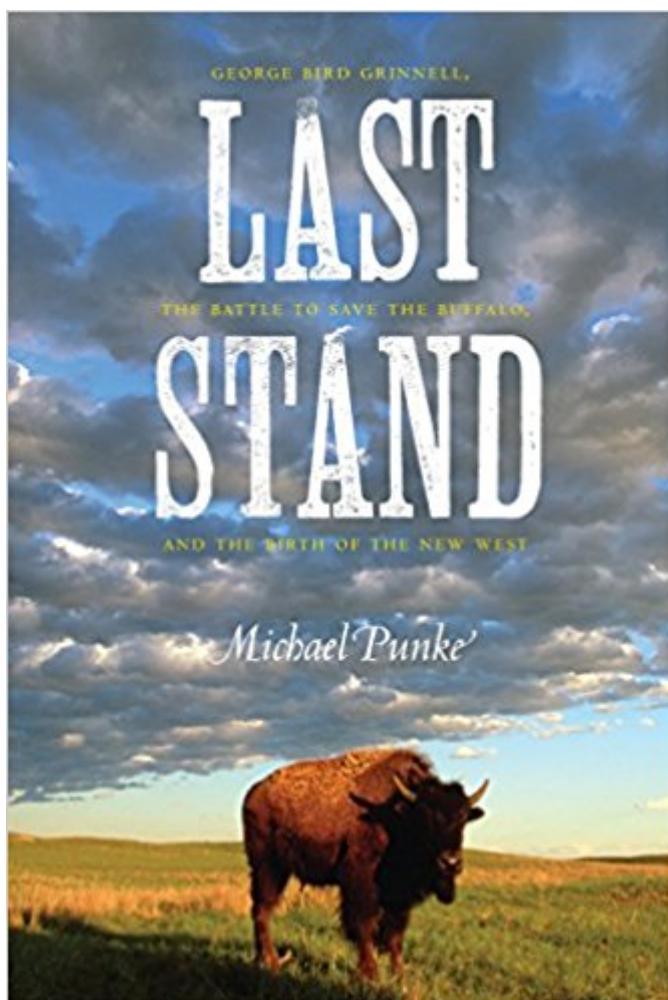


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Last Stand: George Bird Grinnell, The Battle To Save The Buffalo, And The Birth Of The New West



Synopsis

In the last three decades of the nineteenth century, an American buffalo herd once numbering 30 million animals was reduced to twenty-three. It was the era of Manifest Destiny, a gilded age that viewed the West as nothing more than a treasure chest of resources to be dug up or shot down. Supporting hide hunters was the U.S. Army, which considered the eradication of the buffalo essential to victory in its ongoing war on Native Americans. Into that maelstrom rode young George Bird Grinnell. A scientist and a journalist, a hunter and a conservationist, Grinnell would lead the battle to save the buffalo from extinction. Fighting in the pages of magazines, in Washington's halls of power, and in the frozen valleys of Yellowstone, Grinnell and his allies sought to preserve an icon. Grinnell shared his adventures with some of the greatest and most infamous characters of the American West—from John James Audubon and Buffalo Bill to George Armstrong Custer and Theodore Roosevelt. Last Stand is a strikingly contemporary story: the saga of Grinnell and the buffalo was the first national battle over the environment. Grinnell's legacy includes the birth of the conservation movement as a potent political force.

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Customer Reviews

The near extinction of the buffalo herds of the Great Plains in the nineteenth century was the product of several factors, including the greed of buffalo hunters, the callousness of "sportsmen," and the desire of the federal government to deprive the Plains Indians of their food source. But the

buffalo did (barely) survive, and one of their unlikely saviors was Grinnell, a Brooklyn-born, Yale-educated anthropologist and naturalist. Grinnell was entranced by the West. He took part in one of the last great buffalo hunts in 1872 and even accompanied Custer on his 1874 Black Hills expedition, which opened this sacred ground to the depredations of gold seekers. But as native westerner Punke shows, his deep interest in and love for the land and the people led him to become an ardent conservationist, forming a surprising alliance with hunters and fishermen that launched a stream of environmental initiatives. As seen by Punke, Grinnell was a major figure in reimagining our wilderness areas as places to be preserved rather than to be "tamed," exploited, and ravaged. Freeman, Jay Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

"By providing short accounts of these two complementary activities, Punke presents an interesting array of conflicts, western expansion, wildlife conservation, eastern politicians, railroad lobbyists, power of the press, and concerned citizen participation. . . . A well-documented history of Grinnell's environmental activities and the quick near-extinction of bison." •Choice (Choice)
"Michael Punke's meticulously researched *Last Stand* chronicles the transformation of the Great Plains from untouched wilderness in the mid-19th century to a land, less than 30 years later, where the future of wildlife hung in the balance." •Audubon (Editors' Choice) (Audubon)
"The heart of this book and its best part is the tale of how [Grinnell's] career was put to use saving the bison from extinction—a decision that could have gone the other way in an instant." •One person can make a difference, indeed all the difference.
Punke writes in closing. Through Grinnell, he makes a powerful case. •Kirkus Reviews (Kirkus Reviews)

