



# **Queer + Trans Voices:** **Achieving Liberation Through** **Consistent Anti-Oppression**

**AN L.G.B.T.Q.I.A. + VEGAN COMMUNITY PROJECT**  
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***Toward an Anti-Carceral Queer Veganism***

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As a white queer person from a conservative working-class farming and hunting community in the Midwest, my relationship with veganism was involuntarily queered and politicized from the beginning. When I became a vegetarian in my mid-20s, I received homophobic comments and right-wing political mockery from friends and family for my refusal to eat flesh. I was not yet out as a bisexual (and am still not fully out to many of these family members), but they unknowingly prompted me to examine what Carol J. Adams aptly defines as *The Sexual Politics of Meat* (1990), which offers an analysis of the heterosexist misogyny bound up in nonhuman animal consumption and patriarchal dominion. It was through the work of leftists like Black lesbian feminist Audre Lorde, queer ecofeminist Greta Gaard, and queer theorists Judith Butler and Sara Ahmed that my queerness and veganism began to evolve in tandem (Kirts 2018) as did my awareness of their roles as movements in part of a broader struggle against oppressive hierarchies like white supremacy and capitalism.

Black radical vegan scholars such as Dr. A. Breeze Harper, Aph & Syl Ko, and Christopher Sebastian McJeters write deftly about the historical relationship between white supremacy and speciesism (the belief in a human-animal binary where humans are superior). In reading their scholarship, I recognized my own ignorance of and complicity in the rhetoric of the nonhuman animal rights and gay rights movements that elevates the experiences of white cis men and white cis women who often reside a comfortable distance from the state-sanctioned violence of policing and incarceration. In and outside of liberal vegan activist circles, there is a strong presence of carceral politics (a reliance upon the correctional system also known as the penal system) to solve social problems by incarcerating individuals for hate crimes and nonhuman animal cruelty. Queer history is grounded in the Stonewall rebellion against police raids and against the routine violence and imprisonment of LGBTQ people; therefore, any political stance that upholds punitive justice (the belief that punishment can change behavior) is incompatible with queer politics but is especially antithetical to vegan principles. How could one demand the liberation of imprisoned nonhuman animals while simultaneously celebrating the imprisonment of humans?

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There is a general lack of imagination within mainstream nonhuman animal advocacy about the plight of farm and slaughterhouse employees, and the recurrent criminalization of workers by carceral vegan activists stands out as a racial and class-based disconnect with the harsh realities of labor conditions in farming operations, something that I saw firsthand as an adolescent while helping on my uncle's dairy farm. In retrospect, I've grappled with my uncle's mistreatment of the dairy cows on his farm and how it mirrored his abuse and exploitation of the undocumented Mexican immigrants he employed for years in what can only be described as a form of indentured servitude.

By using a queer vegan anticapitalist and anti-carceral political framework, we can look at the institutional treatment of nonhuman animals and the mass incarceration of marginalized groups not as separate issues but as linked systems of oppression. The punitive justice system, animal agriculture and mainstream animal advocacy don't exist in political vacuums but are deeply connected. Similarly, radical liberation movements are also in dialogue with each other, sharing strategies, crossing borders, and overlapping efforts. It's crucial to think of veganism not as an end unto itself but as inseparable from other political movements striving for the total liberation of all marginalized bodies

such as prison abolition, Black Power, queer and trans liberation, Indigenous land rights, the labor movement, and environmental justice.

In 2012, a poultry worker at a Butterball turkey farm in North Carolina became the first person in U.S. history to be convicted of a felony for cruelty to factory farmed birds. The arrest followed an undercover investigation by a prominent vegan animal advocacy group that led to the employee's sentencing, probation, fines, and subjection to warrantless searches by law enforcement (Borlick, 2012). Butterball management and executives weren't charged or fined for creating the conditions that led to the abuse of turkeys on the farm while the farm worker's arraignment was hailed as a milestone in the vegan movement. This would become an important legal precedent that would make future convictions of cruelty against farmed animals easier to secure (Runkle, 2012). According to local news, within six months, four more Butterball workers from the same farm were convicted of felonies (WECT News, 2013).

