



NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE

Humanities

DIVISION OF RESEARCH PROGRAMS

Narrative Section of a Successful Application

The attached document contains the grant narrative and selected portions of a previously funded grant application. It is not intended to serve as a model or to indicate particular areas that are of interest to the Endowment, but to give you a sense of how a successful application may be crafted. Every successful application is different, and each applicant is urged to prepare a proposal that reflects his or her unique project and aspirations.

NOTE: The page limit for the narrative section of Public Scholar Program applications has been reduced from five pages to four pages since the attached application was submitted. Prospective applicants should consult the application guidelines at <https://www.neh.gov/grants/research/public-scholar-program> for the current formatting requirements and submission instructions. Applicants are also strongly encouraged to consult with the NEH Division of Research Programs staff well before a grant deadline.

The attachment only contains the grant narrative and selected portions, not the entire funded application. In addition, certain portions may have been redacted to protect the privacy interests of an individual and/or to protect confidential commercial and financial information and/or to protect copyrighted materials.

Project Title: The Age of Fair Chase: Making a Hunter's Paradise in America

Institution: Independent Scholar

Project Director: Philip Dray

Grant Program: Public Scholar Program

Narrative: The Age of Fair Chase by Philip Dray

Significance and contribution

There are certain subjects in public discourse these days that immediately get cast as polarizing “red state/blue state” issues, perhaps none more so than gun culture. What intrigued me and led to my current project—a social and cultural history of hunting in America—was the possibility that beyond the vociferous rhetoric of the culture wars lay a history that is in fact unifying and widely shared. This tradition, I believe, holds out not one but rather several keys to understanding facets and origins of our nation’s character and commitments, whether the latter are to animal conservation or to gun rights.

Sports hunting was instantly popular when it was promoted to the public in the mid-nineteenth century. A means of reconnecting an increasingly urban America with nature, sports magazines and newspapers invoked the elitism of the aristocratic British hunt, the independence of the American frontiersman, and the stealth of the Native American. Even clerics sermonized on the sport’s behalf, as it was said to restore spiritual health and manliness. Gun-making, clothing, and tourism industries sprang up around the pastime. Hunting went on to have a deep influence on the American experience, nurturing a love of the great outdoors, begetting the conservation movement, and inspiring countless works of art and literature.

My work will show how this robust history links America’s past and present. Going beyond the present-day cultural battles regarding hunting, and those of gun and animal rights, the book will explore what hunting’s history has to tell us—about the country’s westward expansion; its evolving views on Native Americans and the concept of race, nature and wildlife; its love of sports and leisure; its notions of self-reliance and manhood—in short, about nothing less than the shaping of our national character.

It is, to be sure, a twinning story. The Gilded Age’s love affair with hunting and the great outdoors led to the creation of America’s national parks and the acceptance of the need for government to manage animal populations and preserve wild places; but it also contributed to the development of the myth of the superior white hunter/conqueror, the slaughter of animal species, the reprehensible dabbling by some early conservationists in “race science”, and the perpetuation of a largely white sports hunting culture.

At first, hunting seemed an ideal tonic for the emerging middle-class of the 1870s, offering its pedigree as the elitist pursuit of aristocrats yet also an association with the egalitarianism of the American frontier, as well as an eagerness to appropriate the forest stealth of Native Americans and their mystical bond to nature. Finally, it rejuvenated the American Enlightenment’s fascination with natural history—Jefferson’s curiosity for the fossils and mammals of North America, the specimen-gathering of Philadelphia naturalist John Bartram and his son, William, whose rapturous *Travels*, a book of exploration set in the Southeast and Florida, was read widely in nineteenth century America.

Sports hunting proposed to “rescue” American men from the drone of office and factory work through the pursuit of a vigorous outdoor life. The hunter’s code of ethics

known as *fair chase*—a respect for wildlife that included criteria for how and under what conditions animals could be hunted and killed—became almost overnight a kind of worldview, a faith preached by newspapers, hundreds of new sportsmen’s groups, even from church pulpits. The response was overwhelming, as newly outfitted (and well-armed) Americans took to the woods.

The growth of the sport’s popularity, its emergence as a subject in the arts—in literature, painting, the prints of Currier & Ives, furniture carvings, and even the patterns on boys’ pajamas—and the eventual channeling of hunting’s energies into a more genial “capturing” of the West through photography, paleontology, and conservation, belong to an eventful historical process. The imprint it has made on our national experience is undeniable.

