

White Man's Game-Saving Animals, Rebuilding Eden, and Other Myths of Conservation in Africa
by Stephanie Hanes

A gripping story about the hubris of good intentions and the differences among peoples

Eco-barons are up-to-date philanthropists. Past givers such as Rockefeller, Carnegie, and Ford set up foundations to help their own societies, distributing their fortunes to benefit their countrymen. The eco-barons have all broader perspective. They want to help the world.

One thing that characterizes people who have made great fortunes is hubris. They tend to believe that having succeeded in one realm, they should be able to succeed in almost any realm.

They also have cultural blinders. The chief character in the story, Greg Carr, a Mormon from Idaho, wanted to set up wanted to save the country of Mozambique by setting up a natural park, Gorongosa, which would provide income for the people of Mozambique and protect the wildlife and protect African wildlife.

This book is an evenhanded, nonjudgmental, assessment of how well he did. More than that, and most significant, it is an analysis of what can go wrong when Westerners projects their own mentality, expectations and experience on other parts of the world.

People in the Western tradition tend to implicitly, quite overtly, not overtly regard our civilization as the acme of human achievement. We regard ourselves as more perceptive, more successful than other cultures throughout the world. And with we have a can-do attitude that leads us to attempt to solve problems throughout the rest the world.

The common denominator among the eco-barons is money. They have all made tons of money, more than they will ever need in their lifetimes, and seek to put it to work doing things for the betterment of mankind. Greg Carr is a lapsed Mormon from Idaho. The Internet makes no mention of family. If so, this is the sets him apart; family is an essential part of Mormon doctrine. So I've framed the following picture. A very intelligent guy, with more money than he knows what to do with, and no family to spend it on. No way to perpetuate himself, so is interested in perpetuating his reputation through good works.

There is a general tendency of philanthropists not to recommend not to recognize how incapable mankind is of absorbing their largess. How self-absorbed we are, and how unlikely mere money is to make us change our ways. I offer further examples in Comment 1 below.

This is a story of one country, Mozambique, and one particular incident, the establishment of that in the Gorongosa are nature reserve, and all of the hype and hope that went along with it.

The book paints a pretty good picture, without being explicit about it, of how great wealth is equated with great wisdom. Greg Carr was able to get the government of Zimbabwe of Mozambique to do pretty much what he wanted. If he wanted to create a national Park and fund it himself, he was more than welcome.

The theme running throughout the book is the ways in which the interests of the park, and the interests of preserving wildlife, and with the interests of the native Mozambican people. Just as an example, the colonial whites, the native governments that followed them and the park services regard poaching as a very serious crime. To the inhabitants, killing the wildlife to eat is what they have always done. They have no alternative, to put protein on the table, and they don't have much sense of loyalty or respect for the colonial or national governments far away. They do what they've always done. They kill the animals to eat or to sell.

The theory that Mozambique could build a tourist oriented economy in which the money would trickle down to the common people in sufficient quantities, and be sufficiently well distributed to discourage poaching was a mirage.

Hanes quite effectively uses a storytelling metaphor throughout the book. In a western play there five acts. First one sets the stage, the second act builds suspense, the third act is the climax, and the fourth and fifth acts resolve all of the plot lines. In the five acts story for the Gorangosa, the fifth act was supposed to be that the animals are thriving, the people are doing better than they've done before, and everybody lives happily ever after. This simply cannot happen. There are too many people.

In this is an issue that Stephanie gets into rather repeatedly. Africa's problem is that there is too much competition for the resources between wildlife and people. The number of people is growing exponentially. They are crowding the wildlife. There is no easy or moral solution to the problem.

The white man's mistake has been to ignore the vast differences among peoples' histories, cultures and abilities. Well-meaning liberals like Carr, despite their Darwin-fish bumper stickers, really don't believe in evolution. Instead, they conjecture that the people of the less-developed countries of the world are just as rational as they suppose themselves to be, but simply in want of resources and education. They subscribe to the Standard Social Science Model, created a century ago by anthropologists such as Franz Boas, that our differences are only skin deep. It is not so.

