

*HISTORY AS IDEA*

NEBRASKA  
STATE  
HISTORICAL  
SOCIETY

2010



## ARTIST'S STATEMENT

The modernist architecture of the building that houses the Nebraska State Historical Society was the primary and overarching consideration in the formal organization of our installation. The piece has been embedded into the existing structure, but we have also worked with the staff of the Historical Society to reinstate the original lighting plan, in order to fully realize the original intent of the architect, Ellery Davis.

Our view of history is that it is not reducible down to a series of “facts.” It is not objective. It is never comprehensive. Many voices are necessarily left out in the re-telling of any historical narrative. It is a rich maelstrom of competing views in much the same way that art is.

The role of art is not to make a series of statements, but to engage dialogue. *Industry of the Ordinary* intend this work to engage in a dialogue about history in general terms and Nebraskan history more specifically. It does not need to reproduce the job already successfully undertaken by the Historical Society and its museum or, indeed, any other institution or collection that celebrates the history of Nebraska.

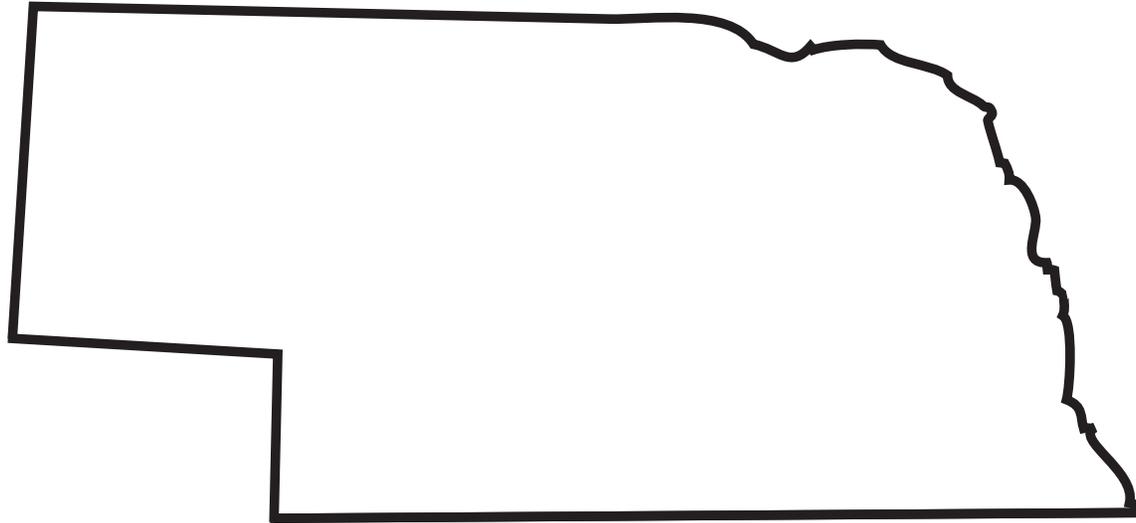
This booklet itself becomes an integral component of the project as it surveys the content of this work and elaborates upon each individual panel, beginning with the panel to the right of the entrance to the Nebraska State Historical Society building.

Adam Brooks and Mathew Wilson  
Industry of the Ordinary



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By definition, History cannot be all-inclusive. A space must be created to allow anyone to bring their personal experience and understanding to the inevitably malleable flow of recorded and unrecorded events.



Bordered primarily by straight lines, Nebraska's physical form is a unique portrait of the political, social, economic and military journey it took to statehood. Topography and nature, as is often the case, are an afterthought.

Color choice is taken from a photograph that Industry of the Ordinary took of fossilized rhinoceros tracks at Agate Fossil Beds National Monument, near Harrison.

# NATIVE

OJAWAHA PONCA WINNEBAGO SANTEE SIOUX PAWNEE APACHE  
CHEYENNE-ARAPAHO OGLALA-LAKOTA IOWAY OTO-MISSOURIA

Over the past millennia, various indigenous peoples have occupied or traversed the land now known as Nebraska.  
These are some whose names are known.

Color choice is taken from a photograph that Industry of the Ordinary  
took of the Oglala-Lakota leader Red Cloud's jacket.

