

INTRODUCTION

Animal Rights Nation

Tom Regan*

In addition to the many countries of the world, including Brazil and the United States, all of which are separated by geographical boundaries, there is a nation of a different kind. Like St. Augustine's City of God, this other nation, Animal Rights Nation, has no particular location and is not confined to a particular time. Shared values and commitments, not date and place of birth, are the qualifications of citizenship.

The values are these: that animals have basic moral rights, including rights to freedom, bodily integrity, and life. And the commitments? That we will work, not for a month, or a year, but for a lifetime to see that these rights will one day be recognized.

With the publication of a Portuguese translation of my most recent book, *Empty Cages*, I am honored to make the acquaintance of Portuguese speaking readers who already are members of Animal Rights Nation as well as those for whom animal rights is a new idea. (For further information, readers are encouraged to log on to animalrightsnation.com).

Like other countries, Brazil provides too little protection for animals. Overwhelmingly, the response to "pet" over population is death for stray animals, often using lethal gasses. Increasingly, farmed animals are raised in inhumane conditions where even the simplest movements are denied. Relentlessly, rodeos flourish no matter the costs to the animals when it comes to their suffering and deprivation.

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Shockingly, animals continue to be subjected to the worse forms of physical and psychological abuse in the name of “scientific research.”

When Gandhi observes that “the greatness of a nation and its moral progress can be judged by how its animals are treated,” the sad fact is that no nation can lay claim to the title “greatest.”

But let us not fail to note—indeed, let us celebrate the progress Brazilian members of Animal Rights Nation have made.

The prohibition of cock fighting (until a few months ago still allowed in some states in my country).

Rio de Janeiro’s ban on circuses and other shows that include performing animal acts (still permitted in Raleigh, where I live).

The elimination of dissection and vivisection in public schools (still common throughout the United States).

A total shut down of marine mammal “entertainment” (still flourishing at American theme parks, like Sea World-San Diego).

An end to the use of steel-jawed leg hold traps (still the trap of choice among American trappers).

These wonderful achievements would never have happened without the committed efforts of people who, seeing evil, would not permit it to remain. For their commitment, some animals in Brazil, and all Brazilians, should be grateful.

As for the future: the recent actions of the founders of *Revista Brasileira de Direito Animal* portend a new future for animal rights in Brazil. Never before had a Brazilian dared to file a habeas corpus writ on behalf of a nonhuman. Imagine: a legal claim demanding release of a nonhuman animal *illegally imprisoned!* But this is precisely what the founders of *RBDA* did in September of this year, on behalf of a chimpanzee cruelly condemned to a life behind bars in a zoo in the state of Bahia. Added to the tragedy a chimp’s freedom denied is the fact that the Swiss (as the chimp was named) died before legal proceedings could go forward. Even so, when Brazil’s lawyers and scholars demonstrate that the force of the law, in ways never dreamed of before, will be brought to bear in defense of the rights of animals, every member of Animal Rights Nation, wherever we live, has reason to celebrate. And hope¹.

¹ I hope the day will come (and not far distant) when my wife and I can visit Brazil, as we have visited Portugal, learn your history, explore your bountiful natural treasures, breathe your culture. Most of all, though, I hope I discover that Animal Rights Nation is flourishing in Brazil and that, in historically unprecedented numbers, cages that once imprisoned animals now are empty.