

FOUR

*Indigeneity, Settler Colonialism, White  
Supremacy*

*Andrea Smith*

Many scholars in Native studies have argued that the field has been co-opted by broader discourses, such as ethnic studies or postcolonial studies (Cook-Lynn 1997; Stevenson 1998). Their contention is that ethnic studies elides Native claims to sovereignty by rendering Native peoples as ethnic groups suffering racial discrimination rather than as nations undergoing colonization. These scholars and activists rightly point to the neglect within ethnic studies and within broader racial justice struggles of the unique legal position Native peoples have in the United States. At the same time, because of this intellectual and political divide, there is insufficient dialogue between the two that would help us understand how white supremacy and settler colonialism intersect, particularly within the United States. In this chapter, I examine how the lack of attention to settler colonialism hinders the analysis of race and white supremacy developed by scholars who focus on race and racial formation. I then examine how the lack of attention to race and white supremacy within Native studies and Native struggles hinders the development of a decolonization framework. I conclude with a brief look at emerging intellectual and political projects that point to new directions in addressing the intersecting logics of white supremacy and settler colonialism.

FROM MULTICULTURALISM TO WHITE SUPREMACY

Before I begin this examination, however, it is important to challenge the manner in which ethnic studies has formulated the study of race relations,

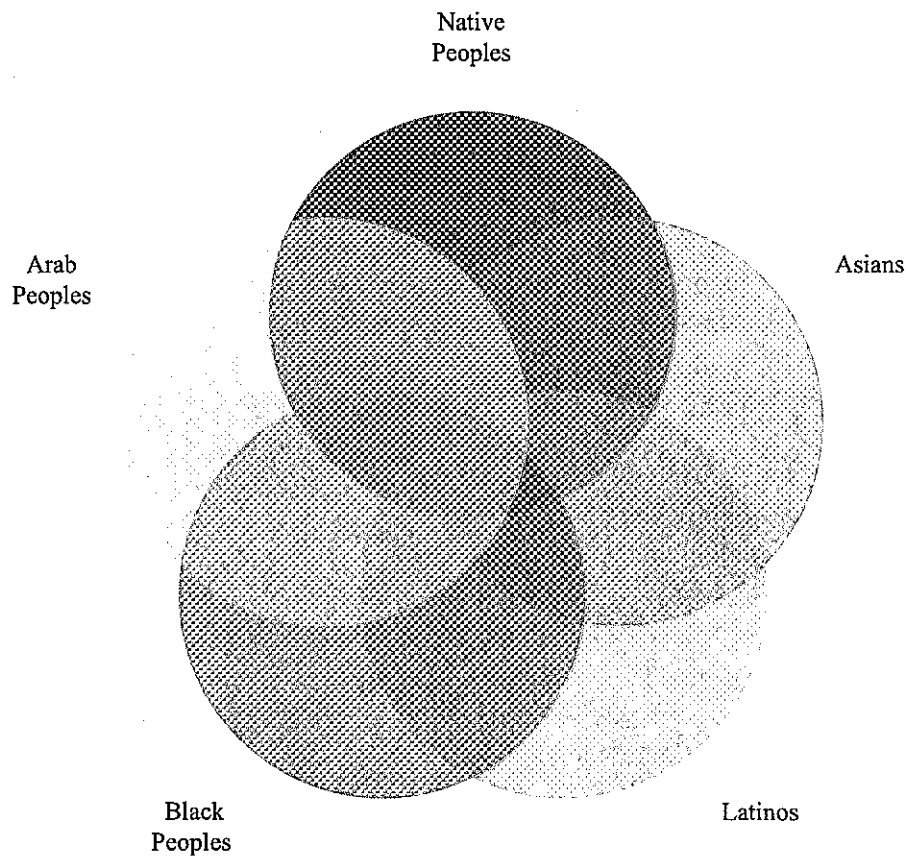


FIGURE 4.1. Traditional model for people-of-color organizing or ethnic studies.

as well as how people-of-color organizing within the United States has formulated models for racial solidarity. As I have argued elsewhere, the general premise behind “people of color” organizing, as well as behind “ethnic studies,” is that communities of color share overlapping experiences of oppression that they can compare and organize around (see figure 4.1) (A. Smith 2006). The result of this model is that scholars or activists, sensing that this melting-pot approach to understanding racism is eliding critical differences between groups, focus on the uniqueness of their particular history of oppression. However, they do not necessarily challenge the model as a whole—often presuming that this model works for all groups except their own. Instead, as I have also argued, we may wish to rearticulate our understanding of white supremacy by not assuming that it is enacted in a singular fashion; rather, white supremacy is constituted by separate and distinct, but still interrelated, logics.

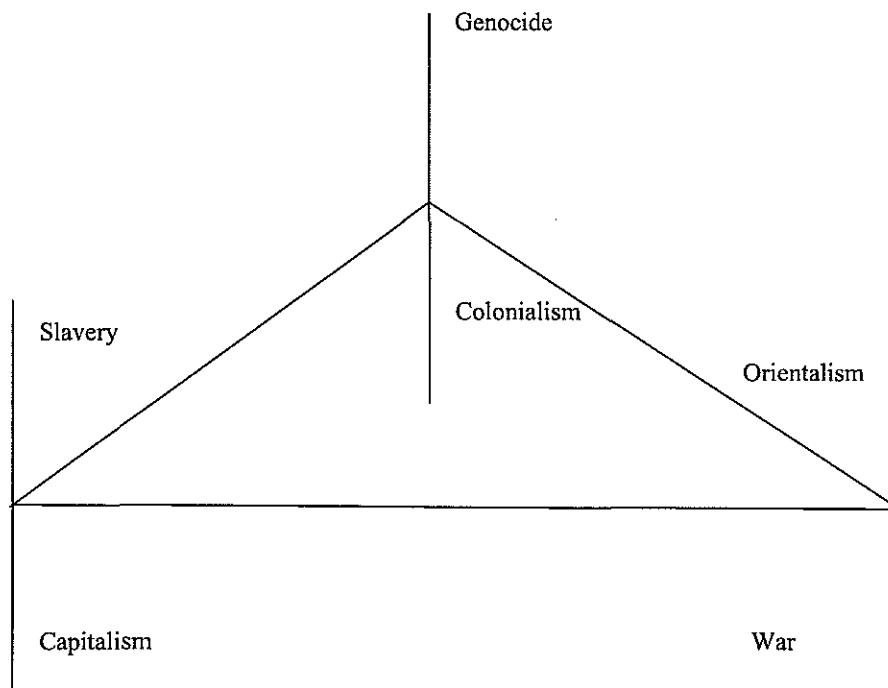


FIGURE 4.2. Three pillars of white supremacy.