When advocates of nonhuman animals<sup>18</sup> champion the use of punitive justice, and more

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<sup>18</sup>While there are distinct groups within the nonhuman animal movement, the central ideologies are animal rights, farmed animal protection, animal liberation, and animal welfare. In

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specifically, when a white gay-led animal advocacy group chooses to align their work with the power of the American carceral system, such as in the Butterball case, it alienates and harms Black, Brown, Indigenous people of color (BBIPoC), lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer (LGBTQ), and low-income communities that have historically been and continue to be targeted, harassed, detained, imprisoned, deported, and killed by the U.S. government at disproportionate rates (Dolovich 2011; Lambda Legal 2012; Hinton 2016).<sup>7</sup> The instance of law enforcement punishing individuals for animal cruelty isn't evidence that the legal system is compassionate toward nonhuman animals. What is evident is that animal protection laws can and will be used to incarcerate individuals, and that is something that should alarm vegan animal advocates. Hence, the carceral state doesn't need to be veganized; it needs to be dismantled. My criticism of carceral veganism isn't meant to discredit the work of nonhuman animal liberation but to examine the interconnections of veganism with other social justice issues that also form part of discussion in other movements. This examination is valuable because it is foundational to achieving

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this piece, I use the term animal advocacy to encompass the different facets of the movement without diminishing their distinctions. I also recognize that not all animal advocates are vegan and not all vegans are animal advocates.

liberation not only for nonhuman animals, but for all marginalized communities.

### **Liberty and Justice for Whom?**

In order to establish an anti-carceral queer vegan politics, it's necessary to first examine the roots of the U.S. carceral system. According to crime historian Dr. Gary Potter, American society operates under a centralized punitive justice system, the enforcement of which evolved out of an informal communal watch system in Northern cities during the mid-1600s and slave patrols in Southern states circa the early 1700s, that gained power in the mid-1800s as cities grew to absorb industrial labor while municipal forces grew to protect the interests of the economic elite, maintain civil order, and suppress the collective organizing power of the poor and formerly-enslaved (Potter 2013).

Northern police forces did the bidding of wealthy merchants, targeting the poor and working classes and disrupting organized labor strikes. Described by Potter as "paramilitary forces occupying the streets," municipal police departments stood between property-holding elite and "propertyless masses" deemed a "politically dangerous class" (Potter, 7). Although queer people

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are not named in Potter's research, given the criminality of homosexuality and gender nonconformity, we can be certain that queer people were among those whose behavior and movement was policed. Policing in the Southern colonies consisted of vigilante slave patrols that quelled slave revolts through methods of organized terror. After the Civil War, slave patrols evolved into police departments that enforced Jim Crow segregation laws and controlled the movement of formerly enslaved African Americans who labored in the U.S. agricultural caste system (Potter, 3).

Since its inception, policing in the U.S. has been used to enforce the white supremacist, cishetero, capitalist, and patriarchal agenda within society to protect the property of the rich, to maintain the status quo set by those who hold power, and to criminalize people who do not comply (Ritchie 2017). Punitive justice heavily informs how we interact in our communities today and how we respond to conflict both as individuals and as a society. Punishment isn't necessarily based on one's actions but is determined largely by one's perceived value in society, and U.S. society consistently upholds a hierarchy that privileges whiteness, wealth, heterosexuality, and cis-masculinity (Peterson 2012). This agenda has been and continues to be especially violent toward queer and



trans BBIPoC through racial profiling coupled with gender policing by law enforcement (Springate 2016). People who occupy public space like homeless queer youth and trans sex workers are even more vulnerable to police brutality and arrest.

In contrast to punitive justice, prison abolition and restorative justice pose alternatives to the penal system that seek to repair the harm that has been caused to victims, offenders, and their communities through rehabilitation, reconciliation, and restoration. They seek to transform the extent to which federal and local governments are able to define and respond to crime (The Centre for Restorative Justice 2020). Nonviolent frameworks like restorative justice hold the individual responsible for their actions while engaging community accountability and teaching strategies for how to resolve conflict without involving the cops. The scope of restorative justice goes beyond mediating individual crimes and examines how socioeconomic factors like affordable housing, education, food security, and fair wages can reduce future crimes.

