

# A FULL-FORCE REMEDY FOR FATALISM: THE TRIBAL BUFFALO CONSERVATION SUMMIT IN 2018

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Center of the American West  
November 2, 2018



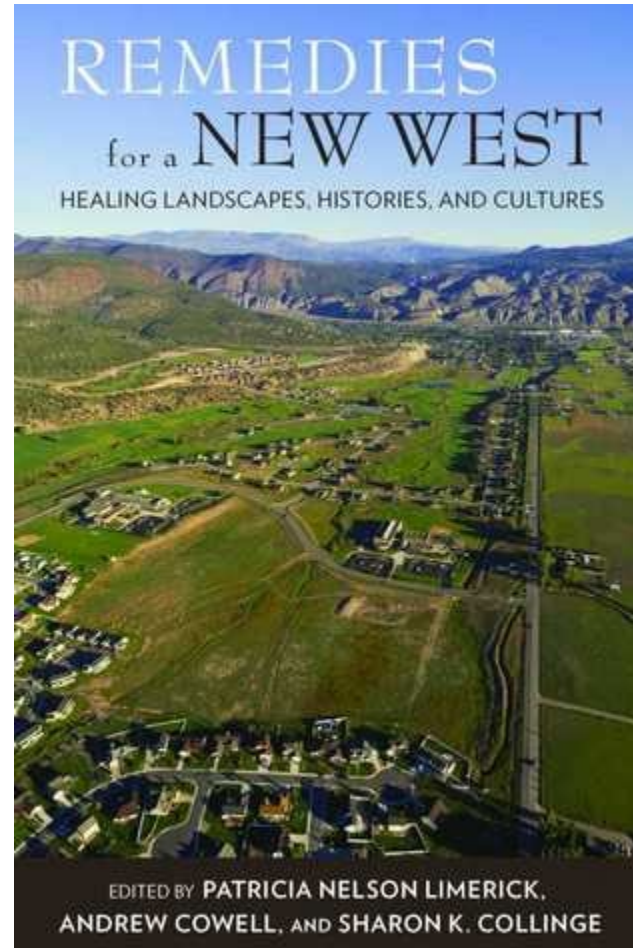
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# The Historian's Persistent Dream



# THE CENTER OF THE AMERICAN WEST: CHEERLEADING FOR RESTORATION, REMEDY, AND REPAIR



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# NORTH AMERICA IN THE PAST: ABUNDANCE BEYOND FATHOMING



# DEATH AND DESTRUCTION, BEYOND FATHOMING



# RECOVERY AND RETURN: BEYOND PREDICTION AND ALMOST BEYOND IMAGINATION, BUT NONETHELESS ACTUAL AND REAL



Blackfoot Nation's Bison Herd



Fort Belknap Herd



# Complicated Timing: Stopping Short of the Extinction of the Buffalo

Late 1800s and early 1900s, a.k.a. "The Progressive Era"

A growing concern over the consequences and impacts of U.S. westward expansion on landscapes, natural resources, wildlife, and water,

*And*

A mounting recognition that the resources of North America were not unlimited, and not inexhaustible.



# Giving Away the Punchline: The Idea of “Progress” Gets a Whole New Lease on Life through the Leadership of the Tribes in Our Times

\*The legacy of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and also of the Progressive Era: the installation of a narrow, exclusive, and imperial definition of “**progress**” (also known as “westward expansion”), casting Indian people only as “obstacles” soon to “vanish.”

\*The situation before us *today* and the spirit-lifting message of buffalo conservation: Indian tribes as the embodiment and at the forefront a reconfigured definition of **progress**.



# In Other Words . . .

It took a few centuries, but now we have a major social and cultural understanding of **progress** that acknowledges and features Indian people.

*. . . But now a moment or two more assessing our legacy from the Progressive Era . . .*



# Theodore Roosevelt and Gifford Pinchot: Principal Figures in Progressive Reforms



# Progressive Era Innovations

- \*Antiquities Act
- \*National Wildlife Refuges
- \*National Parks
- \*Forest Reserves and the U.S. Forest Service
- \*Initiatives to protect fish, game, and wildfowl



# Progressives and the Nadir of American Race Relations



# The Human Dimensions of the Progressive Era: A Legacy Still Shaping Our World?

A major shift (and by many measures, an improvement) in national attitudes and laws involving natural resources,

*And*

Also the persistence of national beliefs in and practices of racial, ethnic, and cultural subordination and repression.



# A Calamity in Popular Thought, Widespread in the Progressive Era: The Deeply Wrong, but Still Influential Idea of the "Vanishing Indian"



John Mix Stanley, *The Last of Their Race*, 1857



James Earle Fraser, *End of the Trail*, 1918

# A Historical Pattern Still Shaping Aspects of our Times?

A troubling legacy that may still get in the way of building alliances and coalitions between Euro-American conservation and environmental groups, and Indian peoples.



