Animals, Slavery, and the Holocaust
by Charles Patterson

Where does all the war, racism, terrorism, violence, and cruelty that's so endemic to human civilization come from? Why do humans exploit and massacre each other so regularly? Why is our species so violence-prone? To answer these questions we would do well to think about our exploitation and slaughter of animals and its effect on human civilization. Could it be that we oppress and kill each other so readily because our abuse and slaughter of animals has desensitized us to the suffering and death of others?

The "domestication" of animals--the exploitation of goats, sheep, cattle, and other animals for their meat, milk, hides, and labor that began in the Near East about 11,000 years ago--changed human history. In earlier hunter-gatherer societies there had been some sense of kinship between humans and animals, reflected in totemism and myths which portrayed animals, or part-animal part-human creatures, as creators and progenitors of the human race. However, mankind crossed the Rubicon when Near Eastern herdsmen and farmers started castrating, hobbling, and branding captive animals to control their mobility, diet, growth, and reproductive lives. To distance themselves emotionally from the cruelty they inflicted, they adopted mechanisms of detachment, rationalization, denial, and euphemism, and in the process became a harder, more ruthless lot.

In 1917 Sigmund Freud put the issue in perspective when he wrote: "In the course of his development towards culture man acquired a dominating position over his fellow-creatures in the animal kingdom. Not content with this supremacy, however, he began to place a gulf between his nature and theirs. He denied the possession of reason to them, and to himself he attributed an immortal soul, and made claims to a divine descent which permitted him to annihilate the bond of community between him and the animal kingdom."

The domination, control, and manipulation that characterizes the way humans treat animals who come under their control has set the tone and served as a model for the way humans treat each other. The enslavement/domestication of animals paved the way for human slavery. As Karl Jacoby writes, slavery was "little more than the extension of domestication to humans."

In the first civilizations that emerged in the river valleys of ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, India, and China, the exploitation of animals for food, milk, hides, and labor was so firmly established that these civilizations sanctified the notion that animals existed solely for their benefit. That allowed humans to use, abuse, and kill them with total impunity. It also led humans to place other humans--captive, enemies, strangers, and those who were different or disliked--on the other side of the great divide where they were vilified as "beasts," "pigs," "dogs," "monkeys," "rats," and "vermin." Designating other people as animals has always been an ominous development because it sets them up for humiliation, exploitation, and murder. As Leo Kuper writes in Genocide: Its Political Use in the Twentieth Century, "the animal world has been a particularly fertile source of metaphors of dehumanization."

From Slaughterhouse to Death Camp

THE RELATIONSHIP OF ANIMAL EXPLOITATION TO THE HOLOCAUST is less apparent than it is in the case of slavery, but there is a connection nonetheless. Take the case of Henry Ford, whose impact on the twentieth century began, metaphorically speaking, at an American slaughterhouse and ended at Auschwitz.

In his autobiography, My Life and Work (1922), Ford revealed that his inspiration for assembly-line production came from a visit he made as a young man to a Chicago slaughterhouse. "I believe that this was the first moving line ever installed. The idea [of the assembly line] came in a general way from the overhead trolley that the Chicago packers use in dressing beef." A Swift and Company publication from that time described the division-of-labor principle that so impressed Ford: "The slaughtered animals, suspended head downward from a moving chain, or conveyor, pass from workman to workman, each of whom performs some particular step in the process." It was but one step from the industrialized slaughter of animals to the assembly-line mass
murder of people. In J. M. Coetzee's novel, The Lives of Animals, the protagonist Elizabeth Costello tells her audience: "Chicago showed us the way; it was from the Chicago stockyards that the Nazis learned how to process bodies."

Most people are not aware of the central role of the slaughterhouse in the history of American industry. "Historians have deprived the packers of their rightful title of mass-production pioneers," writes James Barrett in his study of Chicago's packinghouse workers in the early 1900s, "for it was not Henry Ford but Gustavus Swift and Philip Armour who developed the assembly-line technique that continues to symbolize the rationalized organization of work."