Angela Davis, a scholar, leader of the Black Power movement, political organizer, prison abolitionist, and lesbian vegan, illuminates the ways in which incarceration reinforces cycles of capitalist

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dispossession and perpetuates ideologies of ableism, speciesism, and heteropatriarchal white supremacy. In the early 1970s, Davis was targeted by the FBI after being labeled a dangerous terrorist by President Nixon. She was apprehended and held on bail for 16 months, some amount of which was spent in the New York Women's House of Detention in Greenwich Village while she faced the death penalty. House of D, the prison's informal title, was known for its high incarceration rates of lesbians and nonbinary people and thus became a queer meeting place for their lovers and friends on the outside (Ryan 2019). It was an important site of queer history and no coincidence that after fighting to be released from solitary confinement there, Davis began organizing from behind bars for her and others' release. Prison conditions were such that maggots infested the meat being served as food, prompting Davis to become a vegetarian and later begin to examine the relationship between the commodification of nonhuman animals and the marginalization of Black and Brown communities under capitalism.

In her recent book, *Freedom is a Constant Struggle* (2016), Davis explains how neoliberalism (a political economic model based on individualism, deregulated free market trade, and defunded social welfare protections) steers our focus toward

individual victims and individual perpetrators causing us to believe that by exacting revenge on one person, we can eradicate a social problem. "By focusing on the individual as if the individual were an aberration," she writes, "we inadvertently engage in the process of reproducing the very violence that we assume we are contesting" (Davis 103). What this means is that laws that target discrimination and hate crimes encourage us to think about oppression in terms of individual action rather than the widespread failure of social welfare services.

With laws focused on personal bias and individual intent, the penal system is freed from having to account for the unequal distribution of wealth and social services like affordable housing, quality education, healthcare, and living wages. When these services are accessible to the public, crime rates are shown to drop (Dumont 2012). Incarceration does not solve for social deficits but exacerbates them by incurring tremendous emotional and financial burdens for inmates and their families on the outside. "Prisons do not disappear problems, they disappear human beings" (Davis 1998), extracting resources from communities through fines, court costs, bail bonds, telephone calls, and a lack of provisions behind bars, as well as the cost of extracting people from

their communities (Wagner 2017). Abolition and restorative justice, however, are models that get at the root of crime and reduce recidivism (Ascione 2001). When locking someone away for causing harm to themselves or others is no longer an option, treatment, rehabilitation, and social accountability become mandatory responses. Offenses like nonhuman animal abuse can be processed through community-based programs where offenders and their families join with animal protection agencies and affected community members to collectively decide what holistic amelioration requires (Muller-Harris 2001).

### **Industries Built on Exploitation**

The lives of farm workers, imprisoned people, and nonhuman farmed animals are significantly different, yet it is important to iterate that the industries that exploit them operate in similar ways and are historically connected. Animal advocates and prison abolitionists share a similar goal: to empty cages. But prison abolition seeks more than to free prisoners from their cells but to render the entire system of incarceration obsolete. In many cases, nonhuman animal advocacy campaigns become tools that strengthen the arm of the carceral state rather than weaken it. Unlike dogs

and cats, farmed animals are rarely set free after undercover investigations reveal their mistreatment nor do their conditions improve because a worker has been convicted of abuse. The laws, however, especially those that carry felonies, lead to the criminalization of individuals who often represent the most marginalized populations of low-wage workers in the country that experiences the most extreme and routine workplace exploitation and abuse (Sokol 2016).

Laws that protect nonhuman animals rarely include farmed animals because abuse is standard practice in hatcheries, on farms, and in slaughterhouses. Male chicks are macerated, females are forcibly inseminated, birds' beaks are clipped, piglets' tails are docked and testes ripped out without anesthesia, calves are separated from their mothers hours after birth, and slaughter lines operate at such high speeds that many animals are scalded and skinned while still alive (Solotaroff 2013). The legal and ceaseless confinement of nonhuman animals under industry practices varies state by state due to recent bans, but the majority of states still includes battery cages that are roughly the size of a sheet of paper where laying hens are crowded so tightly they're unable to spread their wings, gestation crates that pen sows in so tightly they cannot stand or turn around, veal crates, and

tethering practices that restrict the movements of calves so they are unable to fully extend their limbs (Pachirat 2013).

