'Police boys' and poachers: Africans, wildlife protection and national parks, the Transvaal 1902 to 1950

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Abstract

The concentration on pure scientific research in the Kruger National Park has resulted in a neglect of a humanistic approach to nature conservation issues. The lack of human and political dimensions in important scientific contributions are serious short-comings in the light of present politico-environmental concerns. The impact of race and class on wildlife protection needs to be integrated. Scientifically sound but culturally chauvinistic protectionist strategies have been imposed upon disadvantaged African communities unable to articulate or formulate alternatives. African participation has usually either been ignored or relegated to patronizing and oversimplified accounts of Africans in the roles of ‘native rangers’ or ‘poachers’. This police-poacher view is countered by an over-simplified African perception of national parks as being of benefit only to elitist white recreation. These divergent perceptions have important implications for the future of nature protection in South Africa.

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Before the National Park Service, Yellowstone was guarded by the cavalry. Without them, we might not have national parks today. Soldiers pose with bison heads captured from poacher Ed Howell. There had been little protection of the park’s natural wonders. Congressional funding was an afterthought. “I would submit the Army went a long way towards protecting an area that had very little protection and turned it into a place of relative tranquility, where tourists could enjoy it while also protecting its wonders.” Without that intervention, he adds, “Congress might have thrown up its hands and turned it over to private settlement. There certainly were a fair number of voices yelling for that in Congress.” 1902-1905: British Governor-General Lord Milner promoted British economic interests and white immigration as a means to thwart Boer nationalism. 1902: white mineworkers formed the Mine Workers’ Union; “coloured” residents led by Abdullah Abdurahman formed the African Political Organization. 1906: Black Africans protested wage cuts, so the government began to import Chinese workers to work in the mines. The “Apprenticeship Act” protected other white workers by setting educational

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requirements for apprenticeships. 1923: “Natives (Urban Areas) Act” provided for the creation of “African locations” and began the segregation of South African towns. Indian residents led by P. R. Pather and Abdulla Ismail Kajee founded the South African Indian Congress. The Second Boer War (1899-1902) was costly for Great Britain and the semi-independent South African Republic (Transvaal). It strained political relations between the British and the Boers, who did not gain independence from the United Kingdom until 1961. Political freedom and civil rights for South Africa's native population came later.