E. P. Thompson. WHIGS AND HUNTERS: THE ORIGIN OF THE BLACK ACT (Pantheon Books) 1975, 313 pp., $5.95 (paper).

Class struggles in 18th-Century England led to enactment of "The Black Act" in 1723 which made poaching of deer, fish, rabbits, and other animals, as well as wood-cutting, in royal parks a capital crime. Villagers and farmers could not even kill deer which wandered out of the reserves to ravage their gardens without risk of the gallows. Many people were tried, many hanged. The Black Act, so called from the practice of blacking faces for night raids, was resisted in rural England, but not repealed until Victoria's time. This book discusses the rise of poaching, maiming of deer, breaking of fish impoundments, and wasting of forest reserves as an act of protest against harsh Whig policies. The deer, especially, were regarded as symbols of the king and his agents, and as such became victims in the class struggle. Suffering caused mutilated animals is not discussed in this work, as it doubtless was not at the time. Methods of game management, the size of royal herds of red fallow deer, and the politics of hunting privileges are documented. The book has no discussion of ethical considerations of the legal and illegal hunt, but is of interest to those tracing the history of hunting and of humane sentiments toward wild animals.

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