

Nicholas D. Chabraja Center for Historical Studies
Northwestern University
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Graduate Student Conference
April 29, 2022

“When They Became Pests: Human & Nonhuman Species as Vermin in History”

convened by Guangshuo YANG,

T.H. Breen Fellow at the CCHS

Call for Papers—proposal deadline: **January 24, 2022**

Our views on nonhuman creatures, mythological or scientific, can serve as powerful symbols and metaphors to organize human identities. History is replete with cases of dehumanization that equated targeted groups to vermin and pests: nonhuman species associated with pain, fear, and disgust. The Nazi defamation of Jews as rats, and the Hutu *génocidaires*' labeling of Tutsi as cockroaches are two familiar examples. However, we often take for granted the cultural meanings embodied by these nonhuman species and overlook the contingency of the meaning-making process.

Are pests and vermin socially created? If so, what conditioned the creation of such enemy species? How did certain life forms become widely accepted public enemies? Are such notions translatable across cultures? Who had the authority to make such decisions on behalf of the collective interests? How did scientific knowledge and spiritual beliefs about enemy species affect political language, cultural metaphors, social institutions, and vice versa? How did the designation of species enemies affect a culture's relationship with other human groups, nonhuman animals, and the environment?

“**When They Became Pests**” seeks to explore the making of enemy species concerning human history. We welcome graduate students from different fields of humanities and social to discuss issues related to the questions raised above. The conference will take place on **April 29, 2022**, at Northwestern University in Evanston, IL. Professor **Susan D. JONES** of the University of Minnesota will be the **keynote speaker**. Professor Jones is a historian of modern biomedical and life sciences focusing on the historical ecology of disease, environment, and health. For more of Professor Jones' research, see <https://cbs.umn.edu/contacts/susan-d-jones>.

Interested graduate students should send a paper proposal of no more than 250 words and an updated C.V. to Guangshuo Yang (gy@u.northwestern.edu) by Monday, **January 24, 2022**. A Northwestern faculty committee will select the papers. The conference papers (10-12 pages, double-spaced) are due on **April 8**, three weeks before the conference, to allow time for circulation to the commentators. Presentation will run 10 minutes.