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The Smell of Slavery

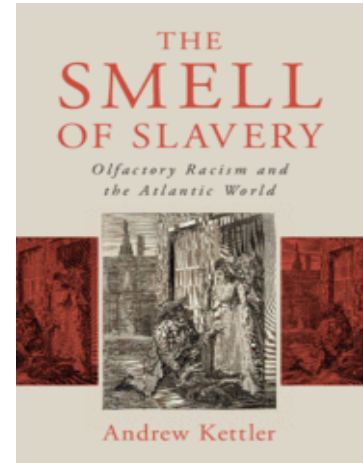
Olfactory Racism and the Atlantic World

Andrew Kettler

University of California, Los Angeles

In the Atlantic World, different groups were aromatically classified in opposition to other ethnic, gendered, and class assemblies due to an economic necessity that needed certain bodies to be defined as excremental, which culminated in the creation of a progressive tautology that linked Africa and waste through a conceptual hendiadys born of capitalist licentiousness. The African subject was defined as a scented object, appropriated as filthy to create levels of ownership through discourse that marked African peoples as unable to access spaces of Western modernity. Embodied cultural knowledge was potent enough to alter the biological function of the five senses to create a European olfactory consciousness made to sense the African other as foul. Fascinating, informative, and deeply researched, *The Smell of Slavery* exposes that concerns with pungency within the Western self were emitted outward upon the freshly dug outhouse of the mass slave grave called the Atlantic World.

Introduction. Pecunia non olet; 1. The primal scene: ethnographic wonder and aromatic discourse; 2. Triangle trading on the pungency of race; 3. Ephemeral Africa: essentialized odors and the slave ship; 4. 'The sweet scent of vengeance': olfactory resistance in the Atlantic world; Conclusion. Race, nose, truth.



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'The Smell of Slavery makes important and original contributions to both the history of the senses and studies of racism and resistance in the Atlantic World. Kettler sheds further light on the embodied dimensions of slavery, convincingly tracing across centuries the role of smell in the construction of a racist system of dehumanization, commodification, and segregation, while illuminating the contrasting smellscape of the oppressed.'

Céline Carayon,
Salisbury University and author of Eloquence Embodied: Nonverbal Communication among French and Indigenous Peoples in the Americas



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