



Our Hen House Podcast: Transcript for Episode 648, Interview with Christopher Sebastian

Jasmin Singer: Welcome to Our Hen House, Christopher!

Christopher Sebastian: Thank you so much for having me today.

Jasmin: I'm really, really looking forward to talking to you. And I think we both said before we started recording that we're both nervous. I don't know if either of us know why, but we're just going to be transparent about that. We're both nervous.

So we're in this together and I think maybe I'm nervous because. You're sort of iconic to me. Like I follow your work and I haven't really met you yet. So I just sort of feel like that Beatlemania thing that people get like it's...it's Christopher it's Christopher!

Christopher: Oh God, no. Like I jump into my trousers with both legs, just like everybody else.

Jasmin: Well, okay. That's good to know. So I am going to get over my nerves and just sort of jump in. I'm going to jump in with the big question, just get it out there. Uh, so we're gonna go right in here. You have said that speciesism is situated inside a racist and classist system. So we're going from jumping into your trousers with two feet to speciesism being situated inside a racist and classist system.

I know that this is a big question, but can you give us the overview of how you relate race to animal rights.

Christopher: Absolutely. First of all, me coming into this work was like, was kind of late. I feel like I've been following you and all of the people that I think are iconic for far longer. I started down this journey maybe seven or eight years ago.

And one of the first books that I read was *The Dreaded Comparison* because after reading *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, I was curious about like how other people interpreted the relationship...because Carol Adams had interrogated the relationship between feminism and patriarchy and eating meat and speciesism.

And so I was curious what existing literature was out there that looked at this from a racial perspective and it absolutely floored me. So, you know, that scholarship was just kind of like a launchpad in addition to reading the scholarship of people like Breeze Harper. So with that understanding, I know that like with a lot of people who are not already vegan and sometimes even with people who are, it's very unpopular to talk about that relationship between speciesism and racism.

But yeah, for me, it's the opposite. It's hard not to, because I recognize it so very clearly. The animalization of black people, of people of color by and large, and how identity or political identity plays into our relationships with other animals and how we interpret that or how we integrate that into our relationships with one another.

And you see just like throughout social media or throughout political discourse, how that animalization occurs and what that looks like. The memes that have people like Michelle Obama portrayed as a monkey, or both of the Obamas, Serena Williams... It's so funny to actually see, not funny ha ha of course, how frequently black women are the targets of this animalization. But what's at the heart of that ends up being my own interrogations. Like, it's the fact that black people have never actually been seen as fully human ourselves. And, you know, one of the first steps to de-personifying any group or taking away the rights of any group is to present them as something that is either less than human or other than human. Which is why I say that such a speciesism is situated within that.

Like, even when you go back to the 17 hundreds, and the 18 hundreds, and you see the theories of polygenesis...which already like, you know, as a “scientific,” in air quotes there, theory that posits that different races actually come from different species. Which even though we know intellectually that that's not true, we don't actually see that played out in society so much.

So we haven't moved on in meaningfully significant ways since then. And mostly European people have used this as like an impetus to own black and brown people. I know it's really sensitive to talk about and I try to approach it as sensitively as possible.

Which means that this isn't a conversation that I'm going to have with somebody when I'm, say, leafletting, for example. This is something that is happening in classroom settings and in settings where people are aware of what they're getting into and can meaningfully consent to this type of dialogue. Because if you're not prepared to have it, and you're not aware that you're getting into it, then like, you know, this is going to come across as absolute lunacy for a lot of people and like, incredibly degrading and dehumanizing for black and brown people. Who are like, you know, largely wrapped up in our own ideas about speciesism if we even know what it is to begin with.

Jasmin: Hmm. Okay. Well, there's a lot there that I want to sort of unpack. So I want to sort of focus for a moment on the current, I'm going to say institutional, animal rights movement. So what's wrong with it? What's wrong with it? *laughing* Nothing! *laughing* What's wrong with the current animal rights movement? Like let's focus on that. And then what can we do better? Because this has been a big topic of late in the animal protection world. And, you know, sometimes I don't know if I'm just like really in a bubble in the fact that this is a focus.

So I'd love your insight.

Christopher: Is it a focus? Like, I don't know, we could spend a whole hour just talking about that alone. Like, I think that it becomes a focus a couple of times a year. Usually in the United States, we see Black History Month come along...and people largely have stopped doing this with me because I'm quite vocal about it...but it's usually sometime in like, you know, late December, early January, "Oh, we're putting together a list of black vegans" or something. And so it's like, "Oh, it's February is coming up. So I guess we're doing that."

And in the UK, you know, you have Black History happen in the fall and it's October. And so like you go through this whole thing again. That is really disappointing.

The animal rights movement or the animal protection movement...and I never know what to call it, or even if indeed they are the same movement. So I apologize if I'm clumsy about language around that. But like, I think that there is a problem with race as there would be a problem with race in pretty much any movement for any type of liberation that is not led primarily by People of Color.

