



## A BOOK DISCUSSION GUIDE

for *Zoo Renewal: White Flight and the Animal Ghetto* by Lisa Uddin

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lisa Uddin is Assistant Professor of Art History and Visual Culture Studies at Whitman College where she teaches courses in visual culture, architecture and urbanism, and race and ethnic studies. Her writing on the human/nonhuman interface in American visual culture and the built environment have appeared in a number of journals, including *Parallax*, *Topia*, *Humanimalia*, *Public: Art/Culture/Ideas*, and *Afterimage*.

### PRAISE FOR ZOO RENEWAL

“Lisa Uddin’s highly original and compelling argument considers modern zoos as phenomena of urban, suburban, and exurban hopes and fears. The book makes clear that ever-more-ambitious plans to build a finally great zoo are deeply tied to our desires not for a better life for captive animals but for a better life for ourselves.”

—NIGEL ROTHFELS, author of *Savages and Beasts: The Birth of the Modern Zoo*

### CONTEXT FOR ZOO RENEWAL

Americans and other zoo goers are familiar with a postwar narrative of zoo reform that charts a shift from “naked cages” to more “naturalistic” enclosures and renewed emphasis on global wildlife conservation. In *Zoo Renewal*, Lisa Uddin foregrounds the urban racial dynamics that underwrote these improvements, demonstrating how efforts to make the zoo more natural reflected white racial fears about the inner city and desires to suburbanize. Approaching change as a discursive shift as much as a material one, *Zoo Renewal* moves from a multi-sited campaign against zoo cages to reform campaigns at Washington DC’s National Zoo and the San Diego Zoo in the 1960s and 70s. In the process, Uddin unpacks episodes that challenge assumptions that zoos are about other worlds and other creatures and expand the history of U.S. urbanism. Confronting prevailing ideas about public

animal display, Uddin provides a new set of questions: Where did zoo animals belong in struggles over urban decay, rebirth, and suburban growth? Which spaces, and which species, abetted wider processes of white racial formation? The story that emerges reveals the complex entanglements of rare and endangered animals with the experiences of postwar American whiteness. In so doing, *Zoo Renewal* ultimately reveals how feeling bad, or good, at the zoo is connected to our feelings about American cities and their residents.

This book will interest urbanists, architectural historians, and a growing audience of cultural critics and workers attuned to the “question of the animal.” Historians of science and the environment will also find this work engaging for how it orients wildlife conservation towards the racial registers of American urbanism.

## **ZOO RENEWAL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. What do people expect from modern zoos? What do *you*? Why do zoos sometimes fail to meet those expectations? How does Uddin address these questions?
2. Are modern zoos primarily about wildlife and wildlife conservation? What are the roots and implications of that assumption? Which zoo exhibits, images or stories complicate that assumption?
3. What does Uddin mean by characterizing *Zoo Renewal* as a “counternarrative”? Do you think her narrative negates the possibility of building a better zoo? Consider how your local or regional zoo positions itself today. How might you call that position into question?
4. What are the connections between the revitalization of zoos in the 1960s and 70s and processes of urban renewal in the United States? How have zoos been similar to and distinct from other forms of U.S. urban redevelopment? How can zoos add to or revise existing histories of urban renewal?
5. Is the “naked cage” model of animal display intrinsically bad? Why or why not? How might a postwar zoo reformer respond to this question?

6. How have zoos continued and expanded patterns of racial identity formation? Which identities have been historically privileged in the zoo's built environment? How do zoo exhibits come to express specific racial meanings? Which meanings?
7. Are zoos always meaningful? How so, and to whom? Reflect on the ways that captive animals have embodied and eluded human meanings. How might you navigate this tension as a zoo goer? Critic? Historian? Designer?
8. Do you think Dr. Theodore Reed was wise to label the National Zoo a "zoological slum"? Why or why not? What other terms and ideas might have been used instead, and to what effect?
9. How did zoo officials and advocates characterize the renewal of the San Diego Zoo? In what ways was the built environment of Southern California reflected in the zoo's revitalization?
10. How were white tigers and white rhinos instrumental to postwar zoo reform? Which species would you rather be? Explain your desires and reasoning.
11. Assess the controversy over the Maasai Journey exhibit at Seattle's Woodland Park Zoo. Which responses to the exhibit do you find most striking, and why? What do you think of exhibits that include living humans, or their traces, as part of wildlife conservation education?
12. What value, if any, do you ascribe to zoos today? What makes a good zoo? Draft a master plan for an existing mid-sized American zoo. What are the key principles of your design? Which animals would you include? How does your scheme make visible, or conceal, its urbanism – aesthetically, materially, symbolically, socially?

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