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Oct
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Alumni Voices: Robin O'Sullivan's American Organic

by American Studies

AMS :: ATX is a blog dedicated to representing the many activities and interests of the department of American Studies at The University of Texas at Austin. Together with the department's Twitter feed, this blog exists to serve the AMS and Austin communities by acting as a hub for up-to-date information on events and opportunities at UT and beyond.





UT AMS grad Robin O'Sullivan recently published *American Organic: A Cultural History of Farming, Gardening, Shopping and Eating*, about the history of the organic movement in the United States. AMS grad student Kerry Knerr spoke to her last week.

Can you tell us a little bit about your book *American Organic*, and how you came to the project?

It's a cultural history of the organic food and farming movement, which first elicited my interest after I happened to visit the homestead of Helen and Scott Nearing in Harborside, Maine (when I was living up there in Portland). As I began to research the history of homesteading, I learned more about the organic movement, which was related but also distinct.



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What projects or people have inspired your work?

The Nearings, certainly; and the major player in the organic farming movement was J.I. Rodale, who began farming in Pennsylvania in the 1940s and subsequently developed a media empire that publicized the organic movement.

How do you see your work fitting in with broader conversations in academia and beyond?

It's relevant to work in environmental and agricultural history, consumer studies, food studies, and, of course, American Studies.

How is this work you're doing now, as a scholar, teacher or both, informed by the work you did as an American Studies student at UT?

At UT-Austin, four talented professors served on my dissertation committee: Jeff Meikle, Janet Davis, Steve Hoelscher, and Elizabeth Engelhardt. All four have written books that served as models for mine, and all four were delightful to work with.

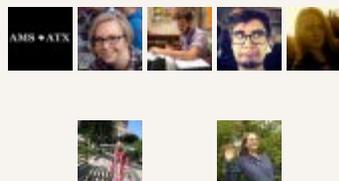
Do you have any advice for students in our department about how to get the most out of their experience at UT?

I'm sure the students already know how fortunate they are to be surrounded by such

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stellar faculty members!

What projects are you excited to work on in the future?

My next project will be an analysis of “techno-natural” phenomena, with a particular focus on its manifestations in 19th century literature.

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