And I think that that's one of the central things that we would look at. Largely the presentation of animal rights and animal liberation is white, middle-class. Some of that is by design. And some of that I will absolutely say is something

that...it is a perception that people outside of the movement are quite comfortable with because if you can say like, "oh, this is just a bunch of middle-class white people who were doing middle-class white things" then it alleviates one's responsibility for meaningfully engaging with our own bigotry toward other species.

And so you see from within the movement, this is the face of it. And outside of the movement, people who are very comfortable making sure that it stays that way. Or at least in their own minds, because the consequences of that would be would mean having to rethink how we treat other animals and that's incredibly difficult.

And I don't think that our problems with race and race relations are necessarily intentional. Like much of the racism that we experience is actually institutional and as such many people don't really think about it. Don't think what they're doing or what are the ways that we engage with one another in our advocacy. And that's something that we definitely need to work on. Like as a broad overview, that's what I can say about institutional animal rights and animal protection, the way that it exists right now, at least in North America and much of Europe.

And that's actually another thing that really needs to be addressed. The fact that like, we don't really highlight how animal rights and animal protection look in the rest of the world, like in the global south, in Asia and in African countries. And I think that that's a real shortcoming that we have.

And one of the things that I would definitely like to see us address in much more meaningful.

Jasmin: I'm not sure how you're going to answer this next question, but in light of everything you just said... do you ever know how you're going to answer... do you ever surprise yourself when the thoughts come out?

Christopher: I have no idea! *laughing*

Jasmin: I just wonder if it's like, you're figuring things out as you talk, because it seems like you've been thinking about this stuff forever. And when you say you're fairly new to the animal world, I'm surprised. Because I just am like, everything you're saying makes so much sense. So with that said, where do you see the most important leadership coming from?

Vis-a-vis...I'll call it animal rights now. And I also don't know what to call it... animal advocacy, animal protection, animal rights.

Christopher: We're using these words quite interchangeably

Jasmin: The vegan movement...I don't even know what the vegan movement... but anyway, where do you see the most important leadership coming from now?

Or is that even, is that question worded incorrectly? Maybe the leadership doesn't come from the animal protection movement. What are your thoughts?

Christopher: Oh boy, I think that the best leadership, the most exciting leadership that I see comes from the grassroots. And I get excited about that because I think that our institutions or the nonprofit industrial complex, that some may call it, it leads to a lot of co-opting. A lot of focus on things that I wouldn't necessarily agree with. A lot of focus on consumerism, a lot of focus on capitalism, but from the side of like, you know, the capitalist class as it were, and not from the perspective of the working class. And I think that that's what the grassroots organizations and small groups that I see, that's what they get right. And that's one of the things that I really appreciate about them.

And these things aren't universal either. Like, for example, I would count organizations like Food Empowerment Project as a nonprofit...it is a nonprofit, but at the same time, it is very grassroots because like it's very focused on a specific region of the United States, particular groups of working class people. People who are part of multiple overlapping identities, farm workers, People of Color, people who are working class and people who generally are invisible in the larger, like in the larger movement. And as such, I think that the folks who are operating at Food Empowerment Project do an incredible job raising the issues of farm workers, the people who pick our vegetables, the people who are exploited in the agricultural system. And of course Lauren Ornelas has been the Founder and Executive Director and she is herself, a Chicana woman, as she self describes.

And she's just an absolute powerhouse. I really look up to her and I really appreciate the work that she does and every opportunity that I'm able to just like highlight the things that she does and that FEP does within the movement. And also for like several different minoritized or marginalized groups of oppressed individuals and I think that that's really important, but then I look at other organizations that focus on like developing cultured meat or focus on like consumer trends or like introducing new products into the supermarkets or into restaurants or whatever have you. And I think that that's where a lot of the like

institutional power and focus goes and as such...And I don't make people wrong for that, but I think that...well, it marginalizes. So it puts on the margins, the actual animals themselves. And I get why there is a temptation to do it. I get the reward in, like in doing that. People are afraid of animal rights. It's really scary, really overwhelming and intimidating to have to talk to people about like animal oppression.

People have absolutely no idea what speciesism is. And like, "what do you mean I have to think of animals as actual persons?" And that's not a conversation that people want to have. And so it's easier to sideline animals as an issue or speciesism as an issue or as a meaningful oppression itself and focus on like, "well, I can just focus on changing people's eating habits." But changing eating habits is only one aspect, in my opinion, of changing our relationships with other animals.

That may or may not come with people actually confronting the realities of what speciesism is. And it also hyper focuses on food in a way that I think really hamstrings, the vegan movement, the animal protection movement, and all of the various ways that we refer to the movement, because we have ceded over to the main stream, the narrative for upwards of 30 years.

And now we're living in a world where we think of veganism as a diet and not this radical stance that the people had like 50 years ago. That is so powerful when you actually stop to think about it! Longer than 50 years. Like, you know, as I actually think about my math there...But really like, you know, the revolutionary idea that we should exclude animals from our lives as exploitable resources.