I argue that the three primary logics of white supremacy are (1) slaveability/anti-Black racism, which anchors capitalism; (2) genocide, which anchors colonialism; and (3) orientalism, which anchors war (see figure 4.2).

One pillar of white supremacy is the logic of slavery. As Sora Han, Saidiya Hartman, Jared Sexton, and Angela P. Harris note, this logic renders Black people as inherently slaveable—as nothing more than property (Han 2002; Hartman 1997; Sexton 2008; A. Harris 2000). That is, in this logic of white supremacy, Blackness becomes equated with slaveability. The forms of slavery may change—whether through the formal system of slavery, sharecropping, or systems that image Black peoples as permanent property of the state, such as the current prison industrial complex (whether or not they are formally working within prisons).<sup>1</sup> But the logic itself has remained consistent. It is the anchor of capitalism. That is, the capitalist system ultimately commodifies all workers: one's own person becomes a commodity one must sell in the labor market while the profits of one's work are taken by someone else. To keep this capitalist system in place, the logic of slavery applies a racial hierarchy to this system. This

racial hierarchy tells people that as long as you are not Black, you have the opportunity to escape the commodification of capitalism. Anti-Blackness enables people who are not Black to accept their lot in life because they can feel that at least they are not at the very bottom of the racial hierarchy: at least they are not property; at least they are not slaveable.

The second pillar of white supremacy is the logic of genocide. This logic holds that indigenous peoples must disappear; in fact, they must *always* be disappearing, in order to enable nonindigenous peoples' rightful claim to land. Through this logic of genocide, non-Native peoples then become the rightful inheritors of all that was indigenous—land, resources, indigenous spirituality, and culture. The pillar of genocide anchors colonialism—it is what allows non-Native peoples to feel they can rightfully own indigenous peoples' land. It is acceptable to singularly possess land that is the home of indigenous peoples, because indigenous peoples have disappeared.

The third pillar of white supremacy is the logic of orientalism. Edward Said defined orientalism as the process of the West defining itself as a superior civilization by constructing itself in opposition to an “exotic” but inferior “Orient” (Said 1994). (Here, I am using the term *orientalism* more broadly than to solely signify what has been historically identified as the “Orient” or “Asia.”) The logic of orientalism marks certain peoples or nations as inferior and deems them to be a constant threat to the well-being of empire. These peoples are still seen as “civilizations”—they are not property or “disappeared”—however, they are imagined as permanent foreign threats to empire. This logic is evident in the movements within the United States that target immigrants of color. Regardless of how long any particular group of immigrants of color reside in the United States, they generally become targeted as foreign threats, especially during wartime. Consequently, orientalism serves as the anchor for war, because it allows the United States to justify being in a constant state of war to protect itself from its enemies. Orientalism allows the United States to defend the logics of slavery and genocide, as these practices enable the it to stay “strong enough” to fight these constant wars. What becomes clear, then, is, as Sora Han has put it, that the United States is not *at* war; the United States *is* war (Han 2006). For the system of white supremacy to stay in place, the United States must always be at war.

Under the old but still-dominant model, people-of-color organizing was based on shared victimhood. In this model, however, we see that we not

only are victims of white supremacy but are complicit in it as well. Our survival strategies and resistance to white supremacy are set by the system of white supremacy itself. What keeps us trapped within our particular pillars of white supremacy is that we are seduced with the prospect of participating in the other pillars. For example, all non-Native peoples are promised the ability to join in the colonial project of settling indigenous lands. All Non-Black peoples are promised that if they comply, they will not be at the bottom of the racial hierarchy. And Black and Native peoples are promised that they will advance economically and politically if they join U.S. wars to spread “democracy.” Thus, people-of-color organizing must be premised on making strategic alliances with one another, based on where we are situated within the larger political economy. Coalition work is also based on organizing not just around oppression but also around complicity in other peoples as well as our own oppression.

These pillars are best understood as logics rather than categories signifying specific groups of people. Thus, the people that may be entangled in these logics may shift through time and space. Peoples may also be implicated in more than one logic simultaneously, such as people who are Black and Indigenous. This model also destabilizes some of the conventional categories by which we often understand either ethnic studies or racial justice organizing—African American, Latino, Asian American, Native American, Arab American. In the case of Latinos, these logics may impact peoples differently depending on whether they are Black, Indigenous, Mestizo, or other. Consequently, we may want to follow the lead of Dylan Rodriguez, who suggests that rather than organize around categories based on presumed cultural similarities or geographical proximities, we might organize around differential impacts of white supremacist logics. In particular, he calls for a destabilization of the category “Asian American” by contending that the Filipino condition may be more specifically understood in conjunction with the logics of genocide from which, he argues, the very category of Filipino itself emerged (D. Rodriguez 2010).

In addition, these logics themselves may vary depending on the geographic or historical context. Obviously, these logics emerge from a U.S.-specific context and may differ greatly in other places and times. However, analyzing white supremacy in any context may benefit from not presuming a singular logic but assessing how it might be operating through multiple, varied logics.

## THE DISAPPEARING NATIVE IN RACE THEORY

With this framework in mind, I now explore how the failure to address the logics of genocide and colonialism negatively affects the work of scholars who focus on racial theory. Of course, the most prominent work would be that of Michael Omi and Howard Winant's *Racial Formation*. This groundbreaking work speaks to the centrality of race in structuring the world. The authors demonstrate that race cannot simply be understood as epiphenomenal to other social formations, such as class. They further explain that race is foundational to the structure of the United States itself. As I discuss later, their work makes important contributions that those engaged in Native studies will want to take seriously. At the same time, however, this work generally ignores the importance of indigenous genocide and colonialism in its analysis of racial formations.

The one instance in which Omi and Winant discuss colonialism at length is in their critique of the "internal colonialism" thesis—that communities of color should be understood as colonies internal to the United States. In rejecting this thesis, they do not differentiate Native peoples from "racial minorities." Interestingly, they state that the internal colonialism thesis "as applied to the contemporary U.S. with significant exceptions such as Native American conditions . . . appears to be limited" (Omi and Winant 1994, 47). But then they do not go on to discuss what the significance of this "exception" might mean.

