

Editorial Foreword

SOVEREIGN AESTHETICS Aesthetic regimes build sets of values and impose social codes in materials and sensory cues. This happens in consequence of careful curatorial management, especially in museum spaces, where pedagogy is an explicit objective. Still, art objects and other versions of things have agency of their own, acting on visitors in ways outside of, and even unknown to, a museum's staff. As a composite of human and non-human agencies, then, museums manifest an ethos and an atmosphere, a mood. Every museum space has its own ruling aesthetic but establishing and maintaining that mood is a matter of, among other things, political contest and authority. Who has the capacity, and the authority, to name a museum's sovereign aesthetic?

In "Mrs. Rockefeller's Exquisite Corpse," **Courtney Bender** explores the early twentieth-century history of the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York through a prismatic thing, Mrs. Rockefeller's gift book. Working through the social networks the gift book brings to light, Bender discerns a liberal-protestant *spiritual aesthetic* that reigned in MoMA's early period, one that shaped the presentation of artists from Diego Rivera to the European surrealists, and through them the ethos of the museum as a whole.

Yaniv Feller's "Whose Museum Is It? Jewish Museums and Indigenous Theory" brings Jewish museums and Indigenous museum theory into conversation, attending especially to two major institutions: the Jewish Museum in Berlin and the National Museum of the American Indian. Through the close study of the JMB's exhibitions Feller analyzes the relative ability, and right, of a community to determine narratives, especially ones about a group's origins. Feller's essay assesses the fraught political debates leading to recent controversies and administrative shake-ups, exposing the contested dynamics of community claims. Ultimately Feller proposes that museums should be seen not only as sites for contestation about communal memories and who speaks for them, but as spaces for constituting the community.

WAR AND LABOR DURING AND AFTER SLAVERY Slavery, indenture-ship, and other forms of coerced labor share with war the qualities of organized, systemic violence. But in fact, their entanglement reaches deeper, since slavery is itself a kind of internal war. Nevertheless, slavery and war are all too often analyzed as distinct versions of violence whose stories diverge as often as they intersect. The two articles presented here open new paths of inquiry by showing

in rigorous archival detail how thoroughly enmeshed, even stubbornly so, are slavery and war.

In “Slavery and the ‘American Way of War,’ 1607–1861” **Gervase Phillips** and **Laura Sandy** visit Britain’s North American colonies and the early republic and excavate an “American way of war,” for which slavery was a formative factor. They show that slavery was central to American war-making from the colonial to the antebellum periods, including in slave-raiding against Native Americans, in slavery leveraged in imperial and national strategy-making and diplomacy, and slavery as an “internal war.”

Then, **John Higginson**’s “Making Sense of ‘Senseless Violence’: Thoughts on Agrarian Elites and Collective Violence during “Reconstruction” in South Africa and the American South” compares key moments of the American Civil War and the 1899–1902 South African War. In the decades following both wars most of the black and white agrarian populations discovered that state and agrarian elites had manipulated and even extinguished their hopes. For black agrarians, violence was the instrument most readily available to pursue their aspirations after Reconstruction in the United States, and after the Anglo-Boer War in South Africa. In both cases, the results were dire, the further entrenchment of institutional violence or internal war—under Jim Crow in the United States and the apartheid regime, in South Africa.

STATE-CORPORATION ALLIANCES Beginning at least as early as the founding of the British East Indian Company, in 1600, and Holland’s West Indian Company, in 1621, nation-states and corporations have worked hand-in-glove. Corporations have often served as proxies for state policies of colonial intrusion, resource extraction, and capital expansion, even as states have long offered political cover and military protection for “their” companies in the name of national interest. The two articles juxtaposed under this rubric demonstrate the degree to which states and corporations remain jointly vested into the present period, not least in mining operations and tobacco production. **Veronika Kusumaryati**’s piece, “Freeport and the States: Politics of Corporations and Contemporary Colonialism in West Papua” demonstrates the outsized political roles of transnational corporations, especially during high colonialism. Kusumaryati explores the case of American mining company Freeport-McMoRan, which operates today the world’s largest gold and copper mine in West Papua. The company played a key role in the transfer of West Papua from the Dutch to Indonesia during the decolonization period of the 1960s, and in the formation of the postcolonial Indonesian state. Even more, Freeport’s operation in West Papua was central in shaping U.S. imperial policy. The company’s relationship with the U.S. government and its contract of work with the Indonesian government reproduce an older form of state-corporation partnership, the charter.

Also working in Indonesia, **Marina Welker** offers a window into the economy of the clove-laced “national” tobacco as both health hazard and cultural heritage. In “Indonesia’s Cigarette Culture Wars: Contesting Tobacco Regulations in the Postcolony,” Welker juxtaposes discourses of public health and commodity nationalism, as these generate clashes over Indonesian tobacco regulations and enforcement. Commodity nationalists cast the clove cigarette industry as a source of pride rather than shame, decrying tobacco control as a neocolonial plot to destroy an indigenous industry, even though a few large foreign companies dominate production. The stakes of contending discourses of public health versus “national tobacco” are high in the world’s second largest cigarette market.

ON ARCHIVAL LACUNAE AND GENEALOGICAL GAPS Historians and political entities alike face gaps that require interpretation and the development of new heuristic techniques. In “Making Reliable Persons: Managing Descent and Genealogical Computation in Pakistan,” **Zehra Hashmi** analyzes the launch of Pakistan’s biometric-based national identity card in 2016, an attempt to “re-verify” personal identity as part of a national security drive. The card relies on verification via the documentation of descent-based relations, posing questions of who belongs where, and who is a citizen, via a kind of anachronism: who one “is” hangs on the question of who they used to be. Hashmi traces the movement of genealogies between the realm of the familial and the bureaucratic, showing how the colonial state deployed and managed expertise in genealogical computation toward the making of a particular vision of the postcolonial present. The state crafts “reliable persons,” then, by repurposing parts of their pasts for a new set of present uses.

An analogous hermeneutic challenge appears in **Danna Agmon’s** “Historical Gaps and Non-existent Sources: The Case of the Chaudrie Court in French India.” Agmon leads us into the archival labyrinth of the eighteenth-century Chaudrie court in the French colony of Pondichéry in India, where French judges were meant to dispense justice according to local Tamil modes. Agmon found that the records of this court that did *not* survive are, paradoxically, crucial to understanding how the court worked. Focusing on these “phantom” sources, Agmon leverages their absence to join an important historical claim and a methodological cue. The Chaudrie was a court where jurisdiction was decoupled from sovereignty, and this was the reason it did not generate a state-managed and preserved archive of official records. The archival absence indexes, then, a specific form of colonial legal practice that warrants close attention.