The Journal is degrading itself and the profession by first altering a direct quotation from a leading conservationist of the first half of the 20th century, and second, by publishing a defense of that action by editor Rebecca Staebler and author Zane Cornett. Leopold said or wrote what he believed, and that is now a matter of history.

The Journal has adopted a policy that seems silly to many, and Cornett presumes to know how Leopold would think and act in 1996, nearly 50 years after his death. Perhaps the Journal and Cornett can explain what he was thinking in 1947. He said this to the conservation committee of the Garden Club of America on June 7, 1947:

The practice of conservation must spring from a conviction of what is ethically and aesthetically right, as well as what is economically expedient. A thing is right only when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the community, and the community includes the soil, water, fauna, and flora, as well as people (The River of the Mother of God and Other Essays by Aldo Leopold, eds. S.L. Flader and J.B. Callicott, 1991, p. 345).

Leopold's book, A Sand County Almanac, published in 1949 from the manuscript entitled Great Possessions submitted in December 1947, states, "Examine each question in terms of what is ethically and aesthetically right, as well as what is economically expedient. A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise."

Who changed Leopold's original ideas written and spoken in June 1947? Was it Leopold himself, the editor, the publisher? Many SAF members regard Leopold's writings as the foundation for management and preservation of the ecosystem. The quote from June 1947 is more applicable to the practice of forestry, and it is this philosophy that is reflected in the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969.

Ralph Solether
Albuquerque, New Mexico

More Than We Need

The matter of editing past quotations to make them "politically correct" is an interesting one to consider from a rhetorical standpoint. It begs a number of questions that are typically addressed by those schooled in composition and rhetoric. Having had that background before I entered my current forum among forestry and natural resources professionals, I have a few observations that might be pertinent.

In the case of Cornett's quotation from Leopold, Cornett hasn't technically changed Leopold's original because the brackets indicate Cornett's modification. The informed reader will recognize that alteration as an editorial one, and it is in line with Leopold's use of the proper grammatical form when he was writing (1947). Cornett is probably correct in asserting that "they" currently reflects the meaning Leopold intended then. Legally, he's okay doing this to the text. The Journal is on firm ground to make such changes, if it wants to, but I question whether it makes sense to do so.

I would ask why Cornett thinks the change is necessary when we all realize that a 1947 citation reflects a point in the evolution of the English language at which the masculine pronoun did universal work as a substitute for the antecedent non-gender-specific "individual? Do we really need to attempt a clean up of the entire language record? The printed record is hardly a toxic waste dump threatening the health (even mental health) of future readers of Leopold's work. Aware as they are likely to be made by the legion of English teachers that gender issues exist in language, readers should recognize the pretransition nature of a 1947 publication date.

One could argue that changes like the one Cornett makes threaten the linguistic heritage we all share. English, like any active language, is an evolving complex of the habits of mind and communication dominant at the time. Revisionism and selective editorializing from a later time seems to me problematic on a number of fronts—the most important being that it tends to homogenize that historically rich and individualized linguistic record into an ever less personal "bureau-speak."

Gary Blank
Raleigh, North Carolina

What's Truly Important

I am saddened that at a time when so many substantive challenges face the forestry profession—and the need for dialogue, listening, and understanding among our members is great—some choose to argue over Zane Cornett's use of gender-neutral language when quoting Aldo Leopold in his September 1995 article in the Journal.

Authors often add emphasis, delete words, and otherwise alter someone else's words when they choose to use a quote in their own writings. When Cornett chose to do this by using gender-neutral language in Leopold's quote, he made it clear where he changed it. I agree with Cornett that if Leopold were writing today he, like most others in 1996 in the United States, would use gender-neutral language if he were not referring to a specific person.

Most men are noticeably uncomfortable if a writer or speaker uses feminine pronouns, with no specific woman in mind, when they refer to foresters, managers, landowners, scientists, and so forth in their papers or presentations. Is it any surprise that women feel excluded when masculine pronouns are used in otherwise gender-neutral situations? Would there have been as much concern if Cornett had chosen to make a point by italicizing some other words from Leopold and inserting the comment [emphasis added]?

I hope that we can all move past this and concentrate instead on what Leopold had to say about the land and our relationship to it. His and others' words of wisdom can help all of us—men and women together—face challenges and increase our understanding of the land and the people.

Jo Ellen Force
Moscow, Idaho
Perspective

He Said, [They] Said...

Traditionally, the PERSPECTIVE department features one individual's views on an issue of concern to the forestry profession. This month, we would like to offer several forestry professionals' perspectives on the subject of gender-neutral terminology and whether it is appropriate to alter older quotations to reflect this fairly recent trend in the English language.

To set the scene: In the September 1995 issue of the JOURNAL, which focused on the subject of professional ethics, Zane J Cornett wrote an article entitled “Birch Seeds, Leadership, and a Relationship with the Land” (p. 6) in which he altered a quote by Aldo Leopold in three places, changing the pronoun “he” to “they.” Cornett used brackets, as is traditional when a quote is changed or clarified by a subsequent author to signal to the audience that different wording has been used. A short time later, the JOURNAL received a letter to the editor from Robert Allen regarding the alteration. Allen’s letter, which follows, has sparked an ongoing discussion among forestry professionals and SAF members. We would like to share these comments (printed in the order received) with Journal readers.

--Editor

Politically Correct?

It is repugnant to me to see the words of an author changed to make them “politically correct.” What gives one the right to alter the writing of Aldo Leopold to read, “If the individual has a warm personal understanding of land, [they] will perceive of [their] own accord…” as was done on page 7 of the September 1995 issue of the JOURNAL OF FORESTRY?

Robert M. Allen
Seneca, South Carolina

Rebecca Staebler replies:

Although the JOURNAL’s policy is to avoid gender-specific language, published quotations are generally not altered. In this case, the JOURNAL honored the author’s specific request to substitute gender-neutral language in Leopold’s quote; however, substitutions were clearly marked with brackets according to Chicago Manual of Style directives.

Inclusivity Is “Correct”

In the January 1996 LETTERS column, Robert Allen questioned what right I had to change Aldo Leopold’s quote to gender-neutral language. It seems to me that the published reply, while detailing JOURNAL policy and my request, does not address Allen’s question of “What…right?” I offer this response.

Rights are balanced with responsibility. As an author, I have the right to alter another’s words to reflect modern language and/or to clarify intent—and I have the responsibility to indicate when I have done so. As an avid disciple of this thoughtful and progressive forester, I believe my changes reflect the way Leopold would have written that passage in the 1990s.

Second-Guessing Leopold

May I add my agreement to Robert M. Allen’s Letter to the Editor (Jan. 1996) regarding Zane J Cornett’s “politically correct” changes in Aldo Leopold’s quote. Cornett justifies his action in making these changes by stating (LETTERS, April 1996):

“I believe that [the use of gender-neutral language] was Leopold’s intention as well.”

Using Cornett’s reasoning, therefore, it is proper for a person to change any quotation because he believes that he is blessed by superior insight to know what the author really intended. Heaven help any serious researcher from the hodgepodge that would follow from such reasoning. What is happening to our professional ethics?

Further, since Cornett obviously feels strongly in this matter, he might do his rewriting without torturing the English language. In his alteration of the Leopold quotation, the subject “individual” is a singular word and should not be the antecedent of the plural word “they.”

The real points at issue here are: (1) Is it ethical for a professional researcher/writer to quote another person’s writing and to make any changes that he wishes in that quotation? (2) Is it ethical for a professional publication like the JOURNAL OF FORESTRY to permit such alterations in the articles that it publishes?

Ed Furlow
Arlington, Virginia

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