Yet hunting has largely been neglected as a topic of historical inquiry in America. This may reflect the reduced participation in the sport over the last half-century and its abandonment by elites, as well as our changing values regarding diet, animal ethics, the use of firearms, and what constitutes recreation. It remains popular, however, among a significant number of people, and continues to affect our cultural and political landscape. Such changes allow “the age of fair chase”—the decades from 1870 to about 1960 in which hunting was a widely embraced American pastime—to more readily come into focus.

This is the story my book will attempt to tell, with its abundant elements of biography, literature, art, animal biology, anthropology, political and social history. It will be a lively account that asks how the sport was promoted so assiduously, why it was taken up by so many people, why it clicked so readily with journalists, artists, scientists, and clergy. It will explore the ways hunting relates to advances in the natural sciences and sociology, the first overseas exercise of American imperialism, or the promulgation of pseudo-scientific arguments regarding race and eugenics.

My ambition will be to not only look back, but to ground my work in up-to-date research. Does the legacy of hunting have anything to say about current wildlife management issues such as the government-funded eradication of animal pests, efforts to control deer populations, the sanctity of wilderness, the designation of endangered species, or the controversial re-introduction of large animal predators? What of the American hunter himself? Has the avid outdoorsman of a century ago been metro-sexualized, has masculinity been redefined? Is hunting been made quaint by newer forms of derring-do like rock climbing, B.A.S.E. jumping, and other extreme sports? And if hunting *has* moved from mainstream to marginal, what can be said of its hardcore participants?

Without assuming strong partisanship in any of the various cultural battles regarding hunting, guns and animal rights, the book’s purpose will be to explore what hunting’s history has to tell us—about the country’s westward expansion, its legends, its evolving views on nature, Indians, and wildlife, its love of sports and leisure and notions of masculinity, and the making of who we are.

Work Plan and Book Outline

To write *The Age of Fair Chase: A Hunters' Paradise in America* I will use a combination of archival research, broad reading in the abundant literature, the study of primary sources such as contemporary magazine and newspaper accounts, and interviews with hunters, retailers, and local historians. My specific request to the NEH is for support of a year of research and travel (Oct 1, 2015 – Sept 30, 2016) so that I may investigate sources such as the Boone & Crockett Club Archives at the University of Montana, which holds the story of the early hunting/conservation group (founded by Teddy Roosevelt) and its battle to establish Yellowstone National Park. The Papers of George Bird Grinnell at Yale University are a trove of writings by and about a man who rode with Custer, became editor of *Forest and Stream*, and was both a devoted hunter and a leading figure in the early conservation movement. The Yellowstone Park Archives contains much information on efforts at buffalo herd stewardship and the Park's early wars against local game poachers.

The Theodore Roosevelt Papers at Houghton Library, Harvard University and in the Library of Congress, hold correspondence and materials Roosevelt used to compile his several books of hunting memoirs, as well as records of his activities in the Boone & Crockett Club. The George Armstrong and Elizabeth Bacon Custer Collection at the Kansas State Historical Society and the Elizabeth Custer Papers at the University of North Dakota will also be helpful in understanding the popularity of hunting among military officers on the frontier.

Research visits will be undertaken to the Adirondack Museum in Blue Lake, New York; the Massachusetts Historical Society; the Buffalo Bill History Center in Cody, Wyoming; the Black Hills Knowledge Network Archives in Deadwood City, South Dakota; the Special Collections Unit at the Library of the University of Wyoming; and the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum in Oklahoma City.

Closer to home, both the New York Historical Society Library and the New York Public Library contain extensive collections of nineteenth and early twentieth century sports literature, including memoirs, brochures and pamphlets. The Archives of the New York Museum of Natural History has biographical profiles and stories of the American big game hunters whose specimens from North America, Asia and Africa now fill the exhibit cases at the museum.

My objective is to have a draft version of the book manuscript complete at the end of the NEH grant year.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

INTRODUCTION: The introduction will lay out the premise of filling in sports hunting's important social and cultural history, highlight some of the leading personalities involved, and discuss the questions the book will raise.