Henry Ford, who was so impressed by the efficient way meat packers slaughtered and dismantled animals in Chicago, made his own unique contribution to the slaughter of people in Europe. Not only did he develop the assembly-line method that Germans used to kill Jews, but he launched a vicious anti-Semitic campaign that helped make the Holocaust happen.

In the early 1920s Ford's weekly newspaper, the Dearborn Independent, published a series of articles based on the text of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, an anti-Semitic tract that had been circulating in Europe. Ford published a book-length compilation of the articles entitled The International Jew, which was translated into most of the European languages and was widely disseminated by anti-Semites, chief among them the German publisher Theodor Fritsch, an early supporter of Hitler. Thanks to a well-financed publicity campaign and the prestige of the Ford name, The International Jew was hugely successful both domestically and internationally.

The International Jew found its most receptive audience in Germany where it was known as The Eternal Jew. Ford was enormously popular in Germany. When his autobiography went on sale there, it immediately became the country's number one bestseller. In the early 1920s The Eternal Jew quickly became the bible of the German anti-Semitism, with Fritsch's publishing house printing six editions between 1920 and 1922.

After Ford's book came to the attention of Hitler in Munich, he used a shortened version of it in the Nazi propaganda war against the Jews of Germany. In 1923 a Chicago Tribune correspondent in Germany reported that Hitler's organization in Munich was "sending out Mr. Ford's books by the carload." Baldur von Schirach, the leader of the Hitler Youth movement and the son of an aristocratic German father and American mother, said at the postwar Nuremberg war crimes trial that he became a convinced anti-Semite at age seventeen after reading The Eternal Jew. "You have no idea what a great influence this book had on the thinking of German youth. The younger generation looked with envy to symbols of success and prosperity like Henry Ford, and if he said the Jews were to blame, why naturally we believed him."

Hitler regarded Ford as a comrade-in-arms and kept a life-sized portrait of him on the wall next to his desk in his office in Munich. In 1923 when Hitler heard that Ford might run for President of the United States, he told an American reporter, "I wish that I could send some of my shock troops to Chicago and other big American cities to help in the elections. We look to Heinrich Ford as the leader of the growing Fascist movement in America. We have just had his anti-Jewish articles translated and published. The book is being circulated in millions throughout Germany." Hitler praised Ford in Mein Kampf, the only American to be singled out. In 1931, when a Detroit News reporter asked Hitler what Ford's portrait on the wall meant to him, Hitler said, "I regard Henry Ford as my inspiration."

Although Ford stopped publishing the Dearborn Independent in late 1927 and agreed to withdraw The International Jew from the book market, copies of The International Jew continued to circulate in large numbers throughout Europe and Latin America. In Nazi Germany the influence of The Eternal Jew continued to be strong and lasting, with German anti-Semites advertising and distributing it throughout the 1930s, often putting the names of Henry Ford and Adolf Hitler together on the cover. By late 1933, Fritsch had published twenty-nine editions, each with a preface praising Ford for his "great service" to America and the world for his attacks on the Jews.
In 1938, on the occasion of his seventy-fifth birthday, Henry Ford, the great admirer of the efficient way they slaughtered and cut up animals in America, accepted the Grand Cross of the Supreme Order of the German Eagle, the highest honor Nazi Germany could bestow on a foreigner (Mussolini was one of the three other foreigners to be so honored).

On January 7, 1942—exactly one month after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor that brought the United States into the war—Ford wrote a letter to Sigmund Livingston, national chairman of the Anti-Defamation League, in which he expressed his disapproval of hatred “against the Jew or any other racial or religious group.” By that time, Einsatzgruppen (German mobile killing squads) in the East had already murdered hundreds of thousands of Jewish men, women, and children, and the first German extermination camp at Kulmhof (Chelmno) was already operational.

From Animal Breeding to Genocide

Another American contribution to Nazi Germany’s Final Solution—eugenics—was rooted in animal exploitation. The breeding of domesticated animals—breeding the most desirable and castrating and killing the rest—became the model for American and German eugenic efforts to upgrade their populations. America led the way with regard to forced sterilizations, but Nazi Germany quickly caught up and went on to euthanasia killings and genocide.

