

Extraction on Display Delving into Research, Curation, and Collaboration at a Liberal Arts College

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Article abstract

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ABSTRACT

Drawing on our recent collaborative experience in teaching an intermediate-level museum studies course in Fall 2023, this reflective essay aims to demonstrate how faculty and librarians can employ object-centered research to guide students in their exploring and understanding of the extractive practices associated with imperialism and colonialism that have shaped museum and library collections. We specifically focus on the research and curatorial practices that culminated in an end-of-semester exhibit, showcased in both physical and digital formats. Through this exhibit, our student-curators brought to light the process of removing artifacts from their original material and political contexts and their subsequent integration into our collections. Moreover, they critically examined how classification and organization practices and, in certain instances, digitization processes in libraries, can either continue to veil or reveal the history of violence.

Keywords: *collaboration · exhibition · extraction · objects · pedagogy*

RÉSUMÉ

S'appuyant sur notre récente expérience collaborative dans l'enseignement d'un cours d'études muséales de niveau intermédiaire à l'automne 2023, cet essai de réflexion vise à démontrer comment les professeur.e.s et les bibliothécaires peuvent utiliser la recherche centrée sur l'objet pour guider les étudiant.e.s dans leur exploration et leur compréhension des pratiques extractives associées à l'impérialisme et au colonialisme qui ont façonné les collections des musées et des bibliothèques. Nous nous concentrons spécifiquement sur les pratiques de recherche et de conservation qui ont abouti à une exposition de fin de session, présentée à la fois sous forme physique et numérique. À travers cette exposition, nos étudiant.e.s-conservatrices.teurs ont mis en lumière le processus d'enlever des artefacts de leur contexte matériel et politique d'origine et leur intégration ultérieure dans nos collections. De plus, elles ont analysé de manière critique

comment les pratiques de classification et d'organisation et, dans certains cas, les processus de numérisation dans les bibliothèques, peuvent continuer à voiler ou à révéler l'histoire de la violence.

Mots-clés : collaboration · exposition · extraction · objets · pédagogie

MANY instructors recognize the pedagogical value of having students work with actual objects (Heidenwolf and Xu 2020, 5–6; Hodge 2018; Schultz 2018; Tanaka et al. 2021, 36–37; Xu 2021). However, artifactual analysis is often limited to understanding what the objects are, how they were created, by whom, when, and for what purpose. Rarely do students move beyond these initial inquiries to examine the provenance of these materials and the context and conditions that facilitated their removal from their original settings and entry into formal collections. In other words, there is little effort to teach students about the extractive practices—such as looting, seizing, collecting, and appropriating objects from marginalized communities under colonial, imperial, and neoliberal contexts—that have been carried out and concealed by libraries and museums. This lack of attention to libraries and museums as extractive agents is peculiar, especially considering that historically, the collection of artifacts and natural resources is embedded in the same logic of resource-making, which continues to operate today (Achim 2021, 231; Hicks 2020).

Drawing on our collaborative experience in teaching an intermediate-level museum studies course in Fall 2023, this essay, intended as a pedagogical reflection, discusses how faculty and librarians can make the “underlying logics of exploitation and subjectification” of extraction visible to students within the library context (Junka-Aikio and Cortes-Severino 2017, 177). Throughout the semester, we guided students in developing a physical and digital exhibit featuring objects from the library’s Special Collections and College Archives, which interrogated the role of libraries as institutions participating in extraction. Our student-curators examined the provenance of these materials, the process of their removal from their origins, and their subsequent integration into our collections. They also explored how information description and organization practices, and in some cases digitization processes, can either continue to conceal or reveal the history of violence (Trouillot 1995; Stoler 2002; Turner 2020). Displaying extraction was a valuable exercise that allowed students to question and reimagine the extractive logic that still shapes library practices today.

Context, Course Overview, and the Exhibit Project

We, the authors, have been working together on a number of classes due to our shared interests in critical pedagogy, teaching with primary sources, and the politics of

knowledge production. As a historical anthropologist, Mónica is interested in critical museum and heritage studies (Salas Landa 2018; 2024). As an information literacy librarian, Lijuan incorporates various types of sources, including both academic and non-academic materials, in her teaching. Approaching information literacy through the lens of epistemic justice, she asks students to critically examine the structural issues in knowledge creation and resultant silences (Xu 2022; 2024).