- 1) **Great Shots**: This opening chapter will provide historical perspective by looking at the aristocratic Old World traditions upon which American sports hunting drew, including deer and fox hunting in England and big game hunting in the British Colonies in South Asia. It will trace the origins of hunting in America – subsistence hunting, Virginia fox hunting, the emergence of the Revolution’s citizen-soldier, and the popular legends of America’s mythic frontiersmen Daniel Boone and Davey Crockett.
- 2) **Philosopher’s Camp**: The father of American sports hunting was Henry William Herbert, an English émigré novelist turned outdoors writer. Under the pen name Frank Forester, he informed Americans that the vigor of the English aristocracy derived from its passion for blood sport, and that hunting would have a restorative effect on the average American man, who risked losing his soul to the burdens of family, a dull, salaried job, or the “trickeries of trade.” The equating of hunting and woodland adventure with moral good received an intellectual nod in 1858 on the occasion of the Philosophers’ Camp, a hunting trip to the Adirondacks by Ralph Waldo Emerson, Louis Agassiz, James Russell Lowell and other elites to embrace what Emerson called “the joyous change,” the burgeoning love and appreciation of wilderness as a means of American renewal.
3. **Forest and Stream**: This chapter will introduce three early proselytizers for the sport. “The Shooting Parson,” Boston **Reverend William H. H. Murray**, who opened the floodgates of hunting tourism in the Adirondacks; *Forest and Stream*’s founder **Charles Hallock**, who editorialized for the principles of fair chase and urged his readers to take to the great outdoors; and **Ned Buntline**, the dime novelist who helped create the real-life western myth Buffalo Bill Cody and popularized western hunts and adventure.
- 4) **Guns, Boys, and Dogs**: The surge of interest in hunting as a middle-class pastime caused a corresponding commercial upheaval. Along with the sporting clubs and shooting societies that emerged, brand names such as Pendleton, Abercrombie & Fitch, Remington, and Smith & Wesson made their debut -- a bounty of sports-related goods from heavy boots and jackets with pockets for shotgun shells, duck calls, taxidermy, and hunting excursions sponsored by railroads, hotels and lodges.
- 5) **The West**: This chapter will relate the story of hunting in the West—the visits of eastern and British hunting notables on American “safari,” the ways of the cowboys and mountain men, and the habits of the army officers like Generals George Armstrong Custer, George Crook and Philip Sheridan, who were among the most prominent big game shooters in the region.
- 6) **“Bully!”**: This chapter will examine the hubris of American hunting in the Victorian Age—the claim that sports hunting was an example of the superiority of American decency and resilience, bestowing the natural mantle of world leadership upon the United States. As Theodore Roosevelt and other hunting advocates liked to point out, hunting shaped Americans’ capacity as warriors and conquerors.
- 7) **“God’s Big Show”**: The hunter’s affinity for nature and the sanctity of the hunt became first an interest in safeguarding wildlife’s ability to procreate, and then by 1890 a

determination to preserve natural places from over-use. From these often local concerns grew a broader philosophical understanding of the importance of restraint with regard to wilderness, and the creation of our first forest preserves and national parks, such as Yosemite, whose glorious scenery John Muir termed “God’s Big Show.”

8) **Epilogue:** Hunting has retained a hold on the American experience and imagination through war, economic depression, social upheaval; it has weathered (and evolved with) shifting values regarding diet and the sanctity of wildlife. Its story can offer an understanding of America’s most fundamental cultural transformations.

Author’s Competency

The proposed book will continue an approach to American social and cultural history that I’ve brought to several earlier titles. In *At the Hands of Persons Unknown* (Random House, 2002), I looked at the lynching of African-American not as aberrational or infrequent events, but as belonging to a long historical arc of summary punishment and institutionalized racial injustice. In *There is Power in a Union* (Doubleday, 2010), I looked back at the impressive history of organized labor in America from the perspective of today’s far less welcoming environment for unions and workers’ rights. *Capitol Men* (Houghton-Mifflin, 2008) showed how the black Southerners elected to Congress during Reconstruction, despite vicious assaults on their characters and mistreatment by generations of history books, were in fact one of the best products of that idealistic age, advocating nobly for its goals while setting the stage for a broader movement of liberation and equal rights to come.

As a public scholar, I strive in all of my works to use strong narrative and fully realized characters to accentuate for lay readers (like myself) those critical elements that reveal a larger story of American history and social/cultural development. I am also a veteran researcher, with extensive experience at the National Archives, the Library of Congress Manuscript Room, the Franklin D. Roosevelt and John F. Kennedy presidential libraries, and university libraries and special collections from NYU to Yale and beyond.

Final product and dissemination

As the author of popular adult books, I have considerable experience sharing my work with the public. I have been a frequent guest on NPR, CNN, regional public radio, and have appeared on TV shows such as Good Morning America, the Today Show, and the Daily Show, while giving “book talks” at venues ranging from Politics & Prose Books in Washington to the historic Old South Church in Boston. I’ve also published follow-up articles and op-eds about my books’ subjects on the *Washington Post’s* web site and elsewhere.

The book’s publisher is enthusiastic about the project. They intend to issue the book in several formats – hard cover, paperback, e-book – and secure prominent magazine placement of some of its contents prior to publication. They also will support a media launch and arrange author appearances at private book stores and outlets like Barnes & Nobles. We will also make a special effort to outreach to conservation groups, hunters’ organizations, and blogs and publications with an interest in outdoor recreation.