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AMERICAN HISTORIANS AND INDIANS

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ABSTRACT. *United States's historians are almost alone in the scholarly world in using the term 'Indian' to describe the original inhabitants of the landmass that came to be called the Americas. The term is an artefact of Christopher Columbus's imagination, and it conditions American historiography in ways that reflect the particular logic of the first contact that Columbus initiated. This review draws upon several recent books in native history, as well as a few older ones, to explicate how Columbian logic has informed the evolution of such scholarship and to suggest new ways of thinking about contact, colonization, and acculturation in the Americas. The concept of 'creolization', developed by francophone and anglophone scholars in the Caribbean, it is argued, offers a particularly interesting and constructive way to imagine a different history of America's first and second peoples.*

With the patronage of Isabella the Catholic, queen of Castile, and her husband King Fernando of Aragón, Christopher Columbus carried Spain's expansionist impulses westwards to an unknown, but wholly anticipated, region that medieval cosmographers had associated with health, happiness, and paradise. Indeed, as Columbus tracked the expanses of the open Atlantic during the three voyages he made to the Indies, he thought himself closer and closer to a holy paradise that sat atop not the spherical earth of Aristotle and Ptolemy, but one that was pear-shaped or, better yet, pendulous like a woman's breast. The cyclopes, cannibals, and other inversions of the natural order that had inhabited the antipodal lands since antiquity were, however, another matter entirely. To his sovereigns, the 'lovers and promoters of the Holy Christian Faith, and enemies of the false doctrines of Mahomet and of all idolatries and heresies', Columbus pledged fealty and promised to continue across the seas what the assault on the Alhambra had finished.[1]

The great sailor navigated the western seas by dead reckoning, inferring what was not known – his actual position – from what was known – the speed at which he was moving and his ship's relationship to the path the sun traced in the sky. The rhumb lines, compass roses, and meridians of the portolan charts he and others used to ply the Mediterranean and the shores of western Africa were of no use in the open Atlantic, and the farther he

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[1] Mary W. Helms, 'Long-distance contacts, elite aspirations, and the age of discovery in cosmological context', in Edward M. Schortman and Patricia A. Urban, eds., *Resources, power, and interregional interaction* (New York, 1992), pp. 167–9; Christopher Columbus, *The diario of Christopher Columbus's first voyage to America, 1492–1493*, trans. Oliver Dunn and James E. Kelley, Jr (Norman, 1989), p. 19; Anne McClintock, *Imperial leather: race, gender and sexuality in the colonial conquest* (New York, 1995), pp. 21–2; and Margarita Zamora, *Reading Columbus* (Berkeley, 1993), pp. 143–4, 174.

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sailed, the more his own mind determined the relationships of wind, sun, and water that bore him westward.[2]

The same navigational assumptions guided him through the worlds he entered. Only to locate himself on the ground he looked not to the sky but to histories, geographies, medieval compilations, and his memories to position what he saw in relationship to what he knew. Marco Polo had already named the land, and Columbus sought in vain Cathay, Quinsay, and Chipangu. The dwellings he spied through his eyeglass reminded him of the tents Moorish soldiers pitched on their campaigns. Pliny the Elder explained why the trees he saw were so large, Ptolemy and Aristotle enabled him to correlate latitude and the skin colour of the region's inhabitants, and Pierre d'Ailly's *Imago mundi* (1483) forced Columbus to reconcile what he saw with what the Bible taught. A host of other authors that crowded his shelves prepared him to believe that beyond the island that came to be called Cuba, he would find, he wrote, 'one-eyed men, and others, with snouts of dogs, who ate men'.[3]

But dead reckoning could only suggest links between fixed objects and fluid positions. The navigator's most primitive craft could not weave new things and old referents into a coherent order. Just a few days after sighting trees unlike anything to be seen in the Mediterranean, he confronted the limits of his knowledge of the world that faced him. 'But that I do not recognize them', he confided to his diary, 'burdens me with the greatest sorrow in the world.' Rather than yield to his own crisis of confidence, however, he made his own fate and his own world all the while believing that his god had handed him both. Wherever his crews made landfall ringing axes felled trees, cross-cut saws hewed timbers, and carpenters assembled crosses to sink into the beaches as if to cow the forests, the rivers, and the plains that opened before them, and to make real what they had imagined.[4]

The wooden crosses, Latin prayers, and linen flags that accompanied each ceremony of possession situated the places he saw within a mental map of dominion that he revised every time he rounded a point or sounded a shoal. And the knowledge he sustained through the names he bestowed on the land bent the unfathomable origins of the place he had entered to the known history of the Creation and the Crown that he served. As the days passed into weeks, though, the world he crafted moved farther and farther from what he might have read in Pliny or Aristotle, seen in the *mappae mundi* that graced the walls of the churches of Genoa, Lisbon, or Seville, or measured in navigational charts that stopped short at the far shores of the Canaries.[5]

[2] Robert Finley, *The accidental Indies* (Montréal, 2000), pp. 60–1.

