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JANET M. DAVIS, *The gospel of kindness. Animal welfare and the making of modern America* (Oxford University Press, 2016). ix + 302 pp. £26.49.

Animal advocacy in the twenty-first century has become a ‘global economy of kindness’, where thousands of organizations compete for public donations to facilitate their version of animal protectionism at home and overseas. The movement itself is fragmented, inconsistent and at times divisive, driven by an unstable mix of altruism, ego, compassion, imperialism, kindness, and greed.

Since the post-World War II ‘rights revolution’ and the splitting of animal advocacy in the 1960s, animal welfare (the prevention of unnecessary suffering) and animal rights (non-human animal equality through liberation) have been increasingly conflated, a mistake compounded by the popular media who readily sensationalize abolitionist stances to increase readerships. Public challenges to human-animal practices in transnational places are often made with a lack of awareness of the specificities of cultural history and the human lives involved. Detached from its historical roots, the wider animal advocacy movement can learn much-needed lessons from *The gospel of kindness*.

*The gospel of kindness* expertly traces the social, cultural and political meanings of the American (PAGE 348) animal welfare movement from the (American) Civil War to the onset of World War II.  The six main chapters focus on implications of the animal welfare movement within the United States in an era of Protestant revivalism and social reform (chapter 1 to 3), and in America’s overseas empire after Spanish-American War in 1898 (chapters 4 to 6).

Fez, Morocco (a city with no US embassy in 1929), is the unexpected starting point, where the structural foundation for the book is laid. Here, the American Fondouk animal hospital, the only shelter flying an America flag in a foreign country at this time, is used to pose broader questions about the evolution of the American animal welfare movement in the US and overseas: ‘Why were discussions of an American animal hospital in Morocco consistently connected to questions of patriotism, uplift, and American benevolence?’ and ‘How did an organized movement, which began in cities across the United States, become a vanguard for the nation’s aspirations for abroad?’ (p. 4).

The first US animal protection organization, the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, was founded in New York by Henry Bergh in 1866. By 1900 every state had passed animal welfare legislation, largely based on Bergh’s New York state laws. Janet Davis explains: ‘animal welfare leaders enthusiastically embraced what they called “the gospel of kindness” to build a harmonious union, which could transcend the potentially divisive particularities of culture, religion, race, and class’ (p. 4). Informed by the biblical concept of stewardship, animals were placed at the centre of wider projects of social and cultural reform, where ‘animal kindness became a barometer of free moral agency and the boundaries of proper, civilized comportment and citizenship’ (p. 5).

*The gospel of kindness* covers new ground on the role of female animal welfare advocates in American identity formation. Where the nineteenth century ‘domestic ethic of kindness’ (explored by Katherine Grier in Pets in America, 2006) saw middle-class women teach children benevolence through pet keeping in the home, the ‘gospel of kindness’ had wider implications. Davis shows how all-female institutions such as the Women’s Pennsylvania SPCA (founded in 1867) and Women’s Christian Temperance Union (founded in 1874) ‘brought women out of the home and into the classroom, doctor’s office, laboratory, church, backwoods logging camp, and state legislature’ (p. 83).

Davis also reveals how public interactions with animals were transformed by humane advocates, the media and law enforcers into signs of ‘American belonging and exclusion’ (p. 85), with racial and class hierarchies being mobilized as pressure points for cultural assimilation. Examples include: othering the visiting Filipino Bontoc Igorots as dog eaters; the routine prosecution of Italian immigrants for hunting and consuming songbirds; the rejection of Jewish slaughter practices for being ‘barbaric’; the portrayal of dog-fighting and rat-baiting crowds as ‘beastly’ immigrant Irish Catholics; and the restyling of bird hats and docked tails as ‘un-American decadence’.

Unlike previous historical work on animal advocacy in America (Susan Jones’s Valuing Animals, 2002; Bernard Unti’s *Protecting all animals*, 2004; Diane Beers’s *For the prevention of cruelty*, 2006) and Britain (Moira Ferguson’s *Animal advocacy and Englishwomen*, 1998; Hilda Kean’s *Animal rights*, 2000), *The gospel of kindness* makes an important contribution to understanding the role of animal advocacy, animal welfare legislation and humane education as tools for empire building in the wider world.

Davis traces the introduction of dog management in the Philippines for public health, safety, and colonial order, acknowledging that ‘dog eating represented a cultural justification for assimilative empire building, even though actual colonial policy did little to stop it’ (p. 126). The challenges of outlawing culturally specific animal practices are demonstrated with the example of cock-fighting in the Philippines, Cuba and Puerto Rico. In the Philippines, the practice became accepted as ‘the embodiment of cultural fraternization and exchange among colonizer and colonized’ (p. 134). In Cuba, Congress repealed the ban as a sign of cultural and political self-determination, and in Puerto Rico, cockfighting enthusiasts ‘simultaneously appealed to ideals of cultural nationalism and citizenship to defend their sport’ (p. 139). Ultimately, American policymakers realised ‘that humane education and practical recognition of pluralistic traditions constituted a more effective animal welfare policy than exclusion and criminalization’ (p. 150).

Colonial India is an unusual case study in that policy-making and law enforcement was outside of American jurisdiction. However, Davis nicely shows how Indian religious traditions of nonviolence (ahimsa) and vegetarianism informed American animal protectionism, whilst teasing out the tensions connected to British colonial policy, religion, pluralism, caste, communalism, and nationalism. The difficulties of imposing universalizing rhetoric overseas become quite apparent, and the rise of ‘cow nationalism’ serves as an important reminder of how animal specific practices can lead to human inequality and dangerous social, cultural and political divisions. This point is reinforced by the example of ‘un-American’ bullfighting, which was treated as a symbol of Spanish decadence and (PAGE 349) decline, and universally banned across the American empire.

*The gospel of kindness* is a remarkable piece of historical scholarship and an excellent book. The critical historical approach is engaging and global scope impressive. Not only does Davis reveal the significance of animal welfare advocates in shaping ideologies, policies and human-animal identities in modern America, she also uncovers and underlines the historical challenges of transnational animal protection. The book is authoritative and highly relevant to the contemporary world, and should be read by anyone with interests either in histories of animals or in the modern, largely secular, animal advocacy movement.

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