

E Cram, **Violent Inheritance: Sexuality, Land, and Energy in Making The North American West**, Oakland: University of California Press, 2022, 269 pp., \$34.95 (paperback).

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In ***Violent Inheritance: Sexuality, Land, and Energy in Making the North American West***, E Cram examines the relationship between sexual modernity and energy regimes across the North American West. The author reconceptualizes sexual modernity as energy extractivism by mapping out how normative sexuality functions as a “technique of transforming the biopolitical body into an economically useful form” (pp. 11–17). The book explains sexual modernity in environmental biopolitics as undergirding White settler colonialism that exhausts racialized energy as forms of violent inheritances that can be traced through landlines. Furthermore, the author suggests that the connection between sexuality and settler colonialism is the “interlocking through contested political processes by which settler states regulate indigeneity to produce ‘elimination’ of ‘Native as Native’ through laws regarding marriage, gender, and reprosexual kinship” (p. 6). Tracing land lines of infrastructure violence from 2010–2018, the author attended to archival spaces of contested memories, conducted interviews and participant observations, and traveled across the state and nation lines to materialize embodied queer ecological criticism. *Violent Inheritance* is divided into five main chapters that examine four sectors of sexual modernity: vitality, intimacies, childhood, and land, and concludes with regenerative possibilities as promising starts to decolonization.



Chapter 1 looks at the relationship between land and the “modern sexual subject” by attending to Owen Wister’s archival writings about his experience with the “West cure” (p. 33). In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, White men like Wister were recruited to travel to the western lands to treat neurasthenia—an emotional disease contracted from overexposure to civilization and modern life. Unusual symptoms include anxiety, fatigue, emasculation, low libido, sterility, food aversions, and irritability. The author highlights that biologists Silas Weir Mitchell, George Beard, and John Harvey Kellogg propounded therapeutic practices and treatments for neurasthenia. As a result, these biologists believed western migration was necessary to restore the body’s maximization and protect White, heteronormative inheritances. For example, Mitchell credited the climate of the West and the wilderness as a place of restoration that revitalizes the generation’s “somatic energy.” This set the stage for increased Western migration, American imperialism, and the 1893 World’s Fair in Chicago. The conclusion considers how the neurasthenia treatments and Chicago are prime examples of sexual inventions that generate modes of settler colonialism. Notably, each centers on exploiting non-White labor, which functions as sediments of land lines, transferring violent inheritances to modern Anglo-American subjects.

Chapter 2 grapples with spaces of violent inheritance in feminist colonialism through the archival collections of land lines at the American Heritage Center (AHC)—specifically the historical writings, public addresses, and anecdotes by historian, feminist, and professor Grace Raymond Hebard. The author calls attention to the rhetorical modes of memory and heritage imagination by spotlighting the selective stories of settler feminism, mainly through sensory stimulation (e.g., touch), told in AHC. Ultimately, the book argues that Hebard’s sexual modernity is in part due to her quest for fossils, hairbrushes apparently used by Sacajawea, and her Americanization movement that fetishizes the possession of land and inheriting indigenous resources. The author explains that Hebard’s writings of Sacajawea as a mythic figure are sentimental because they move “land’s energy into bodily vitality” (p. 63). It assumes women pioneers as the primary predecessor of land possession. Appropriating Sacajawea as the woman pioneer who can be consumed by the White settler woman further contributes to generations of violent inheritance. Cram spends the remaining chapter mapping out their embodied experience of handling archival materials, specifically the poem “Thy Hand,” and photographs of Hebard’s letters bolster symbolic connections to her intimate relationship with Agnes Wergeland. While many of the archival resources about Hebard’s sexuality are absent, Cram notes remnants of witnessing sexuality within these collections.

