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RESPONSE

Author's Reply

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Hendrix, Vasko, Gordon, and Bernal raise challenging questions and illuminate key dimensions of *Remapping Sovereignty*. Their interventions explore the stakes of my interpretive method; probe close readings of the book's six key thinkers; animate my mapping of Indigenous political theory in longer histories and expanded geographies; and press on the implications of my theorizations of colonial sovereignty and earthmaking for Indigenous and anti/decolonial thought and movements. To synthesize, their comments touch on dual aspects of the book, and how I weave connections between them: on one hand, the historical and interpretive work of (re)mapping Indigenous political theory; on the other, the conceptual insights gleaned through close reading of Indigenous political theory. I address their contributions in turn, starting first with the historical-interpretive dimensions, and next, the political-philosophical implications of guiding conceptual frameworks.

Burke Hendrix raises crucial questions about this first aspect, the historical end(s) of mapping Indigenous political theory: how ought we to interpret thinkers (Indigenous and other marginalized thinkers in particular) whose views have conflicting tendencies—including elements that seem retrograde from our contemporary perch? He uses the example of Ella Deloria, a brilliant Dakota thinker whom I interpret in my second chapter as a powerful Native critic of twentieth-century anthropology and federal Indian policy.

Hendrix and Vasko both pull out these contradictory threads in Ella Deloria's writing. They aptly converge on the contention that the uncertain future of Dakota modernity is the central problematic of Deloria's *Speaking of Indians.* I agree. There are divergent possibilities jostling in her writing—some amenable to liberal capitalism, some utterly resistant to it, others seeking awkward compromise between the two. For my purposes, genre and audience considerations weighed heavily in choosing to underscore the more critical anti-assimilationist elements of Ella Deloria's writing.

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Deloria wrote *Speaking of Indians* in 1942 for the Friendship Press, then an imprint of Episcopalian missionaries. Given this context, it would have been shocking had she not addressed her primary audience through assimilationist beliefs. I contend that the more subversive elements of the work are manifest where she "smuggles in the powerful but critical notion that kinship is an imaginative and quite flexible solution to the universal problem of how to maintain social order and decency in a political community" (77). I focused on these moments because they are the most surprising and illuminating threads in a book that is otherwise—quite understandably—straightjacketed by the confines of US World War II propaganda. True, the former are not the only threads. But to offer an otherwise similar case by way of contrast, Friendship Press also published a book by Cherokee activist Ruth Muskrat Bronson in 1944. Unlike Deloria's extended moments of critique, Bronson mainly toes the assimilationist line.

Accordingly, I ventured that the remarkable feat of Ella Deloria's writing is that such a charged critical vision of Dakota kinship practices as part of the vibrant, evolving connective tissue of a non-colonial, "humanized" political modernity could plausibly emerge at all from writing coded innocuously as friendly "popular science." Of course, one should not pretend it is the only vision nor that it is not itself an innovative (contestable!) reworking of Lakota-Dakota historical consciousness, but much is missed—including the Lakota-Dakota reception of her writing—without attending to such critical valences. Though battling with alternative possibilities, this critical thread represents a profound challenge to sovereignty's endemic role in the colonial pacification of alternative futures authored on recognizably Dakota terms—an answer to the question of Dakota modernity.

Further extending *Remapping Sovereignty*'s historical dimensions, Timothy Vasko offers welcome supplements to the genealogy of Indigenous political thought. He traces the work of Incan author Garcilaso de la Vega, the Nahua historian Don Fernando de Alva Inxtilxochitl, and Pequot minister William Apess. Far from isolated or inconsequential, scholars have recently uncovered their wide but disavowed influence on Euro-American political thought from Locke to Melville. In situating my book in these longer intellectual trajectories, Vasko generously illustrates how it provides a model and point of departure for deeply contextualized future studies of Indigenous political theory still to be written.

Vasko also presses on the multiple political valences of articulations of Indigenous self-determination, especially among thinkers who animatedly engage with and adapt the vocabularies, experiences, and political imaginaries of Black political thinkers' engagements with New World chattel slavery and anti-Black racism. In chapter 1, for example, I show how Zitkala-Ša reworked the keystone Pan-Africanist metaphor of empire as enslavement for Indigenous critique, as collective bondage encapsulated in reservation confinement.

As Vasko rightly observes, a subterranean theme of the book is the sustained, productive, and sometimes troubling engagements of (non-Black) Indigenous thinkers with Black political thought. One goal in staging these engagements was to push back against the oft-repeated claim that there is just one stable

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intersection between settler colonialism and anti-Black racism—let alone between the more discursively capacious political imaginaries of Indigenous and Black political thought. My wager is that specification should encourage us to interpret—and to criticize—with a far deeper appreciation of thinkers' much more expansive, non-siloed, and often discursively blurrier articulations of their problem-spaces in tow.

Take Vine Deloria Jr. as an example. I agree with Vasko that Deloria scholars must be attentive to the "prickliness" of his readings of African-American political thought, right alongside his admiration for the Black Power movement. In practice, Deloria was more reticent to forge multiracial coalitions than contemporaries such as Clyde Warrior, the latter of whom organized across communities around shared conditions of economic oppression (52). Deloria acutely underscored how the distinctiveness of the history and experience of Indigenous peoples' tribal sovereignty was frequently erased in US racial politics' Black-white binary. Even so, Deloria's position should also be interrogated. He tended, at times, toward a divisive insistence on the singularity of Indigenous experiences in the face of deeply convergent and interactive transnational systems of colonial and racial domination. Accordingly, when reading Deloria's unsympathetic portrait of the civil rights movement in *Custer Died for Your Sins*, it is imperative to acknowledge that he also risked carelessly reproducing imaginaries and tropes of anti-Black racism. Further research might seek to map both Deloria's way of grappling with the problem-space of a US racial politics narrowed to the Black-white binary and to reckon more extensively than I and other "Deloria studies" scholars have with the limits of this approach today.