Offered for the first time in fall 2023, A&S 325 Museum Studies: History, Theory, and Debates provides an introduction to the social and cultural history and theories of museums. It investigates the notion of the “modern” museum as both an instrument and a technology of power (Salas Landa 2023). The course begins by exploring how colonialism, looting, and exploitation have shaped the development of museums, collections, and archives from the Enlightenment’s cabinets of curiosities to today. It then focuses on specific collections and exhibits in natural history, anthropology, and art, incorporating discussions on decolonization, cultural restitution, and repatriation. This critical examination of museum extractive practices prompts consideration of the potential for museums to transform into spaces that enable restitution, repatriation, community engagement, and the unlearning of the imperial foundations of knowledge. The 15-week long course had seven students enrolled, and met twice a week for 75 minutes each time. Throughout the semester, students engaged in a collective effort to develop a physical and digital exhibit featuring objects from the library’s Special Collections and College Archives. Drawing inspiration from Ariella Aïsha Azoulay’s thought-provoking work, *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism* (2019), the exhibit aimed to confront the profound legacy of violence deeply ingrained within museum (and library) collections. Specifically, it addressed the imperial endeavors that led to the extraction of objects from diverse communities. This process involved detaching artifacts from their original material and political contexts, selectively placing them within timelines, stages of development, and art histories imposed by empires, while conveniently erasing the violence that facilitated their inclusion in museum collections.

In what follows, we will discuss the preparatory work and the various stages that guided the class in presenting imperial extraction through our collective exhibit.

Exhibit Development I: Preparatory Work

To prepare for the exhibit project, Mónica collaborated extensively with the Special Collections and College Archives over the summer of 2023 to curate objects for the class. She outlined the exhibit’s goals and the inspirations behind it, prompting the librarians to propose a list of 20 objects from various collections for consideration. These collections included donations from Egyptian and Sumerian Objects, the Asian

Miscellany Collection, the Howard Chandler Christy Papers, The Rio de la Plata Collection, the Imperial Postcard Collection, the Kirby Museum, and the Philippine American War Collection, among others. Mónica refined this list to 10 objects, to allow each student to select an object for their research focus. The main criterion for the final list was to choose objects that exemplify typical acquisition areas for art, archaeological, and ethnological museums, representing regions such as Egypt, modern-day Iraq, Native North America, the Philippines, Taiwan, and Hawaii. Each of the 10 objects was then photographed with support from the Digital Scholarship Services department, specifically the Visual Resources Curator, to create digital surrogates for the digital exhibit and catalog using Omeka.

Exhibit Development II: Interpretative Hierarchy and Object Selections

During the second week of class, after reading and discussing Chapter 1 “Returning the Collection” of *Decolonize Museums* by Shimrit Lee (2022) and exploring the origins of museums through the development of cabinets of curiosity in Europe and the United States (Boetsch and Blanchard 2014; Davies 2013; Impey and Macgregor 2017; Robinson 1995), Mónica assigned excerpts from *Potential History* (Azoulay 2019). The class first discussed Azoulay’s main concepts, such as “the shutter” (the mechanisms that dictate what needs to be forgotten, suppressed, or ignored), “the Congo Condition” (how imperial looting is embedded in current museum procedures and the exposure of members of these expropriated communities to various forms of violence), and the need for “rehearsals,” or interventions into the curatorial grammar and practices. Armed with these insights and using Mónica’s exhibit development guideline, adapted from the Smithsonian’s Guide to Exhibit Development (2018), the class collaboratively created an interpretive hierarchy. Mónica and her students jointly identified the key ideas, messages, and the critical questions that the exhibit needed to address for visitors (figure 1).

Once the class established the interpretive hierarchy, students visited the Special Collections and College Archives. They examined pre-selected objects and chose a specific one for their research. The co-directors of the department and the Distinctive Collections Librarian provided an overview of the objects, including their provenance and acquisition history. They also showed students receipts and other archival materials. While being attentive to each object’s unique history, students were reminded to also consider the broader process of collecting and displaying material culture from the specific region of their chosen object. Their task, in short, was to research and effectively narrate this dual story. Assigning, from that week onwards, selected chapters from Dan Hicks’s *The British Museum: The Benin Bronzes, Colonial*

Violence, and Cultural Restitution (2020) provided students with a model for this kind of research. During that initial session at Special Collections and College Archives, students also learned that the research conducted on their selected object would serve as the basis for creating a series of textual interventions aimed at challenging the often-neutral language found in museum labels.

