

# Interview with Anthony J. Nocella, II, co-editor of Terrorists or Freedom Fighters? Reflections

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Interview with Anthony J. Nocella, II, co-editor of Terrorists or Freedom Fighters? Reflections on the Liberation of Animals

By Richard Kahn

Richard Kahn: Thank you Anthony for meeting with me today, and congratulations on the release of your new controversial

book examining the history and future of the Animal Liberation Front (ALF)! Before we go any further, I think everyone will want to know, are you yourself or have you ever been a member of the ALF?

Anthony J. Nocella, II: The answer is no. I have never been and I never plan to be a member of the ALF. I get asked this question all the time. Oddly enough, in my work I study many extremist, revolutionary, and even terrorists groups, and yet I never get fingered as being a member of those organizations. Yet, because I have practiced as an animal rights activist in the past, people tend to assume that I must be an ALF spokesperson or cell member also. Of course, this is just a silly mistake -- the animal advocacy movement should not be directly equated with the animal rights movement, nor should the animal rights movement be perceived as being the same as the Animal Liberation Front. There are many differences, sometimes big differences...I'm simply interested in analyzing those differences and in helping the public to achieve greater clarity about militant politics such as practiced by the ALF. That does not require my affiliation. Further, while we're on the record, let me state that I have never conducted interviews with the so-called "underground" either. The only people that I ever communicated with during the entire process of putting Terrorists or Freedom Fighters? together were above ground activists, as well as a few former ALF members that have been convicted and are no longer active in the underground.

RK: You alluded to your interest in revolutionary movements and the ALF, but could you say a little more as to exactly why you assembled this book right now?

AN: About three years ago I began to examine the ALF's support movement and, to be honest, I was not at all pleased with what I found. I saw people conducting themselves inappropriately -- meaning in a non-revolutionary and divisive manner. I thought those involved in the animal rights community should be aware that the ALF was serious and legitimate as an organization, but instead I found that there was a tendency on the part of many to portray the ALF as bands of fools, not mercy. I also found that the ALF needed to better articulate its philosophy and to better relate its beliefs and values in a logical, systematic fashion to the public, authorities, and opposition. In other words, it was my feeling that it was indeed time for the animal rights movement and the ALF to begin to transform through the practice of rigorous self-study and critique. This was the genesis of the book -- what someone like the critical pedagogue Peter McLaren has called "conscientization," the raising of a critical consciousness and radical practice for oneself. The whole idea was to take up and voice education as part of the ALF's own political history, rather than allowing others (often powerful and opposed others) to name what the movement is, does, or means.

RK: So how did you begin this project?

AN: Good question. Being a scholar of revolutionary movements, I began to look at other militant factions such as the IRA and the Zapatistas. Almost immediately, I began to perceive something different between those organizations and the ALF support group: they all had a number of books written by and about their movements, whereas the ALF did not.

So I began to informally call a few people and sent e-mails back and forth telling people about my idea -- to edit a book that would collect all the major figures in the academic and activist communities that had strong understandings of and sympathetic stands towards the ALF. Then and now, I take the position that one person should not speak on behalf of underground movements that include a wide diversity of viewpoints and backgrounds. Instead, I think advocacy needs to be conducted as a collective process that incorporates a wide variety of standpoints.

After some e-mail exchange, I managed to get in touch with Steve Best, whom I thought would be just ideal to make sure this book would be both credible and profound. Happily, Steve and I hit it off right away and with his expertise as a theorist and text editor and mine as a grassroots organizer, we made a great team. Since, we have worked together on almost everything, including starting the Center on Animal Liberation Affairs (CALA). In short, we've become really good friends. Actually, its from experiences such as this that I think the animal rights movement can still learn a thing or two. Friendship and true love and respect for those with whom you work can build amazing things. In this case it built a book -- but not just a book, also the relationships that grew out of the text. Relationships that have continued to grow and spawn new possibilities, such as this interview even! For, how do I know you? Through Steve... and now we are all off working on an Earth Liberation Front book, tentatively called *Igniting a Revolution: Voices in Defense of Mother Earth*, which will be very exciting to publish and has many new outstanding academics and activists such as yourself. So friendship is the key to growth.

RK: Nicely put! Let me ask you Anthony, we all know that even a cutting-edge book like *Terrorists or Freedom Fighters?* can't say it all. There's always something that causes an author or editor such as yourself to step back and say, "Gosh, I wish I would have changed that!" If you had the opportunity to go back and edit the book one more time, what do you think you would you change?

AN: Well, there is always the possibility for a second edition, and so Steve and I are most likely going to strive to get more of a global perspective -- including a lot more people from the well developed animal rights communities in Australia and Europe, and of course I will want to add a few of my new friends such as Jeff Watkins, Joel Capolongo, and yourself.

RK: Ok, final question from one educator to another: What do you think you learned from working on this book?

AN: People in cultures such as our own may be glutted with texts and information, causing them to take these things for granted in some ways. So I learned, or re-learned, just how powerful a book is as a tool for developing social change. The whole process of becoming literate in a subject, forming relationships, and producing one's own message -- this was an astounding experience. Thus, I think that it is very important for revolutionary and other marginal groups to challenge themselves to become more literate in their issues and histories, to become articulate so as to be able to transmit their messages to the public, and to produce their own works. As a peacemaker who works primary with a variety of militant groups it is my responsibility to provide them with a respectful and safe environment in which they can express themselves, towards the hope of building a long-term peace. The method of providing revolutionaries with vehicles to

voice their demands, and be heard, is also a method of de-escalating conflict. It is only, as history shows, when parties are repeatedly not brought to the table that they adopt more extreme tactics and strategies.

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