That's absolutely staggering. And when we reduce this to like a dietary choice, we don't think about the animals that are part of our textiles, the animals that we use for entertainment, the animals that are exploited in literally a dozen different ways. Now we leave the door wide open for people to absolutely make accusations about like about health, mostly baseless accusations at that. And allow people to say that like, "oh, this is classist and this is elitist." And all of these many other things that the people say. And sometimes these things are very much rooted in classism and ableism and all of that. But people use it as a cudgel in order to further minoritize animals and that I think is a problem and we want to minimize that.

We want to reclaim the revolutionary idea that the other animals are not exploitable resources. That's something that I think is lost when we allow institutions to be able to wait and get away with what they do.

Jasmin: Yeah. At Our Hen House, we talk to everyone across the gamut who are changing the world for animals in a variety of ways. And, by the way, I am thrilled to hear you talk about grassroots. Because that was my roots here in this world were in grassroots in New York City. My bedroom in this tiny little apartment was full of these leaflets that...I would go to sleep and they would be by my feet because that was the only spot that they would fit. And the protest signs would fit behind shelves and it was cool. Like it was cool times and I didn't obviously realize how quickly it would shift into what it is now. And I think that's partly what Our Hen House was born from. Just like an exploration of all of the different ways people are working on this.

How would you describe your personal theory of change? At least when it comes to animals?

Christopher: Oh boy, I do think that it's super important to have a plurality of approaches and operate from a plurality of theories. Do I have a theory of change? I'm not even sure. *laughing* I think that my focus, personally, has evolved in a lot of ways.

And I'll reiterate that I don't make people wrong for like focusing on food. My God, I absolutely love new products. I will go to the grocery store every day and buy something new and vegan that I haven't tried before. And just side note, if anyone is listening to this...*whispers* I think we have enough burgers. *laughing* Um...

Jasmin: But there we need some more hyperbole around the burgers. Because we've got beyond and impossible...we need like amazing and other-worldly!! *laughing*

Christopher: I'm definitely...like you should absolutely trademark that. I want other-worldly burgers. Run down to the patent office as soon as this call is over. *laughing*

So, that said, I have I've evolved from being very online and really trying to like, well...a couple of things...like really trying to learn from people who have been in this movement for far longer than myself. Really trying to learn from the grassroots, as I said, because I think that they do extraordinary work with everything from food access to education.

And really we see this across the board, not just with like the vegan movement, but also with other social movements as well. And all of these things, like they start in the grassroots and they filter up. And then the one who is earning a six

figure salary, who is the head of an organization, is like, "oh, I came up with this brilliant idea."

It was like, "oh, I think that somebody probably did five years ago and it's worked its way to you, but that's all, that's also okay. We won't get into that. Or maybe we will later, but..." Like I've moved into more of an academic space and experimenting with sometimes theory, but also like specifically with media and just like utilizing my own background to relate to people better or to help people better understand this.

And a lot of that actually comes from Black feminism, like, you know, reading Bell Hooks and what she's had to say about the use of pop culture to help people better understand theory, which is itself pretty dense and difficult for a lot of people to consume. And it's also time consuming.

And so if you're time poor, nobody's going to sit you down and say, "here's like 40 books by people who've been dead for a hundred years. Read that and get back to me." So that's a mistake, but just making it fun and exciting for people. Faunalytics actually just came out with a study, talking about what's really effective advocacy.

And I was really surprised to see that like social media posts, which of course with my media background... And having said that, I've been very online for a long time, I was happy to see. News articles was another one, and me being in journalism, that's something that was really exciting. And classroom experiences as well.

And I'm like, "oh yes." But I felt like that was super validating to read that study and the results of their study, because those are the three things that I have been doing. Spending my time in the classroom and really recognizing that like, listen, I've got these people who at anywhere from 10 to 25 people like a semester at a time and really hammer away at all of our preconceived notions about what it means to be vegan or to engage in animal rights or animal liberation. Or how important animal liberation is to all of our other work that we're doing or alongside all of that work.

But also focusing on those news articles and just like, kind of almost infiltrating spaces where you would be able to have this... enjoy like a level of effectiveness without working too hard. Kind of getting into these institutions, like, these institutions before the state, like journalism, like academia and really being able to express exciting new ideas to people who haven't really had to engage with that before.

These are the things that I think are extremely important and really effective. And of course social media. We've seen how social media has had an effect on people's behavior, largely to the negative. And so that's part of the reason why I have moved away from it because I find it really difficult to manage communities in a way that doesn't turn toxic or reward outrage merchants, or negativity like that.

That's really hard. That's really hard work. I leave it to much better people than myself, but yeah, those are the ways in which I have largely been engaging with animal rights for probably now the past 10 years.

Jasmin: Well, as a specialist in media, how do you feel that the animal rights movement should be using social media most effectively?

Like both at the institutional level and the individual level.

Christopher: Oh my God. Jasmin, are you telling me to pull out the magic wand or the... oh boy, like I've talked to people about this many different times and many different ways. And I wish that people would listen.

Jasmin: Um, well, our listeners will listen!

Christopher: This is good. This is good. But like institutionally, I actually said after the 2016 election, I really want people to pay attention to the way that social media affects people. How it really like manipulates our cognitive behavior and it can be used for good. It really can be, but we have to be very intentional about that.