The desire to improve the hereditary qualities of the human population had had its beginnings in the 1860s when Francis Galton, an English scientist and cousin of Charles Darwin, turned from meteorology to the study of heredity (he coined the term “eugenics” in 1881). By the end of the nineteenth century, genetic theories, founded on the assumption that heredity was based on rigid genetic patterns little influenced by social environment, dominated scientific thought.

The eugenics movement in America began with the creation of the American Breeders’ Association (ABA) in 1903. At the second meeting of the ABA in 1905, a series of reports about the great success achieved in the selective breeding of animals and plants prompted delegates to ask why such techniques could not be applied to human beings. The creation of a committee on Human Heredity, or Eugenics, at the third ABA meeting in 1906 launched the American eugenics movement in America.

Its leader was poultry researcher Charles B. Davenport, who served as the director of the Eugenics Record Office (ERO) at Cold Spring Harbor on Long Island in New York. Davenport, who described eugenics as “the science of the improvement of the human race by better breeding,” looked forward to the time when a woman would no more accept a man “without knowing his biologico-genealogical history” than a stockbreeder would take “a sire for his colts or calves who was without pedigree.” He believed that “the most progressive revolution in history” could be achieved if “human matings could be placed upon the same high plane as that of horse breeding.” Sterilization began in America in 1887, when the superintendent of the Cincinnati Sanitarium published the first public recommendation for the sterilization of criminals, both as a punishment and a way to prevent further crime. Authorities used the same method to sterilize male criminals that farmers used on their male animals not selected for breeding—castration. Castration was the preferred method used to sterilize male criminal offenders until 1899, when vasectomy was adopted because it was more practical.

Indiana passed the first state sterilization law in 1907. By 1930 more than half the American states passed laws that authorized the sterilization of criminals and mentally ill people, with California leading the way with more than sixty percent of the country’s forced sterilizations. By the 1930s compulsory sterilization had widespread support in the United States, with college presidents, clergymen, mental health workers, and school principals among its strongest supporters. The United States quickly became the model for other countries that wanted to sterilize their “defectives.” Denmark was the first European country to pass such a law in 1929, followed in rapid succession by other European nations.
Matt Prescott, who directs the “Holocaust on Your Plate” exhibit, argues that “Comparisons to the Holocaust are undeniable and inescapable not only because we humans share with all other animals our ability to feel pain, fear and loneliness, but because the government-sanctioned oppression of billions of beings, and the systems we use to abuse and kill them, eerily parallel the concentration camps.” He explains:

The methods of the Holocaust exist today in the form of factory farming where billions of innocent, feeling beings are taken from their families, trucked hundreds of miles through all weather extremes, confined in cramped, filthy conditions, and herded to their deaths. During the Holocaust, hundreds of thousands of men, women and children died from heat exhaustion, dehydration, starvation or from freezing to the sides of cattle cars. Those who arrived at the concentration camps alive were forced into cramped bunkers where they lived on top of other dead victims, covered in their own feces and urine. They were forced to work until their bodies couldn’t work anymore, and were then herded to their deaths in assembly-line fashion. Ten billion animals a year in the U.S. suffer through these same horrors every single day. We must ask ourselves: sixty years later, have we learned nothing? Why are we still transporting animals through all weather extremes, forcing them to endure extreme heat and cold? Why are we still confining them in conditions so dirty, the only way to keep them alive is through the extreme overuse of antibiotics? Why are we still ripping children away from mothers and leading them by the necks and legs to the kill floor?

Moreover, Prescott points out that the United States Holocaust Museum states in its guidelines for teaching about the Holocaust that “The Holocaust provides a context for exploring the dangers of remaining silent, apathetic, and indifferent in the face of others’ oppression” (2004).

One of the many questions that emerge from the current debate about the use of the Holocaust to illuminate humankind’s relationship to billions of nonhuman animals is the extent to which the outrage of having one’s own suffering compared to that of others centers primarily on issues of identity and uniqueness or on issues of superiority and privilege. The ownership of superior and unique suffering has many claimants, but as Isaac Bashevis Singer observed speaking of chickens, there is no evidence that people are more important than chickens (Shenker 1991, 11).