[3] Seymour Phillips, 'The outer world of the European middle ages', in Stuart B. Schwartz, ed., *Implicit understandings: observing, reporting, and reflecting on the encounters between Europeans and other peoples in the early modern era* (Cambridge, 1994), p. 25; Columbus, *Diario*, pp. 69, 91–3, 145, quote on p. 133; Ashis Nandy, Zia Sardar, and Merryl Wyn Davies, *Barbaric others: a manifesto on Western racism* (Boulder, 1993), p. 53; Anthony Pagden, *European encounters with the New World: from Renaissance to Romanticism* (New Haven, 1993), pp. 47–8; and Peter Mason, *Deconstructing America: representations of the other* (London, 1990), p. 18.

[4] Alfred W. Crosby, *The Columbian exchange: biological and cultural consequences of 1492* (Westport, CT, 1972), p. 9; Miguel Angel Ledero Quesada, 'Spain, circa 1492: social values and structures', in Schwartz, ed., *Implicit understandings*, pp. 98–100; McClintock, *Leather*, p. 24; Zamora, *Reading*, p. 176; and Columbus, *Diario*, pp. 111, 157.

[5] Columbus, *Diario*, p. 235; McClintock, *Leather*, p. 28; Jamaica Kincaid, *My garden (book)* (New York, 1999), p. 155; and Mason, *Deconstructing America*, p. 17.

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The people he met posed a particular challenge. He called them *indios*, a term that reflected his own erroneous assumption about where he was and who he was seeing. But the meanings he attached to the term as he navigated the island seas came to denote so much more than a people who inhabited the Indies. The edenic qualities Columbus attributed to the islands he surveyed suggested that he wondered whether or not the Fall or the Flood had ever happened there. If they had not, the 'Indians' were a people who had lived outside of time as he understood it. And if they were innocent, their poverty, simplicity, and, ultimately, degradation made them ideal candidates for redemption before the One True Faith in vassalage to the Crowns of Castile and Aragón. As he reported to his sovereigns, the 'Indians' were 'fit to be ordered about and made to work, plant, and do everything else that may be needed, and build towns and be taught our customs', and, lastly, 'to go about clothed'.[6]

The place that Columbus brought into being, however, was neither blank nor empty, nor particularly new, for where he saw Muslim tents, medieval monsters, and the Garden of Eden, the people who lived there held altogether different conceptions of the land and of themselves. To limit the story of colonization to the narrative of the fall of the 'Indian' that so often follows from Columbus's voyages predetermines the outcome of the story and leaves unchallenged European notions of what the land and its possession meant. While explorers charted spiritual, gendered, and commercial cartographies, their encounters with other people and places unsettled the stability and veracity of the maps and the ideas that guided them. Columbus, for one, saw a people who lacked all conventional accoutrements of civilization, as he knew it, such as towns, laws, clothing, and a work ethic. We do not know what deficiencies his hosts saw in him. Probably a lack of generosity, a suite of bad manners, too much hair, and an unwillingness to become a part of their world that galled them every bit as much as their alleged indolence appalled him. But in order to contest the Eden and the 'Indians' that the invaders imagined and the very real processes that created the colonies, we need to know, in a fundamental way, how the Columbian moment has transfixed our historical gaze in one way while distracting us from other possible readings of the American past.[7]

Columbus has cast a long shadow over the field of American history and scholars still take refuge in his shade. Beginning with his *diario* and continuing through early chronicles by scholars such as Gabriel de Oviedo, cosmographers like André Thevet, and naturalists such as Thomas Hariot, each imperial power developed its own language to describe the people they saw and sought to dispossess.[8] Columbus coined *indio* while the French preferred *sauvage*. The early records of the English colony at Jamestown depicted 'salvages' who lived rude lives in the forest and 'infidels' who did the devil's bidding. Scholars, of course, no longer write about savages or infidels, but among today's national

[6] Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr, *The white man's Indian: images of the American Indian from Columbus to the present* (New York, 1978), p. 3; Ter Ellington, *The myth of the noble savage* (Berkeley, 2001), p. 12; Johannes Fabian, *Time and the other: how anthropology makes its object* (New York, 1983), passim; and Columbus, *Diario*, pp. 235–7.

[7] McClintock, *Leather*, pp. 1–3; Zamora, *Reading*, pp. 143–8; Helms, 'Long-distance contacts', pp. 171–2; and Marilou Awiakta, 'Daydreaming primal space', in Parks Lanier, Jr, ed., *The poetics of Appalachian space* (Knoxville, 1991), p. 194.

[8] Gabriel de Oviedo, *History of the Incas* (Cambridge, 1907); André Thévet, *La cosmographie universelle* (Paris, 1575); and Thomas Hariot, *A briefe and true report of the new found land of Virginia* (New York, 1972).

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historiographies, scholars in the United States are almost alone in their use of the term 'Indian'. Why?

