

Call for Papers
Special Issue on Speciesism, Racism, Sexism
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American Studies is a field that is centrally concerned with power in its most salient manifestations: race, sex, class, sexuality, empire, and more. It is therefore a field well situated to take up the challenge of engaging meaningfully with one of the most ubiquitous, enduring, and momentous social hierarchies: that between human and nonhuman animals. Although human/animal dualism ranks among the major dualisms undergirding western culture and discourse, relatively little critical work has been done in American studies to critique, deconstruct, and politically challenge it, even as discussions of “intersectionality” and “interlocking hierarchies” intensify within the field. A quick glance at the program of the 2010 American Studies Association Annual Meeting confirms that despite attention to “nature” and “the human,” there was scant discussion of the human/animal divide—its genealogy, meaning(s), operation, etc. Meanwhile, in other sites in the academy, there has been a noticeable quickening of interest in human/animal issues during the past decade, as reflected in conferences, book series, list serves, and journals on the topic.

The stakes involved in deconstructing the human/animal divide are significant. The fact that “the animal” has been constructed as a relatively stable site of meaning that has historically served to define “the human” means that an analysis of the human/animal dualism will help us think critically about our self-understandings, how we think of ourselves as a species apart, unique and superior among living beings. It will also stimulate us to ask new questions about the lives of nonhuman animals, whose experiential realities we have often declined to explore because of our assumptions about their inferiority and incapacity. Also, because of the ubiquity of ideologies and practices of human supremacy, analyzing its functions and mechanisms is critical to grasping how power works. In particular, speciesism (defined as the preference for one’s own species against others) has been intertwined in dramatic ways with racism and sexism over the past few centuries in western culture. It is, for example, a familiar move on the part of colonizing/dominating peoples to define the subaltern as (non-human) animals or as akin to animals, thus justifying that domination. This entanglement—the association of animality with the subaltern—once deconstructed, makes possible the liberation of both human and non-human targets of this kind of analogizing oppression.

The papers will address some of the following questions: What is the relationship between speciesism and other forms of supremacy in the contemporary west? In what ways have racialization and gendering depended upon processes of animalization? Does the formulation of “interlocking” dualisms or hierarchies do the work we need it to do in connecting speciesism to racism and sexism? Do anti-racism and feminism commit one to an anti-speciesist position as well? What tensions have emerged among civil rights, feminist, and animal liberation movements? How might we conceive of animal subjects in a way that escapes the pitfalls of neoliberal thinking? How has speciesism (and its relation to other supremacies) assumed different forms and guises in different cultures, spaces, and time periods? How have speciesist ideologies and practices developed in tandem with U.S. imperialism?

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