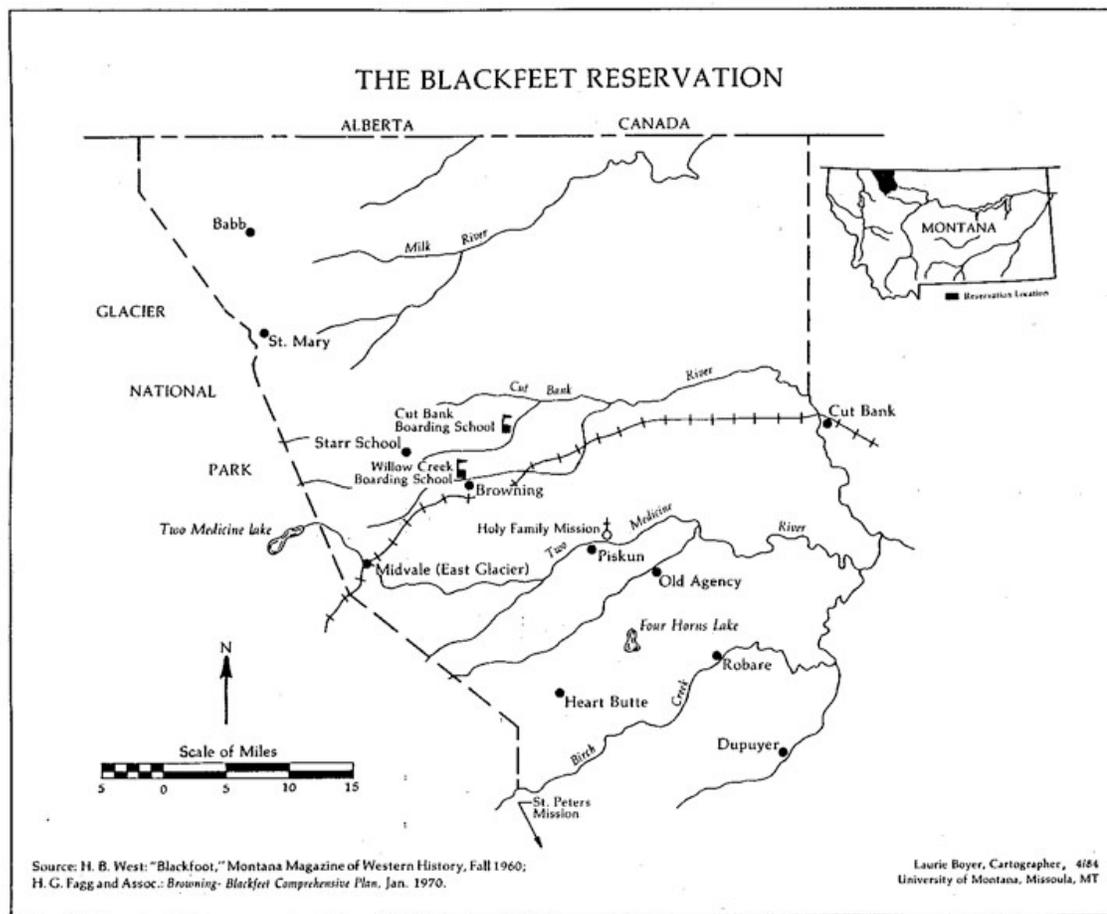


Illustration 4: Map of the Blackfeet Reservation.²²⁰

In the midst of these debates over trespass and leasing cases, the merciless winter of 1919 was foreshadowed by another brutal winter in 1906. To OIA personnel invested in the cattle industry, the winter seemed to turn back the clock. Many starving Blackfeet began once again “living like wolves,” scavenging meat from frozen beef carcasses. The next spring, agent Dare reported, “The loss of cattle during the past winter to both Indians and permittees, has been very heavy and many Indians have been

²²⁰ In the early-twentieth century, Blackfeet cattle owners mostly lived around Browning and on the northern end of the reservation. Poorer Blackfeet who did not own cattle tended to live on the southern half of the reservation, particularly around Heart Butte where the OIA relocated many of them in 1902 in order to work on the irrigation projects along the Two Medicine River. Image from William Farr, *The Reservation Blackfeet, 1882-1945: A Photographic History of Cultural Survival* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1984), 1.

subsisting from cattle that have died from the effects of the cold, and from the sale of hides taken from the carcasses of said animals.”²²¹ That year’s winter almost completely wiped out a large issue of ID beef cattle made to individual Blackfeet the previous summer. Purchased from the Texas panhandle, where a large glut of poorly-bred beeves had driven down prices, the OIA shipped the cattle over one-thousand miles to Browning, just in time for the one of the worst winters in twenty years. Most of the un-seasoned Texas cattle died. Three years later, Churchill expressed his doubts that “there are [even] five hundred head of the 2000 cows and calves issued now living. One mixed blood Indian who has been more successful in stock raising than the average tells me that some of this southern stock actually froze to death while standing in sheds knee deep in hay at his ranch.” The great die-off temporarily crippled the reservation cattle industry, as even the largest stockowners on the reservation contemplated insolvency. But more importantly, the majority of Blackfeet cattle owners, most of whom owned fewer than half a dozen animals, were immediately devastated by the loss of their small herds. With few other sources of livelihood for the coming year, these people would be end up back on the rations rolls, or else stalking others’ cattle, as OIA administrators anticipated.²²²

Fearing another string of depredations like the ones of the pre-slaughterhouse days, the reservation’s large stock growers and lessees agitated for greater enforcement of anti-rustling laws. Whether the incidence of cattle theft actually increased from 1907 onward or not, most reservation stock-growers and off-reservation lessees seemed to think it had. In 1909, Churchill reported that “cattle and horse thieves have been

²²¹ Dare to CIA, May 1, 1907, in *TW-ICC*, Box 2, Folder 2.

²²² *Annual Report of the Blackfeet Agency*, Nov. 12, 1909, in *TW-ICC*, Box 2, Folder 4.

working on the reservation to an alarming extent the past year,” even rustling off a herd of work horses used by Bureau of Reclamation.²²³ Some of the worst victims of theft were small Blackfeet stock-owners with ID cattle. The unsophisticated “I D” brand was easily worked over by experienced cattle hands, probably some of whom already had practice doing so on other northern plains reservations like the Crow, Pine Ridge, or Rosebud.²²⁴ In 1909, Churchill was reluctant to report that the theft of cattle had reached a fever pitch.²²⁵ Unable to assuage the stockgrowers’ concerns over theft, and unable to improve conditions for the increasing numbers of starving enrollees, Churchill resigned his position later that winter.

His successor, the notorious Arthur McFatridge, hastily formed the Blackfeet Stock Protective Association (BSPA) to address the problem of cattle theft. Seeking to run the Blackfeet Reservation like his own personal cattle kingdom, McFatridge envisioned himself as a twentieth-century successor to Granville Stuart, the wealthy rancher who cemented Montana’s vigilante tradition by orchestrating the murders of alleged cattle thieves in the 1880s. Harkening back to the old-time vigilante groups that had terrorized Montana in the years after the Civil War, McFatridge organized the Blackfeet Stock Protective Association, and charged it with protecting the reservation’s animal property. With a contempt for legal process unusual by federal standards, but typical by Montana standards, McFatridge deputized the BSPA’s members, granting them the authority to summarily arrest and jail any individual caught stealing or killing cattle on the reservation. Forty-three men paid five dollars each for this power.

²²³ *Annual Report of the Blackfeet Agency*, Nov. 12, 1909, in *TW-ICC*, Box 2, Folder 4.

²²⁴ In Evelyn M. Rhoden, “Cattle Rustling.” WPA Records, Collection 2336, Box 53, Folder 8, MSU. “Blackfoot Cattle Brands.” WPA Records, Collection 2336, Box 73, Folder 6, MSU.

²²⁵ *Annual Report of the Blackfeet Agency*, Nov. 12, 1909, in *TW-ICC*, Box 2, Folder 4.

McFatrige himself anxiously wrote his superiors in Washington, D.C., begging for the approval to grant this authority. Despite its auspicious start, the BSPA would not amount to much, other than a bullying organization for the reservation's budding cattlemen.²²⁶

Despite these substantial headwinds, from the 1890s through 1912, when the reservation's allotment was completed, Blackfoot stock growers amassed modest fortunes raising cattle on the reservation, building their herds through a series of federal decisions that favored their enterprise, through the purchase of other Indians' tribal issues of stock cattle, and through partnerships with white cattlemen living off the reservation. However, the majority of Blackfeet continued to struggle in the market economy. Mostly without cattle, without opportunities for employment, and lacking access to traditional sources of subsistence, these Indians lived without cash and remained on the ration rolls.

Like Montana's wolf bounty laws, the BSPA's short-lived vigilante uprising against cattle rustlers reflected stock growers' desires to regulate the legitimacy of the labors of hunting and husbanding, more than its actual effectiveness in eliminating fraud and theft. As such, the BSPA was a means to harness representations of predator and producer to justify the particular flow of value from cattle to their owners as much as it was intended to make sure that this flow actually did occur. This emphasis on regulating forms of labor, rather than measuring labor in simple terms of subsistence and provision, also mirrored the Office of Indian Affairs' wider approach to labor and assimilation policy on the Blackfeet Reservation. The OIA hoped to transform the

²²⁶ See McFatrige to CIA, April 16, 1912, in *TW-ICC*, Box 3, Folder 4.

Blackfeet from “idle tramps,” as Senator Charles Dawes had described them in 1885, into sturdy, individual cattle growers, albeit not ones independent, but rather dependent on markets controlled by a regional white elite. This was the essence of colonialism—the ruling class’s disavowal of its own predatory inclinations through the adjudication of legitimate labor and non-labor.

The Blackfeet sought their own modern alternatives to this colonial binary of predation and production. At the heart of their considerations was a tension over valuations of labor as communal or individual. Concealing the contributions of human and nonhuman others to “self-making” of individual capitalists offered the main advantage of colonialism’s discourse of production. But in seeking to disenchant and de-animate the origins of value in their representations of labor, capitalist stock growers nevertheless relied on animal labor, and were forced to recognize this dependence in their day-to-day operations. The reservation’s livestock regime existed in tension with Blackfeet knowledge of *áuatcini*, and controversies over allotment would further expose these divisions between the OIA’s goals of cattle-based individualism.

Allotment and Land Sales

Cattle ranching and allotment politics made for strange bedfellows on the Blackfeet Reservation. Left completely un-allotted until 1907, a full twenty years after the passage of the Dawes Act, the reservation had become a unique grazing landscape precisely because of its un-allotted lands. As homesteaders carved up the Montana plains and plowed under its cattle trails, many local white ranchers viewed the reservation as a final refuge of open-range stock-raising. OIA personnel were well

aware of this fact, Clarence Churchill explaining that “stockmen who are acquainted with all the grazing sections of the State, admit that there is no better grazing in any part of Montana than the Blackfeet Reservation.”²²⁷ In managing the Reservation’s grasslands, the OIA was tasked with balancing the needs of the Blackfeet’s tribal herd, along with the needs of individually-owned cattle herds owned by a few prosperous enrolled Blackfeet, and, after 1904, the desires of local whites who began leasing significant portions of the reservation’s acreage. This was a challenging job that the OIA was ill-suited to undertake. The allotment process aggravated its difficulties.

As Blackfeet foodways shifted during the early reservation era, the Blackfeet adapted their visions of land and sovereignty to reflect changed circumstances in food production and distribution. John C. Ewers, the well-respected mid-twentieth-century Blackfeet historian, remarked that Blackfeet survival during this era—the 1870s through the 1920s—relied on a process of “trading land for food.” According to Ewers, the major land cessions of this period, which reduced the reservation from around 50,000 square miles to 3,000 square miles—a difference approximately the size of Pennsylvania—were accepted by the Blackfeet because their vast eastern ranges no longer supported bison (see illustration 5). And after the adoption of reservation stock-raising in the 1890s, Ewers argued that the reservation’s over-hunted, mountainous western fringe also no longer mattered as a serious source of food production, so the Blackfeet were willing to trade it—it is now part of Glacier National Park—in exchange for future OIA cattle and rations issues. Blackfeet wealth in land, so goes Ewers’

²²⁷ Churchill to CIA, September 15, 1909.

narrative, provided hard currency to weather a brutal modern American colonization that repeatedly forced the Blackfeet to the brink of starvation.²²⁸

BLACKFEET RESERVATION BOUNDARY CHANGES, 1873 TO PRESENT

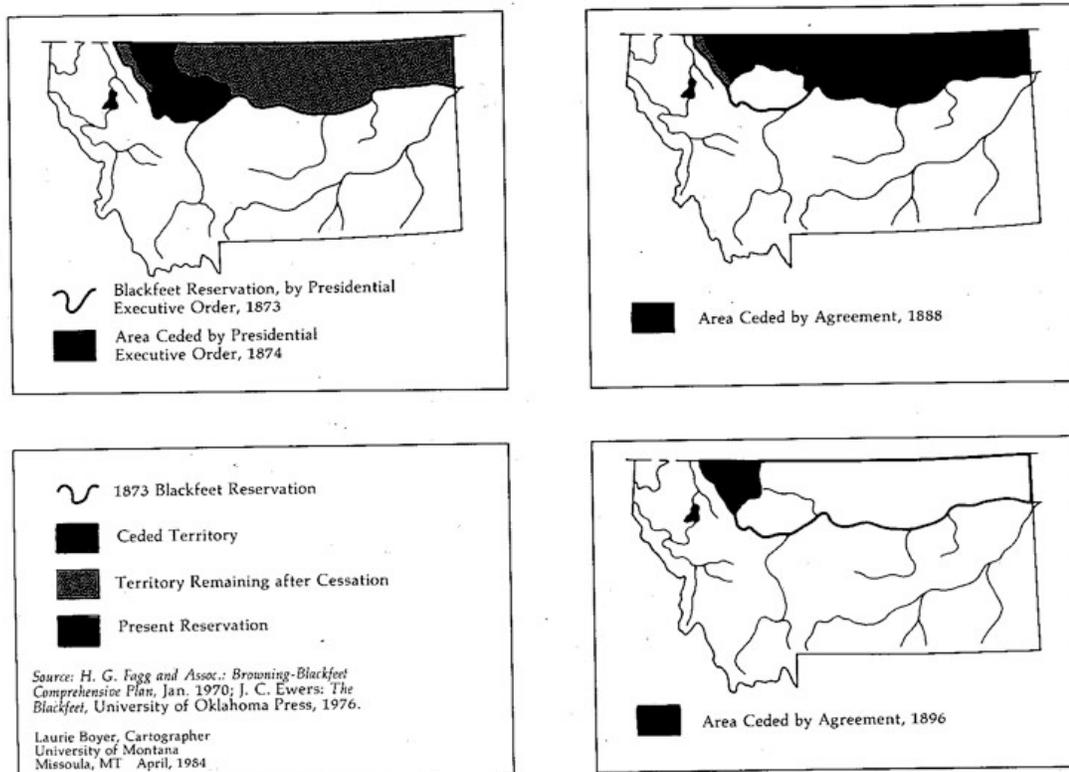


Illustration 5: Changes to Blackfeet Reservation Boundaries.²²⁹

Although more recent historians of Blackfeet politics like Paul Rosier have been careful to point out that the difference between “full blood” and “mixed blood” designates cultural, rather than biological distinctions, I think it is more useful to discard these categories and organize Blackfeet political history around supporters and opponents of the livestock industry, who developed differing political identities based

²²⁸ See John C. Ewers, “Trading Land for a Living,” in Ewers, *The Blackfeet: Raiders on the Northwestern Plains* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1958).

²²⁹ The amount of land ceded by the Blackfeet from 1873 until 1896 was roughly the same size as Pennsylvania. Image from Farr, *The Reservation Blackfeet*, 2.

on their different understandings of place, livelihood, and selfhood—concepts tied directly to notions of predation and production. Following Ewers, subsequent historians have complicated Ewer’s narrative, but mainly by recourse to race. In doing so, they have placed too great an emphasis on blood quantum as a denominator for Blackfeet land politics in the early-twentieth century, situating controversies over allotment on a continuum between white and red. Although the majority of Blackfeet stock growers were “mixed bloods,” it is misleading to categorize stock growers on that basis, since a handful of “full bloods” numbered with the reservation’s largest cattlemen, including Wolf Tail, who also sat as a judge on the agency’s Court of Indian Offenses.²³⁰ Likewise, many “mixed bloods” resisted the OIA’s management of their reservation as an industrial cattle outpost and sided with the reservation’s anti-cattle faction, including Robert J. Hamilton—son of a Pikuni woman and an Irish whiskey trader—the ostensible leader of the “full-bloods” through the 1910s.²³¹

By 1912, when Blackfeet allotment was completed, the reservation had been making progress towards McFatridge’s dreams of a grand cattle yard—a vision increasingly shared by his loose coalition of Blackfeet cattlemen and by off-reservation lessees. The range was already stocked with over 20,000 head, “but with the excellent and abundant supply of water and grass the country is unsurpassed for the grazing of stock, and with the numerous excellent wild meadows to provide hay for winter feeding, there is no good reason why there should not be at least 100,000 head of cattle on this reservation.” Oscar Lipps, the OIA’s livestock supervisor declared: “The

²³⁰ Churchill to CIA, July 12, 1909, in *TW-ICC*, Box 2, Folder 4.

²³¹ Rosier, *Rebirth of the Blackfeet Nation* is one such work that analyzes Blackfeet tribal history on the basis of “full-blood” and “mixed-blood” as cultural and political categories.

country needs the beef, the Indians would like to produce more of it.” Lipps suggested a post-allotment plan that McFatrige and his coalition embraced; the expansion of common tribal herd, from which cattle could be issued to individual Blackfeet who demonstrated that they could take proper care of the animals. This plan would work in a similar way to the Dawes Allotment Act’s system of land patents and competency commissions, with one major difference. Although the Blackfeet’s cattle would belong to them in trust, in order to actually sell or otherwise dispose of their animals on the market, individual Blackfeet would need to demonstrate their “competency” as stockmen. Demonstrating competency, in this case, would require that the Blackfeet sell their cattle on the market, rather than kill their issued cattle for food.

Lipps also recommended a controversial solution to the problem that the reservation’s allotment posed to the agency’s cattle leasing program. On the reservation’s un-allotted lands, which the OIA planned to put up for sale under the terms of the Allotment Act, Lipps suggested the retention of a least “a few townships of land” which would be set aside for open-range grazing leases. Despite its allotment, McFatrige and Lipps set about maintaining the Blackfeet Reservation as an open range, a clear expression of the OIA’s continued intention of incorporating Blackfeet land into the North American beef industry.²³² McFatrige was backed by Blackfeet cattlemen who viewed the sale of the surplus unallotted lands as a means of purchasing additional cattle and as a solution to the problems of off-reservation grazing lessees.

