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‘EAT. DIE.’

The Domestication of Carcinogens in the 1980s

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IN THE TWO DECADES following the 1962 publication of *Silent Spring*, the US government sought to regulate environmental pollutants in the name of controlling human cancer. The development of short-term tests for mutagens promised an inexpensive, rapid way to identify carcinogens among the tens of thousands of chemicals on the market. However, by the 1980s, findings from these rapid,

in vitro mutagenicity tests corroded these hopes. A public anxious about the dangers of contaminating pesticides and food additives was confronted with the message that the natural components of the human diet were already carcinogenic. This lecture attempts to offer a critical appraisal of the diet-cancer conundrum of the 1980s against the background of the emerging field of genetic toxicology.

ANGELA N. H. CREAGER is the Thomas M. Siebel Professor in the History of Science at Princeton University. She is the author of *The Life of a Virus: Tobacco Mosaic Virus as an Experimental Model, 1930-1965* and *Life Atomic: A History of Radioisotopes in Science and Medicine*, both published by the University of Chicago Press. Her recent research focuses on the history of environmental health and regulation. She is currently President of the History of Science Society.