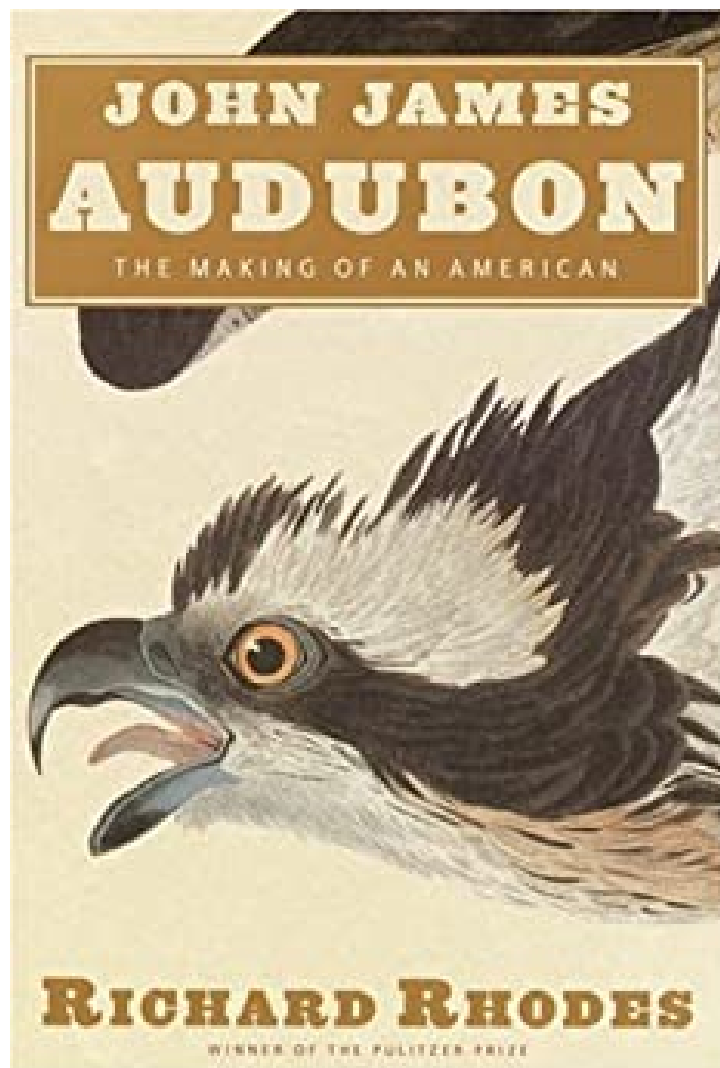


John James Audubon: The Making of an American

by

Richard Rhodes



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Synopsis

John James Audubon came to America as a dapper eighteen-year-old eager to make his fortune. He had a talent for drawing and an interest in birds, and he would spend the next thirty-five years traveling to the remotest regions of his new country—often alone and on foot—to render his avian subjects on paper. The works of art he created gave the world its idea of America. They gave America its idea of itself. Here Richard Rhodes vividly depicts Audubon's life and career: his epic wanderings; his quest to portray birds in a lifelike way; his long, anguished separations from his adored wife; his ambivalent witness to the vanishing of the wilderness. John James Audubon: The Making of an American is a magnificent achievement.