Leading the opposition to this cattle-focused vision of reservation land use and to the sale of surplus unallotted lands was Robert Hamilton, a young Blackfeet whose

²³² Oscar Lipps, Supervisor, “Report on the Education, Industrial, Economic, and Home Conditions, Blackfeet Reservation, Montana,” October 20, 1913, in *TW-ICC*, Box 4, Folder 1.

skills as an organizer eventually seated him at the head of the Blackfeet's reorganized Tribal Business Council (BTBC). From this position Hamilton developed access to influential members of the U.S. Congress who went to battle against the interests of the reservation's cattlemen and the OIA. Hamilton was the adopted son of Alfred Hamilton, co-founder of the Fort Whoop-up whiskey trading post in 1869. Al Hamilton had long proved a headache for the OIA, and during the 1880s he fled to Canada to avoid murder charges. As a descendant of this former whiskey trader, Robert Hamilton was himself a marked man by the Blackfeet agency administration.

The foundation of Hamilton's politics was his desire to achieve Blackfeet economic independence by managing the Blackfeet's land base for the direct benefit of the entire tribe, rather than for the OIA and their wealthy stock-owning allies in Browning. The OIA first recognized Hamilton as an anathema to their control over Blackfeet labor in 1906, when he organized a strike of Blackfeet workers on the Two Medicine irrigation project. The workers struck in October, a critical moment to complete excavations before the ground froze. Their demands were simple, an increase in wages from the Bureau of Reclamation. Within two days, and without any violent incidents, Hamilton and his supporters succeeded in negotiating a raise that brought their wages to parity with white workers hired for the project. An infuriated agent Churchill arrested Hamilton and threatened to remove him from the reservation, but was denied this authority by his superiors. Explaining the incident to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Churchill wrote: "The Indians have worked well and have done good work. They have been told so, and a few of them were led to believe that their labor

and that of their teams, was equal to that of the white men with larger horses.”²³³ In fact, the workers struck not because of the agent’s praise for their contribution to the Two Medicine project—which would establish an irrigated valley that the OIA would later attempt to sell as un-allotted land—but because they were being paid below subsistence-level wages that brought them away from their homes and families. The strike’s success brought Hamilton to the center of popular politics on the reservation.

The focus of Hamilton’s career as a tribal organizer for the next decade would be his opposition to the Allotment Act’s proposed sale of the Blackfeet Reservation’s un-allotted lands. By act of Congress on March 1st, 1907, the Blackfeet Reservation was ordered to be allotted, each enrolled member of the tribe receiving 320 acres. This plan left over 800,000 un-allotted acres on the reservation, roughly half of its total area, most of which would be returned to federal domain and sold to settlers under terms proscribed in the original Allotment Act of 1887. Not surprisingly, the reservation’s allotment was a popular throughout the rest of northern Montana, as the region’s cattlemen eyed the possibility of purchasing—possibly for pennies on the dollar—its unallotted grasslands.

Hamilton and his supporters sought to stop the surplus land sale, to pull the fangs from an Allotment Act that threatened to dispose over half the Blackfeet’s remaining land base. They eventually achieved this goal, not by resisting allotment in its entirety, but by organizing the tribe against its land sale provisions. At one council meeting in 1909, Hamilton collected the statements of dozens of tribal leaders who objected not to the allotting process, but to the sale of unallotted land. Mountain Chief

²³³ Dare to CIA, October 4, 1906, in *TW-ICC*, Box 2, Folder 1.

remarked that “In regard to the allotting, when the surplus land is left, I don’t want to dispose of this land but I want to hold it for the little children who are coming. This is the strongest idea I have in my head.”²³⁴ ²³⁵ After twelve years of fighting that stalled any general land sales, Hamilton and his supporters accomplished this goal in 1919, when Congress passed a bill exempting the Blackfeet from selling any surplus lands, and that also allotted each enrolled member an additional 80 acres.

Hamilton and his supporters developed relationships with legislators and bureaucrats in Washington, D.C. who were willing to hear and act on his stories of agency corruption and the shortcomings of the OIA’s cattle strategy. Hamilton’s first trip to D.C. was reluctantly sponsored by the OIA, and resulted in an OIA-administered inspection of the agency that, not surprisingly, concluded that the agency was well-run and that its administration worked toward the benefit of all Blackfeet. But although his visit was held under the tutelage of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, on his trip Hamilton also met with U.S. Senator Harry Lane of Oregon, whom he convinced to lead a separate inspection of the reservation and its management, an inspection which drew much different conclusions—that the majority of Blackfeet lived in a state of destitution, ruled over by an agent and a clique of stockgrowers more interested in the

²³⁴ Churchill to CIA, July 12, 1909.

²³⁵ Blackfeet opponents of allotment did not necessarily view privatization itself as a means of dispossession, only the sale of surplus lands. See Churchill, “Transcript of Tribal Council Meeting at Blackfeet Agency,” April 24, 1909, in *TW-ICC*, Box 2, Folder 4: “The Indians are very anxious to have the allotment completed so that they can make permanent improvements and establish suitable homes. They have been looking forward to the time when allotments would be made them for about ten years. While there have been several instances of personal differences arising from disputes over selections for allotment, there have been no general complaints nor individual opposition to allotment.” In the future, I plan to further analyze Blackfeet debates over allotment in comparison the earlier allotment of the “closed reservations” of the Blackfoot, Blood, and Piegan Reserves in Alberta. See Hana Samek, *The Blackfoot Confederacy, 1880-1920: A Comparative Study of Canadian and U.S. Indian Policy* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1987).

private acquisition of government-issued cattle than in improving the reservation's broader economic conditions.²³⁶

McFatrige sought to discredit Hamilton and his supporters by characterizing them as lazy Indians with little personal initiative who survived off agency largesse. McFatrige's particularly vicious enforcement of the OIA's "work or starve" mentality led him to trim the rations rolls that winter, resulting in more cases of starvation. In a letter exposing his breathtaking colonial hubris, the day after McFatrige explained to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs why he ended the distribution of these goods—guaranteed by treaty—to the "able-bodied," he requested authority to spend \$1,250 from the same Blackfeet annuity fund to buy himself a new Buick. Upon Hamilton's return to the reservation, McFatrige fumed that "[he] had not worked one single day." Despite the damning evidence from the Lane inspection, McFatrige continued to rule with an iron fist. He answered reports of destitution with a familiar refrain, that Indians, like Hamilton, simply would not work. "There are a number of Indians on the reservation," he explained, "that are able to earn a living who have refused to perform labor for rations for themselves and their families, and I have refused to issue rations to such people. Those who do not have enough to live on," he continued, "can blame themselves." McFatrige sought to establish the value of his own work as agent by representing Hamilton's political efforts as an illegitimate form of labor.²³⁷

The next year, Hamilton tried to organize a second trip to Washington, which brought him into a series of direct clashes with McFatrige. Over the winter, Hamilton

²³⁶ See Rosier, *Rebirth of the Blackfeet Nation*.

²³⁷ See McFatrige to CIA, April 17, 1914, in *TW-ICC*, Box 4, Folder 2; McFatrige to CIA, January 31, 1914, in *TW-ICC*, Box 4, Folder 2; and McFatrige to CIA, April 16, 1914, in *TW-ICC*, Box 4, Folder 2.

had organized a business council meeting without notifying McFatridge. The council voted to send Hamilton back to D.C. along with two tribal elders, Wolf Plume and Young Man Chief, who would help finance the trip. After discovering the plan, McFatridge was enraged, describing to his superiors that Hamilton was “simply an agitator and has caused more trouble in this tribe of Indians than any other person.” McFatridge ordered the tribal police after the trio and had them arrested at the Browning railroad station. After their release, they tried a second time, riding off the reservation to pick up the Great Northern Railroad at Cut Bank. McFatridge gave chase and once again arrested them. But the OIA could no longer overlook the agent’s constant overreaches of authority, and they fired McFatridge later that month. He fled to Alberta with \$1,200 of tribal funds, cash raised from the annual grazing tax.²³⁸

McFatridge’s sudden departure left the agency administration in disarray. From 1916 until 1920, seven different OIA employees managed the agency. During these years, the center of power on the Reservation shifted from the OIA to Hamilton and the Blackfeet Tribal Business Council, his grassroots governing body which stalled the sale of unallotted lands and pressured Congress to overturn the provision altogether. Hamilton and his supporters sought to use allotment to their advantage to secure a victory against the reservation’s stock-growing elite.

Key to their success was their relationships with emerging radical centers of power in both Montana and federal politics, including the Non-Partisan League. In 1918, the tribe selected its former allotment agent, Louis S. Irvin, to serve as their tribal

²³⁸ See McFatridge to CIA, January 19, 1914, in *TW-ICC*, Box 4, Folder 2; McFatridge to CIA, January 29, 1914, in *TW-ICC*, Box 4, Folder 2; McFatridge to CIA, January 31, 1914, in *TW-ICC*, Box 4, Folder 2; and Robert Hamilton to A.R. Serven, January 31, 1914, in *TW-ICC*, Box 4, Folder 2.

attorney.²³⁹ Irvin was himself married to a Blackfeet woman. He quickly sided with Hamilton's faction against the OIA's flawed plans to sell oil leases on the reservation. In 1920, Irvin served as Burton K. Wheeler's running mate in Montana's gubernatorial election.²⁴⁰ Although Irvin and "Bolshevik Burt's" run on the Non-Partisan League ticket was an electoral disaster, the campaign catapulted Wheeler into the U.S. Senate as a Montana Democrat two years later, during the height of the Northern Plains' regional economic depression. By the 1930s, Wheeler was chair of the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs, and the primary sponsor of the Indian Reorganization Act, which the Blackfeet were one of the first tribes to sign.

Although unsuccessful in reversing OIA policies regarding the stock industry, the reservation's anti-cattle faction took the lead in the Blackfeet's effective resistance to the Allotment Act's provision for surplus land sales. These debates revealed conflicting visions of how the reservation's land and resources would be best utilized, but also tensions over understandings of labor and selfhood that underlay the OIA's assimilation project and its reception by enrolled Blackfeet.

PFLA

Historians have been right to criticize federal allotment policies as a means of dispossessing American Indians of their lands and labors. Tom Wessel has described the allotment of the Blackfeet Reservation in particularly stark terms: "Instead of independent agricultural communities, the government created pockets of rural poverty

²³⁹ Rosier, 43.

²⁴⁰ See Burton K. Wheeler, *Yankee from the West*, with Paul F. Healy (New York: Doubleday, 1962), 177.

physically fractionalized and politically factionalized.”²⁴¹ It is no surprise that Eloise Cobell and other Blackfeet have been national leaders in ongoing attempts to reform the management of Indian trust assets, as the crippling legacies of allotment and fractionation remain evident across the Blackfeet Reservation. However, in the immediate wake of allotment, the Blackfeet did not give in to the colonial prerogatives that would supposedly be accomplished by the privatization of their tribal lands. As Emily Greenwald has argued in her study of allotment policy, many Indians ironically used their allotments to “remake themselves as Indians in the context of a policy that sought to destroy Indianness.”²⁴² In recent study of Creek history, David Chang has remarkably shown how allotment policy led not to assimilation, but to a complex formulation of Creek racial nationalisms during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.²⁴³ Far from signaling the disappearance of Blackfeet understandings of land and livelihood, allotment opened the door for an interwar renaissance of Blackfeet environmental knowledge. Through the development of the Piegan Farming and Livestock Association (PFLA), the Blackfeet accommodated allotment to Blackfeet notions of *auasini*.

Even a colonial institution like allotment could be reworked by the Blackfeet to fit within their broader communal kinship traditions. As the radical positions of Robert Hamilton and his supporters indicated, many Blackfeet saw in their individual allotments opportunities to reconnect their individual labor back to a broader communal

²⁴¹ Wessel, “Agriculture on the Reservations,” 17.

²⁴² Emily Greenwald, *Reconfiguring the Reservation: The Nez Percés, Jicarilla Apaches, and the Dawes Act* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 145.

²⁴³ David Chang, *The Color of the Land: Race, Nation, and the Politics of Landownership in Oklahoma, 1832-1929* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

tradition of value creation, one that spanned white conceptions of human-animal difference and modern capitalist understandings of discrete individual selfhood. Through the PFLA, Blackfeet sought to use their individual allotments to develop a communal subsistence economy on the reservation. While it is too much to suggest that allotment offered a powerful mode of resistance to colonization—after all, sales of patented allotments and fractionation have subsequently devastated the Blackfeet’s land base—by the mid-1920s, many Blackfeet had nevertheless utilized their allotments to develop effective cooperative organizations that blended subsistence and market agriculture in a way that resonated with Blackfeet understandings of place, sustenance, and selfhood.

Several generations of American Indian historians have now studied the PFLA, approaching it mainly as a bureaucratic anomaly of early-twentieth-century Blackfeet history. John Ewers, Paul Rosier, and Tom Wessel, working from mostly OIA sources, have ascribed the PFLA’s successful emergence primarily to the good-hearted efforts of Fred Campbell, the reservation’s superintendent throughout most of the 1920s.²⁴⁴ They are right to point out that Campbell’s earnest administration represented a radical departure from the corrupt and inefficient tenure of previous Blackfeet agents, particularly from 1916 to 1920, when no less than seven agents cycled through Browning, an era that Paul Rosier calls the “revolving door period.”²⁴⁵ But the PFLA, borne from Campbell’s ambitious “Five-Year Industrial Program,” succeeded in spite of the OIA’s economic motivations for the reservation. It succeeded because it offered the

²⁴⁴ See Ewers, *The Blackfeet*; Rosier, *Rebirth of the Blackfeet Nation*; and Wessel, “Agriculture on the Reservations.”

²⁴⁵ Rosier, 34.

Blackfeet opportunities to refashion their indigenous understandings of production and relational selfhood into a viable and modern social alternative to the forms of commodity agriculture that had bankrupted the borderlands over the previous decade.

The PFLA emerged during the fall of 1921 as a reservation-wide Blackfeet organization committed to reaching the subsistence goals of Campbell's Five-Year Industrial Plan (FYIP). Adopted in March of 1921, the FYIP aggressively focused agency energies around the task of expanding subsistence agriculture on the reservation, with the main objective of achieving Blackfeet agricultural self-sufficiency by 1926. Although the plan did place its faith in a kind of mixed agriculture sure to conjure images of white yeoman farmers, the program's emphasis on communal self-sufficiency nevertheless signaled a radical departure from the OIA's traditional emphasis on assimilation. Paired with the Blackfeet-organized PFLA, the FYIP-PFLA achieved widespread popularity with the Blackfeet. It also generated economic results that were, perhaps, unprecedented and unrepeated anywhere else in Indian country. For his part, Campbell became the OIA's brightest star; by 1923 he spent most of his time away from Browning, touring other reservations throughout the United States and Canada, giving lectures and trying to convince other agency administrators to adopt his program, a task in which he was mostly unsuccessful. In 1928, he was "fired" by Hamilton's Blackfeet Tribal Business Council, in some ways a victim of his program's own success, the BTBC claiming his administration was no longer needed. Reinstated by the Commissioner of Indian Affairs—the BTBC's legal authority to fire agency personnel questionable—Campbell's tenure boiled into a controversy over Blackfeet sovereignty and OIA administration that led directly to the desks of Senator Wheeler

and, eventually, John Collier, authors of the Indian Reorganization Act six years later.²⁴⁶

Year one of the FYIP set fairly modest goals. Sending out a wide call for participation, Campbell offered all enrolled Blackfeet the necessary fencing materials to enclose a forty acre field on their allotment. Each family that built fences also received one milk cow, twenty sheep, and twelve chickens. Using agency funds, Campbell also built a flour mill in the Heart Butte district, optimistically awaiting the reservation's first major harvests of grain. More significantly, Campbell visited every household on the reservation that summer, along with an interpreter, the agency doctor, its farmer, and its livestock supervisor. He explained the program personally, encouraged Blackfeet participation, wrote reports, and photographed the reservation's population outside of Browning where previous agents had seldom ventured.

Because of the way it engaged Blackfeet understandings of relational selfhood, this personal attention during the summer of 1921 may have been one of the keys to the FYIP-PFLA's success. The Blackfeet concept of "medicine power" had been invoked earlier by OIA assimilationists to explain Blackfeet reluctance to pursue agriculture. According to this understanding of power, individuals needed to borrow or beg abilities with which they were not originally endowed. Rather than personal initiative amounting to the basis for individual success—one of the base truisms of Anglo-American autonomous selfhood—Blackfeet selfhood, *mokaksin*, constituted an assemblage of personal capabilities gathered from other human and nonhuman persons. In the pre-reservation era, Blackfeet commonly forged these relationships through

²⁴⁶ See Rosier, *Rebirth of the Blackfeet Nation*.

dreams, ritual fasts, sweats, and self-torture. Sometimes the powers derived could be embodied within collections of objects—medicine bundles—and then exchanged with others. The animal world was the original source of ability and knowledge. Animals held powers in their pure forms; humans drew on a panoply of watered-down powers granted them by their nonhuman patrons.²⁴⁷

Although the ritual practices associated with medicine power, particularly self-torture, had been severely curtailed by OIA administrators from the 1880s onward, reservation Blackfeet continued to organize their confidences around the concept. In 1923, for instance, the Blackfeet adopted Tom Gibbons, Jack Dempsey's challenger in the title fight for heavyweight boxing held that summer in Shelby, Montana, just east of Browning on the Great Northern Railroad. They granted Gibbons the name Pony-kick-in-hands to describe his unique boxing abilities, surely derived from his kinship with horses. Despite losing to Dempsey in fifteen rounds, Pony-kick-in-hands remained a folk hero on the reservation, and a testament to the modernization of medicine power in Blackfeet popular thought by the 1920s. Campbell's house-by-house canvas of the reservation thus fell within an established Blackfeet framework of medicine power, ritual, and relational selfhood that undoubtedly encouraged the success of the FYIP-PFLA. Through these personal interactions, Campbell transferred agricultural abilities of that his medicine powers represented, increasing the share of relational selfhood accessible by PFLA members.

²⁴⁷ For a good description of these Blackfeet concepts see Clayton C. Denman, "Cultural Change Among the Blackfeet Indians of Montana," Ph.D. Thesis, University of California, Berkeley, 1968, Anthropology.