This was an amazing book, and the background information and anecdotes were exceptional. All merged together to create a very visual and encompassing story of the terrible demise of these noble beasts, the corruption in Washington (I guess nothing much has changed there, though), the poachers illegally further decimating the herds in disregard for the laws protecting them, and the very interesting and frustrating history of Yellowstone, our first national park. As with most other Americans, I knew that by 1900 our buffalo herd had diminished to a few dozen animals in Yellowstone. In college, I remember reading about people taking trains out west, and almost every open window being occupied by a man shooting out the window at the herds just because "they were there." But Punke's "Last Stand" brings the entire story of the terrible slaughter and the

eventual rebuilding of the herd into sharp focus. Robert Bird Grinnell was an amazing person. Well educated and with extraordinary prescience as to the need to protect our resources, he fought long and hard not only for the preservation of the herd, but also for the establishment of Yellowstone as a place that belonged to the "American people and their descendants." During this period in history, the idea of any type of "conservation" was anathema. America was a land rich in resources and they were meant to be exploited. From the robber barons of the late 1800's to the poachers who sometimes killed the buffaloes and took nothing more than their tongues, it was a time of self-indulgence and rape of the land. Grinnell fought with everything he was worth to get it through the mindset of his countrymen that we needed to preserve our lands and resources. I knew that Theodore Roosevelt was one of the founders of the Boone and Crockett Club, but I had no idea that Grinnell was also one of them. Neither did I know that while Congress created Yellowstone National Park and passed laws making it illegal to poach game or fish from within its borders it failed to pass any laws providing penalties for doing so. Money for rangers to patrol the park was minimal. Consequently, buffaloes were poached to the point of near extinction. To ever imagine something like this happening in this day and age is impossible. We take our national and state parks and all our resources for granted. But we would not have any of this bounty and beauty if it had not been for people like Grinnell and Roosevelt, who realized that without legal protection, the rapaciousness of the railroad barons, who wanted the buffaloes gone so they wouldn't interfere with their rail lines, and the poachers who cared nothing for conservation but only with lining their own pockets would destroy not only the buffalo herd but anything that stood in their path. Included in this book was the plight of the Native Americans, and the story of their eventual decline and consignment to reservations, and how their demise was so tied to the buffalo. Also explained was the terrible indifference of Congress to either animal or Indian when its members' pockets were lined by the bribes and influence of those with money. I would definitely recommend this book. It's not only the story of Robert Bird Grinnell and his laudable efforts to bring conservation into the American psyche, but it's also the story of America's growing pains in so many other ways. The author's style of writing was wonderful. Flowing, articulate sentences, with well-structured chapters and a wealth of background information. I had to look up the author as I'd never heard of him before, and I was also hoping that perhaps he'd written more books about the American West as I would surely like to read them. I don't know if his novel, "The Revenant," based on the true story of Hugh Glass would be as interesting a read, but I will surely give it a try.

Very interesting biography of George Bird Grinnell and his role in saving Yellowstone National Park

from complete decimation by hide and trophy head hunters, railroads, and souvenir-hunting tourists. It took a decades-long fight through his magazine, influential (rich!) friends, and lobbying in Congress to do it, but he persisted until he was successful. After winning his Yellowstone battles, Grinnell didn't ride off into the sunset, but began another fight to preserve what is today Glacier National Park. He should be known to every American school child, but had been largely forgotten until the recent celebrations of the 100th anniversary of the National Park Service. Grinnell was an amazingly gifted and talented writer, but this book is only part of his story. Not detailed in the book is Grinnell's years of correspondence with many former Indian warriors, including George Bent, son of fur trader William Bent and his Cheyenne wife and survivor of the Sand Creek Massacre. While John Wesley Powell's Bureau of Ethnology concentrated on collecting physical artifacts, photographs, and Indian languages, Grinnell was documenting late 19th century Native Americans' views of their own oral history, culture, and wars against encroaching American civilization. Today it would be hard to say which of these efforts are more valuable to the study of the history of the American West.

Michael Punke has done a wonderful job telling readers how the thundering herds of magnificent buffalo have disappeared and the senseless greed that drove this genocide of a species. He has given details of the way "hunting" was done of this docile creature and how this business was first considered an adventure and food source then became a way to make money then turned into an industry regardless of the obvious impact on the survival of the species. On this path, colossal waste also took place of unwanted carcasses left to rot in the open plains. How the excess meat lying around created a boom in the birth rate of wolves which in turn were also slaughtered because they came in the way of the white man. Punke also describes the brave and tireless efforts of early ecologists and wild life advocates who alone are responsible for the minuscule few buffalo we see today. It is a must read for Americans who love their wilderness and we can take heart from some of our men who did the hard work for the rest of us who followed them. Into this narrative is woven the actions of a number of celebrities some of whom also took part in the destruction Buffalo Bill and Armstrong Custer to name some, and how the latter was one who felt that decimating the buffalo was a necessity to remove Indians from their land.

A very informative book about the sad saga of the buffalo and Yellowstone Park. And also about Congress, which took almost 20 years to pass meaningful legislation. Note that tomorrow, May 7, is the 120th anniversary of the Lacey Act, in essence the real beginning of Yellowstone. Since I am

currently going through a similarly frustrating Congressional process, it taught a very good lesson: Substance does not guarantee success. As Grinnell noted: "There is no crisis more pernicious than a slow motion disaster. Human nature and with it the American political system are geared to the immediate, the proximate and the tangible. The gradual, the distant, the abstract are the enemy of action." George Bird Grinnell's assessment of Congress in 1894 after a 20 year battle to pass laws to prevent the extermination of the buffalo. After the public was motivated by outrage via the new thing, a media campaign, Congress was pressured into passing a law that prevented the extermination of the buffalo in Yellowstone National Park by market hunters. Some things change, some stay the same. Congress has not changed its ways in 100 years!

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