X

*Learn to see, listen  
and think for yourself*

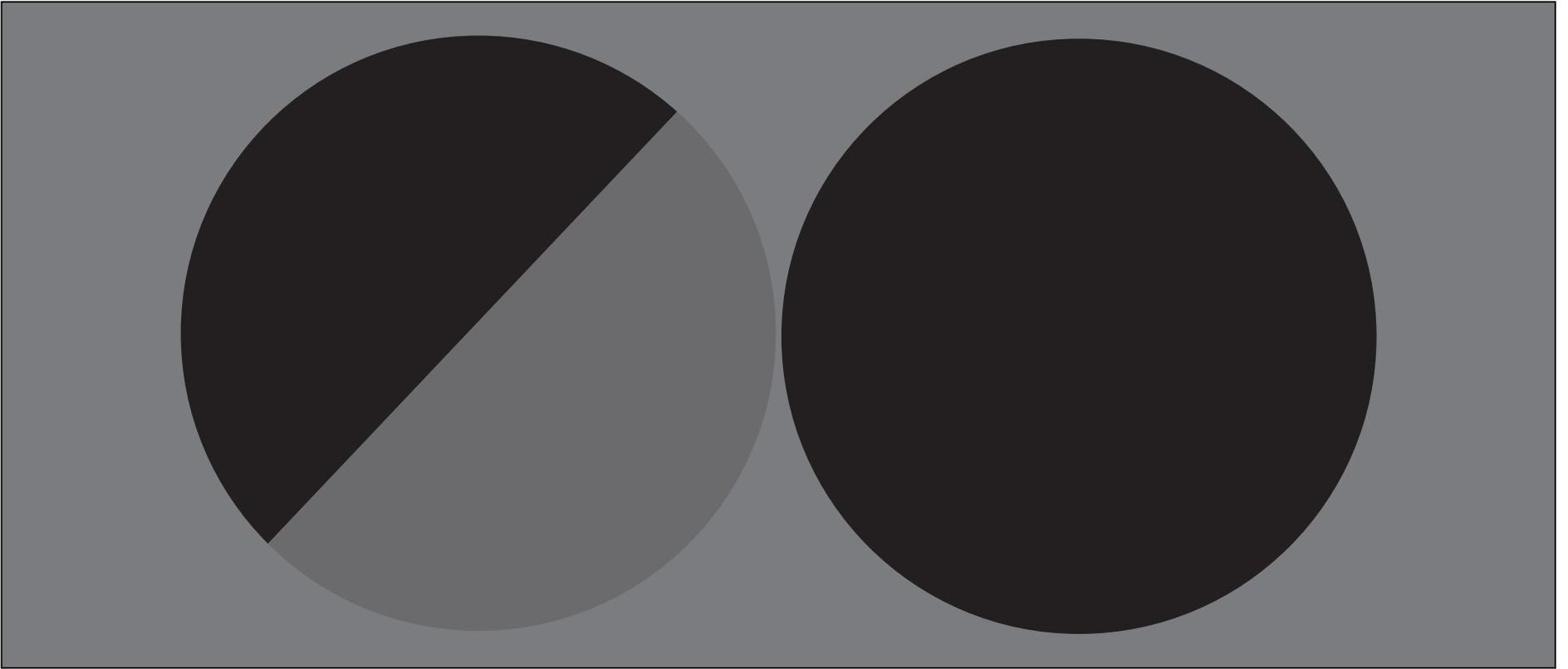
Many famous individuals have been born in Nebraska. Many have made their reputations elsewhere.

Few more controversial figures have been born in this state than Malcolm Little,  
more commonly known as Malcolm X.

This quote from Malcolm X reveals a thoughtful and complex individual.

Color choice is taken from a photograph of the signage outside  
the *Omaha Star* newspaper in the neighborhood where Malcolm X lived.