One possible reason for not fully exploring the "exception" of Native genocide is that it is relegated to the past. Omi and Winant explain that the United States has shifted from a racial dictatorship characterized by "the mass murder and expulsion of indigenous peoples" to a racial democracy in which "the balance of coercion began to change" (1994, 47). Essentially, the problem of Native genocide and settler colonialism today disappears. This tension is further reflected in some contradictory impulses in Omi and Winant's analysis. On the one hand, they note that "the state is inherently racial" (1994, 82). Their analysis of an inherently racial state echoes Derrick Bell's notion of racism as permanent to society. However, they do not necessarily follow his implications. Bell calls on Black peoples to "acknowledge the permanence of our subordinate status" (1995, 306). He disavows any possibility of "transcendent change"; to the contrary, he argues that "it is time we concede that a commitment to racial equality merely perpetuates our disempowerment" (307). The alternative he

advocates is resistance for its own sake—living “to harass white folks,” or short-term pragmatic strategies that focus less on eliminating racism and more on simply ensuring that we do not “worsen conditions for those we are trying to help” (308). While Omi and Winant similarly argue that the United States is inherently racial, they clearly do not want to adopt Bell’s pessimism. Consequently, they argue that a focus on institutional racism has made it “difficult to see how the democratization of U.S. society could be achieved, and difficult to explain what progress has been made. . . . The result was thus a deep pessimism about any efforts to overcome racial barriers” (Omi and Winant 1994, 70). Now, if one understands the state to be inherently racial, it would then follow that one would not expect racial progress, but rather shifts in how racism operates within it. Under this racial realism framework, either one is forced to adopt a project of racial progress that contradicts the initial analysis of the United States as inherently racist, or one must forego the possibility of eradicating white supremacy. The analysis leading to these two equally problematic options presumes the permanency of the United States. Because many racial theorists lack an analysis of settler colonialism, they do not imagine other forms of governance not founded on the racial state. When we do not presume the givenness of settler states, it is not as difficult to recognize the racial nature of nation-states while simultaneously maintaining a nonpessimistic approach to ending white supremacy. We can work toward “transcendent change” by not presuming it will happen within the confines of the U.S. state.

This tendency for theorists of race to presume the givenness of the settler state is not unique to Bell or Omi and Winant, and in fact appears to be the norm. For instance, Joe Feagin has written several works on race that focus on the primacy of anti-Black racism because he argues that “no other racially oppressed group has been so central to the internal economic, political, and cultural structure and evolution of American society” (Feagin 2001, 3). He does note that the United States is formed from stolen land and argues that the “the brutal and bloody consequences of the European conquests do indeed fit the United Nations definition of genocide” (39). So if the United States is fundamentally constituted through the genocide of Native peoples, why are Native peoples not central to the development of American society? Again, the answer is that Native genocide is relegated to the past so that the givenness of settler colonialism today can be presumed.<sup>2</sup> Jared Sexton in his otherwise brilliant analysis in *Amalgamation Schemes*,

also presumes the continuance of settler colonialism. He describes Native peoples as a “racial group” to be collapsed with all non-Black peoples of color (Sexton 2008, 246, 249). Sexton goes so far as to argue for a Black/non-Black paradigm parallel to a “Black/immigrant” paradigm, thereby rhetorically collapsing indigenous peoples into the category of immigrants and effectively erasing their relationship to this land and hence reifying the settler colonial project (253). Similarly, Angela Harris argues for a “Black exceptionalism” that defines race relations in which Native peoples play a “subsidiary” role (A. Harris 2000, 444). To make this claim, she similarly lumps Native peoples into the category of a racial minority and even that of “immigrant” by contending that “contempt for blacks is part of the ritual through which immigrant groups become ‘American’” (443–444).

Of course, what is not questioned in this analysis is the idea that “America” itself can exist only through the disappearance of indigenous peoples. Feagin, Sexton, and Harris fail to consider that markers of “racial progress” for Native peoples are also markers for genocide. Sexton contends that the high rate of interracial marriages for Native peoples again indicates racial progress, rather than reflecting part of the legacy of U.S. policies of cultural genocide, including boarding schools, relocation, removal, and termination. Interestingly, a central intervention made by Sexton is that the politics of multiculturalism depends on anti-Black racism. That is, multiculturalism exists to distance itself from Blackness (since difference from whiteness, defined as racial purity, is already a given). However, with an expanded notion of the logics of settler colonialism, his analysis could resonate with indigenous critiques of *mestizaje*, whereby the primitive indigenous subject always disappears into the more complex, evolved mestizo subject. In doing so, these signs of “racial progress” could then be rearticulated as markers of indigenous disappearance and what Denise da Silva terms as racial engulfment by the white self-determining subject (da Silva 2007). Thus, besides presuming the genocide of Native peoples and settler society, these analyses also misread the logics of anti-indigenous racism (as well as other forms of racism).

As mentioned previously, it is important to conceptualize white supremacy as operating through multiple logics rather than through a single one. Otherwise, we may misunderstand a racial dynamic by simplistically explaining one logic of white supremacy through another logic. In the case of Native peoples, those who may have lighter-skin privilege may to some extent have more “independence” than Black peoples, reflecting



their position on the color hierarchy. However, if we look at the status of Native peoples also through a logic of genocide, this “independence that accrues through assimilation” is in fact a strategy of genocide that enables the theft of Native lands (Feagin 2001, 39). Andrew Jackson justified the removal of Cherokee peoples from their lands on the basis that they were now really “white,” and hence not entitled to their lands.<sup>3</sup> It is important to complicate how proximities to whiteness can enable different kinds of white supremacist projects. Andrew Shryock has argued that because Arab Americans are classified as “white” in the U.S. census, that they cannot be properly understood as “racialized” (Shryock 2008). Essentially, they are sufficiently distant from Blackness and close to whiteness on the Black-white binary that they cannot qualify as racialized. But again, if we understand Arab Americans as racialized through a white supremacist logic of orientalism, it is in fact their proximity to whiteness that allows this logic of orientalism to operate. That is, while their proximity to whiteness may bestow some racial privilege, it is also what allows them to be cast as a “civilization” that, while “inferior,” is still strong enough to pose a threat to the United States. This privilege, then, does not signal that they will be assimilated into U.S. society, but that they will always be marked as perpetual foreign threats to the U.S. world order. Similarly, in the case of indigenous peoples, it is the proximity to whiteness that allows them to disappear into white society. Cheryl Harris has brilliantly articulated how whiteness is constructed as “property” withheld from people of color (C. Harris 1995). George Lipsitz similarly argues that white people have a “possessive investment in whiteness” (Lipsitz 1998). However, these characterizations of whiteness as property generally fail to account for the intersecting logics of white supremacy and settler colonialism as they apply to Native peoples. In this intersection, whiteness may operate as a weapon of genocide used against Native peoples in which white people demonstrate their possessive investment not simply in whiteness but also in Nativeness. The weapon of whiteness as a “scene of engulfment” (da Silva 2007) ensures that Native peoples disappear into whiteness so that white people in turn become the worthy inheritors of all that is indigenous.

