

# The Politics of Zoos: Exotic Animals and Their Protectors



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Zoos have found themselves continually under fire in recent decades. Animal rights activists initiated the attacks; at the same time regulatory agencies, anti-tax advocates, and an assortment of litigators have also targeted zoos. In an effort to defend themselves in this hostile landscape, zoos and aquariums joined forces under the leadership of the American Association of Zoological Parks and Aquariums (now called the AZA). They learned to use the political system to their own advantage while at the same time crafting a more progressive public mission. In *The Politics of Zoos*, Jesse Donahue and Erik Trump present a political biography of the AZA to show how the zoo community has emerged as a political player. Rather than recount the history of a face institution, the authors focus on the cohort of directors who navigated the political turbulence of the 1960s and 1970s and set the agenda for subsequent decades. Ironically, at a time when activists began to charge that zoos and aquariums did not know how to care for animals and did not care for the well-being of endangered species, the opposite was true. These institutions were increasingly attracting well-educated professionals who indeed cared a great deal. Amidst controversies over ownership and funding, capture and disposal, and the health and well-being of animals on display, AZA leaders acted not merely to protect their own interests in the political arena but to ensure the welfare of captive animals and to assist with the conservation of wild species. Donahue and Trump's original study of the politics of American zoos and

aquariums from the 1960s to the present draws upon interviews, archival sources, congressional records, court cases, regulatory hearings, media accounts, and the authors' ongoing field research. It will appeal to zoo professionals, political scientists, historians, and those concerned with animal welfare.