

Bullfighting and its Many Evils

*by: Megan Dixon*

It hides behind many names: culture, art, bravery, heritage; but it is none of these.

Bullfighting is a heinous crime; it is animal cruelty. Why it is even given the name bullfighting when in fact there is no fighting I do not know. In the end what bullfighting really is, is this: the methodical torment killing of a lone, terrified and weakened creature.

So, they tell you about the “heroic” matadors, picadors and their kind? How dangerous it is out there in the ring? How only true, brave men can face down a bull? The truth is that very few bullfights end in the bullfighter being injured or killed – in reality; in the past half century only 10 bullfighters have died in the ring worldwide. This small number comes as no surprise when you look into what a bullfight really is.

People call them dangerous, fierce beasts but what Steve Hindi – SHARK president and part of an undercover team documenting the torment killing of twenty-eight bulls in Mexico in 1998 –saw when he went to visit the “fighting bulls” was totally the opposite. Laying his eyes on a “fighting bull” he later named Bright Eyes, he saw no fight in the young bull’s eyes. Rather he saw a beautiful young black bull that was calm, tranquil, responsive and non-threatening. This, as he came to recognize, is the nature of a “fighting bull”. The bulls forced to endure the torture of bullfighting do not want to cause trouble, they want to live quiet, sociable lives with the rest of their kind. They are not our enemy;

we are theirs. The following events are what transform young bright-eyed bulls like Bright Eyes into the well-recognized “fighting bull” they are portrayed as.

The first step down their slow road of torture is as such. The young bulls that have until then been peacefully enjoying their fellow companions company are herded by a group of men into individual isolation stalls where they are refused food, water, light and the companionship of their herd. Isolation and physical deprivation cause the bulls to become bewildered, scared and destabilized both physically and mentally.

In the next step they are further weakened by men who throw harpoons into their backs before they leave their stalls in an effort to cripple and disadvantage the bull. At times the horns that they rely on to help them navigate are illegally shaved; many law breakers get away with this. What follows only gets worse.

In the bullring the bulls are then further massacred by spears and more harpoons. It is the picadors that first approach the bulls in the ring – a picador being similar to a matador but in the fact that their job is to drive lances into the bull’s back from horseback – only after that does the matador enter the ring and attempt to kill the bull with his sword, although more often than not he only ends up further wounding the magnificent creature. In the ring a bull does not just face one brave matador but is instead ganged up on by a group of insensitive barbarians that feel no guilt in attacking an animal that is both wounded and crippled before setting even one foot into the bullring. These barbarians demonstrate their “courage” by mobbing an innocent and dying creature.

During the whole performance the terrified bulls cry out in vain, begging their torturers to have mercy. Cornered against walls the bulls are assailed with insults and jeers from the watching crowd.

Even when the bulls give up and lower in complete acts of submission, their torturers do not slow their weapons. The bulls must wait until a heartless thug is called in to sever their spinal cords with their hideous daggers, leaving them paralyzed yet still conscious. In an act of domination, the executioners always wipe their daggers off on their helpless victims.

The bulls' ears, their tails and their hooves can then be cut off as trophies that are awarded to the matador by the president according to the matador's performance, only after this is the convulsing bull dragged off to be butchered alive.

The horrific animal cruelty is not only limited to the bulls themselves but is also inflicted on the picadors' horses. Injured bulls in their desperate hope to end their suffering cannot determine that their torture comes from the picadors on top of the horses and not from the horses themselves. It is not uncommon for horses to be so badly injured that they have to be killed; however, they are only spared this courtesy after being dragged from the ring and the view of the jeering crowds.

Bullfighting has resulted in disputes throughout history. Originally, it was a sport for the aristocracy but it later became one for the lower and middle class in 1724 when King Felipe V banned aristocracy from participating in this 'sport', believing it to be setting a bad example for the public. Clearly it was if they took off from where the aristocracy left off. Following on this theme, bullfighting has been condemned throughout the centuries by religions and governments – it is now illegal in many countries. Examples of religious opposition are as such: in 1567 Pope Pius V issued a papal bull condemning bullfighting, threatening supporters with excommunication. Popes such as Pope Pius IX, Pope Pius XII all stressed this fact during their time. The 1567 papal bull finally resulted in prohibitions of bullfighting in Italy and a 1928 ban on bullfighting to the death in Portugal, improved on in 2000. Cardinal John Henry Newman spoke out to all religious people on the issue of animal cruelty, presenting them with this issue to ponder, "Cruelty to animals is as if man did not love God...there is something so dreadful, so satanic, in tormenting those who have never harmed us, and who cannot defend themselves, who are utterly in our power." If you are religious maybe you should heed his words.

There are ways to lessen and finally put an end to this most heinous crime and they come in the form of governments, tourists and citizens; as you can see in the above paragraph it is not impossible. You do not however have to be anyone special to fight against the evils of animal cruelty and make your voice known; every man can do his part in stopping the crime of bullfighting.

You can shun nations that still hold bullfighting as a legal sport. You can protest and send letters to government officials to express your opposition and horror; let them know that you do not approve and maybe even add in that you would rather follow another political party in the next elections if they do not share your view on the subject yet the other party does. Support the parties that share your views. If you are living in a country where bullfighting is illegal, contact countries where bullfighting is legal and tell them that although you would like to visit their country as a tourist, you will not do so until they prohibit this act of cruelty – encourage your friends to do so as well; the more people that express their opposition, the more pressure there is on a government to put laws into action. Spread awareness! Write articles to the newspaper detailing the horrors of bullfights and make sure that you bring as many people’s attention to the issue as is in your power. Lastly, if you must visit a country that hosts bullfights do not support it. Do not go watch and let your money fuel their economy. Remember: without any profits a business will go bankrupt and the industry will fade into non-existence.

I chose to centre my essay on bullfighting because, after looking into this act of cruelty, I could not believe that anyone could remain unaffected by the horrors involved. I chose it also because this is a form of animal cruelty that relies on support from the public; without the public’s support the sport of bullfighting would not continue. It relies solely on the soullessness of men.

“From beasts we scorn as soulless,

In forest, field and den,

The cry goes up to witness

The soullessness of men”

- M. Frida Hartley

Many people justify animal cruelty with words like, ‘They are only animals’ or, ‘they do not feel pain like men’ but a quote from Jeremy Bentham illustrates my feelings on this attempt at justification, ‘The question is not, “Can they reason?” nor, “Can they talk?” but rather, “Can they suffer?”

Citations

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