The way that political campaigns and politicians use social media, especially targeted advertising, is almost with scalpel-like precision, and you see it over and over again. Or more specifically, you don't see it! Because if you're not part of that targeted group of people, the advertising is so ephemeral, like it appears in your feed on Facebook or Instagram or whatever have you, and then it's gone unless you actually take a screenshot of it or record it on your screen.

Like, it's there and then it's gone again and like, and if you're not part of that group of people, you don't even know that it's happening. I can have my phone out and scroll through my feed and stand right next to someone who like, you know, I may be very good friends with and not have any idea what they're looking at or what they see. Institutionally, I think that it would be smart of people who are part of like the animal rights community or like non-profit

organizations to, I don't want to say exploit that because it has negative connotations, but really meaningfully engage with people.

And I do see some organizations starting to do that, learning to engage audiences and do sort of that deep canvassing online that politicians have been engaging with for absolute ages. What I don't want to see people doing, and this is on the individual level, is getting into nasty knock-down drag-out fights with people, getting into those flame wars, that's really not what's up. Engaging in online pile-ons, it may be entertaining, I'm not going to say that it isn't! But I don't think that it is the most productive use of our time.

Online community building is something that I think that we should probably be doing more. And back in the day, because I'm a hundred years old, so I get to say back in the day, like back in the day, we had a much more democratized internet where people had to work for their communities.

So you had to go to say, Black Planet, you had to go to Yahoo groups or whatever. And you either received a daily digest from them or you went to your specific groups and you engaged in conversations with people there. Does that mean that all of those conversations were co-operative and uplifting and like revolutionary? No, it absolutely doesn't, but like, you know, but there was a much smaller potential for people to get into the nasty types of flame wars that we see online.

We didn't cede all of our critical thinking and opinion-making to the outrage merchants, as it were, who had the loudest voice. And that was part of web 1.0, if you will.

Now we're living in an internet space where there's not a lot of unclaimed real estate, on social media, if you will. You've got Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok. And so like, we've had to reorganize ourselves in a way that isn't necessarily set up for having productive conversations.

We're ruled by algorithms, rather than going to groups like I had described before, that put inflammatory or incendiary content right in front of our faces and demand our outrage. And we're living in the attention economy now and we respond to that. So I think that if we're more intentional with our social media use, I think that we will see better gains.

Don't look for a news article that has negative comments on it and then shoot off...like, you know...find your targets and shoot off a bunch of opinions. This

sounds like really chaotic advice because like all of the platforms are different and so we have to treat them differently.

Primarily right now I'm talking about something like Facebook, but curate your social media experience so that you personally don't suffer with your own mental health and you're not causing other people to suffer either. I think that there is like...Oh, man. I'm thinking about like a podcast that I was listening to a couple of weeks ago that was actually talking about one of the social media communities that is in Vermont...is going more into what I would call like the web 3.0 or 4.0 space where we kind of reclaimed that wild West feel of 15 years ago.

But moderating communities in a way where you can only post once a day. You have to have a lot of stamina to carry on an argument with somebody if this is your one post that you get. So you better make count. It immediately reduces the air in the room and takes that out. Like, you know, what am I going to post? A dog pic? Or am I going to respond to something that actually meaningfully serves me? Or am I going to get into these fisticuffs with this person that slightly disagrees with me or the bigot? Like, you know, what am I doing with that? And I think that itself is so revolutionary. Kind of like reclaim our social media lives from the algorithms, if you will.

I think that TikTok, while there is a potential for some incredibly damaging behavior on TikTok, and we can talk all about social media from there. I think that TikTok actually has a very different experience from say, Facebook or Instagram, like TikTok does not put the comments right up front.

You move from video to video with rapid-fire, breakneck speed. And so there's a time suck there. And there are some studies that are starting to emerge that indicate that this has a negative impact on our short term memory. So limit your time! But there is a lowered potential for you to get into fights with people because you've moved onto the next video before you actually click on the comments most of the time. Most of the time.

And TikTok's algorithm may or may not be geared for outrage, but I'll tell you what, I don't see NaziTok, I don't see right wingTok. I don't see bigotTok. Their algorithm is curated in such a way that you see exactly what you want to see and you have to work a little bit hard to get to that other side of TikTok to see the things that you don't want to see. So I think that's like, you know, that's a good experience.

Twitter. I don't know. Let's see what happens if Elon Musk continues with his bid to buy it, which is kind of shaky right now! That may or may not happen.

But that's what I would want to see on the institutional level. A better use of targeted advertising to actually reach out to specific audiences in a way that's going to meaningfully connect with them.

And on the individual level, I would love to see people more engaged with the angels of our better nature. Um, and I have not always done that myself! But engage in much less toxic, damaging, emotionally abusive behavior online and not give those platforms the satisfaction of doing that. And know when to step away.

That's what I would want. That was a very long answer. I'm sorry.

Jasmin: No, it was actually really valuable. And you brought me back to like the very late nineties internet when I was around 20 at that time and I just remember like really wanting to go and connect to AOL and that horrible noise of the connection and you're sitting there waiting.