Industrially farmed animals are born into such grotesquely unnatural conditions of confinement and treated with such calloused disposability that “disabilities become common, even inevitable,” writes disabilities scholar and artist Sunaura Taylor in *Beasts of Burden: Animal and Disability Liberation* (2017). The disabilities caused by their toxic surroundings are “often secondary to the ones they are made to have from birth,” writes Taylor. “Farmed animals are bred to extremes: udders produce too much milk for a cow’s body to hold, turkeys and chickens cannot bear the weight of their own giant breasts, and pigs’ legs are too weak to support them,” Taylor continues (31). The genetic manipulation of farmed animals to produce more fluids and flesh than their bodies are able to produce results in their constant chronic pain, emotional distress, and mental illness.

Normalized violence against farmed animals pushes nonhuman animal advocacy groups to document what’s considered unusual cruelty: behaviors that register as torturous to law enforcement because they’re expressions of workers’ personal desensitization, anger, stress, or

sadistic humor and aren't industry practices nor directly tied to productivity. Advocacy groups create campaigns based on shocking undercover footage to lobby lawmakers and pressure law enforcement to act. A felony conviction is a marker of a successful campaign.

Nonhuman animal cruelty is a felony at the state level nationwide and a recent bill, the Preventing Animal Cruelty and Torture (PACT) Act, passed in 2019 making it a federal felony to kill nonhuman animals for entertainment (Deutsch 2013). However, the federal government simultaneously enforces the Animal Enterprise Terrorism Act, a bill passed in 2006 that criminalizes interference with nonhuman animal enterprises as an act of terrorism. Sentencing under the act can carry one year to life in prison (AETA, 2013). Under the same system, a person can be tried as a felon for mistreating nonhuman animals in ways that are unprofitable to the industry while another person can be tried as a terrorist for plotting to rescue nonhuman animals from being mistreated, which is also unprofitable to industry. The commonality between the two pieces of legislation is that they both protect the interests and profits of private property owners through the criminalization of workers and activists.

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Moreover, industries based on the exploitation of nonhuman animals are notoriously awful places for workers because both lives have been devalued to the point of disposability for the sake of profit. The majority of the 250,000 poultry workers in the U.S. today are Black and Brown, immigrants, refugees, imprisoned people, and half are women (Sokol, 1). Across the largest American meat companies like Butterball, employees work grueling hours in dangerous conditions for poverty-level wages that average \$27,790 per year (Bureau of Labor 2018).

The meat industry slaughtered 9 billion land animals in 2018 (over 20 million each day), the vast majority of whom were chickens (USDA 2019). In order to keep up with that scale of production, poultry workers are routinely denied bathroom breaks (Sokol, 10) and experience sexual harassment and threats of termination or deportation for complaining about their work conditions, requesting time off, and seeking medical aid for workplace injuries (Sokol, 30). They suffer from some of the highest rates of workplace PTSD in the U.S. as well as chronic pain and musculoskeletal disorders that lead to severe long-term medical injuries (Sokol, 7-9). They are five times more likely to become sick due to their occupation, three times more likely to have a limb amputated, and, due to



the repetitive motions required to perform their jobs, seven times more likely to develop carpal tunnel than the national average (USDOL 2013). In its demand for ever-increasing profits, industrialized animal agriculture manufactures human and animal disability and largely gets away with it by hiring a workforce that cannot easily advocate for itself due to being social marginalized, economically impoverished, and politically criminalized; nonetheless, the turnover rate for an average meatpacking plant is 100 percent each year (Taylor, 185).

The poultry industry has a particularly long history of racism and suppression of workers who organize to demand fair wages and better treatment (Stuesse 2016), but it isn't unique from other industrial animal-based companies in that they all hold tremendous economic and political sway in their respective localities that's amplified by race, gender, and class privilege. Last year, the single largest ICE raid in U.S. history took place at a poultry processing facility in Mississippi during which nearly 700 Latin American employees were arrested and fired from their jobs. Many of the workers were members of the United Food and Commercial Workers Union, had been actively organizing for better wages and working conditions, and had recently won a \$3.75 million-dollar sexual

harassment settlement against one of the farms (Kirts 2019).