Canadians now write of aboriginals, first peoples, and first nations while Latin American anthropologists and historians use various terms derived from indigene. It is important, then, to ponder the meaning of the word 'Indian' and the ways in which this foundational category, and its opposite 'white', have shaped the contours of United States historiography. Dichotomies are oppositions, anthropologist Neil Whitehead has written, 'that seem to demand, and permit, an answer but in fact are only methods of categorizing the processes of human change and expression that we are trying to conceptualize'.[9] As such, adversarial categories like 'Indian' and 'white' sustain a particular and exclusive view of the past and obscure other creative ways of posing and pondering questions about contact and colonization. We need a new historiographical language to wend our way out of the Columbian binary so that other possible pasts can rise to the horizon and lead us to new questions and new ways of thinking about our shared pasts.[10]

There is a vast historiography on 'Indians' in the United States that reaches back to the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century natural histories of William Bartram and Thomas Jefferson, the early nineteenth-century novels of James Fenimore Cooper and William Gilmore Simms, and the scholarly works of historians who came later in the century such as Francis Parkman and Frederick Jackson Turner.[11] What such intellectuals set in motion was a basic narrative born of memories of contact that pitted European 'civilization' against native 'savagery' leaving hale and hearty democrats in possession of both soundly beaten primitives and their land. In the 1970s Francis Jennings pulled the rug out from under 'Old Indian History' with the publication of *The invasion of America* in which he declared that age-old truths about the inevitability of conflict between 'Indians' and 'whites' and the triumph of the latter's civilization over the former's savagery were fantasies of the colonial and national mind.[12]

Still, 'Old Indian History' has proven durable. When, for example, Anthony Wallace wrote in 1999, 'Of all the tribes in Indiana, the Shawnees were probably most in need to the blessings of civilization', or when in 2000 John Sugden depicted the Shawnees' inability to resist the temptations of alcohol, they echoed some of the assumptions that had inspired George Washington and Andrew Jackson and others who had identified the 'clash of civilizations' as the 'Indian's' pre-eminent problem. Wallace's description of first peoples who valued sharing over accumulation as 'communitarian savages' is even more striking in this regard. In other cases 'Old Indian History's' hangover is not nearly so overt but it still remains. In his recent prize-winning book on the 'Indian' slave trade, Alan Gallay asserts at one point that the 'Choctaw had the potential to destroy' their enemies. He measures that potential, however, in terms of the number of men bearing firearms, not in reference to the diplomatic or cultural values to which Choctaw war leaders aspired. Instead, the

[9] Neil L. Whitehead, 'Introduction' in Whitehead, ed., *Histories and historicities in Amazonia* (Lincoln, NB, 2003), p. xii.

[10] Seaumas Heaney, trans., *Beowulf* (New York, 2000), pp. xxiv–xxv.

[11] William Bartram, *Travels of William Bartram* (New York, 1928); Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the state of Virginia* (Chapel Hill, 1955); James Fenimore Cooper, *The leatherstocking tales* (New York, 1985); William Gilmore Simms, *Early and strong sympathy: the Indian writings of William Gilmore Simms*, ed. John Caldwell Guilds and Charles Hudson (Athens, GA, 2003); Francis Parkman, *The conspiracy of Pontiac and the Indian war after the conquest of Canada* (Boston, MA, 1874); and Frederick Jackson Turner, *The frontier in American history* (New York, 1921).

[12] Francis Jennings, *The invasion of America: Indians, colonialism, and the cant of conquest* (Chapel Hill, 1975).

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presumption of some kind of martial spirit on the part of the Choctaws is a relic of the original idea of the *sauvage*. Gallay's conclusion that Europeans projected 'a more sophisticated social and political system in the region' likewise underlines a basic ethnocentric point of view towards people who held an entirely different set of values, beliefs, and practices. What makes one way of doing things more sophisticated than another when that other is only dimly understood?[13]

In *History's shadow* (2004), Steven Conn examines how scholars in the nineteenth-century United States thought about first peoples. Building on Robert Berkhofer's early work and Lucy Maddox's more recent investigation of 'Indians' as literary tropes, Conn finds that the idea of the 'Indian' played a formative role in the construction of the 'white' American. Moreover, by confronting particular indigenous ways of knowing and explaining the past – what were known then as myths and tales of fancy – American intellectuals had to move away from their Biblically informed view of the world to embrace a concept of time that was more linear, secular, and progressive than that held dear early in the century. With the subsequent rise of anthropology and ethnology, scholars removed 'Indians' even further from the historical narrative that Frederick Jackson Turner had imagined in his famous address on the significance of the frontier in American history. 'Indians' had become once again a people out of time, and because they were outside of time they were as well outside of the place that was the United States of America.[14]

Early critiques of the idea of the 'Indian' exposed any number of implicit colonialist assumptions captured by such a view of the past and of the people. Edmundo O'Gorman's inquiry into the construction of the idea of the 'New World' argued that calling people 'Indians' expelled them from the process of history and from ownership of the land. Indeed, without the use of the word 'Indian' the conceit of a 'New World' would not, he concluded, have been possible. Likewise, anthropologist Johannes Fabian has argued that when basic categories construct people out of time, in the sense Columbus meant when he described 'Indians' as inhabiting a kind of Eden that had never witnessed the Fall, the subjects of study cease to be historical humans and instead become exotic and ahistorical objects of wonder. Berkhofer's *The white man's Indian* (1978) tackled such issues head on by recovering the history of what 'Indian' meant and why its meaning changed over time. His work cautions us to consider more closely how the language of historiography has evolved so clearly out of the language of history. The book alerts us as well to the fact that whether or not 'Indian' meant bloody savage in the sixteenth century, pitiable object in the nineteenth, or environmental conservationist in the twentieth, it has always connoted a fundamental outsider status that is at once apart from the normal narrative of United States history and deeply implicated in the construction of such concepts as whiteness, civilization, and progress.[15]

[13] Anthony F. C. Wallace, *Jefferson and the Indians: the tragic fate of the first Americans* (Cambridge, MA, 1999), pp. 294, 299; John Sugden, *Blue Jacket: warrior of the Shawnees* (Lincoln, NB, 2000), p. 14; and Alan Gallay, *The Indian slave trade: the rise of the English empire in the American south, 1670–1717* (New Haven, 2002), pp. 13, 28.

