

The gospel of kindness: animal welfare and the making of modern America

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Abstrak

This book investigates the historical significance of the American animal welfare movement at home and overseas from the second great awakening to the second world war, a time span encompassing the nations shift from muscle power to motorization. Dedicated primarily to laboring animals at its inception, the humane movement grew to include virtually all areas of human/animal interaction. Embracing animals as brethren through biblical concepts of stewardship, humane activists worked with temperance groups, educators, missionaries, religious leaders, civil rights activists, policy makers, and anti-imperialists to create an expansive transnational gospel of kindness in hopes of building a more merciful nation and world. Ultimately, animal protectionists defined kindness to animals as an American humanitarian ideal. Their interpretation of this gospel extended beyond the New Testament to preach kindness as a secular and spiritual truth. As an ideological and tactical product of antebellum evangelical revivalism and reform, as well as the rights revolution of the civil war era, animal kindness became a barometer of free moral agency, higher civilization, and Americanization. Yet given the enormous intersectional diversity of the United States, its empire, and other countries of contact, standards of kindness and cruelty were culturally contingent and therefore controversial: those accused of cruelty invoked their own culturally specific ideas regarding their rights of self-determination to defend culturally specific animal practices, such as cockfighting, bullfighting, songbird consumption, and kosher slaughter that animal protectionists judged repugnant. Animal welfare, therefore, wa-and remains-in the crosshairs of cultural and political contestation in a pluralistic society.