While Hendrix and Vasko foreground interpretive choices, Jane Anna Gordon alights on the implications of conceptual synthesis. Gordon focuses on two guiding concepts in *Remapping Sovereignty*, earthmaking and sovereignty. If my argument is that Indigenous political theorists have sought out models of political community that build collective power yet eschew sovereignty understood as mastery, Gordon asks why I hang onto the modernist, subject-centered language of "making" in "earthmaking". In adapting the framework of earthmaking, I wanted foremost to reject classic colonial stereotypes about Indigenous peoples' inherent propensity for environmental reverence. Instead, the framework of earthmaking describes a consciously crafted mode of political thought and agency arrayed against the colonial destruction or unmaking of entire networks of ecosocial reproduction (of which humans, of course, are a part). I take Gordon's point that there may be too instrumental an edge to the verb "making," but in adapting this term I aimed to counter an entire imaginary that frames Indigenous knowledge paradigms as static, passive, and unchanging rather than acts of active anticolonial resistance and reinvention.

Moreover, constructive projects of "making" the earth against anti-relational and environmentally destructive modes of colonial invasion require the cultivation of just those alternative sustained networks of interdependence in the pursuit of self-determination. For example, in the passage Gordon quotes from Ella Deloria's *Waterlily*, the idea behind giving a gift to the mice is that one must reciprocate for what one has taken. Deloria acknowledges that use of benefit to humans is unavoidable. That such unavoidable use of other-than-human gifts

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might slip into domineering projection on the colonial model is just what makes it so pressing to affirm receptivity in use in ethico-political repertoires of ongoing interdependent relationships. The protocols that Deloria describes recall on a micro-scale that "self-rule is materially enmeshed in and unimaginable without care and interdependence with others with whom the 'self' is in relation" (16). Such relations, I submit, have to be made and won by reorganizing the terms of structural and institutional power relations. And often on the macro-scale, as Bernal notes, they are won or lost in the face of a vicious nexus of state, paramilitary, corporate, and even putatively "environmentalist" violence against land and water defenders throughout the Americas.

Like Gordon, Bernal poses a pressing—even politically agonizing—question for anti/decolonial political thought and movements: If the nation-state is the source of systemic dispossession and a perhaps unbridgeable gap of representational legitimacy with respect to Indigenous and subaltern groups, are there strategically necessary—or even possibly emancipatory—engagements with the state? Invested as my analysis is in a critique of dominant colonial conceptions of sovereignty, could "remapping sovereignty" encompass the array of Indigenous and popular movement strategies aimed at constitutionalizing—in both international and domestic constitutional law—Indigenous rights and the rights of nature? I agree with Bernal that Indigenous rights mobilizations have exploited (with ongoing tensions and remainders) the polyvocality of popular and state discourses and institutions, to which an example like the constitutional process in Ecuador attests. Likewise, as Gordon points out with respect to crucial Indigenous feminist mobilizations for tribal sovereignty in the US, there is much to recommend a politics that uses hard-won sovereignty discourses "within" states to defend against the gendered violences of settler colonialism.

In referring to "a nonanthropocentric right of Indigenous self-determination" (139), I mean only to suggest that much analysis of Indigenous rights mobilizations fails to attend to the productive dimensions of these movements—namely, that they creatively generate alternative political-philosophical conceptions of self-determination. My analysis resonates with the contention that struggles for constitutionalized Indigenous rights including those specified in the UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples are indispensable strategic tools for taking on state and transnational corporate power. Holding current sovereigns to account is necessary. Such mobilizations are both strategic and productive. In the latter sense, they remake the very concept of "self-determination" in ways that puncture (and erode piecemeal) anthropocentric sovereignty as the normative model of political authority. Some Indigenous practices of closure and enforcing "borders" are themselves repertoires of care aimed at refusing violent relations; those refusals as efforts to reconstruct law and policy cannot—should not—be conflated with the relentless decisionism of colonial sovereignty logics for the colonized.

Context also matters in straightforward ways: If an Indigenous near-majority is imaginable (as in Bolivia), then "popular sovereignty" resonates more deeply for Indigenous anti-extractivist politics. Mass Indigenous party politics that claim state power and raise the *Wiphala* (Andean Indigenous flag) in efforts to institutionalize post-extractivist demands are vital. I agree that one cannot move

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from my conceptual critique of sovereignty to some more generalized political rejection of engagements with actual nation-states.

Finally, Bernal and Gordon both raise the awful specter of front- and backlashes of state violence as endless collective punishment for Indigenous presence/resistance. I have begun to speak to these questions more directly in current work.[1] Indigenous peoples should not be left alone with the heavy burden of struggling—at unspeakable costs—for decolonial climate justice. All people concerned with the devastation of extractive industry and colonial conservation regimes should ask how institutions and movements can materially support alternative models of political-ecological governance that Indigenous societies have been frequently at the forefront of creating. For reasons of justice and practical necessity, Indigenous-led decolonization must become central to transformative decarbonization of the global political economy at every possible scale of political contestation and governance.

[1] David Myer Temin, "Wages for Earthwork," *American Political Science Review* 119, no. 1 (2025): 179-192.

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