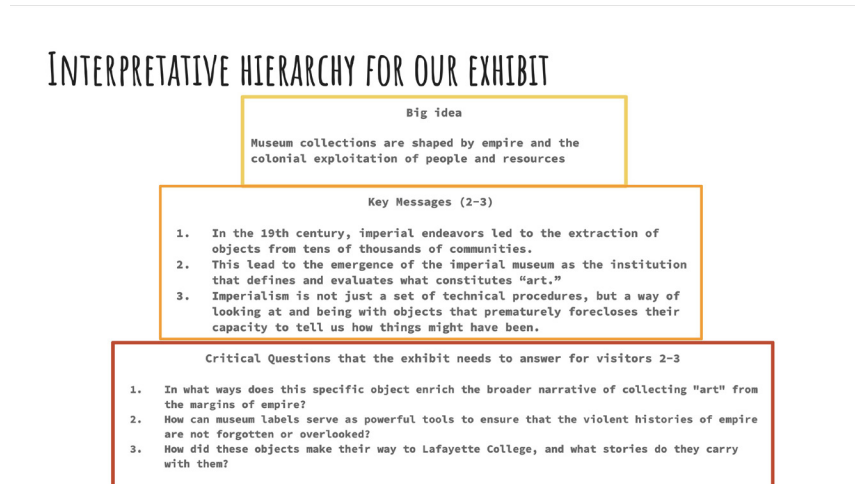


FIGURE I Interpretive hierarchy for the class exhibit of Potential History.

Following the session students visited the “The African Origin of Civilization” temporary exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (2024) and the exhibits in the Northwest Coast Hall at the American Museum of Natural History (2024) to assess how museum language frequently overlooks the violent processes involved in extracting artifacts from their original material and political context. Mónica gave students a handout (Appendix A) with questions designed to guide their critical examination of object displays, specifically from Africa and Native American communities, in these museums. Students had to select and photograph a particular object and a display case, evaluate the accompanying labels and panels, and identify the information conveyed, as well as what was omitted and the effects of such omissions. The subsequent class discussion about their museum visits prepared and built excitement among students to begin their individual research process.

Exhibit Development III: Research Sessions and Object-Oriented Research

After selecting an object for research, students attended a research session the following week, during which we discussed the type of research expected for their object. Lijuan and Mónica first met to develop a lesson plan in preparation for the research session. Lijuan suggested asking students to read the introduction of *How to Hide an Empire* by Daniel Immerwahr (2019) before class. In his introduction,

Immerwahr briefly describes the colonization of Puerto Rico, the Philippines, and Hawaii, and how this history was and remains obscured. He includes primary sources, such as Franklin D. Roosevelt's post-Pearl Harbor attack speech and various maps of the United States, grounding his analysis in the context of U.S. expansion and imperialism. Moreover, he highlights the problematic organization of books in libraries and how such practices can perpetuate the palimpsest effect of history. Lijuan also proposed using one of the preselected objects in Special Collections and College Archives, an armor (figure 2) from the Philippines (*Kurab-a-kulang*, n.d.) that no student had chosen, to illustrate the types of questions students needed to ask about their own objects. As a class, we first examined the armor's physical characteristics and details, and then asked the students the following questions:

- Who created the armor and why? What were the relevant events and contexts surrounding its creation and purpose?
- Why was it in the library? Why were people collecting items from the Philippines?
- What questions do we want to ask about the armor? If the armor could speak, what story could it tell us?



FIGURE 2 Unknown artist, *Kurab-a-kulang*, n.d. Special Collections and College Archives, Lafayette College, Easton, PA.

Our discussion contextualized the armor and its journey within the broader framework of the Spanish-Philippine-American War and the United States'

subsequent colonization of the Philippines, as students learned from Immerwahr's book. We also encouraged students to consider other instances of object extraction and display related to colonial conquests. We then introduced an additional primary source: the cover image of a brochure (figure 3) promoting the Philippine Exposition at the 1904 World's Fair in St. Louis (Newell 1904). The discussion that followed highlighted how this event showcased over 1,000 Filipinos and their material culture, illustrating how world fairs like this one legitimized U.S. colonial rule over the Philippines, helped construct narratives that placed various ethnic groups in the Philippines on an evolutionary ladder (Rydell 1984), and led to the further extraction of objects. We concluded by reflecting on the aftermath of these colonization and extraction processes. Many artifacts from the St. Louis Exposition, including human brains, were later distributed to various museums, such as the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago and the Smithsonian.

