



# **Meatpacking – Here's the Beef**

## **Part 1: How the Beef Got Here**

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# December 12, 2006

- Largest immigration enforcement action in US history
  - “Operation Wagon Train”
- ICE arrests 1,297 undocumented workers at six meat processing plants owned by Swift & Co.
  - IA, MN, NE, TX, CO, UT
- Swift loses 10% of workforce & denies wrongdoing
  - Several HR professionals are later charged



A federal Immigration and Customs Enforcement agent searches an unidentified man during a raid of a Swift meatpacking plant Dec. 12, 2006. (AP file photo)

# A Few Years Later...

- **August, 2010 EEOC files two lawsuits against JBS facilities (formerly Swift) in Greeley, CO and Grand Island, NE**
  - **Hostile work environment due to employees' race, national origin and religion**
  - **Blood, meat and bones thrown at Muslim employees**
  - **Offensive name calling**
  - **Offensive graffiti**
  - **Refusal of right to pray**
  - **Retaliation (firing) for attempting to observe Ramadan**



Muslims in Greeley, CO, last month protested the firing of more than 100 JBS workers after a walkout over Ramadan.  
Sara Loven/The Greeley Daily Tribune,

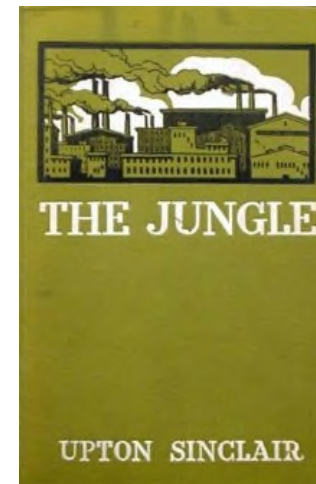


Slaughter house 1940s

**HOW DID WE GET HERE?**

# The Old School of Meatpacking

- **Urban**
  - Cattle shipped to cities
  - Two classes workers:
    - Skilled “craft” butchers working in retail
    - Unskilled packinghouse workers working in industrial settings
- **Close to regulators**
- **Workforce**
  - Unionized & aware of rights
  - Native to US and established immigrant populations
  - Stable





**Then came Iowa Beef Packers, Inc...**

**“Why should meat companies remain wage-locked in heavily unionized cities when unorganized workers could be hired at far lower wages out in the country?”**

***Currier Holman & Andy Anderson***  
***IBP Founders***

# The New School of Meatpacking

- **Rural**
  - Cattle collected in rural feedlots and processed far away from urban areas
  - Craft butchers were more or less eliminated from increasingly automated production process
- **Distant from regulators**
- **Workforce**
  - Unaware of labor rights or the role of unions
  - Not native to US (some undocumented workers)
  - Hispanic, SE Asian & East African
  - 40-100% annual turnover



This IBP slaughterhouse was located in Finney County, Kansas, near huge feedlots.

# **Labor Practices in the Meat Packing and Poultry Processing Industry: An Overview**

William G. Whittaker  
Specialist in Labor Economics  
Domestic Social Policy Division

**“Immigrant workers normally enter the United States with the intention of working. Even adverse working conditions and low wages may be better than those offered in the immigrant’s country of origin. As a result, new arrivals may have low expectations and be willing to endure conditions, both at work and of home life, that American workers would not willingly tolerate.”**



# East Africa



- **Eritrean-Ethiopian War  
1998-2000**
- **Somali Civil War  
1991- present**
- **Second Sudanese Civil War  
1983-2005**
- **Ethnic violence South Sudan  
2011-present**