[14] Steven Conn, *History's shadow: Native Americans and historical consciousness in the nineteenth century* (Chicago, 2004), and Lucy Maddox, *Removals: nineteenth-century American literature and the politics of Indian affairs* (New York, 1991), passim.

[15] Edmundo O'Gorman, *The invention of America; an inquiry into the historical nature of the New World and the meaning of its history* (Bloomington, 1961), and Berkhofer, *White man's Indian*.

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Recent studies, such as Conn's, that deconstruct the object of the 'Indian' rarely push beyond the object to explore the real people who found themselves depicted in paintings, books, and academic treatises as 'natural' people. Lucy Maddox's *Removals* (1991), for example, focuses on the 'Indian' as object leaving unexplored both their role in either influencing the form of such objectification or suffering under its weight. The social import of such ideas, however, is what sustained them, so any investigation of the idea of the 'Indian' that leaves out the people who were forced to wear the red mask belongs, in some ways, to the same genealogy such scholars purport to examine and to criticize. In this way, such books are revisionist but also very much a part of the uniquely American intellectual fetishism of the 'Indian'.[16]

At the other end of the spectrum stands what one might call 'American holocaust studies'. Scholars such as David Stannard, Ward Churchill, and, most recently, Barbara Alice Mann have in different ways shown how the same idea of the 'Indian' that underwrote benevolent reform organizations and romantic artistic movements enabled the perpetration of genocide whether at the hands of the Spaniards in sixteenth-century New Spain or at the bayonet points of tattered columns of colonial militia in the American Revolutionary War. Calling for a Truth and Justice tribunal for the Americas, Mann exposes George Washington's genocidal plans to win control of upstate New York and the Ohio country, the 'sheer murderousness' of the American past, and the ease with which colonials killed not fellow humans but 'Indians'.[17]

'Through continued use of the term Indian', Berkhofer asked, 'does the present-day White still subscribe to past stereotype?' In her recent study of historical memory in the Columbian Andes, anthropologist Joanne Rappaport answered affirmatively. More than a term, 'Indian', to Rappaport's mind, constituted an oppressive social reality for indigenous people. In both civic life and scholarship the power of 'Indian' has worked as a tool, she noted, 'for dominating Native Americans by denying them access to a knowledge of their own past'. These are not idle criticisms. While Daniel K. Richter's *Facing east from Indian country* (2001) has received a number of accolades for the powerful way in which Richter opened an eastern view of a past that historians have tended to see from the west, his use of Columbus's 'Indian' looms over the book, drawing a range of specific nations into one people or race whose existence as 'Indians' is predicated on the arrival of Europeans. To be sure, historians must be able to generalize, and while terms drawn from either native history such as 'real people' or 'true people' or others taken from contemporary politics such as 'first people' also threaten to obscure distinct cultures and identities, choosing the term 'Indian' places such a work squarely in the discourse of contact and 'Otherness' that Columbus inaugurated with his landfall in the Caribbean. Indeed, one might argue, there is no more westward-facing word than 'Indian', and its centrality to what is otherwise a carefully crafted eastern sensibility attests to the enduring power of the Columbian mind.[18]

[16] Maddox, *Removals*, passim.

[17] David Stannard, *American holocaust: the conquest of the New World* (New York, 1992); Ward Churchill, *A little matter of genocide: holocaust and denial in the Americas, 1492 to the present* (San Francisco, 1997); and Barbara Alice Mann, *George Washington's war on native America* (Westport, CT, 2005), p. 1.

[18] Berkhofer, *White man's Indian*, pp. 195, 29; Joanne Rappaport, *The politics of memory: native historical interpretation in the Columbian Andes* (Cambridge, 1990), p. 1; and Daniel K. Richter, *Facing east from Indian country: a native history of early America* (Cambridge, MA, 2001).

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Ethnohistorians have sought to move away from objectifying first peoples in order to ascertain the motivations, biases, and beliefs that impelled their stories of contact, accommodation, and conquest. Born of investigations undertaken by anthropologists in a series of land claims cases in the 1950s, the ethnohistorical method braids anthropological assumptions about culture and the nature of its persistence and change together with historical research in archives about past peoples. With the achievement of more fully realized histories of first peoples, the old themes of conquest and assimilation have fallen away leaving scholars to confront the persistence of first peoples and the challenges they pose today to past verities.[19]