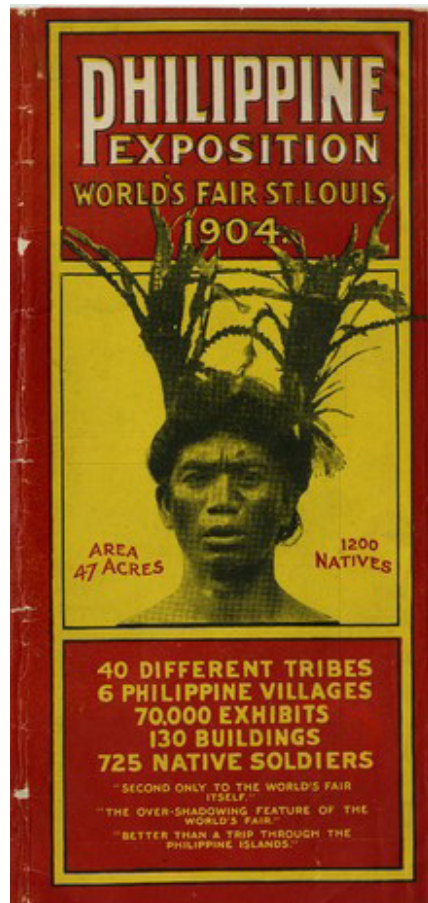


FIGURE 3 Brochure for the “Philippine Exposition: World’s Fair, St. Louis, 1904.” The University of Michigan Library, Ann Arbor, MI.

Moving beyond the legacy of colonialism ingrained in the collecting practices of museums and libraries and the resultant collections, the second part of the class focused on another form of institutional complicity and extraction. We discussed

how the ways in which libraries and museums describe and organize information not only obscure colonial violence and subjugation, they also present research challenges to uncover what is hidden. As Immerwahr points out, there have been a lot of books written about the U.S. colonies but they are often “on the wrong shelves” in the libraries (2019, 15) and thus silence the past. The Library of Congress Subject Headings have a similar effect. To demonstrate this, we asked students to examine the subject headings of *How to Hide an Empire* and *God’s Arbiters: Americans and the Philippines, 1898-1902* by Susan K Harris (2011) and discuss the following:

- Would you have used words such as “colonial question” or “territories and possessions” to describe or look up these two books?
- What does the term “foreign relations” imply? How would you characterize the relationship between the United States and the Philippines at that time?
- Why is there no subject heading of “United States-Colonies” like those for countries such as Great Britain and Spain?
- How might sanitized subject headings—such as “territories and possessions”—conceal and distort history? What challenges do they pose for research?

We ended the discussion by talking about how we needed to be creative in finding sources. For the remainder of the class, students started to research their own object while we went around to talk to each of them.

We all returned to the library for two more dedicated research sessions to continue investigating the pathway of our object to Special Collections and College Archives. During these meetings, Lijuan and Mónica asked students to scrutinize the archival record of their object to identify what information was missing and to narrow down their secondary research to five to seven sources (Appendix B). Based on the discussion about the armor in the first session, we realized that the best way to assist students with their research and exhibit development was by collaboratively working with them. This meant conducting further research on the armor and becoming co-curators with students. We modeled research by sharing how we approached our curatorial object and refined our focus. Since the Special Collections and College Archives files indicate that the armor, *Krab-a-kulang*, dated to the 19th century and was from the Moro Nation in the Philippines, we began by searching for sources about the Moros during the U.S. military conquest of the Philippines. Our research led us to juxtapose the violent conquest with the accompanying cultural campaigns—including the live exhibits of the Moros at the 1904 World's Fair in St. Louis—both of which facilitated the extraction of artifacts from the Philippines. Artifacts from the Moro people such as the armor, a likely war souvenir, thus convey

a narrative of power, subjugation, and the transformation of Moro cultures under colonial rule.

Exhibit Development IV: Writing Labels, Installation, and Omeka Site

Labels

Based on our research, each curator, including ourselves, developed interpretive texts for their objects. These included labels with textual interventions that highlighted the contexts leading to the extraction of our chosen objects. Specifically, we examined Japan's colonial expansion in Taiwan; the convergence of the U.S.'s assimilation policies towards the Native American population with the Salvage Project in Anthropology; the U.S. annexation of Hawaii and colonial rule in the Philippines; and British colonialism in Iraq and Egypt. To bring these critical insights to the fore, the labels we created mimicked the conventional language, content, and style used in museums but were visibly modified by marking revisions in red—adding contextual information, incorporating the language of the source community, or striking out certain words and replacing them with others. This strategy, proposed by a student to counter the sanitized narratives often found in conventional museum labels, was adopted by the class during one of the meetings with the exhibit designer partner prior to our writing workshops.

During these workshops, students drafted their labels after Mónica shared the label that would accompany the *Krab-a-kulang* as an example. Students then worked independently on their own writing and submitted their drafts to Mónica, who then provided individual feedback. We then worked together as a group to revise these labels, offering feedback to each other during subsequent writing workshops to ensure our labels were concise. Additionally, we collaborated on writing the identification labels for additional materials that were reproduced for display alongside our objects.

Digital Exhibit and Catalog

In addition to creating labels, each curator was tasked with creating an exhibit page using Omeka, providing everyone the opportunity to share their research findings. In preparation, student completed a series of readings to reflect on access and care in digital archive (Agostinho 2019; Turner 2020). It was important for Mónica to introduce students to the challenges of digitization and to emphasize, following Daniela Agostinho, “the intersected problematics raised by the encounter between the colonial, the archival, and the digital” (141).

