



Killing Tradition: Inside Hunting and Animal Rights Controversies

Simon Bronner

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Across the country and around the world, people avidly engage in the cultural practice of hunting. Children are taken on rite-of-passage hunting trips, where relationships are cemented and legacies are passed on from one generation to another. Meals are prepared from hunted game, often consisting of regionally specific dishes that reflect a community's heritage and character. Deer antlers and bear skins are hung on living room walls, decorations and relics of a hunter's most impressive kills. Only 5 percent of Americans are hunters, but that group has a substantial presence in the cultural consciousness. Hunting has spurred controversy in recent years, inciting protest from animal rights activists and lobbying from anti-cruelty demonstrators who denounce the custom. But hunters have responded to such criticisms and the resulting legislative censures with a significant argument in their defense—the claim that their practices are inextricably connected to a cultural tradition. Further, they counter that they, as representatives of the rural lifestyle, pioneer heritage, and traditional American values, are the ones being victimized. Simon J. Bronner investigates this debate in *Killing Tradition: Inside Hunting and Animal Rights Controversies*. Through extensive research and fieldwork, Bronner takes on the many questions raised by this problematic subject: Does hunting promote violence toward humans as well as animals? Is it an outdated activity, unnecessary in modern times? Is the heritage of hunting worth preserving? *Killing Tradition* looks at three case studies that are at the heart of today's hunting debate. Bronner first examines the allegedly barbaric rituals that take place at deer camps every late November in rural America. He then analyzes the annual Labor Day pigeon shoot of Hegins, Pennsylvania, which brings animal rights protests to a fever pitch. Noting that these aren't simply American concerns (and that the animal rights movement in America is linked to British animal welfare protests), Bronner examines the rancor surrounding the passage of Great Britain's Hunting Act of 2004—the most comprehensive and divisive anti-hunting legislation ever enacted. The practice of hunting is sure to remain controversial, as it continues to be touted and defended by its supporters and condemned and opposed by its detractors. With *Killing Tradition*, Bronner reflects on the social, psychological, and anthropological issues of the debate, reevaluating notions of violence, cruelty, abuse, and tradition as they have been constructed and contested in the twenty-first century.

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