There is no evidence, either, that human suffering, or Jewish suffering, is separate from all other suffering, or that it needs to be kept separate and superior in order to maintain its identity. But where, it may be asked, is the evidence that we humans have had enough of inflicting massive preventable suffering on one another and on the individuals of other species, given that we know suffering so well, and claim to abhor it? In Eternal Treblinka: Our Treatment of Animals and the Holocaust, Charles Patterson concludes that “the sooner we put an end to our cruel and violent way of life, the better it will be for all of us – perpetrators, bystanders, and victims” (Patterson 2002, 232). Who but the Nazi within us disagrees? If we are going to exterminate someone, let it be the fascist within.

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At the same time, a human or nonhuman animal’s suffering may be so extreme, so unnatural and unbearable, that the longing arises never to be “seen” again. Take the poem “The Snow Leopard in the MetroToronto Zoo” by Jason Gray:

He pads on grassy banks behind a fence

with measured paces slow and tense.
Beyond his cage his thoughts are sharp and white;

he lives a compelled anchorite.

A solid ghost gone blind with all the green,

he waits and waits to be unseen. (Gray 2003, 56)

2 In fact, however, when the public is exposed to some of the more “dramatic” scenes taking place behind the scenes that are still largely hidden from view – e.g., force-feeding of ducks and geese to produce foie gras, artificial insemination and masturbation of “breeder” turkeys on which the commercial turkey industry is based, treatment of newborn chicks at the hatchery, candid-camera looks at what really goes on inside a slaughterhouse – there is a much greater sense of the individuality of each animal and, one hopes, greater empathy. Undercover video investigations are starting to make this happen – to foreground individual animals in their struggle against their abusers in the midst of the mass-suffering in which each animal is submerged in factory-farm settings.

3 Peter Singer’s position regarding the superiority of most human adult suffering and death over the suffering and death of most, if not all, nonhuman beings may be inferred, for example, in his discussion of damming a river that will adversely affect the nonhuman animals in the area: “Neither drowning nor starvation is an easy way to die, and the suffering involved in these deaths should . . . be given no less weight than we would give to an equivalent amount of suffering experienced by human beings. . . . But the argument presented above does not require us to regard the death of a nonhuman animal as morally equivalent to the death of a human being, since humans are capable of foresight and forward planning in ways that nonhuman animals are not. This is surely relevant to the seriousness of death, which, in the case of a human being capable of planning for the future, will thwart these plans, and which thus causes a loss that is different in kind from the loss that death causes to beings incapable even of understanding that they exist over time and have a future. It is also entirely legitimate to take into account the greater sense of loss that humans feel when people close to them die; whether nonhuman animals will feel a sense of loss at the death of another animal will depend on the social habits of the species, but in most cases it is unlikely to be as prolonged, and perhaps not as deep, as the grief that humans feel” (Singer 2000, 96).

4 Many Jews don’t like to use the word holocaust anymore because it has been used to apply to too many things not unique to the Jewish experience; so some scholars are opting for other words like Shoah, Churban, the Event, and the Tremendum to try to recapture some sense of singularity. See, e.g., James E. Young (1988, 85-89). See also Nathan Snaza (2004, 12).
I think we have just not learned to look deeply enough into the causes of our current social and environmental problems. I believe with a growing number of others that these problems began several millennia ago when our ancestors took up farming and broke the primal bonds with the living world and put human beings above all other life. Because of this, we have no sense of kinship with other life on this planet, hence no good sense of belonging here. Our tradition is one of arrogance toward the living world around us; it is a thing beneath us - to be either used up or kept at bay. We are, as intellectuals say, alienated from nature.

Although most religions today describe a three-tiered hierarchy: God, people, and everything else ... primal people lived not merely close to, but in and with nature. Food and materials came not by working with the soil, not by controlling the lives and growth of plants and animals, but by incredibly detailed knowledge about them. They lived with daily reminders of their connections with the living beings around them and with constant awareness of how their taking from their world might affect their lives in it. All of this evolved into a set of beliefs and eventually into tribal religions, which have taken on many forms and variations. What they all have in common, though, is a deep emotional attachment to, and respect for, the living world that made changing or controlling it unthinkable.