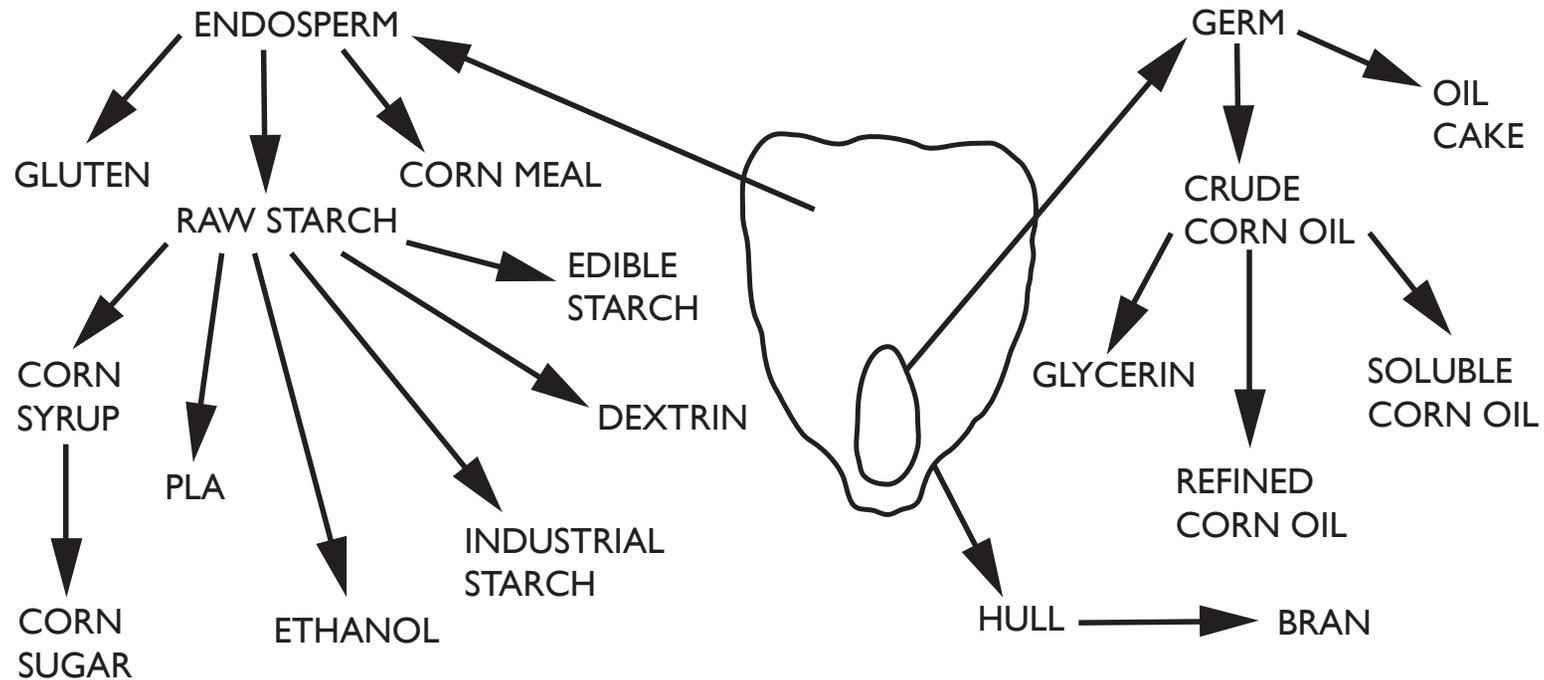
# WATERLAND



Some areas of the state are not naturally conducive to the growing of crops.  
Yet through engineering invention, dependable water is brought to this landscape.  
This panel shows a stylized aerial portrait of some of these endeavors.

Color choices are taken from a photograph that Industry of the Ordinary took of the grasses growing by the Niobrara River near the Agate Fossil Beds National Monument.