What people say about this book

Anne Salazar, "MAGNIFICENT!. This book is nothing short of MAGNIFICENT! Rhodes is an elegant writer who knows and loves his subject as well as history and gets it all right. This is more than the biography of one brilliant man; it is a history of frontier America in its early days and is populated with much more than birds. There are Indians, friends, enemies, 4-legged animals, and yes, loads and loads of American birds. The voyages back and forth from Europe to America are enlightening and amazing to think about. I knew next to nothing about birds when I bought this book; I bought it because of an interesting book review I read a couple of years ago. There is another Audubon book that came out the same year, *Under a Wild Sky* by Souder, and I own that book, too. The Souder book was a finalist for the Pulitzer, but I really don't know how it could have been selected over this book by Richard Rhodes. For example, this book goes into all the details of Audubon's personal life right up to his last days on earth, whereas the Souder book covers most of it in a few paragraphs at the end of his book. I LOVED this book! I had a couple of bird books next to my chair as I was reading (one, a condensed version of Audubon's *Birds of America*), and referred to them throughout reading, which was fun and very enlightening and educational. Audubon knew and loved his birds so well that he even wrote biographies of individual species, and indeed individual birds themselves! What could be more amazing than that? This is a truly delicious book that I wish more people would read. Right now there are only 18 individual reviews, which is much less than this book should have. I always blame the publishers for not doing justice to the fabulous books they are entrusted with. Do yourself a favor and read this special book! It is about a great man, yes, but also covers so much more. In these days of being green, Audubon predicted (and saw the beginnings of) the sad ruination and ultimate demise of nature in all its forms, and that was in the early 1800s. He was a pioneer as well as a bright man, and a funny man, and a driven man who loved and adored his family and his birds."

Damon D. Hickey, "Better than fiction. The life of John James Audubon could have been a historical novel. This West Indian French bastard survived revolutions, wars, earthquakes, floods, economic collapses, and epidemics. He crisscrossed everywhere in North America, as well as Europe and the Caribbean, his home. He combined entrepreneurial skills with a love of the outdoors and the gifts of the naturalist and artist (not to mention hunter). His equally-amazing English-born wife Lucy took to the frontier as readily as he, raising a family and providing frontier hospitality wherever their fortunes took them. A biographer or historian may lack a novelist's eye for the kinds of background details that make the past come alive to the reader. But Richard Rhodes has immersed himself in his subject's world. He's read everything, not only what Audubon himself wrote, but also what his family, acquaintances, and others who experienced the same things wrote. Suppose you'd been in New York City on 9/11 but hadn't written much about your experience. A future historian might use the descriptions by others who were there

too to fill in the gaps. That's what Rhodes has done for Audubon. Before this book, Rhodes was known for his Pulitzer-winning history of the development of the atomic bomb. Now he's known as Audubon's biographer, having edited the Everyman's Library edition of *The Audubon Reader* and contributed an introduction to the forthcoming *Audubon: Early Drawings*. This is a remarkable book by someone who really knows his subject, his period, and his craft as writer and historian."

Abigail Stone, "Rhodes Biography of Audubon. Is it just me or are all the Audubon biographies relentlessly depressing? Either we are hearing about his shooting or he is witnessing some atrocity in the wild. As a birder and appreciator of the natural world, I can hardly read these accounts of slaughter. And when it is not the birds or buffalo dying, it is the sweet Bachman daughters. I know times were hard then, but surely these biographers could have stuffed some cheer into those grim cracks of despair.... but no, the passenger pigeon slaughter, the trail of tears, and other terrible events of the day are recorded. The book ends abruptly with Audubon dying and his wife melting down the precious etched plates and throwing out half or more of his journals, and selling off everything else. I mean, the man dedicated his life to drawing the birds of America and he wrote about every step of the way in his journals and she tosses them? It is beyond upsetting. The book is full of wonderful photos of his art and pictures of his family. It is more focussed on his drawing than the other bio I read by Shreshinsky. But it still lacks bird information. It says he discovered a number of new birds but they don't say which ones... that sort of omission is not good in my opinion. But it may be that due to the loss of journals they don't know as much as they wish... in any case, it is worth reading, and well written."

Lucyme, "A wonderful history of one of the great natural history artists A wonderful history of one of the great natural history artists of America. It is sometimes difficult to reconcile the number of birds that are sacrificed in the process, but he lived in a different time. There was a great abundance of almost every species he recorded. Only later did the consequences of over hunting and disturbances of the wilderness lead to extinction. It is a sad tale when thought about in those terms, but a brave and glorious journey of discovery by one extraordinary man."

Crianhard, "Very interesting, but very long. Quite amazing history of a true naturalist... he even felt and knew that nature destruction was on the way in the 1800's... all the killing and forest destruction.. and when he went west he saw the bison hunts and the terrible treatment of Indian tribes... the book is too long... but the story is incredible"

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