So there's a wait element. And then I found like these, you know, my world was Broadway. So I found these old gay men in all of these like Broadway spaces. And they became like my friends. The most outrageous thing I would post is that like Patti LuPone was robbed of her Tony and then you go to bed and that was it.

So it's just, it's true. Like it has gotten the better of us. And I love the way that you're talking about sort of either having groups manage the quota, or maybe you self-manage the quota, like having a consciousness around what we're doing, both in terms of the quality of what we're posting, but also in terms of the quantity. I think will help us in immeasurable ways. That's great advice.

Patti LuPone was robbed of that Tony!

Christopher: I agree! *laughing*

Jasmin: So what about mainstream media? Like, will it ever be possible to get it to cover animal issues deeply and fairly?

Christopher: Absolutely. Yes. I'm not saying that it's going to be easy. I'm optimistic. And I do think that this goes back to popular culture and our use of popular culture.

I'm very like, I am so grateful. I lead such a fantastic life and I have to remind myself how grateful I am for that every day. I got to write an essay for a book that is being published by Amelia Quinn and Laura Wright. And it's the *Edinburg Companion for Vegan Literary Studies* is what it is.

And like Amelia Quinn is brilliant by the way. Like everyone references Carol Adams because she's like the great, great grandam of vegan theory and I appreciate her so much. But like Carol Adams had written, and there's going to be a point to this story, but she had written a chapter in *The Sexual Politics of Meat* around *Frankenstein* and Dr. Quinn, Amelia, she had taken that as her inspiration for developing a literary theory or like a theory around a literary trope of the monstrous vegan, because *Frankenstein's* monster of course, as presented, or as argued by Adams, is a vegan or vegetarian. And so what exactly is a monstrous vegan?

And I think that there are like, there are four qualities or characteristics that characterize what a monstrous vegan is. One, they don't eat meat, obviously. Two, they are born or birthed outside of the confines of heterosexual reproduction. And of course that fits with *Frankenstein* too. They had an attachment to literature and there is a fourth quality that I can't think of right now, but borrowing from Quinn's work, I actually got to write a chapter on *Wicked*.

Which was originally a novel in the mid 90s. Like we're going back to the nineties, you and me here. I think we were like roughly the same age...But I read *Wicked* back in the day and I thought that it was absolutely brilliant, but then the Broadway production, the musical came out. And so many of the elements of the original novel had been stripped away.

And now we're talking about a film adaptation too which like potentially will remove further remove those elements. And so many people when I talk to them have absolutely no idea that like Elphaba, the wicked witch of the west, this is the story of a person who...this is her origin story, if you will, she was a radical animal rights activist!

She was a political dissident!

Jasmin: I saw *Wicked* maybe like 15 times, to be honest. And I couldn't believe that not everyone around me realized that this is an animal rights story. Like, I didn't understand, like it's right in front of you, it doesn't even require interpretation. She's freeing the monkeys.

Christopher: Like literally, literally like it's so wild, isn't it? And that's the beautiful...again I will use the word revolutionary, nature. Um, using pop culture to get our message out there in a way that connects with people that is not confronting, but it's not confrontational and really helps us to make that connection. And I hope that I was able to do it justice, but really being able to, to do that type of work with other people, with other scholars who are probably far smarter than me, I get so excited about that.

And like, and you do connect us to other movements as well, because like I quote Bell Hooks and her use of pop culture and what she had to say about it. But so much of this goes back to my late nineties relationship with other publications that I have been inspired by. I look at Bitch Media, which is now sadly closing this summer.

Jasmin: I didn't know that!

Christopher: Oh, Bitch Media is ceasing operations, I hope that I did not bring you down. Um, look it up. It is incredibly...like, Bitch Media was such a huge thing for me, and it was such a huge pop cultural phenomenon. But one of the things that I thought was so subversive about Bitch Media, is that like when it was just a magazine.

Like, you know, and I say just in air quotes because it was never just a magazine to me. I thought it was like, what, even the word bitch, putting that into the public lexicon when it was not popular to do so. And like, and really for women to reclaim that word was huge. But for me, like, you know, one of the big things about them was that they would, they wrote stories in a way that was just electrifying.

Taking something that was popular in the culture in the moment, pop culture, and like, you know, just taking something that was hugely popular in the moment and tying that to a larger story or hyper-focusing on one element of it in a way that told that story in a different way is something that they, that the journalists and the writers there, that they did that just blew my mind.

And that was an inspiration for me as a budding journalist as a budding author, or like all of those things. And like I've looked at that and use that as a template for how I want to talk about other things as well, and commenting on animal rights themes in books, in film and focusing on the very obvious things that are under our nose, or that should have been under our nose the whole time or that we had overlooked and bringing that to the forefront and putting it right in people's faces where we have to stop and say, "oh, I did not recognize the

importance of this, the relevance of this and how it ties into all of the other things that I'm working on.” And that, that is a huge inspiration to me. And so this is another way in which I see all of these things working together.