According to Campbell's original plan, the main goal of the FYIP's second year would be to "discourage the nomadic habits and inclinations and to create for the [participants] an incentive for staying at home and strictly attending to their industrial activities." "Nomadic habits" was a euphemism for the Sun Dance, the annual Blackfeet gathering that agency authorities had tried to suppress for over thirty years. A bastion of traditionalism, as well as the main setting for ritual self-torture, Campbell opposed the Sun Dance and other large tribal gatherings also because they brought the Blackfeet away from their farms and ranches, sometimes for a month or longer. Other agents had tried to outlaw the Sun Dance without success. About ten years earlier, McFratridge tried to merge it, without success, with an annual Fourth of July celebration in conjunction with his assimilation campaign. The establishment of the PFLA provided a workable solution to the Sun Dance dilemma for Campbell.

The third year rolled out the FYIP's most revolutionary goal: "Elimination of the necessity for the Indian to leave his home in search of employment and to help him work out a plan whereby he may spend a three hundred sixty-five day working year on his own allotment." Unlike three decades of OIA programs that sought to subordinate and incorporate Blackfeet labor into Montana's livestock industry, the FYIP emphasized the goal of eschewing Blackfeet wage labor altogether. More than anything else, this goal of the FYIP provided a complementary element to Blackfeet understandings of food and place. The land and its interrelationships could provide livelihood for those who dwelt upon it.

But it would be a mistake to characterize the FYIP and the PFLA as being entirely subsistence-based. An auxiliary goal of the organization was to "work out a

system of marketing whereby the Indian can place upon the open market any surplus farm or live stock products.” The PFLA was not a retreat from the market economy, but a program to establish Blackfeet means of production that could accommodate the reservation’s subsistence requirements and also accumulate capital. Accordingly, the programs goals sought to see 75% of allotments producing at least ten acres of wheat by year four, enough to feed the reservation, but also by year five have 70% of the reservation’s allotments producing an agricultural surplus for sale—either in grain, vegetable crops, livestock, or hay, which was probably the most common surplus commodity.²⁴⁸

During the first summer, the Blackfeet developed 29 PFLA chapters to administer the project, each chapter loosely organized around existing kinship relationships. About 15 different families, most of which were interrelated through marriage, comprised each chapter. This familial geography was the legacy of a previous relocation effort. In 1902, agent James Monteath relocated a substantial number of full-blood families to Heart Butte and other southern districts in anticipation of irrigation projects.²⁴⁹ When the reservation was allotted between 1907 and 1912, most of these neighbors were allotted together, “so that a chapter membership [of the PFLA],” wrote a reporter for the *Indian Leader* in 1923, “in many instances comprises a large family group.”²⁵⁰ Organized around existing family units, PFLA chapters existed similar to band units, drawing on pre-reservation Blackfeet social structure (see illustration 6).

²⁴⁸ See Fred Campbell, “Five-Year Industrial Program from April 1, 1921 to April 1, 1926,” in *TW-ICC*, Box 9, Folder 1.

²⁴⁹ See Wessel, “Agriculture on the Reservations,” for background on the Monteath relocation.

²⁵⁰ “The Five-Year Program on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation,” *The Indian Leader* 26(25): 3.



Illustration 6: “Piegan Farming and Livestock Association, White Grass Chapter, ca. 1924”²⁵¹

One major way that PFLA chapters formed a cooperative organization was through group purchases and sharing equipment. All 29 chapters shared the same flour mill, constructed in 1921. They also shared two grain threshers that traveled across the reservation during harvest season. But most chapters bought other machinery for use by their own chapter members, including hay binders and rakes, and other machines. The *Indian Leader* also reported on this phenomenon, “This farming machinery is turned over to the president of the chapter and he is held responsible for its housing and safe-keeping and the various chapters all over the reservation are building community machinery sheds for this purpose.” The cooperative use of machinery helped PFLA

²⁵¹ Photo courtesy of Rose Tatsey, published in Farr, *The Reservation Blackfeet*, 111.

members avoid the large debts faced by regional farmers forced to purchase equipment on their own.

The PFLA's cooperative mission extended beyond the bounds of financing machinery purchases, however. One of the PFLA's strongest admirers, General H.L. Scott, an inspected the reservation for the Indian office in 1925, lauded the program through the story of George Wren, an older chapter member who suffered from blindness and was unable to plant in 1924. "The other members of his chapter, noting his condition," wrote Scott, "got together and put in his crop in addition to their own, a circumstance which would not have happened had there not been a chapter organized."²⁵² Belonging to the PFLA chapter expressed a series of kinship obligations that extended to providing labor beyond the boundaries of one's individual allotment.

The Blackfeet were very optimistic about the PFLA and the FYIP, an enthusiasm revealed in a cartoon drawn by Richard Sanderville in 1922 in the *Haskell Indian Leader* (see illustration 7). The cartoon depicted a broken-feathered warrior poised to ascend a progressive staircase. In the summer of 1923, Mountain Chief regaled William Woehlke, the editor of *Sunset Magazine*, when he visited the reservation to report on the program. In order to lead by example, Mountain Chief told Woehlke he planned to stay home and tend his chickens rather than see the boxing match in Shelby.²⁵³

²⁵² "Extract of the Report of General H.L. Scott, dated October 10, 1925," in *TW-ICC*, Box 8, Folder 6.

²⁵³ See Walter V. Woehlke, "Hope for the Blackfeet," *Sunset Magazine* 51(6), December 1923): 9-11.

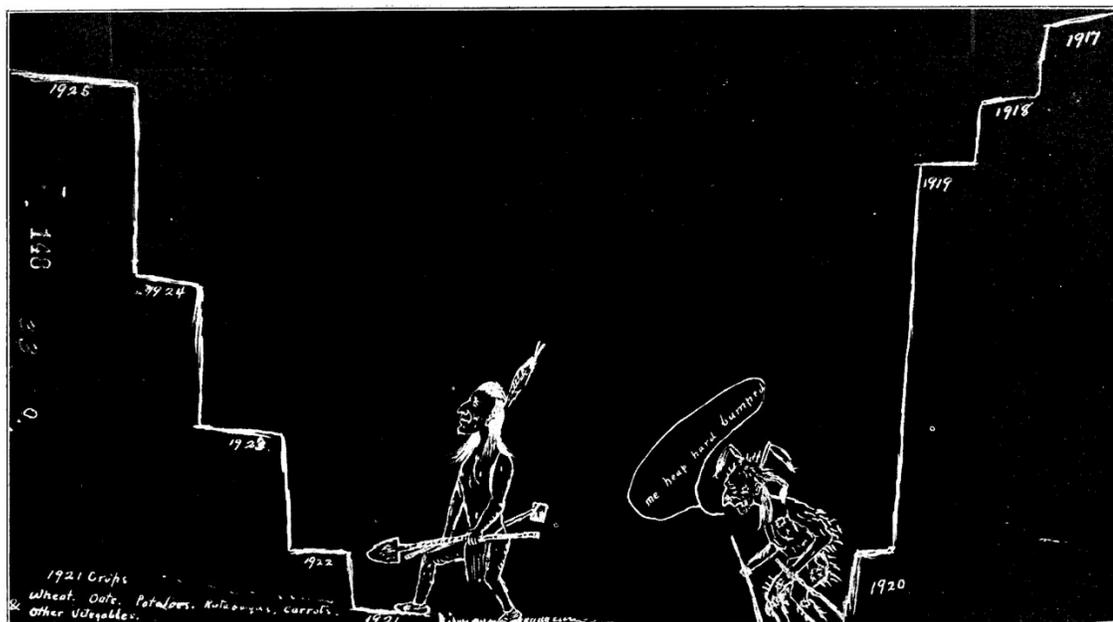


Illustration 7: Cartoon from the *Indian Leader*, 1922.²⁵⁴

Even after the first year, the PFLA's results impressed commentators. The old-time Indian office inspector Oscar Lipps visited the reservation in the fall of 1921. He reported on one Blackfeet named, ironically, After Buffalo. "The old man and wife and two grandsons live together," he remarked. "They raised nothing last year except a few potatoes. This year they raised 40 bushels of wheat, 30 bushels of oats, 50 sacks of potatoes, some rutabagas, beets, carrots, peas, corn, etc. They put up hay, sold 20 tons and have one stack left."²⁵⁵ With hay selling for around \$12 a ton, After Buffalo and his family not only grew enough food to sustain themselves for an entire year, but generated a cash income of over \$200—a fortune by early-twentieth-century reservation standards. Satisfied with the program's results, Lipps ended his report: "Thus stands the record of the efforts of these old buffalo-eaters and hunter-sportsmen in their first

²⁵⁴ Cite *Indian Leader* and page number.

²⁵⁵ Oscar Lipps, "Subsistence Farming on the Blackfeet Reservation; Memorandum for Mr. Cooley," in *TW-ICC*, Box 8, Folder 5.

attempt at subsistence farming.” Even a veteran representative of the OIA grudgingly admitted the PFLA’s success. In the fall of the 1921, the Blackfeet harvested and milled 1,100 bushels of grain. The following year they milled 15,000 bushels, even to feed the reservation.²⁵⁶

Nevertheless, the PFLA was not without controversy. An older generation of assimilationists denounced the program from the start as an unrealistic experiment in agriculture that was “doomed to failure,” as James Willard Schultz put it. Schultz, a white settler on the reservation in the late 1800s, and the popular author of *My Life as an Indian*, a book that described his marriage to a Blackfeet woman and their life in Browning, published a scathing editorial on the PFLA from his retirement home in southern California in 1921. On the reservation, Schultz was an advocate of the cattle regime that had bankrupted the Blackfeet during the 1910s. He published the editorial under the title, “The Starving Blackfeet,” drawing upon a longstanding tradition of similar charges against the OIA that reflected a Progressive-era white philanthropic mission to lessen the suffering of American Indians. Except this time, the charges of starving Blackfeet were unfounded. Schultz represented the Blackfeet as “starving” under the PFLA to help justify a return to previous administration tactics that focused on procuring livestock for the reservation’s previously well-off stockgrowers. Schultz did not advocate the growth of Blackfeet communal self-sufficiency, but instead worked as an apologist for the failed policies of individuation and assimilation that the PFLA overturned. He ended his editorial with one last admonishment for the project: “There remains but one hope for the Montana Blackfeet, and that is, to obtain from the

²⁵⁶ “The Five-Year Program,” *The Indian Leader*, 3.

government a portion of the value of the vast territory arbitrarily taken from them by presidential executive orders.”²⁵⁷ Although Schultz was right to request compensation for lands stolen from the Blackfeet during the nineteenth century, his opposition to the PFLA revealed his shortsightedness in retreating toward the prospect of “trading land for food,” the old tactic that he believed would spare the Blackfeet from colonial annihilation, but that could not ensure their long-term prosperity.

Other critics decried the project as Bolshevist and communistic. These charges mostly came from men like Schultz who continued to cling to the promise of an individuated cattle economy. Supporters of plans to sell oil and mining leases on the reservation also resorted to harnessing the red scare to support their political mission. In a report written in 1924, General Scott responded to these criticisms, retorting that “The program is in no way communistic, it works for individual effort in a cooperative way.” He further commented that the PFLA was on the leading edge of other cooperative associations forming throughout the United States and Canada in response to the challenges of industrial agriculture: “The white farmers are forming cooperative societies all over the country for mutual support and benefit as many other industries are organized.”²⁵⁸ Scott realized that the PFLA was situated within a broader Progressive movement, not toward a radical communism, but towards a cooperative social democracy based on understandings of social selfhood, rather than pioneer individualism, that perhaps reached full expression during the 1930s.

²⁵⁷ James Willard Schultz, “The Starving Blackfeet Indians” (Los Angeles: The National Association to Help the Indian, 1921).

²⁵⁸ “Extract of the Report of General H.L. Scott,” in *TW-ICC*.

In this sense, the PFLA drew on Blackfeet traditions of relational selfhood to inform its cooperative endeavors, but it would be a mistake to characterize the program as traditional. The PFLA was significant because it provided a means to blend Blackfeet knowledge of the world with nontraditional forms of food and market production. Unlike previous OIA programs, its goal was not the assimilation and incorporation of the Blackfeet into the American body politic as colonial subjects, but to establish Blackfeet communal self-sufficiency by partnering modern agricultural procedures with an organization that drew on Blackfeet understandings of selfhood, labor, and the origins of value.

Conclusion

While the allotment of the Blackfeet Reservation stood to further incorporate the Blackfeet as unequal members of a colonial society, Blackfeet efforts to integrate conceptions of *auasini* into the privatization of the reservation landscape helped to establish a cooperative mode of subsistence with the development of the PFLA. Throughout the allotment process, the Blackfeet battled amongst themselves and the OIA largely along political lines drawn by the cattle industry. By utilizing the discourse of predation and production as a language to track the relative progress of Blackfeet assimilation, the OIA dissociated the nonhuman labors necessary to livelihood from the private labors of individual Blackfeet. The reservation stock industry provided a suitable political ecology for making these social distinctions. Rather than conceptualizing cattle issued to the tribe as public elements of the reservation's broader environment, the OIA and its Blackfeet allies represented cattle as forms of animal

capital whose value accrued to the work of their owners. To the OIA, civilizing the Blackfeet would required subsuming nonhuman work under the category of individual human labor.

By privatizing tribal lands, the allotment of the Blackfeet Reservation also served to individualize Blackfeet relationships to the nonhuman environment. But through the cooperative subsistence agriculture practiced by the PFLA, the Blackfeet developed a new mode of livelihood that constructed a series of broader environmental and social relationships atop the individuated grid of private property that allotment had established. By reintegrating indigenous concepts of human-nonhuman kinship into reservation agriculture, the Blackfeet established an alternative mode of livelihood that expanded their economic options as a colonized society.

By the early-twentieth century, Anglo-American understandings of predation and production had come to hinge on concepts of individual and social selfhood. Representing oneself as a producer required a disavowal of the nonhuman labor necessary for the creation and distribution of value and capital. Subsuming the animal labors of cattle under the individual self of a stock grower was a major process in which this representation of capital worked out on the ground. Representing non-stock related forms of work as non-labor, or even as predation, the OIA and their stock-growing allies on the reservation sought to reorient Blackfeet labor to serve the broader goals of stock industry's capital accumulation. As the next chapter demonstrates, the logic of predation and production, and its relationship to Anglo-American concepts of selfhood, helped structured historical narratives of the borderlands that made it a landscape capable of conservation as well as exploitation. Colonialism's disavowal of its own

exploitative labors relied on the ongoing fabrication of predatory persons, both human and nonhuman. Under the cultural and ecology regimes of the capitalist livestock industry, it remained necessary to designate predators in order to establish oneself as a producer.

Chapter 5:

Unnatural Hunger

On New Year's Eve of 1900, diners across the United States ate twelve bison from northern Montana. Raised on the Flathead Reservation by Charles Allard and Michel Pablo, the animals were slaughtered before the jeers of 1,500 spectators at the Montana State Fairgrounds in Helena, then shipped by rail to restaurants in Saint Louis, New Orleans, San Francisco, and New York. The meat was "coarse and dry" compared to the lamb chops and rib roasts preferred by American epicures at the dawn of the century, but the bison whetted romantic appetites for the nation's frontier past. Hunger for bison, remarked the *Minneapolis Tribune*, "will never die as long as the memory of man runs to the era of the conquering of the west."²⁵⁹ In tendering communion with a century of conquest, the bison's flesh connected a nation's elite to the landscapes and labors of its colonizing forebears.

Never fully vanquished from the North American plains, bison began to feed a broader set of eaters during the Progressive Era. From gourmands to welfare recipients, bison meat ended up in public relief houses, at Indian agencies, and in the dining cars of railroad tourists bound for Glacier and Banff. This was somewhat ironic given the bison's stature as a contemporary symbol of wildlife conservation. But by the 1910s, two of the era's flagship wildlife conservation projects, the Montana National Bison Range and the Wainwright Buffalo National Park in Alberta, quickly became breeding grounds of bison overpopulation, ironically increasing the animal's marketability and presence in American and Canadian kitchens. Established by the U.S. and Dominion

²⁵⁹ "Kill Buffalo," *Minneapolis Tribune* (December 31, 1900), 7.

governments in 1908, these refuges were envisioned and managed as closed ecosystems free from the effects of human and nonhuman predators. Bison herds at both parks reached unsustainable sizes, and refuge administrators began slaughtering the surplus animals. Planned and administered as ranches for wild ungulates, these national bison refuges represented the saturation of colonial idioms of predation and production within the broader goals of Anglo-American wildlife conservation, and their history reveals how local understandings of human and nonhuman labor shaped national frameworks of colonialism and human-animal relationships during the early-twentieth century.

This chapter argues that a dissociation of predation from production guided early efforts to preserve wildlife in the Montana-Alberta borderlands, focusing on the histories of bison and antelope conservation. In the first decades of the twentieth-century, conservationists bridged the political and social gaps between eastern animal preservationists and the interests of western livestock growers by ascribing the near-extirmination of bison and antelope to over-hunting rather than habitat loss. Western cattlemen and other powerful stakeholders forced eastern philanthropists to frame conservation policies within a colonial narrative of predation that has broadly informed regional wildlife controversies ever since.²⁶⁰ In the case of bison conservation, William Hornaday, founder of the American Bison Society, was himself largely responsible for crafting and articulating this narrative, publishing various histories both of bison

²⁶⁰ I do not have adequate space in this chapter to fully develop the significance of these narratives of predation in structuring current debates over bison conservation. However, one noteworthy example is the brucellosis controversy on the Yellowstone winter range. While ecologists agree that a lack of sufficient winter habitat within the park is the limiting factor in the health of Yellowstone's migratory bison herds, public outcry against Montana's recreational bison hunters is far more visible than the ongoing efforts to expand winter bison habitat on private lands adjacent to the park. In part, this chapter tries to explain why it is easier to sell to the liberal public a discourse of anti-hunting than it is to push for the repatriation of former wildlife habitat.

extermination and bison recovery from the 1890s through the 1920s. More broadly, Hornaday and other eastern conservationists drew upon local historical narratives that characterized wolves, Indians, and Basque shepherders as “predators” who preyed upon the West’s productive colonial institutions, primarily the livestock industry, but also the region’s game refuges. These narratives fell upon a receptive western public eager to displace the environmental effects of colonization and industrial agriculture onto the presupposed actions of bloodthirsty hunters—both human and nonhuman. This narrative of predation was attractive as well for wider national publics in the United States and Canada that began celebrating their western heritages during the early-twentieth century; easterners embarking on tours of Glacier, Banff, and other sublime landscapes of the Northern Rocky Mountain Front. Conservationists would gain more local cooperation if they could draw on these narratives and assign blame for conservation problems to actors already locally disenfranchised as predatory, while casting powerful white cattlemen, settlers and other stakeholders as productive.