# Telling Example of the Progressive Era: The Elite and Distant Founders and Members of the American Bison Society

An influential association founded in 1905: the exact opposite of a local, place-based movement to address the catastrophe of impending bison extinction.

Two notable figures in the founding: Theodore Roosevelt and William Temple Hornaday.



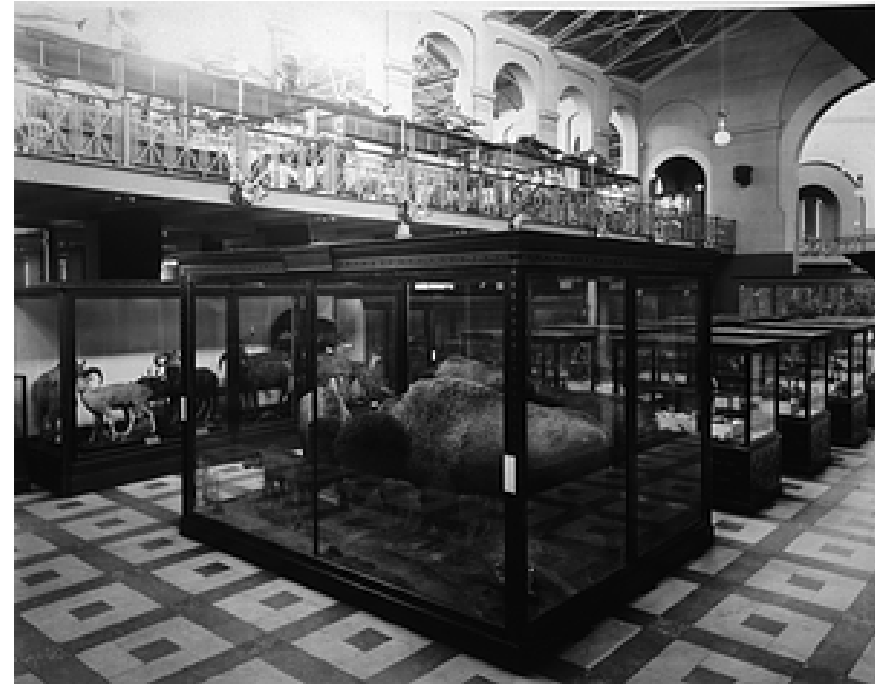
# Theodore Roosevelt



# William Temple Hornaday: Not the Most Agreeable of Conservationists



# The Customs of the Taxidermist: Hornaday's "Buffalo Group" at the Smithsonian (Memorialization as a Mindset)



# Uncomfortable Predecessors and the Challenge of Alliance-Building

The strenuous exercise of figuring out how to think about William Temple Hornaday, founder of the American Bison Society, and the author of a forceful report in 1889 (“The Extirpation of the American Bison”).

Can we make our peace with him as a significant predecessor, if not a hero or role model?



# Opportunities to Take? The Blessing (or Not) of the Visibility of Association with an Iconic Creature

Yes, Euro-Americans have long thought of the buffalo as an essential symbol of North America.

And, yes, the visibility of this iconic creature could open the door to many very productive exchanges and discussions . . .

And yes, I fully realize that all of you here today have taken on a very big undertaking, and you do not need to add "the redeeming of national discourse" to your list of "Action Items."

And yet . . . .



# The Installation of the Buffalo at the Center of National Attention



Buffalo Bill Cody as one of the most influential people on the planet.

(And, thanks to the writings of Vine Deloria, Jr., we have a better sense of the complicated relationship between Cody and Indian performers in his Wild West)



# HOPE, POSSIBILITY, PROMISE, AND TENACITY GET TRACTION: THE INTERTRIBAL BISON COOPERATIVE (founded 1991)



# The Designation of the Buffalo as the National Mammal, 2016



H.R. 2908

One Hundred Fourteenth Congress  
of the  
United States of America

AT THE SECOND SESSION

Began and held at the City of Washington on Monday,  
the fourth day of January, two thousand and sixteen

An Act

To adopt the bison as the national mammal of the United States.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of  
the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "National Bison Legacy Act".

SEC. 2. FINDINGS.