Another example of the monopolization of political and economic power is Fair Oaks Farm in Indiana, the fifth largest dairy cooperative in the U.S. that is considered to be the Disneyland of agritourism and a leader of sustainability in the dairy industry. In 2019, an undercover investigation carried out by the Animal Recovery Mission (ARM), a militarized nonhuman animal defense organization, revealed the routine abuse of calves and dairy cows by farm employees (Riess 2019). ARM prides itself on working with law enforcement agencies including the FBI, CIA, and ICE to conduct raids and facilitate the arrests of people engaged in unlawful acts of nonhuman animal cruelty (Elejalde-Ruiz 2019).

All of the Fair Oaks farm workers depicted harming calves were fired, but only one person was arrested: a 36-year-old undocumented immigrant from Mexico who was held on bond for misdemeanor and felony charges. When his undocumented status was discovered, local officials transferred him into ICE custody where he faced deportation (Bangert 2019). It's no coincidence that Fair Oaks' founder Mike McCloskey served on Trump's agricultural advisory committee on immi-

gration reform (DelReal 2016). McCloskey's business benefits from the delegitimization of immigrants that his political efforts seek to uphold, and the undocumented worker's charges gave the illusion that justice was served in the face of bad press. After an event like this, it's common that undercover footage like ARM's is gathered and released to the public in order to haunt viewers, inspire them to adopt vegan principles, boycott companies where animal abuse occurs, and donate money to fund more investigations. Rather than take an additional step to connect the abuse of nonhuman animals and workers in animal agriculture, the plight of the latter is almost always obscured.

There are salient connections between farming operations like Fair Oaks and other carceral systems. Beyond the physical similarities of metal gates, bars, locks and chains is a deep-rooted belief system that justifies the treatment of carceral subjects. In her book *Carceral Space, Prisoners and Animals* (2018), critical feminist scholar Karen Morin uses carceral geographies and critical animal studies to develop a "trans-species carceral geography" that identifies social and spatial relationships shared between imprisoned humans and nonhuman animals in sites of mirrored confinement and labor exploitation: death row and slaughterhouses, phar-

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maceutical testing laboratories and prison labor, zoos and solitary confinement. The proximity of humans to nonhuman animals contributes to the former being seen as “bestial” thereby making their treatment appear warranted.

Central to speciesism is an ableist assertion that vulnerability and dependency are undignified and reduce one’s value. To be dependent is seen as an “inherently bad, even unnatural,” characteristic among humans which “is played out across the species divide” (Taylor, 214). Taylor looks at the ways disabled people and domesticated animals are “presented as beasts and as burdens” in society, which holds relevance when we extend that scrutiny to the marginalization of incarcerated bodies. In the Stanford Prison Experiment, the perception of dependency was a determining factor in how people in the study assigned as guards responded to the people in the study assigned as inmates. McLeod writes, “As the prisoners became more dependent, the guards became more derisive towards them. They held the prisoners in contempt and let the prisoners know it. As the guards’ contempt for them grew, the prisoners became more submissive. As the prisoners became more submissive, the guards became more aggressive and assertive” (2018).

Though an experiment, the behavior exhibited by the guards in the study closely mirrors the abuse of power that occurs through the arm of the state on a daily basis. The prison industrial complex (PIC) is a mass incarceration system that extends beyond federal and state prisons, and includes county jails, immigration and youth detention centers, military prisons, psychiatric hospitals, and holding cells. The carceral state systematically extracts resources from families of loved ones in the criminal justice system to fund its own governance in what is considered by scholars to be an “inversion of welfare for the poor” where the poor are funding the very system that imprisons them, the effects of which are cyclical and damaging (Katzenstein 2015). Whether or not individuals get convicted of the crimes they are charged with, their arrests lead to exorbitant bail bonds, pretrial detention, and commissary fees. Any amount of time spent behind bars, no matter how short, erodes wealth, perpetuates debt, and impedes future employment opportunities upon their release (Prison Policy Initiative 2019).

The U.S. has the highest incarceration rate in the world—655 out of 100,000 Americans are prisoners—with nearly 2.2 million incarcerated people as of 2016 (Kaeble & Cowhig 2018). According to the Prison Policy Initiative (PPI), the majority of inmates are confined in state prisons followed by

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local jails, the latter of which only 24 percent have been convicted of a crime (Sawyer & Wagner 2019). PPI reports that nearly half a million people (one in five imprisoned people) are incarcerated for non-violent drug offenses on any given day. Black people experience incarceration at six times the rate of whites while Latinx people are twice as likely to be imprisoned, and prisoners of all backgrounds are overwhelmingly from low-income communities when compared to the total U.S. population (PPI 2019).

