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# Every Twelve Seconds: Industrialized Slaughter And The Politics Of Sight (Yale Agrarian Studies Series)



## Synopsis

This is an account of industrialized killing from a participant's point of view. The author, political scientist Timothy Pachirat, was employed undercover for five months in a Great Plains slaughterhouse where 2,500 cattle were killed per day—one every twelve seconds. Working in the cooler as a liver hanger, in the chutes as a cattle driver, and on the kill floor as a food-safety quality-control worker, Pachirat experienced firsthand the realities of the work of killing in modern society. He uses those experiences to explore not only the slaughter industry but also how, as a society, we facilitate violent labor and hide away that which is too repugnant to contemplate. Through his vivid narrative and ethnographic approach, Pachirat brings to life massive, routine killing from the perspective of those who take part in it. He shows how surveillance and sequestration operate within the slaughterhouse and in its interactions with the community at large. He also considers how society is organized to distance and hide uncomfortable realities from view. With much to say about issues ranging from the sociology of violence and modern food production to animal rights and welfare, *Every Twelve Seconds* is an important and disturbing work.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Pachirat's extraordinary narrative tells us about much more than abused animals and degraded workers. It opens our eyes to the kind of society in which we live."--Peter Singer, author of *Animal Liberation*"A lucid writer, Pachirat excels in explaining how a slaughterhouse

works."--Ted Conover, *The Nation* "The book is superbly written, especially given the grimness of the subject."--Mark Bittman, *The New York Times*, Opinionator column "A fascinating, gut-wrenching study--but absolutely not for the weak of stomach."--Kirkus Reviews "A truly stunning achievement." *Every Twelve Seconds* takes us into the slaughterhouse and asks: Why do we work so hard to conceal the daily routine of industrialized killing?"--Steve Striffler, author of *Chicken: The Dangerous Transformation of America's Favorite Food* "By far the most thorough and immersive accounting of slaughterhouse operations in contemporary agribusiness."--Erik Marcus, author of *Meat Market: Animals, Ethics, & Money* "Pachirat's prose and tone are readable, horrific, and compelling." The documentary spell it casts recalls the steady, unflinching eye of Orwell's *Road to Wigan Pier*. Astonishing."--John Bowe, author of *Nobodies: Slave Labor in Modern America and the Dark Side of the New Global Economy* "Timothy Pachirat's courageous study of kill floor work exposes the fiction of humane slaughter. This book is required reading for people who care about animals and for those interested in how distance and concealment operate in our society."--Gene Baur, President of Farm Sanctuary and author of *Farm Sanctuary: Changing Hearts and Minds About Animals and Food* ". . . a detailed and brilliantly executed ethnography of an industrialized slaughterhouse in Omaha . . . its clear, jargon-free prose will make it accessible to both graduate and undergraduate students across disciplines."--Clarissa Rile Hayward, author of *De-facing Power* "A profoundly sobering exploration of the interplay between the imperatives of the modern meatpacking industry and the dehumanizing slaughter of cattle."--Ian Shapiro, author of *The Real World of Democratic Theory* "As a lawyer who has learned the food industry's hidden truths from whistleblowers and insiders, I commend Pachirat for sharing his philosophical and physical exploration of the obscured world of animal agriculture."--Amanda L. Hitt, Director, Food Integrity Campaign Government Accountability Project "[I]t would take an exceptionally visceral, in-depth account to make a meaningful contribution to the literature of animals suffering for our nourishment. That's exactly what Timothy Pachirat provides in *Every Twelve Seconds*."--Tom Bartlett, *Chronicle of Higher Education* "From June to December 2004, Pachirat (politics, New Sch.) worked at a cattle slaughterhouse in Nebraska. During his tenure, he worked in three distinct areas: in the cooler as a liver hanger, on the killing floor herding cattle to the knocking box, and in quality control. Through these disparate positions, he gained a thorough understanding of the formal and informal rules that govern American slaughterhouses. His conclusions are grim--bureaucracy and ineptitude combine in a way that does not bode favorably for food safety. He

