

Animal Diversity Web: *Charlotte's Web*, Show Livestock, and the Nostalgia for “American” Childhood

One of the most beloved American children's books of all time, E. B. White's *Charlotte's Web* (1952) has provided the most prominent depiction of show livestock for generations of children and adults. Wilbur's competition as a show pig at the county fair creates for many either the idea that these competitions are a relic of the past or the belief that little has changed in ongoing rural events of this nature. The contemporary nature of competitive livestock and youth agricultural programs is, in truth, a complicated mix of reminiscence, politics, and comparative socioeconomic privilege. This talk will document the progressive professionalization of this competitive field over the past seventy-five years, as well as the enduring racial homogeneity of 4-H and FFA youth programs. In particular, it will address the problematic nostalgia for a particular notion of youth ethics and “American” identity associated with these almost exclusively white organizations, and their assimilation by the political right as a contrast to stereotypes of underachieving immigrant and minority youth (in addition to left-wing animal rights activists). The talk will also draw attention to the paucity of depictions of youth livestock and agricultural programs since *Charlotte's Web*, considering how such participants represent both a privileged and a marginalized group at the same time. Ultimately, while *Charlotte's Web* may rightfully be celebrated as an allegory of diversity, the show livestock culture it depicts offers both a problematic application for contemporary children's literary studies and an opportunity for engagement with an isolated segment of rural American youth.