To be clear, I am *not* arguing against a Black-white binary. Nor am I arguing that lighter-skinned Native peoples are more oppressed than those who are darker skinned. Recently, with the growth of “multiculturalism”

there have been calls to “go beyond the black-white binary” and include other communities of color in our analysis. There are a number of flaws with this analysis. First, it replaces an analysis of white supremacy with a politics of multicultural representation: if we just *include* more peoples, then our practice will be less racist. This model does not address the nuances of white supremacy’s structure, such as through these distinct logics of slavery, genocide, and orientalism. Consequently, scholars who challenge the so-called Black-white binary do not address settler colonialism any more than do scholars who focus on anti-Black racism. As Candace Fujikane, Dean Saranillio, and Sora Han note, these calls to go beyond the Black-white binary often rely on an immigrant paradigm of “exclusion” from the settler state that does not challenge the conditions of the settler state itself.<sup>4</sup>

Second, the call to move beyond the Black-white binary obscures the centrality of the slavery logic in the system of white supremacy, which is *based on a Black-white binary*. This the Black-white is not the *only* binary that characterizes white supremacy, but it is still a central one that we cannot go “beyond” in our racial justice organizing efforts or critical analysis. It also imposes a color hierarchy that impacts all peoples of color. However, I am suggesting that in addition to the Black-white binary, there are other binaries that intersect with this one, such as an indigenou-settler binary, that are distinct but mutually reinforcing. These logics position peoples in multiple and sometimes contradictory positions within the larger settler colonial/racial state.

In addition, I presume that Angela Harris and Jared Sexton’s interventions are primarily to call attention to the anti-Black implications behind the call to go beyond the Black-white binary rather than to render a full account of the dynamics of white supremacy. Thus, my point is not to invalidate the importance of those interventions. Rather, I think these interventions can be strengthened with some attention to settler colonialism. The consequence of not developing a critical apparatus for intersecting all the logics of white supremacy, including settler colonialism, is that it prevents us from imagining an alternative to the racial state. Our theoretical frameworks then simultaneously consolidate anti-Black racism rather destabilize it. This tendency affects not only the work of race theorists but that of Native studies as well. I next focus on some of the work emerging in Native studies as it grapples with white supremacy.

## WHITENESS IN SETTLER COLONIALISM

As mentioned previously, many Native studies scholars have refused engagement with ethnic studies or critical race theory because they think such engagement relegates Native peoples to the status of racial minorities rather than as members of sovereign nations. Yet, even as Native studies articulates its intellectual framework around sovereignty, some strands within it also presume the continuance of settler colonialism. Glen Coulthard sheds light on this contradiction in noting that in the name of sovereignty, Native nations have shifted their aspirations from decolonization to recognition from the settler state (Coulthard 2007). That is, they primarily articulate their political goals in terms of having political, economic, or cultural claims recognized or funded by the settler state within which they reside. In doing so, they unwittingly relegate themselves to the status of “racial minority,” seeking recognition in competition with other minorities seeking the same thing.

One example can be found in the work of Ward Churchill. Churchill offers searing critiques of the United States’ genocidal policies toward Native peoples and calls for “decolonizing the Indian nations” (Churchill 1983, 202). Nevertheless, he contends that we must support the continued existence of the U.S. federal government because there is no other way “to continue guarantees to the various Native American tribes [so] that their landbase and other treaty rights will be continued” (Churchill 1983, 1). Thus, in the name of decolonization, his politics are unwittingly grounded in a framework of liberal recognition whereby the United States will continue to exist as the arbiter and guarantor of indigenous claims. In such a framework, Native peoples compete with other groups for recognition. For instance, in some of his work Churchill opposes a politics that would address racism directed against nonindigenous peoples, arguing that Native peoples have a special status that should take primacy over other oppressed groups (Churchill 1983, 419). Such analyses do not take into account how the logics of settler colonialism are enabled through the intersecting logics of white supremacy, imperialism, heteropatriarchy, and capitalism. Consequently, when Native struggles become isolated from other social justice struggles, indigenous peoples are not in a position to build the necessary political power to actually end decolonization and capitalism. Instead, they are set up to be in competition rather than in solidarity with other groups seeking recognition. This politics of recognition then presumes the

continuation of the settler state that will arbitrate claims from competing groups. When one seeks recognition, one defines indigenous struggle as exclusively as possible so that claims to the state can be based on unique and special status. In contrast, if one seeks to actually dismantle settler colonialism, one defines indigenous struggle broadly in order to build a movement of sufficient power to challenge the system. (As I discuss later, indigenous peoples' struggles in Latin America that are based on a politics of decolonization have articulated indigeneity as an expansive rather than an exclusive category.)

Churchill's analysis is similar to that of many other scholars who replace a Black-white binary with an indigenous-settler binary. While, as argued previously, this binary certainly exists, our analysis of this binary is insufficient if not intersected with other logics of white supremacy. In particular, we need to look at how "settlers" are differentiated through white supremacy. In much of the rhetoric of the Red Power movement, scholars and activists did not necessarily question the legitimacy of the U.S. state, arguing instead that the United States just needs to leave Native nations alone.<sup>5</sup> As Native activist Lee Maracle comments: "AIM did not challenge the basic character, the existence of the legitimacy of the institutions or even the political and economic organization of America, but rather, they addressed the long-standing injustice of expropriation" (Maracle 1988, 128). Native studies scholars and activists, while calling for self-determination, have not necessarily critiqued or challenged the United States or other settler states themselves. The problem that arises from this analysis, as Maracle notes, is that if we do not take seriously the analysis of race theorists such as Omi and Winant and Bell who define the United States as fundamentally white supremacist, we will not see that it will never have an interest in leaving Native nations alone. Also, without a critique of the settler state as simultaneously white supremacist, all "settlers" become morally undifferentiated. If we see peoples in Iraq simply as potential future settlers, there is no reason not to join the war on terror against them, because morally, they are not differentiated from the settlers in the United States who have committed genocide against Native peoples.

