

Did wolves change the development of the government?

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At first glance the title may seem a little odd. Most would say, how could a dog change the development of a country? The fact is that it did. The Europeans view of wolves changed their reactions to problems and led them to a different path of government than what would have probably otherwise come to pass.

First, lets get an idea of the animal in question. The wolf is the largest wild canine in the world, with the largest weighing in at about 175 pounds. They are about 5 to 6 feet long and stand about 3 feet high. They are usually a grizzled gray in color, but all coat patterns are seen from white to black. They have 42 teeth with the canines being about 2 1/2 inches long. Their senses are superior to ours especially scent and hearing. Most people would describe them as a German Shepherd with longer hair, shorter ears, and a bushier tail.

In Europe the wolf was viewed as a monster. It was seen as an animal that would attack humans every chance it had. It was said to kill for the joy of it and for bloodlust. An animal that was seen as the messenger of the devil and corrupter of the paradise man made. Most of this was religious fear while some was simply fear of the unknown. Once I make an image of the Europeans view, perhaps I will begin to see how this view of the wolf might have changed the development of the "New World".

Religion

At the time most people immigrated to the New World, Christianity was the major religion. Not everyone was Christian, but the main groups known were.

Why would the Christian religion be a factor? Christianity became a major religion because it combined old religions with a little bit of new information. Christianity is a mix of most of the older religions and some of it is still seen as such. The leaders of Christianity didn't like this idea so they took all the leading icons of the founding religions and turn the new religion of Christianity against them. To rebel against the Greek, Roman, Norse, Egyptian and Celtic mythology that was the basis for Christianity, the wolf had to be turned from a hero into a villain. One of the Egyptian gods was pictured as a wolf or with a wolf head (Conway 94). Most people know the story of Romuleus and Remus who were saved by a she-wolf. There are several other cases where a she-wolf is said to have been the foster mother of the founder of a nation. Greeks revered the wolf because it was associated with several of the major gods and goddesses. Zeus had followers called Lukoi; Apollo had a golden wolf at Delphi while his sister Artemis was called the "Great Bitch" (94). Celts viewed it as a strong and helpful animal. Cernunnos is always pictured with a wolf. Norsemen had Odhinn with Freki (Greed) and Geri (Ravenous), Loki with Fenrir, and their word for doomsday meant the 'Day of the Wolf' (94). For their reason of why the sun and moon moved across the sky and sometimes disappear they said that Skoll (Repulsion) and Hati (Hatred) chased the sun and the moon and when they disappeared the wolves had momentarily swallowed them (94). Even Odhinn's Valkyries were sometimes shown riding on wolves (94).

The leaders didn't like all the "pagan" religions revering the wolf so by turning the wolf into an animal that was the messenger of the devil, they repressed the other religions or destroyed them completely. Other animals were treated the same. The cat was associated with witches, the

snake with the devil and the raven as well. Europeans listened to the church for at the time they migrated to the "New World"; the church was in charge. The church had taught them to fear and hate the wolf. So that is what they did.

Legislation

I found it interesting that in ten years, the Massachusetts Bay Colony passed its first bounty on the wolf. In only two years several other colonies followed suit. In eighteen years, the bounty in Massachusetts change twelve times and it ended up as the same amount as a full month's pay for a common worker, per wolf (Hampton 70). Soon after colonies started bounties they realized there was a problem, actually several. One was that they only removed the wolves nearby which were soon replaced by dispersing wolves. Another problem was how to pay for this new bounty system. The other main problem was fraud. Each area required a different part of the skin and sometimes one skin would be used to collect several bounties, while other times it was not a wolf but a coyote, dog, or stretched jackrabbit hide (70). In 1915, the first professional trappers and hunters hired by the U.S. Biological Survey, with wolfers working through 1942 in several states. As the years continue, wolves are exterminated in states until in 1950, Alaska allows aerial wolf hunts. These hunts usually involved running the wolf to exhaustion and then landing a few feet away to kill the gasping, exhausted animal as it tried to get away. It wasn't until 1973 that the Endangered Species Act was passed into law (Murray 238). In recent years several wolves have been released into the Yellowstone Park area. Their reintroduction was strongly supported and so far most things are going well. Several wolves were illegally killed and a mother and her eight pups had to be recaptured when her mate was killed and skinned.

Killing

Traps were probably the most common way of capturing wolves at first, but the colonist eventually turned to wolf pits. The reason being that wolves chewed off their own limbs to get away. Many escaped in this manner. It is interesting to note that the entire time colonists were destroying the wolf, people were saying that the wolves weren't dangerous and ran away from people. This story sums up the thick headedness of colonists:

'On a dark winter night in 1630 in Lynn, Massachusetts, a woman accidentally fell into a wolf pit. Soon a wolf tumbled in on top of her. Both wolf and woman spent a terrifying night huddled in opposite corners of the pit until rescuers arrived in the morning. The woman was pulled out, and the "ravenous cruell creature," still huddled in the opposite corner, was bludgeoned to death.'
(Hampton 75)

Dogs were commonly used to help hunt down wolves. Usually the dogs ran the wolf to exhaustion and then the hunters roped the wolf, tied its muzzle shut and let the dogs tear the wolf apart. Other atrocities were directed at the wolf. I think that this quote sums it up.