This dissociation of predation from production was a necessary cultural element of attempts to bridge the divide that separated western and eastern conservation politics during the Progressive Era. Moreover, negotiating this divide on the local, western level enabled the broader emergence of national conservation movements and the wider legal frameworks supporting them.²⁶¹ Bison conservation and repatriation in Montana was a central focus for the Progressive-era conservationists and a pet project of Theodore Roosevelt himself, who was both a friend of Hornaday and a member of the

²⁶¹ For a summary of the federal legal framework on conservation that emerged in the early-twentieth century, see Samuel P. Hays, *Conservation and the Gospel of Efficiency: The Progressive Conservation Movement, 1890-1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959); and Roderick Frazier Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 4th edition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).

American Bison Society. From the beginning of the Bison Society's fundraising efforts, Hornaday and his east-coast lieutenants worked to establish themselves as producers, seeking to overcome western suspicions of their sentimental, preservationist impulses. Through a strident anti-predator emphasis, both materially and discursively, the Society leveraged its existing regional alliances and forged new relationships with centers of western power. The Society's emulations of the western, stock-raising ethos, framed on distinctions between predation and production, provided the critical link between an eastern politics of preservation and a western politics of economic progressivism.

Since the 1980s, historians have been hard on Progressive-era conservationists. A generation of scholarship has now focused on the myriad social injustices that accompanied Progressive-era efforts to set aside lands for conservation.²⁶² Fifteen years ago, Bill Cronon convincingly situated the cultural history of conservation within the problematic concept of wilderness.²⁶³ Karl Jacoby's research on the late-nineteenth-century development of National Parks affirms Cronon's suggestion that conservation during the period was primarily an upper-class conquest of urban sportsmen striving to protect an ironic wilderness ideal. Ted Steinberg adds that historians should see the conservation movement as "another chapter in the eclipse of the commons," a social watershed based on privatization rather than a major turning point in ecological

²⁶² For more discussion of this point, see Joseph Cullon, "Legacies and Limitations: Environmental Historians Reconsider Progressive-era Conservation," *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 1(2), 2002: 179-191 and Ted Steinberg, "Down to Earth: Nature, Agency, and Power in History," *American Historical Review* 107(3), 2002: 798-820.

²⁶³ William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness: Or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," *Environmental History* 1(1), 1996: 7-28.

relationships.²⁶⁴ Environmental and social historians, including Gray Brechin, Bill Cronon, Drew Isenberg, Karl Jacoby, Mark David Spence, and Louis Warren, have revealed the movement's disturbing origins in nostalgia, racism, imperialism, and profiteering.²⁶⁵

The rich historiography of bison conservation, and of North American wildlife conservation in general, has cast Progressive-era conservation history as a movement based in the metropole. From Samuel Hays to Char Miller and Douglas Brinkley, historians of this era have documented a conservation movement rooted in Washington, D.C., controlled from the top by men like Theodore Roosevelt and Gifford Pinchot.²⁶⁶ Likewise, Canadian historiography has emphasized the origins of wildlife conservation in the Dominion's national parks, attributing their successes and failures largely to the histories of federal parks policies.²⁶⁷ In their histories of local resistance to the imposition of these eastern conservation bureaucracies, historians such as Karl Jacoby, Louis Warren, and others have developed sophisticated social critiques of this

²⁶⁴ Steinberg, 818.

²⁶⁵ See Gray Brechin, "Conserving the Race: Natural Aristocracies, Eugenics, and the U.S. Conservation Movement" *Antipode* Volume 28, Issue 3 (July 1996): 229-245; Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness"; Andrew Isenberg, *The Destruction of the Bison: An Environmental History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Karl Jacoby, *Crimes Against Nature: Squatters, Poachers, Thieves, and the Hidden History of American Conservation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Mark David Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness: Indian Removal and the Making of the National Parks* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); and Louis Warren, *The Hunter's Game: Poachers and Conservationists in Twentieth-Century America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997).

²⁶⁶ See Douglas Brinkley, *The Wilderness Warrior: Theodore Roosevelt and the Crusade for America* (New York: Harper Collins, 2009); Hays, *Conservation and the Gospel of Efficiency*; and Char Miller, *Gifford Pinchot and the Making of Modern Environmentalism* (Washington: Island Press, 2001).

²⁶⁷ See Jennifer Brower, *Lost Tracks: National Buffalo Park, 1909-1939* (Edmonton, AB: Athabasca University Press, 2008); Tina Loo, *States of Nature: Conserving Canada's Wildlife in the Twentieth Century* (Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia Press, 2007); and John Sandlos, *Hunters at the Margins: Native People and Wildlife Conservation in the Northwest Territories* (Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia Press, 2007).

metropolitan conservation-colonialism.²⁶⁸ As these scholars have demonstrated, the imperatives of eastern conservationists often ran rough-shod over the local interests of a broad range of westerners. However, by tracing the incorporation of western dissociations of predation and production into the cultural idioms utilized by eastern conservationists, this chapter suggests that local elements were crucial to the moral and economic feasibility of the eastern-based conservation movement. Prominent eastern conservationists like Madison Grant, William Hornaday, and Edmund Seymour adapted their conservation prerogatives to understandings of predation and production that had emerged in the borderlands over the previous four decades. The colonial language used to support wildlife conservation policy developed in the colonial periphery itself.

Adapting to western land use practices, not only in setting aside parks, wilderness areas and bison ranges, but also by killing predators, was a centerpiece of conservation. Maligning predators offered a route toward shared concepts of labor, value, and profit that rested at the heart of eastern and western political outlooks. Identifying the predatory habits of wolves, Indians, and Basques as the primary culprit of wildlife loss, the Bison Society and regional stock growers overlooked the larger environmental effects of the borderland's forty-year transition into a colonial landscape of homesteads and cattle ranches. Although swollen herd sizes and inadequate habitat posed the greatest challenge to the management of Wainwright Buffalo Park and the National Bison Range, their administrators maintained a focus on eliminating predators through the 1920s and 1930s. These efforts brought conservationists further into alliance with the region's livestock industry. By utilizing a logic of predation that

²⁶⁸ See Cronon; Jacoby, *Crimes Against Nature*; Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness*; and Warren, *The Hunter's Game*.

supported capitalist stock-raising as natural and productive, organizations like the Bison Society succeeded in mobilizing regional support for wildlife refuges, as well as popularizing the common truism that predation was the main impediment to successful wildlife conservation.

By 1931, the U.S. Animal Damage Control Act enacted these conceptions into federal law. Department of Agriculture hunters had effectively exterminated wolves from Montana five years earlier; Albertan wolves had similarly disappeared from the province's southern and eastern rangelands. Just as the bounty bills (discussed in chapter two) proved more effective for hardening the logic of predation into official colonial discourse than as tools for managing wolf behaviors, the Animal Damage Control Act more reflected the institutionalization of the logic of predation into wildlife conservation than it did either the political and ecological realities of animal preservation. By cultivating a common ground that represented their own labors as productive, western ranchers and eastern wildlife conservationists both found something useful in the borderland's colonial narratives of predation. Moreover, these local constructions of predation and production migrated eastward to influence conservation policies on a federal level, providing a natural-historical narrative of immutable predator-prey relationships that shaped the Animal Damage Control Act.

Positioned at the heart of controversies over this bill were local western understandings of what constituted categories of legitimate labor and "natural hunger," notions based on a colonial history of dissociating predation from production. Even those contesting the 1931 Animal Damage Control Act, like the American Society of Mammalogists (ASM), took these understandings for granted. In private

correspondence to Stanley Young, director of the USDA's Division of Predatory Animal and Rodent Control, the Johns Hopkins mammalogist A. Brazier Howell conceded that the ASM's admonitions against predator control did not extend to wolves, "who were truly killers." Young agreed. "The animal is one hundred percent criminal," he retorted, "more often killing to satisfy his lust than to satisfy a natural and reasonable hunger." Narratives of predation demarcated the boundaries between acceptable and unacceptable modes of exploiting human and animal flesh. Only by integrating these local colonial narratives into the core tenets of Anglo-American wildlife politics could federal conservation projects succeed on western terrain. Progressive-era conservation mattered because it established a legal validation, backed by scientific authority, of the disenfranchisement of those human and animal livelihoods deemed unproductive under colonialism and capitalism. Dissociating predation from production was necessary to the conservationist's work of repatriating bison and eradicating wolves.

Narratives of Predation and the Origins of Bison Conservation

Because of its significance as a western story of tragic over-hunting and subsequent productive recovery, bison preservation rested as a cornerstone project of Progressive-era conservation. As such, it offers a useful barometer to measure the penetration of colonial understandings of predation and production into the wider arena of Anglo-American wildlife politics. In 1909, William Hornaday celebrated the founding of the Montana National Bison Range by serving as the park's first chronicler. Eager to commemorate his own contributions to the bison's restoration, he exaggerated

the project's difficulties. He began his account by justifying the Bison Society's role as historian: "As compensation for the labor performed, we have the privilege of writing this history."²⁶⁹ From the moment of its founding, understandings of labor framed narratives of the park's inception. These understandings situated the work of bison conservation as a productive effort that reversed the forces of predation and overhunting. Hornaday and the Bison Society utilized a logic of predation that cast their own labor as productive forces within a western political ecology built around economic growth.

In his official recollection of the range's history, Hornaday paid little attention to regional and national opposition to the plan. Opponents of the Montana National Bison Range had criticized the plan as a regression of the West's modern history. The *Washington Post* explained its opinion of the bison project in social Darwinian terms that stressed the natural succession of predation with production. "The wolf and the coyote must give place to the collie, the pointer, and the setter, just as the Indian receded before the white man." The bison "had his day," continued the editorial. "In our civilization there is no place for him. We demand the milk, butter, and cheese cow and the beef bullock."²⁷⁰ A special report on the bison range from the *Minneapolis Tribune* opined that the preserve seemed a "queer turning back of history to the old settlers of the northern plains."²⁷¹ Linking the slaughter of bison as a stage in the

²⁶⁹ William Hornaday, "Report of the President on the Founding of the Montana National Bison Herd," in *The Second Annual Report of the American Bison Society* (New York: American Bison Society, 1909): 1-18; 1.

²⁷⁰ "The Vanishing Buffalo," *Minneapolis Morning Tribune* (February 20, 1910), 54. Reprinted from the *Washington Post*.

²⁷¹ "National Bison Preserve Turns History Backward," *Minneapolis Morning Tribune* (Feb 5, 1911), 14. As I revise this dissertation into a book manuscript I plan to augment these sources with editorials from

process of civilizing the Montana plains, opponents of the project likened bison conservation as a step back from the state's progressive history.

Finding a place for bison conservation within this discourse of progress and production was the primary challenge that faced Hornaday and members of the American Bison Society. But Hornaday emphasized other factors in his recounting, most importantly land. There was nothing novel about the National Bison Range. Small herds of bison already existed on public land, in Yellowstone National Park and in Oklahoma's Wichita Mountains Refuge. The Bison Society had actually stocked the Oklahoma range with fifteen bison from the Bronx Zoo in 1907. Earlier in 1908, the Canadian government had established Buffalo National Park in Wainwright, Alberta, a bison conservation project with over 400 head, dwarfing the Bison Society's proposed project. Montana stockgrowers were understandably vexed by Hornaday's call to establish another bison refuge. Even by the conservation goals of the Bison Society, the buffalo had been saved. "Shed no tears over the bison," claimed one editorial. "Keep him as a curiosity. That is all he is good for."²⁷² In his hybrid role as zookeeper and ranch manager, Hornaday sought to accomplish little more than this limited goal. Following the National Bison Range's establishment, Hornaday even worked to stop the creation of other bison conservation projects on public land, including the Wind Cave herd in South Dakota.²⁷³ From the standpoint of existing conservation projects and

Montana newspapers. The Montana Historical Society is currently digitizing Montana newspapers, but as of April 18th, 2011 the project is not complete.

²⁷² "The Vanishing Buffalo," *Washington Post*.

²⁷³ See William Hornaday to Franklin Hooper, June 16, 1913. *American Bison Society Records* CONS 4 (ABS): Box 1, Folder 6. The Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado (DPL).

regional politics, the National Bison Range was ill-conceived and poorly-timed. Under usual circumstances, finding land for the project would not be easy.

The Bison Society, however, found a windfall in Indian allotment. An act of Congress, introduced by Senator Joseph Dixon of Missoula, had allotted the Flathead Reservation in 1904, splitting 228,434 acres among 2,390 original allotments registered to individual Salish and Kootenai. Nearly one million acres of reservation land remained unassigned and was classified as surplus, stripped from tribal ownership, and opened for public sale in 1908.²⁷⁴ Established later that spring, the National Bison Range encompassed 18,000 acres of these former tribal lands.

The privatization of the Flathead Reservation left a moment of opportunity for Hornaday's incipient Bison Society. He had enlisted Professor Morton J. Elrod, chair of University of Montana's Biology Department, to conduct a survey of the reservation's surplus lands and locate range for the proposed refuge. Elrod's job was relatively easy, since, for the previous twenty years, two Indian men—Michel Pablo and Charles Allard—had grazed a herd of bison on the southern cone of the reservation, near the foothills of the Mission Range. The Pablo herd had descended from a handful of bison driven from across the mountains in 1878 by Samuel Walking Coyote, a Blackfeet man married to a Salish-Kootenai.²⁷⁵ Less than fifty miles from Missoula, the land the bison grazed was located near the town of Dixon, recently named for the reservation-opening senator by his grateful business associates. Not only was this good

²⁷⁴ Ronald Lloyd Trosper, *The Economic Impact of the Allotment Policy on the Flathead Indian Reservation*, Ph.D. Thesis, Economics, Harvard University, 1974: 35.

²⁷⁵ For more on Samuel Walking Coyote and the history of the Pablo-Allard bison herd see Bon I. Whealdon, et al. *"I Will Be Meat For My Salish": The Montana Writers Project and the Buffalo of the Flathead Indian Reservation* (Pablo, Montana: Salish-Kootenai College, 2001); and Ken Zontek, *Buffalo Nation: American Indian Efforts to Restore the Bison* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007).

year-round pasture, but it had a proven ability to support herds of over 500 bison. Elrod submitted his report to the Bison Society, who referred it to the Senate Indian Affairs Committee early in the spring of 1908. As chairman of the Senate Indian Affairs Committee, Dixon sponsored legislation that passed the Senate just in time for incorporation into the House's Agricultural Appropriation bill, which President Roosevelt signed into law on May 23rd, 1908. The bill authorized a budget of \$30,000 to purchase Flathead Reservation land from the Office of Indian Affairs for the National Bison Range. Without Indian allotment, the National Bison Range would not exist.

Hornaday credited his own business savvy for the range's establishment. He acknowledged the challenge of finding land for the refuge without "interfering with the settlement of the country."²⁷⁶ But rather than stating how the project's success relied on Congress's dispossession of native land, Hornaday instead emphasized the Bison Society's skill in political lobbying. Finding land for the range, remarked Hornaday, "was done with the same briskness and precision with which the best-managed business corporation takes up and acts upon an important matter when the urgency for action is very great."²⁷⁷ Using this commercial language, Hornaday represented the Society's actions as productive in the western colonial sense, eliding the expropriation of native land and excluding the Salish-Kootenai contribution to bison conservation.

After locating land for the National Bison Range, finding bison to stock the refuge became Hornaday's second major task. Like the rangeland itself, the project's bison had Indian origins. With allotment imminent, Michel Pablo, the surviving owner of the Flathead bison herd, had put his animals up for sale. Earlier in 1907, the

²⁷⁶ Hornaday, "Report of the President," 5.

²⁷⁷ Hornaday, 9.

Canadian government created a similar bison preserve near Wainwright, Alberta and was also in the market for bison. Like the National Bison Range, the mandate of Canada's Buffalo National Park required that it be stocked with pure-bred bison; not with cattalo, beefalo, or other hybrid species developed during the era by regional entrepreneurs.²⁷⁸ Numbering over 500 head, Pablo's herd was the largest remnant of plains bison in the world. The Dominion government and the American Bison Society developed an intense rivalry as they competed to acquire the herd.

Sensing trouble with Hornaday, Pablo sold the herd to the Canadians. Like many others on the Flathead Reservation, Pablo faced an antagonistic relationship with the U.S. government during the allotment process. Although he stood to potentially profit from the sale of the bison herd, he was ultimately forced to do so by the allotment act. With privatization and the disappearance of tribally-owned land under the act, Pablo was left with an 80-acre parcel on which he could no longer graze the herd without cobbling together extensive grazing leases. Moreover, the transfer of the bison range from tribal authority to the federal government seemed to indicate the Americans' intentions of seizing control over the animals if they remained on public land. These circumstances facilitated the Canadians' negotiations with Pablo. Left with few other choices, Pablo sold the herd to the Wainwright Buffalo National Park for \$200 a head shortly after Congress authorized the National Bison Range in 1908.

An infuriated Hornaday was left to locate other options for stocking the National Bison Range. In personal correspondence to Bison Society members, he fumed over Pablo as a "half-breed Mexican Flathead" who sold out the nation's stake in bison to the

²⁷⁸ The history of experiments with cattle-bison hybrids has been explored in Isenberg, *The Destruction of the Bison* and other works.

Canadian government.²⁷⁹ By piecing together a much smaller herd from individual animals scattered across the United States, Hornaday thought he could succeed without Canadian or Flathead assistance. Over the summer of 1908, he arranged to purchase forty bison from Alicia Conrad in Kalispell, widow of Joseph Conrad, a Montana business magnate and former Fort Benton whiskey trader. Conrad had purchased these bison from Charles Allard in the late-nineteenth century. Hornaday also contacted James J. Hill in St. Paul, owner of the Great Northern Railroad, who agreed to donate three bison bulls he kept at his country estate in North Oaks, Minnesota—though these bison were killed by his neighbors and his son before they arrived at the Bison Range. By the end of the 1908, Hornaday had made sufficient arrangements to acquire a nucleus herd for the range.

Hornaday represented his search for a bison herd as a paragon of productive labor, a form of value-creation forged in opposition to the predation of Indians and others. “In these days of destruction,” he recorded, “any man’s interest in wild life can be measured by the amount in cash, and hours of labor, that he annually expends in the promotion of measures for wild-life protection.”²⁸⁰ Hornaday situated wildlife conservation as a series of economic transactions premised on growing the stocks of certain wild animals. In essence, the task of a conservationist was similar to that of the cattleman—protecting the herd from predatory agents to secure its increase.