Alienated as we are from the natural world, our modern minds are too maimed to fully grasp how thoroughly this human mind was fed by its environment - particularly by the moving, living beings in it. The emerging cultural human mind literally took its shape and substance, its basic images and ideas, from the plants and animals around it. It came to know which plants out of hundreds made the best foods, medicines and materials. It came to know the life cycles and day-to-day habits of dozens of kinds of animals intimately enough to be able to predict when and where a hunt might be most successful. It came to know how all of the above might be affected by wind, rain, seasons, and the other elements and forces in nature. From such living, the people knew the land, their foraging territory, probably better than any modern ecologist could. They had, after all, generations of wisdom and experience in living in it, and most of all, a feeling for it that no books nor journals can ever convey.

Animals intrigued human beings with their size, speed, strength, habits and other features. They were believed to have powers humans did not. For primal humans - especially those with the flowering mind, consciousness and culture of modern Homo sapiens about 45,000 years ago - the animals in their foraging lands were the most impressive, the most fascinating living beings in the world. Measured in terms of the amount of human wonder they caused, animals were the most wonderful things out there in the world. The primal relationship with the powers of the living world was more of a partnership in which human beings had interactions and a strong sense of interdependence with them.

Other things in nature impressed us, too, like dark forests, violent storms, rivers swollen by flood waters. Yet animals impressed us in ways that the rest of nature could not. Why animals? Why do animals figure so centrally to the process of mind formation? Why isn't the child moved by stuffed plants and figures of trees and rocks? Animals, like us, move freely; and they are more obviously like people than are trees, rivers and other things in nature. Animals have eyes, ears, hair, and other organs like us; and they sleep, eat, defecate, copulate, give birth, play, fight, die and carry on many of the same activities of life that we do. Somewhat similar to us yet somewhat different, animals forced comparisons, categories, and conclusions. Animals made us think. Animals drove and shaped human intelligence. They are fascinating to watch. Of all the things in nature, then, animals stand out most in ways needed by the developing brain/mind. Animals are active, noisy, colorful characters - all of which makes them most informative. In contrast, the rest of nature is background - relatively amorphous, still, inscrutable, and not much help to the budding brain/mind, whether that of the species or the individual.

As movers of the mind, thought and feeling, animals are very strong stuff to human beings. No wonder our ancestors believed they had souls and powers.
One July day on my way to the pond I stopped short. Through the leaves, I thought I saw white forms moving around on the other side of the screen. Listening, I thought I heard voices. A moment later I was staring through the screen. White, young-looking chickens covered the ground. Several, when they saw me, came over and sank down in front of me. Back then I knew almost nothing about chickens, but I could see that their legs weren’t right. They tended to be thick and swollen with the toes curling inward and outward in odd sorts of ways. Many could barely make their way to the metal feeder which stood at a considerable distance, under the circumstances, from the water trough rigged up along one wall. A few fumbling steps and they would sink down on their broad, heavy breasts, their eyes peering at me.

[“Fleshly bodies of broiler chickens grow heavy so quickly that development of their bones and joints can’t keep up. . . . Many of these animals crouch or hobble about in pain on flawed feet and legs.” – Jim Mason & Peter Singer, *Animal Factories*]

From then on I used to visit the chickens almost every day, wondering dimly as to their ultimate fate. One morning in late August I went out to see them as usual. Only, this time the place was deserted. Then I saw her. [“When you choose a career in the poultry industry you may not see a chicken or an egg or a turkey – except at mealtime.” – Careers in the Poultry Industry: A Job is Ready When You Are].

She was stumbling around over by the feed cylinder on the far side where the low shelf piled with junk made everything dark. A shaft of sunlight had caught her, but by the time I was able to get inside she had scrunched herself deep in the far corner underneath the shelf against the wall. She shrank as I reached in to gather her up and lift her out of there. I held her in my lap stroking her feathers and looked at her. She was small and looked as if she had never been in the sun. Her feathers and legs and beak were brownstained with dirt and feces and dust. Her eyes were as lusterless as the rest of her, and her feet and legs were deformed. I let her go and she hobbled back to the corner where she must have spent the summer, coming out only to eat and drink. She had managed to escape being trampled to death, unlike the chicken I had found some weeks earlier stretched out and pounded into the dirt.