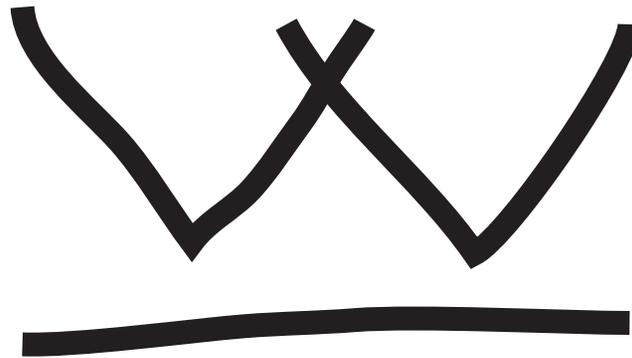
# ADAPT



The presence of corn in Nebraska is ubiquitous and unavoidable. Yet this “miracle” grass has multiple applications, and is the principle source for products and materials as varied as adhesives, aluminum, antibiotics, aspirin, automobiles, baby food, batteries, beer, breakfast cereals, candies, canned vegetables, carbonated beverages, cheese spreads, chewing gum, chocolate products, cosmetics, crayons and chalk, degradable plastics, disposable diapers, dyes, edible oils, ethanol, explosives, flour, frozen foods, fructose, gypsum wallboard, inks, insecticides, instant coffee and tea, insulation, ketchup, latex paint, livestock feed, margarine, mayonnaise, paper, pharmaceuticals, printed coatings on wood, paper and metal, rugs and carpets, salad dressings, shaving cream and lotions, shoe polish, soaps and cleaners, soft drinks, starch and glucose, tacos and tortillas, textiles, toothpaste, wallpaper, and whiskey.

Color choice is taken from a photograph that Industry of the Ordinary took of a grain silo outside of Lincoln.

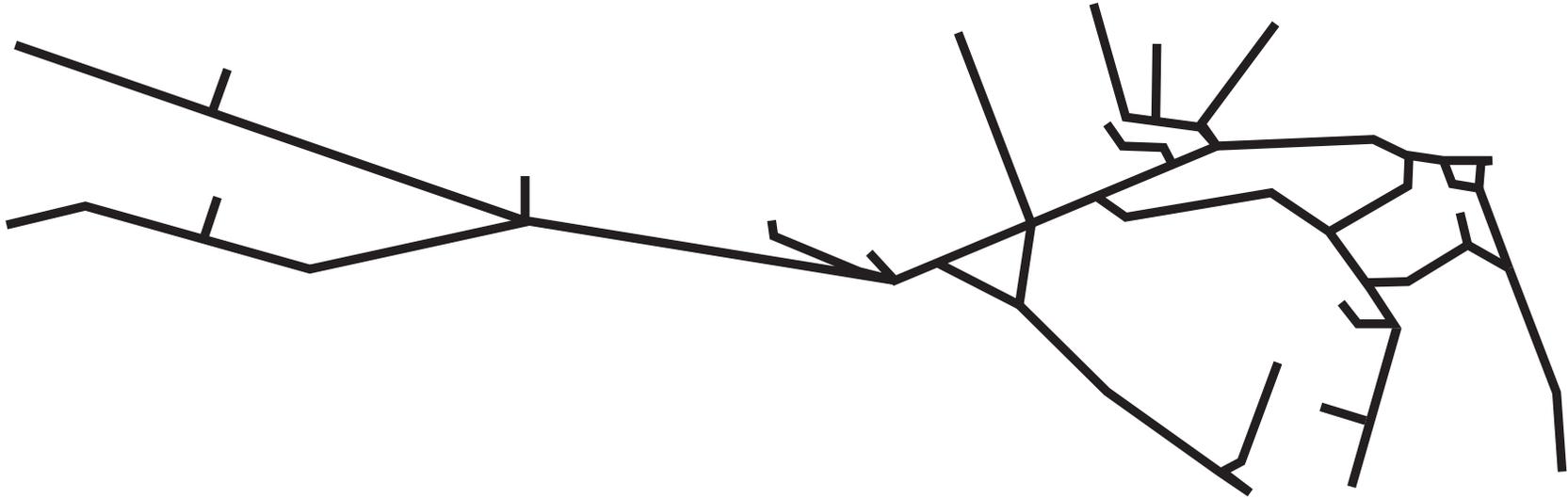
# CLAIM



Marks on animals as well as marks on the land denote territory or possessions. Through burning a mark into the flesh of an animal, the first ranchers laid claim to their wealth. This panel shows the first brand registered (18 January 1887, to Mrs. Annie Walker) in the cattle country of Sioux County.

Color choice is taken from a photograph that Industry of the Ordinary took of a heifer near Chimney Rock.

