

## The Hunter Elite: Manly Sport, Hunting Narratives, and American Conservation, 1880-1925

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Iowa as the ideal type of a place where particular state accomplishments and a Unionist memory of the war flourished and survived, even as Southern memories of the war took up greater cultural currency in later years. Drawing on an article he published in this journal in 2015, Cook discusses early Iowa regimental histories; details the Iowa legislature's funding of monuments in Des Moines, Shiloh, and Vicksburg; and analyzes how Governor Samuel Kirkwood and Iowa GAR posts insisted on emphasizing Union triumph even after more reconciliationist themes had taken hold nationally.

*Civil War Memories* serves as a good, comprehensive guide to an exciting and significant area of history. Cook's book probably shouldn't be the only one most people read on this topic, but it does helpfully enable us to think about the ways difficult issues such as race, violence, and regionalism continue to echo in our national life.

*The Hunter Elite: Manly Sport, Hunting Narratives, and American Conservation, 1880–1925*, by Tara Kathleen Kelly. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2018. 348 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$50.00 hardcover, \$27.95 paperback and ebook.

Reviewer Andrea L. Smalley is associate professor of history at Northern Illinois University. She is the author of *Wild by Nature: North American Animals Confront Colonization* (2017) and "'I Just Like to Kill Things': Women, Men, and the Gender of Sport Hunting in the United States, 1940–1973" (*Gender & History*, 2005).

Close your eyes and imagine a late nineteenth-century American big-game hunter. You're likely picturing a white man of the leisured class, gleefully blazing away at the last bison roaming the western prairies. Perhaps you're conjuring up a portrait of a gun-toting, buckskin-wearing, eastern socialite posing by a string of dead deer or the severed head of an elk—in other words, Teddy Roosevelt. But that picture, Tara Kathleen Kelly tells us in *The Hunter Elite*, is a seriously misleading one. She argues that this image of the violent and hypermasculine big-game hunter bears no resemblance to the depictions American sportsmen constructed of their own hunting adventures.

In order to uncover the variegated meanings these men attached to the hunt, Kelly delves deeply into an impressive array of stories published by sportsmen-writers at the turn of the twentieth century. She not only reveals how "hunting narratives became fertile sites for public negotiations over ideas about imperialism, national identity, gender roles, and even marital relations" (6) but also offers an eye-opening explanation

for sport hunters' influential positions at the forefront of the conservation movement.

Hunting narratives, written by sportsmen and published in books and mass-circulated magazines such as *Forest and Stream* and *Outing*, proliferated in the last two decades of the nineteenth century. Kelly explains this sudden outpouring of literary effort as a "response to the anxieties of the time" (40). Faced with the devaluation of the workplace as a location for the display of manliness, many middle- and upper-class white men turned to the hunt as a way to hone the qualities that set them apart from other men. But Kelly, unlike an earlier generation of historians who have tended to see the rise of recreational hunting, along with other "blood sports," as evidence of a reconstructed masculinity rooted in primitivism and violence, argues that big-game hunters deliberately avoided such connections in their stories. Instead, they stressed the manly virtues of self-discipline, willpower, and restraint. That emphasis gave sportsmen's hunting narratives a social purpose and cultural authority in a modernizing world.

Kelly's close attention to what prominent sportsmen said about themselves illuminates a number of recurring themes: the still-hunt as the epitome of proper hunting; the special connection between big-game hunting and the American pioneering frontier; the valorization of hunting as manly work rather than leisure. She also asserts (at times a bit too starkly) what hunting narratives were *not*. According to Kelly, they were never about primitivism, war, violence, or the exclusion of other genders, races, or classes from legitimate hunting. Above all, they were never primarily about the kill.

Kelly extends her analysis beyond the text to situate hunting narratives in their economic context, detailing the industrial processes that transformed sportsmen's personal ruminations on hunting into mass-produced and mass-circulated commodities. Sportsmen's magazines and organizations such as the Boone and Crockett Club published and advertised entire libraries of big-game hunting tales. By the start of the twentieth century, the hunting narrative had become a familiar genre, one crafted by a cohort of sportsmen-writers who shared a common language of restraint, self-mastery, and control. Disseminated to the wider public through expanding publication networks, these accounts of men's (and sometimes women's) outdoor experiences popularized a particular discourse of hunting. The hunting narrative thus cemented sportsmen-writers' roles as the arbiters of correct hunting practice.

That authoritative role had far-reaching implications, as Kelly explains in her most significant historiographical contribution. The genre that sportsmen-writers first popularized in the late nineteenth century

proved to be a vehicle easily converted to conservation's cause at the turn of the century. Certainly, ever since the publication of John Reiger's *American Sportsmen and the Origins of Conservation* (1975), historians have recognized the centrality of sportsmen-writers and their publications to Progressive Era conservation. But we've failed to fully explain why sport hunters' perspectives were so influential in the movement. The hunting narrative provides that crucial missing piece of the explanation. By the time vanishing wildlife became a national concern, sportsmen-writers had an already established format, distribution network, and audience for stories about the proper ways to act in nature. Kelly's study resolves a fundamental paradox at the heart of conservation historiography—sportsmen's advocacy of hunting limitations and outright prohibitions—by reinterpreting that advocacy as the logical outgrowth of a preexisting discourse rooted in manly self-restraint. Anyone interested in the history of environmental policy will find *The Hunter Elite* valuable for this critical rereading of the curious intersections of gender, nature, and narrative that made the American big-game hunter.

*Circus Life: Performing and Laboring under America's Big Top Shows, 1830–1920*, by Micah D. Childress. Sport and Popular Culture Series. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2018. xiv, 247 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$57.00 hardcover and pdf.

Reviewer Chris Rasmussen is professor of history at Fairleigh Dickinson University. He is the author of *Carnival in the Countryside: The History of the Iowa State Fair* (2015).

Anyone who has ever dreamed of running off to join the circus should read this book first. Micah D. Childress's *Circus Life* recounts the "hard, dangerous work" (90) and grueling itineraries of America's traveling circuses in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. The circus attained enormous popularity in the nineteenth century, and Americans ranked "circus day" alongside the county fair and the Fourth of July as summer holidays. But for roustabouts, the circus employees who traveled incessantly, loaded and unloaded wagons and railway cars, and raised the big top, circus work was a demanding, ill-paid job.

Childress credits the circus with launching the show business, and his account of the show business focuses on the business, not the show. He acknowledges that the circus, a transient show boosted by hyperbolic advertisements and featuring outlandish acts and costumes, stood as "a world apart" from Victorian society, but he emphasizes instead the