argues that industrialized slaughter is a hidden world tolerable only because it is invisible to most. Repugnant tasks like the ones associated with processing cattle should be more transparent and would perhaps be duly transformed as a result. Complete with meticulous diagrams showing each worker's position in the slaughterhouse, descriptions of each worker's job duties, and an appendix detailing cattle body parts and their uses, this compelling documentary work illuminates in great detail the workings of an industrial slaughterhouse. VERDICT For anyone curious about the origin of beef in America or those interested in the politics of concealment."--Diana Hartle, Univ. of Georgia Lib., Athens, *Library Journal*"The fascination of *Every Twelve Seconds* lies in the meaty main chapters, which recount Pachirat's passage through the hiring process and then into the factory and abruptly out of it, five months later."--Ted Conover, *The Nation*"Pachirat thinks about the larger issues of killing in a satisfying, comprehensive way: how people in the plant handle it, and how he did."--Ted Conover, *The Nation*"This is a masterful expose, written in crystalline prose. In tying the cruelty and dehumanization of industrialized slaughter to the politics of sight, the book adds to a growing canon of recent work . . . by extending people's understanding of and exacerbating human repugnance to one of the great moral failings of current times. Summing Up: Highly recommended."--Choice"This book is important. Very important. [. . .] buy it, read it, and share it with anyone who thinks they're at peace with eating animals. After all, what Pachirat shows without telling, is that every time we eat animals we promote suffering that, should we confront it directly, we'd deem entirely unacceptable."--James McWilliams, *Eating Plants* blog"A firsthand account of various kinds of slaughterhouse work [in which] Timothy Pachirat did it all. . . . We can count ourselves lucky that *Every Twelve Seconds* is a very good book if not a flawless one. . . . It forces upon us an unacademic yet profound question: How can something be right, if it feels so horribly wrong?"--B. R. Myers, *The Atlantic*"The Jungle for the 21st century."--Portland Press Herald"Every Twelve Seconds is a bold, gut-wrenching, beautifully written book. I suspect it has already found its way onto a number of syllabi for courses in animal and food studies. Yet its appeal is broader... its substantive and theoretical focus on violence, power, and "dirty work" should make the book a welcome addition to a myriad of "mainstream" sociology and political science courses as well. Finally, by complementing the vivid ethnographic narrative with penetrating yet accessible critical theory, Every Twelve Seconds also holds out the promise of contributing to the public discussion about the morality of organised slaughter."--Colin Jerolmack, *Society & Animals*"The book is superbly written, especially given the grimness of the subject."•Mark Bittman, *The New York Times*, Opinionator column "A firsthand account of various kinds of slaughterhouse work [in

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A political scientist goes undercover in a modern industrial slaughterhouse to provide an account of killing work from the perspective of those who carry it out. He offers a thought-provoking report on the industry—and on the society responsible for it.

It starts out a bit dry and technical, but stay with it-- this true account of one man's experience in a typical large-scale (~2500 per day) cattle slaughterhouse and "processing" facility is insightful on many levels. It gives a very detailed account of exactly how these operations work, but for me what was the most eye-opening insights were those related to how complex the conflicts of interest are, and how they in turn make it impossible for either the USDA or the slaughterhouse workers to adequately monitor the quality of the "product" and the way the animals are treated. In addition, he infused his perspective with compassion for the people who work there, in addition to compassion for the animals. The way the reality of what is happening there has to be concealed even from the people who work there (by designing the building with lots of concealing walls, turns, etc) underscores how much that ignorance is required in order for people to do their jobs. The mental

"compartmentalizing" of what they are doing reminds me of the same coping technique used by people working in the Nazi concentration camps. People do things they would never normally do when they mentally compartmentalize it and remove their focus from the suffering of the person or animal in front of them. It made it even more clear to me that the market for animal products must vanish in order for this insidious factory farming machine to come to a stop. And this book helps the reader take the step of SEEING and KNOWING that is essential in order for pity, mercy and compassion to follow. May pity, mercy, and compassion truly follow for everyone who reads this book.

Great read for all meat eaters

"Every Twelve Seconds" is a very important book. It is a well-written and gripping account of what exactly happens in a modern industrial slaughterhouse. It is absolutely horrifying - I really hope that word gets out about this great book. I also appreciate that it is not a long book and that it is so clearly written, with very helpful diagrams that I found myself constantly referring to.

Disturbing but necessary read on the industrialized slaughter of animals in CAFO's. Highly recommend.