To build our digital exhibit, we input the metadata for each object into the platform, a skill students acquired with support from the Digital Initiatives Librarian. This librarian, serving as a project partner, conducted two sessions to familiarize the class with the platform and the Dublin Core Metadata set. Despite the platform's potential and utility, the metadata scheme seemed restrictive due to its lack of specific metadata items for highlighting the violence intertwined with the objects' histories—an aspect essential to the exhibit project. The Dublin Core lacks alternative fields such as “Curator’s Comments” or “Historical Context.” For instance, the “Description” field required a focus on the object's materiality and specificity. Such sole focus on materiality, in our view, promoted a misleading sense of objectivity and disconnected the object from its context of extraction. We discussed these concerns in class. To avoid sanitizing the narrative, thereby undermining the exhibit’s goals, the class opted to “intervene” in the digital catalog by adding supplementary context about the imperial/colonial circumstances underpinning our items’ collection.

Physical Display

After finalizing our digital exhibit pages in week 11, the following week was dedicated to installing the physical exhibit in Special Collections and College Archives. Each curator received a glass box to display their selected object, along with high-resolution images of accompanying primary source materials and labels (figure 4). Additionally, our exhibit featured an introductory panel (figure 5) collaboratively written by Mónica and the students, as well as a selection of quotes from Azoulay's work, chosen by the students from their study of the text. Lastly, following our discussions with our design partner, we decided to feature a word cloud on the exhibit space's glass windows. This word cloud (figure 6) juxtaposed terms associated with the violence of extraction and colonialism against verbs suggesting potential avenues for reimagining museums and libraries as institutions.



FIGURE 4 Votive cone on display with reproductions of photographs of Gertrude Bell at work in Iraq.

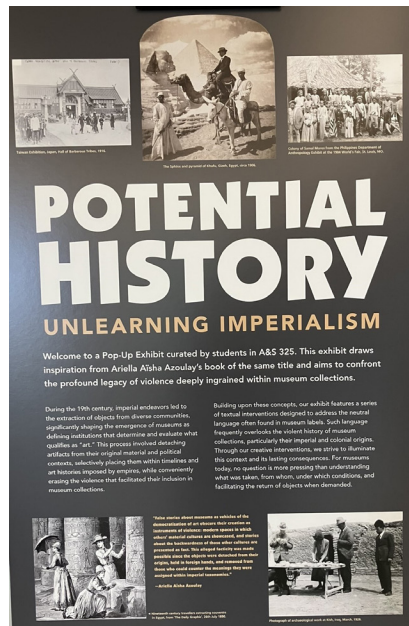


FIGURE 5 Introductory panel for the class exhibit of Potential History.

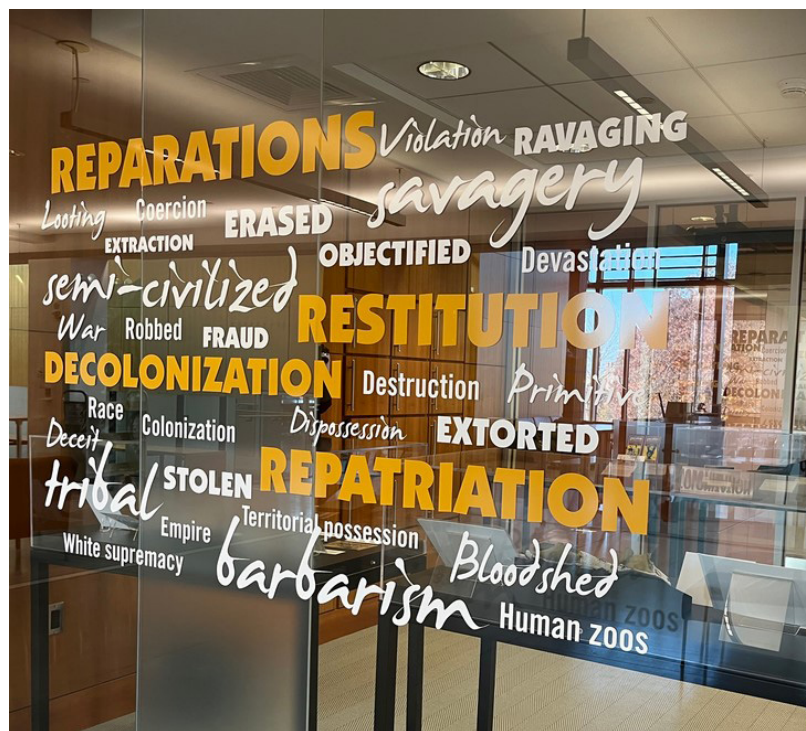


FIGURE 6 Word cloud welcoming visitors.