Like how feminism works together with anti-speciesism work. How anti-speciesism work is so important and so relevant to Black liberation work to Queer liberation and so forth and so have you. And so that's huge for me. And it would be irresponsible for me to not acknowledge that in this conversation, but, but yeah...

Jasmin: Oh, I love that answer so much. I feel like that's like my thing... First of all, you brought in Wicked. Like, anyway, I'm just going to listen to that answer. That's so true.

Christopher: It's published by Oxford University Press and it's going to be out in the fall! *chuckles*

Jasmin: And I'm so excited to read it, to get it, to cover it, all of the above. So, let's dig in a little bit to Black liberation and Queer liberation. You've mentioned that you have encountered non-vegan audiences who feel that animal rights comes at the expense of Black liberation. What is their argument and how do you address it?

Christopher: Yeah, like it is a friend of mine, Zerandrian Morris, who actually is the person who led to me teaching for a very long time at Columbia. She talks about a scarcity mindset. And she, by the way, like full disclosure is not vegan herself, but she's a trans black woman and she is an absolute powerhouse too.

But she talks about the scarcity mindset that so many of us are inflicted with where we see like this sort of zero sum game where it has to be either, or, or we talk about like things as binaries when there is no black and white. Like, you know, there is no binary other than the one that we have ourselves created.

And so like, you know, it really benefits the systems and the institutions that we have in place that oppress us. And that we look at these things in a binary, and it's not limited to like animal rights. It's not limited to animal rights and Black liberation. Like we see this all the time with Black liberation and Queer liberation.

There are people in my family right now who talk about, they call the, like the, the, the alphabet mafia or the LGBTQ, ABC I, like you and me, and whatever in a very mocking and derisive way and how quote “they” are doing whatever

have you. Or that like Black rights are coming at the expense of like, or excuse me, like Queer rights are coming at the expense of Black rights without any realization whatsoever that like I'm sitting right in front of them as a queer and Black person at the same time. At the same time.

So many of the people who have fought, who have been arrested, who have died for Black liberation have been queer and are so right now. And so like aggregating these things out and pretending that like we are all not part of a minoritized community. It is to our detriment. It only benefits our oppressors. When people say, "oh, the Mexicans are coming over to the U S to do whatever it is that I guess Mexicans are doing...live? And that's going to take away from my rights." Like, you know, when we, when the United States inevitably succumbs to being a minority majority nation, Latinos are likely to be one of the largest groups. That means absolutely nothing because Latinos are still like minoritized, they're still experiencing oppression.

Like, you know, it doesn't take away from my Black justice to support other minoritized communities and vice versa. So yeah, the idea that we should compartmentalize our justice or that we have a necessity to compartmentalize our justice is a-historical and completely senseless! It's completely senseless because it never has been the case.

And we are more powerful by recognizing our solidarity or as patrice jones would say, like the commonality of our oppression.

Jasmin: There's something that I want to ask you related to all of the above. And, you know, patrice is an interesting transition here because back in 2006, the first article I wrote that was published in the animal protection movement was for Satya magazine and it was called *Coming out for Animal Rights*.

patrice was a big part of that article. She was really helpful for me as a younger person, trying to figure this out. It was about those overlaps of oppressions, the commonality in the mindset of the oppressor. And at that time, I had also reached out to Mariann, who's my co-host for Our Hen House, also my former partner, and I found this email that I wrote to Mariann this morning, like the very first email I ever wrote to her in 2006, which was very funny. I like misspelled her name, it was very funny. Anyway, I then was talking to Mariann about my interview with you, she was helping me to prepare.

Within the context of me finding this old email, she was like, Christopher could probably answer that original question you asked me a whole lot better than I was able to. And it was about those overlaps between the LGBTQ movement

and animal rights and between the commonality of the oppressor and just the various overlapping issues.

This was core to my animal rights activism. I came from the AIDS awareness movement. I came from the LGBTQ world and when I think of that old article, it seems very basic to me. Like, it was big for me at the moment with drawing the connections, but I feel like something has evolved in the last, you know, 15 years since I wrote it, 16 years.

And I just wanted to talk to you a little bit about those overlaps, because one of the things that Mariann said to me in that original email was, “Most of the queer people I know do not make this connection.” She was coming at it from the other side. I was coming at it from the side of like, “well, the LGBTQ people I know are curious about the connections, but they're all vegan.”

She was saying, I know a lot of animal eating queer people who couldn't care less. Can you help me sort of untangle this a little bit, like should queer folk be more sensitive to animal issues and if so, why aren't they and what do you see as these overlaps?

Christopher: Wooo, child! That's another like 40 minute question. Um, I was going to try to sum this up in five minutes, but only because I recently answered this question and had been writing about it in anticipation of Pride Month.

But yeah, first of all, I will say good on you that obviously if you haven't grown in 15 years...I will not even read something that I wrote 10 years ago. Like I look back at then like baby Christopher, and I'm like, “Ooh, child, you had so much growing and learning to do.” And then you. And then you did it like holy smokes.