As Hanes so clearly exposes, the Africans have a different sense of their history and a different perception of the present. Their perception of the present includes the spirits of ancestors and many kinds of magic. A great many books have been written on the

subject; Carr would have been well advised to read a few before setting out on this adventure. Just to name a few of those I have reviewed:
[[ASIN:B0023FJXK8 Dr. Schweitzer of Lambarene]]
[[ASIN:B00F2MPO2U Racism, Guilt, Self-Hatred and Self-Deceit]]
[[ASIN:2738408931 Et si l'Afrique refusait le développement ? (French Edition)]]
[[ASIN:0312610580 The Crisis Caravan: What's Wrong with Humanitarian Aid?]]
[[ASIN:0984907017 Into the Cannibal's Pot: Lessons for America from Post-Apartheid South Africa]]

Success stories in Africa seem to be rare and fleeting. The ones being celebrated at this moment are Botswana and Madagascar. South Africa seems to be slipping backwards, with impending expropriation of white owned lands. The would-be philanthropist would do well to start with a study of history and perhaps a reading of Joseph Conrad and Rudyard Kipling.

Another theme running through the book is the great extent to which a single person's money, charm and will can affect the course of human events, and the very limited extent to which it can change human nature. Greg Carr was able to charm even the father of Sociobiology, E. O. Wilson, bringing him fully on board with the Gorongosa project. He is apparently able to charm the Mozambicans as long as the money keeps flowing, but seems not to have made a dent on the way they look at the world.

Hanes has written a book that is a delight to read, highly informative, and which does not moralize. She is telling you how it is.

Comment 1

On home turf we have many examples of misdirected philanthropy. Consider the lottery winner syndrome, when ordinary people become unimaginably rich and simply do not know how to handle the money. They lose the money and often wreck their lives. In this manner Indian tribes get unbelievable wealth from setting up gambling casinos or from mineral rights on their reservations. They usually do not handle it well, and the incidents in which it results in lasting betterment of the lives of Indians are very scarce.

In domestic American politics, we have had the theory that poverty is a result of a lack of education. We have poured trillions of dollars into education, with no visible improvement. We have poured trillions of dollars into the war on poverty. Ditto – no improvement. We have made trillions of dollars available and subprime loans to subprime lenders to subprime borrowers to buy houses and cars. The same result – the poor appreciate the largess, but they do not change their ways and did not work their way out of poverty. In fact, they become more mired in poverty because they incur obligations that they cannot pay back. They become more dependent on government.

Putting philanthropic money to good use is a difficult problem. One wonders if the makers of the Rockefeller, Carnegie, and Ford fortunes would be pleased with what the way their money is being dispensed through the foundations that they established. The modern notion of philanthropy seems to be very hands-on, but the people who made the money directing how it is spent.

We observe in Bjorn Lomborg's book, *How To Spend \$50 Billion To Make The World A Better Place* that this is not easy to do. Bill Gates is spent vast amounts of money on American education. He has not made a dent, and his Common Core Curriculum has seriously upset people who believe in local control of schools. Gates spent a lot of money to reduce disease in Africa, and was a longtime advocate of African migration to Europe until he reversed himself a couple weeks before this writing in 2017, noting that Africa has more Africans in Europe can possibly handle and that they should stay home. It was a little bit late. Perhaps it would've been better to curb African fertility.

George Soros is a great believer in the equality of man, and gives great sums of money to people fighting for equality all over the world. He does this with no regard to whether or not the people are equal or whether equality is a just claim.

My hero billionaire is Larry Ellison of Oracle. He spends money just on himself. He has spent fortunes on 12 m yachts to win the America's Cup. This is probably as benign a use of money as any millionaire had a billionaire has yet contrived. It doesn't mess up the existing order.