Outcomes and Assessment

The exhibit that students developed—both physical and digital—and their curatorial talks were well received. Students demonstrated a clear understanding of the concepts and theories studied in class as well as their painstaking research around their object. They incorporated a variety of primary sources—such as photographs, paintings, excavation plans, traveler’s handbooks, trademark registration, and documents—to render visible the extraction enabled by American, British, and Japanese colonial and imperial projects.

Based on their research, some students were able to rename the object and properly attribute its origin, as demonstrated by these labels (figure 7 and figure 8). In their virtual display, most students elaborated further on the origin of their object and its broader political and historical context. They depicted the journey of their object as one of colonial conquest, exploitation, plunder, and misappropriation. For example, one student contextualized a coffin fragment from Egypt within the framework of organized thefts—the Partage System—which divided and dispersed items from Egypt during British colonial rule. Another traced the Votive cone with cuneiform inscription to Western involvement in Iraq, particularly the “adoption of an antiquities law that allowed for foreign archeological expeditions to Iraq to legally retain some of the items they uncovered, dividing the items between their place of origin and the foreign powers who were given the privilege of digging them up.”

Moccasins

Tsitsistas/Suhtai (Cheyenne)

Plains region, 19thC.

Glass beads and leather

Donated [Misappropriated]

Displayed here is an extraordinary example of the craftsmanship of **the Cheyenne** [the Tsitsistas/Suhtai people], showcasing their unparalleled skill in creating both functional and elaborately decorated attire. In the 19th century, during the United States’ westward expansion, [a colonization process that led to the loss of land and lives, as exemplified by the Sand Creek Massacre of 1864], items like this were **obtained** [amassed] by amateur collectors and curio-shop owners who removed them from their original contexts.

By the early 20th century, these artifacts had fallen into the possession of “salvage” anthropologists who accumulated objects from Native communities [they incorrectly believed were vanishing].

Decades later, artists such as Howard Chandler Christy (1872–1952) acquired Native American garments, including these moccasins, to depict historical events and figures. His [romanticized, homogenizing, and grossly inaccurate] artwork **educated** [misinformed] the public **and celebrated Native Americans** [by obscuring the harsh realities of forced displacement and violent dispossession of land that Native American communities, including the Tsitsistas/Suhtai people, endured—a critical aspect of settler colonialism].



Moccasins

FIGURE 7 Exhibit label for moccasins.



[Suk'-lâng ("headhunter hat")]

Suk'-lâng
("headhunter hat" [basket-work hat])

Igorot people [Bontoc, Ibaloi, Ifugao, Kalanguya/Ikalahan],
Northern Luzon, Philippines, 19thC (early)

Rattan, Red Bamboo, Animal Tooth, Plant Fiber, Brass Wire, Animal Tooth,
Hair, Army Pin

This traditional woven hat, known as the Suk'-lâng, is typical attire for the indigenous **Igorot** men [of the Luzon *Cordillera*]. Positioned at the back of the head and secured with a cord across the forehead, the Suk'-lâng signifies the wearer's marital status, village affiliations, and **head-hunting prowess** [whether they were a successful hunter of men]. Beyond its social function, the hat doubles as storage for personal items such as tobacco, tinder, and related paraphernalia.

After the Philippine-American War (1899-1902), Lt. Truman Hunt **acquired** [extracted] these hats from the Bontoc province and showcased them [along with their wearers], at the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair, [portraying the people of *Cordillera* as primitive beings to be studied].

Today, the **Igorot** [*Cordillera*] people remain a well-documented community, with their [stolen] artifacts distributed across museums worldwide. [Attempts to "civilize" the population continue, reflecting the ongoing colonialism imposed on this community].

FIGURE 8 Exhibit Label for Suk'-lâng.

Students argued that such extractive practices underscored the savior mentality and upheld the interest of colonial powers. For example, a student asserted that while the United States government was decimating Native American communities, "[a]nthropologists, explorers, and collectors...used it as an opportunity to play a white savior role" to collect and protect artifacts from these communities. Once removed from their origin, the items become art objects of a bygone era, of a perceived primitive culture. Such is the case with the "headhunter hat" by the "Igorots" from the Philippines who were on display for their primitiveness at the 1904 St Louis World's Fair. Both the Hawaiian Kapa and the Cheyenne moccasins are also used "as a way to understand a distinctly 'primitive' culture." Students highlighted the word choices typically associated with these objects and their creators, such as primitive, savage, uncivilized, and barbarians. They argued that words such as these helped construct and reinforce the inferiority of colonized and indigenous populations while at the same time, they erased any trace of violence and effectively silenced these communities, all of which justified the colonial rule. Referring to the World's Fair and the displays of the Filipinos as "[a] form of violent imperialism," a student wrote, "the entire fair served as a legitimation for a war colonizing the Philippines."