Congress finds that—

- (1) bison are considered a historical symbol of the United States;
- (2) bison were integrally linked with the economic and spiritual lives of many Indian tribes through trade and sacred ceremonies;
- (3) there are more than 80 Indian tribes participating in the Intertribal Buffalo Council;
- (4) numerous members of Indian tribes are involved in bison restoration on tribal land;
- (5) members of Indian tribes have a combined herd on more than 1,000,000 acres of tribal land;
- (6) the Intertribal Buffalo Council is a tribal organization incorporated pursuant to section 17 of the Act of June 18, 1934 (commonly known as the "Indian Reorganization Act") (25 U.S.C. 477);
- (7) bison can play an important role in improving the types of grasses found in landscapes to the benefit of grasslands;
- (8) a small group of ranchers helped save bison from extinction in the late 1800s by gathering the remnants of the decimated herds;
- (9) bison held significant economic value for private producers and rural communities;
- (10) according to the 2012 Census of Agriculture of the Department of Agriculture, as of 2012, 162,110 head of bison were under the stewardship of private producers, creating jobs and providing a sustainable and healthy meat source contributing to the food security of the United States;
- (11) on December 8, 1905, William Hornaday, Theodore Roosevelt, and others formed the American Bison Society in response to the near extinction of bison in the United States;
- (12) on October 11, 1907, the American Bison Society sent 15 captive-bred bison from the New York Zoological Park, now known as the "Bronx Zoo", to the first wildlife refuge in the United States, which was known as the "Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge", resulting in the first successful reintroduction



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# Buffalo-Centered Topics Aimed at Repairing the Nation

\*The route to recovery from specialization and fragmentation of knowledge, and the restoration of a sense of the whole (i.e., the many fields and disciplines that must unite for the well-being of buffalo).

\*Buffalo restoration (in spiritual reconnection and in the return to health-promoting) as a concrete, down-to-earth, multi-dimensional demonstration of what "healing" means when it is more than a well-intentioned abstraction.



# Buffalo-Centered Topics Aimed at Repairing the Nation

- \*The wonder of having buffalo among us, and the attention we should pay (or not pay) to calculations of genetic purity.
- \*The reciprocal understandings and insights that could emerge in a robust dialogue between buffalo stewards and cattle ranchers.
- \*The compatibility—or incompatibility—of spiritual connection and economic benefit in enterprises in environmental repair and restoration.



# Buffalo-Centered Topics Aimed at Repairing the Nation

\*The possibility that Euro-Americans have a richer, more promising heritage of thought and feeling lying just beneath the surface of what we usually remember about American history, and the benefits that we might harvest by bringing that heritage into view.

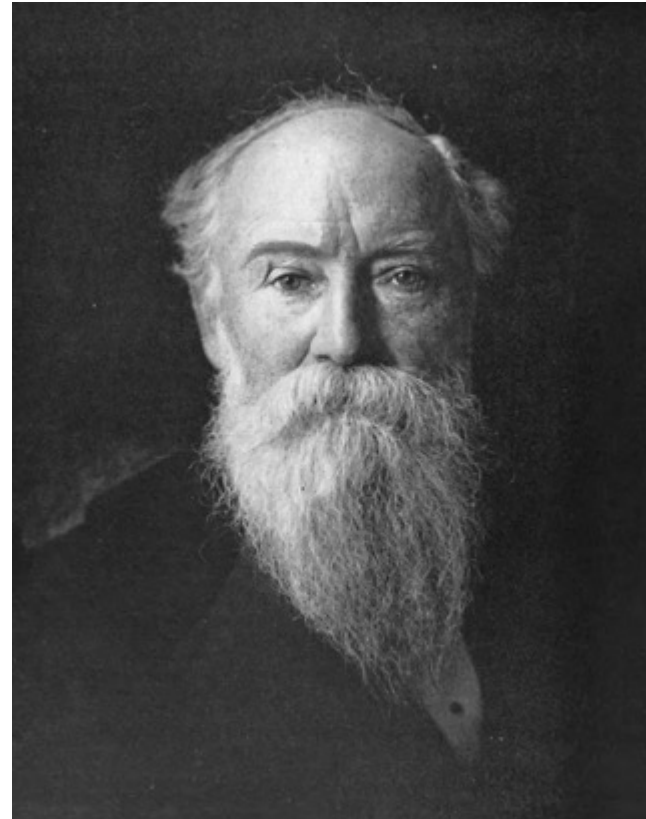
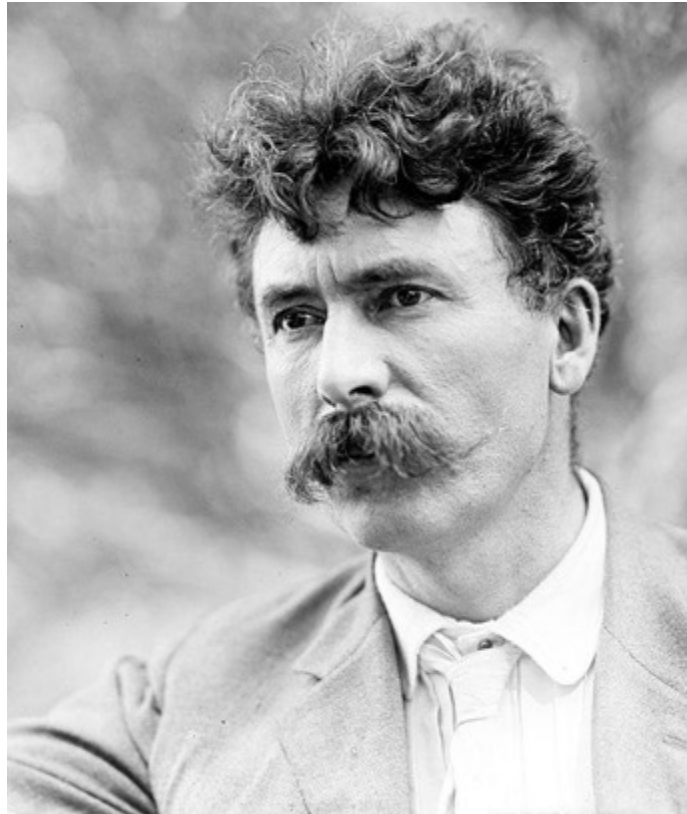