Native studies scholar Robert Williams does address the intersection of race and colonialism as it impacts the status of Native peoples. Because Williams is both a leading scholar in indigenous legal theory and one of the few Native scholars to substantially engage critical race theory, his work demands sustained attention.

Williams argues that while Native nations rely on the Cherokee Nation cases as the basis for their claims to sovereignty, all of these cases rely on a logic based on white supremacy in which Native peoples are racialized as incompetent to be fully sovereign. Rather than uphold these cases (decided under the John Marshall court and understood as articulating Native nations as domestic, dependent nations), he calls on us to overturn them so that they go by the wayside like the Dred Scot decision:

I therefore take it as axiomatic that a “winning courtroom strategy” for protecting Indian rights in this country cannot be organized around a set of legal precedents and accompanying legal discourse that views Indians as lawless savages and interprets their rights accordingly. . . . I ask Indian rights lawyers and scholars to consider carefully the following question: Is it really possible to believe that the court would have written *Brown* the way it did if it had not first explicitly decided to reject the “language in *Plessy v. Ferguson*” that gave precedential legal force, validity, and sanction to the negative racial stereotypes and images historically directed at blacks by the dominant white society? (R. Williams 2005, xxxiii)

This intervention demonstrates the extent to which Native peoples, by neglecting the analytics of race, have come to normalize white supremacist ideologies within the legal frameworks by which they struggle for “sovereignty.” What this illustrates is the manner in which Native peoples can themselves unwittingly recapitulate the logics of settler colonialism even as they contest it, as long as they do not engage the analytics of race. Williams points to the contradictions involved when Native peoples ask courts to uphold these problematic legal precedents rather than overturn them: “This model’s acceptance of the European colonial-era doctrine of discovery and its foundational legal principle of Indian racial inferiority licenses Congress to exercise its plenary power unilaterally to terminate Indian tribes, abrogate Indian treaties, and extinguish Indian rights, and there’s nothing that Indians can legally do about any of these actions” (R. Williams 2005, 151).

However, Williams’s analysis also tends to analytically separate white supremacy from settler colonialism. That is, he argues that addressing racism is a “first step on the hard trail of decolonizing the present-day U.S. Supreme court’s Indian law” by “changing the way that justices themselves talk about Indians in their decisions on Indian rights” (R. Williams 2005, xxix). The reason for this first step is that direct claims for sovereignty are

more politically difficult to achieve because claims based on sovereignty challenge the basis of the United States itself.<sup>6</sup> As a result, Williams articulates a political vision that contains many of the contradictions inherent in Omi and Winant's analysis. That is, he cites Derrick Bell to assert the permanency of racism while simultaneously suggesting that it is possible to address racism as a simpler "first step" toward decolonization. "I believe," Williams writes, "that when the justices are confronted with the way the legalized racial stereotypes of the Marshall model can be used to perpetuate an insidious, jurispathic, rights-destroying form of nineteenth-century racism and prejudice against Indians, they will be open to at least considering the legal implications of a postcolonial nonracist approach to defining Indian rights *under* the Constitution and laws of the United States (R. Williams 2005, 164; emphasis mine). If Williams were to take seriously the implications of Bell's analysis of the permanency of racism, it would be difficult to sustain the idea that we can simply eliminate racial thinking in U.S. governance in order to pave the way for "decolonization." Consequently, Williams seems to fall back on a framework of liberal multiculturalism that envisions the United States as a fundamentally nonracial democracy that is unfortunately suffering from the vestiges of racism. According to Williams, the Supreme Court is not "a helplessly racist institution that is incapable of fairly adjudicating cases involving the basic human rights [and] cultural survival possessed by Indian tribes as indigenous peoples. I would never attempt to stereotype the justices in that way" (R. Williams 2005, xxvii). He implies that the Court is not an organ of the racial state, but simply a collection of individuals with personal prejudices.

In addition, the strategy of addressing race first and then colonialism second presupposes that white supremacy and settler colonialism do not mutually inform either other—that racism provides the anchor for maintaining settler colonialism. In the end, Williams appears to recapitulate settler colonialism when he calls for "decolonizing the present-day U.S. Supreme Court's Indian law" in order to secure a "measured separatism for tribes in a truly postcolonial, totally decolonized U.S. society" (R. Williams 2005, xxix, 172). He holds out hope for a "postcolonial nonracist approach to defining Indian rights *under* the Constitution and laws of the United States" (164; emphasis mine), as if the Constitution is itself not a colonial document. Obviously, if the United States and its highest court were "totally decolonized," they would not exist. In the end,

Williams's long-term vision does not seem to go beyond state recognition within a colonial framework.

That said, this critique is in no way meant to invalidate the important contributions Williams makes in intersecting Native studies with critical race theory. The apparent contradictions in his analysis may well be based less on his actual thinking than on a rhetorical strategy designed to convince legal scholars to take seriously his claims. In addition, while conditions of settler colonialism continue to exist, short-term legal and political strategies are needed to address current conditions. As Michelle Alexander notes, reform and revolutionary strategies are not mutually inconsistent. Reformist strategies can be movement-building if articulated as such (Alexander 2010). In this regard, Williams's provocative call to overturn the precedents established in *Johnson v. McIntosh* and the Cherokee Nation cases speaks to the manner in which Native sovereignty struggles have unwittingly built their short-term legal strategies on a foundation of white supremacy. And as Scott Lyons's germinal work on Native nationalism suggests, any project centered on decolonization begins with the political and legal conditions under which we currently live, and so our project is to make the most strategic use of the political and legal instruments before us while remaining critical of how we can be co-opted by using them (Lyons 2010). But in the end, as Tiaiake Alfred and Coulthard argue, we must build on this work by rethinking liberation outside the framework of the white supremacist settler state (Alfred 1999; Coulthard 2007).

#### FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Scholars are wrestling with how to address the intersecting logics of empire, white supremacy, and settler colonialism. As a means to explore possibilities for future directions, I focus on the debate about whether to term nonindigenous communities of color as "settlers of color." The arguments on all sides of this debate provide building blocks for both politically and intellectually engaging the intersections of white supremacy and settler colonialism.