Hornaday supplemented conservation’s productive ethos with narratives of predation that represented the decline of wildlife populations as a consequence of over-hunting, narratives that grew intertwined with common understandings of American

²⁷⁹ William Hornaday to Morton J. Elrod, June 30th, 1908. *ABS*: Box 1, Folder 2. DPL.

²⁸⁰ Hornaday, 13.

environmental history. The near-extirmination of bison offered one of the most dramatic examples of this predatory narrative in North America, even the world. Hornaday himself authored one of the first iterations of this narrative. He began his lifelong public association with bison while employed as the Smithsonian Institute's taxidermist during the 1880s. In 1886, Hornaday had convinced the Smithsonian to send him and a field outfit to Montana to collect and taxidermy specimens for the museum. Following his trip to the west, Hornaday wrote the first natural history of American bison, *The Extermination of the American Bison*, in 1887.²⁸¹ Hornaday emphasized the complicity of hide hunters and sport hunters in the bison's wanton destruction. Taking a romantic view of American Indians, Hornaday also leveled contempt for the corrupting influences of the market economy on native tribesmen. However, throughout the book, Hornaday was careful not to criticize the colonial process itself. Accepting the inevitability of western conquest, Hornaday merely objected to colonization's lack of wildlife preservation.

Hornaday detested the practices of other hunters, from sportsmen to subsistence gatherers, but he had a voracious appetite for those same animals himself. Although he developed a reputation as a virulent anti-hunter, Hornaday was himself responsible for killing some of the last free-ranging bison in North America. On his expedition to Montana in 1886, Hornaday shot six bison in the Judith Basin to taxidermy for the Smithsonian. This was typical behavior for Hornaday. As director of the Bronx Zoo, he later contracted the notable wild animal trader Carl Hagenbeck to procure four Indian rhinoceroses in 1902. Hornaday was undeterred when Hagenbeck's team killed forty

²⁸¹ William Hornaday, *The Extermination of the American Bison, with a sketch of its discovery and life history* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1887).

rhinos in the process of supplying the zoo's order for live animals. Of the three that survived transport to New York, Hornaday wrote that "they will be of more benefit to the world at large than would the forty rhinoceroses running wild in the jungles of Nepal, seen only at rare intervals by a few ignorant natives."²⁸² Likewise, during his career at the Bronx Zoo, Hornaday founded the park's "National Collection of Heads and Horns," a clear continuation of his earlier interests in the material capital of dead animals. In 1909, he tried to talk Fred Kennard into travelling to Newfoundland on a similar mission to kill and retrieve caribou heads. "I long most ardently," he intimated, for "about four big heads of caribou, such as were the largest to be secured." "Ordinary heads," he added, "will not do."²⁸³ Hornaday similarly sought the heads of mountain goats from Banff, enlisting the help of a local guide, James Simpson, a man who lost his hunting license five years later for poaching.²⁸⁴

For Hornaday and other conservationists of his class and temperament, such as Theodore Roosevelt, hunting was an acceptable activity so long as it maintained a dissociation from predation. In his book *Our Vanishing Wildlife*, Hornaday made this clear. "Unless man is willing to accept a place in the list of predatory animals which have no other thought than the wolfish instinct to slay every living species save their own, he is bound by the unwritten laws of civilization to protect from annihilation the beasts and birds that still beautify the earth."²⁸⁵ Using narratives of predation to mark destruction as a characteristic of the uncivilized, Hornaday unconsciously looked to

²⁸² William Hornaday to Carl Hagenbeck, June 11th, 1902. Cited in Nigel Rothfels, *Savages and Beasts: The Birth of the Modern Zoo* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 67.

²⁸³ Hornaday to Frederic H. Kennard, Jan 23, 1909. ABS: Box 1, Folder 2. DPL.

²⁸⁴ Hornaday to Jimmy Simpson, April 4th 1912. *Simpson Family fonds* M78: Folder 3. Whyte Museum, Banff, Alberta. From Simpson family fonds.

²⁸⁵ Hornaday, "The Destruction of Our Birds and Mammals: A Report on the Results of an Inquiry," in *The Annual Report of the New York Zoological Society*, Volume 2 (New York: 1898): 77-107; 77.

resolve the paradoxes of conservation's own reliance on animal death. Crafting a narrative of predation that cast subsistence, and even market hunting as inherently uncivilized, Hornaday sought to justify his own predacious practices on the grounds of their scientific and philanthropic benefit. Ultimately, this effort hinged on broader social understandings of production, framed in opposition to predation, that had developed in the western borderlands.

Crafting the Narrative of Productivity

East Meets West: Enlisting Easterners

As historian Andrew Isenberg has pointed out, tensions over bison conservation often emerged along regional lines. Eastern conservationists sought to save bison and other wildlife as symbols of a passing frontier and its concomitant elements of American whiteness and manliness. Westerners fell into conservation almost by accident, led by opportunities for profit. The stories of the bison society's fundraising campaigns exemplify Isenberg's generalities, but they also reveal how Hornaday and other conservationists of the society worked to cultivate a productivist ethos in order to blend in with the western political economy. This history demonstrates how conservation, both as a national movement and as a matter of federal policy, emerged from local colonial efforts to dissociate predation from production. The American Bison Society accomplished this feat by framing their own labor as conservationists in opposition to the work of predators—both animal and human. In so doing, they simultaneously established themselves with credentials as western producers while using the logic of predation to build support for their conservation efforts.

Like Theodore Roosevelt, Hornaday sought to capitalize on representations of proletarian western labor while performing little of it himself. Although he held a reputation for “farmyard crudeness” with Roosevelt and other members of the New York elite, in his middle age Hornaday cultivated a white-collar image rooted in anti-unionism and the affectations of old money.²⁸⁶ As director of the New York Zoological Society, Hornaday spent his days in the Bronx fundraising and promoting the zoo, not feeding the park’s animals or sweeping up the peanut shells left by visitors, a “curse,” he sulked, that “fearfully disfigured miles of walks and lawn borders.”²⁸⁷ Director of the Zoo for thirty years, Hornaday’s conception of productive labor seems to have corresponded closely with own daily activities. Raising and allocating money for conservation was Hornaday’s profession, and the measures by which he judged the productive work of himself and others.

Hornaday documented his fundraising efforts well in the Bison Society’s history of the founding of the National Bison Range. Although Congress provided funds for the purchase of the Flathead’s surplus unallotted land, the American Bison Society was responsible for raising money to purchase bison to stock the park. From his office in the Bronx, Hornaday coordinate a national subscription campaign to drum up \$10,000 for the fund, a successful effort over the course of 1908 and 1909.

In the course of the campaign, however, Hornaday encountered resistance from western businesspeople; the bulk of the bison subscriptions came from New York and Massachusetts, the western states failing to “contribute becomingly” to bison

²⁸⁶ This is how Brinkley, *The Wilderness Warrior*, 284, puts it.

²⁸⁷ Hornaday, *The Annual Report of the New York Zoological Society*, Volume 20 (New York: 1916), 66.

conservation.²⁸⁸ “The men of the West are all right when it comes to commercial development,” he complained, “but in a matter requiring as broad citizenship as the founding of a National Bison Herd... it is the men of the East, who as usual, bear the burden and heat of the day!”²⁸⁹ The Society’s secretary, Frederic Kennard, politely suggested that Hornaday tone down his criticisms of western philanthropy in the Society’s official history. “I will modify my report in deference to your views,” responded Hornaday, “but when a man starts in to write history, he is expected to state the facts.”²⁹⁰ Hornaday felt frustrated and betrayed by the lukewarm reception his conservation plans garnered in states where the buffalo once roamed.

From Minnesota to Montana, businesses balked at Hornaday’s plans. Having failed, as yet, to make the proper impression as a productive ally of western business interests, he attempted to chagrin skeptical donors into making contributions. His efforts in Minneapolis and St. Paul offer a good example of Hornaday’s strategy. With a hint of Manhattan pretension, Hornaday wrote the Minneapolis Commercial Club asking for \$250, the contract price of one bison from the Conrad herd. “If there are not at least 250 persons in Minneapolis who are willing to subscribe \$1.00 each... then I am totally mistaken in my estimate of your people, and I will be willing to state publicly that I over-estimated Minneapolis!”²⁹¹ Hornaday’s solicitation earned mention in the city newspaper, but little in the way of funds.²⁹² Looking across the Mississippi, he approached St. Paul with similar ineffectual bluntness. Offering a brief and inaccurate

²⁸⁸ Hornaday, “Report of the President,” 13.

²⁸⁹ Hornaday to W.P. Wharton, July 20th, 1908. *ABS*: Box 1, Folder 2. DPL.

²⁹⁰ Hornaday to Frederic Kennard, April 5th, 1909. *ABS*: Box 1, Folder 2. DPL.

²⁹¹ Hornaday to W.G. Nye, Commissioner of Public Affairs of the Commercial Club, Minneapolis, October 6th, 1908. *ABS*: Box 1, Folder 2. DPL.

²⁹² “Wants City to Buy A Buffalo,” *Minneapolis Tribune* (September 26th, 1908), 6.

history of St. Paul as an entrepot in the fur trade, Hornaday's letter to city officials suggested the "big furhouses should subscribe handsomely; for goodness knows, they made good profits out of the extermination of the Bison."²⁹³ Insinuating the "fur houses'" implication in the predatory destruction of America's animal totem was an ill-planned approach to solving Hornaday's fundraising dilemma.

Unsurprisingly, nobody from Minneapolis or St. Paul donated to the Bison Society's subscription fund, with the significant exceptions of James J. Hill and Howard Elliot, owner and chairman, respectively, of the Great Northern and Northern Pacific Railroads. Taking a sweeter tone with these two business magnates, Hornaday emphasized how donations to the Bison Range would enhance the two men's philanthropic reputations. But even so, Hornaday incorrectly estimated their levels of interest in his bison conservation project. Tied closely with St. Paul's commercial community, Elliot acquiesced to Hornaday only after the fundraiser berated him and his city for its lack of charity. Elliot made an anonymous donation of \$1,000, a full ten percent of Hornaday's fund, largely in an effort to quiet him.²⁹⁴ James J. Hill, owner of his own personal herd of bison, had little interest in supporting a far-off herd of the animals in a location where they would provide a likely tourist amenity for Elliot's competing Northern Pacific but not Hill's own Great Northern Railroad. Nevertheless, in the fall of 1908 Hill agreed to donate seven of his bison to the project, although none of them ever made it to the refuge.

Hill's aborted donation revealed the tensions that wracked bison conservation outside of eastern urban centers. Hornaday, Roosevelt, and other early popularizers of

²⁹³ Hornaday to Fred B. Strunz, November 23rd, 1908. *ABS*: Box 1, Folder 2. DPL.

²⁹⁴ Hornaday to Howard Elliot, February 8th, 1909. *ABS*: Box 1, Folder 2. DPL.

bison had situated the animal as a symbol of frontier manhood for an eastern elite afflicted by neurasthenia, a reminder of their pioneer ancestors' supposed colonial virility. However, on the rural plains and prairies, local farmers and ranchers predominantly viewed the bison herds of Hill and others as affectations of wealth and pretension. Hill acquired his bison in the late 1890s from U.S. Senator Richard Pettigrew of South Dakota. The animals arrived in St. Paul safely by rail, but Hill's livery staff, inexperienced with bison, were unable to herd them to his estate in North Oaks. Local western knowledge, as well as affect, were essential for managing the animals. Hill asked Pettigrew for advice, who recommended Thomas Hardwick for the job—an old Whoop-up country wolfer, approaching seventy years of age and notorious for his role in the Cypress Hills Massacre. Hardwick traveled to St. Paul on Hill's expense, telling the railroad baron that he could herd the bison by himself with only “a good horse and saddle.” Mounted on Hill's private riding horse, in just five minutes the old-timer drove Hill's bison the remaining mile to their enclosure.²⁹⁵

The inexperienced staff at Hill's farm could have used Hardwick's full-time assistance, since it was difficult keeping the bison at home on the estate. On December 14th, 1910, one of Hill's bison bulls escaped its enclosure and embarked on a 48-hour tour of rural Anoka County, invariably described by local newspapers as a “rampage.” The sensational incident revealed the seams of rural resentment toward Hill's genteel menagerie. In violation of federal bison hunting restrictions, local farmers and police began stalking the bull, nicknamed “Bad Bob” by the county press. “Not a farmer young or old remained at his work,” reported the *Tribune*, “but got out with the nearest

²⁹⁵ “End of Famous Frontiersman,” *Helena Independent* (July 18, 1901).

deadly weapon... everything from a pea-blower to a Gatling gun.”²⁹⁶ The owners of National Automobile in Minneapolis donated the use of their new forty-horsepower race car, the Arrow, for the chase. After tracking the animal through Anoka’s fields and woodlands for an astonishing two days, over fifty hunters were present for the animal’s expiration in a farmer’s ditch on December 17th, where Bad Bob bled to death, crippled by several misplaced rounds of .303 Savage. Hill’s foreman requested and paid for the return of Bob’s carcass to North Oaks.²⁹⁷

Reluctant to part with his prestigious animals, Hill had delayed shipping his pledged bison to the National Bison Range for over two years. Hornaday wrote Hill several times asking for the status of the bison shipment, only to hear excuses about the expense and difficulty of shipping the live animals to Montana.²⁹⁸ On the eve of Bad Bob’s escape, Hill’s son apparently had several of the cows slaughtered to cater an party. “It is a great pity that any female buffaloes should be slaughtered,” lamented Hornaday.²⁹⁹ In the end, Hornaday asked Hill to transform his pledge into a cash donation, but Hill refused. By the close of 1910, the Bison Society’s ability to cast itself as a productive force by engaging local understandings of predation was still in development. Learning from Hornaday’s mistakes, however, other members of the Bison Society perfected its narratives of predation and production over the following decade.

²⁹⁶ “Buffalo Hunt by Auto Ends in Beast’s Death,” *Minneapolis Morning Tribune* (December 17, 1910).

²⁹⁷ See the following newspaper articles: “Auto Eclipses Buffalo in Exciting Anoka County Chase,” *Minneapolis Morning Tribune* (December 18, 1910); “Farmers Take Down Guns to Fight Warring Bison,” *Minneapolis Morning Tribune* (December 16, 1910); “Buffalo Scare at Anoka Rouses Town and Country,” *Minneapolis Morning Tribune* (December 14, 1910); and “Speedy Auto Takes Bronco’s Place in Buffalo Chase,” *Minneapolis Morning Tribune* (December 18, 1910).

²⁹⁸ Hornaday to James J. Hill, August 30th, 1910. *ABS*: Box 1, Folder 2. DPL.

²⁹⁹ Hornaday to James J. Hill, October 14th, 1910. *ABS*: Box 1, Folder 2. DPL.

West Meets East: Writing the Narrative of Productivity and Conservation

Throughout Montana, local concepts of predation and production affected the central ideals of bison conservation and their effective implementation, understandings that also reverberated throughout the west, through North America and eventually even across the Atlantic. The Bison Society faced similar challenges mobilizing funds in Montana, although Hornaday and other members eventually achieved a great level of success utilizing their personal connections to represent themselves and their work as economically productive.

Western American identity was firmly yoked to myths of frontier conquest and pioneer spirit during the early-twentieth century, as a long line of historians, from Edward White to Bill Cronon have argued.³⁰⁰ For Hornaday and Bison Society members, L.A. Huffman, a Montana oil speculator, former state legislator, and prominent Montana photographer, particularly exemplified these connections. Described in the *Montana Stock Grower's Journal* as “a man who is right abreast of the flood tide of twentieth century progress,” as an artist and businessman Huffman also capitalized on old west sentimentality and his reputation as a Montana pioneer.³⁰¹ Huffman offered a hybrid figure for the Bison Society to resolve the tensions between conservation sentimentality and western-progressive colonialism. From the late 1870s through the 1920s, his photographs captured the Montana plain's transformation from a

³⁰⁰ See Cronon, “The Trouble with Wilderness”; and G. Edward White, *The Eastern Establishment and the Western Experience: The West of Frederic Remington, Theodore Roosevelt, and Owen Wister* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968).

³⁰¹ “Old Times and New,” *Stockgrowers Journal*, Miles City, Montana, July 10, 1907, Box 8, Folder 28, L.A. Huffman Studio Collection, Buffalo Bill Historical Center: Cody, Wyoming. Hereinafter cited as HSCBB.

wild grassland to a bounded landscape of farms, ranches, reservations, and oil pumps. Serving as the American Bison Society's informal Montana liaison, he also led its members in several failed investments in the Cat Creek oil region east of Lewistown, Montana. Huffman's activities offer a provocative window into the relationship between business and the conservation movement in the early-twentieth century American West.

Huffman and his colleagues reconciled conservation and development by appealing to an ethos of western manliness founded on labor and its relationship to the earth, upon which hung notions of Anglo-Saxon racial dominance as well as productivity and progress. Huffman and other white men and women of eastern Montana clung to a perception of themselves as hardworking people who labored to extract the resources of the northwestern plains—whether animals, metals, or fuels—in order to sustain, enrich, and grow their western communities. For eastern men like Hornaday, celebrating and preserving the symbols of this so-called pioneer heritage in the face of the industrial transformations wracking the United States held importance. L.A. Huffman's photographs, primarily pictures of pastoral work, helped popularize the mythology of manly frontier labor. His unique images of bison hunting, and his later images of ranch work, featured white male laborers as brawny protagonists of independence, as heroic tamers of wilderness and animality—the latter a key component of colonial notions of predatory behavior. By contrast, Huffman's only published image of a non-Anglo ranch-worker is of a man called "Mex John" working

in a domestic role as a cook.³⁰² Like the work of Charlie Russell and Fredric Remington, Huffman's triumphal images of white manhood resonated widely across the United States and Canada, and his work achieved a fair measure of national celebrity. Theodore Roosevelt adorned the White House with six large Huffman prints (see illustration 8). Cowboy songwriter Badger Clark lamented that "trails, guns, game, leather pants, sunburned noses and free-and-easy ways of living are all vanished or vanishing," but that he found solace in Huffman's images. And in the late 1920s, a teenager from South Carolina even wrote Huffman asking if he could move to Montana and work with him on the open range.³⁰³ By that time, however, Huffman was an old man long out of the hunting and ranching business, who made his living as a landlord in Miles City and Billings. Even so, Huffman retained his persona as a Wild West legend until his death in 1931.

³⁰² L.A. Huffman, "Mex John Making Pies [picture]," undated, Montana State Historical Society: Helena, Montana. Also online at (<http://digitalarchive.oclc.org/request?id=oclcnum:70586358>).

