



American Canopy: Trees, Forests, and the Making of a Nation

Eric Rutkow

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This fascinating and groundbreaking work tells the remarkable story of the relationship between Americans and their trees across the entire span of our nation's history.

Like many of us, historians have long been guilty of taking trees for granted. Yet the history of trees in America is no less remarkable than the history of the United States itself—from the majestic white pines of New England, which were coveted by the British Crown for use as masts in navy warships, to the orange groves of California, which lured settlers west. In fact, without the country's vast forests and the hundreds of tree species they contained, there would have been no ships, docks, railroads, stockyards, wagons, barrels, furniture, newspapers, rifles, or firewood. No shingled villages or whaling vessels in New England. No New York City, Miami, or Chicago. No Johnny Appleseed, Paul Bunyan, or Daniel Boone. No Allied planes in World War I, and no suburban sprawl in the middle of the twentieth century. America—if indeed it existed—would be a very different place without its millions of acres of trees.

As Eric Rutkow's brilliant, epic account shows, trees were essential to the early years of the republic and indivisible from the country's rise as both an empire and a civilization. Among *American Canopy's* many fascinating stories: the Liberty Trees, where colonists gathered to plot rebellion against the British; Henry David Thoreau's famous retreat into the woods; the creation of New York City's Central Park; the great fire of 1871 that killed a thousand people in the lumber town of Peshtigo, Wisconsin; the fevered attempts to save the American chestnut and the American elm from extinction; and the controversy over spotted owls and the old-growth forests they inhabited. Rutkow also explains how trees were of deep interest to such figures as George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, Teddy Roosevelt, and FDR, who oversaw the planting of more than three billion trees nationally in his time as president.

As symbols of liberty, community, and civilization, trees are perhaps the loudest silent figures in our country's history. America started as a nation of people frightened of the deep, seemingly infinite woods; we then grew to rely on our forests for progress and profit; by the end of the twentieth century we came to understand that the globe's climate is dependent on the preservation of trees. Today, few people think about where timber comes from, but most of us share a sense that to destroy trees is to destroy part of ourselves and endanger the future.

Never before has anyone treated our country's trees and forests as the subject of a broad historical study, and the result is an accessible, informative, and thoroughly entertaining read. Audacious in its four-hundred-year scope, authoritative in its detail, and elegant in its execution, *American Canopy* is perfect for history buffs and nature lovers alike and announces Eric Rutkow as a major new author of popular history.

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Patrick Duenas:

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