Every Twelve Seconds will be of interest to anyone concerned about food safety, the exploitation of workers in modern industrialized society, and the abuse and mistreatment of animals. Every Twelve Seconds is a first-hand account of the gruesome operations of an Omaha slaughterhouse. The author, Timothy Pachirat, is a professor in the Department of Politics at The New School University, and he obtained an entry level position at the slaughterhouse in order to see and document exactly how cattle are killed and processed. He worked in several different areas and was able to see the entire scope of the operation in the five and a half months that he worked at the abattoir. As a vegan, I am predisposed to be sympathetic to Pachirat's project, but were I someone who eats meat, I have no doubt that I would still be horrified by what is revealed in the pages of Every Twelve Seconds. First, if you eat meat, you should definitely cook it at as high a temperature as possible to kill the bacteria that are present. There is no question that most of the meat that is eaten is tainted with fecal matter and other contaminants, which explains why we often see outbreaks of E. coli-based food poisoning. Additionally, your meat comes at a high cost to the workers who produce it. As the title of the book indicates, the slaughterhouse where Pachirat works kills a cow every

twelve seconds. Speed, rather than quality, is the primary driving force in the slaughterhouse: the longer it takes to process a cow, the more hours that the company must pay the workers, and the more hours that the workers work, the less profit the company makes. With speed being of primary importance, USDA inspectors are viewed as the enemy. The management and all the workers, whose jobs depend upon pleasing their managers, do whatever they can to deceive the inspectors and to skirt, as much as possible, the food safety regulations, which invariably slow the production line, that the USDA inspectors are trying to enforce. The workers themselves are almost exclusively immigrants or the very poor and uneducated. They work grueling hours, often 10 or more hours a day, six days a week, and their pay is usually barely above minimum wage. Their jobs are highly dangerous because they are working with knives, implements, and machines for deconstructing the bodies of cows into meat: cuts (including loss of fingers) and crushing wounds and repetitive motion injuries are a constant hazard. The slaughterhouse itself assaults the senses with a stench that even soaks into the workers themselves to the extent that they can't even wash it off. The workers are constantly scrutinized by supervisors and managers and can be fired on a whim for minor infractions or for being too slow or even for taking unapproved bathroom breaks. It is extraordinarily stressful work, both physically and psychologically. Due to these working conditions, the turnover rate is astronomical, nearing 100% per year for most slaughterhouses. At one point in the book, Pachirat describes the plight of the knocker: the knocker uses a captive-bolt stun gun to render the cows unconscious; he places the gun against the forehead of a cow, which is often thrashing its head wildly in terror, and shoots the bolt into the cow's forehead to knock it out. Often, it takes more than one shot to knock out the cow because it won't hold still. Most of the workers in the slaughterhouse believe that the knocker's job is the worst possible job. The knockers often suffer nightmares and need psychiatric help due to the effects of their job. One of Pachirat's co-workers succinctly describes the problem with the knocker's job when Pachirat inquires what's wrong with the job: "Because, man, that's killing; that s--- will f--- you up for real." Of course, there is also the problem of animal abuse: cows often are not properly stunned and so can move down the production line while still conscious: in this conscious condition, they will have their carotid arteries and jugular veins slashed, but before they bleed out and die and while still conscious, they will have their tails and rear right leg cut off. Now, this isn't the norm: most cows are stunned before the processing begins, but there are still a number of cows who do slip through to the production line without being knocked out. There is also a problem when a cow falls in the chutes that lead to the kill area: many times, the workers will not try to help the cow up but will instead let it be trampled by the other cows that are being forced through the chutes with electrical prods. When the workers do

try to help a downed cow, they can be unbelievably cruel: Pachirat relates one instance in which a nose clamp is put into a cow's nostrils, and the workers pull so hard that they rip through the cow's nose. For the animals, their deaths are fraught with terror and horrific abuse: death in an abattoir is anything but a good death. Pachirat argues that the problem with the slaughterhouse is that it is completely hidden from public view: the vast majority of the public has no idea what goes into the production of meat in terms of how unsafe it really is, in terms of how it exploits the workers, and in terms of how the animals are abused. Pachirat is hopeful that, if the true nature of the slaughterhouse were known, conditions could be improved, but he is also realistic enough to know that, even if the things he exposes in this book were to become common knowledge, the public might very well find some way to sequester this knowledge, to block it out, so that they could eat their meat in peace and with a clear conscience. I do not see how anyone provided with the information that Pachirat documents in this book could continue to eat meat with a clear conscience. This is a book that should unsettle meat eaters; it should disturb them deeply; and if their consciences and sense of compassion--both for the workers and the animals--serve as their guides in any moral way, then what is revealed in this book should spur them to re-think whether their decision to eat meat is really ethical.

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