# Myanmar/Burma



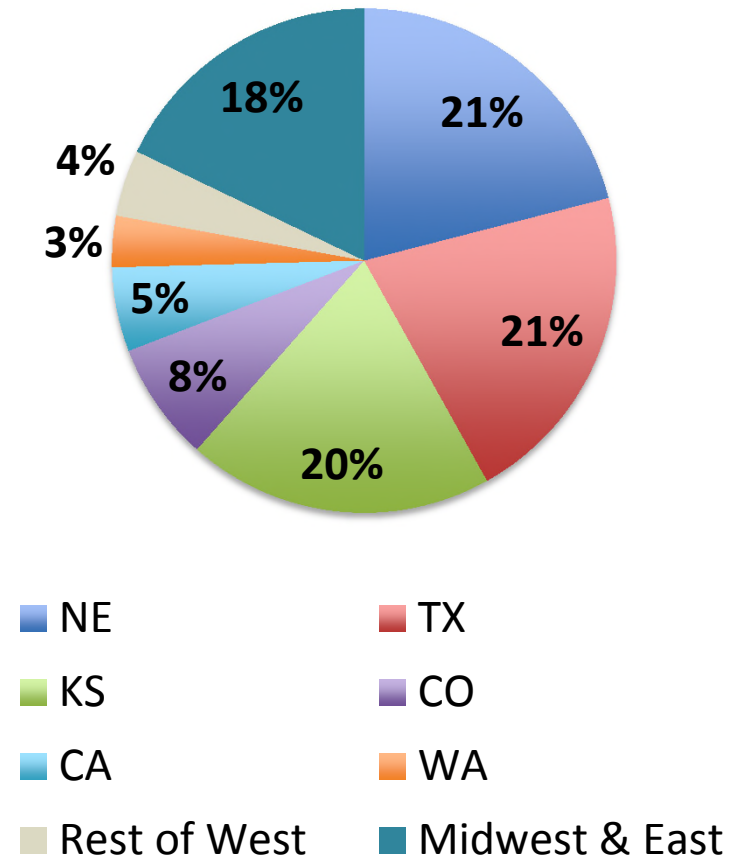
## Karen/Karenni

- Sino-Tibetan language ethnic groups
- reside primarily in Karen State and Kayah (Karenni) state
- 7% of total Burmese population
- Waged war against central Burmese government since 1949
- 200,000 Karen have been driven from their homes
- 160,000 more refugees from Burma, mostly Karen, living in refugee camps on the Thai side of the border



# Cattle Slaughtering Stats by State

| State/Region   | Number of cattle slaughtered commercially, 2011 (1000s) |
|----------------|---|
| NE             | 6,865.60  |
| TX             | 6,833.00  |
| KS             | 6,417.80  |
| CO             | 2,499.70  |
| CA             | 1,763.50  |
| WA             | 1,074.60  |
| Rest of West   | 1,393.70  |
| Midwest & East | 5,845.00  |
| Total US       | 32,692.90   |





THE DENVER POST | Joe Amon

# WHERE WE CAME IN

# How We Connected

- **James Chiu**
  - Lawyer involved in EEOC case & works
  - Represents workers at JBS and Cargill facility in Fort Morgan
  - Hears about worker safety issues through his civil rights legal work
  - Believed that few of his clients understand their rights on the job
  - Introduced us to...



# Global Refugee Center

- **Established by five leaders in East African community in Greeley, Colorado in 2008**
  - **Originally as the East African Community of Colorado**
- **Mediated disputes between East African communities in Greeley**
- **Began ESL language classes in 2008**
- **Now offer following programs**
  - **Seven levels of ESL**
  - **GED classes**
  - **Citizenship classes**
  - **Translation for healthcare professionals**
  - **Advocacy & assistance services**
- **Co-directed by Asad Abdi and Colette West**
- **Supported EEOC efforts**



# What We Did

- **Two Days of Training**
  - Work Comp
  - OSHA
- **Partners:**
  - Global Refugee Center
  - James Chiu
  - MAP ERC
  - HICAHS
  - OSHA
  - UFCW





# What we learned

- **Workers often denied bathroom breaks (sometimes passive-aggressively)**
- **History, religion and culture have impacts on meatpacking safety and health in real and tangible ways**
  - Hazard communication
  - Strength of union tied to unity of workforce
  - Baseline awareness of workplace rights
- **Impossible to separate OSH rights from other worker rights**
  - Example: Religious discrimination against Muslims & sexual harassment of Muslim women

# What we learned

- **Global politics make union politics more complex**
- **Nuanced reasons why labor rights are not recognized**
  - **Example: Burmese union steward was ignoring Karen and Karenni workers, despite the union's efforts to include "Burmese" representation in union leadership**
- **EH&S training can be woven into other types of education programs (ESL, citizenship classes, etc.)**
- **Different communities and cultures have different hierarchies and different reliance on the law to resolve disputes**
- **EH&S training may require a global perspective**

# Resources

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# Questions?