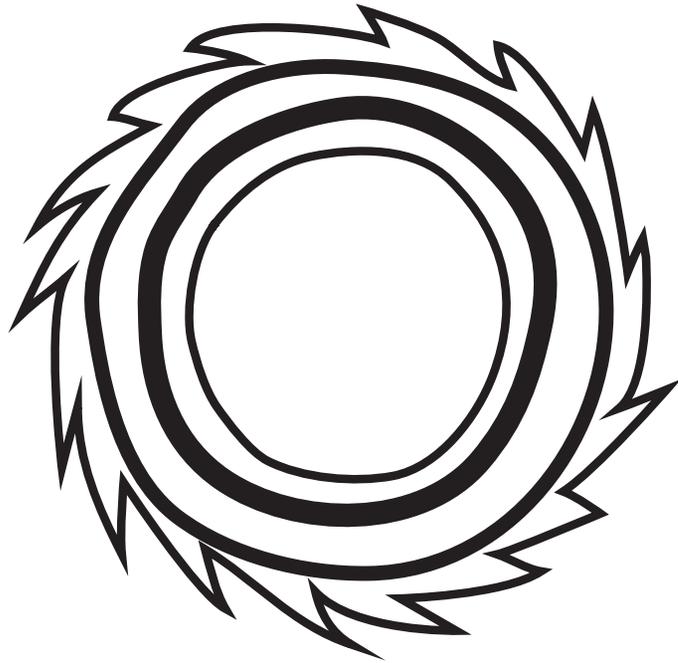
# ACCESS



Trans-continental trade has always existed in the Americas. During the 19th century, the railroad facilitated the exploitation of natural resources in the West and sated the appetites of those in the East. Nebraska became the thoroughfare and crossroads for interstate commerce. Indeed, the world's largest railyard is found in North Platte.

Color choice is taken from a photograph that Industry of the Ordinary took of a piece of indigenous turquoise jewelry in the Historical Society Museum in Lincoln.

# ORDER



Civilization demands control. Representations of this control and order are depicted by a native American pictogram for the beginning of the universe, and a roundel emblazoned on U. S. planes during the Second World War. These planes included the *Enola Gay*, which was built in Nebraska.

Color choice is taken from a photograph that Industry of the Ordinary took of an image of Lt. Levi Robinson, a casualty of the Plains Wars, for whom Fort Robinson was named.

# DESTINY

I<sup>N</sup>DE UWATHA TA (Omaha)

SUERTE (Spanish)

DESTIN (French)

NDOGOLU YALLA (Wolof)

命運 (Chinese)

OSUD (Czech)

BESTIMMUNG (German)

PRZEZNACZENIE (Polish)

ÖDE (Swedish)

גורל (Hebrew)

DESTINO (Italian)

運命 (Japanese)

운명 (Korean)

ΠΡΟΟΡΙΣΜΟΣ (Greek)

VẬN MỆNH (Vietnamese)

LAWV TXUJMOO (Hmong)

AYATIIN (Somali)

مصير (Arabic)

The settlement and industrialization of the territory, which subsequently became the State of Nebraska, prompted the influx of a myriad of different nationalities from around the world seeking a better future. The word DESTINY is translated into the mother tongues of major migrant groups, who continue to arrive in Nebraska to this day.

Color choice is taken from a photograph that Industry of the Ordinary took of the sky reflected in Lake McConaughy.

# TIME

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1541 – Spanish explorer Francisco Vasquez de Coronado led an expedition across the North American Southwest into present-day Kansas. He claimed the entire territory for Spain.

1682 – French explorer René-Robert Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle, travelled down the Mississippi River to its mouth. He claimed all the land drained by the Mississippi, as well as its tributaries, for France.

1714 – Étienne Veniard de Bourgmont was the first recorded European to visit what would become Nebraska.

1763 – *Treaty of Paris*. All land west of the Mississippi River became Spanish.

1789 – Juan Munier met the Ponca Indians living near the mouth of the Niobrara River. He was given exclusive trading rights with the Poncas by the Spanish.

1800 – *Treaty of San Ildefonso*. The Spanish found it too costly to explore this new country and returned it to France.

1803 – The U.S. acquired the area from France as part of the Louisiana Purchase.

1804 – Lewis and Clark travelled along the eastern edge of Nebraska.

1819 – The U.S. Army established Nebraska's first military post at Fort Atkinson.

1823 – Council Bluffs Indian Agency at Bellevue spurred permanent settlement in Nebraska.