Three recent histories have shown clearly just how important the ethnohistorical method has been to restoring balance to the field and how crucial early relations between first people and settlers were to both the local colonial scene and, more broadly, to the creation of colonial societies. In *At the crossroads* (2003), for example, Jane T. Merritt explores 'Indian–white' relations in and around the towns and missions of western Pennsylvania. In some respects her book follows a trajectory Richard White charted in *The middle ground* (1991): an early period characterized by negotiation and coexistence collapses amidst feelings of racial antipathy and mistrust that followed the end of the Seven Years' War. Pushing more deeply, however, Merritt moves beyond the 'Indian/white' dichotomy to explore the kinship ties built by blood and adoption, uniting settlers, Delawares, Mohawks, and others into a wide-ranging colonial family. Business interests, communities of faith, and respect for one another's diplomatic protocols enabled a thriving multicultural world to exist almost in defiance of the logic and imperative of being either 'Indian' or 'white'.[20]

David Silverman's study of the connections that knitted Wampanoags and New Englanders together on Martha's Vineyard, *Faith and boundaries* (2005), also sidesteps the old narrative of inevitable warfare, loss of land, and disappearance to explain how the praying towns founded by Thomas Mayhew and his Wampanoag counterparts persisted in spite of enormous pressures set against them. Likewise, Jeffrey Ostler's *The plains Sioux* (2004) sets aside previous stories that focused on such salient events in Sioux history such as their victory over the US army at Little Bighorn, Sitting Bull's efforts to resist federal policy, and the mass murder the people suffered at the hands of the army at Wounded Knee to reveal the interconnectedness of Sioux and United States history. What makes Ostler's approach novel is that he considers the expansion of the United States into the west as an act of colonialism. Whether or not Americans are willing to accept such a judgement is one of many interesting questions Ostler raises. To be sure, disparities in power impinged upon the Sioux's room to manoeuvre, but their resistance to federal policies of acculturation and their removal to reservations forced federal and military officials to make choices which, in turn, demanded further choices by Sioux leaders. In the end, Wounded Knee was not the inevitable culmination of decades of warfare and hostility but the outcome of a series of miscommunications, misunderstandings, and conscious choices made by each side.[21]

[19] James Axtell, 'Ethnohistory: an historian's viewpoint', *Ethnohistory*, 26 (1979), pp. 1–13.

[20] Jane T. Merritt, *At the crossroads: Indians & empires on a mid-Atlantic frontier, 1700–1763* (Chapel Hill, 2003), and Richard White, *The middle ground: Indians, empires, and republics in the Great Lakes region, 1650–1815* (Cambridge, 1991).

[21] David J. Silverman, *Faith and boundaries: colonists, Christianity, and community among the Wampanoag Indians of Martha's Vineyard, 1600–1871* (Cambridge, 2005), and Jeffrey Ostler, *The plains Sioux* (Cambridge, 2004).

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The humane touch Merritt, Ostler, and Silverman bring to their studies results in a focus not on 'Indians', though they each rely on that term as a kind of shorthand, but on particular communities. They each, however, in their own way, also situate their local subject matter in reference to popular American antipathies towards 'Indians'. Merritt contends that the Seven Years' War 'unleashed cultural fear', for it is clear that by demonizing Delawares in the 1760s the colonists were able to racialize first peoples across the region. Silverman found the same phenomenon nearly a century before in New England while Ostler carefully situates the Sioux in a similar context.[22]

What is most striking, however, is how, in both Silverman's and Merritt's studies, racial lines were drawn at precisely the same time as cultural lines were being blurred. The congregational Wampanoags that New Englanders could not bring themselves to trust and the Conestogas of Lexington county, Pennsylvania, who sported trousers and shirts along with English names like John, Anne, and Peter bespoke something that was happening on both sides of the contact experience. The problem, for these scholars and for others, is that while we tend to recognize the acculturation of 'Indians', the colonists' cultivation of maize, enjoyment of tobacco, and mutilation of enemies tend to be underappreciated as the other side of the acculturative flow. What we are often left with, then, are 'Indians' who become unrecognizable as 'Indians' and English folk who become American. Such an imbalance is a direct product of the 'Indian/white' dichotomy and the timelessness to which the 'Indian' is always subjected. Any lasting cultural convergence between the two is almost impossible to conceive.

Regardless of their respective successes in showing the degree to which the histories of such nations are implicated in the broader national history of the United States, studies like Merritt's, Silverman's, and Ostler's are still very much about 'whites' and 'Indians'. Indeed, for their novel and important extension of our ability to see the degree to which the history of first peoples and of the English colonies and the United States are intertwined, their analysis comes up short at the edges of the Columbian dichotomy. Merritt, for example, juxtaposes the 'ideal Indian' of the colonial mind with the 'actual Indians' who inhabited the borderlands. But 'Indian' is an ideal category. What is an *actual* 'Indian'?[23] Ostler draws upon two categories with deeply colonial roots. Like 'Indian', 'mixed blood' and 'full blood' are terms used today but such usage does not justify their historiographical utility. Indeed, as Theda Perdue and I have argued, the notion of native communities divided into discrete groups of 'mixed bloods' and 'full bloods' perpetuates a myth concocted in the early nineteenth century that the former were more disposed to acculturation than the latter owing to the mystical properties of blood. Bloodedness, however, rarely affords a reliable predictor of either cultural tendencies or political allegiances and is yet another historical racial relic that has found its way into modern historiographical language.[24]

The problem is that United States scholars lack an historiographical language to articulate the full extent of the blended worlds that Merritt, Silverman, and Ostler found. To position both Sioux and cavalrymen, Delawares and Quakers, and Wampanoags and Congregationalists as, on some level at least, members of a common society and culture that each side helped to create strikes me as the field's next great challenge, for here lies the

[22] Merritt, *At the crossroads*, pp. 196–7.