³⁰³ Edith Franz to L.A. Huffman (LAH), undated, Box 5, Folder 1, HSCBB; Badger Clark to LAH, January 4, 1921, Box 2, Folder 40, HSCBB; and John E. Steele to LAH, undated, Box 1, Folder 24, HSCBB.

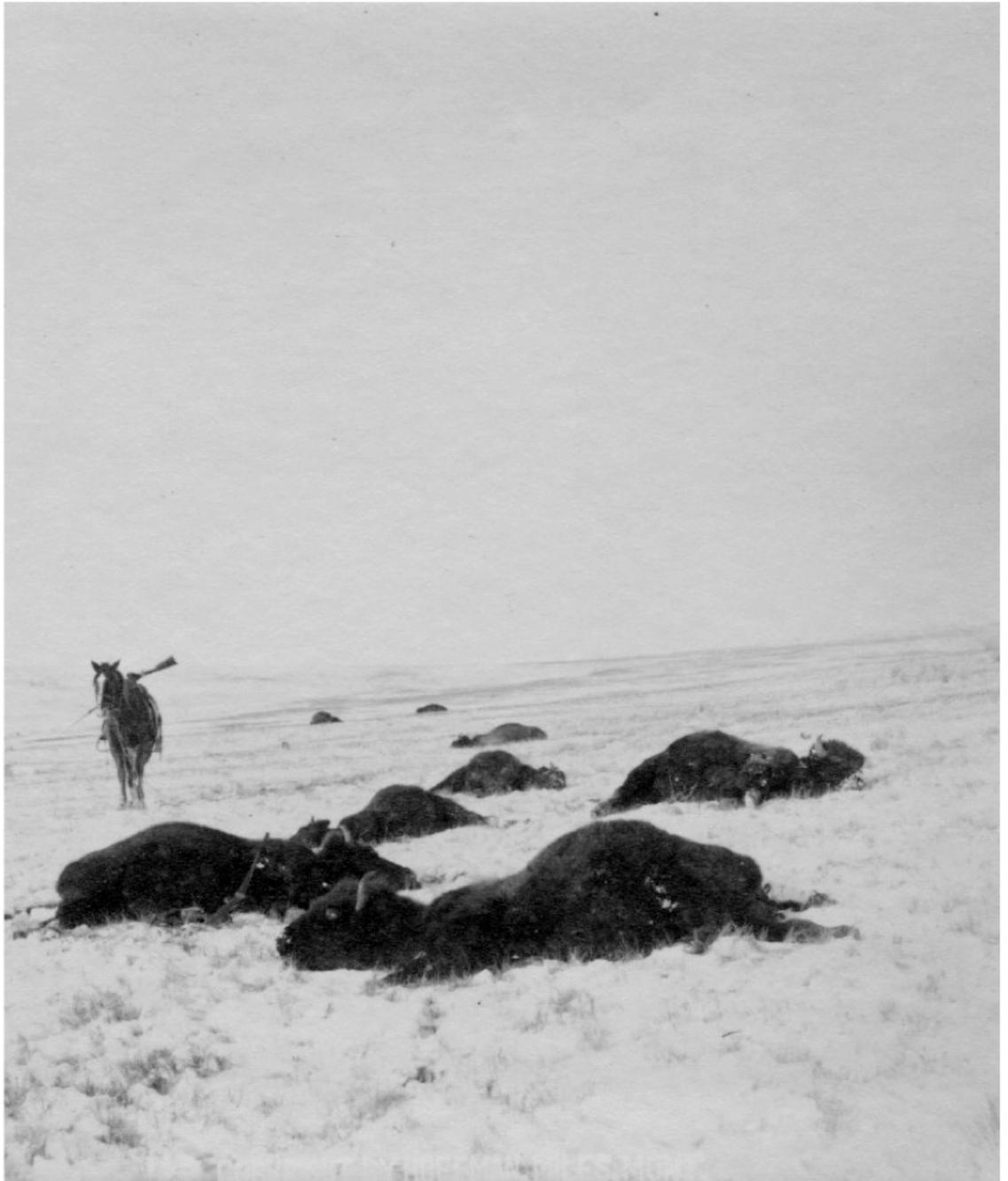


Illustration 8: “Five Minute’s Work,” L.A. Huffman, 1883.³⁰⁴

With this high profile as a western artist, Huffman’s connection with the American Bison Society benefited the organization. Already close friends with William

³⁰⁴ L.A. Huffman, “Five Minute’s Work,” *Huffman Studio Collection*, Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming.

Hornaday from the former's hunting trips to Montana in the 1880s, Huffman's inclusion in this appendage of the eastern establishment provided the Society with a much-needed local presence in Montana. And Huffman's photographic work also created a visual image of the cultural narrative that linked conservation with productivity and progress (see illustration 9). With regional politics dependent on stockgrower's associations, irrigated alfalfa farms, and railroads, wildlife conservation programs had more trouble finding supporters on the Montana plains than in the mountainous western third of the state. Huffman's reputation as a Montana pioneer provided a critical link between Hornaday's Wall Street-based alliance of conservationists and local Montana cattlemen. Moreover, Huffman's pioneer identity provided a model for the Society's mostly younger eastern members. These would-be prodigal sons and cowboys of the post-frontier generation admired Huffman's western authenticity and reveled in his rare visits to New York City. Introducing Huffman to their families and business colleagues whenever he was in town, these Bison Society members also referred Huffman's work to magazines and publishers, and ordered more prints of his photographs. Invited through one Bison Society member as a guest to a dinner honoring Theodore Roosevelt, Huffman dined on French haute-cuisine and conversed with the Fairchilds, Dominicks, and other wealthy easterners eager to offset their masculine insecurities through an association with Huffman's western gruffness.³⁰⁵

³⁰⁵ "Proceedings Around the Welcome Camp-Fire Given in Honor of Colonel Theodore Roosevelt at the Waldorf-Astoria," Camp-Fire Club of America, June 22, 1910, in Box 4, Folder 24, HSCBB.



Illustration 9: “Electric Peak, Yellowstone National Park,” L.A. Huffman.³⁰⁶

Huffman also brought Bison Society members directly into Montana business affairs by selling them investment shares in startup oil companies. Serving as the Bison Society’s *de facto* Montana consulate, he helped members chart the regional terrain of commercial politics. Investing his modest fortune in the Montana Mutual Oil Syndicate and the Black Panther Oil Company, Huffman bought large blocks of shares and resold them to many of his colleagues in the east that he knew through his involvement with the American Bison Society. In particular, Edmund Seymour—president of the American Bison Society following Hornaday’s retirement—and George Roberts, both successful Wall Street bond traders, invested thousands of dollars in these ventures at

³⁰⁶ L.A. Huffman, “Electric Peak—Yellowstone National Park,” *Huffman Studio Collection*, Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming.

Huffman's direction.³⁰⁷ Located in the Cat Creek oil field, one of the most profitable oil districts in Montana, both the Black Panther and Montana Mutual ventures failed miserably. The Black Panther Oil Company was a particular source of aggravation for Huffman. Turned on to the brand-new, Philadelphia-headquartered business by his son-in-law and Montana congressman W.T. Felton, Huffman sold large blocks of the company's shares to his local and eastern friends. Before the company dug any wells in Cat Creek, however, the federal government imprisoned several of its officers for fraud and embezzlement.³⁰⁸ Huffman's investment in the Montana Mutual Oil Syndicate was a more private, local affair, but it ended in disaster too, when the crude pulled from its wells in Cat Creek proved too impure to cover the piping and refining costs necessary to bring it to market.³⁰⁹

The Bison Society's participation in Montana's oil industry demonstrated that conservationists did not necessarily contradict western development; the two trajectories went forward hand in hand, based on their belief and faith in science, and in the conviction that the manly labor of hunting and resource extraction—labor in the earth—was necessary for the continued vitality of the United States. Following the work of historian Frederick Jackson Turner, historical and social theory in the early

³⁰⁷ See many correspondences between Edmund Seymour and LAH regarding oil in Box 1, Folders 21 and 22, HSCBB.

³⁰⁸ See George Washington Moore to J.E. Campbell, December 11, 1923, Box 3, Folder 69, HSCBB. More evidence on the impending implosion of the company can be found in Black Panther Oil and Refining Corporation, "Financial Statement and Report," July 30, 1921, Box 6, Folder 11, HSCBB.

³⁰⁹ Information on the Montana Mutual Oil Syndicate is available in the many manuscripts held in Box 6, Folder 46, HSCBB. In particular, see Eugene Kegley to George Roberts, November 25, 1921, Box 6, Folder 46, HSCBB. Hornaday was the exception. In 1921 Hornaday responded to Huffman's investment suggestion, explaining that "having recently contributed a modest \$250 to a dry hole in Oklahoma, which a shrewd and very dear friend became convinced was a sure thing, I am sore on all well drilling. My friends are all dry hole investors." Hornaday might have been right with his arithmetic when he opined to Huffman that "incidentally, it is my belief that two dollars go down into the earth in dry holes for every one that comes out in the shape of oil."

twentieth century postulated that the United States derived its greatness from its frontier experience; that America was essentially a rejuvenation of European democratic institutions and culture forged in the savage wilderness of the American West. This frontier narrative offered a way of streamlining American business and politics that the Bison Society sought to take full advantage.³¹⁰

Perhaps more than any other eastern Bison Society benefactor, Ed Seymour perfected these western affectations and provides another example of the embodied link between Western ideas of productivity and Eastern ideas of conservation. Born into one of the Hudson River Valley's wealthiest families, Seymour first met Huffman through Hornaday several years before the oil fiasco, when he had been searching out a .45-120 buffalo rifle for his gun collection.³¹¹ Eager to collect relics of the nation's western heritage, he was also anxious about his own past history in the west. As a young graduate of Williams College in the 1870s, Seymour purchased a herd of 5,000 cattle in Texas that he eventually moved to northern Wyoming. He quit the cattle business following the bust of the mid-1880s, and used his remaining capital to open a bank in Tacoma, Washington. After marrying in 1891, he moved back to New York and began trading bonds.³¹²

In his correspondence with Huffman and other western contacts, Seymour emphasized his western credentials. In courting one potential benefactor from San Angelo, Texas, Seymour explained his personal history in the Texas cattle business.

³¹⁰ See Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," in *Rereading Frederick Jackson Turner*, ed. John Mack Faragher (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 31-60.

³¹¹ Edmund Seymour to L.A. Huffman, undated? ABS: Box 4, Folder 10. DPL.

³¹² *Who's Who in New York City and State*, Vol. 4, 1909, ed. John William Leonard and Frank Holmes, (L.R. Hamersly Company, 1909), 1170.

Although he admitted moving his herd to the northern plains, he lauded Texas as “a wonderful state... doing some very good things in the preservation of game.”³¹³ Unlike Hornaday, Seymour was careful to compliment potential western allies, encouraging them to consider themselves as stakeholders in regional wildlife preservation through their shared commercial interests in cattle, oil, and land development. Seymour himself represented these shared interests well. He served simultaneously, for instance, as president of the American Bison Society and as the chairman of a national livestock corporation. In forging alliances in Montana, Seymour recognized the importance of valuing local perspectives, but he also made it clear that association with the Bison Society would increase the political clout of Montana organizations. In a letter to one Missoula business owner, he explained that, while “you can function usefully in the West... you never will have influence east of the Missouri River to amount to much.” Joining the Bison Society, urged Seymour, would broaden the scope of Montanans’ potential in national politics. And doing so would come at small risk of compromising western ideals because conservation was not and need not be antagonistic to local goals of productivity. After all, “I am a ‘Wyoming Pioneer,’” reassured Seymour, “and I might be classed as a Montana Pioneer, etc.”³¹⁴ Using his western background to demonstrate his commitment to the region’s logic of production and predation, Seymour instilled trust in a regional elite initially suspicious of the Bison Society’s intentions.

But performing western business culture was not, on its own, sufficient to establish conservation’s compatibility with Montana commerce. The Bison Society and

³¹³ Edmund Seymour to A.A. Sugg, August 5th, undated. MSS 1, Box 14, Folder 2. The Wildlife Conservation Society Archives, the Bronx Zoo, New York (WCS).

³¹⁴ Seymour to M.S. Carpenter, July 16th, 1926. MSS 1, Box 14, Folder 2. WCS.

other conservation groups still needed to demonstrate their willingness to serve as good neighbors to the cattle industry and other regional enterprises. Managing wildlife refuges as ranches was one way they accomplished this task. This primarily meant a commitment to killing wolves and coyotes, and limiting the access of Indians, Basques, and other humans deemed predatory under Anglo-American colonialism to the harvest of wild game. Learning from the dissociations of predation from production perfected by the borderland's livestock industry, conservationists further positioned their work as an acceptable labor of production through their attempts to designate, control, and remove predators.

Un-naturalized Immigrants: Racializing the Narrative of Predation

The eugenicist Madison Grant, author of *The Passing of the Great Race*, was one of the Bison Society's more prominent members, as well as an office holder on the New York Zoological Society's Board of Directors. He was one of the organization's most passionate defenders of western wildlife, especially antelope. In 1919, while touring eastern Oregon as part of an exploratory trip for an antelope refuge with Secretary of Interior E.W. Nelson and U.S. Senator Harry Lane, Grant offered a \$200 bounty for the conviction of anyone caught killing the animal—presumably Basque shepherders.³¹⁵ Even by the standards of the uneconomical bounties placed on wolves during the era, this was a remarkable sum. Ironically, the majority of Oregon's poached antelope were killed for use as bait animals by bounty-hunting wolfers. But if Grant's

³¹⁵ Seymour to Hornaday, December 20th, 1919. ABS: Box 3, Folder 24. DPL. "It comes to me as a rumor that your friend Grant put his foot in it out in Oregon... offering a reward of \$200 himself for the conviction of anybody killing antelope."

bounty therefore exposed the subtleties of predation as an intellectual concept, it steamrolled any ambiguities with the weight of its payout. Using their prestige as scientific experts, Grant and other members of the Bison Society largely shaped western perceptions of predation as a biological category relevant to human and nonhuman populations during the 1910s and 1920s. At the heart of these conceptions was an understanding that predatory behavior was an immutable characteristic of particular human races and animal species, a concept rooted in the taxonomic, natural history paradigm of the late-nineteenth century.³¹⁶ In the western, and eventually national contexts, Basques, Indians, and wolves stood in as these natural predators—beings whose racialized bodies marked them as inherently violent, vicious, and wasteful toward wildlife (see illustration 10).

³¹⁶ I am referring to a natural history paradigm that emphasized the habits and characteristics of organisms as predetermined taxonomic certainties rather than as mutable social and ecological behaviors.



WORK OF THE UNNATURALIZED BASQUE SHEEPHERDER
IN THE GUANO VALLEY, LAKE COUNTY, OREGON, WERE FOUND THE CARCASSES OF
SEVENTY-FIVE ANTELOPE WHICH ON INSPECTION DISCLOSED THE FACT THAT THEY
HAD BEEN WANTONLY SHOT, AS THEY ALL HAD BULLET HOLES IN THEM AND NO
PART OF THE CARCASSES UTILIZED

Illustration 10: “Work of the Unnaturalized Basque Sheepherder.”³¹⁷

With an eye toward eugenics, Grant, Hornaday and other Bison Society members conflated the biological management of human and non-human populations.³¹⁸ Hornaday’s *Wild Animal Interviews*, a collection of short animal allegories, offers an interesting manifestation of these ideologies of animals and race.³¹⁹ A strangely serious attempt to collect ethnographic testimony from different wild animals, *Wild Animal Interviews* is noteworthy for the ways in which Hornaday invested his animal subjects with racial characteristics. The bison and “star-spangled Antelope” interviewed by Hornaday, seem convincingly civilized, and like the “Anglo-Saxon race,” in constant danger of destruction at the hands of other savage species. Hornaday’s interview with a gray wolf anthropomorphized the predator as a vicious savage; “the meanest and cruelest animal of all North America, and if I could do it I would exterminate all of you but one pair.”³²⁰ Hornaday’s genocidal rhetoric resonated with western artist Frederic Remington’s famous diatribe against so-called “non-Americans”: “Jews, Injuns, Chinamen, Italians, Huns—the rubbish of the Earth I hate—I’ve got some Winchesters and when the massacring begins, I can get my share of ‘em,

³¹⁷ “Work of the Unnaturalized Basque Sheepherder,” in American Bison Society, *Report of the American Bison Society, 1922-1923*, 48.

³¹⁸ On these misuses of Darwin, see Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1981). See also Madison Grant, *The Passing of the Great Race: Or, the Racial Basis of European History*, 3rd Edition (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1919) and William Zebina Ripley, *The Races of Europe: A Sociological Study* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1899).

³¹⁹ Here is Hornaday’s explanation and justification for his methodology: “Any naturalist who is worth his salt can determine the thoughts and feelings of mammals, birds, and reptiles by the sign language, by facial and bodily expression, and by telepathy; and afterward he can easily translate the whole interview product into outdoor English for the benefit of the reading classes.” William T. Hornaday, *Wild Animal Interviews and Wild Opinions of Us* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1928), ix.

³²⁰ Antelope; Tiger; Wolf. Hornaday, *Wild Animal Interviews*, 163; 235; 295.

and what's more, I will."³²¹ Artists, conservationists, historians and philosophers of the American West, eugenicists and racial theorists all contributed to these shared discussions of the scientific and aesthetic merits of whiteness based on an implicit understanding of predation as a savage characteristic.

This discourse of predation and race also inverted Anglo-American ideologies of native and immigrant during the early-twentieth century. Although Indians had been vilified as primitive and savage in earlier centuries by European-Americans eager to maintain their connections with their mother countries, "native American" acquired a new nationalist meaning amidst the new immigration of the Progressive Era. The new nativism originated during precisely the same decades as the United States and Canada intensified their bitter programs of conquest, colonization, and forced assimilation, which killed and dislocated thousands of North America's indigenous people.³²² Encapsulating the spirit of both Grant and Hornaday's conceits of Anglo-Saxon dominance, by the Progressive Era "native American" had come to epitomize the second-, third-, fourth-generation white American elite—often with British or Dutch surnames—the Roosevelts, Seymours, and Remingtons who squared off against the huddled masses in order to deal with their own class affliction, the racial and gender insecurities accompanying their rise to affluence.

³²¹ Quoted in Poultney Bigelow, "Frederic Remington; with Extracts from Unpublished Letters," *New York State Historical Association Quarterly Journal* 10, 1929: 46-48, in G. Edward White, *The Eastern Establishment and the Western Experience: The West of Frederic Remington, Theodore Roosevelt, and Owen Wister* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), 109.

