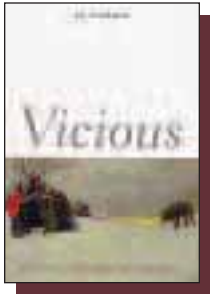


# EDITORS' CHOICE



## **Vicious: Wolves and Men in America**

BY JON T. COLEMAN

*Yale University Press, New Haven, CT, 2004. Pp. 288.  
ISBN 0-300-1039-5, \$28, hardcover*

**W**olves have historically been one of the most maligned and despised of wild animals, yet certain societies regard them highly, and the dual existence of these attitudes indicates a cultural, rather than an intuitive human response to the wolf. With a foundation of fairy tales where wolves lie in wait for children in dark forests it is easy to blame our European ancestors for creating and transporting their negative attitudes about wolves from the Old Country to the New World. This idea may appear overly simplistic, but as a mammal ecologist with the Wisconsin DNR whose programs include management of gray wolves, I found myself wanting to learn more. Jon Coleman illustrates in his book, *Vicious: Wolves and Men in America*, that the original European immigrants to North America brought with them negative attitudes about wolves that persisted for generations. Coleman explores how these attitudes were part of a complex setting of religion, culture, economics, social stratification, politics, and environment. For example, European immigrants maintained the common practice of allowing livestock to roam freely, making them susceptible to wolf attacks. As a result, “biblical visions of wolves with [a] focus on greed, corruption, and theft flourished.”

Although not condoning the cruel behavior that humans have displayed toward wolves, Coleman sets the stage to explain that behavior. He describes the circumstances in which these behaviors occurred, without being overtly judgmental of the people who displayed them. Often he contrasts the struggle of the two species, humans and wolves, attempting to adapt and adjust to changing environments. He compares the two in reference to territoriality, spacing, communication, and social systems used by each species to adapt to the environment and adjust to each other. For example, wolves mark their territory with scent marks, and howl to ward off neighbors, while European Americans marked their territories with signs and fences, and used musket fire to declare their property.

Coleman explores the relations of Euro-Americans to wolves by examining three case studies of human-wolf relations. He initially focuses on the interactions and attitudes of the early colonists of New England toward wolves. From New England, Coleman follows settlers west into Ohio and

describes the political and economic systems that continued to encourage persecution of wolves. In the third case study, he follows the Mormons from the Midwest to Utah, and despite some initial attempts to develop more positive attitudes toward wolves, the hardships the Mormons faced during their travels ultimately caused them to also adopt negative attitudes toward wolves. The final two chapters in the book detail the government programs that eliminated wolves from the west, and the changed attitudes toward wolves in the twentieth century that eventually lead to their restoration in part of the west.

I was intrigued by Coleman’s treatment of people’s claims of being surrounded by ravenous wolves, despite the lack of documentation showing that healthy wild wolves in North America kill and eat people. It appears that the theme of a hero being surrounded by wolves was common, climaxing with a last-minute escape. The fables or cautionary tales lived on in the culture. In my own work, I receive reports about wolf attacks that often prove to be exaggerations of minor, or non-existent events, showing that the human imagination is still strong when it comes to interactions with wolves.

Not all of Coleman’s work is about imagined encounters with wolves. Coleman illustrates the wolves’ adaptability to a changing environment during the decimation of bison herds in the nineteenth-century west. Although the sound of gunfire alerted wolves to the dangerous presence of human hunters, it also signaled the presence of bison carcasses left rotting on the prairie. Wolves did not remain in the area to attack humans, but rather to use the human’s actions to provide themselves with food. Modern versions of similar phenomena in Wisconsin include wolves attracted to areas with a concentration of deer hunters where unretrieved deer serves as wolf food.

As a Wisconsinite, you won’t read anything about the Badger State in this book. Coleman incorrectly states that in 1950, wolves existed only in Michigan and Minnesota (Wisconsin held about fifty wolves at the time, about the same number as in Michigan). Although Wisconsin is absent from the book, the attitudes about wolves in Wisconsin were probably very similar to those of early settlers of New England and Ohio. Yet attitudes have changed in Wisconsin in recent decades. Wolves have recolonized in the state and their numbers are nearly four hundred. But in recent years some negative attitudes toward wolves have resurfaced, and it is important to remember how these negative attitudes have had such a drastic affect on wolf populations in the history of America.