[23] Ibid., pp. 272, 41, and 169.

[24] Ostler, *Plains Sioux*, p. 230; Theda Perdue, '*Mixed blood' Indians: racial construction in the early south* (Athens, GA, 2003); and James Taylor Carson, *Searching for the bright path: the Mississippi Choctaws from prehistory to removal* (Lincoln, NB, 1999), pp. 86–9.

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last stubborn limit of Columbus's shadow – the inability to imagine social forms that can, as anthropologist Bernard Cohn put it, unite 'the European colonialist and the indigene … in one analytic field'. In Canada, Nathalie Zemon Davis has advocated *métis* as a term that might be shifted from its particular application to the descendants of fur trade marriages to Canadian society in general to connote the cultural mixing that has occurred over the past few centuries and that has confounded arbitrary lines of race and colour. R. Douglas Cope offered a similar insight in his study of Mexico City's plebian society. Scholars, he urged, should avoid accepting official or colonial views of the divisions of race.[25]

To accept such colonial views of race, as Rolena Adorno has argued, involves mutating historical categories into historiographical ones. The consequences are terrible, according to Adorno, because reinscribing colonial racial terminology obscures both historical and contemporary challenges to the colonial and neo-colonial orders.[26] Indeed, Silverman criticizes colonial leaders like Samuel Sewall and John Elliot for being 'willfully naïve' in their belief that settlers and first people could someday merge as a people. Popular 'Indian hating' offers, to Silverman, a more reasonable foundation upon which to assess the consequent course of social relations on Martha's Vineyard and in New England. But we need not be beholden to such a dark colonial legacy today. We have a choice, naïve as it may seem.[27]

Binary oppositions like 'white' versus 'Indian' or 'civilized' versus 'savage' expressed the tidy categories colonizers used to organize their thinking about the places they inhabited and the people they aspired to rule, but they foreclose any other kind of perspective. Indeed, the racial and cultural discourses of colonialism substitute the illusory simplicity of a phenotypically and behaviourally bounded and ordered society for the variety and complexity of the human relationships that actually constituted the colonial and nation-state societies of the Americas. The circularity and interconnectedness of historical and historiographical language, therefore, makes it difficult for scholars to break out of what Ashis Nandy has called 'the strict rules of historiography' that, in the American case at least, rest on a fundamental division of people into 'Indians' and 'whites'. Getting outside of such rules, Nandy argued, is imperative in order to uncover the multiple perspectives that were at work in past places. As well, scholars must avoid reinscribing the colonial categories that gave life to race and racism in the first place lest their works become the latest descendant in a long genealogy of racial reproduction that reaches back to the first exploration narratives and colonial chronicles.[28]

Members of various disciplines have raised serious objections to the usefulness of racial language in contemporary scholarship, but their caveats have not yet amounted to a

[25] Bernard S. Cohn, *An anthropologist among the historians and other essays* (Oxford, 1987), p. 44; Natalie Zemon Davis, 'Polarities, hybridities: what strategies for decentring', in Geraldine Warkentin and Carolyn Podruchny, eds., *Decentring the Renaissance: Canada and Europe in multidisciplinary perspective, 1500–1700* (Toronto, 2001), pp. 19–32; and R. Douglas Cope, *Limits of racial domination: plebeian society in colonial Mexico City, 1660–1720* (Madison, 1994), p. 6.

[26] Rolena Adorno, 'The indigenous ethnographer: the 'Indio Ladino' as historian and cultural mediator', in Schwartz, ed., *Implicit understandings*, p. 382.

[27] Silverman, *Faith and boundaries*, pp. 118–19.

[28] Martin S. Staum, *Labeling people: French scholars on society, race, and empire, 1815–1848* (Montréal, 2003); Ashis Nandy, 'History's forgotten doubles', *History and Theory*, 34 (May 1995), p. 50; and Abdul JanMohamed, 'The economy of Manichean allegory: the function of racial difference in colonialist literature', *Critical Inquiry* 12 (Autumn 1985), p. 62.

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thoroughgoing reconsideration of the place race holds in scholarly writing. Geographers Peter Jackson and Jane M. Jacobs, for example, noted that the pitfalls of the language of race revealed 'the internal vulnerability of colonialism, the way it folds in on itself by producing categories of difference which are not stable, [and which] will not remain "in place"'. Scholarship that unreflexively blurs colonial and modern preoccupations with Otherness, skin colour, and behaviour transforms colonial moments into what historian Thomas C. Holt has characterized as an ongoing '*means* of living'. The importance of race to modern scholarly discourse, anthropologist Laura Ann Stoler has agreed, 'may speak more to contemporary political agendas than to ambiguous colonial realities'. When we 'make up' people in particular ways, we set in motion certain processes that are dynamic, contested, and materially real but that constrain our view to one set of possibilities while obscuring other realities that other categories may open to our eyes. For race, the implications of how scholars make up people are powerful. 'Conceptual categories [like race]', Nandy has written, 'establish such complete hegemony over the domains they cover that alternative concepts related to the domain are literally banished from human consciousness'. The consequences are significant, for, as historian Emma Pérez warns, the 'result of such traditional approaches to history is that these spatio-temporal models enforce a type of colonialist historiography'.[29]