Gays, lesbians, and bisexuals are incarcerated at three times the rate of the general population according to a study on incarceration rates of sexual minorities, the first of its kind, published by the American Public Health Association (Meyer et al. 2017). Broken down by group, the study reveals that gay men represent 9.3 percent of men in prison and 6.2 percent of men in jail whereas lesbian and bisexual women make up a staggering 42.1 percent of women in prison and 35.7 percent of women in jail. Trans people were not accounted for in this study, but according to Lambda Legal, in the U.S. nearly one in six trans or nonbinary people has been imprisoned while the rate increases to one in two for Black trans or nonbinary people.

In prisons, bodies are confined and categorized by rigid notions of gender to serve various agendas including the organization of forced penal labor where imprisoned people earn between 20-30 cents per hour for what is essentially enslaved labor, which decreases costs and increases the wealth of a penal system literally built on enslavement (Schwartzapfel 2018). Carceral networks are invested in compulsory cisgender and heterosexual normativity, explains Elias Vitulli (2013) in *Queering the Carceral: Intersecting Queer/Trans Studies and Critical Prison Studies*, the prescription for which poses life-threatening risks to trans and nonbinary people who experience disproportionately high rates of incarceration. In men's prisons, for example, concentrated masculinity naturalizes violence toward people seen as feminine or queer whereas the expectation in female prisons is for inmates to be docile and any deviation or gender-nonconformity is seen as a contributing factor of their incarceration (Vitulli, 117).

State violence against trans and nonbinary people is a byproduct of compulsory cisgender and heterosexual normativity that the PIC both hinges upon and reproduces. Compulsory heterosexuality is the process by which society assumes heterosexuality as a natural state and enforces behaviors and relationships that affirm its legitimacy onto

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subjects while disappearing behaviors and relationships that are seen as deviant or unnatural. "Gender normativity understood as a series of cultural, political, legal and religious assumptions that attempt to divide our bodies into two categories (men/women), is both a product of and a producer of the PIC," writes Eric Stanley, editor of *Captive Genders: Trans Embodiment and the Prison Industrial Complex* (2015). "We must pay attention," they continue, "to the ways in which the PIC harms trans/gender-non-conforming people and also to how the PIC produces the gender binary and heteronormativity itself" (Stanley 12).

Stanley defines the "webs of surveillance" in society that touch queer people before they ever enter a jail or prison as modes of policing trans and nonbinary bodies that start from childhood at home, continue through the education system, and compound in adulthood at the workplace, on public streets, and homeless shelters (Stanley, 13) where LGBTQ youth account for 40 percent of all homeless minors (Durso & Gates 2012). Societal gender norms push trans and nonbinary people into informal economic labor such as selling drugs and sex work for which they are disproportionately targeted by police for classist infractions like soliciting, truancy, and loitering (Stanley, 13).



“When people are released, especially those with felonies, the issues that found them in the prison industrial complex are dramatically compounded,” says Stanley, who hauntingly defines prisons as “spaces of suspended death” during an interview (Rasheed 2014) in which they argue that advocates of prison reform fail to acknowledge that the very process of reform expands the PIC through so-called progressive solutions that alter and spread state power rather than shrink it. “The distinction between reform and abolition is vital” because reform assumes that the system is broken (and can be fixed) whereas abolition serves as “a political commitment that makes the PIC impossible,” Stanley explains. The debate on reform versus abolition within nonhuman animal advocacy runs along similar lines where more laws translate into more opportunities for the legal system to diminish the agency of human bodies. Industries that commodify nonhuman animals share with prisons in their production of wealth through the commodification of captivity.

Like prisons, farms are heavily gendered spaces. Animal agriculture is an industry rooted in the heterosexist ideology of animal husbandry which hinges upon the denial of nonhuman animals’ agency over their own bodies, sexuality, reproduction, and ability to experience pleasure. Though

homosexuality is common among nonhuman animals just as it is among humans (Sommer 2006), farmed animals are denied both the ability to pursue behaviors that are natural to them and the agency to form relationships with mates of their choosing. "In animal agriculture—whether on factory farms or animal farms—everything depends on reproduction," writes Ecofeminist vegan scholar patrice jones, who charts animal agriculture's enforcement and exploitation of heterosexuality through repetitive breeding, birthing, egg laying, and milking, "from the electro-ejaculation of bulls to the confinement of fragile 'broiler breeder' hens with heavyweight roosters made sex-mad by starvation, numerous cruel and unusual strategies ensure that no farmed animal opts out of compulsory heterosexuality (jones 2014).