# Under-Currents of Euro-American Thinking and Feeling Worth Bringing to the Surface?

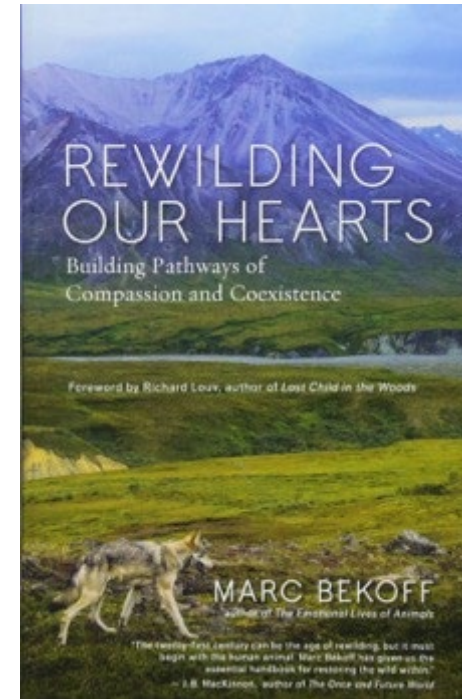
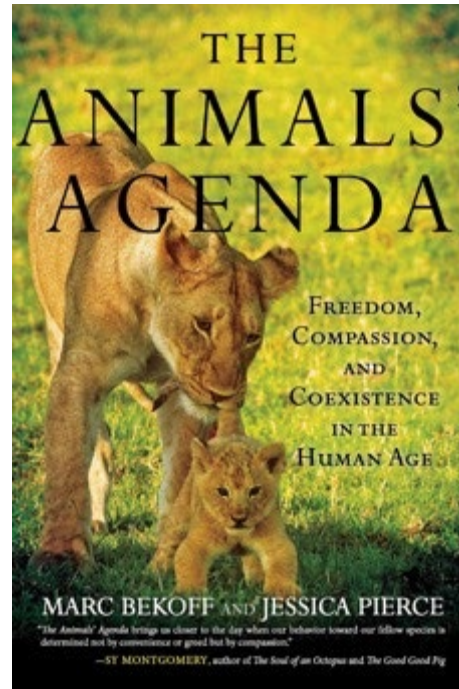
- Recognitions of injury and waste.
- Expressions of the ethical reasons to spare animals pain, suffering, and unnecessarily premature death.
- Recognitions of the consciousness and intelligence at work in animals.
- Acknowledgment of kinship between creatures endowed with life.



# Early (Forgotten or Even Scorned) Advocates for the Sentience of Animals



# The Heritage Persists? Marc Bekoff, My Lively, Persistent, and Empathetic Colleague at the University of Colorado



# And, Finally, Buffalo Conservation's Promising Role in Reducing the Nation's "Dignity Deficit" in the Twenty-First Century

A scarce feature of life in the United States in 2018:

Dignity: "The quality or state of being worthy, honored, or esteemed."  
(Merriam-Webster Dictionary)



# A Sentence that Caught My Attention, and an Irresistible Response to It

*A sentence that caught my attention . . .* The Intertribal Bison Cooperative “emerged as a pan-tribal organization that provides a unifying force in Indian country for restoring [the] bison’s ‘dignity’ . . .” Ken Zontek, Buffalo Nation: American Indian Efforts to Restore the Bison (2007)

*My peculiar, but justifiable response to reading this sentence: “Good heavens, it would be wonderful if public attention to buffalo conservation could launch a society-wide campaign for ‘dignity restoration’ on behalf of the future of wildlife, the future of human beings, and the future of the earth.”*



**Thus, My Lasting Gratitude for the Invitation to Be in Your Company Today, and  
to Contemplate Your Work**



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# A Grim Group, Embracing Conflict, at a National Wildlife Refuge . . . .



# The Best Imaginable Response to the Bundys' Intrusion into the World of Wildlife Restoration: Charlotte Rodrique, Burns Paiute Tribal Chair

