

*From the Sacred Cow and the
Abominable Pig
by Marvin Harris*

CHAPTER SIX

HOLY BEEF, U. S. A.

AMERICANS CONSUME about 150 pounds of "red meat" per capita per year. About 60 percent by weight is beef and veal; 39 percent is pork; 1 percent is lamb and mutton; and the amount of goat meat consumed is almost too small to measure. Over a three-day period 39 percent of Americans will eat beef at least once, 31 percent will eat pork at least once, and neither lamb nor goat is likely to be eaten at all. During a one-week period 91 percent of United States households purchase beef; 80 percent purchase pork, 4 percent purchase lamb; and practically no one purchases goat. Why is beef "king" in America? Why is pork the runner-up? Why are lamb and mutton so little appreciated? And why is goat meat almost as unpopular as horsemeat?

The preference for beef some say was transplanted from Great Britain along with the English language—a nice explanation as long as you ignore the fact that the English traditionally consumed almost as much mutton as beef, and that the majority of Americans do not have British ancestry. Another notion that we can easily dispense with is that the preference for beef is an ancient heritage shared by all Europeans that harks back to the days when cattle were a medium of exchange and therefore symbolized wealth and power. Or as one "good-to-think" scholar would have us believe, beef eating is part of a "sexual code of food which must go back