Students realized that the extractive practices resulted in the collections of cultural institutions such as universities, museums and libraries. They started to examine how colonialism and imperialism permeate through these seemingly benign institutions. As one student pointed out, the University of Michigan was directly involved in the 1924 excavation through the partage system where Howard Carter discovered the tomb of Tutankhamun (Egypt). Furthermore, students questioned the collecting and acquisition practices of institutions and how they reflected complicity. One of them interrogated the problematic amassing of Native American artifacts

of the Smithsonian through the Bureau of American Ethnology in 1897. Another considered the practice of our own library in the purchase of several Mesopotamian artifacts—including the Votive Cone—from a dealer. The student wrote that such practice “is representative of how complicit Western academic institutions have been in their participation in the antiquities market, willing customers for products of looting and extraction under colonial circumstances. Such complicit behavior creates a self-perpetuating system of artifact misappropriation.”

Through their object-based research, students also recognized how particular groups such as Indigenous populations, post-colonial nations, and Native American populations have responded to museum practices and narratives. For example, Hawaiian people “ingeniously devised strategies to challenge colonial narratives that enforced primitive, eroticized roles.” The EMOTIVE project in Egypt aims “to connect modern Egyptian locals with their culture by connecting with archaeologists to provide raw materials that they can then interpret for themselves.” Students argued that western institutions, including museums and libraries, should take responsibility for the role—both direct and indirect—they have played in the plundering and misappropriation of artifacts. It is imperative that they rethink their collecting practices and engage in reparation efforts. Students also realized that although theories such as scientific racism and social Darwinism that served as the impetus for colonial expansion and exploitation have long been discredited, their specter remains. A student asserted, “It is crucial to reflect on the past and understand how colonial beliefs continue to exist in many forms today, and morph to hide in plain sight.”

Reflections

Through the exhibit project, students successfully narrated the story of their object and confronted the legacy of colonial violence deeply ingrained in its journey as well as within museum and library collections. They brought to light the process, contexts, and consequences of the removal of their objects from their original locations. Furthermore, students understood that how artifacts are assembled, categorized, and presented in libraries and museums can profoundly alter their meaning and thus erase the larger historical context in which they were created. These ongoing extractive practices subsume colonial violence, create an innocent narrative of progress, and perpetuate the dominance of the colonial power and the West.

Several factors contributed to the project’s success: Mónica’s commitment to object-based pedagogy, the careful planning and scaffolding of the project, the collaboration between librarians, faculty, and students, and our decision to participate as co-curators as the class unfolded. Mónica designed the Museum

Studies course around objects, their history, and the broader context that resulted in their extraction from their original context. The object-centered pedagogy made the library a natural partner, not just because of its collections but also because of the range of expertise of librarians. As mentioned earlier, Mónica and librarians in Special Collections and College Archives curated over the summer a list of artifacts, which were subsequently digitized by the library's Visual Resource Curator. The preparatory work and the confined list of items alleviated some of the workload pressure during the semester. Furthermore, Mónica secured a grant from Lafayette's Arts & Technology program (2023) to provide stipends to Digital Scholarship Services librarians to recognize the expertise and intellectual contributions of librarians. Librarians from the departments of Digital Scholarship Services and Research and Instruction were integral to the success of the exhibit. They led Omeka workshops, provided additional readings, and facilitated discussions on object-based research. The different expertise ensured that students had adequate support throughout the exhibit development process.

When the two of us decided to curate an exhibit about *Krab-a-kulang*, we not only took our partnership to a different level but also transformed our relationship with students. Through our immersion in and modeling of the researching and curating process, we were able to speak students' language and provide them with more organic support. Since it was difficult for us to carve out time to work on the project, we also developed greater empathy for students considering that they often worked on multiple projects at any given time. Furthermore, students greatly valued our participation in the project and came to regard us as "peers," as suggested by the comments on the course evaluations.

In addition to the faculty-librarian collaboration, another centerpiece of the exhibit project was that students worked collaboratively and collectively to develop the exhibit. At the beginning of the semester, the students as a group, along with Mónica, discussed and determined what the exhibit should get across to the visitors. Both the introductory panel and the word cloud that framed the physical exhibit were also born of collective efforts, drawing from class readings, discussions, and debate. So was the writing of the exhibit's labels and the installation of the exhibit. It was everyone's continuous participation and collaboration that resulted in the creation of a learning community and the success of the exhibit project.