1830 – The *Indian Removal Act* allowed the U.S. government to relocate Native Americans west of the Mississippi River.

1834 – The *Trade and Intercourse Act* prohibited whites from trespassing on Native American lands west of the Mississippi River.

1842 – The word "Nebraska" first began to appear in publications when John Fremont explored the Platte Valley and used the Indian name.

1844 – The first bill to organize the new Nebraska Territory, introduced in Congress on December 17, by Illinois Representative Stephen Douglas, failed to pass.

1854 – The *Kansas-Nebraska Act* was passed by the U.S. Congress on May 25.

It allowed people in the territories of Kansas and Nebraska to decide for themselves whether or not to allow slavery within their borders. The Act served to repeal the *Missouri Compromise* of 1820 which prohibited slavery north of latitude 36°30'.

1862 – The *Homestead Act* and the *Pacific Railroad Act* were passed.

1867 – Nebraska joined the Union as the 37th state on March 1, 1867.

1868 – Lincoln replaced Omaha as the state capital. Oglala-Lakota leader Red Cloud and other tribal leaders signed the *Treaty of Fort Laramie*.

1869 – The Union Pacific Railroad was completed; the eastern terminus was at Omaha.

1870 – Robert Anderson was the first black person to homestead in Nebraska.

1875 – A new state constitution was adopted.

1895 – Silas Robbins was the first black person to be admitted to the Nebraska State Bar Association.

1902 – The *Reclamation Act* earmarked federal aid for irrigation projects.

1933 – Governor Charles Bryan imposed a moratorium on farm foreclosures.

1937 – The unicameral state legislature held its first session.

1944 – Congress passed the *Pick-Sloan Missouri Basin Project*, which authorized the creation of flood control dams, reservoirs and hydroelectric plants in states drained by the Missouri River, including Nebraska.

1948 – Strategic Air Command established headquarters near Omaha.

1963 – Demonstrations in Omaha led to the creation of the *Citizens Civic Committee for Civil Liberties*, or 4CL, and the *Omaha Human Rights Commission*.

1982 – *Initiative 300* prohibited individual farmers from selling their land to corporations.

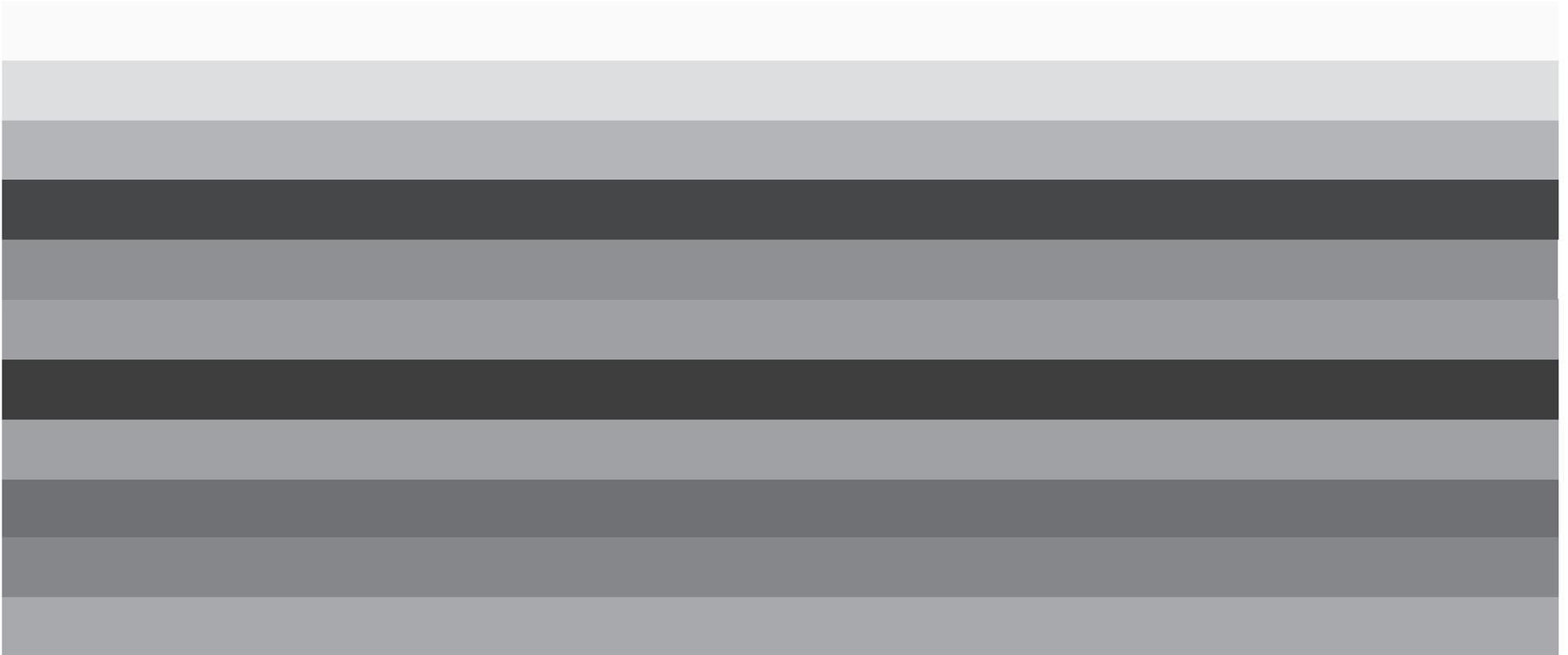
2010 – City of Fremont passed referendum to require all renters to provide information regarding their immigration status to the police department in order to obtain occupancy licenses.