What are, historian Robert Blair St George has asked, 'The pasts we deem possible'?[30] One of the most promising means to answer such a challenge, in relation to the history of native North America, is to be found in the historiography and literature of the Caribbean whose practitioners see the inhabitants of the Americas as creoles more so than as 'Indians', 'whites', or 'blacks'. Both the Spanish and the Portuguese used 'creole', derived from the Latin verb *creare*, to create, to denote the animals, plants, and people that had been born in the Americas out of contact between the 'Old' world and the 'New', and enslaved people used the term to distinguish between those born in Africa and those born in America. Following from historic uses of the world creole, Raymond Relouzat recently defined creoles as people who adapted their beliefs and practices to the physical and social environment of post-contact America. To Veronica Marie Gregg, in her study of the fictional work of Jean Rhys, the creole persuasion neither denied nor overturned the materiality of power as practised in colonial contexts. Rather, it questioned and undermined the truths of the colonial order.[31]

Kamau Brathwaite's *Development of creole society in Jamaica, 1770–1820* (1971) offered the definitive statement on creolization as a form of colonial social formation. Writing in a

[29] Peter Jackson and Jane M. Jacobs, 'Editorial: post-colonialism and the politics of race', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 14 (Feb. 1996), p. 3; Thomas C. Holt, 'Marking: race, race-making, and the writing of history', *American Historical Review*, 100 (Feb. 1995), p. 12, emphasis in original; Ann Stoler, as quoted in John Beverley, *Subalternity and representation* (Durham, NC, 1999), p. 86; Ian Hacking, *The social construction of what?* (Cambridge, MA, 1996), pp. 165–8; Nandy, 'History's forgotten doubles', pp. 53–4; and Emma Pérez, *The decolonial imaginary: writing Chicanas into history* (Bloomington, 1999), p. 4.

[30] Robert Blair St George, 'Introduction', in St George, ed., *Possible pasts: becoming colonial in early America* (Cornell, 2000), p. 3.

[31] Sybil Klein, 'Introduction', in Klein, ed., *Creole: the history and legacy of Louisiana's free people of color* (Baton Rouge, 2000), pp. xiii–xv; Marvyn Bacigalupo, *A changing perspective: attitudes toward creole society in New Spain* (1521–1610) (London, 1981), p. 13; Raymond Relouzat, *Tradition orale et imaginaire créole* (Martinique, 1998), p. 15; and Veronica Marie Gregg, *Jean Rhys's historical imagination: reading and writing the creole* (Chapel Hill, 1995), p. 73.

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present marked by racial division and political unrest in Jamaica, Brathwaite sought to locate in the island's plantation past an elusive unity that could offset the prevailing polarities of blackness and whiteness. While giving due attention to the importance of the metropole and the Crown's other colonies in the Atlantic world, Brathwaite saw the generative power of Jamaican society in the sugar fields and the slave cabins where 'a cultural action – material, psychological, and spiritual – based upon the stimulus/response of individuals within the society to their environment and – as white/black, culturally discrete groups – to each other'. The contact could be cruel, but in this cruelty Brathwaite found another possibility. The failure of Jamaican society was not so much its reliance on the horrors of slavery to compel economic production but its inability to 'recognize … its own creativity'.[32] The society failed to understand its own creativity as creolization because of the mystifying powers of past and present racial thinking. By defining the basic structures of society in reference to race, colonizers and plantation owners had crafted a political, economic, and social system that was unable to accommodate the colonial situation on the ground. Bonds of practice that formed in the towns and plantations of the Jamaican countryside cut across lines of race and class, and the more time passed, the more the racial underpinnings of the society crumbled and threatened to give way in the face of creolization. But so long as past people and the scholars who studied them relied upon the language of race to understand their social relations, they perpetuated the power structures that the colonizers had created first in the plantation economy.

Brathwaite adopted creolization as an interpretive approach to revise the black/white model of the history of Jamaica. 'The process of creolization', he wrote, 'is a way of seeing the society, not in terms of white and black, master and slave, in separate nuclear units, but as contributory parts of a whole'. As one critic put it, Brathwaite's advocacy of *créolité* was 'less a discourse of resistance than a discourse claiming centrality'.[33]

The concept of creole, then, even if historians have tended to use it in conjunction with studies of African slavery in the Americas, can allow us to name the powerful cultural creativity that followed from contact between first peoples and Europeans, and, to be sure, Africans, so that even if the first nations in such histories disappear through disease, war, or confinement to reservations, the colonizers do not emerge from the contact situation untouched. So long as American scholars rely on categories like 'Indian' and 'white', however, they will be incapable of imagining each group's lasting impact on the other and the degree to which they founded together, through both conflict and accommodation, societies that were neither part 'white' nor part 'Indian' but wholly creole.