The success of the research-intensive, hands-on, and collaborative exhibit project was also due to the small class size and adequate resources, including the Arts & Technology grant and additional department and college funding that Mónica was able to secure. Such funding covered transportation, museum tickets, and other expenses for students' visits to the museums in New York City. It ensured that the

project was accessible and equitable to all students, not just those who could afford the extra expense. Moving forward, we will explore ways to scale up the project.

The Museum Studies course was intentionally designed around objects—including treating archives as artifacts—and the questions of extraction and knowledge production. However, we firmly believe that there is room for anyone to undertake similar efforts, not only to question the nature of things and the way we understand them but also to begin envisioning different and less colonial and imperial (and thus extractive) ways of engagement. Regardless of the class, faculty and librarians can provide opportunities for students to interrogate and make visible different forms of extraction and their consequences. By critically examining the provenance, trajectories, and decontextualization of objects, students confront how libraries and museums have extracted materials produced by marginalized groups and how these violent histories are rarely taught or confronted, allowing for their reproduction. The critical consideration of the materials themselves and, equally important, how they are collected, categorized, and presented in libraries and museums will result in a much better understanding of the past and ongoing violence and subjugation as well as ways to avoid perpetuating such injustices.

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Appendix A: Museum Visit and Response Essay (abridged)

Objectives:

- Engage in critical thinking by exploring Clifford's concept of museums as "contact zones."
- Reflect on Ariella Azoulay's idea of the "Congo condition," which highlights how contemporary museum practices are shaped by imperial looting and the continued exposure of expropriated communities to various forms of violence.
- Initiate the development of our own pop-up exhibit by examining the display of objects from Africa and Native American communities. Pay close attention to the accompanying labels and panels to evaluate the presence or absence of contextual information, as well as the interpretations provided.
 - Choose one of the focus cases and closely examine a specific object and its accompanying label, capturing photographs of both.

Essay Prompt (7-10 pages):

Use Azoulay's notion of the "Congo condition" to critically evaluate James Clifford's proposition of museums as "contact zones." Strengthen your analysis by delving into two particular artifacts and their accompanying descriptions: one from the Metropolitan Museum of Art (MET) and the other from the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH). Incorporate observations and photographs from your museum visits for reference. Contemplate how the labeling of objects can either conceal or highlight the often-violent processes involved in extracting artifacts from their original material and political contexts.

Citation and Format

You will want to establish a professional relation to your readers by using the following formatting and citation guidelines:

- Type, proofread, and spellcheck all written work.
- Use standard, 12-point font (Times New Roman or its equivalent).
- Double space your essay.
- Use one-inch margins and leave your right margin unjustified.
- Follow sentences with a single space, not two.
- Number your pages.
- Follow the citation guidelines for in-text author-date references in The Chicago Manual of Style, 17th edition. A quick guide can be found [here](#)
- All writing assignments need to be submitted as PDFs

Appendix B: Appendix B: Library Session #2—Research for “Potential Histories: Unlearning Imperialism” Pop-Up Exhibit

SECONDARY SOURCES

Peer-reviewed articles, books, or book chapters

Narrow down your selection of secondary sources to 5-7 that address the role of colonialism and empire in the extraction processes of objects similar to this or from the same region/culture. Keep in mind that the aim of your research is to understand the overarching context that enables the collection and extraction of objects like the one you chose.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.

Digital materials: videos, websites, podcasts

If you have found interesting materials, that's excellent; you will be able to incorporate them into your digital exhibit page.

PRIMARY SOURCES

1. Tracing the object's journey: What is the pathway that brought your objects to Lafayette College?

Consult the Special Collections records for details on your object:

- Date of acquisition
- Was it a donation?
- If donated, ascertain the details: when and by whom?
- Has the object been displayed before?
- Was it purchased? When? Purchased objects provide insights into the creation of value that drives the market for antiquities and potential illicit activities associated with them (e.g., looting).
- The absence of records or information about your object is also significant. Remember, what is missing from an archive can be as illuminating as what is present.

2. Depicting violence and colonial influence

- Source a primary material (photograph, poster, document) that vividly showcases the brutalities of extraction, colonialism, or imperialism. This source will be displayed next to your object and will enable visitors to link your object to these historical processes.

- Consider imagery such as war scenes, depictions of “otherness,” or portrayals of colonial and imperial agents – ranging from soldiers to archaeologists.
- Add an image your source to the Google Drive

Why Research Matters: Your research will enable you to create an “edited label” to be exhibited next to your object, as well as write secondary text to be featured on your Omeka exhibit page. We will work on labels and the digital exhibit page in the following weeks.