

# ACTIVISM: A goal to educate the next generation

Rachel Sloane | May 2022



Animal rights activist and media educator Carrie Freeman addressed SUNY Oneonta students on Earth Day during Green Dragon week when the school celebrated our planet and all who occupy it. Freeman advocated for activism of all kinds, focusing on animals, for Sociology Professor Brian Lowe's Animals and Society class of 33 registered students on Friday, April 22nd, 2022. A professor at Georgia State University and author of *The Human-Animal Earthling Identity*, among other publications, Freeman joined the class from her residence in Atlanta, Georgia, over Zoom in the Science Discovery Center on the SUNY Oneonta campus.

Hosting the event was Douglas Reilly, Coordinator of Science Outreach and Director of the Science Discovery Center.

Participants included SUNY Oneonta's Sustainability Coordinator Rachel Kornhauser and other faculty guests. Freeman's conversation was also a prelude to the 2041 Festival that was held on April 23 in the Science Discovery Center and adjacent spaces. The 2041 Festival focused on ways of imagining and pursuing a positive and plausible near future despite climate change.

Lowe said he "found Dr. Freeman to be a very friendly and engaging speaker.

"I gravitated to her work because, in my opinion, she is addressing one of the central issues of our time: how to generate new identities that will compel recognition of and appreciation for concerns beyond humanity. I was delighted that she could speak, as her work is integral to longer-range thinking," Lowe said.

Freeman said her career path started with veganism and food coming from farmed animals, but she decided to branch out into a field of study that brings a number of social movements together in their efforts to make a difference for the planet.

“There's just a need to work together. Human rights, environmentalism, and animal rights, because they're all related to well-being and health and life and asking humans to be fair to one another and nature,” Freeman said.

Lowe says his sociology class incorporates Freeman's book and shows the wide spectrum of animal studies which, is why he was enthusiastic about introducing the book to his class. “The idea is that we have these different social movements and how they can be united so that they're positive in multiple ways for animals, the environment, and for humans,” Lowe said.

Freeman started working on her book through a pilot chapter in 2016. Still, her research dates back to 2013 when she began comparing human rights charters to those addressing environmental and animal rights issues on a global scale. What she discovered was a commonality in language and values.

Speaking about veganism, Freeman mentioned that pigs and cows have historically served as ‘poster animals’ for the movement trying to recruit followers. She said that contrary to what people may think, sea animals like fish are killed in the highest numbers. She believes that for environmental, human, and animal rights to work together as a cohesive unit, humans in this need to advocate for all kinds of animals and not just mammals, which people tend to care about the most.

Questions from the class directed the discussion towards the role of students in activism, and the way their college campus can make a difference. Freeman said if she had a million dollars, she would fund campus groups for progressive causes at both high school and college levels.

“It's so overwhelming for the youngest generation to think of all the problems they're inheriting, like massive problems,” Freeman said. She stressed the need to get students engaged in thinking about the future of our planet as early as possible and building their own future by reversing the problems created by previous generations.

Freeman's engagement with environmental action started in the late '80s with the *Ethical Treatment of Animals Group* while working on her undergrad at The University of Florida. She said college-educated people are the prime group of adults charged with the leadership roles of tomorrow as they tend to be more open-minded and readier for change.

Freeman believes that it is important to start recruiting young adults early into advocacy for rights. In the animal rights movement, the logic is “If I could get someone to go vegan

when they're 20, as opposed to when they're 60, think how many animals' lives will save and how much water would be saved, and how many fewer greenhouse gases would be emitted.

“This generation has so much opportunity if you're lucky enough to live to be in your nineties and think of all the great things you can accomplish in that time,” Freeman said.

Freeman encouraged students to aims their career goals towards something that they truly care about, while incorporating and contributing to meaningful causes along the way.