I made her a bed by the stove, close to our kitchen table. We named her Viva. Neurotically adapted to corners by now, Viva would hide her head in whatever closest corner she could find inside the house, or if outside she would often stick her head under a bush or pile of cut grass and just stay that way. Despite this, she liked to be outdoors. To see her sitting among the bright leaves scattered over the grass in the autumn sunshine, you would not have guessed what her legs and feet were like. Yet she liked to move around. When we first had her she used to cover a surprisingly wide territory in spite of her hardship, for though crippled, she was quick, and I would sometimes catch her hobbling vigorously to some point or other straight across the yard with her little wings fluttering.

She used her wings for balance in order to get about. To steady herself, and to keep from falling, she would spread them out so that the feather ends touched the ground, and standing thus, she would totter from side to side in a painstaking adjustment before going ahead. Much of her energy was spent upon this procedure every other step or so.

At first I hoped that exercise would help strengthen her legs, but as her body grew bigger they got worse. Often I would find her sitting with them spread out on either side of her, and sometimes they would even get caught in her wings, causing her terrible confusion and distress. One day I noticed that certain parts of her legs and feet were a greenish-blue, and wondered if she had some disease. I’d been thinking lately that even if she were not in actual physical pain, which I wasn’t sure of, she was still in some kind of acute misery, for she acted as though she was. She hid her face in corners more and more as the weeks went by, and ordinary efforts like eating and turning around were increasingly done with a commotion which left her exhausted.

One of the most touching things about Viva was her voice. She would always talk to me with her frail “peep peep” which never got any louder and seemed to come from somewhere in the center of her body which
pulsed her tail at precisely the same time. Also, rarely, she gave a little trill. Often after one of her ordeals, I would sit talking to her, stroking her beautiful back and her feet that were so soft between the toes and on the bottoms, and she would carry on the dialogue with me, her tail feathers twitching in a kind of unison with each of her utterances.

I decided to have her looked at, so I made an appointment and on a Saturday morning took her in a bed of straw in a cardboard box to the veterinarian's office an hour away.

The veterinarian asked briskly, was this some sort of pet, what was it? No, I said, not exactly – Viva was our companion, she had been abandoned and she lived with us in our house. The veterinarian looked at me. She said, “Most people would not care what happened to a chicken.”

She spread out Viva's wings and showed me that the undersides were black and blue like the blotches in her legs and feet. She said that because of her struggle with her condition, Viva's body was full of wounds, inside as well as out. I asked, what is her condition? And she said Viva suffered from a congenital leg defect, called splay foot, an inborn weakness in her joints typical of birds bred for the modern food industry. ["Dramatic changes have taken place within the industry. Instead of 'scratching for their food,' today's pampered chickens are the products of advanced science and technology." – Careers in the Poultry Industry: A Job is Ready When You Are]. She said Viva should be euthanized and that she would use an inhalant, which is more gentle than the usual leg injection. She had to look in on another animal just now which would give me time to spend a last few minutes alone with my friend.

I pulled up a chair next to the box on the table with Viva in it. Just then a young veterinary aid rushed in, “Where is it? Can I see it? I've never seen a chicken," she said making for the table. She left. I thought my heart would burst. Viva was very peaceful, and when I spoke to her she piped back in the way that she had, her little tail pulsing its perky beats, from somewhere inside.

The veterinarian took Viva away. Later, as I was leaving, she said that Viva would not die fast enough so she had to use a leg injection after all. She thanked me for caring about a chicken. I placed Viva in the car in the front seat beside me. The box in which she had travelled alive she was carried home dead in. My husband and I dug a hole in the corner of the yard and laid her inside. We covered her up with the dirt. I made a note on the inside cover of my dictionary: On Saturday, November 28, 1985, soft Viva died.

