The animal research war

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In recent years, the Animal Liberation Front (ALF) has become one of the most active extremist elements in the United States.

FBI, February 2002

In a war you have to take up arms and people will get killed, and I can support that kind of action by gasoline bombing and bombs under cars, and probably at a later stage, the shooting of vivisectors on their doorsteps. It’s a war, and there’s no other way you can stop vivisectors.

Tim Daley, Animal Liberation Front, 2003

Michael Conn is a researcher who wastes hundreds of thousands of federal tax dollars torturing and killing monkeys, a practice which has in no way benefited human health.

Craig Rosebraugh, vegan baker and former Press Officer for the Animal and Earth Liberation Fronts, in response to questions from the US Congress, 2002

When research laboratories and university researchers are targeted and attacked, the ones who lose most are those who are living with a disease or who are watching a loved one struggling with a devastating illness.

Senator Orrin Hatch, Senate Judiciary Hearing, 2004

If you work with animals, or even work for an institution that works with animals, you know the feeling—you’re at a party and, after proper introductions, someone asks you what you do for a living. You tell him that you’re a scientist studying hormone regulation in several animal species. Awkward silence ensues for a second or two that seems like minutes. Time enough for you to hear in your head his accusation of animal cruelty and to rehearse your defense about IACUCs, about the time you spend justifying the value of each study, about the care that is taken to prevent pain and suffering in biomedical laboratories.

He is speaking now, and you are snapped back into real time. “Well, let’s not talk about that at dinner time.” What can you say? You are at loss for words that won’t sound defensive. Fortunately, another guest cuts in to get his reaction to the sale of the local NBA team franchise. What a relief!

As a scientist perhaps you’ve already done the experiment that inspired us: we went to the local bookstore and found 34 inches of books (measured across the spines) on animal rights—a lucrative topic for publishers . . . but not one book that was supportive of animal research! It’s not just that the stories about good things coming from research don’t sell too well, but that we scientists have difficulty in explaining what we do to the general public.

Animal right activists do not share our difficulty in communicating. They have made people laugh by putting up billboards encouraging children to drink beer instead of milk; they pose near-naked women with body parts that are marked like a beef cow; and they promote contraception to keep the deer population low. They even gained media attention by writing to convicted Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh urging him to stop the killing at his dinner plate by requesting a vegetarian dinner for his last meal.

They attract news coverage with their poor taste when equating the Holocaust of World War II with raising broiler chickens and suggesting that circus animals are comparable to human slaves. Then there is this curious candor from a “Senior Scholar” of the Humane Society of the United States, “The life of an ant and that of my child should be granted equal consideration.”

It isn’t hard to wave that silliness away. But we are at risk for personal safety, if we choose to ignore these statements from animal extremists:

Arson, property destruction, burglary and threat are ‘acceptable crimes’ when used for the animal cause.

Alex Pacheco, Co-founder of PeTA, Associated Press, January 1989

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I would be overjoyed when the first scientist is killed by a liberation activist.

Vivien Smith, former Animal Liberation Front spokesperson, USA Today, September 3, 1991

Property destruction is a legitimate political tool called economic sabotage, and it’s meant to attack businesses and corporations.

David Barbarash, spokesperson for the Animal Liberation Front, NPR radio show, “The Connection,” January 7, 2002

I don’t think you’d have to kill—assassinate—too many [doctors involved with animal testing]... I think for 5 lives, 10 lives, 15 human lives, we could save a million, 2 million, 10 million non-human lives.


Says one senior FBI representative, referring to the extreme element of the animal rights movement, “Make no mistake about it, by any sense or definition (this) is a domestic terrorism group.” U.S. District Judge Ann Aiken appears to agree. In May 2007, she sentenced members of an Eugene (Oregon)-based cell known as The Family who admitted to having set more than 20 fires in five western states from 1996 through 2001. She ruled that “terrorism enhancements”—increased penalties provided in the Animal Enterprise Act of 2006 for acts “dangerous to human life that are intended to influence the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion; or to retaliate against government conduct”—could apply to each case.

The extremists whom the FBI has labeled a terrorist group have claimed responsibility for well over $100 million in damage, the planting of bombs, and physical assaults, all the while claiming a peaceful agenda.

We think it is time to stop being quiet and speak out—drawing the public to understand the argument for animal research. We want people to know about how closely it is regulated and the good that comes from it.

The result of our efforts is, The Animal Research War. This book is a personal account of what it is like to be terrorized, an analysis of the effect of animal extremists on the world’s scientists, and the changing way in which the public and legal system views animals and the evolution of the animal rights movement. We profile its leadership. We show how funds given in the belief the donor is supporting homes for stray animals may actually be routed into activities that destroy the life-saving work of university researchers. We look at the arguments frequently used by animal activists. Most important, we reveal the truth behind animal research.

We hope you will find it interesting. When you finish you might want to pass a copy to your uncle who has no idea how his medicine came to be, your neighbor who never clearly understood what you do... and, oh yeah, that guy from the dinner party.

The authors have written The Animal Research War, a personal account of what it is like to be terrorized, an analysis of the effect of animal extremists on the world’s scientists, and the changing way in which the public and legal system views animals. The book traces the evolution of the animal rights movement, profiles its leadership and reveals the remarkable value of the research enterprise, Macmillan/ Palgrave, 2008.