

“Heredity”: Call for Papers. A Special Issue of *American Quarterly*. Editors: Jodi Byrd, University of Chicago Kimberly Anne Coles, University of Maryland Sharon P. Holland, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill Greta LaFleur, Yale University

Ideas of heredity are as much about the present and future as about the past. They are an imaginative structure of chronological time, kinship, custody, and rights. But settler colonial ideologies of heredity and kinship in the Americas are unique, and uniquely linear in their formations. They mobilize a different history. They formulate distinct notions of possession and ownership. They tie blood – and its letting – to land enclosure and property transfer, a situation in which heredity articulates blood and belonging as capital. Blood and its presumed possession legitimates belonging, exclusion, rights, and claims to identity. In the early modern period, the term “race” was largely used to refer to family lineage, or bloodline, and invoked the imagined humoral superiority of noble blood. The racial logic of hereditary blood guaranteed the stable transfer of power and wealth through the assurance of enhanced physiological and moral traits as a family inheritance. A society that saw a supposed superior bodily temperament as the premise for the oversight of land, created identity through land management.

The purpose of this special issue of *American Quarterly* will be to interrogate settler colonial models of heredity and kinship as the source of white supremacy, binary sex, patriarchy, property, and ultimately, hereditary chattel slavery. If an earlier racial ideology licensed particular people to rule through their presumed moral authority, later developments of racial logic condemned other people to serve premised upon similar ideas of the internal manifestation of moral capacity. Meanwhile, settler governments, to facilitate land dispossessions, instituted blood quantum requirements to regulate and legitimate Indigenous belonging.

The special issue will make an intervention in two ways: first, through a look at heredity, property and capital from the early modern period to the present, in order to interrogate the continuities and discontinuities in these formations across time; second, we propose to curate pieces from established scholars to those just beginning their academic careers, in order for readers to find the volume truly useful in terms of scope of field. The issue will span the chronological space of the 16th to the 20th centuries. While each editor will oversee a section of the volume, our special issue will not be organized chronologically, but thematically. We will have four sections: Heredity and Property; Indigeneity and Coloniality; Family and Kinship; Human, Animal, and Other. Please submit abstracts of 500-750 words to [AQSpIssue@gmail.com](mailto:AQSpIssue@gmail.com) by December 15, 2025.