'It had begun in earnest three centuries earlier, directed against an animal-unlike the whale, buffalo, or passenger pigeon-not for the value of its hair, skin, or meat, but because that animal preyed upon other animals that humans desired for their own consumption. Along the way, the wolf became an object of a passionate, often irrational, sometimes brutal hatred that humans ordinarily reserved for members of their own kind. Hundreds of thousands of wolves were trapped, poisoned, shot, or dynamited in their dens, while others suffered deaths that had every visage of revenge. Caught alive and soaked with kerosene, wolves were set ablaze; others were scalped, had their mouths wired shut or had their eyes pierced with branding irons before being released to starve to death. Still others were bound with ropes on their upper and lower jaws, tied to horses, and ripped apart.' (7). I find the brutality of these acts disturbing, especially when the people committing these acts called themselves Christian. The total lack of respect for the land and animals seems to go against the very teachings of the bible. Early settlers may have had reasons for attacking the wolves in their area. When livestock was first brought over, wolves were

numerous and occasionally attacked cattle, sheep and horses. As the settlements grew and the natural prey was killed off, wolves turned to livestock with vigor. Supposedly cattle were found killed and or wounded daily and some were mutilated. Some of the reported killed livestock may have just runaway and not been found. Others may have been stolen but wolves probably killed some.

Poisoning

The other aspect of killing wolves involved the poison used on them. Strychnine was the most widespread poison by arsenic was also common. "The wolves that howled at evening about the traveller's campfire, have succumbed to arsenic and hushed their savage music-Francis Parkman" (Busch 100). To give an idea of the widespread use of poison consider this, '...all hands were preparing meat in pieces about 2" square...putting a quantity of strychnine in the center. One morning after putting out the poison they picked up sixty-four wolves, and none of them a mile and a half away from camp' (Bass 181). Songbirds were used for baits as well as buffalo, deer, antelope and cattle meat. Later on in the comments Bass says, 'I picture a mile-wide circle of ding wolves, the prairie writhing with them in the moonlight as they flopped and back-flipped in their slow deaths.' (Bass 181).

There were a few problems with the poison though. The temperature would affect the length of time it took for the poison to kill the animal and the wolf could wander off to die and never be recovered. Also the saliva that fell from a dying wolf's mouth sometimes poisoned the grass and made it unsafe for other animals to graze. Wolves weren't the only animals that were affected by poison. Other animals such as eagles, coyotes, bobcats and any other animal that scavenged off a killed animal would be poisoned. Inadvertent poisoning and attacking a dead wolf or one that was dying killed many pets. Probably the most deadly poison was 1080. I am not sure where the name came from and couldn't find much information on it other than the fact that it was a strong poison that had an effect similar to rabies in making the affected animal stagger, foam and the mouth and become extremely aggressive if approached.

Man-eaters

While many children hear the story of 'Little Red Riding Hood' and are happy when the wolf is killed, the truth is that in all of North America there has never been one undisputed attack on a person by a wolf. Perhaps the wolves of North America are less aggressive than those of Europe and Russia for when 'a newspaper in Ontario offered a reward of \$100 for proof of an unprovoked attack, the reward went uncollected' (Matthews 42). I find it strange that with news of wolves running away from people and not attacking, the stories of wolves attacking and killing wounded pack mates still continued. John Steele wrote, 'shot the closest ones, then heard "awful sounds" that he identified as the dead wolves being "devoured" by their brethren.' (Hampton 93). Adding to this, the violence wolves supposedly had towards another led to the belief that after a hunt, wolves would go into a frenzy and kill mates, children and pack mates, 'such stories fulfilled people's expectations of what life on the wild frontier was like. Even if these stories weren't true, they should be.' (93). One early colonist asked, 'why should an animal like a wolf, powerful and capable of killing prey many times its size, not kill humans?' (92). I find it funny that people wanted wolves to be vicious killers.

Survey

I did a survey of the senior studies class and two of Mr. Hickman's biology classes. I was looking to see if any of the information might reflect a difference in opinions on wolves in a younger group. I found no real differences as far as gender lines, farmers vs. non-farmers or preference. I found it interesting that the majority of people said they have no preference as to the issue of the reintroduction of wolves. The three main things I focused on therefore were concerning reparations, farmer carelessness, and lethal control. I found that many people in both age groups were supporting reparations, about half said the farmer should be responsible for carelessness

that allowed wolves to attack livestock, and about three quarters said that lethal control was a good idea.

Conclusions

- 1. Yes wolves did change the development of the government. The fact that the bounties, predator control and poison regulations all came about in the war against the wolf shows that if settlers hadn't waged war on the wolf these would never have come about. Therefore we would also not have the Animal Rights activists as early in history, nor the Environmental Protection Agency or the Endangered Species Act.
- 2. Settlers acted in an unforgivable manner and their attitude was based almost solely on their religion. Therefore I will not support the teachings of a Christian church in regards to what animals I should like and which I should fear.
- 3. The settlers called wolves destructive and gave the name to Native Americans but, 'There's no more savage beast stalks through Wales Than the two-legged beast who talks.'-Welsh Proverb I also found, 'If the wolves who killed and ate sheep and deer were evil, what did that make the men who killed and ate sheep and deer? If killing was evil, what did that make the men who killed wolves?'(Wallace 118). The contradictions in the thinking of settlers can not be overlooked. They considered themselves better than everything else even though in most ways they were worse. I would like to close my paper with what I think is an example of the change in the view of wolves. Written by Aldo Leopold in his famous 'Thinking Like A Mountain' essay, it sums up the change in the view about wolves. 'In those days we had never heard of passing up a chance to kill a wolf. In a second we were pumping lead into the pack, but with more excitement than accuracy: how to aim a steep downhill shot is always confusing. When our rifles were empty, the old wolf was down, and a pup was dragging a hind leg into impassable slide-rocks. We reached the old wolf in time to watch a fierce green fire dying in her eyes. I realized then, and have known ever since, that there was something new to me in those eyes-something known only to her and to the mountain. I was young then and full of trigger-itch; I thought that because fewer wolves meant more deer, that no wolves would mean hunters' paradise. But after seeing the green fire die, I sensed that neither the wolf nor the mountain agreed with such a view.' (Leopold 22).

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