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The Destruction of the Bison: An Environmental History, 1750-1920 (Studies in Environment and History)

Andrew C. Isenberg

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The Destruction of the Bison explains the decline of the North American bison population from an estimated 30 million in 1800 to fewer than 1000 a century later. In this wide-ranging, interdisciplinary study, Andrew C. Isenberg argues that the cultural and ecological encounter between Native Americans and Euroamericans in the Great Plains was the central cause of the near extinction of the bison. Drought and the incursion of domestic livestock and exotic species such as horses into the Great Plains all threatened the Western ecosystem, which was further destabilized as interactions between Native Americans and Euroamericans created new types of hunters in both cultures: mounted Indian nomads and white commercial hide hunters. In the early twentieth century, nostalgia about the very cultural strife that first threatened the bison became, ironically, an important impetus to its preservation.

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