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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Mapping Indigenous Political Theory

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Abstract

Political theory has, until recently, exhibited a telling lack of interest in Indigenous thinkers and ideas. Remapping Sovereignty is an impressive history of twentieth-century political thought that follows recent efforts to correct this tendency. Remapping Sovereignty's unique strength lies in its focus on individual Indigenous political theorists. Temin presents these figures as sophisticated, systematic thinkers with specific, context-motivated agendas and stakes animating the ideas they articulated. Remapping Sovereignty balances careful historicism with an edifying showcase of how twentieth-century Indigenous political thinkers' situated ideas continue to offer generally valuable contributions to contemporary political theory. Temin's textual expositions and the historical context he provides for the conceptual lineage he reconstructs will, hopefully, push readers to exercise and demand more precision when invoking the still sometimes vague category of "Indigenous political theory."

Keywords: Indigenous activists; decolonization; civil rights; earthmaking; anticolonial thought

Political theory has, until recently, exhibited a telling lack of interest in Indigenous thinkers and ideas. *Remapping Sovereignty* is an impressive history of twentieth-century political thought that follows recent efforts to correct this tendency. Previous works have advanced this corrective largely through a focus on the legal architecture of state neglect of Indigenous political agency and the social movements that challenge these structures. *Remapping Sovereignty's* unique strength, by contrast, lies in its focus on individual Indigenous political theorists —Zitkala-Ša, Ella Deloria, Vine Deloria, Jr., George Manuel, Howard Adams, and Lee Maracle. Temin presents these figures as sophisticated, systematic thinkers with specific, context-motivated agendas and stakes animating the ideas they articulated. *Remapping Sovereignty* balances careful historicism with an edifying showcase of how twentieth-century Indigenous political thinkers' situated ideas continue to offer generally valuable contributions to contemporary political

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theory. Temin's textual expositions and the historical context he provides for the conceptual lineage he reconstructs will, hopefully, push readers to exercise and demand more precision when invoking the still sometimes vague category of "Indigenous political theory."

This achievement makes *Remapping Sovereignty* a helpful starting point for discussions about what it has historically meant to speak about Indigenous political theory, and how that history can and should inform the reading and citation of Indigenous political thinkers today. While political theory has largely neglected Indigenous peoples and their ideas, Indigenous authors have nevertheless quietly played an important role in the development of the canon for quite some time. Considering this tendency may help us to map Indigenous discourses of political thought with the precision that Temin models, while bearing in mind some of the problematic ways that political theory has historically framed the work of Indigenous political theorists.

Political theory and adjacent disciplines have only relatively recently begun to reconstruct the dialogue between Indigenous authors and the imperial worlds they inhabited. However, it has become clear that, between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, European and American political thinkers drew on their Indigenous counterparts in order to substantiate a variety of political critiques and horizons as solutions to national and imperial dilemmas. The Incan author Garcilaso de La Vega (1540–1616) and the Nahua historian Don Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl (c.1568–1640) were relatively widely read and cited sources of information about the original inhabitants of Peru and Mexico in early-modern European and American political thought. De La Vega was read by early Peruvian nationalists, and by Samuel Purchas, John Locke, and the nineteenth-century American historian William Henry Prescott.[1] Ixtlilxochitl was read by the early Mexican creole nationalist Carlos de Sigüenza y Gongorra, the Italian traveller Gemelli Carreri, and Prescott as well.[2] The Black and Pequot author and orator William Apess (1798–1839) was a well-known public figure in the early American republic whose writing and speeches helped to shape and sometimes contest common perceptions about Indigenous peoples in the nineteenth century. His work inspired critical sensibilities in nineteenth-century American imperialism later espoused by Henry David Thoreau and Herman Melville, particularly when these authors wrote about the original inhabitants of America, and he probably also offered an early model of how to publicly advocate for oppressed peoples in New England to a young Frederick Douglass, whose own public speaking career began close to the time of Apess's death.[3]

[1] D. A. Brading, *The First America: The Spanish Monarchy, Creole Patriots, and the Liberal State 1492–1867* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 255–72, 391–421; James Fuerst, "Locke and Inca Garcilaso: Subtexts, Politics, and European Expansion," in *Inca Garcilaso and Contemporary World-Making*, ed. Sara Castro-Klarén and Christian Fernández (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2016), 269–96.

[2] Brading, *The First America*, 273–92, 362–90; Jorge Canizares-Esguerra *How to Write a History of the New World: Histories, Epistemologies, and Identities in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 221–30.

[3] Alexander Keller Hirsch, "Agonism and Hope in William Apess's Native American Political Thought," *New Political Science* 39, no. 3 (2017): 393–411.