³²² Few historians have explored this link between the new nativism and Indian dispossession better than Richard Slotkin, who plotted the Indian Wars in relation to eastern labor disputes following the Civil War. See Richard Slotkin, *The Fatal Environment: The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization, 1800-1890* (New York: Atheneum, 1985).

Embracing the Indian then, at least a fictitious one, offered a possible and popular way not only to reconcile these two meanings of native, but also provided a mechanism for white elites to reclaim and celebrate their masculinity. Taking a trip to Oklahoma to kill predators on the Wichita Mountain Wildlife Refuge, President Roosevelt “acquired in the Indian country a complexion that would do credit to an Apache warrior,” the *Washington Post* approvingly reported. “For the next four or five weeks he will make life miserable for members of the cat and bear family that happen to come his way.”³²³ These “shades of Hiawatha,” as Alan Trachtenberg calls the Indian ghosts haunting Progressive-era metaphor, created a new category in nativist America’s public memory, and in its national self-identity.³²⁴ For instance, Frederick Jackson Turner’s frontier thesis, historian Alan Trachtenberg argues, offered one important solution to the paradoxical double-meaning of “native American.” Articulating an American identity formulated on the dialectics between civilization and savagery, Turner’s binary implied that so-called savage Indians provided an essential ingredient in the seasoning of the American nation. By extension, the mortal struggle of conquering and “taming” wild Indians helped germinate the seeds, according to Turnerian visions, of white America’s virile masculinity.³²⁵

By the 1920s, the seeming success of Indian assimilation and citizenship also provided a counterpoint to problematic populations of “unnaturalizable” immigrants to the western states. This sentiment had been building in the northeast for a number of

³²³ “Speeding to the Rockies,” *Washington Post* (April 14, 1905), 1. Cited in Brinkley, 612.

³²⁴ Alan Trachtenberg, *Shades of Hiawatha: Staging Indians, Making Americans, 1880-1930* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2004).

³²⁵ Kerwin Klein, *Frontiers of Historical Imagination: Narrating the European Conquest of Native America, 1890-1990* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997) takes up this issue as well many others relating to Turner’s thesis.

years. In 1908, for instance, George Bird Grinnell wrote Huffman, the Montana photographer, looking for some photographs of “western scenes” for his magazine *Forest and Stream*. “The picture of a lot of dead animals hanging up, or with the slayers standing by them, do not appeal to us very strongly,” wrote Grinnell, presumably familiar with Huffman’s work on bison hunts. “Neither do we care for pictures of Indians,” he continued, “unless they are doing something, and Indians wearing the war bonnet are barred.”³²⁶ It is unclear what “something” Grinnell wanted the Indians to do, but his prohibition of the war bonnet precluded the typical Remington and Charlie Russell scenes. Hunting for western images, but not those of savage Indians or slaughtered wildlife, Grinnell’s editorial taste seems to indicate a broader Progressive-era admittance of notions of “civilized” or assimilated Indians into the mainstream.

Granted, some have argued that a vision of Indians as sensitive stewards of wildlife also emerged during this period.³²⁷ The “noble relationship” of Plains Indians with bison, for instance, provided grist for conservationists eager to tout them as heroes. William Hornaday made exactly this point in his history of bison extermination. Focusing on the ravages of non-native hide hunters on the southern plains, many of them recent immigrants to America, Hornaday downplayed Indians’ roles in bringing the Plain’s totemic animal to the brink of extinction—not to mention his own engagement in the slaughter.³²⁸ However, while this vision reflected the Anglo-

³²⁶ George Bird Grinnell to LAH, October 28, 1908, Box 10, Folder 64, HSCBB.

³²⁷ This is the romantic narrative explored by Shepard Krech, *Ecological Indian* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999).

³²⁸ William Hornaday, *The Extermination of the American Bison*, reissue edition (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2002).

American fetish of romantic primitivism, it rarely contributed to an actual colonial tolerance of indigenous hunting practices. In Glacier National Park, for instance, the treaty rights of Blackfeet hunters provided an extreme example of conservationists' battles to limit the native harvests of elk and other game, as Louis Warren and Mark David Spence have emphasized.³²⁹ Despite being often envisioned as noble keepers of the game, actual Indians were largely discouraged or even excluded from hunting wildlife throughout the borderlands.

Moreover, western Indians themselves commonly transgressed the noble fictions transposed upon them by eastern romanticizers, even turning narratives of predation and production on their heads. In a sense, the early literary work of D'Arcy McNickle, a Salish-Kootenai raised on the Flathead Reservation during the conversion of its southern tier into the National Bison Range, represents this phenomenon. In "Meat For God," published in *Esquire* in 1935, McNickle told the brilliant story of an old Indian protagonist and his grandchild unapologetically poaching deer out of season, driven by a starvation wrought by the predacious expansion of Anglo-American colonialism. Published a year later, his masterpiece, *The Surrounded*, originally hinged on the violence between Indians and game wardens over reservation hunting and was titled "The Hungry Generations."³³⁰ Commonly remembered for his gritty depictions of modern reservation life, McNickle's works of fiction equally served as political statements exposing the absurdity of Anglo-American ideals of romantic primitivism in a colonial world where native people were marked as predators.

³²⁹ See Spence; and Warren.

³³⁰ See Birgit Hans, ed. *D'Arcy McNickle's The Hungry Generations: The Evolution of a Novel* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2007).

Throughout the borderlands, anxieties over the predatory savagery of wolves easily interacted with legacies of western conquest, ideologies of eugenics and conservation, and notions of virile white masculinity to warp into a complex xenophobia of immigrant Basque shepherders. First arriving around 1900, these Basques, many of whom worked with sheep in the high plains and mountains of the Pyrenean Basque country, found work in the interior northwest United States as shepherders as well.³³¹ Competing with struggling Anglo-Saxon cattlemen over dwindling range resources, these immigrants, cattlemen claimed, upset the state's tenuously-balanced political economy. More significantly, however, Basques provided a foil for the construction of a white nativism across Montana and the northern plains. Drawing on racial theories that classified Basques as non-European, the conservationist-oil speculators of the American Bison Society singled out Basque immigrants as environmentally destructive, the keepers of animals that cattlemen ironically referred to as "locusts." While sheep typically graze grasses more closely than cattle, beef cattle greatly outnumbered sheep on the northern plains and took a far more drastic toll on the western rangelands. The 1924 Immigration Act set a quota on immigration from Spain, partially in response to these western grumbles over the Basque sheep industry.

In 1908, Huffman and Hornaday co-authored a photographic essay in *Scribner's* that offers a glimpse of the connections between bison conservation and suspicions of the sheep industry. Titled "Diversion in Picturesque Game-Lands," the article provided an account of a hunting trip that Hornaday and Huffman took the previous

³³¹ While there is not yet a comprehensive history of Basque immigration to Montana during the Progressive-era, Jeronima Echeverria and Richard Etulain, eds. *Portraits of Basques in the New World* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1999) offers a useful selection of historical articles on Basque migration more generally.

year, a trip to “energize” the two aging men—Hornaday weighted down by the “effête” surroundings of his office in New York, and Huffman apparently freed by the recent engagements of his two daughters.³³² Describing the environmental destruction wrought by sheep in the Missouri River badlands north of Miles City, Hornaday lamented, “the awful sheep-herds have gone over it, like swarms of hungry locusts, and now the earth looks scalped and bald, and lifeless. To-day it is almost as barren of cattle as of buffaloes, and it will be years in recovering from the fatal passage of the sheep.”³³³ On their hunting trip, Huffman and Hornaday also found some dinosaur bones in a cut-bank along a Missouri tributary. Sending the specimens to Henry Fairfield Osborn, Hornaday’s paleontologist colleague at the New York Zoological Park, the bones led to the discovery of *Tyrannosaurus Rex*, the northern plain’s most apocryphal predator.³³⁴

H.F. Osborn was a friend of Madison Grant’s, and also an advocate of Grant’s racial taxonomy and eugenic history of America. In the preface to Grant’s *Passing of the Great Race*, a call to address the problems of white “race-suicide” precipitated by the destruction of World War I and decreasing white birth rates, Osborn concluded that the “conservation of that race which has given us the true spirit of Americanism is not a matter either of racial pride or racial prejudice; it is a matter of love of country, of a true sentiment which is based upon knowledge and the lessons of history rather than upon the sentimentalism which is fostered by ignorance.”³³⁵ Both Osborn and Grant agreed

³³² William Hornaday, “Diversions in Picturesque Game-Lands: Grand Bad-Lands and Mule Deer,” *Scribner’s Magazine*, July 1908: 1-17.

³³³ Hornaday, “Diversions,” 1.

³³⁴ Hornaday, “Diversions,” 17.

³³⁵ Henry Fairfield Osborn, “Preface,” in Grant, *The Passing of the Great Race*, ix.

that this patriotic racial character came from the “Anglo-Saxon pioneer type,” an artificial evolution of man spurred by a Turner-esque frontier conquest. Separating European whiteness into three races, Nordic, Teutonic, and Alpine, Grant’s taxonomy ranked Nordic as the purest disposition of pioneering impulse, the basis of American racial character, and the natural human aristocracy. Basques, on the other hand, fit into none of these three categories. Due to their unique language, Grant theorized the Basques as an ancient “An-aryan” race migrated from Asia, some kind of hopelessly anti-white presence in Europe.³³⁶ Grant’s analysis of Basque racial origin, written in 1916, established a seemingly scientific basis on which to discriminate against Basque claims to legitimacy as white co-owners of the American West, accelerating calls for their removal.

In its 1922 report, the American Bison Society opined that “if the Basque sheepmen are allowed to occupy the country, it will be but a short time before the antelope are killed or driven off and the nests of the sage grouse trampled out by the sheep, vegetation destroyed, and the country made a barren waste.”³³⁷ The report also mentioned “60 antelope wiped out last winter by wolves and Indian dogs.” “Stockmen pay taxes on land and cattle,” the report continued,

They are opposed to the sheepmen and their methods, as he is neither a settler, desirable person or of any benefit to the community, pays no taxes, ruins the land and then passes on... When the grazing is destroyed by the sheep, it is, and will remain, a barren desert of loose stones, whereas cattle have and do graze on it year after year without injuring it.

Clearly, these tirades against Basque shepherders represented the anxieties of white cattlemen toward immigrant shepherders. But the metaphorical connections between

³³⁶ Grant, *The Passing*, 234-235.

³³⁷ *The Annual Report of the American Bison Society*, 1922, 41, 63. In Box 1, Folder 23, HSCBB.

Basques and wolves also served to naturalize Basque racial characteristics as savage and cruel.

Frank Van Nuy's *Americanizing the West*, a history of immigrant naturalization programs throughout the western states from 1890 to 1930, uses a hydrological metaphor to explain the history of the west's relationship with immigrants. "Like engineers harnessing a wild river's flow behind an elaborate system of dams," he suggests, "the Americanization movement had attempted to control the chaotic, diverse, and mobile immigrants of the West."³³⁸ Van Nuys concludes that these efforts to Americanize immigrants—to naturalize them—as part of a contained human current, failed in large part due to the "uncertain results" of Progressive-era immigration reforms.

But the Immigration Act of 1924, a system of quotas that relied on Grant's hierarchy of European whiteness to exclude non-Anglo-Saxon immigrants from southern and eastern Europe, was not just due to Basque failures to "naturalize" to the norms of American behavior. Instead, the obstacle to their "Americanization" lay in the science of racial taxonomy and its imbrication within a logic of predation that cast immigrants like Basques as unproductive species, unworthy of inclusion in America's modern, scientifically-managed landscape. For Basques, detested by conservationists as wolf-like predatory criminals, one obstacle to "naturalizing" as American citizens was their naturalization as predators. Racial ideologies bolstered by myths of white conquest and animal metaphors precluded the incorporation of Basques into the white conceptions of the western landscape.

³³⁸ Frank Van Nuys, *Americanizing the West: Race, Immigrants, and Citizenship, 1890-1930* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002), 192.

Within a broader political ecology dominated by the livestock industry, wildlife conservationists in the borderlands had to make it clear that they would be good neighbors, and they achieved this mainly through persecution of predators. And in this way, the narratives of predation and production used by conservationists were shaped by the needs and goals of local westerners, who above all desired to maintain their own status as producers by continuing to designate and destroy predators. For instance, one woman who lived adjacent to Wainwright Buffalo Park during the 1910s, which she called the “coyote reserve,” complained bitterly about the shooting restrictions within the park that had made it a seeming sanctuary for local predators. “The wolves have learned to come out and help them selves to the poultry and dash back in again,” she explained. “With this park, I look upon the Dominion Government as a neighbor of mine who is not being neighborly.”³³⁹ In response to complaints like these, park managers and conservationists not only redoubled efforts to eliminate predatory animals from wildlife refuges, they also extended their expertise to lay blame for conservation difficulties on Basques and Indians—the local disenfranchised people who had been recast over time, both culturally and materially, as “predatory.” This process of racializing predation was borne through the demands of integrating the eastern-based conservation of wildlife with the commercial prerogatives of regional western authority.

Hardening the Logic of Predation

“Advancing civilization” was a well-worn euphemism by 1930, when Stanley Young explained to Arthur Carhart why wolves would be annihilated. Just three years

³³⁹ Brower, *Lost Tracks*, 94.

earlier, the two had collaborated on *The Last Stand of the Pack*, a collection of stories celebrating the Bureau of Biological Survey's wolf hunters and their elusive quarry.³⁴⁰ Recently promoted to the Bureau's chief of Predatory Animal and Rodent Control (PARC), Young now faced a barrage of questions from Carhart, a former Forest Service professional, an old friend, and a new advocate of wolves. Carhart's interrogation threw Young into a lucid counter-offensive, to the extent that copies of Young's response circulated throughout the Bureau for the next thirty years, providing an official list of dogmatic answers to the difficult questions that scientists, conservationists, and the public asked about the agency's predator eradication programs.³⁴¹ Unable to support his position with empirical data—PARC, after all, waged “campaigns” rather than “studies”—Young used the familiar narrative of conquest, of “advancing civilization,” to point out wolf defenders' central misconception:

You state, “Isn't it a just consideration that the cats and wolves and coyotes have a damn sight better basic right to live in the hills and have the use of that part of the world as their own than the domestic stock of the stockmen?” Do you say that also with respect to the American Indian? Your reasoning in this connection would argue that the Indian should have been allowed to “stay put,” but advancing civilization has dictated otherwise, and the same holds true for predators. Young summoned the full force of

³⁴⁰ See Arthur Carhart and Stanley Young, *The Last Stand of the Pack* (J.H. Sears and Company, 1929). See Jon Coleman, *Vicious: Wolves and Men in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), for an account of this book's development as well as Young's early partnership with Carhart.

³⁴¹ In 1939, the Bureau of Biological Survey and Fisheries turned into the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Carhart was not the first to question the Bureau of Biological Survey's predator control mission. Several outspoken members of the American Society of Mammalogists, including Charles Adams, Joseph Grinnell, and E. Raymond Hall—along with other affiliates of the University of California's Museum of Vertebrate Zoology—had been pressing the Bureau about its predator control agenda since the mid-1920s. See Tim Dunlap, *Saving America's Wildlife*, and Michael Robinson, *Predatory Bureaucracy* for excellent analyses of this debate.

frontier history's mythic inevitability to justify PARC's mission; a wave of civilization regretfully purging the plains of its unproductive predators.

Young was not unique in his outlook. From the beginning of the Progressive Era, American and Canadian scientists, activists, and bureaucrats faced down the "Gospel of Efficiency" by utilizing discourses and practices of conquest to express the intangible values of wildlife conservation programs. In the Montana-Alberta borderlands, bison and antelope had stood in as positive symbols of these national narratives, while wolves presented regretful figures of failed evolution under the forces of civilization. For organizations like the American Bison Society, which actively created bison and antelope refuges throughout the Canadian-American West, wildlife conservation offered a way to atone for the sins of Anglo-American colonization while redoubling its political consequences. Saving a species nearly wiped out by commercial exploitation, Hornaday, for instance, saw in his work an effective battle to preserve living animal specimens of North America's pre-colonial past as a way to demonstrate capitalism's ultimate governance by philanthropic principles. But driven by much the same motivation as their "salvage anthropology" contemporaries, the ABS sought wildlife for its representative power, as objects of colonial domination, rather than fighting to let the "uncivilized" live on their own terms. For the ABS and similar organizations, working to eradicate wolves was an easy decision; as predators of bison, wolves, like the Indians whose cultures anthropology fetishized, but whose presence disdained, held no physical place in the borderland's post-conquest order.

The North American scientific mode of natural history also posed limits to the acceptance of wolves as valuable creatures. Dominated by descriptive methods that

classified animal behaviors based on immutable characteristics, research in the field was slow to accept the dynamism of nonhuman behavior, and remain unfocused on explicating the mechanics of organismal relationships. Under the influence of this philosophy, most zoologists, and even scientists in the emerging field of ecology, were content to attribute to wolves a set of static behaviors, namely an insatiable taste for killing. Although Young, for instance, wished that “the wolf,” always in the singular, “would change its ways just a little so that the hand of man would not be raised so constantly against this predator,” wolves’ failure to do so was a foregone conclusion: “This animal is one-hundred-percent criminal, killing for sheer blood lust, more often killing to satisfy his lust than to satisfy a natural and reasonable hunger.” Even the American Society of Mammalogists, one of PARC’s earliest and harshest critics, admitted that wolves “were truly killers.”³⁴² This dominant understanding postponed serious research into wolf behaviors until the second half of the twentieth century. Meanwhile, it hindered the scientific community’s effectiveness as an advocate for wolf conservation.³⁴³

Usual narratives of wildlife conservation in the United States and Canada commonly locate the popular emergence of predator advocacy alongside Aldo Leopold and Olaus Murie’s epiphanies in the 1940s. Leopold’s “land ethic” and Murie’s abandonment of the Bureau—like Young, Murie was a former PARC district manager in the Rockies—supposedly signaled the emergence of a new environmental movement

³⁴² A. Brazier Howell to Paul Redington, undated. *Olaus J. Murie Papers* CONS 90: Box 3, Folder 33. DPL.