In 2006, I was barely vegan. And you were already writing importantly about these things. This is like, this is why I have to look at other people like yourself who have been doing this for so long and honor the fact that like the people have been writing foundational material for 20 years or more for 20 years or more.

And like, that's so incredible to me and very, very humbling. And so I thank you for that.

Jasmin: Well, thank you. And I do want...patrice was really the expert in like I was basically, she was telling me things and I was writing more or less her words. So, but anyway...

Christopher: Totally. Yeah, that is absolutely like anybody who knows anything at all about pattrice.

That is what pattrice does. I think that like everyone who has ever talked to pattrice has written down her words in some form or another, and they go completely uncredited because pattrice doesn't give a shit. She is phenomenal that way. And I like, you know, I appreciate her too. And I will have another call with pattrice tomorrow and we'll do it all again.

Yeah, queer people should pay more attention to animal liberation. And I will explain why. And I will give a couple of examples here in my thesis, like for school, what I had written about, or one of the incidents that I had written about was like an article that had happened in like 2019. Um, and I first read about it in the LA times and I thought that it was absolutely hysterical.

Now paraphrase the quote that had gotten me to thinking about this. And it was a trapper who was talking about how young people are not wearing fur anymore. And because this was an article about fur and how it is becoming less and less present or, or prevalent in fashion circles and in the fashion industry.

And he was lamenting this, and he said that animal rights organizations, again, paraphrasing are led by...they're terrorist organizations. First of all, they're terrorist organizations that are led by lesbians. And they're going to come for hunting too in their ongoing...

Jasmin: After we are done cuddling with our cats and having our kitchery and going to bed by eight thirty...*laughing*

Christopher: A hundred percent! *laughing* And in their ongoing march toward communism, they're going to take away hunting too!

So he throws communism in there and I was like, "oh, this is rich." There was so much in like two or three sentences to work with here. Brilliant. Let's start with the lesbians. Why? Like, not only did he focus on people who were queer, and not only did he tie this to communism, there's so much to be said about that... but he hyper-focused on lesbians. And why lesbians?

And what I argue is that he focused on lesbians because to the patriarchal system that we live under and to people who revere it, lesbians represent the biggest threat. Because these are women who are so terrifyingly self-sufficient that they demonstrate that we do not need straight men.

Jasmin: YES!! *laughing*

Christopher: *laughing* And whether he intends to do this or whether it is completely subconscious. And I do think that it's subconscious. That is one of the things that I observed. Like so much of queerness has to do with the devaluing of women and female identity in one way or another, I would say that's like 75% of queer antagonism and homophobia right there. And transphobia too.

And to tie this to again, to communism, I think is absolutely hilarious, but incredibly telling because I'm quite certain that like this person didn't even have any idea what communism is.

He is right, by the way. I've frequently told people since then that like, you know, this is all part of the manifesto. It's on the website. Like we've got t-shirts about it, we're not even hiding it anymore.

And I do wish that lesbians were running these terrorists organizations because I think they would be enormously successful. If we had all lesbians doing this, we would've been finished ages ago! *laughing*

Jasmin: I'll make it happen.

Christopher: Make it, please! Tell other people, like, you know, we could've had this wrapped up by now! *laughing*

But the other thing, and the perhaps more important thing is that there's a recurring theme that is shared between like animal liberation and Queer liberation. And that is the continued sexualization of queer people and the animalization of queer people.

But it's not so dissimilar to the animalization of Black people in the society that. And why is that sexualization important? Because people hyper-focus on sex acts between queer people or same-sex couples. Anything that that is a non, like straight, usually white cis-gender like monogamous pairing is looked at as something that is so horrific and transgressive. But very frequently, you'll see people, from politicians to the everyday person on the street, who equate same-sex attraction to bestiality in one form or another.

There's actually an example of that from TikTok that I pulled last week of someone doing this. And why is it bestiality that people so frequently reach for? And like, and really what I'll tell you is that it has to do a lot with

projection. What I argue is that we project... like we hyper-sexualize queer people and we project bestiality on queer people as a cover for what mostly heterosexual people are doing.

The three things that I had identified are that like, number one, people are already having sex with animals, or I should more specifically and explicitly say people are already sexually assaulting animals. Most of the people that are doing that are not queer. And people largely the number three is that like people largely don't care that like, you know, that people are committing sexually violent acts against other animals, as long as we are benefiting from them.

Because most of the bestiality that occurs in this world is occurring on a farm somewhere. Is occurring when we reproduce or forcibly reproduce companion animals. Is occurring when we create these new lives in these incredibly exploitative systems, every single day in the service of capital, that's what we're doing.

And we take all of that violence and we project that on to queer people in the most disgusting and dishonest fashion possible. And this is why we need that solidarity between queer liberation and animal liberation, because we should be able to step up and recognize that it is because mostly heterosexual people are doing this for the purposes of capitalism or in the service of capitalism and in the service of patriarchy and in the service of like all of these violent, oppressive exploitative systems that we need to take a stand against that. We need to recognize that we need to be in solidarity with other animals who are experiencing this type of violence and what are we doing instead?