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The more well-known political thinkers who cited these authors usually did not do so to highlight the specific contextual stakes or sophistication of Alva's, Garcilaso's, or Apess's ideas. But on certain occasions these writings were held up as exemplary confirmations of early Enlightenment political philosophies, epistemologically authoritative and morally superior because of their authors' racial identities. De Sigüenza y Gongorra likened Alva to a "Mexican Cicero." Purchas and Locke frequently referred to Garcilaso, implicitly and explicitly, as a superior source of information about American Natives, their religion, and their forms of life which corroborated both their critique of Spanish imperial doctrine and their promotion of English imperial expansion. The primary value that Indigenous authors have held in the history of political thought then, has been as representatives of a wholly Other form of life whose Otherness affirms the new forms of philosophical and political identity particular European theorists have been intent on advancing. This background demonstrates the extent to which Indigenous political theory can be put forward as a marker of the authentic corroboration of any particular political position. *Remapping Sovereignty* avoids replicating this pattern for the most part.

At moments, however, Temin downplays important differences between authors' ideas and occasionally imputes more contemporary political sensibilities to earlier theorists. His reading of Ella Deloria's ideas paint her as a kind of traditionalist when her work, especially *Speaking of Indians*, offers a complex meditation on the challenge of balancing "traditionalism" with the ambition to "modernize" that characterizes most works of colonial and postcolonial thought (63–86). Indeed, much of the first chapter of *Speaking of Indians* is framed around this question. Vine Deloria is a very different kind of thinker in this regard, and a more explicit engagement with the divergent ways that aunt and nephew encountered and understood the role of religion in Indigenous society, development, and thought—particularly the Episcopalianism that shaped so much of both authors' lives—would help to highlight these important textures in each author's work. We could read Ella, in this sense, as struggling with the quandaries of establishing a more nuanced and complex set of relations between Christianity, modernity, Indigenous tradition, and the Native and settler societies forged and fractured through those worldviews. Vine, as Temin shows on the other hand, approached the question of Indigenous–settler relations from a much more Manichean perspective, one rooted in a strong theory that Indigenous societies were fundamentally shaped by religious traditions that bore absolutely no relation to the Christianity underpinning Western forms of social and political order, and that this made the two forms of life ultimately incompatible (47–62, 75–99). Highlighting this distinction would not necessarily negate the shared stakes, conceptual symmetries, and overlapping ideas between the Delorias or other Indigenous theorists that Temin masterfully maps throughout the work. But it would demonstrate that the roads leading to those similarities are winding, divergent, and do, on occasion, suggest differing political visions that are worth weighing against each other.

Discerning differences between authors' respective political stakes, visions, and rationales is crucial to determining, historically, where past theorists stand in relation to their own and our present and therefore, normatively, the extent to

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which we might accept or need to adapt their theories as in efforts respond to contemporary predicaments. *Remapping Sovereignty* makes a powerful case in favor of Indigenous political theory in the latter regard. But Temin occasionally misses the opportunity to offer a more nuanced reflection on how, as with virtually all theories of sovereignty, Indigenous remappings were not without their troublesome elements. In discussing what he calls Zitkala-Ša's and Vine Deloria's respective "neorepublican" theories of Indigenous sovereignty, Temin passes over these theories' tendency to cast themselves in relationship to strange ideas of Blackness—for example, Zitkala-Ša's invocation of slavery (against the backdrop of Jim Crow) in the epigraph to Chapter 1, and Deloria's notoriously prickly writings in *Custer* about the Civil Rights movement and the appropriate legal status for Black people in the United States (35–47, 50–55). What does this say about how those particular theories of Indigenous decolonization, potentially realized, might deal with the presence of a population of deracinated, formerly enslaved people in the Americas? How might their visions differ from what Temin notes was the deep inspiration George Manuel drew from Pan-Africanist theorists and leaders like Julius Nyerere (125–39)? Confronting these thorny topics would not negate the value of advocating Indigenous self-determination, but would demonstrate further how and why Indigenous political theory remains essential for students of politics.

It is to Temin's credit that, even if readers take issue with certain details or emphases, *Remapping Sovereignty* sets a new standard for discussing Indigenous political theory. It offers the possibility of beginning to draw out deeper dilemmas animating, and divergent aspects within, twentieth-century Indigenous political thinkers' arguments as well as the potential connections that link multiple authors in a longer discourse. Like any good book, it leaves us with as many questions as answers, initiating a long-overdue conversation about the role that Indigenous political thinkers have played in shaping the contours of modern political imaginaries—even when their work has gone overlooked.

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