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Ivory's Ghosts: The White Gold of History and the Fate of Elephants

John Frederick Walker

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Praised for the nuance and sensitivity with which it approaches one of the most fraught conservation issues we face today, John Frederick Walker's *Ivory's Ghosts* tells the astonishing story of the power of ivory through the ages, and its impact on elephants. Long before gold and gemstones held allure, humans were drawn to the "jewels of the elephant"—its great tusks. Ivory came to be prized in every culture of the world—from ancient Egypt to nineteenth-century America to modern Japan—for its beauty, rarity, and ability to be finely carved. Elephants tusks were transformed into sensuous figurines, sacred icons, scientific instruments, pistol grips, and piano keys. But the beauty came at an unfathomable cost. Walker lays bare the ivory trade's cruel connection with the slave trade and the increasing slaughter of elephants in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. By the 1980s, elephant poaching reached levels that threatened the last great herds of the African continent, and led to a worldwide ban on the ancient international trade in tusks. But the ban has failed to stop poaching—or the emotional debate over what to do with the legitimate and growing stockpiles of ivory recovered from elephants that die of natural causes.

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