A critical contribution made by scholars and activists who adopt the terminology of "settlers of color" is to highlight how nonindigenous peoples of color are set up to take part in a politics of genocide regardless of their intentions or historical circumstances, because their displacement onto

indigenous lands simultaneously erases the indigenous people who previously occupied those lands. At the same time, this intervention has been sharply critiqued on a number of grounds. This section of the chapter engages these critiques through Nandita Sharma and Cynthia Wright's germinal essay to explore what these disagreements might tell us about future intellectual and political possibilities (Sharma and Wright 2009).

According to Sharma and Wright, the "settlers of color" argument presumes indigenous nationhood as an inherent good that cannot be questioned (2009, 130). While Sharma and Wright do note that not all articulations of indigenous nationhood are based on statist models of sovereignty, they nonetheless conclude that decolonization must entail an end to nationhood itself. They contend that nationhood necessarily defines a group of people against others in a manner that facilitates capitalism and empire rather than challenging it. Of course, many indigenous scholars critique this approach because disclaiming all projects of nationhood when your nation is not subject to genocide sounds highly suspicious. However, even as Sharma and Wright note, just because an argument may seem suspicious does not mean the argument has no validity. Certainly, as I discuss later, there is much debate about and critique of the efficacy of terms like *sovereignty*, *nationalism*, and *nationhood* within Native studies and Native communities (see, for example, Womack 1999; A. Smith 2008; Alfred 1999). These terms could have such baggage attached to them that they may not be politically efficacious. At the same time, because of this baggage, we may presume that indigenous peoples' articulations of these terms are always equivalent with their use in mainstream discourse. This presumption is often based on western epistemological understandings of the subject as individualized self who connects with others through a fiction of nationhood that then positions itself over and against others who are not part of the nation. However, as we can see particularly with the development of indigenous struggles in Latin America, not all forms of nationhood derive from this sense of self. If one understands oneself as fundamentally constituted through relationship with all of creation and other peoples, then nationhood is not defined as being against other peoples, but through radical relationality. Nationhood is by definition expansive rather than insular. Consequently, the desire to liberate Native peoples from nationalism can reinstantiate what Elizabeth Povinelli describes as a tradition-free and nation-free liberal subject free from past encumbrances. The liberal subject articulates itself, she suggests, as an autological subject



completely self-determining over and against the “genealogical” subject (i.e., the indigenous subject) that is trapped within tradition determined by the past and the future (Povinelli 2006). Essentially, then, this call for “no nationalism” can rely on a primitivizing discourse that positions a simple, premodern indigenous subject locked in history as a foil against the complex cosmopolitan diasporic subject.

Sharma and Wright further contend that the “settler of color” paradigm falsely equates the migration of peoples through enslavement, war, and so forth with the processes of settler colonialism. Such an approach, they contend, pits one oppressed group against the other (Sharma and Wright 2009, 121). Their critique reminds us that white supremacy operates through multiple logics. As previously argued in this article, if we focus only on the logic of settler colonialism without looking at how migration is racially differentiated, we may neglect how Native peoples are sometimes complicit in these processes of forced migration.

Sharma and Wright further contend that this “settler of color” critique presumes a moral innocence to indigeneity in which migrants are marked as “enemies of the nation” (Sharma and Wright 2009, 123). The ultimate problem of settler colonialism, they argue, is thus migration itself. Of course, some proponents of “settler of color” politics implicitly or explicitly base their analysis on such an assumption. However, I would contend that this assumption is not inherent in the critique. The central program presumed in such a critique is not migration, but the relationship between peoples and land. According to Wright and Sharma, indigenous nationhood is defined ethnically or racially by which one group has claim to a land based on prior occupancy. This rationale certainly does exist within Native communities, but the claim occludes alternative visions of indigeneity articulated by many scholars and organizers. As Glen Coulthard and Patricia Monture-Angus demonstrate, this politics of recognition co-opts decolonization struggles by reshaping the relationship between indigenous peoples and land. Indeed land claims are often made on the basis of a temporal framework of prior occupancy rather than on a spatial framework of radical relationality to land. This temporal framework of prior occupancy is then easily co-opted by state discourses that enable Native peoples to address land encroachment by articulating their claims in terms of landownership. Essentially, it is not “your” land; it is “our” land because we were here first. Following this line of thinking, land must then become a commodity that can be owned and controlled by one group of people.

If we understand Native identity as spatially rather than temporally based, claims to land are based not solely on prior occupancy (a temporal framework) but based also on radical relationality to land. As Patricia Monture-Angus (1999) argues, indigenous nationhood is not based on control of territory or land, but on relationship with and responsibility for land.

Although Aboriginal Peoples maintain a close relationship with the land . . . it is not about control of the land. . . . Earth is mother and she nurtures us all . . . it is the human race that is dependent on the earth and not vice versa. . . . Sovereignty, when defined as my right to be responsible, . . . requires a relationship with territory (and not a relationship based on control of that territory). . . . What must be understood then is that the Aboriginal request to have our sovereignty respected is really a request to be responsible. I do not know of anywhere else in history where a group of people have had to fight so hard just to be responsible. (Monture-Angus 1999, 36)

Unfortunately, Sharma and Wright's analysis overlooks those Native scholars and organizers who are reconceptualizing the relationship between land and peoples. In doing so, they fail to consider how the capitalist conception of land forces all peoples (including indigenous peoples) who migrate (whether it be through enslavement, migration, or relocation) to become "settlers." However, the issue is not migration per se, but the construction of land as property. If land is property, then migration, for whatever reason, relies on a displacement and disappearance of indigenous peoples that emerge from that land. The processes of settlement can be undone when we rethink our relationship to land.

Fortunately, there are many Native scholars and activists who articulate an indigenous politics that centers on relationality to land. One example would be the statements issued by indigenous peoples' organizations at the 2008 World Social Forum. These groups contended that the goal of indigenous struggle was not simply to fight for the survival of a particular people, but to transform the world so that it is governed through principles of participatory democracy rather than through nation-states. The nation-state has not worked for the past five hundred years, they argued, so it is probably not going to start working now. Their vision of nationhood requires a radical reorientation toward land. All are welcome to live on the land, they asserted, but we must all live in a different relationship to it. We must understand ourselves as peoples who must care for the land rather than control it. Because they articulate indigeneity within the

context of global liberation, their understanding of indigeneity becomes expansive and inclusive. Their politics is not based on claims for special status to be recognized by the state, but on a commitment to liberation for all peoples that depends on dismantling the state.

Essentially, then, indigeneity in this framework becomes a praxis rather than a static identity that focuses on the building of relationships between peoples and all of creation. Consequently, the “migrant” is not the problem—the problem is commodification of land such that migration can happen only through the processes of land commodification.