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Like a fingerprint, the list of dates recorded and deemed important in any state is unique, and its idiosyncrasy is central to the idea of History and its construction.

Color choice is taken from a photograph that Industry of the Ordinary took of the limestone used to construct the Nebraska State Historical Society and the State Capitol.

# STRATA



The passage of time is measured in different ways. The age of the world can be inferred from sacred texts or read from the rock beneath our feet. Whether one's culture considers the world thousands or billions of years old, our understanding of the history of a place is informed by the multiplicity of geologic, social, cultural and political events that have shaped it, layered one upon another.

Color choices are taken from all of the other panels layered sequentially. The color of the text STRATA is made up of all of these colors mixed together.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many people have been integral to the conception and production of this project.

Alexa Loftus, for her patient transcriptions and overall assistance.

The selection committee for this project (Sharon Kennedy, Sheldon Museum of Art; Robert Peters, NSHS Board of Trustees; Michael Smith, Bob Puschendorf and Lynne Ireland, NSHS staff) for putting their faith in our conception and ability to produce a work that departed from a conventional pictorial, timeline-based representation of Nebraska history.

Jay Kaser, Don Denton and Michael Trotter, for their responsiveness to our plans and for the execution of crucial components of the finished work.

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J. D. Hutton, Artist Services and Communications Manager, and Deborah Teamer Bunting, Heritage Arts Manager, Nebraska Arts Council, for their insightful and appropriate suggestions for outreach and connectivity with individuals and organizations.

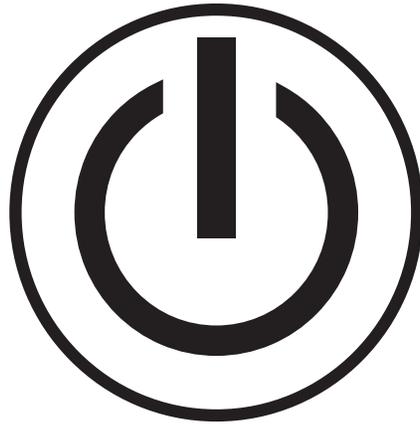
Mark Hertig, Museum Curator, Agate Fossil Beds National Monument, and Dawn Little Sky, for providing specific information pertaining to traditional symbolic imagery.

John Carter, Senior Research Folklorist at the Nebraska State Historical Society and Tom Buecker, Curator, Fort Robinson Museum, for their insights about the wide range of Nebraska experience.

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Finally, our thanks go to the many Nebraskans to whom we talked over the course of the spring and summer of 2010, from one end of the state to the other. Without their candid, insightful and often contradictory perspectives on the state and its history, this project would not have been possible.

Commissioned by the Nebraska State Historical Society under the Nebraska 1% for Art Program for its Headquarters Building as authorized in Nebraska State Statute and administered by the Nebraska Arts Council.



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