

Call for Papers for an Essay Collection

Literary Property in America: Claims, Creativity, Copyright

Across numerous disciplines, scholars continue to grapple with property as a central organizing feature of North American culture, past and present. Definitions of property thus range from ownership over tangible as well as intangible objects and proprietary rights to understanding property as a holistic system that shapes an array of social, cultural, and economic relations. Such a system is subject to the law. However, literature has been instrumental in (re)shaping legal conceptions of property while simultaneously constituting an intangible form of property itself. Literary forms such as the antebellum slave narrative, for instance, were key in abolishing property regimes of enslavement. And over the course of the long nineteenth century, American writers and publishers were mobilizing new politics of authorship to claim creative labor as “literary property” by law.

As members of the [Collaborative Research Center “Law and Literature,”](#) we adopt and adapt the term “literary property” to investigate historical and contemporary dynamics between property and literature. When, where, and how does literature become recognized as property—and by whom? How do different strands of literature aesthetically and politically engage with questions of ownership? How are competing notions of creativity—as individual or collective cultural property—negotiated in legal discourses and larger public debates? Under what circumstances is copyright understood as protection, property, or as complicit with exploitative, oppressive structures?

We plan on submitting the finalized contributions as an essay collection to [De Gruyter’s Law & Literature series.](#) The essay collection will be edited by Cedric Essi, Fenja Heisig and Debora Stanca and published in Summer 2024. While we are particularly interested in the general concept of literary property in America, we welcome theoretical contributions as well as transnational approaches to property from a variety of disciplines, methodological angles, and historical time frames.

Contributions can focus on but are not limited to the following questions:

- In what ways is literary property embedded in larger regimes of property as a system of social relations?
- How are legal and cultural conceptions of literary property informed by regimes of race, gender, class and sexuality?
- How is literary property connected to other (in)tangible forms of property?
- How did the formation of literary property prefigure modern forms of copyright, patent, and IP law?
- Since property is deeply connected to questions of citizenship, what does literary property, in particular, tell us about the (re)making of citizenship in America?
- How is literary property entangled with questions of settler colonialism, enslavement and their ongoing aftermath?

To apply for the publication, **please send an abstract of 300 words, double-spaced, along with a one-page CV in one pdf to literaryproperty2023@gmail.com by September 15, 2023.** The abstract should outline your plans for a full-length article. You will receive a response within two weeks. Full manuscripts of 5000-6000 words (excluding the list of works cited) will be **due on January 31, 2024.**