I really enjoyed reading this book, despite its absence of

Wisconsin-specific material. Coleman has a very pleasing writing style and provides his historical accounts in a smooth, narrative style. In some portions of the book, Coleman becomes a little anthropomorphic, but it provides a contrast between human and wolf behavior that is interesting. His

book provides a good perspective of how attitudes toward wolves, other wildlife, and the environment are shaped by culture and the environment where people live.

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## A Question of Loyalty

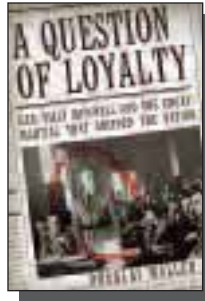
BY DOUGLAS WALLER

*Harper Collins, New York, NY, 2004, pp. 448, index, bibliography photos, ISBN 0-06-0505-47-8, \$26.95, softcover.*

In *A Question of Loyalty*, veteran journalist and historian Douglas Waller examines the case of General William C. “Billy” Mitchell, the Wisconsin-reared air power advocate who accused his superiors in the army, navy, and civilian defense establishment of “incompetency, criminal negligence and almost treasonable administration of the national defense”—and suffered the consequences. Mitchell’s accusations, which zipped over the nation’s newswires in early September 1925, came in the wake of the unconfirmed loss of five naval aviators attempting to make the first flight from the continental United States to Hawaii and the fatal crash of the Navy’s rigid airship *Shenandoah*, which broke up in a storm over southern Ohio and took the lives of fourteen crewman. In Mitchell’s view, the losses were the result of wrongheaded policies pursued by a high command that knew virtually nothing about aviation and therefore dispatched courageous aviators aloft in flawed aircraft and hazardous conditions.

It was the latest barrage in a battle Mitchell had waged since he came home from World War I a decorated hero of the air war and a zealot convinced that the airplane had changed everything, not only about warfare but about civilian transportation as well. From his post as second-in-command of the Army Air Service, he argued for the creation of an air force separate from and equal to the navy and the army, that command of all the armed forces be unified into a single department of defense and that all aviation research, development, and production be administered by a cabinet-level department. Mitchell also declared that land-based, long-distance bombers would win wars for the army and replace the navy as America’s first line of defense from invasion. After a working honeymoon tour of the Pacific in 1923, he famously predicted a successful Japanese air attack on woefully unprepared American bases in Hawaii, including the key naval station at Pearl Harbor. Mitchell’s post-*Shenandoah* attack was one blow more than Calvin Coolidge, his generals, and admirals would take. At the behest of the president, the Army charged Mitchell with violating the Articles of War and set the stage for the “trial that gripped the nation.”

The court-martial of Billy Mitchell was a celebrity trial and had much in common with other celebrity trials, before and



after: a well-known, media-savvy defendant in the role of underdog; his faithful wife, steadfast at his side throughout; massive media coverage in the form of daily bulletins and breathless headlines in newspapers from coast to coast; a politically ambitious defense attorney given to raucous courtroom theatrics who outshone the plodding army prosecutors; celebrity witnesses, including colorful New York Congressman Fiorello LaGuardia, World War Ace Eddie Rickenbacker and Margaret Lansdowne, the youthful and glamorous widow of the *Shenandoah*’s commander. A panel of nine generals served as judge and jury. They all knew Mitchell and none was unbiased.

For Mitchell the trial was a golden opportunity to present his views on aviation to the American people, whom he hoped would share his outrage. For the generals, the trial was a straightforward military tribunal summoned to determine whether Mitchell was guilty of violating the Articles of War and, if so, the extent of his punishment. It was on these terms, and not on his views on air power, that Mitchell was ultimately judged.

The trial also raised, as Waller’s title states, a question of loyalty. It asked where a soldier, sworn to obey his superiors and defend his country, should place his allegiance when his conscience tells him he must disobey his commanders in order to defend his homeland. Likewise, how much loyalty does a soldier owe to his comrades in arms? Mitchell was not alone in his conviction that, by failing to support the development of aviation, his superiors were condemning aviators to death. For Mitchell there was no question. Loyalty to his country and to his fellow airmen required that he speak out and become the rebel/martyr his adherents remember to this day.

Douglas Waller has done an excellent job of telling Billy Mitchell’s story. While focusing on the court-martial, he has discovered and made good use of documents held by Mitchell’s families and in the Wisconsin Historical Society archives to compile a concise biography of his subject, with insights on little-discussed subjects such as Mitchell’s first marriage and divorce, his chronically precarious finances, his abuse of alcohol and his undisguised racism. As Waller concludes, “Mitchell had his personal flaws . . . [but] He had the courage of his convictions. . . . He deserves a place in history.”

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The History of Aviation in Wisconsin*