Chapter 3 builds on childhood as a domain of sexual modernity by examining how the Canadian Museum for Human Rights (CMHR) functions as a protective shield for mainly White settler children to guardedly learn about colonial history. This is accomplished through framings of sexual abuse, genocide, and the displacement of Native children in residential schools through dark and light modes of affective sensations to elicit emotional responses. The CMHR affords a comparative lens to the United States—as no U.S. museum currently documents its colonial history. In addition, there have been many controversies about the museum’s pedagogical framing of colonial history as being “too soft,” which the author contends is the “hierarchical relationship of control and protection to maintain ‘innocence’” (p. 114). This chapter offers two contrasting readings of exhibits within CMHR: *Childhood Denied* and the *Witness Blanket*. Cram problematizes *Childhood Denied* by arguing that it showcases paternal control of the space by depicting black-and-white photographs from the residential schoolhouses that fail to document the abuse and sexual violence toward Native children. By contrast, the *Witness Blanket* is a collection of texts, like photographs, textiles, and bricks from the residential school operative in Canada located on the sixth floor that “disrupts the paternal settler aesthetics of violence” (p. 121). Thus, the *Witness Blanket* invites the visitor to bear witness to the residential school survivors’ stories and allows visitors to make meaning by opening spaces for reflection and reckoning with one’s own violent inheritance.

Chapter 4 demonstrates the relationship between sexuality, labor, and region by turning to Minidoka National Historic Site. In 2012, Idaho ruled in favor that owner Big Sky Farms could authorize 8,000 Animal United Livestock Confinement Operations (CAFO), which was a little over a mile from the Minidoka National Historic Site. The legal decision ruling in favor of CAFO was prompted by affected persons, which are, in short, “figures born of a land line sedimented by formations of extractive racial capitalism and settler biopolitical governance” (p. 133). Cram maps the land lines of Minidoka’s violent inheritance by understanding how “the appropriation of land within settler colonialism as an ongoing containment to produce wealth, govern sexuality, and naturalize ethnonationalist exclusion” (p. 135). While the containment camps and CAFO are not completely parallel, both surveil human populations to reduce them through spatial modes and uniformity of labor production that reduces life to technologies of production and, as Cram puts

it, generational ways of racial capitalization. As such, the author states that extracting energy to repurpose the land “is never known in advance,” but the Minidoka pilgrimages invite visitors to witness the history of labor and privatization of space to extract humanness for bodily labor of Japanese Americans to sediment settler colonialism (p. 163).

Chapter 5 looks at connections between rural and urban spaces in the Rocky Mountain West as a producer of petroculture (e.g., fossil fuels, coal, and oil). Petroculture is “atmospheric and intimate,” meaning that these energy systems are embedded deep in social life that can be tracked through land lines to White settler masculinity (p. 174). Cram tethers stories of queer living within infrastructures dominated by oil—specifically through conducting interviews mediated by mobility between Laramie, Wyoming, and Boulder, Colorado. The author highlights the sexual reimagining of how heteronormative pressures mobilize resilience through the act of automobile escapism by queer people. By concluding with *Queer Nature*, founded in Boulder, Colorado, by Pinar and So Sinopoulos-Loyd as a “trauma-informed collaborative quest that teaches survival techniques” (pp. 190–191). *Queer Nature* exposes violent inheritance by rooting LGBTQ+ people as belonging through thoughtfully attending to the sensory connections to reimagine those that came before on this land. This chapter concludes by underscoring how regenerative inmates foreground decolonial ecologies through grief and isolation.

Violent Inheritance concludes by restating that violent inheritance manifests through domains of sexual modernity that “[demand] vital energy and [exhaust] racialized populations” (p. 200). Cram eventually turns their focus to regenerative potential through imaging queer embodied collaborative stewardship, which challenges violent settler colonialism. Collaborative stewardship as a regenerative possibility opens spaces for political imagination that emphasizes land care that relinquishes possessive ownership by the settler colonial. I wonder about the practicality of collaborative stewardship by White settler bodies within the United States—as the author notes, “places outside of the North American West supported by inquiry” (p. 206). Some of the regenerative possibilities are documented through the lens of those already at the margins. So, I have a lingering question: How can regeneration invite White heteronormative sexual bodies to reckon with their violent inheritances to become collaborative stewards of the land? This inquiry is one of wonder that suggests potential opportunities for future communication, queer, and ecological humanities scholarship. *Violent Inheritance* makes a tangible connection between sexual settler colonialism and environmental politics that would be a beneficial read for scholars and graduate students across disciplines interested in such topics. Overall, *Violent Inheritance* is a compelling case that is methodologically rich and draws from interdisciplinary works to theorize sexual modernity as a sector of biopower and biopolitics. The book ends by emphasizing regeneration, which I suggest leaves the reader hopeful for a future of decolonial kinship between humans and nonhumans.