There is specific protocol for nonhuman animals based on the profitability of their assigned gender: male chicks are macerated hours after hatching because they cannot lay eggs or grow large breasts and thighs while female chicks are raised to become broiler hens for their flesh or laying hens for their eggs. Male calves are killed as infants for veal or they live a year or two longer to be killed for other cuts of beef while females are used for their milk. (After their lactation ceases, they, too, are sold for their flesh and ground into hamburger.) In *The*

*Sexual Politics of Meat* (1990), Carol J. Adams distinguishes between the animalized and feminized proteins to unpack the gendered and sexual politics of nonhuman animal consumption. "Through the animalizing of protein animals are reduced to being a means to our ends, converted from being *someone* to *something*. They are seen as bodies to be manipulated as incubators of protein," Adams writes (emphasis hers). "A corollary and prelude to animalized protein is feminized protein: milk and eggs" she continues. In both instances, nonhuman animals are treated as objects not living beings, but in terms of feminized proteins, nonhuman animals are oppressed specifically for their ability to "produce food from their own body while living," she concludes (Adams, 52).

Nonhuman animals and farm workers aren't the only beings who are harmed by animal agriculture. As meat industries reap billions, they outsource the damages caused by industrialized practices to the environment, public health, and the economy, the burden of which is borne primarily by impoverished Communities of Color that reside near the farms where waste run-off, ground water contamination, soil erosion, and air pollution adversely affect their quality of life (Environmental Working Group 2016). These residents develop chronic illnesses, lose property value, and endure

the constant stench of ammonia and fecal matter (Cooke 2016), which has prompted affected communities across the US to organize and file lawsuits against farms and the EPA for damages. But they face an uphill battle against wealthy, influential corporations that aggressively lobby their business interests to state and federal officials (Center for Biological Diversity 2019).

### **Veganizing the Carceral State**

The trend in animal advocacy is to also appeal to the power of the state on behalf of nonhuman animals, which poses grave setbacks in its appeal to the larger anti-oppression movement. “Among progressive social movements, the nonhuman animal rights movement stands as a notable exception to an overriding trend of advocacy against tough-on-crime policies,” writes Justin Marceau (2019), law professor, former public defender and author of *Beyond Cages: Animal Law and Criminal Punishment*. According to Marceau (2019), it is paradoxical that a movement would pursue “radically progressive social reform through regressive social policies,” displaying a willfully ignorant “fidelity to and support for a proven system of human oppression and suffering as an assumed vehicle for undermining the structural

oppression of non-humans." Marceau (2019) charts how nonprofit organizations like the Animal Legal Defense Fund (ALDF) and the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) support the detainment and deportation of undocumented immigrants, the incarceration of minors, increased felony sentences, and animal cruelty offender registries.

Founded in 1866, the ASPCA passed one of the first pieces of anti-cruelty legislation in the U.S. which granted them power to conduct investigations and make arrests (Finsen, 1994). The ASPCA boasts an unprecedented alliance with the New York Police Department (NYPD) that funds special officers to rescue animals, provide treatment and placement, and make arrests of which there were 131 in 2018 (ASPCA, 2014). The NYPD is the oldest, largest, and most militarized police force in the US (Ganeva & Gottendeiner, 2012) with a history of corruption, violence against queers, trans women, and sex workers, racial profiling of Black and Brown adults and youth, unlawful surveillance of Muslims, excessive force against peaceful protestors, and fatal shootings by police of unarmed Black people (Make the Road NY, 2012).

The ALDF works more directly with the courts and has privatized prosecution in states by

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subsidizing the costs of local law enforcement to investigate and prosecute nonhuman animal abuse cases. They support felony convictions and perpetuate moral panic that nonhuman animal abusers will inevitably become violent toward humans (ADLF 2018). Their tough-on-cruelty campaigns are byproducts of racist tough-on-crime policies passed down from the Johnson, Reagan, and Clinton administrations that took rights away from incarcerated people and incentivized state law enforcement to be more punitive (Robinson 2016). This approach upholds the belief that locking individuals behind bars will solve a complex social problem.

