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**January 8, 2025**

Search Committee  
Center for the Humanities  
Tufts University  
48 Professors Row  
Medford, MA 02155

**Dear Members of the Search Committee,**

I am writing to express my enthusiastic interest in the Mellon Foundation Postdoctoral Fellowship at the Center for the Humanities at Tufts University, beginning July 2025. With a Ph.D. in History from the University of Missouri (2024) and a research focus at the intersection of environmental, intellectual, and economic history, my work critically examines the socio-ecological transformations shaped by knowledge production and resource commodification. This fellowship offers an exciting opportunity to contribute to the collaborative research project University Ecologies and the Question of the Commons, aligning deeply with my expertise in public history, environmental justice, and the histories of land use and dispossession.

My scholarship interrogates the environmental impacts of colonial and industrial systems of knowledge production. My book project, Reciprocities Market: Ecology and Economy of John Bartram’s Trans-Atlantic Botanical Subscription Service, traces how 18th-century transatlantic botanical exchanges commodified ecological knowledge and transformed landscapes into economic assets. This research highlights the extractive dynamics of early capitalist systems, grounded in dispossession, enslaved labor, and environmental exploitation alongside the genesis of utilitarian knowledge. By employing digital tools such as ArcGIS and NVivo, I connect intellectual production to ecological and material landscapes, examining how knowledge networks emanating out of North America shaped as much as facilitated the solidification of market centered socio-environmental hierarchies in knowledge networks across Europe.

My public facing work centers public engagement and collaboration with communities impacted by historical inequalities. As project lead for Madison Historical, a digital archive initiative, I partnered with de-industrialized local communities to digitize and preserve oral histories and archival materials, creating an accessible platform for exploring regional environmental and social histories. This experience underscores my commitment to collaborative methodologies that amplify marginalized voices and challenge traditional hierarchies of knowledge production. Additionally, my background in museum studies and archival curation informs my ability to work across interdisciplinary frameworks and media, skills

The Mellon Fellowship’s emphasis on reimagining university ecologies aligns with my commitment to exploring the legacies of land use and appropriative knowledge. My work critically examines the intersections of property regimes, scientific labor, and environmental exploitation, offering historical context to contemporary debates relevant to the idea of the commons.

Beyond the fellowship’s collaborative focus, the opportunity to advance my own research is especially compelling. Building on my current projects, I aim to further explore the ecological and social impacts of institutional land use, including the ways universities have shaped agricultural landscapes, supported extractive labor systems, and defined hierarchies of ecological and intellectual value. Tufts’ vibrant intellectual community and the Center for the Humanities’ commitment to interdisciplinary dialogue provide an ideal environment for refining these inquiries and contributing to broader conversations about the university’s role in fostering equitable and sustainable futures.

Thank you for considering my application. I am eager to bring my expertise in environmental history, digital humanities, and public history to the Center for the Humanities at Tufts University. I look forward to the opportunity to discuss how my background and skills align with the goals of University Ecologies and the Question of the Commons.

**Sincerely,**  
Shannan Catherine Mason, Ph.D.