Chickens Raised for Meat

Chickens are cheerful, vibrant, sociable birds who evolved in the forests of India and Southeast Asia. Chickens mass-produced for food never feel the sun or soft grass or see the sky overhead. They never know the comfort of a mother hen's wing or the pleasure of parenting their young. Every day in North America and throughout the world, hundreds of millions of chickens are forced to live in filth and fear and are brutally slaughtered. As a result of genetic manipulation for overgrown muscle tissue of the breast and thighs, chickens suffer miserably from painful lameness. They suffer from gastrointestinal disorders, blood diseases, and chronic respiratory
infections. The parents of these birds are kept in darkness on semi-starvation diets designed to reduce the mating infirmities that result from breeding chickens to grow too large too fast.

During their six weeks of life, “broiler” chickens – soft young chickens just like Viva – live in semi-darkness on manure-drenched wood shavings, unchanged through several flocks of 30,000 to 50,000 or more birds in a single shed. The ammonia causes chickens to develop a blinding eye disease called ammonia burn. So painful is this disease that afflicted birds rub their hurting eyes with their wings and let out cries of pain.

“Broiler” chickens are crowded by the thousands in long dark sheds contaminated with Salmonella, Listeria and Campylobacter bacteria and Avian Influenza viruses. Poultry products are the main source of food poisoning in the home and a leading cause of arthritis in consumers.

Catching, Transport, and Slaughter

At six to twelve weeks old, chickens are violently cornered and grabbed by catching crews and carried upside down by their legs – struggling, flapping, and crying – to the transport truck.

At the slaughterhouse, the chickens are torn from the cages and hung upside down on a conveyer belt. As they move toward the killing knife, they are dragged through an electrical current that paralyzes their muscles but Does Not Stun Them. Chickens are intentionally kept alive through the slaughter process so their hearts will continue to beat and pump out blood.

“The chickens hang there and look at you while they are bleeding. They try to hide their head from you by sticking it under the wing of the chicken next to them on the slaughter line. You can tell by them looking at you, they’re scared to death.” – Virgil Butler, former Tyson chicken slaughterhouse worker in Grannis, Arkansas.

Millions of chickens are alive, conscious and breathing not only as their throats are being cut but afterwards, when they are plunged into scalding water to remove their feathers. In the scalder, “the chickens scream, kick, and their eyeballs pop out of their heads,” said Virgil Butler. The industry calls these birds “redskins” – birds who were scalded while they were still alive.
Even though animal slavery is different than human slavery in a number of ways, how is animal slavery not a form of slavery? Are not animals legal property literally? Are not animals literally bought and sold? Is not farmed and captive animal reproduction forcefully controlled through breeding? Pick your analogy! There is so much more that could be said here on the holocaust of the animals, animal slavery, and the list goes on. For now, I’d like to end on a less scholarly note and circle back to how we live our daily lives by quoting Edgar’s Mission Farm Sanctuary in Australia: If we could live happy and healthy lives without harming others, why wouldn’t we? While animal slavery is different than human slavery in many ways, how is animal slavery not slavery? Are not animals legal property literally bought and sold? Whenever animal advocates make comparisons to human racism, sexism, slavery, other prejudices and oppressions, and yes, even The Holocaust, it seems inevitable that some people get offended. Such people are often quick to assume that animal advocates are equating animals with able-minded humans in every single respect, when that is not the case at all, and they are simply talking about perfectly valid comparisons of prejudicial thought processes and perfectly valid comparisons of the qualities we still have in common. To be sure, slavery and the Holocaust differ from animal agriculture in fundamental ways. For one, slavery and the Holocaust were the result of discrimination based on ethnicity (and religion, for the latter). Black people, Jews, and other victims of the Holocaust were forced to work, were tortured, and were brutally, callously murdered. Today, animals are killed for food. Therefore, a major difference is that black people and Jews were murdered because of their identity, while animals are killed because their meat tastes good. The most salient legacy of the Holocaust and slavery is the unimaginable suffering that took place during that time and for many years afterward. Millions of lives were lost, many more were displaced, and the reverberations of those dark times continue to this day.