Locking a person behind bars does not address the circumstances or environmental factors that contribute to their violence against nonhuman animals. While their incarceration may temporarily prevent them from committing the same type of harm, it does not allow for transformation and healing of the individual, the community they belong to, and the being(s) who have been harmed. As I've explored earlier in this essay, because of systemic racial and gendered violence that disproportionately harm marginalized communities, the work of organizations like the ALDF and the ASPCA to enforce animal protection through the carceral state and thus amplify its reach, their work

does and will continue to treat the symptoms (behavior) rather than systemic oppression, which will in turn contribute to more queer and BBIPoC being imprisoned by the PIC.

### **Anti-Carceral Queer Veganism**

The narratives of modern mainstream vegan and LGBTQ movements have become defined by their alignment with hegemonic power rather than their subversion of it. Reliance upon recognition from the state through animal rights-based legislation runs parallel to the LGBTQ movement that pivoted from starting riots in protest of the legal system to the demand for rights and protection under it.

“The heavy price of institutionalized protection is always a measure of dependence and agreement to abide by the protector’s rules,” writes political theorist Wendy Brown in her book *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity* (1995). It is the sharing of power, she explains, not the regulation of it, that leads to liberation. Once a movement begins to mobilize around emancipation, which are given by the state—rather than liberation, which is taken by the people—the collective power of the group is exchanged for the assigned rights of

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individuals who must become coherent legal subjects in order to gain status through their assimilation into the state. But though the mainstream version of a movement is its most visible arm, it by no means outweighs the masses of people striving for radical political change through collective power.

We cannot attempt to solve one thread of an interconnected web of oppressions while denying the others exist. This applies to vegans and nonvegans, queers and heterosexuals, and prison abolitionists and reformers alike. In *Striving with Systems*, Black queer vegan scholar Christopher Sebastian McJeters calls for a liberatory, rather than emancipatory, anticapitalist radical vegan philosophy that avoids the pitfalls of the kind of reformist thought that has held movements back in the past because “the system only finds new ways of enslaving us” (2017).

At the core of oppressive carceral institutions in the U.S. that exploit humans and nonhuman animals is the system of capitalist white supremacy and its deconstruction is central to any movement that seeks to return power to the people. To overlook or actively ignore the role of speciesism in the construction of white supremacy, colonialism, and extractive capitalist expansion (which are at the



heart of heteropatriarchal carceral system) allows the central argument for racial hierarchies to continue unchallenged. "It was whiteness that politicized 'human' as an identity separate from and superior to 'animal,' a shift that allowed for the enslavement of black people because we were (and are) dehumanized, nee [sic] de-personified, in the eyes of whiteness," McJetters continues.

When it comes to nonhuman animals, we can no longer hide or disappear their lives from society or from our collective conscience. "Animal exploitation is the bedrock of imperialist white supremacist capitalist cis-heteropatriarchy," McJetters concludes. "You want to abolish oppression, you gotta include other species." To hold nonhuman animals at a distance in our minds as philosophical quandaries to ponder or to infantilize them as dependent beings without agency is to ignore the reality of their circumstances. They are living autonomous beings who have complex and emotional inner lives, who exhibit the full spectrum of sexuality and gender, who cultivate their own language and culture, who choose mates and companions and create families, who seek shelter, nourishment, and happiness, and who are incarcerated by the billions as political prisoners in zoos, circuses, research laboratories, farms, and slaugh-

terhouses from which they actively seek to escape (Pittman 2017).

We cannot decry the prison industrial complex and justify the factory farm when they are different parts of the same carceral network. If we are to imagine a world where prisons cease to exist, we must include the complex systems of captivity that imprison nonhuman animals, too, recognizing that solidarity does not stop at one's species. "The true potential of queer and trans politics cannot be found in attempting to reinforce out tenuous right to exist by undermining someone else's," Stanley explains. "If it is not clear already, we are all in this together. To claim our legacy of beautiful possibility is to begin practicing ways of being with one another and making movement that sustain all life on this planet, without exception" (Stanley, 43).

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