

# Animal Cruelty

*A Multidisciplinary Approach to  
Understanding*

Edited by  
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# Foreword

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*Wayne Pacelle,  
President and CEO of The Humane Society of the United States*

*Animal Cruelty* is a welcome, timely, and truly comprehensive look at the history of animal cruelty in the United States, and our nation's multi-dimensional response to it, including attempts to define and understand it. There are several worthy readers devoted to cataloguing statutes and understanding the application of these codes, but there are no works as multi-faceted as this one. This is an anthology that should find receptive audiences among animal welfare advocates, social scientists, those within the criminal justice system, and so many others who abhor cruelty to animals and want to do something about it.

We've always had a moral intuition that cruelty to animals is wrong. In fact, the first anti-cruelty statutes in the colonies and in the states predate the first animal welfare organizations, revealing that our social instincts drove policy in the right direction even before there were groups to show us the way and remind us of the importance of an aggressive response to needless and malicious human violence toward animals. During the nineteenth century, an emerging social consensus about the problem of cruelty to animals caused a vibrant social movement devoted to the welfare of animals to coalesce, and set off a round of related lawmaking in most of the states. There was a broad acceptance of the idea that society has a general interest in cruelty, not simply because we should prevent harm to creatures capable of suffering and highly dependent on human beings, but because it was a social evil whose perpetrators might graduate to various acts of interpersonal violence against other human beings. It was already commonplace that people who could be cruel to animals were also capable of domestic abuse, whether of wives, children, or other relatives and dependents.

This was a very fine start, but as 150 years of subsequent experience have demonstrated, cruelty is a more complex phenomenon. Happily, since the revitalization of animal protection in the post-World War II period, which gained particular momentum in the mid-1950s, we have seen a steady advance in our understanding of cruelty as a social problem, and in the remedies proposed to address it. An invigorated animal protection movement has made dramatic gains in this period (Unti & Rowan, 2001).

It is possible to trace this progress by a few salient measures. The empirical evidence of cruelty to animals as a sentinel crime inextricably tied to interpersonal violence is overwhelming now, and the social science literature on this and related issues has swelled. The available typologies of cruelty have reached a level of sophistication suited to the modern era. There is a much stronger public understanding of cruelty and its implications, and there is greater concern. There is deep and pervasive evidence of how much people care for animals, and the strength of the human-animal bond (Pacelle, 2010). And finally,

there is a growing scientific understanding of the emotional and cognitive capacities of animals, making acts of violence against animals all the more morally problematic.

The number of laws to protect animals has increased dramatically in recent years. Most importantly, when it comes to the basic anticruelty statutes in most states, we have seen just about every one of them overhauled and fortified to include increased penalties for animal fighting, hoarding, and other cruelties. Many forms of cruelty once barely addressed are now treated as felony-level offenses, and law enforcement agents, prosecutors, and judges are treating the cases that come to their attention as serious crimes. While many prohibitions against dogfighting and cockfighting date back to the 19th century, many states treated this form of staged violence as a petty crime, or no crime at all. In the last 15 years in particular, we have seen bans on cockfighting imposed in the half-dozen or so states where it long remained legal, and we have seen every state adopt felony-level penalties for cruelty. Animal fighting is now a federal felony, and that too marks a tremendously significant advance in the law.

Today's humane societies and animal care and control agencies, at all levels, promote practical approaches to the mitigation of animal suffering, push for stronger regulatory and legislative protection, and seek to promote a better and more sophisticated understanding of cruelty within professional, public policy, and other circles. This is part of a broad effort to ensure that the principle of kindness to animals is taken seriously within every social, cultural, and political institution that might be called upon to take up the question of their treatment and status under and within our society. Contributors to this volume include a number of pioneers in the modern effort to see cruelty to animals treated as the serious problem that it is. At no time has there been more energy, more intelligence, and more initiative invested in this arena, and that's as it should be.

## References

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—MPB and CLR

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—CLR