³⁴³ Dunlap, *Saving America’s Wildlife* and Donald Worster, *Nature’s Economy: A History of Ecological Ideas*, 2nd edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1994) both give accounts of the scientific battles between the ASM and PARC before and after the passage of the Animal Damage Control Act.

from within the professional cadres of American universities and public agencies, establishing a latent core of sympathetic experts for an ecologically-minded public to tap into by the 1960s. The best of these historians have analyzed, in detail, the opposition of scientists and conservationists to predator control as early as the 1920s, citing the “great rift” between the Bureau and the American Society of Mammalogists over predator eradication, a battle that laid the foundations for an environmental movement guided by research in animal ecology.³⁴⁴ But in celebrating the early dissenters and the eventual fruit of their efforts, historians of environmentalism too often forget that in the interim, the Bureau won. In 1931, after years of intense debate, PARC secured a ten-year congressional commitment to fund and expand its eradication work over millions of acres of public land. The reasons for the bill’s passage remained incomprehensible to its early environmental opposition, who were crippled by an unawareness of predator control’s deep imbrication within the colonial logic of conquest and production, a logic that structured the opposition’s politics as well.

Under siege by the American Society of Mammalogists, an organization in which he was himself a member, Young faced his colleagues’ concerns that PARC’s lethal control methods not only hindered the scientific study of carnivorous mammals, but that they also upset nature’s ecological balance. Pointing out the absurdity of this latter objection in a world already mauled by industrial agriculture, Young remarked to Carhart: “In this day and age of man, wild life is where you find it.” Recognizing, before his time, that wildness was part cultural artifice, Young placed his faith in an even more normative bastion of scientific logic, the difference between consumer and

³⁴⁴ See Dunlap, *Saving America’s Wildlife*; and Robinson, *Predatory Bureaucracy*.

producer, between predator and prey. In seeking to establish the limits of “natural and reasonable hunger,” Young dedicated his intellectual life to sorting out the moral boundaries of human and animal exploitation through the concept of predation.

Stanley Young was not alone in his contemplations of nature and social order among modern American scientists. His interest in unraveling the moral bases of hunger and satiation reflected a powerful American concept of predation that was rooted in the colonial experiences of the late-nineteenth century West, and leavened by a liberal-capitalist consensus in the early-twentieth. The 1931 passage of the Animal Damage Control Act operated on the principle that wolves, like other true predators, were voracious killers wholly unproductive according to the logic of modern capitalism. This principle was informed by a natural history paradigm that categorized the wolf as an animal with immutably violent behaviors. By casting predation in such terms, the Animal Damage Control Act and its supporters in the Department of Agriculture hardened western dissociations between predation and production into federal policy. Just as aspects of the 1924 Immigration Exclusion Act hinged on the naturalization of Basques as predators, the Animal Damage Control Act established wolves, along with coyotes, mountain lions, and bears, as predators in need of exclusion from the western landscape.

Conclusion

Well into the 1900s, wildlife conservationists and policymakers were the heirs of a logic of predation that evolved amidst the settlement and colonization of the northern borderlands. This logic, more than the broad cultural milieus of frontier or

empire, served to justify and legitimate the creation of wildlife preserves in Montana and Alberta during a period of major land contestations. In fact, as chapters 3 and 4 have demonstrated, the logic of predation itself gathered momentum during the early years of these controversies—particularly within processes of reservation confinement and allotment—because of the ways that predatory logic separated land users through perceptions of productivity. Collapsing predation with Anglo-American concepts of plunder was one method by which white cattlemen represented themselves as producers, and as such, the rightful occupiers of the northern rangeland. This same logic also provided conservationists the discursive means to justify their incursions on stockmens’ so-called “productive” lands for the sake of rehabilitating wildlife. For both eastern conservationists and western commercial interests, the narrative of production and predation had proved their utility in supporting the colonization of western lands and marginalizing competing peoples and animals.

Despite their colonial affinities, however, tensions between wildlife conservationists and the stock industry were not easily surmounted. Bison conservation was driven by an uneasy and uneven cooperation between eastern sentimentalism and western business interests. As Andrew Isenberg has noted, bridging this divide required an accommodation where conservationists purchased bison herds from enterprising regional stock-owners and confined their activities to isolated refuges that did not threaten the livestock industry’s broader political ecology. The profit motive, or the “returns” of the bison as Isenberg phrased it, connected the divergent interests of stockgrowers and conservationists, allowing the possibility of bison preservation. Taking a different approach, however, this chapter has argued that the origins of this

compromise exist in the logic of predation, revealing how William Hornaday and the American Bison Society relied on framing their agenda as productive in order to attract western support for their conservation efforts.

Beyond simply creating the political possibility of conservation, this logic of predation also set limitations on conservationists' possible achievements. Karen Brower's recent history of the Wainwright Buffalo Park contends that its failures were due primarily to a lack of professional expertise in ecological management. "As little was known about wildlife science until the 1930s," she explains, "the Parks Branch turned to sources knowledgeable in domestic animal management and relied heavily on the Department of Agriculture for advice on managing the bison."³⁴⁵ Although Brower may be correct in emphasizing the Parks Branch's scientific ignorance, this chapter suggests instead that the bureaucratic drift of wildlife conservation was already overdetermined by its proximity to predator/producer idioms of the livestock industry that had evolved throughout the region's local history. Conservationists applied agricultural solutions because the logic of predation foreclosed other possibilities, such as the reintroduction of bison to private rangelands.

Underpinning these specific horizons of wildlife conservation was a broader narrative of predation that accounted animal extinction to the contingencies of overhunting rather than environmental transformations effected by colonization and habitat loss. As this chapter demonstrates, conservationists like the ABS created and utilized this narrative not only to drum up "sentiment" for the preservation of wildlife, but also to create a mythology of animal extinction that would play well throughout the cattle-

³⁴⁵ Brower, *Lost Tracks*, 60.

crossed borderlands, from Billings to Banff. William Hornaday himself authored the first history of bison extinction in 1889, attributing their disappearance to the work of vicious market hunters. Hornaday's history, like the six bison he shot and stuffed for a Smithsonian diorama, became emblematic of the American conservation movement and its legacy. Although excellent research by Ted Binnema, Dan Flores, and Andrew Isenberg has considerably revised the role of grassland ecology in the historical fluctuations of bison populations, the vast historiography of American bison is still dominated by lamentations of their wanton destruction. As recent debates over the "sustainability" of historical bison hunting by indigenous people reveals, the literature still mainly deals with assessing blame to individual agents rather than understanding the broader roles played by capitalism and colonization in the animal's histories of near-destruction and slow recovery.

This persistence of narratives of predation in justifying the need for wildlife conservation speaks to the historical importance of western dissociations of predation and production in structuring the evolution of conservation's role in colonialism. A rich cultural and environmental history of human-animal interactions in the borderlands created a logic of predation that metropolitan conservationists adopted in order to successfully institute national conservation policies in western regions. Investigating the historical relationships between understandings of predation and production reveals conservation's implication within a more complicated history of colonialism. The creation of bison and antelope refuges was not just a top-down imposition of eastern colonial authority, but a necessary performance of western expectations of production that represented "non-productive" work as predatory.

As the ex-officio president of the American Bison Society in 1913, Hornaday decided that the organization had fulfilled its mission of saving the bison. “The future of the American Bison is now secure,” he voiced privately, “at least so far as non-extirpation is concerned.”³⁴⁶ In celebration of the conservation successes, the society hosted a dinner at Delmonico’s. Although bison was not on the menu, they ate a five-course meal comprised of chicken, halibut, squab, and, as the entrée, a roast fillet of beef.³⁴⁷ Eating bison once again would not be far off. In 1925, the Northern Pacific reintroduced the animal to its dining cars (see illustration 11). Serving culled animals from the National Bison Range, located just on the north side of the tracks, the railroad’s roasts and steaks “were as savory and tender as the Indians and pioneer hunters ever tasted.”³⁴⁸ Wildlife conservation was about more than just limiting the kill; it was about establishing who could do the killing.

³⁴⁶ Hornaday to Hooper, June 16, 1913.

³⁴⁷ Menu inserted in *The Sixth Annual Report of the American Bison Society* (New York, 1913). ABS. DPL.

³⁴⁸ Northern Pacific advertisement. ABS: Box 6, Folder 38. DPL. Also cited in Isenberg, *The Destruction of the Bison*, 184.



1925

Buffalo Roasts and Steaks

as savory and tender as the Indians and pioneer hunters
ever tasted may be ordered on this dining car.

Roast—85c per order Steak—\$1 per order

☞ Only prime fat calves are selected from the Montana Bison Range. Have you ever tasted Buffalo? You will be pleased with it.

☞ The American Bison Society, organized with the enthusiastic influence of President Roosevelt, established the Montana Bison Range in 1907 to preserve the Buffalo. The Northern Pacific passes the Range near Ravalli. The efforts of the U. S. Bureau of Biological Survey have been rewarded. Today the Range has over 500 bison. It can support no more. From the surplus animals raised, prime meat animals are selected to serve on Northern Pacific dining cars.

Northern Pacific Railway

A. W. THOMSON, *Supr. of Dining Cars.*

Illustration 11: "Buffalo Roasts and Steaks."³⁴⁹

³⁴⁹ Northern Pacific advertisement. *ABS*: Box 6, Folder 38. DPL. Also cited in Isenberg, *The Destruction of the Bison*, 184.

Conclusion

In July 2007, at a town hall meeting in Cody, Wyoming, tempers flared over conflicting visions of predators and western history. Hosted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to gather input on plans to remove Northern Rockies gray wolves from the endangered species list, the focus of conversation quickly spiraled away from the wolf population data assembled by biologists. Local citizens claimed the state's new management plan masked a government plot to bankrupt private agriculture and put more land under federal ownership. Ranchers from as far away as the Nebraska border arrived to spin outlandish tales of Yellowstone wolves making eight-hundred mile raids on their livestock herds. Representatives from the Natural Resource Defense Council, flown in from the east and west coasts, argued that de-listing the wolves was an illegal violation of Fish and Wildlife's responsibility to the public trust. Shoshones and Arapahos from the Wind River Reservation, their own separate wolf management plan in place, sat quietly until the coffee break, when they disappointed out-of-state environmental advocates by hanging out with the cowboys. Meanwhile, a block away, hundreds of tourists patronized western gift shops along Sheridan Avenue, buying ambivalent assortments of Native art, Stetson hats, and wolf t-shirts.³⁵⁰

Wolves continue to play a profound role in the physical and cultural reproductions of North America's western landscapes. By providing a nonhuman embodiment of predation, wolves have helped to both establish and undermine colonial and capitalist understandings of labor, production, and value created during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Like the costumed gunfighters and prostitutes

³⁵⁰ Open House and Public Hearing, United States Fish and Wildlife Service, Northern Rockies Gray Wolf Recovery Program. Cody, Wyoming: July 17, 2007.

in Cody's summertime parades, wolves perform certain narratives of the western past that are at once both deviant and serve as a natural accompaniment to the region's supposed wildness. Within the constant physical and discursive remakings of capitalism and colonialism throughout the west, predation is what frames production. As much as some ranchers, hunting outfitters, and others claim to hate wolves, the animals' predatory works are necessary to their own self-conceptions of themselves as productive citizens. And as much as environmentalists and others claim to love wolves, their efforts to save the animals often hinge on similar dissociations of predation from production.

It is too easy to love or hate wolves based on what we pretend them to be. Farley Mowat's *Never Cry Wolf*, for instance, is a good example of this predator-producer trap in popular culture.³⁵¹ Filled with ethological fabrications about wolf food habits, the novel works up sympathy for wolves by lying about their "prey" as typically being wild berries and field mice. Purged of their tendencies to kill and devour large mammals, it becomes tempting to imagine wolves as cuddly puppies who enjoy, or even want, to form intimate relationships with human beings. Disavowing wolves' labors as predators has been a common path toward pleas for wolf protection since the 1960s. But why can't we just love wolves for what they are?

The answer I have provided is that debates over predators and their place in the west are fueled by an ongoing disavowal of the violence necessary to sustain our colonial society. Unless we represent them producers, we cannot love wolves for being predators. To a significant extent, these categories of predation and production are

³⁵¹ Farley Mowat, *Never Cry Wolf: The Amazing True Story of Life Among Arctic Wolves* (McClelland and Stewart, 1963).

historical artifacts of the conquest of the Montana-Alberta borderlands. Between the 1860s and 1930s, “living like a wolf” transformed from a metaphor that expressed the complex realities of a livelihood sustained by death into an indictment of those whose labors did not conform to the political ecology of colonial capitalism. This predator/producer logic first emerged in the context of the borderland’s open-range livestock industry during the 1880s, when public and private authorities instituted a series of bounty programs to encourage the extermination of wolves and other predators. Although largely ineffective for addressing the economic costs of livestock lost to wolves, this bounty system helped establish clearer lines between production and predation, legitimate and illegitimate labor in the borderlands that helped remake the region as “range country” by the end of the nineteenth-century. Alongside this process, the subordination of Blackfoot land and labor relied on federal programs of assimilation that sought to purge native people of their so-called “predatory” behaviors. From the early-twentieth century onward, wildlife conservationists similarly appropriated this logic of predation and production to establish themselves as representatives of “progress” rather than stewards of anti-colonialism.

From an intellectual standpoint, another reason we have had difficulty loving wolves has been our academic infatuation with theorizing the hybrid relations between humans and animals. While scholars over the last two decades have developed concepts of nonhuman agency that allowed us to query animals as historical actors, they have largely done so without equaling addressing animal efforts to maintain human-animal differences. Consider Donna Haraway’s recent ruminations on her relationship

with “Ms. Cayenne Pepper,” her pet Australian shepherd.³⁵² Haraway is right to insist that we study the “material entanglements” that connect humans with the nonhuman world. But we should be careful to avoid teleological preconceptions that, as materially-entangled hybrid selves, we are automatically engaged in processes of “becoming with.” Generally speaking, wolves don’t want to be our friends. One of the clearest ways that wolves reveal themselves as historical agents is through their avoidance behaviors toward humans.

Koch was right when he reasoned that one had to live *like* a wolf in order to catch a wolf. Establishing the difference between a human and a wolf, in Koch’s case the difference between a live animal and a dead, skinned one, required an act of mimicry. But we should be careful not to mistake our mimetic performances of animal otherness as a form of hybrid becoming with the animals themselves. Today, when wolf biologists mark their leg-hold traps with wolf urine brought along in Ziploc bags, the object is to mimic wolves only to the extent that it helps to capture a wolf and, ultimately, maintain a human-wolf difference. As Michael Taussig has theorized, mimesis and alterity are mutual functions.³⁵³ We act like others in order to more perfectly distinguish our own selves.

Throughout the history of conquest and colonization of the Montana-Alberta borderlands, people have performed their relationships with wolves in ways that established their own selves as productive members of society. As this dissertation has

³⁵² Haraway provocatively asks: “How can remembering the conquest of the western states by Anglo settlers and their plants and animals become part of the solution and not another occasion for the pleasurable and individualizing frisson of guilt?” Her self-satisfying solution is to “reach out and pet one’s dog.” See Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 41.

³⁵³ Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

demonstrated, the growth of the livestock industry, the dispossession of Blackfoot land and labor, and the early rise of wildlife conservation all relied on dissociations between predation and production. Wolves were themselves important, if unwitting, cultural authors in the formation of this colonial logic by serving as a nonhuman, and supposedly natural example of predation.

I'd like to conclude by considering a set of photographs shot by Evelyn Cameron—married to Ewen Cameron, who we encountered in chapter two—of wolf and coyote pups that they tried to domesticate on their ranch outside Terry, Montana in 1910 (see illustrations 12 and 13). These photos raise fascinating questions about the ambivalent relationships between predation, production, and civilization during the conquest of the borderlands. On the one hand, the Camerons operated a conventional Montana ranch, raising cattle, sheep, and wishing to keep predators at a distance by hiring wolfers to patrol the range and kill them. On the other hand, Cameron's photographs also reveal an attempt to incorporate predators into her own domesticate spaces.



Illustration 12: Woman with wolf pup, Evelyn Cameron.³⁵⁴

³⁵⁴ Evelyn Cameron, untitled photograph, PAc 90-87.48-5 Glass Negative, in Montana State Historical Society Photograph Archives, Helena, Montana *MHS-PA*.



Illustration 13: Woman with wolf pup chained in crate, Evelyn Cameron.³⁵⁵

³⁵⁵ Evelyn Cameron, untitled photograph, #79 A Nitrate, in *MHS-PA*.

I'm not sure exactly how to read these pictures. In an article intended for *Scribner's* that never was published, Ewen recounted Evelyn's attempts to photograph women of neighboring ranches with the wolf pups posed on their laps. "Owing to their frolicsome ways," he wrote, "it was almost impossible to obtain satisfactory photographs of our charges since they declined to remain still for the fraction of a second, and could only be focused when asleep." But their resistance to being captured on slow-speed film, was not merely due to their playful behavior. "When two months old," he explained, "their innocent appearance constantly tempted lady visitors to try and caress them, but the ungracious reception accorded to these overtures soon repelled the most enthusiastic lover of animals."³⁵⁶ About six months later, fearing for his wife's safety, Ewen sold the pups to an amusement park on Coney Island.

In one photograph, of a young pup chained inside a box, who is being protected from who? This is not a picture of Donna Haraway's dog; this companion relationship depicts an unfamiliar intimacy. Stock-growers like the Camerons were already intimate with predators. Like wolves, they themselves killed the livestock they also protected. In that sense, grafting a wolf onto their person through a metal chain offered a visual representation of a stock-grower's juxtaposed roles of protector and predator, a means of maintaining their difference through a mimetic performance of capture, domestication, and assimilation

What can we do to help wolves? For a start, we might reconsider the dissociations between predation and production. The reproduction of life is not reducible to these biological mechanisms. In setting lines between predation and

³⁵⁶ Ewen Cameron, "Wolves in Montana," *Evelyn Cameron and Ewen Cameron Papers*, MC 226, Box 6, Folder 15, MHS, 9 and 11.

production, we have helped entrench problematic boundaries between human and animal, and between civilization and barbarism, relics of conquest and colonization. As Alistair Graham noted in his controversial study of man-eating crocodiles, the usual language of conservation too often functions on an “inverted aggression and crippling sentiment” that limits our abilities to love other animals without casting them in allegories that justify our own uneven social relationships.³⁵⁷ Humanity’s modern emergence as a species of “supermarket carnivore,” as David Petersen has put it, has undoubtedly relied on dissociations of predation from production that have been rooted in the historical development of colonialism and capitalism.³⁵⁸ Compassion for the lives that end in order to sustain our own can only come from acknowledging our own complicities in predator-prey relationships, not by purposefully forgetting the deaths inherent to our modes of production. Maybe by “living like wolves” we can conceive of a more just and equitable world.

³⁵⁷ Alistair Graham and Peter Beard, *Eyelids of Morning: The Mingled Destinies of Crocodiles and Men* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1990 [1973]), 12.

³⁵⁸ David Petersen, *Heartsblood: Hunting, Spirituality, and Wildness in America* (Washington: Island Press, 2000), 71.

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