Such a politics addresses the critique made by scholars such as Sharma and Wright that indigenous claims to land rest on essentialized notions of Native peoples having a “natural” connection to land. Muscogee scholar and language revitalization activist Marcus Briggs-Cloud argues that indigenous relationships to land happens through the *practice* of ceremony and of living in right relationships to land. The fact that many indigenous peoples have suffered relocation, loss of language, and historical discontinuities in the transmission of ceremonies does not preclude them from reestablishing relationships through prayer and ceremony. Tradition is not static—it is the historical accumulation of communications with the land. These traditions may have been severed, but communication can always begin again (Briggs-Cloud 2010). And as Scott Lyons argues in his brilliant *X-Marks*, we must critically examine “the genocidal implications that are always inherent in the notion of Indian identity as timeless, stable, eternal, but probably in the minds of most people still ‘vanishing.’ Being vanishes. Doing keeps on doing” (Lyons 2010, 60).

In addition, many Native scholars and activists are doing political and organizing work that questions what Sharma and Wright see as a presupposition in “settler of color” politics that indigenous nationhood presumes a moral superiority. This work focuses on organizing against the complicity of indigenous peoples themselves in empire, anti-Black racism, and heteropatriarchy.

Julia Good Fox and Michael Yellow Bird have called for a rearticulation of indigenous nationhood that identifies the complicity of indigenous peoples in the forced migration of peoples to this land through their involvement in the military. Good Fox has been active in organizing Native peoples against military recruitment, combat the war on terror, and challenge the Israeli apartheid state. Yellow Bird similarly calls on indigenous people to withdraw from U.S. imperial ventures based on a framework

of radical relationality. In his critique of Native involvement in the Iraq War, Yellow Bird asserts:

All people and beings are related to us, so we are being asked to make war on our relatives.

We value all life, so war truly must be a last resort.

We value Mother Earth as a living being, and the United States military is contaminating the lands, waters, trees, plants and people in Iraq through the use of biowarfare, landmines and depleted uranium.

We believe in the great circle of life, and we are doing to the Iraqi people what the US did to our ancestors.

All of the killing, maiming, poisoning, and torturing will have drastic effects upon our people, especially on the psychic and cosmological levels.

The US has mistreated us in the past and the present, and it has conscripted our minds and hearts so that we are participating in their oppressive behaviour towards another race of humans. (Yellow Bird 2006)

Currently, indigenous and immigrant groups are collaborating to fight Senate Bill 1070, passed into law in Arizona in 2010, which essentially gave police officers carte blanche authority to arrest “suspected” undocumented immigrants. Indigenous groups in Arizona point to the fact that anti-immigration policies have the simultaneous impact of both reinforcing the legitimacy of the U.S. state while liquidating the claims of indigenous nations within the settler state, particularly those nations that cross U.S. borders. According to the O’odham Solidarity Across Borders Collective,

Border security is needed to ensure neo-liberal projects (NAFTA), and really should be read for what it is: border “regulation/militarization” of indigenous land to ensure capital exportation of people and resources.

. . . It must be clear that the immigration struggle is also an indigenous struggle. In order for the state to pass immigration reform, it has called for the “securing” of the borders first, in order to manage the flow of migration. This securing includes and is not limited to a physical wall to be made on indigenous land (Tohono O’odham/Lipan Apache to name a few). The state’s power to waive pre-existing laws (such as NEPA, NAGPRA) in the name of security, directly attacks indigenous autonomy/sovereignty. . . . If others cannot acknowledge the indigenous people of the land, and call for policies that attack them (O’odham! Yaqui!), such as Berlin Wall-like

barriers, in the name of “reform/security,” then we will witness the cycles of capitalist imperialism continue long into the 21st Century! . . . Attack the root, not each other. (O’odham Solidarity Across Borders Collective 2010)

On May 21, 2010, Native activists occupied the Border Patrol office to protest SB 1070. Among their demands were the following:

On this day people who are indigenous to Arizona join with migrants who are indigenous to other parts of the Western Hemisphere in demanding a return to [the] traditional indigenous value of freedom of movement for all people. Prior to the colonization by European nations (Spaniards, English, French) and the establishment of the [E]uropean settler state known as the United States and the artificial borders it and other [E]uropean inspired nation states have imposed; indigenous people migrated, traveled and traded with each other without regard to artificial black lines drawn on maps. U.S. immigration policies dehumanize and criminalize people simply because [of] which side of these artificial lines they were born on. White settlers whose ancestors have only been here at most for a few hundred years have imposed these policies of terror and death on “immigrants” whose ancestors have lived in this hemisphere for tens of thousands of years, from time immemorial.

.....  
The protestors are demanding:

- An end to border militarization
- The immediate repeal of SB1070 and 287g
- An end to all racial profiling and the criminalization of our communities
- No ethnic cleansing or cultural genocide
- No border patrol encroachment/sweeps on sovereign native land
- No Deportations
- No Raids
- No ID-verification
- No Checkpoints
  
- Yes to immediate and unconditional regularization (“legalization”) of all people
- Yes to human rights
- Yes to dignity
- Yes to respect
- Yes to respecting Indigenous People[']s inherent right of migration.<sup>7</sup>

As the occupiers' statement indicates, they identify as the problem not migration, but the nation-state and its reliance on control and ownership of territory.

The Taala Hooghan Infoshop in Flagstaff, Arizona, which was central to the anti-SB 1070 organizing, similarly subscribes to an expansive understanding of indigenous politics. Here are the ground rules for this organization: "This community space maintains agreements which are based on respect and mutual aid. They include, but are not limited to, . . . No drugs, alcohol, racism, heteropatriarchy, colonialism, neoliberalism, hierarchy, capitalism, drama." The Infoshop also attempts to build a politics around decolonization rather than recognition through its critique of the nonprofit industrial complex: "This is not an office. Please refrain from any activities that may be related to or are directly connected to the nonprofit industry, vertical administration (hierarchy), organizational capacity building (and not community building), foundation brown nosing, free market capitalism, and/or just plain capitalism."<sup>8</sup>

Many scholars have spoken out against injustices (including anti-Black racism, homophobia, sexism, and imperialism) committed within Native communities, such as Jennifer Denetdale (2008),<sup>9</sup> Waziyatawin (2008),<sup>10</sup> and Scott Lyons. Lyons encapsulates this work in Native studies in his call for Native scholars to engage broader leftist struggles:

A . . . pressing danger in my view is the use of Native nations and indigenous sovereignty for purposes that can be just as harmful and retrograde as anyone else's oppression. When gays and lesbians, workers, black people—or anyone—are harmed in the name of travel sovereignty, then discourses other than nationalism are called for in the name of justice. . . . It is always the job of intellectuals to "look also at racism, political and economic oppression, sexism, supremacism, and the needless and wasteful exploitation of land and people," *no matter who perpetuates the injustice*. (Lyons 2010, 163; emphasis in original)

These projects of decolonization are achieving a mass scale in Latin America. As I have described elsewhere, these projects are based on the concept of taking power by making power. That is, they are trying to build the world we would like to live in now, proliferating these alternative forms of governance, and in doing so, challenging the state and capitalism indirectly. Consequently, they attend to the local needs of communities, while positioning themselves as part of a global struggle for transformation (A. Smith 2005). While further discussion is beyond the constraints of this

chapter, many intellectual and political projects pursued by nonindigenous peoples are also making these critical links between settler colonialism and white supremacy in the areas of immigration, militarism, environmental racism, queer politics, and gender justice.<sup>11</sup>

## CONCLUSION

What is at stake for Native studies and critical race theory is that without centering the analytics of settler colonialism, both intellectual projects fall back on the presumptiveness of the white-supremacist, settler state. On one hand, many racial justice theorists and activists unwittingly recapitulate white supremacy by failing to imagine a struggle against white supremacy outside the constraints of the settler state, which is by definition white supremacist. On the other hand, Native scholars and activists recapitulate settler colonialism by failing to engage how the logics of white supremacy may unwittingly shape our visions for sovereignty and self-determination such that we become locked into a politics of recognition rather than a politics of liberation. We are left with a political project that can do no more than imagine a kinder, gentler settler state founded on genocide and slavery. Nonetheless, a growing number of scholars and activists (indigenous and nonindigenous) are building theoretical and political projects that address the intersections of settler colonialism *and* white supremacy simultaneously, and that thus engage a politics of liberation that engages us all.

## NOTES

1. For works that trace the lineage of slavery and Jim Crow to the prison industrial complex, see Alexander 2010; Ignatieff 1978; and A. Davis 2003.

2. Feagin acknowledges that the United States is fundamentally built on indigenous genocide and black labor. However, he contends that contemporary society is organized along a black-white binary (along which other communities of color are placed). Here Native nations whose genocide is foundational to the United States disappear, only to reappear as part of the collection of “Latinos . . . and Asian Americans [who] have been able to make some use of these civil rights mechanisms to fight discrimination” (Feagin 2001, 32). Again, with the presumption of settler colonialism, the question of Native nations as nations no longer exists;

Native peoples are simply racially discriminated minorities who can be collapsed with all other people of color. Feagin argues that Native peoples were privileged because they were allowed “more independence, albeit . . . as individuals, only if assimilated” (2001, 39). Assimilation is read then as a relatively benign marker of racial progress rather than as a process of genocide (as I explain in greater detail later in this article).

3. During the Trail of Tears, in which the Cherokee Nation was forcibly relocated to Oklahoma, soldiers targeted for sexual violence Cherokee women who spoke English and had attended mission schools. They were routinely gang-raped, prompting one missionary to the Cherokee, Daniel Buttrick, to regret that any Cherokee had ever been taught English (Evans 1977, 259).

4. For strong critiques of this multiculturalist approach to racism and its inability to address settler colonialism, see Han 2006; Saranillio 2009; and Fujikane and Okamura 2008.

5. For example, prominent Native studies scholar Vine Deloria Jr. once argued that there was nothing particularly problematic with the U.S. political or economic system (Deloria 1970, 61). “It is neither good nor bad, but neutral” (Deloria 1969, 189). Prominent AIM leader Russell Means further argued that Native sovereignty could be guaranteed by “free market capitalism” and “the Constitution” (Means 1995, 482, 542).

6. Sovereignty is “inherently problematic for the dominant non-Indian society and its judges in a way that the more general types of minority individual rights at the center of the struggle for racial equality represented by *Brown* were not. It’s much harder, in other words, to secure recognition and protection for highly novel forms of Indian group rights to self-determination and cultural sovereignty in American society than for the far more familiar types of individualized rights that most other minority groups want protected” (R. Williams 2005, xxxv–xxxvi).

7. No Borders, “Occupation of Border Patrol Headquarters, Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Tucson, AZ, *Arizona Independent Media Center*, <http://arizona.indymedia.org/news/2010/05/76990.php>, accessed May 21, 2010.

8. Photocopy of ground rules in author’s possession.

9. In her critique of anti-black racism, homophobia, and U.S. patriotism within Native communities, Denetdale argues that Native communities support Christian Right ideologies, often in the name of tradition. She calls for a critical interrogation of the politics of “sovereignty,” arguing that present-day tribal governance structures are themselves a by-product of colonialism. As such, tribes’ welfare is then tied to the well-being of the U.S. settler state. She suggests that these formations in turn inhibit the political imaginaries of Native peoples to envision what true sovereignty and self-determination outside the confines of settler colonialism might look like. She suggests that such a vision not entail self-determination for Native peoples at all costs, but would be tied to a politics dedicated to the end of capitalism, anti-black racism, imperialism, and heteropatriarchy.

10. Waziyatawin similarly articulates an intellectual and political project of decolonization that specifically involves the dismantling of both capitalism and



the settler state. Like Williams, she does suggest short-term strategies to promote indigenous peoples' survival, including truth commissions, dismantling the icons of U.S. imperialism, land reparations, and language revitalization. However, unlike Williams, she makes it clear that all of these strategies must be part of a larger project for decolonization that transforms the current political and economic status quo. This project of decolonization necessarily demands the involvement of all peoples in solidarity with those fighting for indigenous struggle. As she notes, the capitalist and colonial world order is an unsustainable system that eventually oppresses everyone. "Decolonization requires the creation of a new social order but this would ideally be a social order in which non-Dakota would also live as liberated peoples in a system that is just to everyone, including the land and all beings on the land. Those clinging to traditional Dakota values are not interested in turning the tables and claiming a position as oppressor, as colonizer, or of ruthlessly exploiting the environment for profit" (Waziyatawin 2008, 174).

ii. For a few examples, see the work of the Audre Lorde Project ([alp.org](http://alp.org)), Incite! Women of Color Against Violence ([incite-national.org](http://incite-national.org)), and the Sylvia Rivera Law Project ([srlp.org](http://srlp.org)).