We engage in the gay rodeo, for example, we engage in all of these systems to prove that we are able to assimilate into these violent systems ourselves rather than try to dismantle them. And like, we see that over and over again. That's the ultimate goal. Um, without even realizing like how incredibly queer the animal world is, if we force mainstream society to engage with the scientific reality that the animal world, that we are a part of, is incredibly queer. It takes like all of their arguments away. It takes all of their arguments. "Oh, homosexuality is so unnatural." Oh really? Oh really? I beg your pardon. I got a couple of species over here, a couple of hundreds of species, they'll fly in the face of that, like that nakedly ignorant and dishonest and inaccurate assertion. Like, "what is all of this transgender business?" Like the performance of gender is a social contract. And there are animals out here that span the spectrum.

There are so many books that are written on this topic. There's *Evolutionary Rainbow* is actually a really good one that I recommend to people from time to time, which is also written by a biologist who is a transgender woman herself.

And there's so much literature out here. We take the legs out from under the table of all of this queer phobia, if we just open our eyes and recognize our inherent solidarity with animal liberation, and that would be so powerful, so powerful if we actually do that. So yes, it is important and yes, it does frustrate me to no end when people don't recognize it.

Jasmin: Got to rewrite that article. That's amazing! Oh, so many layers.

Christopher: You need a second edition!

Jasmin: Yeah. I also, I interviewed, for people listening to this, I interviewed Carrie Hamilton about some of these issues recently, and she also sort of looks, I don't want to put words into her mouth, I believe she looks to Carol as sort of seminal, but from there grows other perspectives. And from there grows other ways of looking at things, especially as the LGBTQ movement has evolved. Some interesting thoughts. Speaking of looking back at things that we've written, which indeed is painful. In fact, one of my things I've written happened to be a memoir. Oops.

So, yeah. Anyway, so I, oh my God, Christopher, I have so many more questions for you, but in the interest of time, I'll just ask you one more and then I'll hope that you'll come back. And then if you don't mind also sticking around for some bonus questions for our flock, that would be amazing.

Christopher: OH! The afterparty, I love it. Yes!

Jasmin: Yeah, totally. We're going to let our hair down.

So just the small little question to end on. Why do people who care about animals continue to eat them?

Christopher: I know that this is, uh, this is not an easy question. I know that it's popular for us to say, "because we simply don't know", but we do, we really do. We know what happens to animals. We may not want to think about it on a conscious level all the time, but we absolutely do know, even if we don't know the most horrific and traumatic details of what happens on a farm or in a slaughterhouse, we are aware of what we do.

And I don't let people get away with calling it, quote, an "invisible system." If you will, it's not invisible. It's in front of us all the time, every single day, like I'm telling you about it right now, you random person that like, you know, that's not Jasmin, we're very aware of what we do to animals.

So it's not that we don't know. And I don't even think that it's not that we don't care it's that we don't care enough. We do not recognize how important this is for everything, not just for our relationships with one another, but for the planet that we're living on. We don't recognize the scale of the violence that we're enacting on ourselves.

And like overall, like human beings are really terrible, people, when it comes to recognizing or assessing risk, we don't care about something until it is either almost too late, or it is too late. We don't recognize the risk of, so this is why we don't report on climate change in a responsible way. This is why we don't report on animal agriculture in a very meaningful way, because we don't recognize how important this is to our everyday lives.

Um, and we trivialize. Um, so yeah, like we just, we need to work on getting people to care more and, and recognize, recognize that. So... There were, there was applause coming from your dog in the form of an ear shake.

Jasmin: She, she has never wanted to be on my lap for an interview. She's usually in the back on the chair, like literally the second we started, she started barking and was like, get me closer to Christopher and I'm sitting.

I don't know, I'm trying to keep her calm because she's not generally a lap dog, but she's like into this, she's into it. So anyway. Wow. There's so many more questions I have for you. I'll I'll ask you a couple of them in our bonus segment, but for our listeners, can you please tell them how they can follow your work and support your efforts and continue to get enlightened by Christopher Sebastian The Great. That's your full name, right?

Christopher: *laughing* I think it stops at Christopher Sebastian. If there is like an addendum, there is the Pretty Mediocre. Um, that's what I would say, but yeah, like my website is christophersebastian.info. You can like find my email address there and you can also get links to my social media.

I am on Facebook and Twitter and Instagram, even if I am not very active on this platforms right now. It comes in waves. And when I have enough emotional energy to engage on social media, I come back to it. But yeah, like that's the easiest way for people to get in touch with me.

Jasmin: Okay. Well, thank you so much, Christopher.

This was such an incredible chat and I am just am an even bigger fan, especially knowing the theater stuff like that we share that. I was just like, it's like my

dream. You're like my dream, you brought up Broadway and, and animal rights, like, ah, thank you so much.

Christopher: We're besties, yeah. *laughing*

Jasmin: I was like, why aren't we besties yet? So now that you said it on the air, we are! So, thanks for being my best friend and for joining us today on Our Hen House.

Christopher: Thank you so much for having me. This has been a blast.