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Faculty Research: Dr. Janet Davis on the History of Animal Activism

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.





Dr. Janet Davis's next book, *The Gospel of Kindness*, is coming out in April from Oxford University Press. Recently, she published a preview of sorts in *The American Historian*. We've printed an excerpt below, and you can find the whole article [here](#).

American animal protectionists from earlier centuries might seem unrecognizable today. Most ate meat. They believed in euthanasia as a humane end to creaturely suffering. They justified humanity's kinship with animals through biblical ideas of gentle stewardship. They accepted animal labor as a compulsory burden of human need. Their sites of activism included urban streets, Sunday schools, church pulpits, classrooms, temperance meetings, and the transnational missionary field. Committed to animal welfare, they strove to prevent pain and



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suffering. Contemporary animal rights activists, by contrast, believe that animals possess the right to exist free from human use and consumption. Consequently, current activists and their scholarly associates often miss the historical significance of earlier eras of activism. A growing historiography, however, demonstrates the centrality of animal protection to major American transformations such as Protestant revivalism and reform, the growth of science and technology, the rise of modern liberalism, child protectionism, and the development of American ideologies of benevolence.

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