One of the important points Conn makes in his book *History's shadow* is that until scholars move beyond concept of first contact and accept that the millennia of human history that preceded Columbus matter to the comparatively brief fluorescence of the United States on the continent, we will be incapable of adequately situating the nation's historiography in reference to first peoples' histories. A number of scholars, however, have recently sought to find ways of transcending the 1492 baseline to reposition how we think of first peoples, their history, and how their stories fit in the broader narratives of the settler nations. In their reference guide to the field, *A companion to American Indian history* (2002), editors Philip J. Deloria and Neal Salisbury propose that 'Indian' history has moved from a subject of

[32] Edward Kamau Brathwaite, *Development of creole society in Jamaica, 1770–1820* (Oxford, 1971), pp. 296, 307.

[33] Ibid., p. 307, and Walter Mignolo, 'Colonial and postcolonial discourse: cultural critique or academic colonialism', *Latin American Research Review*, 28 (1993), p. 129.

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inquiry to a means of telling history that can bridge the wide gulf that continues to divide native from non-native. Their call for reflexive writing, however, is easier issued than met. Two of the essays in the book, for example, John E. Kicza's 'First contacts' and Gregory Evans Dowd's 'Wag the imperial dog: Indians and overseas empires in North America, 1650–1776' are organized around the different colonizing powers, rather than around the nations that greeted the Europeans. While they address the indigenous impact on the various colonies, the organizational premises of such essays have little relation to the narrative possibilities of the more indigenist approach for which the editors called.[34]

Indigenism, as described recently by anthropologist Jeffrey Sissons, is a current phenomenon whereby first peoples around the globe contest the imaginations of the post-settler states they inhabit, advocate their own claims to land and identity, and engage post-settler nations in dialogue about the past and the way it is remembered. While Sissons is most concerned with current politics in New Zealand, Australia, the United States, and Canada, his interests are increasingly shared by historians and other scholars concerned about the colonialism implicit in American historiography. What looms as particularly important is the recognizing first peoples' historicity, what anthropologist Raymond D. Fogelson called 'ethno-ethnohistory', and incorporating it into the historiography.[35]

Historicity involves recognizing the particular ways in which a society remembers and records its past. In his recent and challenging work *A forest of time* (2002), Peter Nabokov offers an exploration of aboriginal reckonings of history as a counterpoint to the standard linear story of progress that underlies much of United States history. Whether seen as legends or oral traditions, aboriginal forms of history, Nabokov argues, contain multiple voices and positions that are crucial to understanding the continental past. In a call to break down the basic division between 'Indian and non-Indian forms of history' Nabokov calls on scholars to 'temper the hegemony of Western historiography' by building into the practice of history a recognition of the value of what first people have to say. Their stories are more than narratives organized around series of meaningful events. They are, he argues, acts of 'philosophical, ideological, and symbolic creativity and synthesis' that need to be respected if American history is to be comprehended in its entirety. And such works are out there. See Georges Sioui's *For an Amerindian autohistory* (1992), Devon Mihesuah's edited collection *Natives and academics* (1998), Taiaiake Alfred's *Peace, power, righteousness* (1999), or Linda Tuhiwai Smith's *Decolonizing methodologies* (1999). We have at hand the tools to heed Salisbury's, DeLoria's, and Nabokov's calls to fashion post-colonial and post-national histories but it is up to us to put them to good use.[36]

In her recent exploration of 'Indian' intellectuals in the late nineteenth-century United States, *Citizen Indians* (2005), Lucy Maddox remarked that 'white' intellectuals of that time relied on 'Indian' as a 'generic category' and 'stylistic commonplace'. The same could be

[34] Philip J. Deloria and Neal Salisbury, *A companion to American Indian history* (Oxford, 2002).

[35] Jeffrey Sissons, *First peoples: indigenous cultures and their futures* (London, 2005), and Raymond D. Fogelson, 'The ethnohistory of events and nonevents', *Ethnohistory*, 36 (1989), pp. 133–47.

[36] Peter Nabokov, *A forest of time: American Indian ways of history* (Cambridge, 2002), pp. 234, 239, 237; Georges Sioui, *For an Amerindian autohistory: an essay on the foundation of a social ethic* (Montréal, 1992); Devon Mihesuah, ed., *Natives and academics: researching and writing about American Indians* (Lincoln, 1998); Taiaiake Alfred, *Peace, power, righteousness: an indigenous manifesto* (Oxford, 1999); and Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing methodologies: research and indigenous peoples* (London, 1999).

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said for historians' use of 'Indian' today. And what Maddox found, that 'the Indian of intellectual debate and the thousands of Indians whose futures awaited the outcome of the debate … often had little in common', is as true today as it was then.[37] No other fields of study in the history of the Americas reveal as clearly the origins of the western hemisphere's modern nation-states and societies than the ancient origins of American civilizations and their encounter with the nations of Europe and Africa. But so long as scholars hold to the old verities of 'white' and 'Indian' or, more bluntly, 'us' and 'them', we run all the risks of navigating by dead reckoning, of seeking Eden, and of never quite understanding the actual people and places we find in either the documents or the imaginations we use to reconstruct our past. A concept like creolization, however, can take us out of Columbus's shadow into the full light of day, afford a different way of viewing North America's past and present, and enable us to tell stories of creation rather than destruction.

[37] Lucy Maddox, *Citizen Indians: native American intellectuals, race & reform* (Ithaca, 2005), pp. 66, 88.

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